



## Political, economic and social influences on Moon Jae-In's policy changes in THAAD deployment

Rostineu\*, Syahroni Reza Ali

Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author: E-mail address: [rostineuo3o8@gmail.com](mailto:rostineuo3o8@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

This research discusses the attitude of President Moon Jae-In in THAAD placement. THAAD is a defense system against short and medium-range missiles. In February 2016, South Korea and the United States reached an agreement on the plan to deploy Terminal High Altitude Area Defense or THAAD in South Korea. In the process of reaching this agreement, South Korea faces complex considerations that are both internal (increasing national security) and external (possible resistance from China and Russia). Moreover, in the middle of the process of implementing THAAD placement, there was a change of government from Park Geun-Hee to Moon Jae-In. China used several official and unofficial media to pressure South Korea during Park Geun-Hee's reign. This problem continued until the government changed to Moon Jae-In, but in the end the THAAD problem was resolved. This background leads to the research question: what factors are contributing behind Moon Jae-In's attitude regarding THAAD placement? By applying the descriptive-analysis method with data sources in the form of online media, this study aimed to explain the background that drove Moon Jae-In to resolve conflicts related to THAAD placement. The results of the analysis showed that there were political, economic, and social factors that drove changes related to the conflict over the placement of THAAD during the reign of Moon Jae-In.

### ARTICLE INFO

**Article History:**

Received 27 Jul 2021

Revised 21 Oct 2021

Accepted 27 Oct 2021

Available online 29 Oct 2021

**Keywords:**

foreign policy,

Moon Jae-In,

South Korea,

THAAD

## 1. INTRODUCTION

South Korea and North Korea, two countries that are still in conflict status, often experience changes in the intensity of aggression from each side. The conflict happened because of foreign policies and agreements that were carried out over time, in order to find a bright spot for the South Korea - North Korea conflict. In early 2016 North Korea's military aggression began to increase, marked by the test launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile. As explained by [Smith](#) in the website entitled *Buying a big stick: South Korea's military spending has North Korea worried in 2019* <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-military-analysis-idUSKCN1VW03C>, North Korea spends approximately US\$4 billion annually on ballistic missile tests which is equal to 24% of their domestic income to demonstrate to the Americans that they are capable of launching missiles towards Washington. After months of discussion, on July 8, 2016 Seoul and Washington officially announced that the THAAD system would be activated in South Korea. On July 13, 2016, Seongju, which will be the location for THAAD deployment, received much controversy in South Korea, as explained by [Williams](#) in the website entitled *THAAD, the missile defense system kicking off a new US-China fight, explained in 2017* <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/3/10/14882778/thaad-south-korea-missile-defense-system-china-explained>, a long period of debate marked with many obstacles on Seoul's part due to resistance from residents living in Seongju and continued American pressure to support the deployment of the previously activated THAAD defense system in Guam and Hawaii.

THAAD is an American-made ballistic missile defense system designed to intercept short, medium, and long range ballistic missiles during the terminal phase of launch. The AN/TPY-2 X-Band radar used with this system is highly sensitive and can acquire targets in the launch phase and track them precisely through their terminal phases. This level of accuracy makes it possible to use hit-to-kill technology to destroy incoming missiles. This makes THAAD considered very useful to counter the North Korean nuclear threat that leads to South Korea. Although its main function is to intervene in incoming attacks, some observers of Chinese defense technology, as explained by [Panda](#) in the website entitled *What Is THAAD, What Does It Do, and Why Is China Mad About It? The Diplomat in 2016* <https://thediplomat.com/2016/02/what-is-thaad-what-does-it-do-and-why-is-china-mad-about-it/>, reconstruct the workings of the THAAD missile and consider that the defense system will disrupt the bilateral military relations between China and South Korea.

China has rejected the deployment of THAAD missiles in South Korea for technical reasons. China fears that THAAD could be used to intercept Chinese missiles and spy on its territory. Both the United States and South Korea disputed that THAAD would only be used against North Korea. The THAAD battery will be placed in terminal mode, so it cannot detect Chinese ICBMs. In addition, THAAD would be less strategically positioned against Chinese medium-range missiles if launched in South Korea or Japan. THAAD's location would allow it to theoretically intercept missiles from Tonghua, as explained by [ISDP](#) in the website entitled *THAAD on the Korean Peninsula. Institute for Security & Development Policy in 2017* <https://isdp.eu/publication/korea-thaad/>, which would follow the same trajectory as missiles from North Korea, but not missiles from Dengshahe, Laiwu, and Hanchang. However, Pentagon reports have shown that it is possible to switch the system to a Forward-based mode in just eight hours. Once in this mode, the radar range will increase to 3,000 kilometers, making it possible to detect Chinese ICBMs headed for the US. While THAAD missiles will not be able to intercept Chinese ICBMs in their launch phase and flight conditions, the information can be transferred to the warning radar at Clear Air Force Station in Alaska. This would allow the warheads to be tracked from greater distances than is currently possible. As explained by [ISDP](#) in the website entitled *THAAD on the Korean Peninsula. Institute for Security & Development Policy in 2017* <https://isdp.eu/publication/korea-thaad/>, the fact that two THAAD radars have been deployed in Japan is already a reason of urgency for China, but an additional system in South Korea allows for more accurate detection, as the radars are 1,000 kilometers closer to its border.

