
Chung Min Lee and Kathryn Botto
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Internal and external forces are converging on the Korean Peninsula with potentially profound implications for Korean futures and regional stability. Between the unprecedented flurry of bilateral summits and agreements on North Korean denuclearization, the two Koreas have a broader goal—reunifying after nearly seventy-five years of division. The April 2018 Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula proclaims, in part, that “South and North Korea will reconnect the blood relations of the people and bring forward the future of co-prosperity and unification led by Koreans by facilitating comprehensive and groundbreaking advancement in inter-Korean relations.” 1 While the two Koreas have starkly different ideas of what form unification should take, it is an undeniable end-goal of ongoing engagement.

While it is a worthy goal, unification poses a high risk to political, economic, and social stability in Korea, even if it occurs peacefully and under the auspices of South Korea’s (Republic of Korea or ROK) democratic government. It requires careful forethought and planning. However, much of this planning is focused on predicting under which scenario—peaceful, collapse, or conflict—unification will occur. While scenario planning is useful, it downplays and neglects critical issues that will determine whether or not true political, economic, and social integration of the two Koreas can be achieved. This publication defines unification as a process of sustainable integration under a single, unified Korean state. While different scenarios may provide different starting points on this path, unification as a process will be drawn out and won’t be complete until the two Koreas are integrated socially, economically, and politically. Regardless of the scenario, such integration is contingent upon successful stabilization and stability actions, which refer to a framework for transforming fragile states into stable states. Although many international organizations will likely be involved in this process, given the importance of the United States’ alliance with South Korea and the positive role the United States can play in support of ROK-led unification, assessing unification through the lens of stabilization is essential.
• The current emphasis on scenario-based planning places a premium on unpredictable elements of unification. Scenarios are also inherently limiting and often-times politicized. Progressives in Korea are reluctant to discuss collapse or conflict scenarios as they imply the absorption of North Korea. On all sides, the lack of Korean involvement in the original decision to divide the peninsula in 1945, among other experiences, makes South Korea wary of the potential for foreign actors to usurp control in any unification enterprise. Such views and other political obstacles severely limit and constrain the U.S. government and military from planning key support to the ROK throughout the process of unification with the exception of conflict contingency planning. However, South Korea also acknowledges that unification will not occur in a foreign policy vacuum. In order to ensure that foreign actors have a constructive, rather than a destabilizing role in unification, it is very important that South Korea work closely with its most important ally and, as necessary, other regional powers to overcome key obstacles to integration.

• All three scenarios assume that unification will occur while North Korea is in a state of fragility, which will require a concerted effort on the part of South Korea and its international partners to stabilize the newly unified country. Many—if not most—of these stability actions will occur regardless of whether unification is peaceful or not. Even in peaceful scenarios, North Korea’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) will need to be secured and dismantled. The 1.2-million-strong Korean People’s Army (KPA) will need to be demilitarized and demobilized and, to the extent possible, employed in other sectors. These tasks alone pose unprecedented challenges given their magnitude. Numerous essential services will need to be established or restored in the North, including access to food, clean water, medical services, temporary housing, as well as expanded educational and employment activities and other government services. Creating more inclusive political and economic institutions will be very difficult given the vast socio-economic-political differences including the enormous economic gap. North Korea’s gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, for example, is estimated at about 6 percent of South Korea’s approximately $32,000.

• These tasks are all critically important to fostering long-term stability regardless of how unification occurs. They can be divided into five major action clusters: establishing civil security, restoring essential services, establishing rule of law, supporting governance, and supporting development. While these five categories of stability actions will be relevant in any scenario, the type of scenarios will determine the magnitude of effort each will require. For example, in a conflict scenario, establishing civil security will be much more difficult, and restoring essential services will require more effort if infrastructure is destroyed or South Korea is temporarily and partially incapacitated as a result of war-related damage.

Under the stabilization framework, this study analyzes what factors present the greatest and most unique challenges to long-term stability in unification, and how the United States can play a supporting role that mitigates potentially destabilizing factors. Although international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), World Bank, and others are likely to be involved in the unification process, this study focuses on the role of the United States. This study also assumes that unification and stabilization will occur under a South Korean rather than North Korean–led scenario. Among the most important factors to consider for U.S. involvement in the unification process are the following:

• Crucially, the United States should, at all times, be the supporting partner in unification contingencies, with South Korea always taking the
lead. The United States’ role will primarily be in the initial and transformation phases of stabilization. In the fostering sustainability phase, the United States should provide assistance and should advise if called upon. Additionally, the U.S. response will be primarily security and humanitarian-assistance related, while limited in actions related to the rule of law, governance, and development.

- In a 2018 survey conducted for the U.S. government’s Stabilization Assistance Review, 86 percent of U.S. government experts did not know which agencies have lead responsibility for which elements of stabilization.\(^2\) The United States must carefully pinpoint areas of responsibility within the U.S. government and communicate them to South Korea. In addition to cooperation with the ROK, the U.S. response must be carefully coordinated with international organizations to the extent South Korea concurs. This will lend South Korea greater legitimacy to its leadership of unification efforts and make available the international community’s resources and capacity to enhance stabilization efforts. Within the United States, interagency cooperation between the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and Department of Defense will be critical to ensuring that stabilization efforts have unity of effort both within the U.S. government and in partnership with and support of its South Korean ally.

- Dismantling North Korea’s WMD programs and demobilizing the KPA will require the greatest magnitude of effort early on. Civil security is a very man-power- and material-heavy task, and it is also critical to establishing an operating environment conducive to restoring essential services, establishing rule of law, and sustaining governance and development. Without successfully establishing civil security in the initial phase of stabilization, practitioners will be largely unable to carry out other stability actions.

- Dismantling WMD will be critical to ensuring the operating environment is safe enough for other stability actions to proceed. Even in a peaceful unification scenario, dismantling WMD will probably be a prerequisite to a political agreement for unification or the initiation of economic integration between the two states. This is because the international sanctions regime is largely predicated on the existence of North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

- The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) prohibits non-nuclear-weapon states like South Korea from having access to information and materials related to nuclear weapons. This would include, for instance, limited involvement with dismantlement activities relating to nuclear warheads, warhead components, fissile material cores for warheads, weapon design information, and other weapons-related aspects of the program. In past cases, and most likely in a future North Korea case, the United States and other NPT nuclear weapon states would secure and dismantle these materials. South Korea would not be restricted by the NPT from undertaking activities related to dismantling other elements of North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs that are not specifically related to nuclear weapons—certain delivery vehicles, material, research and development, and personnel related to the program. In this endeavor, the involvement of international organizations like the IAEA, United Nations, and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) could strengthen international

\[\text{“Crucially, the United States should, at all times, be the supporting partner in unification contingencies, with South Korea always taking the lead.”}\]
confidence and consensus in the destruction of North Korea’s WMD.

- While the ROK’s role in dismantling weaponized nuclear material may be limited, ROK forces and officials must have a leading role in thoroughly vetting and possibly reassigning certain North Korean elites (including government officials, military officers, and anyone with knowledge of WMD programs) into nondefense sectors. Although integrating these elites into a new unified society will be a highly sensitive issue, it is essential that elites feel the process of unification will benefit them. If they feel at any point that the process does not serve their interests, elites will be more inclined to engage in destabilizing activities such as resisting integration, forming factions, or proliferating WMD-related knowledge or technology.

- Given the highly politicized nature of the KPA including the critical role of political commissars, demilitarization and demobilization not only depend on military operations such as disbanding of military units including personnel, weapons systems, and supporting facilities, but also on whether party elements in the KPA will be ready to give up their responsibilities. Demobilizing the KPA also entails paramilitary units and semi-military forces such as units attached to various ministries and security agencies. Demobilizing the KPA, in more ways than one, is akin to demobilizing an entire nation given the highly militarized nature of North Korea.

- Due to the North Korean state’s gross mismanagement of resources and neglect of critical infrastructure, restoring essential services will require a great deal of effort regardless of the scenario. However, it will require significantly more effort if infrastructure in North Korea is destroyed in conflict and if civilians suffer casualties, injuries, and displacement.

- In restoring essential services, the United States and South Korea should plan to quickly establish transportation infrastructure to ensure even and expeditious distribution of resources. As North Korea’s state-imposed system of sociopolitical classification (songbun) often determines where citizens can live, some of the most vulnerable individuals will be located in rural and isolated locations. U.S., South Korean, and other foreign aid to North Korea should be carefully tailored to the local economy and distribution networks to ensure it does not displace local markets (jangmadang).

- In establishing rule of law, supporting governance, and supporting development, South Korea will face major challenges in integrating North Koreans into new and unfamiliar political, economic, and legal institutions. South Korea will be the predominant driver in these endeavors, and should prioritize efforts that build the foundation for inclusive institutions.

- Promoting rule of law is the first step toward creating inclusive institutions, but legal reform must be incremental. Abruptly installing a non-endogenous legal code could encourage the development of de facto norms outside of the law. For example, if North Koreans are suddenly subject to South Korean standards for formal dispute adjudication, many are likely to resolve disputes over property, business, or personal harm informally through social networks rather than through the new and unfamiliar legal system. Over the long term, the entrenchment of these practices can prevent North Koreans from being integrated into the unified Korean legal system, systematically disadvantaging them by creating barriers to their participation and representation in legal institutions.

- A unified Korean government should be cognizant of the political cleavages building a new democracy could create. Although inclusive and democratic institutions have demonstrated support of inclusive
economic institutions that lead to sustained prosperity, they also redistribute power and wealth. In transitioning from a totalitarian autocracy, there will be many in North Korea who have benefited from the nation’s unequal power structure who will oppose a democratic redistribution of power. In the extreme, these individuals could form militant or violent groups that resist South Korean democratic norms. Moreover, they may eventually accept the new political system but organize parties based on the Korean Workers’ Party to contest nationwide parliamentary and municipal elections.

- GDP per capita in North Korea is just around 6 percent of South Korea’s GDP per capita. If the two Koreas unified tomorrow, they would create one of the most unequal societies in the world. Bridging this gap will take time, and it will largely depend on how successful the unified nation is in transforming North Korea’s extractive economic institutions into inclusive ones similar to those in South Korea. Much of South Korea’s plans to develop the North hinge on investments from major conglomerates (chaebol). However, the chaebol’s massive market share already stymies competition from small and medium enterprises. Heavy chaebol investment in the North could therefore perpetuate extractive economic institutions that further concentrate wealth in South Korean conglomerates. Chaebol investment in North Korea should be carefully regulated so that capital flows do not exacerbate inequality.

- The long-term development of the northern provinces of a unified Korea will be a primarily Korean task. That said, the U.S. and international community will have a crucial role in protecting North Korea from predatory and extractive investment by supporting and legitimizing domestic reform efforts. The North Korean labor force will be attractive to South Korean and foreign companies. While foreign investment should be welcome in North Korea, South Korea should remain vigilant and monitor the nature of investment, especially in regards to North Korea’s yet-untapped rare earth mineral reserves. Foreign resources and capital can be very positive for North Korea’s development, but they also have the potential to be environmentally and economically exploitative.
INTRODUCTION

At the Geneva Conference in 1954, South and North Korea stood for the first time on an international stage as separate, sovereign states. The 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement had called for a political conference to “settle the Korea question,” but few truly thought it would succeed. Indeed, the two Koreas entered the conference with what they knew to be irreconcilable conditions for unification. Between competing claims of legitimacy, conflicting provisions for election scope and supervision, and Cold War alliances, the conference failed to reunify the two Koreas and ultimately relegated the settlement of their division to a later date.

The Geneva Conference represented a gap between idea and reality that persists in unification discourses today. Inter-Korean discussions of unification live in the broad, sweeping language of high-level agreements and reflect distant ideals. Although each side has its own vision for unification, the differences that prevented the two Koreas from reunifying in 1954 are now compounded by nearly seventy-five years of separation and institutionalized political, economic, social, linguistic, and cultural divisions. While unification occupies a central place in policy and national identity, a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the Korean question remains more as a long-term goal. Recently, South Koreans have increasingly been thinking about greater inter-Korean cooperation as they witness multiple inter-Korean summits and two U.S.-North Korea summits. While expectations are likely to grow throughout 2019 and beyond, it’s also important to bear in mind the huge structural challenges and impediments related to unification.

This study is concerned with how this gap between idea and reality impacts the role of international actors, and especially the United States, in unification. Since the first inter-Korean agreement in 1972 following Red Cross talks, the two Koreas have avowed that “unification shall be achieved independently, without depending on foreign powers and without foreign interference.” This mindset is justifiably informed by centuries of foreign interference on the Korean Peninsula, and has made the ROK wary of involving international partners in its detailed unification plans. U.S. policy is to support the ROK vision for unification, but ROK reluctance to include the United States (or other major powers) in unification planning has created barriers that prevent either nation from determining exactly what form U.S. support will take.

Currently, the United States has tacitly accepted that it will be called upon to support the ROK in as yet unknown ways in the stabilization phase of unification. Nevertheless, unification will not occur in a foreign policy vacuum, and the United States can better support and help prevent unfriendly actors from undermining the ROK’s vision with greater
preparation and cooperation on key postconflict and peaceful unification issues. Focusing on the importance of stabilization as an essential element of unification could allow the ROK and its international partners, especially the United States, to form an enduring strategic consensus.

This introduction explains why Seoul should include international actors such as the United States on a case-by-case basis in its unification planning. To do so, it assesses the current state of U.S. involvement in unification planning, core issues presented by scenario-based planning, and how stabilization may provide a more productive approach to unification. Subsequent sections break down the challenges Korea will face with its international partners regarding major facets of stability actions such as dismantling North Korea’s WMD programs and demobilizing the KPA to establish civil security, restoring essential services, longer-term governance capacity-building, and supporting economic development. Given that this study focuses on the potential U.S. role, emphasis is placed on establishing security in the immediate to near term where the U.S. role is likely to be the most important and effective.
PLANNING FOR STABILIZATION OF THE UNIFIED KOREAN PENINSULA

By approaching unification through a stabilization framework rather than scenario-based planning, the ROK, the United States, and other potential international actors can open a productive and realistic conversation about unification. In the U.S. conception of stabilization, the goal is to create a stable operating environment in fragile states, whether they became fragile due to conflict, natural disaster, severe mismanagement of government resources, or another reason. The 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review defines stabilization across the U.S. government as “an inherently political endeavor that requires aligning U.S. Government efforts – diplomatic engagement, foreign assistance, and defense – toward supporting locally legitimate authorities and systems to peaceably manage conflict and prevent violence.”

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**FIGURE 1**
Unification Continuum

- **PEACEFUL SCENARIO**
  - Unification occurs through peaceful political settlement and incremental economic integration

- **COLLAPSE SCENARIO**
  - Unification occurs after the Kim regime can no longer exercise effective control over North Korea

- **CONFLICT SCENARIO**
  - Actions to unify the peninsula are undertaken after war breaks out in Korea

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### TABLE 1

**Stability Actions**

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<tr>
<th>Establish Civil Security</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
<th>Fostering Sustainability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enforce cessation of hostilities, peace agreements, and other arrangements</td>
<td>Implement a plan for disposition of KPA forces, intelligence services, and other national security institutions</td>
<td>Establish military-to-military programs with unified Korean forces and services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secure weaponized nuclear material</td>
<td>Identify future roles, missions, and structure of military and decommissioned military under the unified government; vet senior officers and other individuals for past abuses and criminal activity</td>
<td>Sustain denuclearization and waste-management efforts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Search for and secure unknown WMD sites</td>
<td></td>
<td>Destroy and dismantle WMD and conventional weapons stockpiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct border control, boundary security, and freedom of movement activities</td>
<td>Conduct security forces assistance</td>
<td>Begin destruction and dismantlement of weaponized nuclear material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect key personnel and facilities; provide assurance for population</td>
<td>Conventional weapons collection and reduction of unauthorized weapons</td>
<td>Public outreach and community rebuilding programs</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establish Rule of Law</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
<th>Fostering Sustainability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure humanitarian aid and security forces have access to endangered populations including refugee and internally displaced person camps and spontaneous sites</td>
<td>Implement judicial reform</td>
<td>Train legal professionals and police force, support judicial system capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control crowds, prevent looting, and manage civil disturbances</td>
<td>Investigate suspected war criminals; conduct war crimes courts and tribunals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perform civilian police functions, including investigating crimes and making arrests</td>
<td>Implement property dispute resolution process and mechanisms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deploy interim justice personnel; enact interim legal codes; establish an atrocity reporting system</td>
<td>Disseminate information about reconstruction, reconciliation, and integration efforts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Document, preserve, and protect information on past atrocities</td>
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## Restore Essential Services

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<th>Initial Response</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
<th>Fostering Sustainability</th>
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<tr>
<td>Provide for immediate humanitarian needs</td>
<td>Build capacity of unified Korea to operate and maintain essential services in the North</td>
<td>Build capacity for educational opportunities, quality medical care, and access to essential resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure proper drinking water and provide interim sanitation services</td>
<td>Establish civil services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assist displaced persons and refugees; support security to displaced civilian camps</td>
<td>Resettlement and repatriation</td>
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<td>Monitor food markets; assess adequacy of food distribution; provide emergency food aid as needed</td>
<td>Provide security to food distribution networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assess public health hazards and existing medical infrastructure; operate existing civilian medical facilities; provide vaccinations</td>
<td>Rebuild damaged facilities, improve waste management, and promote medical infrastructure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repair and reopen schools</td>
<td>Expand human rights protections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establish transitional curriculum for schools</td>
<td>Expand educational opportunities</td>
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## Support Governance

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<th>Initial Response</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
<th>Fostering Sustainability</th>
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<tr>
<td>Vet officials for transitional administration; reconstitute leadership at multiple government levels</td>
<td>Determine requirements for voter registration; establish or verify voter registry</td>
<td>Promote North Korean engagement in local and national politics</td>
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<td>Establish interim legislative processes and local participation in democratic institutions</td>
<td>Conduct local elections</td>
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<td>Restore and maintain essential public services</td>
<td>Provide security to ensure free and fair elections</td>
<td>Promote inclusivity of political institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure transparency of resources</td>
<td>Provide education to North Koreans on democracy</td>
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<td>Implement reporting procedures for corruption</td>
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Support Economic and Infrastructure Development

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<th>Initial Response</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
<th>Fostering Sustainability</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assess labor force; agricultural sector; natural resources; transportation, telecommunications, and energy infrastructure</td>
<td>Implement employment initiatives and create employment opportunities; promote and support local private sector development</td>
<td>Promote inclusive economy institutions in unified Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish currency exchange rate between North and South Korean won</td>
<td>Convert currency to South Korean won</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reestablish payment mechanisms and capacity to process payments</td>
<td>Initiate essential bank operations in the North</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritize public investment needs and plan public sector resource allocation</td>
<td>Build irrigation and establish agricultural work programs; build essential transportation infrastructure; energy facilities; and telecommunications infrastructure and connectivity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assess private sector and enterprise creation; identify obstacles to private sector development</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Secure vital natural resources and agricultural facilities</td>
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Stability actions are commonly divided into five categories (see table 1). Yet this is far from an exhaustive representation of all stability actions. Depending on which agency is involved, stability-action clusters may be represented by slightly different names and divisions. In this publication, the five task categories in table 1 are used for the sake of simplicity. While nearly all of these actions will be critical in Korean unification, detailing each is beyond the scope of this publication. Instead, this study focuses on three areas where the ROK’s cooperation with international partners will be most critical: establishing civil security, restoring essential services, and supporting development. Governance and rule of law are discussed in the context of building inclusive institutions.

