

# **The Korean Security Dilemma: Shifting Strategies Offer A Way**

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The armistice that ended Korean War hostilities in 1953 has resulted in a situation that is not quite war, yet not quite peace. Left in a technical state of war with North Korea, the United States has continued to maintain a large deterrent force in South Korea, (officially the Republic of Korea or ROK). We posit that in light of increasing operational commitments for U.S. forces, continued reduction of those forces, and changes in emerging DoD strategy requirements, now is an appropriate time to consider an alternative to the current U.S. strategy in Korea. One such alternative Korean strategy emerges when one considers the impact of forces in North East Asia not only through a deterrence lens, but also through the lens offered by the security dilemma.

The conventional wisdom of military advisors is that the U.S. strategy of deterrence pursued in Korea has prevented the technical state of war (albeit a cold war) from erupting into a shooting war. Based on this reasoning, the conclusion can be drawn that the presence of U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula should continue. Among the current plans being considered is a proposal to move weapons and forces from Europe to Korea in order to demonstrate U.S. resolve in staying the deterrence course.<sup>1</sup>

When viewed from a realist, or "might makes right" perspective; maintaining (or perhaps even increasing the numbers of) a U.S. deterrent force in Korea is a logical strategy. According to the deterrence strategy, if North Korea were to attack ROK or U.S. forces, these forces are poised to retaliate immediately against North Korean forces. We concede the argument that this strategy has been successful in preventing a shooting war. However, we assert that this strategy has not been successful in obtaining a peaceful end state that would serve to move the region forward politically and economically. We further argue that the success of the deterrence strategy has come at a high cost in both human and other resources: resources that are becoming increasingly scarce. Finally, we believe that the basic assumptions of the deterrence strategy are flawed—and that the basic premise of deterrence leaves much less possibility for an eventual peaceful end state than other alternative strategies might.

The primary assumption upon which the deterrence paradigm is based is that having enough forces located in the immediate vicinity causes a potential adversary to carefully consider the cost that would be suffered should an act of aggression be pursued. We assert there is another lens through which to view the Korean situation. In this article, we use the framework of the security dilemma to gain the perspective of the potential aggressor, in this case, North Korea. We find that a potential adversary can view actions intended as *deterrence* to be acts of *aggression*. The security dilemma paradigm provides a useful method for developing an alternative set of assumptions that violate the assumptions of the deterrence paradigm. The security dilemma paradigm shows the cycle of deterrence often leads to war, not to continued peace.

***Reconsidering Korean Strategy—The Time is Right***

There are three primary forces at work that prompt a reconsideration of the levels of troops forward based in Korea. The first two reasons; the continuing downsizing of U.S. total force levels and the increase in the total number of contingency operations and operations tempo (OPTEMPO) to which U.S. forces are obligated, have been well documented in previous articles in this journal.

The downsizing of U.S. forces has made an effective forward presence at current levels in Korea, Europe, and Southwest Asia difficult if not untenable. A consolidation of these forces in the CONUS may be a better utilization of these resources. CONUS based forces would be available to flexibly respond to peacekeeping, contingency, homeland defense, or major war operations. Former Secretary of the Air Force Peters saw the transition to an Expeditionary Aerospace Force (EAF) as the beginning of a trend away from close proximity deterrent forces toward an agile U.S. based force capable of better coping with demanding OPTEMPO. He observed that "EAF is a journey, and we have many more steps to take along this path as we transform the Air Force from a forward-based, Cold War force to an expeditionary force able to respond to crises around the globe."<sup>2</sup>

Further, forces currently deployed as a deterrent are fixed--unavailable to serve in contingency operations elsewhere. Once forces are dedicated to a forward based deterrent role, their removal would create a vacuum in the region. For example, using Korean based forces to support a Balkan contingency operation may prove to be too tempting an opportunity for an opportunistic adversary to ignore. Reducing forces as part of a negotiated package of reductions on both sides of the DMZ would alleviate the temptation to take advantage of the situation.