From a military point of view, it is clear that THAAD is not a direct threat to China. The main reason China has repeatedly objected to the deployment of THAAD, as explained by [Zhen](#) in the website entitled Why South Korea's promises on THAAD and a US-Japan alliance are so important to China. The South China Morning Post in 2017 <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2118499/why-south-koreas-promises-thaad-and-us-japan-alliance>, is that Beijing views THAAD as an attempt to shore up the US regional alliance network in response to North Korean provocations. China has spent more and more efforts to improve bilateral relations with South Korea, and have warned that THAAD will be the end of the relationship. In China's view, accepting THAAD is a clear signal from South Korea that they are prioritizing the United States over the emerging partnership with China. as explained by [Panda](#) in the website entitled What Is THAAD, What Does It Do, and Why Is China Mad About It? The Diplomat in 2016 <https://thediplomat.com/2016/02/what-is-thaad-what-does-it-do-and-why-is-china-mad-about-it/>, in addition to economic and trade relations, China and South Korea have overlapping interests in the region, (GCSP, 2014) including the stability of the Korean Peninsula. More importantly, South Korea's growing role as a middle power could allow it to play a mediating role between China and other countries during the era of maritime disputes.

In response, China has used its economic influence and banned Chinese tourists from traveling to South Korea, as well as targeting South Korea's entertainment industry and auto industry through unofficial sanctions. South Korean conglomerate Lotte, which provided the land for the THAAD installation, was particularly affected. In March 2017, China temporarily closed 75 of Lotte's 99 stores across China (ISDP, 2017), citing inspection failures. On August 21, 2017, Chinese Ambassador to South Korea Qiu Guohong reiterated that "THAAD is the biggest obstacle in developing China-South Korea relations and the most difficult problem since the establishment of diplomatic relations." In the past few years, China has indeed threatened many countries with economic penalties on the basis of political problems.

Whether in official statements or through state-run media, Beijing has warned countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Germany and Spain of the consequences of keeping Huawei Technologies Co., the Chinese telecommunications giant, out of next-generation 5G. China issued a veiled threat to Britain after Britain announced it would send an aircraft carrier into the South China Sea. With Turkey, more explicitly, saying economic and commercial ties will take a hit if Ankara continues to criticize Beijing's mass detentions of Uighurs in Xinjiang. Beijing has a long track record of using economic threats as leverage in diplomatic disputes. Imports of Norwegian salmon were blocked after the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Chinese communist party traitor Liu Xiaobo in 2010. As explained by [McGregor](#) in the website entitled China's doghouse is smaller than it looks in 2019 <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2019/04/05/commentary/world-commentary/chinas-doghouse-smaller-looks/>, in another case, mangoes from the Philippines were left to rot after Manila won an international court case against Beijing in the South China Sea in 2016.

The THAAD dispute has proven to create a complicated polemic for South Korea, especially the policies that Park Geun-Hee left after being dismissed, became unresolved homework. Moon Jae-in has faced a difficult political and security environment during his first year and a half in office. After being assigned to the Blue House without the two-month transition period that would normally allow the president-elect to form a new government, Moon Jae-In had to handle North Korea's first intercontinental ballistic missile and hydrogen bomb tests while simultaneously managing relations with the United States and China through controversial deployment of the THAAD system. As explained by [Lee](#) in the research entitled President Moon Jae-in and the Politics of Inter-Korean Détente. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Korean Security and Foreign Policy Initiative in 2018 [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Korean\\_Strategic\\_Review\\_2018\\_FULL.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Korean_Strategic_Review_2018_FULL.pdf), in addition, it

must urgently fulfill its promise to stimulate economic growth, create jobs, and restore confidence in South Korea's democratic institutions.

This article uses media as primary data to look at the role of media in political decision by making use of democracy of society concept. It enables a look at how society's voices and media is both an important support of political decision in the condition in which political actor works. Drawing on descriptive method of research, this article tried to show the power of public participation through media in political decision making. In doing so, the author addresses significant question regarding the background for the political decision on THAAD issue during Moon Jae-In governmental period. The author limits the scope of the article to focus on incoherence of media's voices as representative for society's voices which contribute to a governmental consideration in making political decision. At the same time, this article accommodates two condition of Park Geun-hee 's era and Moon Jae-in'era on the same issue since it is able to explain the background of Moon's political decision on THAAD connected with society's voices on media.