Stability actions occur in three phases of initial response, transformation, and fostering sustainability (see figure 2). These phases are not necessarily discrete—actions in each phase may occur simultaneously with actions in another phase. Importantly, they also interface with a fragility spectrum. The initial response phase generally reflects actions to stabilize an operating environment in crisis, usually directly after a conflict or as violence is still ongoing. In this phase, the military role in stabilization, particularly in terms of civil security, is most pronounced. The transformation phase occurs in an environment relatively free of severe violence and is focused on host-nation capacity building. In the fostering sustainability phase, efforts are focused on building strong institutions, enabling sustainable development, and preventing regression to unstable conditions. As such, stabilization efforts do not only occur in postconflict environments. They may also occur in fragile states in the absence of violence and conflict, in which case stability actions may be focused in the transformation or fostering phase. Stabilization can prevent and mitigate issues that often plague fragile
states—such as violent extremism and organized crime, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), humanitarian emergencies, pandemic diseases, mass atrocities, severe inequality, and many more—and prevent them from leading to violent conflict. In order to have an effective response, these roles must be clarified within the U.S. government as soon as possible and communicated to South Korea.

Successful stabilization is a whole-of-government effort. As of December 2018, “the Department of State is the overall lead federal agency for U.S. stabilization efforts; the U.S. Agency for International Development is the lead implementing agency for non-security U.S. stabilization assistance.” The Department of Defense is a supporting element, providing proper access and resources in the operating environment to civilian agencies. Parts of the Departments of Justice, Treasury, and Agriculture play key roles as well. However, the 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review found that 86 percent of U.S. government experts were “not clear which U.S. government agencies have lead responsibility for different elements of stabilization.”

Even in the absence of conflict, North Koreans exist in a constant state of violence inflicted upon them by a regime that denies even the most rudimentary of civil and political freedoms and essential resources. According to the Fragile States Index, North Korea has been a chronically fragile state since the Fund for Peace began collecting data in 2006. Regardless of how unification occurs, the ROK and its international partners have to undertake stability actions that ensure the safety, security, well-being, and ultimately, prosperity and freedom of all North Koreans. This is critical not only for humanitarian reasons, but

**FIGURE 2**
**Phases of Stabilization**

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<tr>
<th>FAILED</th>
<th>FAILING</th>
<th>RECOVERING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONFLICT</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>NORMALIZATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Response</td>
<td>Fostering Sustainability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Joint Publication 3-07 Stability, Joint Chiefs of Staff, August 3, 2016.*
to prevent the vast political, economic, social, and cultural differences between North and South Korea from becoming destabilizing.

**CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SCENARIOS AND STABILITY**

At the simplest level, the three scenarios that receive primary attention are peaceful unification, collapse and absorption, and unification through conflict. Peaceful unification would occur via a mutually agreed upon political settlement of the Korean conflict between the ROK and North Korea, and subsequent facilitation of economic, political, and social integration of the two Koreas into a single state, federation, or confederation (discussed in the next section). Collapse and absorption scenarios take a path more similar to that of German unification. In this situation, the Kim regime is unable to maintain effective political, economic, social, and military control, which ultimately leads to regime collapse and absorption by South Korea. In a scenario whereby unification is achieved through conflict, North Korean use of force would trigger a conflict that ultimately results in the unification of the Korean Peninsula. In this circumstance, either of the two Koreas could unify the peninsula. All unification scenarios will require core stability actions to be undertaken. However, the sequence and level of effort required to complete each set of stability actions will differ between scenarios (see figures 3 through 5).

**Conflict Scenario**

Stabilization is most often referenced in postconflict scenarios (see figure 3). A conflict scenario would require that the highest magnitude of effort is put toward establishing civil security as the conflict de-
escalates. In the traditional ROK-U.S. operation plan, this would begin to occur at the point when Kim Jong Un’s regime is incapacitated. In this scenario, political barriers to establishing civil security are minimal in certain aspects, such as securing WMD. Most stability actions, however, would require a high magnitude of effort relative to other scenarios given the destruction of infrastructure that is inevitable in the course of war.

Additionally, incorporating those who benefited from the Kim regime’s patronage would likely take time and negotiation, as reflected in the graph. As U.S. and ROK personnel secure North Korean WMD, establish border security, and make plans for demobilizing the North Korean military, they would very shortly thereafter need to vet and identify those who served in all major political and military posts but especially those in security services and political prisons and begin the arduous process of restoring essential services to North Koreans.

Amid displaced civilians, destroyed or dilapidated infrastructure, and poor or nonexistent services, returning essential services after conflict will require a greater magnitude of effort than other scenarios. As essential services are being restored and negotiations with any remaining North Korean factions or elites wind down, civil control and governance can begin to be revived under a postconflict political order. Here, the emphasis will also be placed on creating more durable governance and development structures.

**Peaceful Scenario**

There are two ways in which peaceful unification is typically discussed, the second of which is represented in figure 4. The first is outlined in detail in the next section, and continues to be represented in ROK unification policy. It involves three phases of unification. The first phase is akin to the steps being laid for South-
North reconciliation now, which would ideally lead eventually to a Korean federation with two systems and two governments. This phase would eventually lead to the third and final phase of unification based on a common constitution, peninsula-wide elections, and a unified government and national assembly.

Another, and perhaps more probable, process of peaceful unification is predicated on economic integration rather than an overt political agreement to form a unified government. This scenario would likely involve a lengthy process of negotiation, as depicted in figure 4. Negotiations would center around North Korean activities that have led to sanctions restricting economic engagement between the two Koreas, particularly North Korea’s WMD programs and human rights abuses. In this scenario, negotiations for unification and civil security, particularly securing WMD, disarmament, and KPA demobilization, will likely occur simultaneously through a slower, step-by-step process. After an agreement to dismantle North Korea’s nuclear program (and ideally its chemical and biological programs) is reached, South Korea and the international community could begin more robust efforts to restore essential services and improve access to basic necessities and rights in North Korea. Through sustained economic engagement, legal, institutional, and political norms in North Korea would hopefully change to accommodate international investment and trade.

While the events that lead to a peaceful unification scenario will be vastly different from those leading to conflict, North Korea will likely remain a fragile state until its WMD programs are dismantled and sanctions are lifted. As a fragile state, North Korea can benefit from stability actions by ensuring aspects of its fragility do not lead to instability, and that any major economic changes do not become destabilizing. In that sense, integrating the two Koreas peacefully will still require many of the same elements as a conflict scenario, although the sequence and magnitude required for each stability action will differ.

Collapse Scenario

The sequence and magnitude of efforts would again be distributed differently in a collapse scenario. Figure 5 also takes into account the possibility of Chinese intervention, an important element that has so far not been discussed. China is just one international actor that could become involved in a unification scenario, and it should be noted that it may be in the interest of other states such as Russia to influence the situation as well. Based on China’s close historical ties with North Korea, its aversion to a North Korean collapse, and steadfast opposition to the stationing of any U.S. forces in a unified Korea, the chances are high.

In the event of a North Korean collapse, China will maximize its leverage to ensure its core interests in keeping a buffer between itself and the U.S. forces in Korea, enhancing its influence over the peninsula, and guaranteeing its access to North Korea’s natural resources. On one major issue—the full control and dismantlement of North Korea’s nuclear and other WMD facilities and programs—the Chinese have similar interests with the United States since neither wants a unified Korea assuming control of North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile arsenals. But beyond the nuclear and WMD issues, active U.S.-China cooperation on civilian displacement and economic development will be difficult. If more international actors are involved, many aspects of stabilization will need to be negotiated. Parties involved will likely permit early establishment of essential services to help those affected by the conflict, but the highly controversial element of establishing civil security (especially as related to WMD) will take far longer to negotiate than in other scenarios, as the three countries currently have no consensus on how to handle North Korea’s WMD.

One of the core assumptions in this study is that stability actions in a collapse scenario could begin after either state or regime collapse in North Korea. The boundary between state and regime collapse is hardly clear, especially in a state like North Korea where the
Kim dynasty embodies the state. As a result, while it may make conceptual sense to differentiate between state or regime collapse, the underlying assumption is that a post–Kim Jong Un regime will be unable to exercise effective control over North Korea and attendant responsibilities.

The other major assumption underlying this study is that there is a possibility of Chinese military intervention in North Korea. As assessed in greater detail later, it is entirely possible that China could undertake limited military operations during and after collapse. These operations may seek to prevent the inflow of North Korean refugees across the Tumen (Yalu) River; to bolster an interim regime in North Korea; to prevent the entrance of South Korean and U.S. forces into North Korea in order to conduct disarmament and demobilization operations; to enhance UN-approved efforts in controlling and dismantling North Korea’s chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) facilities, weapons systems, and personnel; or to increase China’s strategic leverage from the onset of collapse in North Korea. Areas where potential Chinese intervention is likely is assessed in relevant sections but Chinese intervention is not assumed to be automatic. However, crafting contingency operations in North Korea following collapse without due consideration of Chinese intervention would be quite unrealistic.
“Unification should be seen as a continuum and a process; at times volatile with high degrees of uncertainty and at times more predictable.”

The U.S. role in unification is not guaranteed, and will always be negotiated with South Korea. However, the stability approach, while not an end-all-be-all solution to the many barriers to more inclusive unification planning, can help avoid the unpredictable, politicized, and limiting restraints scenario-based planning has reinforced. Discrete unification scenarios—peaceful unification through negotiation, unification through a North Korean collapse and absorption by South Korea, or unification through conflict—offer useful insight into what triggers may lead to conditions favorable to unification. However, they are inherently limited by the convergence of unpredictable variables that will determine the composition of scenarios. Moreover, once a trigger or set of triggers prompts unification, almost all plans are likely to be overtaken by the speed and depth of developments. Rather, unification should be seen as a continuum and a process; at times volatile with high degrees of uncertainty and at times more predictable.

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF UNIFICATION

From China’s centuries-long suzerainty over Korea, to the United States’ decision to cede control of the peninsula to Japan in 1905 through the Treaty of Portsmouth that ended the Russo-Japanese War, to the unplanned U.S. decision to divide Korea at the thirty-eighth parallel in August 1945 in the wake of Japanese surrender, the territorial integrity of Korea has always been mired in geopolitics largely outside the control of the Korean people. As anxieties mounted in Seoul and Pyongyang following rapid rapprochement between the United States and China in 1972, Park Chung-hee and Kim Il Sung agreed to hold the first formal inter-Korean dialogue. The resulting July 4 South-North Joint Communiqué established the principles of independent, peaceful, and nationwide unification. This has remained as the bedrock of all subsequent inter-Korean agreements. The 1954 Geneva Conference was the first and last time foreign powers were included in inter-Korean negotiations over unification.

Although the two Koreas desire an independent unification process, South Korea also acknowledges the possibility of foreign powers’ participation. The integral involvement of the United States in guaranteeing South Korean security attests to its influence, especially in conflict-related scenarios. Until full operational control of the ROK military is transferred to South Korea, the United States will also lead the Korean military in any conflict. Even in a peaceful unification scenario, finding, securing, and dismantling North Korea’s wide array of nuclear weapons and WMD sites would require the United States and most likely, with other permanent members of the UN Security Council, to play a very critical role.

In addition to areas that require U.S. support, the United States has the capabilities and resources to help alleviate the strain on the ROK as it assumes primary responsibility for unification. While the United States has fought about eleven conventional wars since the American Revolution, the majority of its foreign military engagements abroad have been focused on various aspects of stabilization that will be necessary on the path toward a unified Korea. Moreover, U.S. experience in international development and its status as the largest foreign aid donor can be useful in a Korean context. Both successes and failures in U.S.-led stabilization, many of which will be discussed in this study, can inform emerging Korean needs.
This is particularly critical as the cost of unification will be massive for both the government and South Korean taxpayers. Unification cost estimates are numerous and wide-ranging, from $2 trillion, $3 trillion, or $471 billion over ten years; $2.5 trillion over thirty-four years; to even an optimistic $50 billion over forty years.¹² In 2015, the ROK’s National Assembly Budget Office (NABO) estimated that unification would cost over $9 trillion if it occurred peacefully from 2016 to 2060. The office estimated the cost of unification would begin at over $60 billion in the first year and increase annually, peaking at $318 billion in 2056. After forty-five years, the two economies would be sufficiently integrated and the annual cost of unification-related government expenditure would begin to decrease.¹³ That is an annual average of $207 billion, a cost that will be a significant strain on taxpayers, especially as South Korea’s population continues to decline, shrinking tax revenues.

The cost of unification, both human and economic, will be even higher if it follows some form of military conflict. Operation Iraqi Freedom and the subsequent Operation New Dawn, which lasted from 2003 to 2011, cost the United States $815 billion, and those operations confronted a force much smaller than North Korea’s with less sophisticated weaponry.¹⁴ The costs would be astronomically higher if nuclear weapons are involved. If South Korea is decimated by war, its capacity to conduct stability actions to unite the peninsula would be limited. South Korea’s economy,
the eleventh-largest in the world, is bigger than that of any country “that has experienced a military conflict on its own soil in the past seventy years.” As Anthony Fensom described in detail in the *National Interest*, a conflict on the peninsula would disrupt global supply chains, and even potentially shrink global GDP.

After the two Koreas resolve to unify, the process of active integration begins in earnest. The differences in development between the two Koreas are not only potentially economically destabilizing, but politically destabilizing as well. For example, Rudiger Frank has noted “as long as the necessary infrastructure is missing, economic development will not take place, and economic problems will accumulate, turn into social problems, and have political consequences.”

South Korea has copious plans to deal with unification on its own, but it will be able to overcome obstacles to integration more quickly with the cooperation of foreign countries.

**INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR KOREAN UNIFICATION**

Although this publication focuses on U.S.-ROK cooperation in unification, it by no means advocates the United States be the ROK’s sole partner in this endeavor. Stabilizing North Korea will require a high magnitude of effort regardless of the scenario, and sharing this burden with the international community can enhance legitimacy and provide assurances to the process and also help alleviate financial, logistical, and man-power strains on South Korea. In other experiences with stabilization, supporting actors have commonly been involved. For instance, stabilization efforts in Afghanistan were supported by some 478 local and 350 international nonprofits, numerous for-profit companies, at least twenty-six UN agencies, five intergovernmental organizations, and a coalition of forty-two countries and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces. This is not to say that the same panoply of international actors would or should descend upon a unified Korea—importantly, the involvement of any actor should require Korean consent. This publication focuses on the U.S. capacity to cooperate for the sake of simplicity, but it acknowledges that other actors could and are likely to support or exert influence over the unification process.

**U.S. SUPPORT FOR KOREAN UNIFICATION**

Given the centrality of U.S. military operations over various conflict scenarios, U.S. involvement in potential conflict-related unification is unavoidable. If North Korea provokes a response that requires the Combined Forces Command (CFC) to incapacitate the Kim regime, it is understood in the alliance that unification will be the end result. Ultimately, once specific goals of CFC’s mission are concluded, the ROK will assume responsibility for unification. However, it is understood that the ROK limits U.S. or other foreign access to their postwar plan at the end of phase III of the operational plan, where the lion’s share of activities to stabilize the peninsula begin (see figure 6). In essence, this planning regards the end of the Kim regime as the point where unification occurs. Beyond this point, U.S. practitioners will likely be asked by the ROK for currently unknown forms of U.S. support that Washington will provide if possible. Currently, it does not appear that USAID plans for unification-related development and humanitarian assistance both for peaceful and nonpeaceful unification. This attention to the earlier phases of unification is echoed in policy and academic discourse, which focus on potential sequences of events that could lead to various unification scenarios.

