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EXERCISE/EXERCICE NEW HORIZONS

TITLE/TITRE

The South Korea-US Alliance: Its challenges and tasks ahead

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ABSTRACT

Over several decades, the ROK-US alliance has become a vital element for South Korea to maintain peace and prosperity. The alliance has important strategic implications that have maintained the *status quo* on the Korean peninsula, supporting as it does the interests of both countries.

However, today the ROK-US alliance is facing a new challenge. On the South Korean side, some of the biggest conflicts for the ROK-US alliance have been the rise of anti-Americanism, a perception and policy gap on North Korea and China's growing role on the Korean peninsula.

To ensure the longevity of the alliance, the alliance requires to adapt to the changing environments on the Korean peninsula. The allies should strive to reduce the current sources of stress related to the Status of Forces Agreement(SOFA) and to bridge the gap in priorities and threat perception of North Korea. At the same, the ROK and the US need to redefine and envision the alliance not only from a perspective of the Korean peninsula situation, but from broader terms in order to manage the China factors in Northeast Asia.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Korea (ROK)¹ and the United States (US) have maintained a Mutual Defense Treaty since 1953². Over the last several decades the alliance has successfully deterred another war and managed numerous crises on the Korean peninsula, laying the ground work for continued economic prosperity, political democratization, and cooperation in social areas including remarkable progress in the military area. In other words, the ROK-US alliance has made the Korean peninsula more secure, and has enhanced prosperity for the Korean people.

However, as the security environment and strategic landscape change, new issues and challenges appear. The allies are in a transition period while they seek changes in their alliance relations to better fit the changing environment. Two examples of this changing environment are the ongoing issue of the nuclear program in North Korea and the rise of anti-Americanism in South Korea. These challenges and conflicts are triggered by various factors in political, economical, and social contexts. Young people are especially wondering the efficiency of ROK-US alliance, and think that the two allies should replace their existing relations with new ones in order to meet the new requirements of international relations.³ The alliance has recently been under strain both between the allies and within each of them.

¹ ROK is the official name of South Korea, while DPRK(Democratic People's Republic of Korea) is the official name of North Korea.

² Yahoo, "ROK Policy on National Defense," <http://www.shaps.hawaii.edu/security/korea/milit2e.html>; Internet; accessed 17 January 2008.

³ Norman D. Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind?: The U.S.-ROK Security Relationship After 9/11*(CA, Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2004), 27-28.

Accordingly, the alliance must explore new ways to meet these challenges and conflicts. Today ultimately, we stand at a point in time where it might be possible to state that the ROK-US alliance has served its objectives well—peace, stability, and prosperity in the Korean peninsula⁴—for the past several decades. It is also necessary to demonstrate the benefits for the people that each side has received from the alliance, thus making it possible to see where the alliance might, in the long run, continue to provide complementary and shared interests for both countries.

This paper will examine the strategic implications of the ROK-US alliance over time, and analyzes the current challenges to the alliance. The essay will conclude by presenting the tasks ahead which could contribute to the mutual beneficial alliance relationship. Ultimately, the purpose of this essay is to envision a sustainable and desirable ROK-US alliance from the South Korean perspective.⁵

Strategic implications of ROK-US Alliance

An alliance is defined as “formal associations of states for the use of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership.”⁶ Conventional theories in international politics view alliances as tools of capability aggregation; the allies join together against a common threat.⁷ In this view, countries seek alliance

⁴ Ministry of National Defense, *2006 White Paper* (Seoul: MND, 2006), 73; available from <http://www.mnd.go.kr/>; Internet; accessed 22 January 2008.

⁵ Consequently, as far as the purpose of this paper is concerned, the discussion will focus on the South Korean view.

⁶ Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 4.

⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979) and Stephen M. Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

partners primarily for the military strength they possess in order to increase both deterrence of attack from the country that threatens them and defense, should war break out. In this same context, the ROK-US alliance was established during the Korean War and formalized by the ROK-US Mutual Defense Treaty after the war.⁸ The essence of this treaty calls for the two nations to maintain a strong military alliance. The US dispatched troops to the Korean peninsula, and the two governments established a combined command structure.⁹

In the era of the cold war, the combined military capability was the basic framework that guaranteed security on the peninsula. To the US, South Korea was perceived as a critical forward base in Northeast Asia for containing the Soviet Union, while protecting the free world. To South Korea, the US was its most reliable patron in the process of building a free and democratic country, while protecting itself from North Korea's threats. More than any other bilateral relationship in the world, the ROK-US alliance must be regarded as a product of the cold war.¹⁰ This means that the mainstay of such relations had been the cold war and, accordingly, with the termination of the cold war, this mainstay ceased to exist. However, the ROK-US alliance was exposed least of all to the after effects of the post cold war period. This was because, on the Korean peninsula, there