### **1.1 Research Purposes**

Based on the background described above, we can conclude that the placement of THAAD is a conflict between Korea and China because each has different interests. China responds to the placement of THAAD as a political threat to its country, that Korea prioritizes relations with US. As for Korea, the placement of THAAD also contains political content, namely protecting the country from North Korea's attitude which has threatened its country's security several times. It is China's view that presents pressure as well as conflict between China and Korea, so whatever the Moon Jae-In government's policy of replacing Park Geun-Hee becomes an important axis to be analyzed. For this reason, the formulation of the question in this study is what are the factors behind Moon Jae-In's attitude regarding the placement of THAAD? Thus, this study aims to explain the background of Moon Jae-In's attitude or decision regarding the THAAD case.

## **2. METHOD**

To answer this research question, descriptive-analytical method were conducted to enrich the analysis by using reference sources in the form of journals. Related to THAAD research, there have been several papers that have been produced. There are few steps in this method.

The first thing to do is obtaining data specifically related to THAAD from the beginning of the leadership of President Park Geun-Hee (the THAAD procurement plan) to the present, namely the President of Moon Jae-In. The author does not want to rule out the possibility of obtaining sources regarding THAAD so the obtained data comes from various sources, various languages, political views and other aspects related to THAAD. the most important thing in obtaining data is how current the data are. It is because the topic of THAAD discussion is an ongoing topic, and changes in the data may occur, even estimated for the next five years. therefor the author in the process is always looking for the latest news or research and if it is necessary to update the previous data.

After obtaining data related to THAAD, categorizes the data based on the date, the aspects discussed, and who is the researcher of the data. First, the researchers categorized the data according to date because the author must focus on the timeline which may significantly change as a result of certain events. Second, by categorizing the data according to related aspects, the author found a common thread that would lead to specific topics in this research, namely politics, economics and social. Then, the researchers categorized the country where the data comes from. Most of the data were from university journals or institutions in the US, South Korea and China. After that, the writer finds out what the political views of the writer or news portal are. This was done by the author because the data related to THAAD tend to be biased. For example, a Chinese news portal certainly refuses to procure THAAD, but on the other hand, it is certain that journals from the US will support the placement of THAAD. hereby the author tries to keep this research for academic purposes by only taking the information, not biased argument.

The data that has been organized is then analyzed for the cause and effect of existing events with a cultural and psychological approach from the related figures. Finally, organize the data into a coherent chronological analysis.

### **2.1 Literature Review 1**

There was a study conducted by [Amalia](#) in the research entitled "*hallyu* diplomacy against China regarding the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) crisis in South Korea in 2016 - 2017" in 2018. This study discusses the efforts of South Korea, both the government and the private sector, in removing the *hallyu* ban in China which is a response to the agreement between South Korea and America in the placement of missile deterrents or Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) which focuses on 2016-2017. It was written by Qonita that 2016 was the year that South Korea and America cooperation was agreed and the Chinese response emerged which carried out the *hallyu* ban in China until 2017 and is still ongoing. Even until 2018 South Korea made a change of president from Park Geun-Hee to Moon Jae-In. This study uses the theory of cultural diplomacy and the theory of public diplomacy as an analytical tool. From the results of this analysis, it is found that the role played by a country in achieving its interests is not only carried out by the government, but also the private sector. The difference between Amalia's research is that it focuses on *hallyu* as a strategy for the THAAD dispute, while this study focuses on the political and social role of the THAAD dispute.

### **2.2 Literature Review 2**

The second literature study is a study by [Fitri](#) entitled "South Korea's National Interest in Building a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) Military Defense System" in 2019. This study discusses the THAAD dispute between South Korea and China which focuses on the outline of South Korea's interest in using THAAD. The method used in this research is qualitative research. The results of this study describe South Korean interests in using THAAD covering defense interests, namely the interception of North Korean threats, economic interests in increasing South Korea's bargaining power, international governance interests, namely maintaining the stability of the Korean Peninsula region and ideological interests, namely stemming the influence of North Korean communism. Fitri's research difference focuses on the interests of South Korea domestically without looking at external influences on the placement of THAAD.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 THAAD in the era of Park Geun-Hee**

South Korea and the United States agreed to deploy an American-made missile defense system in South Korea called THAAD or Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system. The purpose of deploying THAAD is to protect South Korea and the United States military from the threat of North Korean ballistic missiles. Seoul and Washington have been talking about this for quite a while despite getting a strong response from China which considers it a threat to their country. China's foreign minister responded that the deployment of THAAD would affect the strategic balance on the Korean peninsula and damage China's security interests. "The Chinese side hereby expresses its strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition". As explained by [Choe](#) in the website entitled South Korea and U.S. Agree to Deploy Missile Defense System in 2016 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/08/world/asia/south-korea-and-us-agree-to-deploy-missile-defense-system.html>, China's leader, Xi Jinping, has spent considerable political capital trying to convince South Korean President Park Geun-Hee to resist the Obama administration's push for the THAAD missile system.