To be sure, there are other unification scenarios that could be considered, but this study will focus on the more desirable ROK-led unification scenarios that would require stability actions. Moreover, unification is seen here as an arduous, complex, but ultimately unavoidable longer-term process of political, social,
and economic integration of the two Koreas. As NABO acknowledges, it could take more than forty years or longer for the two Koreas to be fully economically integrated. Even at that point, potentially destabilizing inequalities between the North and South are likely to persist. NABO estimates that after forty-five years, the North’s GDP will still only be 66.5 percent of the South’s. Certain studies have found that “cross-jurisdictional per capita income differences on the order of 40 percent are consistent with social stability.”

**UNIFICATION SCENARIOS: UNPREDICTABLE, POLITICIZED, AND INCOMPLETE**

Korean unification can be positively or negatively influenced by international actors, but it will not occur in a vacuum. As such, South Korea needs to proactively plan with international partners for their role in unification. Nevertheless, the ROK government including the Blue House, the Ministry of Unification (MOU), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and other high-level policymaking bodies have largely excluded the United States and other major powers from any direct or explicit role in unification. The United States and other foreign powers cannot change the ROK’s historical memory that shapes its concerns about foreign involvement in the unification process. However, to adequately plan for unification, it’s important for the ROK to work closely with international actors to ensure that they support, rather than undermine, the process. Building trust is crucial in facilitating cooperation between the ROK and the United States and other major powers throughout the unification process.

In addition to the ROK’s pronounced skepticism toward foreign involvement, the scenario-based planning model is a major barrier to the U.S. ability to support the ROK’s unification plans. This study argues that in order to achieve stability throughout the process leading to unification, the ROK, the United States, and other friendly international actors should focus on stability-based planning rather than scenario-based planning since the former is a much more dynamic mechanism. This approach will ultimately open more avenues to international support for the ROK’s unification plans as it will mitigate unnecessary sources of friction stemming from limited knowledge of the ROK’s and other major powers’ concerns over unification and likely politicization of key issues, especially relating to sovereignty, legal claims, and jurisdictions.

**Unpredictable Scenarios**

The current emphasis on scenario-based planning places a premium on unpredictable elements of unification. Six events are commonly regarded as potential catalysts or triggers for unification scenarios (see figure 7). Each catalytic event (mindful that there are many more potential catalysts than those enumerated in figure 7) has an unwieldy number of potential paths, making predicting its exact trajectory and outcome virtually impossible. Once events reach a certain point, all of them involve the crucial aspects of establishing civil security, restoring essential services, establishing civil control, supporting governance, and supporting development. Hence, unification should be seen as a process whereby stabilization composes the lion’s share of activities and responses by the ROK and the United States.
**FIGURE 7**

Scenario Pathways

- **Conflict Scenario**
- **Collapse Scenario**
- **Peaceful Scenario**
- **Relevant to Multiple Scenarios**

DPRK launches limited attack on ROK

ROK and U.S. engage in limited strike against DPRK

Kim Jong Un incapacitated

Coup in DPRK

DPRK suffering economically

DPRK/ international community receptive to engagement

ROK and U.S. escalate

DPRK retaliates

Military conflict between U.S., ROK, DPRK

Political and/or military factions form in DPRK

Insurrection

Military conflict between U.S., ROK, DPRK, and China

Kim regime falls

De-escalation

Return to status quo

Negotiation

Securing and dismantling WMD; disarming the KPA

Integrating DPRK elites, factions; transitional justice

Humanitarian aid and assistance

Integrating North Koreans into democracy

Economic development

Other stability actions

Unification

Source: Authors' estimations.
Although stabilization is commonly associated with conflict, the goal of stability actions is explicitly to stabilize fragile states. According to U.S. joint doctrine for stabilization, a fragile state is “a country that suffers from institutional weaknesses serious enough to threaten the stability of its central government.” North Korea certainly qualifies based on this definition, and thus is considered a chronically fragile state on the Fragile States Index. Even in a peaceful unification, North Korea’s fragility will require major efforts in the five main areas of stability actions in order to prevent destabilizing disruption to economic and political institutions. It is important to keep in mind that all of the essential elements necessary to fostering greater stability remain unchanged regardless of specific scenarios. As a result, the stabilization framework is more useful for planning, and avoids unpredictable elements that are more prevalent in scenario-based planning frameworks.

**Politicized Scenarios**

On top of their artificial divisions and unpredictability, scenarios are heavily politicized and sanitized in South Korea. Although South Korea and the United States would only support unification under a democratic government, stating as much implies favoring absorption. South Korean progressives are reluctant to discuss unification in these terms for fear of upsetting North Korea, potentially closing doors to engagement and the building of a permanent peace regime. These discussions are also not palatable in the UN, where principles of respecting sovereignty and noninterference are enshrined in the UN Charter. Acknowledging unification-related aspects of conflict runs into similar predicaments.

The United States and China may be involved in peaceful unification scenarios especially if the current armistice is replaced by a permanent peace treaty ending the Korean War. But exactly how these two powers would be involved is a taboo subject in South Korea (as well as North Korea) given its deeply rooted reservations about any form of foreign power involvement on unification akin to the 2+4 process that resulted in German unification. Nevertheless, the overarching importance of stabilization cannot be overemphasized since it will impinge upon a unified Korea’s long-term prosperity, and international actors can help or hurt the speed of that process.

**Incomplete Scenarios**

Lastly, as enumerated earlier, scenarios focus on the short-term aspects of unification and are, therefore, incomplete. Given the permutations of various scenarios, it is better to conceptualize unification as a process that involves the full spectrum of developments ranging from negotiations to massive disruptions. Indeed, even if a negotiated settlement is reached, integrating vastly different organizations and institutions, personnel, and codes of conduct between the two Korea is going to be a long-term process, most likely for decades. Hence, rather than rejecting international support, it is in South Korea’s interest to integrate constructive international efforts from the onset of operations in order to minimize misperceptions and discord.
UNIFICATION POLICIES OF THE TWO KOREAS: COMMON DREAM, DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS

Understanding why unification is such an emotionally charged, politically complicated, and structurally inconsistent concept lies in the very nature of bringing together two almost completely different political entities that also share common ethnic identities, histories, languages, and cultural norms. The South-North divide is a mutually dependent adversarial relationship. The two Koreas are “frenemies” who emphasize the penultimate importance of achieving peaceful unification through national reconciliation and maximizing the opportunities tendered by a common ethnic identity. This fundamental dichotomy has widened through seven decades of charting polar-opposite political trajectories: North Korea that has been ruled by the Kim family since 1948 under a ruthless communist dictatorship and South Korea that emerged from decades of authoritarian rule into a robust democracy one of the world’s largest economies.

The fundamental problem is whether the two Koreas will be willing to compromise core national interests in the name of creating a unified Korean state. Yet it would be extremely naïve to assume that South Korea, for example, could discard its democratic ideals and values to achieve reunification. At the same time, so long as the Kim dynasty remains in power, it is impossible to imagine Kim Jong Un being willing to shed the Juche ideology (the all-important ideology of self-reliance in North Korea) and Kim Il Sung Thought and Kim Jong Il Thought in order to foster a unified Korea. Although both sides emphasize the ultimate importance of a “common Korean home,” the very harsh reality is the juxtaposition of two widely divergent visions of a unified Korea.

SOUTH KOREA’S UNIFICATION FORMULA

While North Korea’s state propaganda machinery constantly emphasizes unification as a central goal including the penultimate importance of forsaking all foreign influence, South Korea also sees unification as central to its national identity. The major problem, however, lies in diametrically different conceptions of unification. A fundamental disconnect exists between unification as a national goal and as a policy precept. In the preamble to the South Korean constitution, it is noted, in part, that the Korean people “have assumed the mission of democratic reform and peaceful unification of our homeland.” Moreover, the ROK is seen as having legal authority and jurisdiction over the Korean Peninsula.
“While North Korea’s state propaganda machinery constantly emphasizes unification as a central goal including the ultimate importance of forsaking all foreign influence, South Korea also sees unification as central to its national identity. The major problem, however, lies in diametrically different conceptions of unification.”

Article 4 stipulates that “the Republic of Korea shall seek national unification and shall formulate and carry out peaceful unification policy based on the free and democratic basic order.” Hence, the notion of a free and democratic unified Korean state is enshrined in the constitution. However, notwithstanding the centrality of this point, left-of-center governments have eschewed the term “free and democratic” when it comes to stating the makeup of a unified Korea since they believe that such a characterization is a conduit for unification through absorption. As an example, the Kim Dae-jung administration (1998–2003) emphasized its so-called sunshine policy based on three key principles: the two Koreas won’t allow armed provocation, the South will not attempt unification through absorption, and the South will pursue a policy of reconciliation and cooperation.

For the Moon Jae-in administration, ensuring peaceful co-existence and common prosperity is the bedrock of inter-Korean cooperation through the “resolution of the North Korean nuclear problem,” sustainable inter-Korean relations, and a new economic commonwealth on the Korean Peninsula.23 Successive governments since democratization in 1987 have adopted their own approaches to inter-Korean ties, but a national unification formula has remained relatively unchanged since the adoption of the Korean National Commonwealth Unification Plan in September 1989 by the Roh Tae-woo administration (1988–1993) and subsequently reconfigured to include a three-phased strategy by the Kim Young-sam administration (1993–1998).

The Ministry of Unification’s official website notes that this unification plan is premised on the philosophy of freedom and democracy and three core principles: unification by the South and the North on the basis of national self-determination; unification through dialogue and negotiations and not through military means; and unification through democratic processes and methods.24 The three phases include the following: (1) reconciliation and cooperation through the basis of mutual recognition and multiple and diverse cooperative exchanges in order to foster change from antagonistic and adversarial ties to co-existence and common prosperity; (2) South-North Federation as an interim step based on the principle of two systems and two governments; and (3) creation of a unified state based on the adoption of a unification constitution through democratic processes, the holding of democratic elections, and the building of a unified government and national assembly.25

Yet while the political rationale for these principles is understandable, there is virtually no guideline on operationalizing them in any concrete fashion. At lower levels, such as fielding a common Olympic team, the two Koreas have reached agreements. But on major areas such as forging a common economic development plan, a unified defense force, and most importantly, the makeup of a unified Korean government, emphasizing the importance of “co-existence and common prosperity,” for example, won’t move the negotiation needle. The notion of a phased transition from “two systems and two governments” is politically palatable as a basic framework but remains virtually impossible to achieve at the operational level unless and until one side is willing to forego critical interests and core values. Since the restoration of democracy in 1987, successive
left-wing and right-wing governments in South Korea have adhered to the Korean National Commonwealth Unification Plan with some modifications. Nevertheless, even this basic plan fails to concretely address how the two Koreas hope to achieve greater integration without massive political adjustments. Yet continuing to ignore this fundamental flaw in South Korea’s unification policy is only going to result in greater obfuscation and, ultimately, irresponsible and ineffective policy responses.

**NORTH KOREA’S UNIFICATION POLICY**

North Korea’s views on unification have been premised on two critical principles since its founding in 1948: first, that national division was caused by imperialist powers, and second, that national unification must be based on total independence from foreign powers. In practice, this means that all foreign forces must be withdrawn from the Korean Peninsula and that a new Korean nation must be created through the basis of a Korean *Joseon Minjok Jaeilijuwi* or “Korean Nation First Policy.”

Here, North Korea is referring to an “ethnically pure Korean race” that is untainted by foreign imperialism and colonialism. For North Korea, the purest Korean race are the Koreans who have thrived under the Kim dynasty. It excludes those who are deemed anti-Juche, anti-unification, and anti-socialist. As South Korean expert Park Young Ho puts it, “‘independence’ does not refer to the concept in which an individual is granted human dignity. Rather, it refers to a component in group [that] receives recognition as a ‘socio-political life’ once it is subject to the ‘Supreme Leader’, under the Juche ideology.” In South Korea, particularly in the political left, independence from imperialism is often discussed in the context of unification with special reference to deconstructing the so-called Cold War mechanism (*naengjeoncheje*). This refers to the institutional norms that have been in place in South Korea since 1948, which many progressives argue were imposed on South Korea by the United States. These include the stationing of U.S. forces, a capitalist economy, and a pro-U.S. political class. As a result, in order for peace and unification to prevail on the peninsula, some progressives have argued that the Cold War mechanism should be deconstructed, to include diminishing or abolishing the U.S. military presence in South Korea (although this is not the stated policy of the current progressive government).

In his New Year’s Address in January 2019, Kim Jong Un stressed that he was committed to ending military hostilities between the two Koreas and that since “north and south committed themselves to advancing along the road of peace and prosperity, we maintain that the joint military exercises with foreign forces, which constitute the source of aggravating the situation on the Korean Peninsula, should no longer be permitted and the introduction of war equipment including strategic assets from outside should completely be suspended.” Pyongyang also maintains that its nuclear weapons program has nothing to do with building a peace regime since nuclear weapons are meant solely for deterring existing nuclear threats from the United States. Only after the United States ceases its hostile policy toward North Korea, such as stopping all nuclear-war-related military exercises and ending the transfer of strategic assets (such as bombers and nuclear submarines) into South Korea, can North Korea begin to talk about genuine denuclearization. Hence, the key phrase in North Korea’s unification policy is “building the conditions of peace,” meaning the withdrawal of U.S. forces and the end of the ROK-U.S. alliance.
Although there is nominal support for unification in South Korea as an important national goal, views on how rapidly unification should be pursued, how necessary it is, and the extent to which South Koreans should bear financial responsibilities such as willingness to accept a unification tax differ substantially. As a national goal or aspiration, a majority of South Koreans support unification as evinced by numerous surveys such as the April 2017 poll conducted by the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU). However, only 13.8 percent of South Koreans responded that unification was very necessary, followed by 44 percent (somewhat necessary), 36.5 percent (not very necessary), and 5.7 percent (not necessary at all).29 (See figure 8.)

The support for the status quo is also reflected in the belief that if the two Koreas can live in peaceful coexistence, then there is less urgency for unification. For example, 46 percent answered that a permanent state of separation was acceptable and 50.4 percent in their twenties said they’re willing to live with a divided Korea so long as there is peaceful coexistence.30 This poll was conducted in April 2017, and public sentiments have changed since the rush of inter-Korean summits in

**FIGURE 8**
How Necessary Is Unification?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Very Necessary</th>
<th>Somewhat Necessary</th>
<th>Not Very Necessary</th>
<th>Not at All Necessary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2018 and the first-ever U.S.–North Korea summit in June 2018. Nevertheless, 65 percent of South Koreans prefer gradual unification over a decade according to a September 2018 Gallup Korea poll (see figure 9).\textsuperscript{31} Interestingly, 16 percent of those under thirty felt that unification should be accelerated, while those in their thirties (13 percent) and forties (14 percent) preferred rapid unification least (see figure 10).\textsuperscript{32} Even of those in their sixties and above, who have the highest emotional attachment to unification given their relative lack of distance from the Korean War, only 26 percent felt that unification should be pursued rapidly.

At a conceptual level, South Koreans believe that there are “national” benefits to unification. In the April 2017 poll conducted by KINU, 54.1 percent said there were some benefits and 14.7 percent responded that there were significant benefits to unification at the national level (see figure 11). Here, South Koreans are referring to a peace dividend flowing from unification rather

### FIGURE 9
**How Rapidly Should Unification Proceed?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RAPIDLY</th>
<th>ABOUT TEN YEARS LATER, GRADUALLY</th>
<th>BETTER IF NOT UNIFIED</th>
<th>DON’T KNOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td><img src="chart1.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart2.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart3.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### FIGURE 10
**How Rapidly Should Unification Proceed? (Age Groups)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RAPIDLY</th>
<th>ABOUT TEN YEARS LATER, GRADUALLY</th>
<th>BETTER IF NOT UNIFIED</th>
<th>DON’T KNOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19–29</td>
<td><img src="chart1.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart2.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart3.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td><img src="chart1.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart2.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart3.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td><img src="chart1.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart2.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart3.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–59</td>
<td><img src="chart1.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart2.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart3.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td><img src="chart1.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart2.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
<td><img src="chart3.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 11
How Much Benefit Will Unification Bring to the Nation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Very Beneficial</th>
<th>Somewhat Beneficial</th>
<th>Not Very Beneficial</th>
<th>Not at All Beneficial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Figure 12
How Much Benefit Will Unification Bring to Your Own Life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Very Beneficial</th>
<th>Somewhat Beneficial</th>
<th>Not Very Beneficial</th>
<th>Not at All Beneficial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>67.1%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Ultimately, factors that compel South Koreans to think positively about unification such as overcoming more than seven decades of partition are always balanced by much more cautious views on the nature of the North Korean regime.”

than living in fear of North Korea’s nuclear weapons or the possibility of another protracted conflict.

The story is very different when South Koreans think about individual benefits from unification. In 2017, for example, 67.1 percent replied that there wasn’t much of a personal benefit stemming from unification, 20.5 percent said that there was some benefit, and 3.7 percent responded that there was a lot of benefit from unification (see figure 12). At the same time, when asked whether South Koreans should “sacrifice everything in exchange for achieving a grand goal of unification,” 3.5 percent answered “very much agree” and 37.5 percent said they “somewhat agree” versus 25.4 percent who said “not very much agree” and 2.8 percent that “not at all agree.”

