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## Who Poses Tougher Challenge For Donald Trump: South Korea's Moon Jae-In Or The North's Kim Jong-Un?

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SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA—Another day, another North Korean missile test it seems. But the new South Korean leader, Moon Jae-in, may prove to be a bigger problem for President Donald Trump than North Korea's Kim Jong-un.

Unlike America's presidential election, South Korea's contest yielded no surprise. Left-leaning Moon topped a multi-member field to take over from disgraced Park Geun-hye, who was impeached and removed from office on corruption charges.

The contest was a rushed affair, held several months earlier than originally scheduled. Moon was the losing candidate five years ago and had served the last liberal president. He won support by criticizing South Korea's influential corporate conglomerates, or chaebols, targeting income inequality, and promising to reduce unemployment.

The ruling party split over Park's ouster and had little time to recover. Moon was briefly threatened by a more centrist opponent who had backed him in the last election, but then faded in the stretch after a bad debate performance. Moon won with 41 percent of the vote, not exactly a record mandate, but nevertheless providing a sizeable margin over the next finisher.

Although Moon will face opposition to his leftish economic nostrums, his foreign policy views likely will generate more controversy at home and abroad. President Moon formally affirmed his commitment to the alliance with America in a post-election phone call with Donald Trump, but the former may be less enamored of his nation's long relationship with Washington than he admits.

Moon rose to prominence as a left-wing lawyer and human rights activist. He was jailed for opposing the long-running military dictatorship, which gave way in 1987 only in response to mass demonstrations by Koreans demanding elections. In 2002 he helped elect Roh Moo-hyun, who won a narrow victory in the midst of surging anti-American sentiment. Roh stood out among South Korean presidents for his hostility toward U.S. policy, though the latter accepted the alliance as a reality. Moon was Roh's chief of staff and lost to Park five years ago. As head of the principal opposition party, however, he was well-positioned when Park's presidency collapsed.

Moon's views are no secret, though like any good politician he downplayed his more controversial views during the brief campaign. He started as an opponent of the THAAD anti-missile system, which has been deployed in the ROK despite China's angry opposition. He urged revival of the so-called Sunshine Policy, which sought to win North Korea's friendship with aid and commerce. (His proposal has been nicknamed Moonshine.) He promoted the idea of an "economic community" with the North, urged talks with North Korea's Kim Jong-un, endorsed revival of the Six-Party talks (which include Japan, Russia, and China), and expressed his desire to take his first foreign trip to Pyongyang.

As the polls tightened he carefully qualified his positions, adding conditions for any approach to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Yet many suspect such promises were merely convenient election add-ons. In fact, some of Moon's top appointees share a radical past. For instance, his newly appointed chief of staff, 39-year-old Im Jong-Seok, once was jailed for promoting contacts with the North and led a student group which occupied the U.S. ambassador's office.

There's nothing wrong with South Koreans criticizing both America and the U.S.-ROK alliance. In fact, the South is longer overdue in taking over responsibility for its own defense. Today South Korea enjoys a roughly 40-1 economic advantage and 2-1 population edge. The South is ahead on most other measures of national power as well; it could devote as much money as necessary to its military.

However, Moon's attitude towards the North suggests more than a tinge of naiveté. Engagement makes good sense, but any contacts should be without illusion. To appear anxious to visit Pyongyang is reminiscent of President Kim Dae-jung's historic trip north in 2000, which, it turns out, was bought with a half billion dollars in payments from Hyundai and the South Korean government.

Moreover, the new administration in Seoul is likely to run into sharp conflict with President Trump. There is no shortage of inconsistencies among the positions articulated by the American president and his aides. Indeed, the latter have spent more than a little time walking back President Trump's comments.

Nevertheless, in broad terms Washington is committed to applying maximum pressure on the North, through military threats and enhanced economic sanctions. The administration plans to condition talks with North Korea on prior agreement to America's demands: dismantling the DPRK's nuclear and missile programs. The U.S. expects China to more fully enforce existing sanctions and make additional cuts in aid and trade.

South Korean officials whom I met last week were particularly circumspect with their government in transition and generally avoided direct criticism of the American president. The best argument they could make was that Presidents Moon and Trump have used some of the same language to describe their respective positions, but it is obvious that the meanings differ substantially. Such details matter.

For instance, South Korea's initiation of a new round of investment and aid would undercut the U.S. objective of "maximum pressure" on the North. If Seoul increased economic ties,

Washington could not easily demand that China sever its commercial connections with the North. If President Moon flew to Pyongyang to negotiate a nuclear freeze, Washington's insistence on full disarmament before talks began would be stillborn. The more America threatened military strikes, the more uncomfortable and even antagonistic South Koreans would become: most were appalled that some U.S. officials freely admit a willingness to risk triggering a Second Korean War.

The two presidents spoke last week by phone shortly after Moon took office and have agreed to a summit next month. Talks might help, but even friendly discussions won't hide the fact that the two countries' interests differ in substantial ways. And if President Moon pursues policies which undercut Washington's objectives, relations could prove quite difficult: President Trump doesn't suffer criticism gladly. The frigid relationship between George W. Bush and Kim Dae-jung might serve as a model.

U.S.-South Korean ties have varied over time, in response to changing international conditions as well as shifts in the respective governments. However, the Trump-Moon match likely will present a special challenge. Donald Trump may find the serious and principled Moon to be a tougher adversary than Kim Jong-un.

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