

**MEDIA ADVISORY**

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**WHAT TO EXPECT DURING SOUTH KOREAN PRESIDENT  
PARK GEUN-HYE'S VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES**

President Park Geun-hye, the first woman to be elected president of the Republic of Korea (ROK), is visiting the United States from June 14 to June 18. This will be her third visit to the United States, having previously visited in 2013 and 2014. President Park's visit this month has special significance because June 2015 marks the 65th anniversary of the start of the Korean War. Her visit will recognize the geopolitical importance of the ROK for the U.S. by reaffirming the alliance between the two countries, strengthening cooperation on regional peace and security in Northeast Asia, and acknowledging the ROK as a future partner in the global arena.

The Obama administration is hosting the leaders of the three major Northeast Asian countries this year, which reflects the geopolitical significance of the region. In addition to President Park, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan visited in April and President Xi Jinping of China is planning to visit in September.

**RESOURCES:**

[The National Bureau of Asian Research](#) (NBR) offers the following resources for Congress, media, and others who are tracking Park's visit. These resources discuss the central issues in today's U.S.-ROK relationship and identify what Park hopes to achieve in the United States. *These publications are available online and are attached below.*

- [\*\*NBR Voices: What You Should Know about President Park Geun-hye's Visit to the United States\*\*](#)
  - NBR's president Richard Ellings, Senior Advisor Nick Eberstadt, and other NBR experts comment briefly on key issues to watch during the visit.
  
- [\*\*Fact Sheet: South Korean President Park Geun-hye's Visit to the United States\*\*](#)
  - A quick check-up on three key areas: U.S.-ROK security alliance, the geopolitics of Northeast Asia, and new areas for U.S.-ROK cooperation.

**INTERVIEWS:**

NBR experts, including Richard Ellings (President), Abe Denmark (Senior Vice President of Political and Security Affairs), and Nadege Rolland (Senior Project Director of Political and Security Affairs), are available for interviews. Please contact [media@nbr.org](mailto:media@nbr.org) or [@NBRnews](https://twitter.com/NBRnews).

## **NBR Voices: What You Should Know about President Park Geun-hye's Visit to the United States**

In this feature, NBR experts highlight key areas to watch during President Park Geun-hye's upcoming visit to the United States during June 14–18. President Barack Obama will welcome President Park to the White House on June 16, and she will visit Houston, Texas, on June 17 for two days before returning to Seoul.

The following quotes identify the central challenges currently affecting the relationship between the United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK) and provide a useful starting point for those tracking President Park's visit.

### **THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE**



The U.S.-ROK alliance remains absolutely critical to the future of the Asia-Pacific region. As North Korea continues to embrace belligerence and aggression as tools of statecraft and China's geopolitical power continues to expand, cooperation and coordination between Washington and Seoul will be essential to sustaining and strengthening a rules-based liberal international order. President Park's visit to Washington presents a significant opportunity to emphasize the importance of the alliance for both nations, to chart a course ahead to sustain the alliance's effectiveness, and to commit to work together to strengthen ties with other allies and partners across the Asia-Pacific to enhance stability in the face of profound emerging challenges.

**RICHARD J. ELLINGS**  
NBR President

## REUNIFICATION



Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Empire, South Koreans have done just about everything they could to avoid thinking about the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. The results of this attempted “holiday from history” are plain to see: Seoul today shares the peninsula with a deformed polity committed to the ROK’s destruction and now possessing nuclear weapons.

The imperative for South Korean policy is clear: reduce the North Korean threat immediately and plan for a successful Korean reunification in due course.

President Park cannot make up for lost time, but she can set her country on a solid course today. In President Obama she has a willing prospective partner, and one with few illusions about Pyongyang.

It is a propitious alignment—the only question is: will she seize the day?

**NICK EBERSTADT**  
Senior Advisor

## ASIA'S PARADOX



President Park memorably summarized Northeast Asia's situation as being characterized by "Asia's Paradox": a region where growing economic cooperation is clashing with deep political and security tensions. Seoul, which skillfully maintains simultaneous strong relationships with China and the United States and is nurturing a relationship with Japan despite continuing differences over history, shows that Madam Park's ideal of "Trustpolitik" among regional players is worth a try.

**NADÈGE ROLLAND**

Senior Project Director for Political and Security Affairs

**NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM**



The U.S. proposal for an alliance-strengthening deployment of a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-ballistic missile battery to South Korea might be nudged along during President Park's visit to Washington, no doubt aided by North Korean claims in mid-May to have tested a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM). However, President Park must still weigh additional concerns, including China's staunch opposition to the deployment and uncertain broader regional impacts, including the ROK's difficult political relationship with Japan.