The new system is also likely to face resistance from residents in any part of South Korea that will be selected as a base. Villagers and politicians from towns who have been named as possible deployments said they would oppose it, concerned that the strong electronic signals from radar could harm residents' health, and that their towns would become early targets for North Korean missiles if it went to war. As explained by [Agence France-Presse](#) in the website entitled South Korean President Park Geun-Hee defends THAAD and urges Pyongyang to abandon

nuclear programme in 2016 <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/2004072/south-korean-president-park-geun-hye-defends-thaad-and-urges>, responding to this, Park Geun-Hee said "I believe that such issues ... should not be the subject of political battles," he said. "If there is another way to protect our people and our country, we must propose alternatives," he added.

"This is an important decision for the US – South Korea" General Vincent K. Brooks, the top American military commander in South Korea, said in a statement. "North Korea's continued development of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction requires the alliance to take appropriate protective measures. As explained by Choe in the website entitled South Korea and U.S. Agree to Deploy Missile Defense System in 2016 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/08/world/asia/south-korea-and-us-agree-to-deploy-missile-defense-system.html>, this caution is to increase missile defenses more effectively." The United States military stressed that THAAD would "focus solely on North Korea".

South Korean President Park Geun-Hee urged North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program and maintain the deployment of US anti-missile systems in the face of repeated "provocations" by Pyongyang. "I urge the North Korean government to immediately stop all provocations and threats targeting South Korea and the development of weapons of mass destruction," Park said. He also warned Pyongyang that all attempts to provoke and intimidate South Korea would be counterproductive. "The more effort North Korea puts in, the deeper it will isolate itself from the international community and the bigger its economic problems will be," Park said. As explained by Agence France-Presse in the website entitled South Korean President Park Geun-Hee defends THAAD and urges Pyongyang to abandon nuclear programme in 2016 <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/2004072/south-korean-president-park-geun-hye-defends-thaad-and-urges>, "The deployment of THAAD is an act of self-defense," Park emphasized in his speech, adding that his priority as president was to "protect the lives of our people from North Korean provocations".

South Korea agreed to consider deploying THAAD after North Korea launched a long-range rocket on February 7, 2016, an event widely seen as a cover for developing long-range ballistic nuclear missiles. In March, Washington and Seoul formed a task force to discuss possible deployments. South Korea's military says THAAD will increase its defenses against North Korean missiles, but its political leaders are reluctant to do so because of Chinese objections.

The deployment of THAAD would probably encourage China to move closer to North Korea as a buffer against the United States and South Korea, and that China might retaliate economically. China is the No. trading partner. 1 South Korea and sends the most tourists to South Korea than any other country.

Therefore, China is very concerned about THAAD in South Korea because its powerful radar could give the United States military the ability to quickly detect and track missiles launched in China, analysts say. As explained by Choe in the website entitled South Korea and U.S. Agree to Deploy Missile Defense System in 2016 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/08/world/asia/south-korea-and-us-agree-to-deploy-missile-defense-system.html>, the United States military already has THAAD batteries deployed in Guam and operates a powerful radar in the region, as well as satellites over China.

While the United States is increasingly concerned about North Korea's efforts to develop the capability to deliver nuclear warheads on intercontinental ballistic missiles, South Koreans are likely to be less concerned. For decades, they have lived in the shadow of North Korea's ability to have devastating effects. Seoul, the capital, is within range of thousands of North Korean rockets and artillery. As explained by Choe in the website entitled South Korea and U.S. Agree to Deploy Missile Defense System in 2016 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/08/world/asia/south-korea-and-us-agree-to-deploy-missile-defense-system.html>, North Korea did not immediately react to the announcement.

