South Korea’s Long Bow

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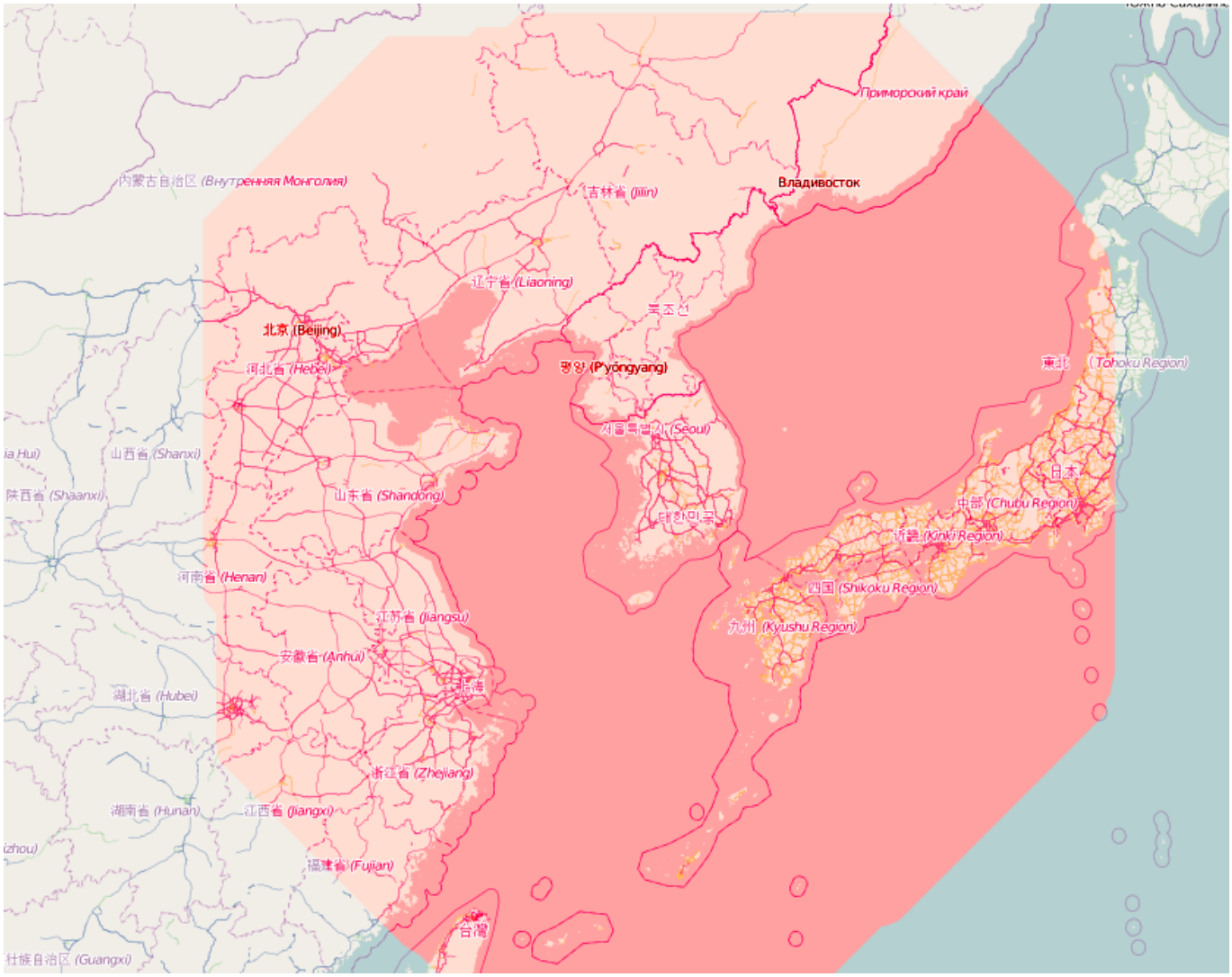

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Nautilus Peace and Security Weekly Report Contributor's blog entry for Deterrence.

Go to the Weekly Report for 26 July 2012.

South Korea has long tried to obtain medium-range ballistic missiles—at least since 1975 when it acquired a jet engine factory in California, and in 1979, when it sought US Atlas Centaur missile blueprints. Park Chung-hee tried hardest but failed when his attempt was squelched in 1979.

In the 1980s, the Pentagon worried about the diffusion of missile technology. It drafted the Missile Technology Control Regime agreement, adopted by seven supplier states in 1987. In the 1990s, the MTCR became the *de facto* institution for controlling the export of whole delivery systems (except for aircraft) and dual-capable items that could carry weapons of mass destruction to targets—including ballistic, cruise, and unmanned aerial vehicles.

The MTCR requires that no delivery systems be exported that can deliver 500 kg payloads more than 300 km. In reality, single-stage missiles with longer range and smaller payloads can be modified easily to deliver 500 kg over 300 km. Thus, supplier states were urged to consider borderline cases in the range-payload tradeoff, and to treat them conservatively.

Today, conservatives in the ROK are outraged that the United States is not inclined to enable the ROK to obtain medium-range delivery systems. Thus, the 1,500 km ROK cruise missile has a limited payload. ROK ballistic missiles are limited to 300 km (up in 2001 from 180 km set in the US-1979 ROK bilateral missile agreement). The ROK's UAV may not even get off the ground with a full fuel load because its 2,000 kg fuel load could be swapped for a 500 kg warhead and go further than 300 km.

Some ROK analysts argue that the North and regional states already have such delivery systems and that arming the ROK would create no marginal instability at a regional level, while leaving it with only MTCR-compliant delivery systems renders unstable the inter-Korean military balance of power.

Why are so many South Koreans agitated about having such delivery systems?

First, some South Koreans think like North Koreans. They want missile *juche*. Underlying this is a 19th century realist view of national power based on a hard state and its military capacities, prepared to go-it-alone. This outlook clashes with the multilateralist, networked "wolf spider" strategy articulated by South Korean intellectuals such as Ha Young Sun.

Second, the United States has failed to construct a global or regional legal framework to control delivery systems for weapons of mass destruction. Doing so requires a consistent set of rules to distinguish between space launch vehicles and missiles, applied at a global or regional level, as prefigured in the 2002 Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation.

Thus, an essential part of a comprehensive regional security settlement proposed by Morton Halperin in November 2011 is agreement on missiles and space launch vehicle rights and obligations in the region, and the possible extension of the US-Soviet/Russian Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty to include China.

—Peter Hayes, NAPSNet Contributor

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