Unification costs are likely to be extremely high for a protracted period of time and an issue that amplifies potential direct costs for South Koreans. The same survey asked South Koreans whether they supported a tax increase for unification and only 1.3 percent said they “very much agree” while 15.2 percent said they “somewhat agree.” Sixty-two percent said they didn’t agree much or not at all (15 percent), which illustrates the divide between normative support for unification versus assuming direct personal costs. Last but not least, continuing ambivalence continues to shape South Korean attitudes toward unification and North Korea. In a poll conducted by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in April 2018, 31.9 percent of South Koreans said that North Korea was a “stranger/enemy” while 55.8 percent said that North Korea was “one of us/neighbor” so that positive views of North Korea prevailed.

What is very surprising, however, is that 49.3 percent of those in their twenties felt that North Korea was a “stranger/enemy.” This is because from the period when democracy was restored in 1987 until the 2000s, ideological affinity with North Korea remained strongest among those who were in their twenties and thirties. The ability to speak much more freely on South-North issues and the propensity to see North Korea as more independent and nationalistic than South Korea contributed to greater sympathy for the North. But millennials in South Korea are much more concerned about job security and new opportunities than focusing on pro-North Korean activities. Clearly, there are millennials who are more supportive of North Korea, but in the mainstream, most of this generation also understands North Korea has committed gross violations of human rights and feels more detached from Pyongyang’s ideology.

These perceptions of unification suggest that there is a significant divergence in how the public will perceive specific aspects of unification, the government’s response to contingencies, and the degree to which it is willing to coordinate policies with the United States. Many South Koreans believe there will be some national benefit from unification. But if they have to assume direct tax burdens, suffer cuts or delays in their own social welfare benefits, or agree to provide preferential treatment to North Korean refugees, political support for whichever government remains in power is going to dissipate. In terms of stabilization, this suggests that most South Koreans are likely to support humanitarian responses, such as economic and food aid to the North, but will be less enthusiastic about the long-term financial burden associated with integrating North Koreans into South Korea’s economic institutions.
South Koreans are more likely to support stabilizing activities such as securing WMD or implementing viable policing in North Korea given that rapidly deteriorating civil security conditions in North Korea could be destabilizing in South Korea as well. However, longer-term commitments required to demobilize the KPA and manage nuclear waste would be called into question. This is why most South Koreans—some 65 percent—believe that unification should be stretched out over a longer period of time, such as ten years.

One of the most important dimensions of unification is that no one really knows the speed or magnitude of changes that are likely to be triggered in the event of regime collapse in North Korea. Moreover, even under the most peaceful unification scenario through a political settlement—a very large leap of faith—major obstacles will remain. If a “two systems, two nations” situation is maintained for the time being, will South Koreans be willing to give up their civil liberties in exchange for the creation of a unified state? Those in their thirties and below have always lived under a democracy in South Korea, it is nearly impossible for them to fathom living in an authoritarian system. As this group matures politically, job security, personal incomes, level of social welfare benefits, and educational opportunities are likely to dominate rather than any ethnic bond with North Koreans.

There will be huge political debates within South Korea as the ROK, together with the United States and other international partners, begins to focus on establishing civil control after order and security are achieved in North Korea. Such control could be realized by putting into place a viable criminal justice system, impartially allocating private property, and addressing the problem of gross human rights violations as well as de facto genocide in North Korea. Finding a political consensus within South Korea on how best to cope with reconciliation but also achieve justice for all of the suffering of the North Korean people will be divided sharply along ideological lines.

Ultimately, factors that compel South Koreans to think positively about unification such as overcoming more than seven decades of partition are always balanced by much more cautious views on the nature of the North Korean regime. In a Gallup Korea poll conducted in December 2018 to assess how South Koreans viewed the flurry of inter-Korean summits in 2018 and unprecedented engagement between the two Koreas, 45 percent responded that North Korea was unlikely to keep its promises while 38 percent said that North Korea was likely to keep its word on the various agreements. Entrenched political divisions and deep contradictions within the South, such as support for unification but unwillingness to make major political concessions as well as perceiving North Korea as a partner but also an adversary, likely means that public support for extensive engagement with North Korea will be tempered over time. Expectations for the results of engagement are already moderating—in a poll conducted by the Korea Society Opinion Institute, 54 percent of South Koreans were optimistic that the second summit between Kim and U.S. President Donald Trump would produce a deal leading to the eventual denuclearization of North Korea, compared to 75 percent at the time of the first Trump-Kim summit.

U.S. ROLE AND CAPACITY

The United States’ role in Korean unification will be shaped largely by three factors. First, as South Korea’s most important ally and one that shares common universal values, the United States has reaffirmed its support for peaceful reunification of the two Koreas as well as the creation of a free and democratic Korea. This is crucial because regardless of the deep sensitivities involved in laying down the characteristics of a unified Korea, it behooves the United States as the world’s most powerful democracy to throw its weight behind the creation of a unified Korea that is free and democratic.

Second, U.S. diplomatic acumen, strategy, and support is going to be critical in forging a broad international
coalition that reaffirms the principles of peaceful unification and the building of a democratic, unified Korea. This will be especially relevant given the growing political influence of China across Asia and, indeed, the world. In a development that no one could have foreseen two to three decades ago, all of the United States’ allies in Asia today trade more with China than the United States. In short, China enjoys significant leverage over every single U.S. ally and partner in the Asia Pacific region but especially on the Korean Peninsula. The only power that will be able to match and counter Chinese influence in and around the Korean Peninsula is the United States.

Third, as described in greater detail below, the U.S. role in undertaking stability actions in North Korea as the unification process begins, if managed properly, will be constructive and significant. Dismantling North Korea’s CBRN, demobilizing the KPA, and controlling the country’s security apparatuses cannot be done solely by South Korea. On top of that, the U.S. capacity to assist in restoring essential services, establishing civil control, and supporting governance and economic development can be a stabilizing force behind South Korea’s efforts.

Regardless of the second U.S.–North Korea summit, the likelihood of a peace agreement formally ending the Korean War, and the normalization of relations between the United States and North Korea, the United States will continue to play an important role in supporting Korean security and taking the lead in multilateral diplomacy. German unification relied on a 2+4 mechanism (the two Germanies plus France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States), and something similar could work in the Korean context. However, it seems highly unlikely that China, Russia, or the two Koreas (in case of a negotiated settlement) would agree to any formal role for Japan. In the end, as South Korea’s most important ally, the United States’ steadfast commitment to a unified Korea that is led by the ROK is the best conduit for ensuring the highest levels of cooperation throughout the process of unification.
ESTABLISHING CIVIL SECURITY (I):
WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

In the stabilization context, civil security refers to “the provision of security for state entities and the population, including protection from internal and external threats.” Creating a secure and stable environment helps not only ensure the protection of civilians but also create conditions for other stability actions to succeed. Without civil security, practitioners will find extreme difficulty in restoring essential services, establishing rule of law, or sustaining governance and development. The exact scale of North Korea’s WMD programs is unknown, but they will certainly require an extensive and complex dismantlement effort. Additionally, although its soldiers are malnourished and possess outdated equipment, North Korea still has the fourth-largest military in the world with 1.2 million personnel, or 5 percent of its population. By contrast, Saddam Hussein’s army in 2003 had just 360,000 to 420,000 men with far inferior conventional capabilities. At this scale, even if unification occurs without conflict, demobilizing all of these elements and simultaneously dealing with the challenge of maintaining civil security will require massive amounts of man power and money, as well as careful strategic planning.

Securing and dismantling WMD programs, and particularly the nuclear program, will be one of the most critical stability actions in North Korea. Building a nuclear program is an expensive and time-consuming process, but so is its dismantlement. In Iraq, 1,625 U.S. and UN inspectors took two years to search nearly 1,700 sites for WMD at a cost of $1 billion. After Russia bought Soviet-era strategic warheads back from the Ukraine, the United States provided $500 million through the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) fund to dismantle Ukraine’s remaining intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), ICBM silos, heavy bombers, and cruise missiles over a period of six years. IAEA safeguards in Iran to implement the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) cost $18.42 million in 2017 to perform inspection activities at eighteen facilities and nine other locations. Libya dismantled its nuclear and chemical weapons programs with assistance from the UK. South Africa decided of its own volition to dismantle its six air-deliverable nuclear weapons in just a few months.

Needless to say, the size, scope, and character of past WMD dismantlement efforts have varied greatly. Dismantlement of North Korean WMD will be different still. U.S. intelligence estimates that North Korea has the fissile material to build between thirty and sixty nuclear bombs, and has assembled ten to twenty. Its copious missile tests have confirmed its ability to manufacture delivery vehicles, including ICBMs. A 2017 U.S. intelligence assessment concluded that North Korea had successfully miniaturized a nuclear warhead to fit ICBMs. Experts estimate that North
Korea has upwards of 1,000 missiles of varying ranges. On top of weapons and delivery vehicles, securing all of North Korea’s highly enriched uranium, plutonium, weapons R&D materials, and personnel will be major tasks. In addition to nuclear weapons, North Korea is believed to possess an arsenal of 2,500 to 5,000 tons of chemical weapons, as well the potential to produce biological pathogens such as anthrax and smallpox.

Fully eliminating North Korea’s WMD programs would require securing at the very least 141 known (and certainly many more unknown) CBRN-related sites, dismantling nuclear arms, halting uranium enrichment, disabling reactors, closing nuclear test sites, ending hydrogen bomb fuel production, destroying germ arms, destroying chemical arms, and curbing its missile program. North Korea’s WMD will require far more extensive counter-WMD (CWMD) operations than recent efforts in Libya, Syria, Iraq, or Iran.

Not only is the scale of North Korea’s WMD programs immense, but in the event of conflict or a messy regime collapse, securing North Korea’s WMD will have to occur in severely unstable conditions. Many of North Korea’s WMD are in heavily fortified, concealed, or unknown locations that will take time to locate without the cooperation of North Koreans with knowledge of the programs. Moreover, securing WMD requires a major ground-force presence, and the United States and South Korea have never fought a ground war with loose CBRN material in the operating environment. Once secured, dismantling North Korea’s nuclear program will also be a decidedly slow endeavor. While National Security Adviser John Bolton has said that fully verified dismantlement can occur within a year, experts estimate the full process could take anywhere from a few years to fifteen years. And after that, a critical remaining issue will be how to dispose of nuclear material.
MAJOR CHALLENGES TO ELIMINATING WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION IN THE KOREAN CONTEXT

In the short term, the most immediate priorities for WMD elimination (WMD-E) related civil security actions will be verifiably locating all WMD, securing CBRN materials, and securing elites and others with WMD-related knowledge. These tasks will be sufficient to ensure enough security that other stability actions can proceed. However, because many of the locations of North Korea’s nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons are unknown, this phase will be a major undertaking requiring a considerable amount of time, delaying other vital missions.

Each phase of stabilization—initial response, transformation, and fostering sustainability—poses its own challenges, but the initial phase will be the most critical as it possesses the most potential for instability if done poorly. In the fog of war, a power vacuum, or pronounced political uncertainty, the threat of uncontained WMD is amplified, and the potential for enemy combatants to seize, use, or proliferate WMD poses a serious threat. For this reason, quickly finding and securing WMD in an unstable scenario is absolutely critical to protecting local populations and enabling subsequent stability actions. As such, the military should first focus on securing population centers and known sites so that essential services can be delivered to these areas as quickly as possible.

Simultaneously, the military will have to scour the country to locate any as yet unknown WMD sites, of which there may be many. In situations where the North Korean government is incapacitated or conflict occurs, securing WMD will be far more integral to ensuring civil security and laying the foundation for other stability actions to begin. Although an incapacitated North Korean government will allow for less restricted access to WMD sites, if North Korean officials do not cooperate, the United States and South Korea will enter into an operational environment with hazardous WMD in unknown locations. Fighting a war in this context poses extremely high risks, including the potential for accidental detonation of a nuclear weapon. In a scenario with various military factions and insurgents, enemy elements could also gain control of WMD. It goes without saying that ascertaining and securing the location of WMD as quickly and thoroughly as possible will be critical to reducing potential harm in these contexts.

In Iraq, no WMD were found but the experience offers insights into the challenges in securing WMD in North Korea. North Korea is a little less than one-third the size of Iraq, and physically searching for hidden WMD could conceivably take less time. However, North Korea’s terrain also presents different challenges. Iraqi terrain consists mostly of broad plains, with some mountains and marshes on the border. North Korea, meanwhile, is predominately mountainous, which makes finding, securing, and dismantling WMD far more difficult, and the KPA has heavily prioritized concealment of everything including “command posts, foxholes, runways, fighter jet and naval bases, and cave strongholds.”

Based on defector accounts and evidence from tunnels discovered leading into the North, IHS Janes estimates that North Korea has a network of 11,000 fortified underground facilities, some of which could potentially conceal WMD. Searching for and locating all the WMD in North Korea could take months or even years. Wargames conducted by RAND that accounted for “Not only is the scale of North Korea’s WMD programs immense, but in the event of conflict or a messy regime collapse, securing North Korea’s WMD will have to occur in severely unstable conditions.”
factors specific to the Korean context found that securing a single site could take weeks or months, depending on the level of interference from North Korean forces. Once located, securing a single large site is estimated to take four days, and then another three days to ascertain whether the site is critical to the WMD program. The process of “systematically searching for and collecting information, material, and persons from a designated location and analyzing them to answer information requirements, facilitate subsequent operations, or support criminal prosecution” (exploitation) would take an average of eighteen days, although very large sites like Yongbyon could take months to secure and exploit. As the RAND study noted:

Reaching these sites is extremely difficult, as is finding the weapons. The mountainous, channelized terrain along the DMZ is defended by dug-in North Korean forces. If these units actively defend their positions, analysis found that U.S. forces would not arrive at the first nuclear site for almost two weeks, and then only after suffering substantial combat losses. Even when wargames posited weak-to-nonexistent North Korean resistance—allowing U.S. forces to quickly reach the closest sites—locating nuclear weapons and material took a considerable amount of time, tying up both large maneuver units and the highly specialized units that locate and safely eliminate nuclear weapons. Moreover, in the wargames, analysts playing the role of North Korean factions impeded the U.S. search efforts by sabotaging the facilities, blowing up tunnels, and contaminating the sites with radiological waste.

In a peaceful scenario, negotiating away North Korea’s nuclear program will likely be a precursor to economic integration and a condition for the unification process to begin. It will therefore not be an initial stability action, as the lack of volatility and negotiated access to nuclear sites will make WMD less of a threat to the general population. However, regardless of whether denuclearization results through diplomatic negotiations or seizure in an unstable context, providing security assurances to North Korean officials will be critical to ensuring nonproliferation and long-term stability of the process. In any scenario, there will be elites and officials in North Korea that have had a stake in, and knowledge of, its WMD program. Successful unification requires that they believe the process will not be harmful for them. If they are uncertain or unconvincing the positive outcomes of unification, they will have an incentive—and resources—to undermine CWMD and nonproliferation efforts.

North Korea has learned from the experiences of Ukraine, Iraq, Libya, and Iran. Specifically, that nuclear weapons are the ultimate deterrent against foreign intervention. Ukraine gave up its large nuclear stockpile in exchange for security assurances from Russia and the United States, yet Russia annexed Ukrainian Crimea in 2014. Iraq did not have nuclear weapons, and thus could not stave off U.S. forces in 1991 or 2003. Muammar Gaddafi renounced Libya’s WMD on December 19, 2003, only to be deposed and killed in the Libyan Civil War in 2011. Iran entered into the JCPOA to reduce its nuclear program, and watched as it was jeopardized by U.S. President Donald Trump’s decision to withdraw from the agreement. As a result, regardless of an agreement, if North Korean elites believe at any point that protections afforded by an external security guarantee will expire, they will be more likely to sell knowledge, expertise, or even smuggle nuclear technology outside of the country. Given the scale of North Korea’s nuclear program and the number of people involved, this has the potential to create a proliferation threat similar and likely larger than that posed by A. Q. Khan, the one-time head of Pakistan’s uranium enrichment program who sold uranium enrichment technology to many international buyers including North Korea, Libya, and Iran.
As such, it is highly important that elites, scientists, and anyone with knowledge of North Korea’s WMD programs, especially nuclear, be quickly located and secured. While unification will require transitional justice to address human rights abuses committed by elites, vetted elites and professionals with WMD knowledge should have opportunities to contribute meaningfully in a unified Korea. The U.S. learned this lesson the hard way in Iraq, when after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 it systematically eliminated Saddam’s ruling Baath Party, confiscated some of its wealth, and removed party members from their government jobs without offering viable alternative occupations or ensuring their safety. The Baath Party was so integral to the governance of Iraq that its elimination left the government short-staffed and hardly able to function. De-Baathification fueled resentment in many communities and led to widespread political and social instability in Iraq that undermined stabilization and contributed to the insurgency, the legacy of which still undermines governance in Iraq today.57

The same potential exists in North Korea with the added threat of elite and professionals’ access to information on North Korea’s WMD programs. The ROK government’s plans for North Korean scientists and elites are opaque, but allowing North Korean scientists and officials to maintain their status will likely be unpalatable to many Koreans. A transitional justice process that judges the future of these people based on their individual conduct, not their affiliations, will be critical to demonstrating to the public rigorous vetting and formally legitimizing security guarantees for WMD-related personnel. Even once transitional justice is complete, elites will need to be constantly reassured of their security. Although technology and WMD research and development materials can be physically secured, individual knowledge cannot. Those with WMD knowledge will continue to pose a proliferation risk throughout their lifetime.

“While unification will require transitional justice to address human rights abuses committed by elites, vetted elites and professionals with WMD knowledge should have opportunities to contribute meaningfully in a unified Korea.”