### 3.2 *Moon Jae-In's Initial View of THAAD*

The chairman of the opposition party at the time, Moon Jae-In, considered that the placement of THAAD would bring more harm than gain. As explained by [Yonhap](#) in the website entitled Main opposition key figures clash over THAAD in 2016 [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/08/113\\_209261.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/08/113_209261.html), Moon Jae-In stated that the government's role was to manage the risks on the Korean Peninsula triggered by the North Korean nuclear issue and criticized the current government's policy of exacerbating the risks rather than solving the THAAD problem. Moon reiterated that the decision on deployment should be left to the next government. "I don't understand why the government is doing it like this, I believe the next government can make rational decisions that meet security and economic interests through consultation with the US and China. Speeding up the deployment will leave little room in diplomacy for the next government." Moon has repeatedly said that the deployment lacks public consensus. Choi Jong-kun, a Yonsei University professor added that the rush of the Park Geun-Hee government to deploy an anti-corruption system -the missile prompted Beijing to retaliate. As explained by [Kim](#) in the website entitled Moon Jae-in's view on THAAD disputed again in 2017 [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/01/113\\_225306.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/01/113_225306.html), "Park Geun-Hee's stubborn decision to the Chinese government gives us little room for negotiation," said Choi.

Moon Jae-in, on the other hand, has come under criticism from conservatives after he raised questions about the arrival time of some US THAAD battery kits. Critics say Moon's position serves only the interests of China and North Korea at a time when a united voice is needed against them. Moon did not qualify as a presidential candidate because he neglected national security at a critical time in the THAAD deployment. "The ambiguity may work in the interests of North Korea or China but it causes unease among the public," said LKP (Liberty Korea Party) leader Chung Woo-taek. "There is nothing scarier than a presidential candidate opposing the military option of self-defense in the nomination." Former UN chief Ban Ki-Moon has directed his criticism of Moon, too, arguing that "strategic ambiguity" has divided the political sphere. "This offers China an excuse to show its strength through economic retaliation by opposing THAAD," he said. "It is very sad that opinion in politics is fragmented," Ban said. "THAAD is representative of security issues. On such issues, both the ruling bloc and the opposition should have one vote." Several DPK members also criticized Moon. Seongnam Mayor Lee Jae-Myung, another DPK presidential candidate, urged Moon to clarify his position, saying, "A political leader should be able to persuade the public. As explained by [Kim](#) in the website entitled Moon Jae-in's view on THAAD disputed again in 2017 [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/01/113\\_225306.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/01/113_225306.html), as a presidential candidate, he must inform the public of his opinion and be judged by them".

### 3.3 *Moon Jae-In's policy change*

Former president Park Geun-Hee was finally fired from office, Moon Jae-In was elected president earlier than scheduled after winning over the main competitor of the People's Party, Ahn Cheol-Soo. The issue of THAAD and economic progress is one of the important work that has not been completed by the previous president. THAAD, was approved under the authority of Park Geun-Hee, South Korea's president who was ousted on corruption charges in March 2017. But President Moon Jae-in, who replaced Park in a special election, cast doubt on the deal and the fate of the missile battery, some of whose main components have been damaged. installed in South Korea, threatened to become a topic of debate when Moon met with President Trump in Washington. Since taking office, Moon has ordered his administration to stop installing additional components from the THAAD battery until it completes a domestic review, including an environmental assessment. The move has stoked fears in Washington that Moon Jae-In may be looking for an excuse to scrap the deal, though he insists that it doesn't mean his government will reverse decisions made under Park Geun-Hee.

South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said the domestic review was to strengthen public support for the missile system by shoring up its political legitimacy. As explained by Choe in the website entitled Trump Rattles South Korea by Saying It Should Pay for Antimissile System in 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/28/world/asia/trump-south-korea-thaad-missile-defense-north-korea.html> calling the deployment an "alliance decision," he said South Korea would "continue to collaborate on the basis of mutual trust".

Since his election, Moon has sought to dispel doubts that his government will weaken those ties, repeatedly stressing the importance of US-South Korean ties. With the progress of North Korea's missile program, he also pledged to increase South Korea's defenses. As explained by Choe in the website entitled Moon Jae-in of South Korea and Tiongkok Move to Soothe Tensions in 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/11/world/asia/Tiongkok-south-korea-moon-jae-in.html?searchResultPosition=1> Moon Jae-In will honor the THAAD agreement for the sake of the alliance.

THAAD is becoming one of the most difficult diplomatic issues facing South Korea's new leader. If Moon asks the United States to withdraw the defense system, he risks undermining South Korea's alliance with the United States and looking as though he is giving in to Chinese pressure. It won't be easy for Moon to reverse the decision on THAAD, especially as it has already been implemented, analysts say. As explained by Choe in the website entitled Moon Jae-in of South Korea and Tiongkok Move to Soothe Tensions in 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/11/world/asia/Tiongkok-south-korea-moon-jae-in.html?searchResultPosition=1> instead, Moon will try to convince China that it must help curb North Korea's provocative behavior until the South and the United States decide that the system is no longer needed.