⁸ Norman D. Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind?: The U.S.-ROK Security Relationship After 9/11* (CA, Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2004), 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁰ Jae-Chang Kim, "The New International Order and US-ROK Alliance," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol.XV, no.2(Fall, 2003), 59-63.

still remained a final legacy of the cold war; the DPRK, with its archetypal communist regime, it continued to remain an enemy of both countries.¹¹

In fact, the US-North Korea Nuclear Framework Agreement¹² concluded in Geneva on October 21, 1994 was designed to freeze North Korea's nuclear program and to reduce the cold war tensions on the peninsula. At the time, one assumption was that if the accord helped ease tensions drastically, then the value of the ROK-US alliance might be lost.¹³ But this assumption was too simple to be persuasive because there could be various factors compelling the two countries to prolong their alliance even if the nuclear issue was resolved.

Basically, the causes that form and keep alliances strong depend on how large a threat states face and how much help partner states can expect.¹⁴ After an alliance forms, the participating states will want to shape and control it so that it maximizes their net benefits.¹⁵ If the benefits outweigh the costs to any of the partners, and if the domestic distribution of costs and benefits is supportable politically, then joint interest in maintaining the alliance will converge and the alliance will stick. Of course, if costs

¹¹ Bruce E. Bechtol, Jr, "Assessing the Present and Charting the Future of US-DPRK Relations: The Political-Diplomatic Dimension of the Nuclear Confrontation," in *The United States and the Korean Peninsula in the 21st Century*(Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 131.

¹² Under the Agreed Framework negotiated between North Korea and the Clinton administration in 1994, North Korea had agreed to freeze its nuclear program and accept international inspections in return for fuel oil shipments and, eventually, two "proliferation-resistant" nuclear reactors, it was expected that this would drastically decrease North Korea threats on the Korean peninsula. Victor D. Cha and David C. Kang, "The Korea Crisis," *Foreign Policy*, No. 136(May-June, 2003), 21.

¹³ ROK-US alliance is a legacy of the cold war to block communist regime. If peace was established on the Korean peninsula, the alliance might lose its existential value.

¹⁴ Walt, *The Origin of Alliances*, 1.

¹⁵ Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 10.

predominate between alliance partners, joint interests will diverge and the alliance may dissolve.¹⁶

Both finding the status quo in their interest in the pursuit of common goal, the two allies have developed positive shared strategic interests in the region. The strategic interests of South Korea and the US in the post cold war era converge mostly over the issue of preventing war and establishing peace in Northeast Asia. Ultimately, South Korea has a vital interest in deterring war on the Korean peninsula, and maintaining peace and economic prosperity. The interests of the US are to prevent North Korea from threatening to the region, which could affect the market-oriented countries in the region and ultimately disrupt economic prosperity.¹⁷

Considering the geopolitical context, moreover, one common view that seems to be shared by regional states is that the security commitment of the US is the indispensable factor for peace and stability in the region.¹⁸ A US withdrawal would leave a power vacuum that would be likely to produce intense and destabilizing competition among the regional powers. Were Japan, for example, to lose the US security umbrella, it is inevitable that it would expand its military forces, which in turn could well lead to an

¹⁶ Ole Holsti, *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances: Comparative Studies* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), 4 and Robert E. Osgood, *Alliances and American Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), 19.

¹⁷ For example, South Korea is the US' eighth-largest trading partner and 11th largest economy in the world (U.S Department of State, "Background notes on South Korea," <http://www.state.gov/www/background-notes/south-korea-899-bgn.html>; Internet; accessed 22 February 2008)

arms race with China. China would likely oppose any change to the US role if the US presence does not inhibit Japan's militaristic tendency,¹⁹ albeit with much ambivalence.