**U.S. ROLE AND CAPACITY**

Securing and dismantling North Korea’s nuclear weapons is perhaps the only aspect of unification in which ROK involvement is restricted by international treaty. The NPT explicitly prohibits South Korea and other non-nuclear-weapon states from handling nuclear weapons and related materials or information.58 Although South Korea can secure non-weapons-related nuclear materials or delivery vehicles, only the five NPT nuclear weapon states are permitted to handle weapons-related materials, technologies, and information. Even IAEA involvement in this endeavor is restricted, except where participating member states are restricted to the five nuclear weapon states. In the fog of war, it may be difficult to distinguish which sites have a combination of weaponized and other material. Even in a peaceful context, North Korea’s nuclear weapons program may be inextricable from peaceful elements of the nuclear program, which could restrict the ROK’s involvement further.

Biological and chemical weapon disposal, however, can include much more robust South Korean participation. It remains unclear how the Biological Weapons Convention would be implemented in North Korea, as the UN Security Council’s power to investigate violations of the convention has never been invoked.59 This in and of itself poses a stability risk—the United States and South Korea should delineate tasks, responsibilities, and lead agencies to
counter biological weapons in conflict or collapse. There is more precedent for chemical weapons, and the OPCW will likely have a leading role in coordinating the destruction as both South Korea and the United States are members. Discovery of chemical weapons can be reported to the OPCW under Article IV of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and generally states are permitted to “select and implement the appropriate destruction technologies” for chemical weapons “by which chemicals are converted in an essentially irreversible way to a form unsuitable for production of chemical weapons and which—in an irreversible manner—renders munitions and other devices unusable as such.” These activities will occur under the supervision of the OPCW, which will verify the completion and legitimacy of destruction.

The United States and ROK have plans for how they will handle CWMD in conflict, although the details of the operational plan are classified. The U.S. Joint Publication 3-40 on Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction, however, lays out U.S. doctrine for neutralizing WMD. The doctrine is geared toward conducting CWMD operations in a failing or collapsing state where intervention to secure WMD is required, although the principles outlined would largely apply in a conflict scenario as well. While the task designations will be the same in Korea, understanding the operational environment, threats, and vulnerabilities will require far greater effort than depicted in this publication. As it stands, the United States and ROK know of many WMD storage sites, research centers, factories, and other facilities, but many remain unknown. If access is permitted, units can be immediately dispatched to secure known sites and the ROK and U.S. may be given information on the location of as yet unknown sites that can be subsequently secured. However, if conflict occurs and especially if a North Korean insurgency is involved, completely and verifiably securing North Korea’s WMD could take much longer.

In many aspects of stability actions in the North, particularly restoring essential services and establishing rule of law, the United States will be most heavily involved in the initial phase of restoration. However, in the case of civil security, the United States needs to remain engaged in the transformation and fostering sustainability phases as well due to the NPT’s restrictions on South Korea’s access to nuclear weapons as well as the logistics denuclearization will require.

While chemical weapons can be destroyed relatively easily and safely through incineration or neutralization, and biological weapons can be eliminated through heat or chemical compounds, dismantling North Korea’s nuclear program will create enormous amounts of nuclear waste that poses a security risk. Decommissioning Yongbyon alone will be a hugely challenging endeavor, Whang Jooho and George T. Baldwin have explained:

[It will] result in anywhere from 50 to 100 metric tons of uranium spent fuel, as much as 500,000 liters of liquid high-level waste, as well as miscellaneous high-level waste sources from the Radiochemical Laboratory. A substantial quantity of intermediate-level waste will result from disposing 600 metric tons of graphite from the reactor, an undetermined quantity of chemical decladding liquid waste from reprocessing, and hundreds of tons of contaminated concrete and metal from facility dismantlement.

Dealing with this waste will be a long-term challenge with international implications. One option for disposing of fissile material and delivery vehicles is to remove them from the country—a very expensive process and one that could be opposed by residents of their destination country. A second option is to transport the spent fuel to a location abroad where it can be vitrified, and then return it to North Korea for storage. Countries with the infrastructure required to vitrify North Korea’s nuclear waste include the United States, Japan, France, and the UK.
MAP 1
North Korea’s WMD Facilities

LUCIDITY INFORMATION DESIGN, L.L.C.
Because of South Korea’s NPT status and North Korea’s radioactive waste, dismantling its nuclear program will at some point become an international endeavor. The ROK’s closest ally, the United States, may not immediately be able to access, locate, or secure North Korea’s WMD sites, but China might. A number of North Korea’s known nuclear facilities are much closer to the border with China than South Korea, including the Pyunggye-ri nuclear test site, suspected uranium enrichment facilities Yeongjeo-ri and Cheonmasan, and suspected underground nuclear facilities Bakcheon, Taechon, and Hagap. In short, almost all of North Korea’s major nuclear facilities other than Yongbyon are closer to China than South Korea. China has the ability to deploy those forces on the ground to WMD sites much more quickly than the United States, and that access has the potential to be destabilizing if not properly coordinated with the United States and South Korea.

If South Korea does not involve China in planning, China’s reactions could be discordant from joint U.S.-ROK responses although it has a vested interest in ensuring stability on the peninsula. Including China in planning for WMD-E operations could decrease the time required to secure the area, allowing for other organizations to come in more quickly and restore essential services to populations in need. Still, this would likely be a difficult sell in both South Korea and the United States, not to mention key obstacles that information sharing with China presents. To open a conversation, the United States and the ROK could approach China first on the basis of dealing with North Korea’s nuclear waste. The issue of nuclear waste is less sensitive than securing and dismantling nuclear material, but still will be a significant challenge in dismantling North Korea’s nuclear program in the long term. This phase of denuclearization also requires less intelligence sharing, and therefore is easier to approach with China. In fact, the United States and China have cooperated before to remove highly enriched uranium from Ghana.65

Assuming trust can be built through discussing this topic, the United States and the ROK can potentially work backward to China’s cooperation on other WMD-E tasks. To mitigate the potential political risks of involving China, such as giving it too much influence, in addition to the IAEA the United States and South Korea could also reach out to other potential partners, particularly the Five Eyes nations—the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and the United States. These five countries share signals intelligence with each other, and cooperate extensively with South Korea in military exercises through their status as United Nations Sending States to the United Nations Command in the ROK. Broadening the coalition of nations involved in WMD-E operations can mitigate ROK uneasiness about U.S. involvement by diluting its influence, as well as help the United States with burden sharing of this massive task.

While the sequencing of dismantling North Korea’s WMD will change depending on the scenario, the essential tasks required will not. In order for the ROK and its international partners to be as prepared as possible in dismantling North Korea’s CBRN, they should prepare for these tasks that are critical for mission success.
Securing and dismantling the KPA’s personnel, facilities, and bases, as well as paramilitary units and security forces (military units attached to the major intelligence agencies and border guards) will require a whole-of-government effort on the part of South Korea with extensive participation of the United States. Four major and interrelated operations need to be carried out simultaneously in order to establish effective civil security and, in the short to mid-term, effective civil control: (1) ensuring adequate policing and maintaining social order throughout North Korea; (2) disarming and demobilizing the KPA and paramilitary units subordinate to the KPA; (3) taking control of and disbanding key intelligence and security apparatuses such as the Ministry of State Security (MSS), the Ministry of People’s Security (MPS), the Public Security Bureau (PSB), and the Reconnaissance General Bureau (RGB) including their own military units and paramilitary forces; and (4) coordinating and putting into place a viable civil control mechanism with relevant institutions, personnel, and infrastructure. Most importantly, establishing more effective civil security is going to depend critically on the speed, agility, and thoroughness of providing adequate policing services throughout North Korea and disarming and ultimately demobilizing the KPA and all other military units.

“Securing and dismantling the KPA’s personnel, facilities, and bases, as well as paramilitary units and security forces will require a whole-of-government effort on the part of South Korea with extensive participation of the United States.”

From a UN perspective, disarmament and demobilization are understood through the so-called “integrated disarmament and demobilization reintegration standards” (IDDR) framework. Specifically, “the objective of [this] process is to contribute to security and stability in postconflict environments so that recovery and development can begin.”\(^\text{66}\) This framework must be part of broader capacity-building endeavors and linked to security issues such as reorganizing the armed forces and other security sector reforms.\(^\text{67}\) However, it’s very difficult to imagine that disarmament and demobilization operations in the North Korean context would also
include reintegration into a unified Korean military so that a more curtailed version of an “integrated disarmament and demobilization” (IDD) can be applied vis-à-vis the KPA.

Two big unknowns that could severely impede or even prevent operations in all four areas would be the possibility and extent of Chinese political and military intervention in North Korea right after collapse and immense fallout from a hard landing in North Korea, that is, the collapse of the North Korean regime followed by significant turmoil, turbulence, and instability. Organized opposition to any IDD could include sabotage, terrorist attacks, and limited military operations. Remnants of the KPA and security agencies could also opt to align themselves with Chinese authorities in order to prevent the United States and the ROK from undertaking stability actions in North Korea including IDD efforts. If China agrees to U.S. and South Korean military responses in North Korea, it would happen only with approval from the UN Security Council. Both Beijing and Moscow will insist on UN approval for any IDD operations in North Korea and most likely veto any efforts by the United States and South Korea in taking unilateral military actions.

For the purposes of this study, stabilization under a soft landing (a more managed collapse akin to East Germany’s relatively peaceful implosion after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989) with no Chinese military intervention and no domestic opposition is emphasized to illustrate how arduous and difficult even the “easiest” stabilization operation will be in North Korea.

As part of comprehensive stabilization, undertaking critically important subordinate tasks such as disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating (to the degree possible), the KPA stands out as a massive security challenge. Given the central role of the KPA in keeping the Kim regime afloat, the immense size of its conventional forces (see table 3), the amount of resources it absorbs (such as 20–25 percent of GDP for defense spending), and the importance of the KPA as the major conduit of a militarized North Korea, disarming and demobilization operations at such a level has little historical parallel.

IDD operations in North Korea can be considered in three major contexts. First, peacetime IDD could only happen if the two Koreas agreed to forge a unified Korean military by first agreeing to dismantle their respective forces. However, given the vast differences in doctrine, education, training, political indoctrination, weapons systems, and political loyalties, it is virtually impossible to imagine that the ROK armed forces and the KPA could agree to fundamentally reconfigure their forces to create a unified Korean military. Second, IDD operations could occur after war-termination. Provided that the ROK and the United States emerge as the victors in a second Korean conflict, the KPA, paramilitary units, and reserve forces would be disbanded. Third, IDDR operations could occur after North Korea collapses, which serves as the baseline assumption for this study.

Two types of state collapse can be imagined: (1) a hard landing or near-total collapse of North Korea including the implosion of the KPA and security forces that could result in significant chaos, uncertainty, and instability; and (2) a soft landing. One of the core dimensions of successful IDD operations in both hard and soft landing contingencies is the requirement for viable policing and civil security services. In a hard landing scenario, one can envision not only the collapse of the KPA but the Ministry of People's Security (akin to the central and provincial police in South Korea) and also the Ministry of State Security that oversees domestic surveillance, intelligence operations, and safeguarding of high-level personnel. If the MPS and the MSS collapse together with the KPA, ensuring that a security vacuum does not persist simultaneously must receive the highest political and policy priorities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NK FORCES</th>
<th>SK FORCES</th>
<th>USFK</th>
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<td><strong>ARMY</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>1,100,000</td>
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<td>Reserves</td>
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<td>Paramilitary</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ballistic missiles</td>
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<tr>
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<td>11,067+</td>
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<tr>
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<td>70,000 (Marines: 29,000)</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrol and coastal combatants</td>
<td>383+</td>
<td>104 (est.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fighter</td>
<td>401+</td>
<td>587</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NUCLEAR</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>40–60 warheads (est.), ability to produce some 12 warheads annually</td>
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<td>1,740 deployed warheads</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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<td>625,000</td>
<td>28,500</td>
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MAJOR CHALLENGES TO DEMOBILIZATION

As one of the most militarized states in the world, the KPA’s footprints cover virtually every square inch of North Korea. Disarming and demobilizing this gigantic military with all its sub-commands and component commands is going to require a massive multiyear effort. In more ways than one, IDDR operations involving the KPA means disarming and demobilizing an entire nation rather than just an organization given the KPA’s massive footprint in North Korea.

The KPA is maintained and supervised through three main organizations (see figure 14): the General Staff Department in charge of all military commands and forces; the Ministry of People’s Armed Forces (MPAF) that oversees policies and logistics but otherwise doesn’t exercise direct control over the KPA; and the KPA’s General Political Bureau (GPB), which supervises and monitors the KPA. The GPB is the most powerful military organization since it receives direct orders from the chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the KWP and chairman of the State Affairs Commission, both of which are led by Kim Jong Un. Any effective IDDR operations can only be executed with the dissolution of the GPB.

Thinking about the structure of the KPA is essential to ensuring maximum efficiency in IDDR operations since as much as it is a formidable military fighting machine, it is also a highly politicized organization. The GPB is akin to superglue that holds a structure in place, and it is related to, but separate from, the KPA’s military command and control. As a result, the structural integrity of the GPB is going to be a critical indicator in assessing prospects for relatively smooth IDDR operations. For example, even if the regime collapses and the KPA no longer functions as the backbone of the regime, the general staff, top echelons, and, in particular, political commissars within the GPB are unlikely to surrender without some type of resistance. The magnitude and duration of such opposition will depend almost wholly on whether the KWP is no longer able to hold onto power and loses whatever legitimacy it has to rule over North Korea in the event of regime collapse. The main point here is to stress the very high importance of the KPA’s political fabric and its xenophobic commitment to the North Korean state and, tangentially, to the survival of the Kim dynasty. Hence, stabilization including IDDR efforts have to place much more emphasis on co-opting the GPB and paying special attention to the political arm of the KPA.

Disarming and demobilizing the KPA and related military units poses enormous challenges with no real precedent. When one combines the KPA, paramilitary, and militia forces, the total number of forces reach about 2 million. The KPA’s 1.2 million conventional forces are among the largest in the world. The army is divided into twenty-seven infantry divisions, four mechanized divisions, one armored division, and one artillery division. It also has 88,000 special purpose
forces and some 600,000 reserves. The KPA air force is very backward compared to South Korea’s, with four
air divisions fielding outdated MiG-15/17/19 models and five regiments of MiG-21s that were delivered in
the 1980s. The North Korean navy is the smallest of the three services with 60,000 personnel. It has seventy-
three submarines, two principal surface combatants, and over 383 patrol and coastal combatants.

Like its counterparts in the Red Army in the Soviet Union and the PLA in China today, the KWP has a key role in running the KPA. Political commissars through the KPA General Political Bureau are present at all military units and levels of the KPA so that it’s difficult to imagine a purely “military” dimension other than undertaking military operations. Hence, ensuring that the political arm of the KPA is also taken into account is going to determine the overarching success of related IDDR efforts. Here, how the KWP is dismantled in conjunction with the party’s provincial, municipal, district, and organizational units is going to play a critical role in IDDR operations. Since political commissars are appointed and dispatched by the KWP, it is easy to imagine an extremely disruptive process if the KWP collapses as a super political body. Whether local political units attached to various KPA echelons will also collapse if the KWP collapses remains unknown.

IDD efforts will also deal with the residues of unmatched political indoctrination within the KPA and by the KWP. Even the PLA, the Soviet Union’s Red Army during the Cold War, or East Germany’s Nationale Volksarmee (National People’s Army, NVA) prior to unification in 1990 stressed such monolithic political education. The KPA’s ultimate goal is preserving the Kim dynasty and not the North Korean state. This factor alone sets it apart from other communist militaries. Even though East Germany’s NVA was heavily supervised by the ruling Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party, SED) with constant reminders that the military served the party, political indoctrination and ideological education in North Korea is incomparably stronger and more resilient. By the time conscripts serve in the KPA, they have been exposed to more than a decade of intensive political indoctrination that begins from nursery school but is drilled in systematically from primary school. The officer corps and elite graduates of military academies such as the Kang Kon Military Academy, Mangyeongdae Revolutionary Institute, and the Kim Il Sung Military University receive additional indoctrination. Constant ideological education and unity of purpose under the rubric of the monolithic ideological system lies at the very heart of the politicization of the KPA.

The Bundeswehr’s Takeover of East Germany’s NVA

Disarming and demobilizing the NVA was carried out based on five critical and nearly simultaneous decisions: (1) to create one unified army following unification; (2) to reorganize remnants of the NVA into the Bundeswehr under a new structure (AS-5) or to superimpose the new structure on the NVA; (3) dissolving the NVA and activating simultaneously an integrated Bundeswehr; (4) creating partnerships between the former military units of the two armed forces; and (5) allowing certain numbers of the NVA to continue to serve in the Bundeswehr, especially in the territory of the former East Germany. In essence, while the Bundeswehr undertook IDDR operations since some elements of the NVA were retained, for all

“Political commissars through the KPA General Political Bureau are present at all military units and levels of the KPA so that it’s difficult to imagine a purely “military” dimension other than undertaking military operations.”
practical purposes, West Germany also put into place IDD rather than IDDR operations.

While the tasks of engineering and coordinating the takeover were arduous, they weren't improbable given that the total size of the NVA on the eve of unification was 90,000 armed personnel with 19,000 border guards, and 40,000 defense civilians. The Bundeswehr inherited all of the NVA's massive armaments including 7,800 armored vehicles, 2,500 artillery pieces, 400 combat aircraft, 90 attack helicopters, 90 surface combatants, 12,000 SAMs, 43,000 anti-tank rockets, 100,000 wheeled vehicles, and 300,000 tons of ammunition. The NVA's equipment was not as modern as West Germany's or NATO's but it was a very capable military with a high degree of readiness.
Almost none of the NVA units were integrated into the Bundeswehr following unification.