**ROY KAMPHAUSEN**

Senior Advisor



North Korea recently announced its ability to mount a nuclear warhead atop a long-range ballistic missile, and many U.S. officials assess that North Korea's development of the ICBM KN-08 was successful. North Korea also possesses several hundred short- and medium-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching South Korea and Japan.

The U.S.-ROK alliance has to date maintained successful nuclear deterrence on the Korean Peninsula. Most recently, the allies launched the Deterrence Strategy Committee to improve the response to potential nuclear threats from North Korea. At the upcoming summit, Presidents Park and Obama should reconfirm the strength of this robust alliance and continue to work together to effectively deter North Korean provocations in order to keep peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula.

**JULIA OH**

Atlas Corps Fellow of Political and Security Affairs

**GLOBAL HEALTH SECURITY**



Recently, improving health security to ensure safety from the threats of infectious disease and bioterrorism has become one of the most important global security issues. The spread of Ebola is a representative case. To address this critical issue, a high-level meeting of the Global Health Security Agenda will be held in South Korea later in 2015. The first meeting was held in the United States last year. At this time, President Park's visit to the United States and the discussion for strengthening cooperation between the two countries to cope with threats to global health security could create the positive momentum needed to increase international attention and, furthermore, deliver a message of hope to people in underdeveloped countries who are suffering from infectious disease or bioterrorism.

**JOO HUN YOU**

Visiting Fellow

**ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK (AIIB)**



The ROK's decision to join the AIIB in March 2015 despite U.S. reservations was a pragmatic one fueled by the country's close trade ties with China and the AIIB's potential to boost growth for some stagnating sectors. Although some analysts say that the AIIB appears to challenge U.S. primacy in the Asia-Pacific, U.S. influence in the region is extremely robust, and the ROK's membership in the bank does not threaten the U.S.-ROK alliance. Presidents Park and Obama should discuss ways for Seoul to lead the AIIB in the adoption of adequate governance standards and proper environmental and social safeguards before the bank begins to invest in the region's more vulnerable economies and political systems.

**RACHEL WAGLEY**

Assistant Director of External Relations, Congressional & Media Outreach

**TRADE AND THE TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP (TPP)**



Presidents Park and Obama should view the visit as an opportunity to focus on trade as a successfully growing aspect of bilateral relations. President Park's visit will come during a period of intense public and congressional debate over the TPP agreement, and highlighting the benefits of the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement could help build support for both the TPP and the White House's broader trade agenda. South Korea has expressed interest in joining the TPP, which increases the likelihood that additional trading partners could be added in the future.

**MEREDITH MILLER**

Senior Vice President of Trade, Economic, and Energy Affairs;  
Director of NBR's Washington, D.C., office

**NUCLEAR ENERGY**



In the last two months, we have seen a breakthrough in U.S.-ROK negotiations on renewing the civil nuclear pact, and Presidents Park and Obama should be eager to highlight this achievement. A key point of discussion during President Park's visit in 2013 was how the two allies can move forward on energy cooperation. Given that nuclear power is responsible for over a quarter of South Korea's electricity supply, these negotiations have been a critical test for advancing that goal.

**CLARA GILLISPIE**

Director of Trade, Economic, and Energy Affairs



## South Korean President Park Geun-hye's Visit to the United States

**P**resident Park Geun-hye, the first woman to be elected president of the Republic of Korea (ROK), is visiting the United States from June 14 to June 18. This will be her third visit to the United States, having previously visited in 2013 and 2014. Security was at the top of the agenda when Presidents Park and Obama met in 2013, which also marked the 60 year anniversary of the U.S.-ROK Alliance. She also previously met with President Obama at the Nuclear Security Summit at The Hague in March 2014, as well as at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Beijing in November 2014.

*The Obama administration is hosting the leaders of three major Northeast Asian countries this year, which reflects the geopolitical significance of the region. In addition to President Park, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan visited in April and President Xi Jinping of China is planning to visit in September. President Park's visit this month has special significance because June marks the 65th anniversary of the start of the Korean War. Her visit will recognize the geopolitical importance of the ROK for the United States by reaffirming the alliance between the two countries, strengthening cooperation on regional peace and security in Northeast Asia, and acknowledging the ROK as a future partner in the global arena.*

*The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) offers the following backgrounder on three areas that policymakers, media, and others should watch during Park's visit.*

### 1

#### THE U.S.-ROK SECURITY ALLIANCE

As with President Park's first state visit in 2013, the U.S.-ROK security alliance will again be a key area of focus. North Korea's nuclear program is at the center of security cooperation between the United States and the ROK. At the 7th Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue in April 2015, the two allies launched the Deterrence Strategy Committee, which sought to improve the response to potential nuclear threats from North Korea by considering not only each threat's nuclear capability but also the missile delivery system. The committee focuses on developing the 4D concept (detect, defense, disrupt, and destroy) and preparing for possible North Korean provocation.