The third catalyst for reevaluation is the change in emerging defense strategy in the current administration. U.S. forces in Korea are currently forward deployed in part because of the "two war strategy" adhered to during the Clinton administration. Under this planning requirement, military planners have been tasked with the requirement to fight two nearly simultaneous major theater wars. For example, the pentagon was required to have plans in place to pursue war efforts in Southwest Asia and on the Korean peninsula nearly simultaneously. Yet this assumption requiring pre-positioned deterrence forces is quickly fading. The efforts of the Bush administration to pursue a "revolution in military affairs" has prompted Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld to finally state what many military planners have been saying for years: that the U.S. has been "living a lie" under its stated strategy of preparing to fight two major wars at once.<sup>3</sup> Rumsfeld's new guidance is that military forces should be prepared to decisively win a major war in one theater, while repelling an adversary in another region.<sup>4</sup>

The flexibility that would result from a move away from the two-war strategy allows for new strategic principles to emerge. Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) principles prepared by Rumsfeld for transforming today's military into a force of the future include the following. First, the ability to protect our bases and the ability to defeat nuclear, biological, chemical and ballistic missile attacks. Second, the ability to project and sustain forces in distant anti-access environments. Third, the ability to deny the enemy sanctuary through the use of long-range precision strikes. Fourth, the ability to conduct space operations. Finally, the future force must have joint interoperability to allow for long-range strikes and deep maneuver.<sup>5</sup> Later in this

article, we will examine how a reduction of U.S. forces in Korea might impact each of these DPG principles.

Given these factors, we believe it is a prudent time to consider the Korean situation from a different perspective. Are the U.S. deterrent forces perceived as an offensive threat or a defensive force by North Korea? If they are perceived as a threat, is a negotiated partial withdrawal of these forces positive with respect to the Korean situation? If so, how will the reduced force measure against the proposed DPG principles listed above? We assert the security dilemma provides a framework for answering these questions.

### ***The Security Dilemma***

*I observe that you are watching our moves as though we are enemies, and we, noticing this, are watching yours too. I also know that in the past people have become frightened of each other and then, in their anxiety to strike first before anything is done to them, have done irreparable harm to those who neither intended nor even wanted to do them harm.*

—Xenophon, 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC<sup>6</sup>

The security dilemma manifests itself when one state (State A) seeking only to increase its own security takes an action that reduces the security of another state (State B). This act of increasing security in order to defend State A makes State B feel less secure. In turn, state B increases its security. Sequential responses to subsequent increases in security lead to a spiral of increased military capability and possibly open war.

As Xenophon's observations illustrate, the security dilemma has been a concern for thousands of years and it continues to foster apprehension today. The security dilemma is present when a state takes national security actions that are observable by other states. (Throughout this article the term state will be used as is common in international system research: to refer to organizations that govern the people of a territory; e.g. countries; not the sub-level, within country, organization such as the individual 'states' making up the United States of America).

The national security actions a state implements may take a multitude of forms. These include forward deployment of forces, the testing of new technology, entering into mutual defense pacts with other states, etc. State B, having observed the actions of State A, is then faced with a security dilemma—do they increase their own capability or do nothing? Figure 1 provides a matrix illustrating the options and potential outcomes for State B. The dilemma arises from the choice between two perceived alternatives, and significant ambiguity over which of the alternatives is the best.<sup>7</sup> State B may assume that State A has only defensive intentions, in which case no national security response is required. Alternatively, State B may assume that State A has offensive intentions, and pursue defensive preparations commensurate with the increase in the perceived threat.

State B's lack of perfect information in regard to the intentions of State A is not only the source of the ambiguousness of the alternatives but also compounds the effect of the alternative which is selected as a course of action. Should State B chose to do nothing, when in fact State A has offensive intentions, State B is put at risk. On the other hand, if State B takes defensive action of their own and State A has no offensive intent, then State A may perceive State B's response as a threat, which in turn requires a response from State A.

	State B perceives A as Offensive and <u>does</u> increase security	State B perceives A as Defensive and <u>does not</u> increase security
State A action is offensive	Status quo is maintained	State B is at risk
State A action is defensive	State A perceives State B as increased threat-dilemma worsens	Perfect information or serendipity

**Figure 1**

Illustrations of the danger of potential spirals of the security dilemma can be seen throughout history. Examples of the security dilemma effect include Germany's building of a powerful navy prior to World War I,<sup>8</sup> the US-Soviet nuclear buildup of the Cold War,<sup>9</sup> the current military competition between Pakistan and India, and the deployment of US forces in defense of the Republic of Korea.