Once West Germany’s Ministry of Defense (MOD) came up with a plan for IDDR operations in July–August 1990, it was decided that the Bundeswehr would take the lead in disarming and reintegrating 90,000 soldiers of the NVA (23,000 officers, 27,000 NCOs, and 40,000 draftees). The NVA had already reduced its numbers sharply after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. At that time, the NVA had some 42,000 officers with 10,000 who were political commissars. In early 1990, the 10,000 political officers were dismissed from the NVA since the Bundeswehr had no desire to retain politically tainted officers in their ranks. Of the 47,000 frontier troops of the NVA whose main job was to prevent East Germans from defecting to the West, only 2,000 were allowed to serve in the federal border forces. Subsequently, the Bundeswehr decided not to retain any generals from the NVA.

When the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, none of the key stakeholders such as West and East Germany, the United States, or the former Soviet Union, could imagine that the two Germanies would be unified peacefully by October 1990. West Germany’s Bundeswehr took over East Germany’s NVA from the summer of 1990 without a single military disturbance. In a remarkable convergence of luck, critical political choices made by the NVA, compliance by East Germany’s political leadership, and West Germany’s comprehensive undertaking of IDDR operations despite the lack of any wide-ranging pre-planning, the NVA opted to surrender without a major political struggle. Ironically, the Sovietized nature of the NVA meant that after a decision was made by the remaining NVA chain of command to disband itself, there was no organized opposition.

While the East Germans were well educated and had a solid grounding in their military specialties, they were used to obeying orders to the letter, doing only what they were told and no more. It was a highly regulated and risk averse army where authority was never questioned, where the party line was strictly adhered to and where officers could advance best if they showed no initiative or nonconformity at any time.70

Once it became clear that the interim East German government wouldn’t be able to forestall the push for rapid unification with West Germany, particularly after the March 1990 all-German election, the West German MOD began to prepare for IDDR operations in consultation with East Germany’s Ministry of National Defense (MND). Subsequently, the MND’s traditional functions were terminated with the appointment of East German politician Rainer Eppelman as Minister of Disarmament and Defense. Eppelman worked from April to October 1990 to peacefully disband the NVA.

On June 1, 1990, the West German MOD created two steering committees, one on Armaments, Security/Military Policy and another on Armed Forces and Administration. The former dealt with the 2+4 talks that led to German unification, disarmament verification, and force structures. The latter was focused on overall administrative issues including budgeting, personnel, organization, legal, and social issues. Then West German defense minister Gerhard Stoltenberg decided in June 1990 that there would be one unified military after unification, which meant the dissolution of the NVA. After the NVA ceased to exist on October 2, 1990, a new and temporary Eastern Federal Armed Forces Command (EFAFC) was created to oversee the takeover of the NVA. This command had operational authority for IDDR operations with three subordinate commands for the former NVA’s ground, air, and naval forces.

The EFAFC was disbanded after its initial mission was completed in July 1991 but the overall IDDR task lasted from 1990 until 1993. The RAND Corporation published a major study on East Germany’s NVA in October 1989, just one month before the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the report, it was noted that
Gorbachev and warming of East-West relations over the past few years have changed the political context for the East German leadership. A large, well-trained army no longer appears to be the most effective way to curry favor with the Soviets. Domestic political pressures for more contact with the FRG [Federal Republic of Germany] and government acquiescence to travel by East German youth to the FRG are making it more and more difficult to maintain the image of the Western ‘enemy.’

Politically, the NVA was modeled after the Soviet Union’s Red Army, intended to serve the interests of the SED. Out of some 42,000 officers, party ideology and education was left to a large corps of 10,000 political officers that functioned in all units and at all levels of the NVA. These political commissars also acted as the eyes and ears of the dreaded Stasi or Ministry for State Security. While the NVA was a professional army, its main goal was serving the SED. Some 99.5 percent of the NVA’s officer corps were members of the SED. This heavy emphasis on political loyalty and affiliation with the SED was most starkly apparent in the air force since the East Germans were very concerned that their pilots would opt to defect to West Germany. “If one even had a cousin living in West Germany, this ruled out being accepted for flight training. East German pilots always flew under rigid control from the ground and were granted no opportunities whatsoever for independent flight maneuvering.”

All of the NVA’s 10,000 political officers were dismissed in early 1990. The process of vetting former NVA officers and NCOs for possible service in the Bundeswehr began with an application process that paid special attention to the applicant’s political affiliations and specifically, if they were members of the SED or had worked as an informant or an operative for the Stasi. The Bundeswehr Counterintelligence Corps took the lead in ensuring that no former Stasi members served in the unified German military. Of the 50,000 officers and NCOs in the NVA who were taken into the Bundeswehr, 30,000 were released of their own accord, 11,700 out of 23,000 officers signed a two-year contract with the Bundeswehr in early 1991, and 1,000 out of 4,000 enlistees also signed a two-year contract.

In early 1992, an independent committee was set up by the German government to review all of the records of the officers and NCOs in the NVA. They had access to all service records, interviews, party records, exam results, and reports made by West Germany’s counterintelligence forces. The decision to allow former officers and NCOs to serve in the Bundeswehr and to be deployed in the eastern part of Germany was a hotly debated issue within the Bundeswehr and the German government. Yet the rationale allowing former NVA soldiers to serve after a very thorough vetting made sense to dispel the image of a conquering army.

In the end, the reformatted Bundeswehr was able to successfully absorb the NVA by taking the initiative after major political decisions were made by West Germany, the two Germanies, or through the 2+4 process. Luckily, while some of the top NVA were unhappy with its rapid decline, they chose not to mount organized opposition. One of the main reasons was that despite heavy political indoctrination, the NVA didn’t see itself as the backbone of East Germany. Once the ground gave out after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the political shock resulted in a near-total political collapse of the GDR and by extension, the NVA. That the GDR leadership was flexible enough to accept its fate throughout this period of extreme volatility was the single most important factor resulting in successful IDDR operations. Critically, even as West Germany took the overriding initiative throughout the phase of IDDR operations, they did while exercising maximum political restraint. As a senior West Germany officer looked back, “there has been none of the backsliding we’ve seen recently in academic faculties and other areas where the Easterners
have become resentful and fed up with what they see as West Germans’ arrogance.”

**U.S. ROLE AND CAPACITY**

Like the U.S. role in controlling and dismantling North Korea’s CBRN capabilities, all major U.S. national security-related departments, intelligence organizations, and military units will have a key role to play in stabilization in North Korea with special reference to IDD operations. While the bulk of IDD operations would be undertaken by ROK forces or a UN-sanctioned multinational force with a large ROK footprint, the U.S. military has unique assets and experiences that would be indispensable in a Korean context. Although only limited lessons from U.S. stabilization in Iraq and Afghanistan can be applied to a Korean context, one critical lesson is the importance of putting into place a viable policing network with requisite manpower and resources following a collapse in North Korea. Sectarian violence is not going to happen in a postcollapse North Korea given the absence of organized religion, but disgruntled KPA units may conduct insurgency operations and undertake terrorist attacks. Here, the U.S. experience with counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations would be invaluable, especially from lessons learned in operations against the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

Most importantly, the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) and other U.S. military assets under U.S. Indo-Pacific Command could be redirected into the Korean theater following a North Korean collapse to facilitate critical missions. First, transmitting critical humanitarian assistance and aid to North Korea will necessitate massive ground, air, and even naval operations by the ROK and the United States. Second, only U.S. intelligence assets can provide requisite real-time intelligence including early warning on potential Chinese (or even Russian) responses. Third, U.S. efforts in helping to build and sustain an overarching military-intelligence-diplomatic support grid for a range of civil security and civil control actions in North Korea will be essential. While the ROK is likely to take the lead in providing civil security and IDD operations, only the United States has the capability to limit any overt Chinese attempt to impede U.S. and ROK IDD operations. This role could be extremely important in case of even limited Chinese military intervention into North Korea following a collapse or massive unrest and instability. In order to prevent North Korea from turning into a de facto Chinese zone of operation, U.S. power projection capabilities based in South Korea, for example, would serve to deter, or at the very least, mitigate, China’s more robust responses.

The U.S. military has helped maintain peace and security on the Korean Peninsula for sixty-six years since the end of the Korean War in July 1953. Regardless of the truly longer-term composition of the U.S.-ROK alliance and military footprints on the Korean Peninsula, helping to foster the transition from a highly volatile security environment to a more stable and secure postcollapse North Korea will go a long way toward the creation of a unified Korea that is free and democratic.”

“Helping to foster the transition from a highly volatile security environment to a more stable and secure postcollapse North Korea will go a long way toward the creation of a unified Korea that is free and democratic.”
over the longer term as former KPA leaders, NCOs, and organizations that had depended on the KPA for their livelihoods will be able to channel their antagonism through political parties and organized opposition. Although IDD operations in North Korea are going to entail massive efforts and coordinated responses for a prolonged period, depoliticizing the KPA is going to be as essential as disarming and dismantling the KPA and other military forces.
RESTORING ESSENTIAL SERVICES: COORDINATING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

In November 2017, a twenty-four-year-old North Korean soldier was shot by his fellow KPA soldiers as he fled from across the DMZ into South Korea. After reaching South Korea, the wounded soldier was rushed to Ajou University’s Trauma Center in Suwon where the medical team conducted emergency surgery to save him from life-threatening gunshot wounds. As the surgeons worked to treat his wounds, they found large numbers of various parasitic worms in his digestive system, some as long as 27 centimeters. The parasites they found are commonly found in dogs. Doctors also discovered the patient had hepatitis B, a condition that the patient said he’d never heard of or been tested for.

The parasites in the soldier’s body were caused by ingesting food grown using human feces as fertilizer, while hepatitis B comes from poor sanitation in medical practices. These health problems are almost nonexistent in the developed world. Importantly, this soldier was actually in relatively good health since he was not malnourished, although the UN estimates that two in five North Koreans are. Research suggests that North Koreans are shorter on average than South Koreans due to food shortages and a lack of nutritional sources, and at 5 foot 5 inches, this soldier was three inches shorter than the average South Korean man.

He did not have tuberculosis, although the World Health Organization estimates that North Korea has one of the highest tuberculosis infection rates outside of sub-Saharan Africa.

The health condition of this soldier—who given his position at the DMZ was likely better off than many in North Korea—is indicative of just a few of the major needs South Korea must address when restoring essential services in the North during unification. In addition to very poor or nonexistent medical care, only an estimated 61 percent of households in North Korea have access to safely managed water sources. Access to food, water, and medical care will be even more difficult and disrupted if unification occurs after conflict. Restoring essential services pertains equally to provisions for human survival and social well-being including, but not limited to, education, public health programs, and infrastructure modernization, and protection of human rights. Providing for these needs quickly will be critical not only for humanitarian reasons but also to prevent destabilizing inequalities as the ROK and North Korea integrate. As North Koreans become exposed to much higher standards of living in South Korea, there will be a greater urgency to rapidly improve the standard of living in the North.
Establishing and restoring essential services earlier will significantly impact prospects for long-term economic development. This is vital for long-term stability and democracy-building in a unified Korea.

Restoring essential services in North Korea will be unlike most instances in which the United States has conducted stability actions. In most past situations, like in Iraq or Haiti, the host nation was unable to provide essential services to its population, so the United States assumed that role. In this context, however, South Korea will assume the host nation role and take the lead in restoring essential services. This dynamic would only be different if the South Korean government was also significantly incapacitated in the aftermath of a conflict and temporarily unable to provide for the Korean population.

For the U.S. military, its major role will be focused primarily on helping to secure the operating environment to provide services to vulnerable populations. For USAID, efforts will be geared toward coordinating and providing immediate necessities such as food aid, water, shelter, and medical care in the short term, and assisting the South Korean government in building capacity to provide for the North Korean population in the long term. Meanwhile, as in all aspects of stabilization, the State Department’s Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization will coordinate between various U.S. agencies while the U.S. embassy will coordinate with the South Korean government and assist with organizations on the ground (unless diplomats have been evacuated due to conflict).

**UNIQUE CHALLENGES TO RESTORING ESSENTIAL SERVICES**

Providing humanitarian relief allows people to return to their daily activities and prevents further destabilization, as well as lays foundation for capacity building. Here, a number of challenges unique to the Korean context will be present regardless of the unification scenario. First, the lack of verifiable and timely intelligence about North Korea presents an obstacle to rapid and effective restoration of essential services. External assessments cannot adequately account for conditions on the ground. The United States learned this first hand in Operation Iraqi Freedom II. In 2003, then secretary of state Colin Powell acknowledged that the United States “underestimated the level of damage that had occurred to the infrastructure as a result of the period of sanctions, but more importantly as a result of the manner in which [Saddam] ran that country in such a brutal, dictatorial way for almost 30 years.”

Similarly in North Korea, limited funds available under sanctions have been redirected to enrich elites and the regime, leaving the country in a deeper state of disrepair. In North Korea, an even greater intelligence vacuum exists. In the first few days of restoring essential services, personnel on the ground will need to quickly assess the situation and revise existing estimates to meet real-time demands. In steady-state operations, the U.S. embassy and USAID will likely coordinate with the ROK to provide assessments that direct military planners in their mission, while in kinetic situations the military will likely be the first eyes on the ground and will provide information from which USAID and the Department of State can create a strategic plan with the ROK.

**Major Distribution of Vital Resources**

Among the most important challenges to confront will be evenly distributing food, water, and medical aid; providing essential services in a way that does not disrupt the local market economy; restoring critical infrastructure; and assisting IDPs. However, the ability to address each of these factors depends on how much access South Korea and international partners have in North Korea. In the event that unification results in a scenario whereby the North Korean regime remains intact in some form, each aspect of restoring essential services will need to be negotiated with North Korea’s leaders.
Ensuring North Koreans have no reason to suspect any favoritism in the distribution of services will be particularly difficult due to North Korea’s *songbun* system. *Songbun* refers to a system of state-assigned sociopolitical classifications used to maintain a rigid class structure that systematizes discrimination. A person’s *songbun* is impacted by paternal ancestors’ actions during the Japanese colonial period and the Korean War, offspring or relatives of defectors, political prisoners and their families, and social factors such as party status and work performance. *Songbun* determines where an individual is allowed to live, what sort of accommodation they receive, what occupations they are assigned to, whether they can attend school and especially university, how much food they receive from the state, and even whom they may marry. However, the rise of marketization in North Korea in recent years has allowed people to use money and foreign currency to procure greater economic and social rights. In such a highly stratified society, people will be especially wary of social status impacting distribution of resources.

Even distribution will be particularly difficult due to the physical segregation of classes in North Korea. Accessing rural areas, where those with the lowest *songbun* reside, will be far more difficult logistically than accessing Pyongyang and other urban areas. Less than 3 percent of roads in North Korea are reportedly paved, with only 724 kilometers of paved roads of 25,554 total kilometers. South Korea, by comparison, has 100,428 kilometers of road. This is critical as according to U.S. joint doctrine for stabilization, “if populations experience inequitable treatment under the law and/or perceive favoritism of one group over another regarding provision of essential services, government legitimacy may be questioned and state vulnerability to crisis increases.” Thus, improving infrastructure for transportation should be an immediate priority of reconstruction efforts to ensure reliable access to all facets of the population. Reliable transit networks will also be helpful in ensuring the secure relocation of IDPs or returning refugees from China.

“In a postconflict situation where resources are scarce, the price of goods on the markets will increase sharply. Hence, international aid will be far more appealing for those who could otherwise afford...”

**Preserving Local Networks**

In restoring essential services, organizations will have to take extreme care to not displace the local economic and service networks, particularly the *jangmadang* in North Korea’s case. *Jangmadang* are markets that emerged after the famine of the 1990s, when the state was no longer able to provide for its citizens. Although originally prohibited, the markets were retroactively legalized as the regime realized it could not undo this capitalist development. The *jangmadang* provide essential access to goods and services in North Korea, and will be an important foundation on which to build up local businesses. However, international aid can potentially disrupt the local market economy, undermining these critical networks.

Aid products may exceed the quality and availability of *jangmadang* goods and make them less appealing, thereby replacing market services and some North Koreans’ livelihoods. At the same time, organizations must be careful to ensure that aid is not being diverted and sold in the markets. Aid organizations must toe a line between these two scenarios by continually assessing what capacity the markets have to provide for the local population and filling only the gaps they cannot provide for. In a postconflict situation where resources are scarce, the price of goods on the markets will increase sharply. Hence, international aid will be far more appealing for those who could otherwise afford...”
to buy goods through the informal market economy. Local aid organizations must ensure that local markets are not completely displaced while simultaneously meeting key demands of the population.

The international community’s experience in Afghanistan can offer vital clues to how to accomplish this. In Afghanistan, a flurry of excitement surrounding the December 2001 deal between leaders of the former Afghan mujahideen and members of the Afghan diaspora raised hopes for democratization in Afghanistan. Scores of aid workers and billions of dollars poured into the country. However, rather than using aid money to build schools, infrastructure, and meet essential needs, the first tranche of money was spent to commission an airline, drivers, and interpreters to shuttle aid workers around the country. English-speaking teachers and bureaucrats were paid handsomely to chauffeur aid workers rather than using their valuable skill sets to assist in building the public institutions critical to Afghanistan’s democratization and development. Billions of dollars were promised to villagers who only received wooden beams too large for building anything in their neighborhoods, while the rest of the money went to paying head-office costs for various aid organizations. Only an estimated 10 to 20 percent of foreign aid ever reached its target. The situation in North Korea will be different given South Korea’s key role, but massive aid isn’t a panacea for a comprehensive economic re-engineering in North Korea.

