

# Terminal High-Altitude Aerial Defense Systems in South Korea

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## Research Question

Should South Korea and the US have completed deployment of THAAD and how should the two nations split costs of joint military exercises going forward?

## Background

- 2017 launch of four ballistic missiles by North Korea with 5,500km range
  - Put Seoul well within reach of Northern attack
- U.S. declared intent to install Terminal High Altitude Aerial Defense Systems
  - China responded with \$15.6 billion in sanctions against South Korea
- Trump administration demanded increase in South Korean contributions
  - Cost-sharing for joint military exercises consistent since Korean War
  - Sought 500% increase from South Korea
  - Resulted in one-year continuation agreement
- Biden administration agreed to 13.9% increase in Korean contributions



## Literature Review

### THAAD Deployment

Nuclear Defense: THAAD is an essential part of America's "nuclear umbrella" to prevent nuclear war

Spying: THAAD systems are an American spy tool to undermine China

### Joint Military Exercises Cost-Sharing Agreement

"Cost Plus 50": Partner nations should pay cost of joint exercises plus a 50% premium

Gradual: American presence abroad is essential and joint exercise cost increases should be gradual



Image: Left: *Council on Foreign Relations*, Right: *Atlantic Council*

## Thesis

Completion of THAAD was necessary to prevent nuclear fallout and combat dangerous precedent of allowing China to undermine U.S. forces in Korea. The U.S.-ROK cost-sharing agreement should follow an inflation model for long-term stability

## Research Design

US-ROK Cost-Sharing Agreement: How did this cost-sharing agreement change over time?

US-Japan Cost-Sharing Agreement: How do the changes to the US-Japan cost-sharing agreement set a model for the US-Korean relationships?

## Findings

- THAAD effectively protects and deters against North Korean attacks
- THAAD deployment was overly politicized
  - Backed South Korea into a strategic corner: Reject US-ROK military alliance in favor of appeasing China or accept THAAD and threaten reunification with North Korea
  - Refusal of THAAD would have counterbalanced in favor of China and North Korea, leading to a reunification that would be on the Kim regime terms
- Public discussion of cost-sharing harms diplomatic relations
  - Discussion of a "better deal" undermines US dedication to peace in East Asia
  - 96% of South Korean citizens oppose increased contributions
- Cost-sharing most effective when based on inflation and changing economic needs

## Implications

- Cost-sharing agreements should occur between trained diplomats in negotiation rooms
- US politicians use of "Cost Plus 50" in campaigns threatens US foreign policy goals and should be avoided
- US-ROK diplomats should renegotiate cost-sharing agreements every five years based on inflation models



Image: *The National Interest*, THAAD in South Korea