In a seminal article on the security dilemma,<sup>10</sup> Jervis synthesizes much of the prior research into a succinct conclusion: states seeking only *security* can fuel competition and strain political relations with other states as a result of their actions.<sup>11</sup> "A state which *thinks* that the other *knows* it wants only to preserve the status quo and that its arms are meant only for self-preservation will conclude that the other side will react to its arms by increasing its own capability only if it is aggressive itself. Since the other side is not menaced, there is no legitimate reason for it to object to the first state's arms; therefore, objection proves the other is aggressive."<sup>12</sup> This observation captures the critical essence of the dilemma—that irrespective of the *intent* on State A, it is the *perception* of State B that becomes the constructed reality.

Thus, states concerned with the implications of the security dilemma must focus on managing the subjective perceptions of others. The perception of another state's actions must focus on the assessment of whether the change in capability is offensive or defensive.

In today's technological environment, with weapons increasingly serving in both offensive and defensive roles, the challenge of determining whether a weapon is defensive or offensive is more difficult than ever. State B, in forming a perception of State A's change in national security, will

seek to determine whether a weapon deployment is primarily offensive since offensive weapons serve as potential threats to State B. In order for State B to determine whether a weapon is offensive or not, it must ascertain which characteristics of a weapon indicate that it should be considered primarily offensive.

It becomes necessary to determine the characteristics of those weapons that Hart argued "alone make it possible under modern conditions to make a decisive offensive against a neighboring country."<sup>13</sup> An analysis of the critical attributes of offensive and defensive weapons throughout history by Dupuy and Eliot,<sup>14</sup> Boggs,<sup>15</sup> Wright,<sup>16</sup> and Levy<sup>17</sup> have found that for weapons to be perceived as offensive, they must possess two key characteristics: mobility and striking power.

Weapons may be placed on a continuum ranging from being immobile to increasingly higher degrees of mobility; and from no striking power to high levels of striking power. As a result, they may be considered to be more or less offensive, as long as they do possess both mobility and striking power. A weapon possessing one but not both characteristics should not be considered to be offensive. For example, a minefield cannot be moved, yet possesses striking power, therefore it would not be considered offensive in nature. The minefields on both sides of the DMZ in Korea serve as good examples of what a non-mobile but highly destructive weapon might be. A truck is mobile but in itself contains no striking power, therefore it would not be considered offensive. Figure 2 provides a graphical depiction of the offensive nature of weapons.

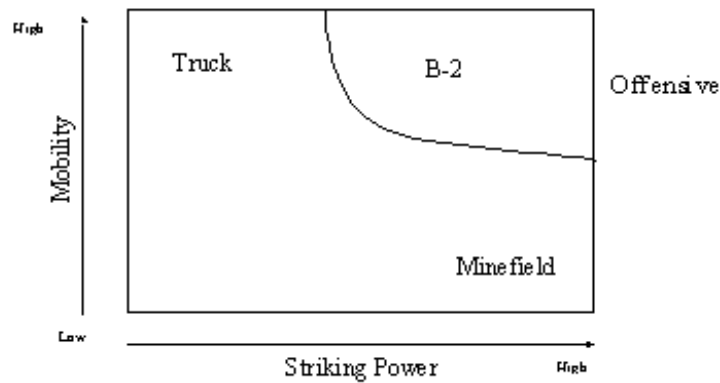


Figure 2—Two Dimensions of Analysis for Nature of Weapons

The U.S. Missile Defense system now under development (in part to counter North Korean development of long range missiles) provides a useful illustration of how a weapon system can easily slip from "defensive" to "offensive" irrespective of the intent of the state deploying it. If the missile defense system is capable of striking targets other than missiles in flight, then it is both mobile and possesses striking power—an offensive system. Further, if the missile defense basing system is mobile (e.g. Airborne Laser), then it is even more likely that the system will be perceived as offensive.