Marginalized Citizens

Taking care of North Korea’s political prisoners incarcerated in kwanliso (gulags) will be another key challenge. Although the exact number of people in these prisons is unknown, the U.S. State Department estimated in 2018 that there are between 5,000 to 50,000 prisoners in each kwanliso, with four to six kwanliso in existence. Some political prisoners in these camps have “disappeared” without trial or judicial order, and others have been tortured, starved, and kept in inhumane conditions “in order to create a climate of fear that preempts any challenge to the current system of government and to the ideology underpinning it.” This group of people will require significant medical attention, food, and water. Prisoners should be reunited with their families as soon as possible, while those without families may require temporary housing. As the unification process continues, a great deal of attention should be paid to the reintegration of former political prisoners into the population. In the event that some sort of North Korean regime is still in control, accessing this population will be extremely difficult.

In the long term, overcoming social divisions will continue to be an issue as those with higher songbun have had greater access to education and higher skills, which will likely make it easier for them to integrate into South Korean society and secure gainful employment in the newly unified Korea. While this goes beyond the scope of this study, how South Korea and international actors respond initially to this issue will have lasting repercussions. Special attention should be paid to those with the lowest songbun, members of the so-called hostile class, to ensure that the systematic disadvantages they have faced in North Korean society are not compounded when they attempt to compete in the new unified economy.

Refugees and Migration

Depending on the circumstances in the initial phases of stabilization, IDPs and refugees may require expedient relocation and related services. One Bank of Korea study predicted in 2007 that 3 million refugees would attempt to cross the border to South Korea, while another 500,000 would flee to China. Other estimates put the number fleeing to China over 3 million as well. However, the scale of this potential problem, especially relating to people crossing the DMZ or the Chinese border, has likely been overestimated. The number of refugees depends heavily on the level of conflict and disruption to everyday life involved. As
Bridget Coggins points out, evidence from other fragile states does not support these numbers. In reality, people are far more inclined to stay put for as long as possible.

The civil war in Syria, which has been ongoing since 2011, has produced 5.6 million refugees from a prewar population of about 20 million, not far from North Korea’s population of 25 million. The first UNHCR-recorded refugees did not cross the border until nine months into the war, when nearly 400,000 casualties had been recorded. Syria’s major population centers were also far closer to accessible international borders than North Korea, and Syrian refugees had far greater access to cell phones and mechanized transport, allowing them to flee conflict zones more quickly and with greater information than North Koreans will likely have. These factors, combined with extreme dangers of crossing the heavily mined DMZ, suggest that refugees would become an issue in a protracted conflict.

As part of its focus on maintaining stability on the peninsula, China is deeply concerned about the potential for a destabilizing flow of refugees pouring across the Tumen River in the event of a messy collapse or conflict scenario. There is evidence that China has made detailed plans for at least five refugee camps along the border if such a migration were to occur. The United States and South Korea should coordinate with China on their refugee plans but also on maintaining border security. If the United States and South Korea arrive at the northern border without coordinating with what is certain to be a sizable Chinese military force, this will invite opportunities for conflict and create obstacles to other stability actions. For the ROK, the highest priority in terms of migration is the potential for destabilizing flows of North Koreans across the DMZ. The Center for Strategic and International Studies conducted a poll in 2017 of ROK policy experts, government officials, scholars, and opinion leaders that found domestic stabilization—including migration—and refugees ranked among the issues of highest concern but lowest level of information. As noted above, the DMZ will be a deterrent for mass refugee flows into the South, but it is also important to also allow freedom of movement. Economic conditions in the South will be a major pull-factor for North Korean migration, and the fact that some migration will occur is an eventuality that South Korea must accept.

However, the level of concern in South Korea over the instability that migration will cause could make ensuring freedom of movement politically difficult. ROK leaders should temper concerns about potential migration well before unification. While many parameters remain unknown in the Korean context, history suggests that migration flows to the South will likely not be as great or destabilizing as many South Koreans fear. Two percent of East Germany’s population migrated to the West between 1989 and 1990, which in North Korea’s case would amount to about 500,000 migrants. While this is a huge number, economic projections of macroeconomic stability in the postunification era indicate that without migration, North Korea’s real GDP will be far slower to catch up with the South’s. A study by the Peterson Institute for International Economics found that the scenario that generated the highest level of postunification income was one with high North–South migration.

While labor migration may not be a significant threat to stability, it does present a major public health challenge. North Korea has a high rate of diseases that are almost completely eradicated in South Korea, particularly tuberculosis, hepatitis B, and malaria. In a unified Korea with higher rates of internal migration and contact between South and North Koreans, there is a risk of these diseases spreading. While programs to eradicate these diseases will need to be established in the long term, for now, migration control will need to take these diseases into account. Personnel securing land and air crossings into South Korea should screen for signs of sickness, particularly tuberculosis, and restrict movement of infected people in order to reduce the risk of epidemic. As is already done in many airports across
the world, active tuberculosis can largely be screened for by checking for fever. Tuberculosis was at epidemic proportions after the Korean War, when 6.5 percent of the population had the disease. The country requires TB vaccination, and has ample experience with latent and active TB in the elderly population in South Korea. This lends the ROK the tools and experience necessary to treat and help the North Korean population recover from infection.

**U.S. ROLE AND CAPACITY**

The main advantage of U.S. and other contributions from the international community is in the cumulative ability to provide timely essential services. While the ROK has participated in stabilization in Iraq, Afghanistan, Timor-Leste, and other locations, it has not led or been first on the ground in a conflict zone. The United States and the UN have extensive experience in stabilization, especially during the critical initial phase of transformation during which speed is critical. By cooperating with the United States and the UN in conducting initial assessments, the ROK can draw on the expertise of experienced partners to ensure needs are identified as quickly as possible.

In a conflict scenario, U.S. military personnel will likely be on the ground in North Korea and able to make initial assessments in cooperation with the ROK, while the arrival of other possible UN forces will take some time. Even in a peaceful scenario, the U.S. military’s close proximity will enable it to restore essential services in conjunction with the ROK, UN, and other international organizations and partners. Combined with ROK expertise and man power in North Korea, more accurate assessments can be made to enhance high-impact assistance.

The ROK will also lead efforts to provide services, improve infrastructure, and relocate IDPs. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, civil affairs officers, and resource management staff can also provide expertise and support that can help quickly bring services to an adequate level. However, after the initial phase is concluded, the United States should coordinate its humanitarian aid efforts through the UN. The UN’s extensive experience not only in restoring essential services but in coordinating across a coalition of nations and organizations to accomplish complex tasks will support an efficient process for restoring essential services. Moreover, given that political perceptions are going to be crucial, U.S. support channeled through the UN will be much more acceptable.

In any fragile or vulnerable state, the arrival of foreign assistance or peacekeeping forces raises expectations for rapid change. In the case of North Korea, this expectation will likely be even greater as most North Koreans are—or will soon be—aware of the higher quality of life in South Korea, and will therefore expect for circumstances to improve dramatically under the unified Korean government. For this reason, speed is even more critical, and South Korea should accept the constructive help of foreign partners to make early progress on the challenges discussed above to meet the population’s expectations.
BUILDING INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS: RULE OF LAW, GOVERNANCE, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

If the two Koreas unified tomorrow, they would create one of the most unequal societies in the world. Estimates of North Korea’s GDP per capita range from $700 to $2,000—between 2 and 6.25 percent of South Korea’s GDP per capita. A newly unified Korea would have per capita incomes similar to Chad in the northern provinces and Spain in the southern provinces. Bridging this gap will take time, and it will largely depend on how successful the unified nation is in transforming North Korea’s extractive economic and political institutions into inclusive ones similar to those in South Korea. Thinking about and planning for long-term development and governance capacity-building in North Korea requires very different political and financial commitments by South Korea and other international partners. While the ROK is likely to assume a significant share of rebuilding the North Korean economy, it cannot do it alone.

As Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson’s research details, extractive economic and political institutions are the major cause of the North and South’s differential development. After the end of Japanese colonization, North Korea was better equipped to succeed than the South. The bulk of Japanese industrial infrastructure and the peninsula’s largest port on the East Sea was in the northern city of Chongjin. The North also had far greater natural resources including coal, lead, tungsten, zinc, graphite, magnesite, iron ore, copper, gold, pyrites, salt, and fluorspar. However, after the Korean War, South Korea adopted economic institutions that—despite its authoritarian political system—were based on a market economy, ownership of private property, and rule of law. Conversely, North Korea adopted a Soviet-esque socialist system that abolished private property of land and capital. The communist state—not markets—mediated economic

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decisions that served to extract capital from lower subsets of society to enrich the Kim family and other elites. Combined with extractive political institutions that concentrated political power in the Kim family, legitimate extractive economic institutions, and for decades severely punished North Koreans engaging in market activities, there has been little recourse, security, or economic opportunity for North Korean citizens to make the sort of investments economic development requires, nor to reap its benefits.

South Korea’s institutions that have propelled its economic rise could serve as models for revamping North Korean institutions. But despite similarities in culture and language, economic and political institutions in South and North Korea could not be more different. Transitioning North Korea to function under South Korean institutions will take time, and South Korea should be prepared to function with interim institutions in the North that do not meet the high standards of South Korean institutions, perhaps for decades. As pioneer of institutional analysis Douglass North explained, attempting to introduce institutions that are not endogenous to the “humanly devised constraints that shape human action” in a nation is one of the most guaranteed ways for development


**NOTE:** Real GDP per capita in 2011 U.S. dollars, multiple benchmarks (suitable for cross-country income comparisons).
projects to fail. Re-engineering the North Korean economy and political system will require a massive whole-of-government effort by South Korea and civil society organizations given the wide disparities in the two countries’ economic institutions and development paths. Transforming the North Korean economy into a free and open market economy will take decades of investments, modernization, and re-education of North Korean workers.

The main mistake that must be avoided is transplanting South Korea’s economic and political system into North Korea without taking into consideration unique local conditions. The United States and the UN have implemented non-endogenous processes of economy and political recovery before that exacerbated social divisions and economic growth in the past. Take the example of Timor-Leste. In October 1999, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) entered the newly independent territory of Timor-Leste with the task of ushering a new nation into the world. It was the largest nation-building initiative the UN had ever undertaken. In 1999, Timor-Leste had no constitution and no governing body. Indonesian armed forces and local militants had destroyed 75 percent of buildings nationwide, almost all of the buildings in the capital city of Dili, and many if not most of the documents constituting Timor-Leste’s formal institutions along with them.

UNTAET treated the project as if it was presented with a tabula rasa on which to set about building a new nation. It marked the first time the UN had exercised complete sovereignty over a state, much as South Korea might do in the North in the future. However, as Jarat Chopra, former head of UNTAET’s Office of District astutely pointed out, “there is never a vacuum as long as there is a population.” While Timor-Leste had virtually no formal governing institutions at the beginning of 1999, it had a rich history of endogenous and informal institutions that UNTAET failed to acknowledge or integrate. UNTAET’s false perception of a power vacuum in Timor-Leste led them to treat the transitional administration as an opportunity to build institutions based on best practices from other countries.

The result of these reforms was the establishment of institutions that were not rooted in local political realities and reinforced colonial power structures, thus contributing to fragility in Timor-Leste today. Sufficiently inclusive coalitions are vital to successful reforms because including diverse stakeholders throughout the reform process lessens the chances for backlash from excluded parties. New institutions are inclusive enough when they include all parties necessary to implement the initial stages of confidence-building and institutional transformation. In Timor-Leste, this should have included both pro-independence and pro-Indonesian parties, all of which were militarized and perceived as potentially capable of destabilizing the fledgling government. Instead, due to conflicts created by the exclusion of these groups, the newly named East Timor erupted into violence between the parties four years after UNTAET departed.

According to international development expert Nicolas Lemay-Hébert, to avoid instability South Korea must ensure that North Koreans experience “an externally-guided process” of institution-building “as an endogenous one.” The unified government will need to promulgate a series of temporary reforms that blend North and South Korean institutions gradually in order to not destabilize the country and create institutions that favor positive economic and social outcomes.

MAJOR CHALLENGES TO ESTABLISHING RULE OF LAW

The first step toward building inclusive institutions will be to establish civil control that facilitates equitable enforcement of the rule of law. In U.S. joint doctrine for stabilization, the rule of law refers to

programs conducted to ensure all individuals and institutions, public and private, and the
Achieving rule of law is essential to facilitating inclusivity in institutions. With strong rule of law predicated on endogenous norms and just practices, citizens can have confidence that the state’s influence on their lives is not arbitrary or extractive but based on a set of norms that are applied equally in society and lend legitimacy to institutions. Any deviation from the equal application of these de jure norms, perceived or otherwise, can support extractive and noninclusive institutions and can even facilitate destabilization.

In North Korea, rule of law has not been weak as in many fragile states—rather, it has strongly and pervasively enforced systematic unequal distribution of wealth, rights, and basic necessities based on songbun, as well as severe punishment for any activities perceived as vaguely anti-regime. North Koreans have learned not only to mistrust law enforcement but their neighbors as well, as everyone is subject to the inminban neighborhood watch system. The inminban “ensure that privacy doesn’t exist, and everyone is under strict scrutiny. Not only criticizing authority, but also unauthorized stays, adultery, absenteeism, or watching South Korean videos are punished with prejudice.”

Because of this system, North Koreans not only lack trust in law enforcement institutions but also their own communities. In this environment, creating trust in new and unfamiliar law enforcement institutions will present a challenge.

In a peaceful unification scenario predicated on economic integration, it is possible that North Korea’s legal norms could naturally, over time, converge with South Korean and international norms to facilitate and encourage foreign trade and investment. In a collapse or conflict scenario, however, the northern provinces would eventually adopt South Korea’s economic, political, and legal system. Promoting rule of law is the first step toward creating inclusive institutions, but legal reform must be incremental to give the population time to adjust to the new social standards of a unified Korea. Abruptly installing a non-endogenous legal code could encourage the development of de facto norms outside of the law. For example, if North Koreans are suddenly subject to South Korean standards for formal dispute adjudication, many are likely to resolve disputes over property, business, or personal harm informally through social networks rather than through the legal system. Over the long term, the entrenchment of these practices can prevent North Koreans from being integrated into the unified Korean legal system, systematically disadvantaging them by creating barriers to their participation and representation in legal institutions.

While new laws should be applied incrementally, South Korea must move quickly to establish police forces, courts, and other legal institutions that represent the new blended population. This requires that officials in all of these institutions, especially those with jurisdiction over areas heavily populated by North Koreans, employ both South and North Korean individuals. As governance expert Richard Downie puts it, “For citizens, a police officer is the symbolic representation of state authority. Their view of the state and their acceptance of its authority are partially shaped by their interactions with the police.”

Although North Koreans do not trust many of their own community members, they are unlikely to trust South
Koreans either. Humans tend to trust individuals who are most like themselves, and police forces in fragile states that are not culturally or ethnically representative of the population are often biased toward individuals who come from the same background. In order to promote equal enforcement of the law, South Korea should vet North Korean individuals early on, taking into account their background in the inminban, in order to staff a blended and culturally representative police force.

**MAJOR CHALLENGES TO SUPPORTING GOVERNANCE**

Although inclusive and democratic institutions have demonstrated support of inclusive economic institutions that lead to sustained prosperity, they also redistribute power and wealth. In transitioning from a totalitarian autocracy, there will be many in North Korea who have benefited from the nation’s unequal power structure who will not take kindly to a democratic redistribution of power. In the extreme, these individuals—who are most likely to be members of the elite, KPA, those with access to large amounts of foreign currency, or older, more conservative North Koreans—could form militant or violent factions that resist South Korean democratic norms. At best, if these individuals eventually accept the new political system, they will comprise new political parties in the unified National Assembly. Their authoritarian proclivities mean that these groups will likely form a new far right movement in South Korea akin to the entrenchment of far right politics in eastern Germany after unification. This is somewhat of an ironic dynamic given that East Germany was, and North Korea is, a communist country.

However, as a result of East Germany’s communist past and state-controlled economy, it has fewer large companies and less international investment than the West. The average income in East Germany is still around 15 percent lower than in West Germany, and its demographics skew older, making it harder to find qualified workers. The legacy of the politics of the German Democratic Republic, as well, have an effect—most journalists, policymakers, and business leaders are still West German. As a result, many in East Germany feel excluded from the nation’s institutions. The consequence of this is that ex-communist East German states are home to the largest proportion of far right Alternative for Germany (AfD) supporters, which now polls above Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union. And Germany’s far right is far from an innocuous political movement. In 2004, the right-leaning state of Saxony became the first eastern state since unification to elect members of the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party to its local parliament. Political opinion in a unified Korea could also become divided along pre-unification lines. South Korea will need to decide how potential new political groups based on the previous North Korean system can have a place in an integrated political system.