U.S. officials now assess that Pyongyang has the ability to mount nuclear warheads atop a KN-08 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), while Chinese experts have reportedly informed the United States that North Korea may possess 40 warheads by next year. Over the course of three successful nuclear tests since 2006, North Korea seems to have obtained the core knowledge of enriching uranium and producing plutonium. Pyongyang will likely be able to launch a nuclear attack against U.S. territory once it acquires more advanced technology for the miniaturization of nuclear warheads. The implications for the U.S.-ROK



## 2

## THE GEOPOLITICS OF NORTHEAST ASIA

alliance of North Korea successfully mating a miniaturized nuclear warhead atop a reliable ICBM could be significant.

Then defense secretary Chuck Hagel and South Korean defense minister Han Min-koo agreed at the 2014 Security Consultative Meeting to push back the timeline for the transfer of wartime operational control to at least 2020. The long-postponed agreement between Washington and Seoul would involve the ROK military assuming a greater leadership role during a conflict. Vague wording on the exact time frame, however, has created concern on the South Korean side over when the actual transfer would occur.

Finally, the deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in Korea may be discussed at the upcoming summit. THAAD is a defensive system capable of intercepting potential ballistic missile attacks by North Korea. Both the United States and ROK are carefully approaching this issue, although President Park's conservative Saenuri Party strongly supports the system's deployment. Secretary of State John Kerry also brought up the subject during his visit to South Korea last month. The deployment of THAAD is one of the hot topics in South Korean media at the moment, even though the Ministry of Defense and Blue House have remained outside of the discussion as of yet. China has publicly objected to the AN/TPY-2 radar embedded in the system, arguing that it will be used for surveillance of Chinese military activities. There are indeed many questions to be answered, including the terms of a cost-sharing arrangement as well as the effectiveness of the system's deployment in the ROK to deter a potential North Korean attack.

**NBR Resources:**

[The North Korean Nuclear Problem: Twenty Years of Crisis](#) (January 2015)

[The U.S.-ROK Alliance and the U.S. Rebalance to Asia](#) (December 2014)

[Nuclear Ambition and Tension on the Korean Peninsula](#) (October 2013)

[Build It, and They Will Recompense: North Korea's Nuclear Strategy](#) (January 2012)

In March 2015, South Korea confirmed its intention to seek membership in China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), seen as an alternative and potential competitor to the U.S.-favored World Bank and Japan-led Asian Development Bank. In addition, on June 1, South Korea and China signed a long-negotiated free trade agreement that will eventually remove tariffs on 90% of goods traded between the two nations.

China remains South Korea's largest trade partner, with bilateral trade totaling over \$228 billion per year. This amount is greater than the ROK's total trade with its second- and third-largest trading partners—the United States and Japan. While South Korea remains a steadfast ally of the United States, it continues to balance between China economically and the United States strategically and will likely continue to do so in the future.

The relationship between South Korea and its other neighbor, Japan, is complicated by deeply rooted historical issues and a major territorial dispute over the Liancourt Rocks (known as Dokdo in Korean, Takeshima in Japanese). The last year, however, has seen some cooperation between the United States' two Northeast Asian allies. In December 2014, Washington brought Japan and South Korea together to sign a tri-national intelligence-sharing accord. While the agreement remains limited to information on North Korea's missile and nuclear programs, previous attempts at such accords were often dropped by Seoul before their conclusion. The success of this agreement has created a modicum of trust between the two nations.

Seoul nonetheless remains worried about Tokyo's changing defense policies. During his recent U.S. visit in April 2015, Prime Minister Abe promised the United States that Japan would push forward on domestic security legislation to revise its right to collective self-defense in order to become a more active strategic partner. That same month, Washington and Tokyo agreed to an update to the bilateral U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines that would allow

Japan to pursue “proactive pacifism” in assisting the United States in operations beyond the Japanese archipelago.

These new agreements stoke fears in South Korea that Japan—as an alliance partner of the United States—may once again project military power into Korean territory. Some analysts have called into question whether the ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty conflicts with the United States’ new agreement with Japan.

In addition, Japan’s revised defense export capabilities may bite into South Korean business. Japan held its first international defense trade show during May 13–15, and Japanese businesses are moving quickly to capitalize on Prime Minister Abe’s 2014 removal of the ban on defense exports. Defense exports have become a large part of Seoul’s export policy, increasing from \$144 million in 2002 to \$3.6 billion in 2014. The new competition from Japan may heighten the rivalry between the two states, while stoking overall South Korean fears of Japanese militarization.