Many liberal supporters of Moon Jae-In oppose the deployment of THAAD, accusing Washington of implementing a weapons system in South Korea which they say is part of a broader American strategy to contain China with an Anti-Missile shield. Trump angered the South Korean public by demanding that South Korea pay \$1 billion for the system. At the same time, the THAAD system has caused divisions in relations between Beijing and Seoul, and has prompted a widespread boycott in China of South Korean brands. As explained by Choe in the website entitled Moon Jae-in of South Korea and Tiongkok Move to Soothe Tensions in 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/11/world/asia/Tiongkok-south-korea-moon-jae-in.html?searchResultPosition=1> this is a big problem because China is South Korea's biggest trading partner to date.

"I am well aware of the Chinese people's concerns and fears about deploying THAAD," Moon told Xi, according to Yoon Young-chan, a spokesman for the South Korean leader. "I hope the two countries can understand each other better on this matter and will open channels of communication soon." As explained by Choe in the website entitled South Korea and U.S. Agree to Deploy Missile Defense System in 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/08/world/asia/south-korea-and-us-agree-to-deploy-missile-defense-system.html> "It is easier to solve the THAAD issue when North Korea is not provoking anymore," Moon said, according to his aides.

Chinese media described the call between Xi Jinping and Moon Jae-In as peace, saying Xi Jinping had reminded Moon Jae-In of friendly relations between China and South Korea since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992. China views Moon as a leader who will be much easier to deal with. with North Korea than his predecessor, Park Geun-Hee, who was impeached and ousted as president. "I have never met you, but I have been watching you with great concern," Xi Jinping told Moon Jae-In, according to the South Korean leader's office. "I am deeply impressed by your unusual background, thoughts and personal point of view." As explained by Choe in the website entitled Moon Jae-in of South Korea and Tiongkok Move to Soothe Tensions in 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/11/world/asia/Tiongkok-south-korea-moon-jae-in.html?searchResultPosition=1> China hopes that the new South Korean government will pay high



attention to China's main problems and take practical actions to promote the healthy and stable development of bilateral relations.

The leaders of China and South Korea seem to be moving to repair strained relations by the planned deployment of THAAD, this is marked by the sending of a South Korean delegation to Beijing to attend the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation created by Chinese President Xi Jinping. As explained by Sheng in the website entitled New South Korean president faces tricky choice of THAAD in 2017 <https://www.GlobalTimes.cn/content/1047015.shtml> the visit was seen by observers as a sign of the restoration of diplomatic ties between Beijing and Seoul, which have been cut off by the THAAD dispute since July 2016, when South Korea decided to deploy the US Anti-Missile.

But THAAD has become a complex issue in many ways. On the one hand South Korea has to follow US military dictates to ensure the security of Washington, Seoul's tensions with Pyongyang are growing and relations with Beijing, its biggest trading partner, have been strained. China is taking steps to impose informal sanctions on various industries to force South Korea economically. The THAAD system was implemented on a plot of land transferred from Lotte to the South Korean government, placing Lotte at the center of a dispute with China. Almost all Lotte supermarkets in China will be closed due to security breaches and fires. But Lotte is not the only industry China is targeting. South Korean cultural exports such as K-pop and K-drama have become a mainstay in Chinese popular entertainment largely disappeared, drama production collaborations are ending, and Korean artists are facing visa restrictions. Beijing has also implemented an unofficial ban on tourism groups in South Korea.

In a bid to ease economic tensions on the targeted industries, Moon's new administration sought a negotiated solution to the stalemate in the fall of 2017. The agreement with China calls for the resumption of normal economic relations and a commitment to "Three No's" with South Korea of no battery additions. THAAD, there is no integration of South Korea into the US-led regional missile defense system, and no trilateral alliance with the United States and Japan.

Despite being criticized at the time for undermining South Korea's national defense and giving Beijing a "strategic gift", the South Korean government made no promises to China. There were no THAAD batteries available for deployment to the Korean peninsula at the time, and the idea of South Korea joining an integrated missile defense system, much less a trilateral alliance, was also not a real option at the time (even if the United States wanted to see South Korea eventually make a move. in that direction over time). "Three No's" also defined South Korea's position before the agreement. South Korea stressed that "Seoul has consistently made it clear to China that any issue that may limit our security sovereignty will never be subject to negotiation."

Despite a 2017 agreement to improve relations, Lotte has largely left the Chinese market as a result of pre-existing sanctions and business pressures. Beijing did not remove sanctions against Lotte and Lotte is also considering closing its beverage and food factories in China as well. Overall, in the 18 months since January 2017, Lotte has suffered a loss of \$1.7 billion in China.

