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North Korea: Long-term Scenarios
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Abstract/outline of presentation

With regard to prospects for North Korea's long-term future, I assume that the central factors affecting North Korea's long-term stability are the pace of change, the leadership's efforts to manage consequences of change, and the short-term versus long-term consequences of those policy decisions. These decisions will influence potential stability or instability internal to North Korea and will determine whether change in North Korea occurs in a gradual or a sudden fashion.

Another factor likely to influence North Korea's long-term future is the external environment, and the relative influence and level of competition between China and South Korea to determine the end state on the Korean peninsula. A potential competition for influence by North Korea's immediate neighbors appears likely have only a marginal influence on North Korea's internal policy direction, even as North Korea's leadership may try to fan competition among external parties in its battle to maintain capacity to manage internal change. An assumed China-South Korea competition for influence in North Korea would be most relevant in the event of North Korean instability.

This analysis analyzes possible scenarios for North Korea's long-term future by examining North Korea's policy choices against its relative capacity to manage internal changes against short-term and long-term time frames. It also examines the relative influence of competition between China and South Korea as an influence on North Korea. A direct competition between South Korea and China would be a source of potentially severe tension in the event of North Korean instability.

The following tables illustrate the set of scenarios described above.

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		Table I: North Korean Instruments to Manage Change	
		COERCIVE/CONSERVATIVE	ADAPTIVE/REFORMIST
NK policy choices and consequences	Policy measure and approach	State controls over economy limit growth potential; nuclear development inhibits external sources of investment	Gradual economic reform; nuclear freeze based on int'l negotiation
	Near-term effect	Greater potential for friction/clashes to suppress economic choices; enhance political controls and reinforce image of leadership power	Economic reforms stimulate growth, but political control is harder to maintain
	LONG-TERM effect	Economic stagnancy, potential for rupture/breakdown Violent clash and suppression of public dissent	Pluralization; power diffusion; greater potential for dissent, but against backdrop of economic growth

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		Table II: External influences and North Korean Instability	
		China	South Korea
Time Frame for NK Instability	Near-term situation	China's economic influence dominant; peak influence depends on forestalling NK instability	South Korean economic influence limited; peak influence likely to follow NK instability, but under circumstances involving political/economic risk
	Long-term policy objectives and means	<p>Policy objective: assure that China's border state remains friendly/nonhostile;</p> <p>Means: draw NK within China's orbit, extend China's influence over peninsula; mitigate costs from disruptive sudden change</p>	<p>Policy objective: peaceful coexistence; eventual Korean reunification</p> <p>Means: grow economic influence, manage gradual political accommodation; reduce NK resistance to South Korean-led reunification; overcome Chinese resistance to a reunified Korea</p>