The coincidence of vital strategic interests and geopolitical location with the US, makes South Korea's position unique among East Asian nations and helps to keep strong the alliance between the two countries. Realistically, there is no better alternative to the ROK-US alliance for South Korea, considering the bellicosity of Kim-Jungil²⁰ regime as well as the geopolitical reality of being like a “shrimp among whales”²¹ in Northeast Asia. In short, the ROK-US alliance has maintained the political and military balance on the Korean peninsula, and may well do so far into the future, supporting as it does the interests of both countries. Consequently, both countries must be able to maintain a desirable alliance “maximizing gains and sharing liabilities.”²²

Challenges for the ROK-US Alliance

The longevity of an alliance is also believed to be dependent on whether members are able to accommodate the tensions that may exist between the partner nations, as well as internal political tensions within the individual states.²³ Despite its strategic implications and successful experience, today influential political analysts openly point

¹⁹ Fei-Ling Wang, “Stability with Uncertainties: US-China Relations and the Korean Peninsular,” in *The United States and the Korean Peninsular in the 21st Century*(Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 200-201.

²⁰As a head of North Korea, he is regarded as one of most brutal dictator in the world.

²¹ Because of Koreans Peninsular’ strategic position, Korea has been invaded several times by Japan, China and Russia.

²² George Liska, “Alignments and Realignment,” in *Alliance in international politics*, ed Julian R. Friedman, Christopher Bladen, and Steven Rosen(Boston: Allyn and Bacon Inc., 1970),109.

²³ Scott Bennett, “Testing Alternative Models of Alliance Duration, 1816-1984,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol 41 no 3(July 1997), 849-850.

out that the ROK-US alliance is “in the lowest point in the history of the alliance.”²⁴ The alliance is facing new challenges. On the South Korea side, some of the biggest conflicts for the ROK-US alliance have been the rise of anti-Americanism and a perception and policy gap on North Korea and China’s growing role on the Korean peninsula.

The rise of anti-Americanism

During the cold war, South Korea and the US maintained a staunch alliance against North Korea's communist regime. However, since the early 1990s, a reconciliation mood between the Koreas and North Korea’s Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) ambitious enabled to explore a new relationship. A delicate “triangular relationship”²⁵ has thus emerged between North Korea, South Korea and the US. Above all, the inter-Korean summit meeting in 2000 gave many South Koreans the hope that the two Koreas would be able to tackle their problems independently. It created a controversy on whether the tension reduction on the Korean peninsula would be compatible with the existence of the ROK-US alliance.²⁶ This means that South Koreans, in terms of ‘brothers’ and ‘friends’,²⁷ started to rethink of the relationship between the two Koreas and the ROK-US relations.

²⁴ David C. Kang, “Rising Powers, Offshore Balancers, and Why the US-Korea Alliance is Undergoing Strain,” *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol.14, no. 2(2005), 116.

²⁵ Dong-shin Kim, “The ROK-U.S. Alliance: Where Is It Headed?” INSS Strategic Forum, No.197(National Defense University: April 2003), 2

²⁶ Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind.*, 27.

²⁷ To South Korea, North Korea is a brother speaking one language as a race, while the US is a best friend in international community.

Moreover, post-September 11, international controversies on the cause of terrorism, and Bush's famous "axis of evil" speech,²⁸ have caused some South Koreans to contend that North Korea's nuclear weapons, if they exist, would target rivals such as the US or Japan, not their Southern 'brethren,' a view North Korea encourages through propaganda crafted to drive a wedge between Seoul and Washington.²⁹ The South Korean are thus in a dilemma in which they do not know which side to choose. On one hand how to deal with their brothers in the North with whom they share blood and on the other hand how to deal with its friend who shed blood during the Korean War.

The recent series of events and perception of the 'inequity' of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)³⁰ guaranteeing benefits to US soldiers within specific legal boundaries, and US Forces in Korea(USFK) environmental pollution³¹—marginalized the US from the intensified debate on the Korean question and fueled anti-Americanism. Especially, the US' apparent insincere attitude and belated apologies for a number of

²⁸ In 2002, the US administration asserted that North Korea was developing a uranium enrichment program for nuclear weapons purposes. US-North Korea tensions mounted when Bush categorized North Korea as part of the "Axis of Evil" in his 2002 State of the union address. Wikipedia, "North Korea-United States relations," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Korea-United_States_relations ; Internet; accessed 11 February 2008.

²⁹ To US' tough policy against North Korea, North Korea assert all inter-Korean projects face grave obstacles posed by outside forces that do not want us to join hands, hence the North and South should uphold the great cause of national independence. Sung-Ho, Han, "North Korea New Paper, Not foreign forces But national reconciliation," *Yonhap New*, 9 March 2008[new on-line]; available from <http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=100&oid=001&aid=0001992400>; Internet; accessed 9 march 2008.