In addition to mobility and striking power characteristics, the time required for a weapon to strike a target must be considered as another determinant of a weapon's offensive perception. Under the criteria of mobility and striking power, a mechanized infantry division is offensive in nature. However, we assert the amount of time required for a weapon to strike a target in the perceiving state must also be considered to determine the perception that state has on the offensive threat of the weapon. The time a weapon requires to strike targets (elapsed time from a go order to the time the target can be struck) is a function of 1) the time required for the weapon to reach the target, and 2) the generation (or alert) status of the weapon. Depending on these variables, the perceived offensive nature of the weapon can be greatly diminished.

For example, the weapons arrayed in the 4<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry Division can clearly be perceived as offensive in nature, as are those of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mechanized Infantry Division. Yet the proximity (time required to strike the target) of the units affects the perception of the observer. Consider the subjective perception of North Korea. Pyongyang will likely have a different perception of the offensive nature of the 4<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry Division at Ft Hood, Texas, than that of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mechanized Infantry Division forward deployed at locations throughout the Republic of Korea. The 2<sup>nd</sup> MID is very close, requires little time to strike targets in North Korea, and is at generally higher states of alert. The 4<sup>th</sup> MID is further away, requires a great deal more time to strike targets in North Korea, and is at comparatively lower states of alert. This relationship is depicted in Figure 3.

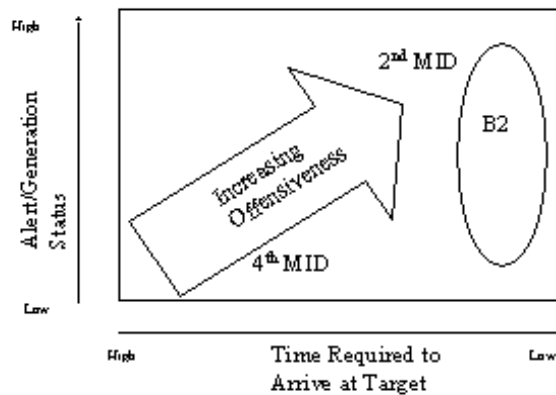


Figure 3—The effect of “Time Required to Strike a Target” has on offensive perception of weapons

On the other hand, a squadron of B-2 bombers can present an offensive threat anywhere in the world whether operating from their home base in Missouri or from a forward deployed location. In the case of the B-2, technology has mitigated the proximity to target issue, greatly reducing the time required to arrive at and strike targets, irrespective of its location.

How does State A, being fully cognizant of the security dilemma, and seeking only to enhance its own security, pursue increased security as well as a legitimate deterrent against aggression, and not exacerbate the dilemma for State B? A review of the security dilemma literature suggests that a pursuit of non-offensive technology to the greatest extent possible is the most prudent course of action. We acknowledge that offensive weapons are necessary, but by positioning them such that distance mitigates their offensive nature, the security dilemma will be further ameliorated. Only by choosing such a strategy can State A avoid the ultimate tragedy of the security dilemma, "that mutual fear of what initially may never have existed may subsequently bring about what is feared the most."<sup>18</sup>

### *Amelioration of the Korean Security Dilemma*

We now examine the Korean situation using the security dilemma as a framework for analysis. In addition, we measure a notional negotiated partial withdrawal of forces against the proposed DPG principles. Finally we discuss factors that would be required for maintaining a legitimate deterrent force while ameliorating the security dilemma.

It must be noted at the outset that the issues tied to Korea (e.g. National Missile Defense, Pacific Rim economic policy, the emergence of China as a potential peer threat etc.) are many, varied and certainly cannot be examined in even a cursory manner in the limited context of this paper. At a macro level however, Korea does provide a useful example of the interaction of the security dilemma and maintaining a legitimate deterrent capability.

Progress was made in 2000 with regard to reducing North Korean production of nuclear weapons, repatriating separated families, and reopening rail links between the divided republics. Yet there has been no move toward a reduction in the 37,000 forward-based U.S. forces.<sup>19</sup> Observers of the Korean situation are quick to point out that there are more than a million troops in the North Korean army, and two-thirds of them are within fifty miles of the border with South Korea.<sup>20</sup> Secretary of State Powell has called on Pyongyang to trim its army and signaled that North Korean force reductions might be a precursor to normalization of relations between the U.S. and North Korea.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, U.S. leaders indicate that the potential threat of North Korean forces demands the current and continued forward deployment of deterrent forces.