On the domestic front, President Park has weathered a slew of problems during her term. The South Korean public condemned the president’s handling of the Sewol ferry tragedy, believing that such a disaster stems from a widespread lack of governmental oversight. On April 27, South Korean prime minister Lee Wan-koo and many of his and Park’s aides were implicated in a massive bribery scandal that has further caused the country’s population to mistrust the government. The Park administration also has drawn heavy flak for its initial response to the recent Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) outbreak. South Korean presidents serve a single five-year term—of which Park is in her third year—and public mistrust could severely halt the president’s ability to carry out initiatives as rival parties continue to exploit the situation to their advantage.

**NBR Resources:**

[Reshaping the Rebalance: How the 114th Congress Can Advance U.S. Asia Strategy](#) (March 2015)

[The 7th Trilateral Ministers’ Meeting: Implications for Regional Cooperation in Northeast Asia](#) (March, 2015)

[The Rise and Persistence of Strategic Hedging across Asia: A System-Level Analysis](#) (December 2014)

[Japan-Korea Relations: Time for U.S. Intervention?](#) (January 2014)

# 3

## NEW AREAS FOR COOPERATION

During his visit to Seoul on May 18, Secretary Kerry pledged a commitment to “deepening cooperation on a range of new frontiers that will help define the 21st century, including science and technology, space exploration, cyber issues.” These areas will become a major focus of U.S.-South Korea collaboration and are among the foremost issues that President Park will address during her visit to the United States.

A major focus of the visit will be both countries’ keen and growing interest in cybersecurity. The hacking of Sony Pictures in December was a high-profile attack on a U.S. target, but both the United States and South Korea are facing increased cyberattacks from North Korea, China, and other states seeking to both disrupt these nations and steal military and business secrets. In March, North Korean cyberattacks on South Korea’s nuclear power industry seemingly attempted to cause malfunctions to Korea Hydro and Nuclear Power Co.’s nuclear reactors.

The Obama administration continues to search for international partners that can help create international norms, regulations, and defenses against malicious cyberspace actors. With South Korea facing similar threats, President Park is seen as a major potential ally in these fields.

A second area for cooperation centers on South Korea’s revived interest in becoming a space power, underscored by the successful March 26 launch of the Korea Multipurpose Satellite-3A. President Park will spend two days visiting NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Houston. South Korea announced in February its intention to increase the nation’s abilities in space technologies by seeking to advance launch

vehicle, space payload, and satellite capabilities. The United States can benefit from working with South Korea on space-related technology and assisting an ally that shares U.S. views on the rights to space. Such collaboration will dovetail well with mutual missile defense initiatives and intelligence sharing.

The United States would like to see more support from South Korea on cooperation against China's South China Sea expansion. The ROK remains wary of China's plans in the region but has resisted siding outright with the United States on the issue—likely because of Seoul's strategy of hedging between the two powers. That being said, South Korea has not ignored China's power plays. In December, after China introduced an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) that overlapped with South Korean territory, the ROK extended its own ADIZ to conflict with the new Chinese zone. In addition, Seoul donated a 1,200 ton Pohang-class corvette to the Philippines as a quiet show of where it stands on territorial encroachments.

On June 3, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific affairs, Daniel Russel, pushed Seoul to “speak out” against China's aggressive behavior as a “major stakeholder” in the international system. The United States would like to see Seoul take a more active part in challenging Chinese regional aspirations, and this topic will be an important focus of Presidents Obama and Park's dialogue.

In the realm of global health, South Korea and the United States are also finding many areas for cooperation. Both states—their governments and their medical sectors—share an interest in addressing threats to global health security and increasing global health cooperation, as well as assisting underdeveloped countries that are suffering from major infectious diseases. The United States' and South Korea's recent battles with Ebola and MERS, respectively, highlight the importance of such interactions. High-level meetings for the Global Health Security Agenda will be held in South Korea this September, and Park's visit to the U.S. is seen as an opportunity to increase dialogue on world health collaboration.

**NBR Resources:**

[Healthcare and Life Sciences Industry as a Strategic Focus for South Korea](#) (April 2015)

[Cyber Cooperation in Northeast Asia](#) (March 2015)

[South Korea's Search for Nuclear Sovereignty](#) (January 2015)

[2014 Pacific Energy Summit Report: Charting the Course to a Secure and Cleaner Energy Future](#) (December 2014)

[South Korea's Interests in the Arctic](#) (July 2014)

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