³⁰ The SOFA is intended to clarify the terms under which the US military is allowed to operate in Korea. Specially, the SOFA provides for how civil damages caused by the forces will be determined and paid. Under the SOFA, US courts have jurisdiction over crimes committed by service members. Therefore the SOFA has become a major political issue following crimes allegedly committed by service members. Wikipedia, "Status of Forces Agreement," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Status_of_Forces_Agreement; Internet; accessed 27 February 2008.

³¹ People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, "U.S. Military Activities and Environmental Disaster," <http://blog.peoplepower21.org/English/8505>; Internet; accessed 27 February 2008.

serious recent incidents at US military bases, including the killing of two middle-school girls by a US military vehicle in 2002, have only served to fan the flames.³² According to the SOFA, South Korea does not have a way to punish US soldiers who committed such crimes as murder or rape in South Korea. As such, South Koreans believe they did not experience fairness under the SOFA. South Korea views USFK as an unavoidable burden.

Consequently, South Korea's recently rising nationalistic sentiment, accelerated by the superb results of its economic development on the one hand and, on the other, by a series of USFK -related incidents in the recent past, that has developed into a demand for a more "reciprocal and equitable" relationship³³ between South Korea and the US. Fraternity to North Korea exacerbates anti-Americanism by stoking long-standing South Korean aspirations for greater political independence and strengthening public antipathy toward the more intrusive aspects of the alliance with the US.

A Perception and Policy Gap on North Korea

Differences over how to deal with North Korea are nothing new. These differences were often tactical and were resolved in large part because of the common perception that North Korea represented a serious security threat. Today, however, the most important security issue for both countries is the North Korea nuclear weapon threat, and the

³² On June 13, 2002, two Korean middle-school girls were killed by an armored vehicle during a US military exercise. The US soldiers were put on trial by the US military court in accordance with the SOFA. They were later found not guilty on charges of negligent homicide. These rulings sparked mass rallies to protest their acquittals and to demand the revision of the SOFA to return criminal jurisdiction in similar cases to the Korean side. Jinbonet, "Hyo-soon and Mi-son who were Pressed and Crushed to Death. . ." http://base21.jinbo.net/show/show.php?p_cd=0&p_dv=0&p_docnr=21434; Internet; accessed 11 February 2008.

³³ South Korea's President Roh Moo-hyun promised, "I would seek a more equitable and reciprocal relationship with the South's main ally, the United States." in his February 25, 2003 inaugural speech. CNN.com, "S. Korean president sworn in(World News, 25 February 2003)," <http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/asiapcf/east/02/24/skorea.inauguration.reut/index.html>; Internet; accessed 21 January 2008.

difference that has emerged over how to manage and ultimately solve this problem. This issue has served to intensify the differences between South Korea and the US to a point greater than many had previously recognized.³⁴

Since the inter-Korean summit, South Korea's fundamental strategic issue has not been nuclear weapons. The key long term issue is how to integrate North Korea back into the world's most dynamic region.³⁵ Therefore, South Korea has undertaken the "sunshine policy"³⁶ in its attempt to engage with North Korea. In contrast, the US sees North Korea as an internationally menacing regime. The Bush administration is skeptical about South Korea's approach to North Korea. The US' skepticism became fully apparent after September 11 and Bush's "axis of evil" speech. The breakdown of the 1994 Agreed Framework and the accelerated secret nuclear weapons development program³⁷ served to demonize North Korea in the eyes of the US. For its part, the US has viewed the North Korea nuclear issue through the prism of its global anti-terrorism efforts.³⁸ Thus, a series of incidents related to North Korea nuclear issues served to highlight the growing perception and policy gap between South Korea and the US.

³⁴ George Ehrhardt, "The Evolution of US-ROK Security Consultation," *Pacific Affairs*(Winter 2004/2005), 665.

³⁵ Victor D. Cha, "South Korea in 2004: Peninsular Flux," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 45, Issue 1(2005), 39-40.

³⁶ The Sunshine Policy articulated in 1998 by President Kim Dae-jung, is the South Korean doctrine towards North Korea. The doctrine emphasizes peaceful cooperation, seeking short-term reconciliation as a prelude to eventual Korean reunification. It has resulted in political contact between both sides and one historical moment in the Korean peninsula, two Korean summit meetings which broke ground with several high-profile business ventures. Wikipedia, "Sunshine Policy," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunshine_Policy ; Internet; accessed 17 February 2008.

³⁷ Victor D. Cha and David C. Kang, "The Korea Crisis," 20-26.