In the context of the security dilemma, the military build-up (on both sides of the DMZ) is understandable. In North Korea's perception, they are in place in response to the perceived threat posed by the U.S. and South Korean forces massed near their border. The overwhelming numbers of North Korean infantry, tanks and artillery are required to match the superiority of U.S. and ROK technology and training, which serve as force multipliers for the numerically smaller forces south of the DMZ. The U.S. and ROK forces currently must be ready to react quickly to halt any advance by numerically superior North Korean forces. Both sides perceive the other to be threats, and have postured themselves accordingly.

We have established that despite its smaller size and intended deterrent role, the U.S. forces are perceived as a threat by North Korea. But how do current U.S. forces match up with Secretary Rumsfeld's proposed DPG principles? Further, how would a potentially reduced forward presence align with these principles?

Regarding the principle of force protection and missile defense, it is reasonable to assume that U.S. forces would be much safer at CONUS bases than they would be at forward locations in Korea. While North Korean development of long-range missile systems continues to be a concern for the U.S., their ability to deliver WMD via short-range systems is a known capability now. The ability to asymmetrically attack U.S. and ROK forces to reduce their effectiveness is an existing North Korean capability. As a result, forward deployed U.S. forces currently represent a conveniently located target for North Korean strikes. Should these forces be struck with WMD, surviving personnel would be forced to operate in a significantly impaired capacity, which would be further diminished by the requirement to care for military members injured in the initial attack. Currently these forces serve fundamentally as a tripwire, with a response capability that may be seriously diminished by a WMD attack. Such an attack would leave the U.S. no choice but to retaliate with forces from CONUS or other Pacific Rim bases. If U.S. forces in Korea are in reality relegated to the role of observer and tripwire, it seems that a much smaller force could certainly carry out this role.

As directed by DPG principle one, a reduction of forces would result in fewer U.S. forces being put at risk as targets for asymmetrical WMD attacks in Korea. CONUS based forces, while not immune to such attacks, would be more difficult to attack. These forces could be offered some degree of protection by the proposed U.S. Missile Defense system. Recalling the impact that proximity has on the security dilemma, a Missile Defense system protecting the U.S. is much less threatening than a system that also might protect forces stationed in South Korea.

The proposed DPG principles also require the ability to project and sustain forces in anti-access environments. A cornerstone of forward-basing has always been that "presence equals access." However, that paradigm may be changing. Recent events indicate that scenarios will develop where access will be available irrespective of a previous U.S. presence. Despite the lack of a U.S. presence in Pakistan or the former Soviet Asian republics, U.S. forces were granted access to bases there to fight the war on terrorism. Further, it is inconceivable that ROK forces would not allow U.S. forces "access" to bases should a crisis develop in Korea.

We agree that once a formal presence is abandoned, it may be difficult to regain access in some circumstances. If personnel and financial resources were unlimited, it would be ideal to be fully engaged in theaters worldwide. Unfortunately, given scarce resources and other operational requirements, choices must be made. Notwithstanding the arguments suggesting that access alone should not be a primary driver for forward basing of forces in Korea, we do agree that some presence should be maintained in Korea to maintain the facilities to which U.S. forces would deploy if required.

In addition, more airlift capability is required to enable the timely re-deployment of forces from their consolidated CONUS locations. Enhancing airlift capability would enable the U.S. to gain a legitimate global deterrent capability, and also an increased capability to assist the world rapidly in a non-violent capacity. The deterrent capability would be maintained by having the resources to transport forces rapidly anywhere in time of crisis. Additional airlift capacity could further enhance U.S. legitimacy when utilized to conduct humanitarian, disaster relief, and other non-offensive missions when the resources are not required for deterrent or offensive missions.



Further, this course of action would demonstrate to the world that options for gaining legitimacy exist beyond the massing of forces.

The proposed DPG principles also require long-range precision strikes. This principle does not require strikes from forces located in close proximity. While any Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) would prefer to have assets located as close to targets as is practical, the ability of U.S. air forces to strike Korean targets from Japan, Guam, or even CONUS bases meets the requirements of this principle. Notwithstanding the JFACC's preferences, we also note that the Joint Force Commander of a contingency operation elsewhere would prefer to have a larger pool of forces to draw from (e.g. the consolidated CONUS forces) and not have a significant portion of available forces removed from consideration because they were locked down in fixed deterrent positions.