At the height of the THAAD dispute, Chinese tourism to South Korea fell by almost half as Beijing banned group tours to South Korea. While the resumption of normal relations has seen an increase in Chinese tourists in South Korea, as of September this year the number of Chinese tourists visiting South Korea was still down 1.9 million compared to the same period in 2016. Based on group average spending. tourists at the time, the South Korean tourism industry may have lost up to \$24 billion over the last two and a half years.

Quoted from the Global Times, comparing the Chinese economy as a promising stock. Alongside the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, China is also pursuing a number of additional initiatives such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Asia Pacific Free Trade Area and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, all of which are underpinned by its strong economy. On the other hand, the US is a bearish country. As the US focuses on domestic goals, its influence abroad has been diminished by substantial changes in the global balance of power in recent years. According to the Global Times, South Korea needs to evaluate

how to get the most out of relations with the US and China. Should you invest in promising stocks like China or bearish ones like the US? This is expected to be able to make a wise choice in the midst of a dispute over geopolitical patterns in Northeast Asia. China and South Korea share a common security interest in preventing war on the Korean Peninsula, the only place in the world where the Cold War mentality persists. The war created a divided Korea and it still affects the lives of the people in the stakeholder countries. Beijing and Seoul should adopt similar policies based on realist thinking to revive Northeast Asia by encouraging cooperation and resisting confrontation.

From the news excerpt above, the researcher also quoted one of the public comments on the page "it seems that the new president of South Korea does not want to offend China, at the same time he does not want to offend the US. The question is, what do South Koreans really want? This may be one of the reasons why Moon Jae-In asked parliament to review THAAD and leave it to the public's choice" from the DazAlot account.

The South Korean public is faced with a transitional government that is far from being a conservative to a progressive government. As South Korean voters resolutely voted for Moon Jae-In as president, concerns arose in diplomatic circles in Washington DC. Given the difficult relationship under progressive president Roh Moo-Hyun, pundits cast doubt on future ties between the two countries. Some say that the uncomfortable element inherently operates when the conservative US government and the progressive government in South Korea have to work together. Moon Jae-in inherited all the burden of foreign policy from the previous Park administration, which was toppled by the South Korean people at a most difficult time.

The next issue is how the South Korean public perceives the current situation and thinks about military options. It explores which countries South Korea considers the most important and cooperative security partners in difficult circumstances. For many, the United States remains a strong and reliable ally and a cooperative military partner. While Trump is not very popular with South Koreans, his reputation has not undermined the overall interests of the United States as an ally. China, on the other hand, appears to have exhausted its political capital over the THAAD issue. This whole THAAD drama seems to remind many South Koreans that China is not really on the side of South Korea and can side with North Korea in case of inter-Korean conflict.

As North Korean provocations continue, the public is seen moving in favor of the deployment of THAAD and tactical nuclear weapons as North Korea increases its nuclear and missile threats, the need for an alliance with the United States that South Korea considers to be stronger. Although confused, South Koreans were little affected by the comments on the way they viewed the United States. The attitude towards the alliance became more supportive. As explained by Kim in the website entitled South Korean Public Opinion in 2018 <http://www.theasanforum.org/south-korean-public-opinion/> China's economic retaliation provides an opportunity for South Korea to reconsider the relationship between the two countries, deciding that it is not a reliable partner in terms of security.

While doubts about the importance of South Korea's economic relationship with China have made South Koreans support for an alliance with the United States higher than ever. Coupled with the Moon Jae-In administration that doesn't seem too far from what the United States has asked for its policy towards North Korea. What South Korea is concerned about, apart from security alliances, is bilateral trade. Of course, in a situation like this, South Koreans will still support the alliance with the United States.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Based on the analysis above, the researcher can conclude that Moon Jae-In's attitude towards the placement of THAAD is driven more by political and economic factors. However, social factors also contributed to Moon Jae-In's change of view in the case of THAAD placement. Although initially, the THAAD deployment plan made Korea faced with a difficult choice, Moon Jae-In tended to consider political factors, that political relations between China-Korea, and also Korea-US must be maintained properly even though in different portions.

Regardless of whether the deployment of THAAD was continued or not, Moon Jae-In, who initially rejected the placement of THAAD, finally realized the fact that it was the South Korean and US alliance that had to be prioritized and maintained because of ideological similarities.

The fact that China imposed informal economic sanctions on South Korea in the midst of such complicated conditions reminds South Korea that China is not a truly profitable ally for South Korea. On the economic side, China's informal sanctions in the economic field have basically been felt by South Korea even before the agreement to improve relations between China - South Korea (Three No's) was made. It's just that the difference in the case of THAAD placement, China further clarifies this condition. This is what presents the negative sentiments of the people of South Korea towards China. Meanwhile, American support that prioritizes Korean security from North Korean actions has not caused any significant change in the attitude of the South Korean public towards the US.