³⁸ Chang-Hee Nam, "Relocating the U.S. Forces in South Korea: Strained Alliance, Emerging Partnership in the Changing Defense Posture," *Asian Survey*, Vol.46, Issue 4(2006), 627.

The US adamantly argues that North Korea should abandon any nuclear program, peaceful or not. However, the South Korea has opined that a non military nuclear power program can be allowed under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).³⁹ Moreover, South Koreans worry that the US will erode the slow gains towards national reconciliation that have been made in the past decade. On other hand, the US worry that South Koreans are being naive in their desire to find a common ground with North Korea. Under these different perception, the Bush's administration approach to North Korea has become the prism through which many South Korean view the alliance relationship.⁴⁰

In fact, when conflicting between the US and North Korea, South Korea is in a quandary because it simultaneously views the North Korea as a threat and as a dialogue partner to promote its security and prosperity. Ultimately, a worsening crisis on the North Korea issues is not desirable to either side. Rather, a well-managed process of negotiation with North Korea—which will require shifts on the part of both Seoul and Washington—would have positive benefits for the alliance. Today, through the Six-Party Talks,⁴¹ both countries have formally agreed that the Korean peninsula should be 'non-nuclear' by negotiation with North Korea and that both sides should cooperate to achieve this objective.⁴² However, differences as to how to achieve this still remain. And exactly how

³⁹ Tae-Hwan Kwak, "The Six-Party Nuclear Talks and the Korean Peninsular Regime Initiative: A Frame for Implementation," in *The United States and the Korean Peninsular in the 21st Century*(Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 21-22.

⁴⁰ Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seung-Ho Joo, *The United States and the Korean Peninsular in the 21st Century*(Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 4.

⁴¹ Six-Party Talk member nations are China, US, Russia, Japan, and the Koreas.

⁴² Bechtol, "Assessing the Present and Charting the Future of US-DPRK Relations.," 138.

these differences affect the alliance will depend on the outcome of current efforts to deal with North Korea.

China's Growing Factors on the Korean peninsula

With its rapidly growing economy, China is increasingly becoming the predominant regional power.⁴³ Like every other country in the world, South Korea sees its economic fate in the future of the Chinese economy.⁴⁴ In 2004, Korea Trade Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) announced that China had overtaken the US as Korea's largest trading partner for the first time.⁴⁵ Especially given the geographic proximity and cultural similarities, South Korea wants friendly relations with China due to its growing importance in terms of security, economy and culture.⁴⁶

Strengthening China's influence on the peninsula is its economic clout coupled with its growing support role in promoting inter-Korean reconciliation. Support for the "Sunshine policy" and efforts to keep ties with North Korea on an even keel have allowed China to enjoy better relations with both Koreas than any other power.⁴⁷ Its brokering role has blossomed during the current nuclear crisis. For example, China is a leading

⁴³ Jae Ho Chung, "South Korea between Eagle and Dragon: Perceptual Ambivalence and Strategic Dilemma," *Asian Survey*, Vol.41, no. 5(Sep-Oct, 2001), 779-780.

⁴⁴ China's massive size means that the potential benefits are large, so various Western and Chinese forecasts have suggested that China will have the economic size of the US by 2020 at the earliest and by 2050 at the latest. Jae Ho Chung, "South Korea between Eagle and Dragon.," 779.

⁴⁵ Keuk-In Bae, "Trade Volume with China Exceeds that with the U.S. for the First Time," *Donga Ilbo*, 22 September 2004; available from <http://english.donga.com/srv/service.php3?biid=2004092301878>; internet; accessed 9 March 2008.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 785.

⁴⁷ David Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula : Playing for the Long Term," *The Washington Quarterly*(Spring, 2003), available from http://www.twq.com/03spring/docs/03spring_shambaugh.pdf; Internet; accessed 9 March 2008.

player of the Six-Party Talks held to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis.⁴⁸ Most South Koreans implicitly realize that even though China was an opponent in the Korean War and is North Korea's 'brother,'⁴⁹ China focus on more toady their national interests than ideologies in the past.

However, there remain important factors limiting a South Korea-China relationship. First of all, regime type does matter. A full-blown political and strategic relationship that replicates and replaces what South Korea has had with the US is unlikely if China's political system remains as it is today. There are natural limits to how closely liberal democracies can tie themselves to non-democracies. Moreover, China, unlike the US, has shown territorial ambitions toward Korea peninsula in the past.⁵⁰ It is clear, however, that relations between South Korea and China have been steadily growing closer. Consequently, their relationship is not nearly as close as the ROK-US relationship. Many South Koreans view the US, notwithstanding recent anti-Americanism demonstrations, as their primary strategic partner over the next decade

However, China's rising power puts South Korea in a more vulnerable position relative to its Chinese neighbor, but also increases the probability of it enjoying the benefits the rising power can provide. When dealing with a conflict between the US and China on Korean peninsula issues, South Korea is approaching a critical decision point. Thus, South Korea must always find some way of dealing with China while retaining

⁴⁸ Fei-Ling Wang, "Stability with Uncertainties.," 194-195.