The ability to conduct space operations is also an emerging DPG principle. While the capability to strike targets with space based assets may not yet be an available capability to U.S. commanders, there is no question that space based systems are critical to the monitoring of North Korean forces and in facilitating the communications of forces across long distances. As these systems continue to evolve, and methods for disseminating the information provided by these systems improve, there is very little reason to depart from the current limited number of space system operators forward deployed.

Finally, the DPG principles call for improved joint interoperability to allow for long-range strikes and deep maneuver. Recall again that history has demonstrated the requirement for land forces to take and hold territory to win wars. The army divisions currently based in Korea are there in part for that purpose. But given the realization that the U.S. cannot fight two simultaneous wars that push the enemy back to their capitals, it may be time to conceptualize a Korean plan that does not revolve around the extended use of ground forces. If the emerging strategy was to call instead for an "Aerial Halt" through precision strategic bombing and interdiction of enemy ground forces, the requirement for forward based ground forces could be greatly diminished.

The forces withdrawn from Korea would be consolidated at CONUS bases to provide a flexible response to other emerging contingencies. For example, the reorganization of army divisions into brigades capable of autonomous response would increase the flexibility of these units. In the current forward-deployed scenario, the mechanized division in Korea is of no use in an emerging contingency outside the theater.

The partial withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea need not be perceived as "the sky is falling" on the U.S. Army. A partial withdrawal coupled with enhanced airlift would allow the Army to pursue its transition to a lighter, faster force featuring Light Armored Vehicles that it plans to deploy by air.<sup>22</sup> In addition, forces withdrawn to CONUS bases would be able to maximize their proficiency by accessing CONUS training ranges that are not available in congested Korea.

An analysis of the Korean situation using the framework of the security dilemma and the developing Defense Planning Guidance indicates that there is some merit to a reduced forward

presence of U.S. forces in Korea. The final issue to be addressed is the maintenance of a legitimate deterrence capability given a partial withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea.

As discussed previously, any withdrawal of forces from Korea would require an enhanced airlift capability that would ensure withdrawn forces could be rapidly reinserted back into the theater and married up with pre-positioned material when required. Forward operating bases would be maintained in theater by a greatly reduced U.S. force, ensuring access in case of a potential crisis. These forces would continue to serve in monitoring and tripwire roles. South Korean forces would take primary responsibility for homeland defense in case of a crisis.

The deterrent capability would be maintained through the regular exercise of a rapid deployment plan. A demonstration of the capability to reinsert forces quickly if required would enhance the legitimacy of the force, and thus serve as a deterrent toward aggression.

In addition to enhancing airlift capability to reintroduce forces to the area, the U.S. must continue to maintain and improve its ability to strike targets around the world with great accuracy. Continued acquisition of the B-2 platform will be required should a course of CONUS basing of forces be pursued. Finally, development of hypersonic and other weapon platforms operating in and through space must continue. These weapon systems will enable the U.S. to truly become capable of "kicking the door in" via global precision strikes in real time.

### ***Conclusion***

States may seek to gain military capability legitimacy or "deterrence" by massing forces along borders with potential adversaries. This is certainly the current scenario in Korea. For non-regional and non-super powers, seeking legitimacy via massed troops may be the only course of action available based on their security dilemma perceptions. But for the world's only superpower, there are other options. It should not be enough for the U.S. to merely seek the legitimacy that is gained through the massing of forces. World events have cast the U.S. as the understudy in the role of *benevolent hegemon*. By breaking the cycle of the security dilemma while maintaining a legitimate deterrent capability, ascension to star status in that role may be possible.

In addition to the security benefits to be realized, there are many potential financial benefits for all involved. Scarce resources currently employed by both sides to fund the military standoff could be redirected toward economic pursuits in the region. In particular, attention should be paid to the desperate health and nutrition situation associated with the famine in North Korea that has claimed one million lives in three years.<sup>23</sup> For the U.S., resources could be freed up for the Bush administration to pursue its military reform agenda, enhance homeland defense, provide more flexibility in reshaping the US military into a lighter, more mobile fighting force, acquire badly needed additional airlift capacity, and continue development of a missile defense system.

### **Notes**

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