**MAJOR CHALLENGES TO LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT**

South Korea already has the experience of integrating some 31,000 North Korean defectors into its society that will prove useful in unification. Once defectors arrive in the ROK, they are interviewed by the National Intelligence Service and then proceed to Hanawon, meaning “House of Unity,” a resettlement center for
North Korean defectors. Hanawon functions as a sort of Ministry of Unification halfway-house that teaches defectors about democracy, capitalism, and life in South Korea for twelve months. After leaving Hanawon, defectors receive help finding housing and financial assistance—including initial settlement benefits of about $6,500 and $11,500 for apartment security deposits (which are quite high in South Korea).124

However, even with generous assistance and specialized resettlement preparation, North Korean refugees often face discrimination from South Koreans and have difficulty finding gainful employment. In 2017, the unemployment rate among defectors was 7 percent according to the Ministry of Unification.125 This was far above the 3.7 percent employment rate for South Korea in 2017.126 North Korean degrees are currently not recognized in the South due to the differences in their education systems, leaving highly educated North Koreans with few options for gainful employment.127 North Koreans are distinguishable by their distinctive accents, and South Korean employers often discriminate against North Koreans in hiring despite the illegality of this practice. On top of these barriers to integration into South Korean society, the majority of defectors have experienced a traumatic event in their lifetimes and often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and/or anxiety. The defectors reaching the South today are likely some of the most entrepreneurial and flexible residents of North Korea—reaching South Korea can cost up to $34,000 by some accounts—while many of those who are forced to integrate in the newly unified Korea will likely be less adaptable to change.128

Barriers to integrating the relatively small number of defectors living in South Korea today will occur on a much larger scale in a unified Korea. Societies with high levels of unemployment and inequality are prone to social conflict, and although South Korea is a resilient democracy and a stable country, the destabilizing impact of combining two countries separated for three generations could impede governance, development, and stability in the long term. In stabilization, supporting long-term economic and infrastructure development to this end concerns a host of activities, among the most important being supporting and rehabilitating existing infrastructure and inclusive institutions, moderating involvement from large-scale enterprises, education, and managing the Chinese role in North Korean development. While there will be many factors far beyond the scope of this study to be considered for North Korea’s development, these are a few of the most critical and unique to the Korean situation.

First, the ROK and foreign institutions should take care not to displace existing inclusive economic institutions. Reforming these institutions is far less difficult than abolishing them entirely and building new ones. State-run transportation, mining companies, and trading companies can be rehabilitated to function in an open market economy, just as the Japanese Zaibatsu were after World War II. As stated previously, the jangmadang must also be supported and encouraged. While the jangmadang are imperfect, they may also be the only means North Koreans have of individually determining their economic futures. They are inclusive in that any North Korean can find a way to participate, including some of the most oppressed groups in North Korea such as women. Although these markets began informally, they are now largely sanctioned by the government, and sellers are familiar with permits, taxes, and other instruments of formal market activity. Jangmadang entrepreneurs will require time to catch up to and implement all of the formalities and regulations required of South Korean small businesses, but they possess nascent compatibility that should be preserved.

However, much of South Korea’s plan for economic reconstruction in North Korea leading up eventually to unification relies heavily on the roles of the chaebol, the behemoth family-run conglomerates that compose a very large share of the South Korean economy. In his September 2018 trip to Pyongyang, seventeen chaebol executives accompanied Moon, including the CEOs of Samsung, Hyundai Motors, and LG, in order to encourage investment in the North.129 The Bank
of Korea estimates that housing development in the North—which the chaebol are expected to undertake—will be worth $50 billion in the decade from 2021.130

The chaebol have been vital to South Korea’s economic development, but their strong market power is also the reason why small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have had difficulty surviving and competing in the South Korean economy. The majority of South Koreans are employed in these SMEs, which are unable to grow in an environment with predatory chaebol competition.131

This is not to say that chaebol reform is a panacea for the economic health of South Korea—labor laws, cumbersome regulations, and minimum wage laws must also be reviewed.

A PIIE study showed that high levels of private South Korean investment were detrimental to economic outcomes. Private South Korean investment may build up infrastructure and create low-wage jobs in the North relatively easily, but South Korean investors retain ownership of the capital, and profits benefit South Korean rather than North Korean incomes.132

South Korea should ensure that chaebol investment in North Korea is regulated so that massive capital flows do not exacerbate existing South-North economic inequality. This will be in the ROK’s best interest since “per capita income differences on the order of 40 percent are consistent with social stability.”133 Getting to this number as quickly as possible (from the starting point of North Korean GDP per capita at 6.7 percent of South Korea’s at highest estimate), should be one of the ROK’s highest priority goals.

This is not to say that low-wage manufacturing jobs of the sort South Korean chaebol are interested in bringing to North Korea have no value—these jobs will likely be critical to North Korean development for many years. However, a new unified government must also focus on education and technology transfer to build capacity for North Koreans to compete for jobs that South Koreans find appealing as well. Without strong education and training, North Koreans will not be able to compete in the South Korean job market. Technology transfer through IP licensing from South Korean companies, universities, and research centers will also stimulate development.134

U.S. ROLE AND CAPACITY

Although U.S. and UN assistance can augment Korean efforts and their experiences may provide cautionary tales, the long-term development of the northern provinces of a unified Korea will be a primarily Korean task. That said, the U.S. and the international community will have a crucial role in protecting North Korea from predatory and extractive investment from other nations by supporting and legitimizing domestic efforts. North Korea’s pool of young, cheap labor will not only be attractive to South Korean companies, but Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and other nations as well. While the North will need to be open to foreign direct investment, it is also imperative that South Korea remain vigilant about foreign investment. In particular, China has a keen interest in North Korea’s yet-untapped rare earth mineral reserves. China’s resources and capital could be very positive for North Korea’s development, but they also have the potential to be exploitative, especially in terms of natural resources, as evidenced by many of China’s Belt and Road Initiative projects.135

North Korea already has contracts with a number of countries including China and Russia for its mineral deposits. South Korea should consider making a preemptive statement, well before unification, to revisit all contracts made prior to unification in regards to North Korean resources. While this would undoubtedly be viewed negatively by China, it will, in the long run, be beneficial for the equitable development of the Korean Peninsula. In order to strengthen the effectiveness of South Korea’s control of foreign investment in the North, the United States and international community should strongly support these measures and provide them with adequate political support.
CONCLUSION

Political expectations for deeper inter-Korean exchanges, the signing of a peace treaty, and possible recalibration of U.S. forces will not wane despite the breakdown of the second U.S.–North Korea summit in Hanoi in February 2019. For the Trump administration, the summit was supposed to showcase Trump’s personal diplomacy, but he walked away when he could not bridge the enormous gap between the United States and North Korea on denuclearization. The Moon administration was deeply disappointed by the failure but continues to stress the need for a diplomatic breakthrough between Washington and Pyongyang. However, unless North Korea moves much closer to the U.S. definition of denuclearization, the gap won’t be bridged anytime in the near future. What is more important, however, is the need to change thinking about unification from discrete scenarios to a stabilization continuum, since stabilization actions can include all scenarios and time horizons. In this respect, three key developments should be emphasized.

First, for the first time since the end of the Korean War in 1953, internal and external forces are converging on the Korean Peninsula with potentially profound implications for Korean futures and regional stability. Eight years after becoming supreme leader, North Korea’s Kim Jong Un has fully consolidated his grip on power. Under his watch, and buttressed by Chinese political and economic support, North Korea has become a de facto nuclear weapons state. With North Korea at its most powerful, South Korean President Moon Jae-In is chasing greater political and economic integration between the two Koreas that could result in major political changes. From threatening to end North Korea with “fire and fury” to a strategic shift by holding the first summit with Kim Jong Un in Singapore in June 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump subsequently stated that there was no more nuclear threat from North Korea. He also said that he was “in love” with Kim Jong Un. More than any other U.S. president, Trump’s North Korea policy could result in the most significant restructuring of geopolitics in and around the Korean Peninsula and U.S. military commitment to the ROK. The February 2019 Hanoi summit dampened Trump’s role as the chief negotiator, but his transactional worldview, including in terms of the U.S.-ROK alliance, will likely foment greater uncertainty in the alliance.

Second, although Kim Jong Un’s grip on North Korea is ironclad, pressure is building up within North Korea after seven decades of draconian rule, revealing significant cracks in the system that are likely to deepen and broaden in the years ahead. This is not to suggest that collapse is imminent or even highly likely; but political transitions in totalitarian states have a logic all their own with very little verifiable intelligence that can shed light on their inner workings. As Robert Kaplan
and Abraham Denmark have written, a North Korean collapse isn’t around the corner. But it is important to consider one key lesson from Eastern Europe: “The more repressive and artificially maintained the regime is, the more sudden and precipitous the collapse.” Although North Korea is a very unique totalitarian state that doesn’t share many traits with other dictatorships, they argue that “another lesson from past regime collapses is that the worse the level of oppression, often the more profound the nightmare upon liberation. We saw in Iraq, for example, how the horrific abuses of Saddam Hussein crippled the Iraqi people’s ability to build peace after his removal.” If and when collapse occurs, stakeholders will be surprised at how rapidly the system unraveled and how little contingency planning was useful in coping with cascading crises in North Korea.

Third, regardless of Trump’s penchant for a grand bargain with North Korea and the optics surrounding U.S.–North Korea rapprochement, the United States’ strategic leverage on the Korean Peninsula is declining commensurate with a rapid rise in Chinese power and influence over the two Koreas. The robustness of the U.S.-ROK alliance is also shifting domestic political forces in South Korea and increasing Beijing’s impact on Korean security. Combined, whether through concerted negotiations between the two Koreas, the conclusion of a peace treaty leading to a new geopolitical balance of power in and around the Korean Peninsula, or even through a North Korean collapse, it’s time to move away from scenario-based unification planning to stability-based unification planning. Even under the best of circumstances, integrating the two Koreas is going to be an extremely arduous process replete with multiple political land mines. Therefore, how South Korea as well as the United States transitions throughout the entire unification process is not going to depend on scenario-based planning, but on multiple responses cutting across political, military, social, and economic domains.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Unification and Stabilization**

- Mindful of the ROK’s political sensitivities and deep reservations on involving the United States on key aspects of unification, Washington should emphasize the benefits flowing from enhanced discussions with Seoul on the multiple political, diplomatic, military, economic, and social challenges relating to stabilization in unification. Even though the United States is South Korea’s most important ally, given Seoul’s reservations on outlining possible U.S. involvement throughout the unification process, Washington should dispel concerns, provide assurances, and reaffirm its goal of supporting the ROK’s aspirations throughout the unification process.

- Washington and Seoul should initiate discussions on unification in the context of stabilization. In doing so, the two countries could avoid politicized unification scenarios that have often stymied discussion. Instead, preparing for civil security, essential services, rule of law, governance, and development-related stability actions will benefit and augment ROK and U.S. responses in any scenario, lending more flexibility to planning.

- Such discussions must consider the range of issues that will inevitably involve some of the regional powers, particularly China, especially during major contingencies such as a North Korean collapse. China remains acutely sensitive to holding any official discussions with the United States, much less with South Korea, on co-managing various aspects of crises involving North Korea. Any potential role of the regional actors will be based solely on UN Security Council resolutions and the consent of the ROK government.

- Stabilization in support of unification will require a whole-of-government effort by the United
States. However, a survey conducted for the U.S. Stabilization Assistance Review found that 86 percent of U.S. government officials surveyed did not know which agencies were the lead for which stability actions. It is imperative that the U.S. government clarify roles for stabilization on the Korean Peninsula internally and with its South Korea ally to ensure the successful execution of stability actions.

- In the same vein, consultations with the ROK government on various aspects of unification should be conducted including the ROK Ministries of Unification, Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Economy and Finance as well as other relevant agencies and organizations. These efforts, however, can only materialize if the ROK government agrees to hold such discussions.

Securing WMD

- Determine, as much as possible and as soon as possible, the potential for ROK involvement in dismantling North Korea’s nuclear program. Pre-crisis understanding of the division of responsibilities will mitigate not only misunderstandings but also perceptions of infringement upon ROK leadership in unification.

- Discern the appropriate division of tasks in eliminating chemical and biological weapons. Particularly during biological weapon elimination, the ROK has an opportunity to set international precedent for how operations should be conducted. However, this positive opportunity can lead to mismanagement, destabilization, or the spread of pandemic disease if not prepared for properly.

- Improve intelligence collection and analysis on known and suspected WMD storage sites, research centers, factories, and other facilities, though many remain unknown. Sharing critical intelligence with the ROK is essential given South Korea’s greater familiarity with North Korean WMD and military assets. Identify, understand, and mitigate major intelligence blind spots in acute and prolonged crises in North Korea with special reference to CWMD operations such as identifying and monitoring high-level personnel, significant movements in equipment and construction, and logistical infrastructure.

- Dismantling North Korea’s nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons in addition to longer-range ballistic missiles is going to entail extensive preparations for waste disposal options in and out of the Korean Peninsula. Getting ahead of the curve on this particular issue will be essential to longer-term operational success including the active involvement of relevant departments and agencies (such as the U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration).

- Game-out various WMD-E scenarios with special reference to the pros and cons of Chinese participation in the earliest phases of WMD-E operations given that if South Korea does not involve China in planning, China’s reactions could be discordant from joint U.S.-ROK responses although it has a vested interest in ensuring stability on the peninsula. The Defense, State, and Energy Departments, for instance, should consider various WMD-E scenarios and interagency cooperation and coordination modalities to enhance policies and strategies.

Disarming and Demobilizing the KPA and Other Military Units

- Configure operational guidelines for executing integrated disarmament and demobilization operations involving the KPA, paramilitary units, and other paramilitary forces attached to major security agencies such as border guards, the Ministry of People’s Security, the Ministry of State Security, and the General Reconnaissance Bureau.
• Incorporate key lessons from previous U.S.-led stabilization in Iraq and Afghanistan in addition to U.S. efforts to defeat the self-proclaimed Islamic State and apply them to IDD operations in North Korea would enhance U.S. capacity building prior to conducting IDD operations. Understanding major bottlenecks including faulty or limited real-time intelligence, complex decisionmaking channels, and shaping desired outcomes and reorganizing them into the North Korean context could enhance situational awareness of pre-IDD operational challenges.

• Institute joint training and exercises with ROK forces and government-to-government tabletop exercises over a range of plausible contingency operations in North Korea. While case-by-case tabletop exercises take place on related issues, they should be routinized and broadened as much as possible with the relevant departments, ministries, and agencies. These exercises could be broken down into different clusters such as providing immediate humanitarian assistance at the beginning of stabilization; building up and maintaining temporary IDD operations in North Korea; and pre-planning for contingencies involving elements of the PLA if and when Beijing decides to undertake limited military operations in North Korea.

Restoring Essential Services
• Use existing or new channels of communication between U.S. and ROK entities to conduct an extensive inventory of roles, missions, capabilities, and goals relating to the restoration of essential services in North Korea.

• Pay careful attention early on to the even distribution of resources regardless of songbun or geography in order to avoid any perceptions of favoritism, which could potentially lead to civil unrest. Accomplishing this will likely require early emphasis on building roads and facilitating transportation to more isolated rural areas.

• Aid organizations must take care to not displace local resource distribution networks by continually assessing what capacity the markets have to provide for the local population and filling only the gaps they cannot provide for. The jangmadang provide essential access to goods and services in North Korea, and will be an important foundation on which to build up local businesses in North Korea.

• The United States and South Korea should coordinate with China on their plans for refugee resettlement and border security maintenance. If in a conflict or collapse scenario the United States and South Korea arrive at the northern border without coordinating with what is certain to be a sizable Chinese military force, this will invite opportunities for conflict and create obstacles to other stability actions.

Building Inclusive Institutions
• Bridging the economic, political, social, and cultural gaps between the North and South will take time, and it will largely depend on how successful the unified nation is in transforming North Korea's extractive economic and political institutions into inclusive ones similar to those in South Korea. Because of the stark differences in local institutions currently, this will be a long process that should be undertaken steadily and incrementally to prevent destabilization. Regardless of how unification occurs, South Korea should be prepared to function with interim institutions in the North, perhaps for decades, before fully integrating North Korean and South Korean economic and political institutions.

• Promoting rule of law is the first step toward creating inclusive institutions, but legal reform must be incremental to give the population time
to adjust to the new social standards of a unified Korea. Abruptly installing a non-endogenous legal code could encourage the development of de facto norms outside of the law. Over the long term, the entrenchment of these practices can prevent North Koreans from being integrated into the unified Korean legal system, systematically disadvantaging them by creating barriers to their participation and representation in legal institutions.

- South Korea must move quickly to establish police forces, courts, and other legal institutions that are representative of the new blended population, requiring that officials in all of these institutions, especially those with jurisdiction over areas heavily populated by North Koreans, have both South and North Korean individuals working in them. This long process of improving representation will begin with vetting North Korean applications to institutions, bearing in mind their former roles in the inminban.

- South Korea must be prepared to uphold and enhance inclusivity in its democracy despite the potential polarization it may bring to politics. South Korea will need to decide how potential new political groups with ties to the previous North Korean system can have a place in an integrated political system.

- While a unified Korea will encourage entrepreneurship in the North, budding North Korean enterprises will not be able to compete with South Korean chaebol. Low-wage manufacturing or service sector jobs that chaebol are likely to bring to the North will be welcome, but chaebol investment should be moderated to ensure it does not perpetuate extractive economic institutions that further divert wealth from the North Korean population to South Korean conglomerates.

- Economic development in the North will be a primarily Korean task, but the United States and international community will have a crucial role in protecting North Korea from predatory and extractive investment from other nations by supporting and legitimizing domestic efforts. North Korea’s pool of young, cheap labor will be attractive to many private companies and foreign nations, and it is imperative that South Korea and its partners remain vigilant about the potential for foreign investment, especially in terms of North Korea’s natural resources, to become extractive or exploitative.

- Reforming institutions is far less difficult than abolishing them entirely and building new ones. Economic institutions, such as state-run transportation, mining companies, and trading companies, in North Korea can be rehabilitated to function in an open market economy.
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