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

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

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?