Moon Jae-In's explanation that the placement of THAAD must be with the approval of the parliamentary council and the public became a social factor that contributed to the change in Moon Jae-In's attitude and views in the case of THAAD placement in Korea. From this we can see that the policy taken by Moon Jae-In towards the placement of THAAD that changes over time is nothing but the interests of the State and the people in it, as well as showing that the government implemented by Moon Jae-In is a democratic government.

## 5. REFERENCES

- Agence France-Presse. (2018, 20 July) South Korean President Park Geun-Hee defends THAAD and urges Pyongyang to abandon nuclear programme. The South China Morning Post, Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/2004072/south-korean-president-park-geun-hye-defends-thaad-and-urges>
- Amalia, Qonita. (2018). *Hallyu diplomacy towards China regarding the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense crisis in South Korea in 2016 – 2017*. (Skripsi) Program Studi Ilmu Hubungan Internasional, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik, Universitas Negeri Islam Syarifhidayatullah. Jakarta.
- Choe, Sang-Hun. (2017, 28 April) Trump rattles South Korea by saying it should pay for antimissile system. The New York Times, Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/28/world/asia/trump-south-korea-thaad-missile-defense-north-korea.html>
- Choe, Sang-Hun. (2017, 26 June) South Korea voices support for U.S. antimissile system. The New York Times, Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/26/world/asia/south-korea-thaad-missile-defense.html?searchResultPosition=4>
- Choe, Sang-Hun. (2017, 11 Mei) Moon Jae-in of South Korea and Tiongkok move to soothe tensions. The New York Times, Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/11/world/asia/Tiongkok-south-korea-moon-jae-in.html?searchResultPosition=1>
- Choe, Sang-Hun. (2016, 7 July) South Korea and U.S. agree to deploy missile defense system. The New York Times, Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/08/world/asia/south-korea-and-us-agree-to-deploy-missile-defense-system.html>
- Fitri, Mitha Maudyani. (2019). *South Korea's national interest in building a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) military defense system*. (Skripsi) Program Studi Hubungan Internasional, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik, Universitas Jenderal Achmad Yani. Cimahi.
- GSSR. (2016, 3 March) China's real objection to Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD). Georgetown Security Studies Review, Retrieved from <https://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2016/03/03/chinas-real-objection-to-terminal-high-altitude-area-defense-thaad/>

- ISDP. (2017, October) THAAD on the Korean Peninsula. Institute for Security & Development Policy, Retrieved from <https://isdp.eu/publication/korea-thaad/>
- Kim, Hyo-jin. (2017, 8 March) Moon Jae-in's view on THAAD disputed again. The Korea Times, Retrieved from [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/01/113\\_225306.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/01/113_225306.html)
- Kim, Ji-yoon. (2018, 27 February) South Korean public opinion. The Asan Forum, Retrieved from <http://www.theasanforum.org/south-korean-public-opinion/>
- Lee, Chung-Min & Botto, K. (2018) President Moon Jae-in and the politics of inter-Korean Détente. Carnegie endowment for international peace: Korean security and foreign policy initiative. [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Korean\\_Strategic\\_Review\\_2018\\_FULL.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Korean_Strategic_Review_2018_FULL.pdf)
- McGregor, Richard. (2019, 5 April) China's doghouse is smaller than it looks. The Japan Times, Retrieved from <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2019/04/05/commentary/world-commentary/chinas-doghouse-smaller-looks/>
- Panda, Ankit. (2016, 25 February) What Is THAAD, What does it do, and why is China mad about it? The Diplomat, Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2016/02/what-is-thaad-what-does-it-do-and-why-is-china-mad-about-it/>
- Sheng, Wang. (2017, 15 Mei) New South Korean president faces tricky choice of THAAD. Global Times, Retrieved from <https://www.GlobalTimes.cn/content/1047015.shtml>
- Smith, Josh. (2019, 11 September) Buying a big stick: South Korea's military spending has North Korea worried. The Reuters, Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-military-analysis-idUSKCN1VW03C>
- Williams, Jennifer. (2017, 2 Mei) THAAD, the missile defense system kicking off a new US-China fight, explained. Vox, Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/3/10/14882778/thaad-south-korea-missile-defense-system-china-explained>
- Yonhap. (2016, 13 July) Main opposition key figures clash over THAAD. The Korea Times, Retrieved from [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/08/113\\_209261.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/08/113_209261.html)
- Zhen, Liu. (2017, 6 November) Why South Korea's promises on THAAD and a US-Japan alliance are so important to China. The South China Morning Post, Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2118499/why-south-koreas-promises-thaad-and-us-japan-alliance>