⁴⁹ Jae Ho Chung, "South Korea between Eagle and Dragon.," 790.

⁵⁰ Sung-Bin Ko, "South Korea's Search for an Independent Foreign Policy," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*(2006), 267-268.

their US relationship.⁵¹ This is not an easy task, especially as the differences between South Korea and the US over the content of specific policies may indeed pull the Korean peninsula away from the US and toward its Asian neighbors in the future.⁵²

To be sure, a security alliance as close, and in certain respects as asymmetrical, as that between South Korea and the US inevitably carries its share of frictions, and working out the problems and differences is something of a continuing struggle. This should not obscure the bottom line: both countries remain committed to the partnership, and alliance with the US continues to be generally perceived as beneficial to national interests. Today the ROK-US alliance is being severely tested at precisely the same time that its importance in advancing critical South Korean and the US' interests is arguably greater than ever. It may well be time to redefine the ROK-US alliance and to present a desirable direction in which the alliance might go.

Tasks ahead for the ROK-US Alliance

As we have seen, the challenges to the ROK-US alliance are not separate issues, rather they are relatively entangled in each other. Today, anti-Americanism sentiments in South Korea are likely to have a negative synergistic effect on the ROK-US relationship. In part, the issues seem to have originated from the characteristics of the ROK-US alliance. The alliance is an example of the 'asymmetric alliance' pattern between a major

⁵¹ Jae Ho Chung, "South Korea between Eagle and Dragon.," 795-796.

⁵² According to several nationwide surveys, South Koreans' favorable perceptions of China were inversely correlated with age, while those of the US were positively correlated. That is older generations with more immediate memories of the Korean War and Cold War expressed less affinity for China, while younger generations were much more positive toward it. On the basis of the younger generations' more favorable and hopeful views of China, the frictions between Korea and US cause to move the minds of young South Koreans much more toward China than the US. Jae Ho Chung, , "South Korea between Eagle and Dragon.," 783-785.

and a minor power.⁵³ The capabilities of South Korea were small compared to those of the US when the alliance was formed, and the US largely viewed the alliance within the context of broader global geo-strategic concerns, while South Korea viewed US involvement within the narrow context of bilateral competition with North Korea.⁵⁴ Due to the differences in capabilities and interests that characterize asymmetric alliances, the alliance members often face issues of trade-off and autonomy.⁵⁵

Ultimately, bilateral ties in the alliance will depend on how well the two allies manage those challenges originating from the asymmetry of the alliance. For alliance longevity, the allies will need a broader view to address the divergent perspectives of each partner. A narrow approach to the ROK-US alliance with a focus only on the North Korean threats of the past cannot surmount the limits of an asymmetrical alliance. Today, the alliance should be able to manage South-North Korea issues, the China factors, and still find mutual benefits. Below are tasks which will have to be completed in order to revitalize the ROK-US alliance in the future.

Reduce presence stress: Improve SOFA implementation and mutual understanding

As seen, a recent major challenge is the growing anti-Americanism and potential demands for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. In essence, the intensive, spreading, anti-Americanism has deep roots in the US forces' extended presence in the region, and mainly surfaced primarily as a result of incidents involving the behavior of USFK

⁵³ James D. Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 35, No. 4(November 1991)

⁵⁴ C.S. Burchill, review of *The US-South Korean Alliance: Evolving Patterns in Security Relations*, by Gerald L. Curtis and Sung-Joo Han. *International Affairs*, Vol.60, no. 4(Autumn, 1984), 727.

⁵⁵ Ehrhardt, "The Evolution of US-ROK Security Consultation," 668.

personnel. These incidents have required the occasional adjustment of the ROK-US alliance's legal provisions of the SOFA.

Strictly speaking, the SOFA is based on the presence of US forces. Under the foreign forces presence, even though frictions between the host nation and its ally may be inevitable, as are grievances occurring over unexpected accidents or incidents involving foreign soldiers, the effective application of the SOFA is important in resolving the problems related to the privileges and immunities that the US servicemen enjoy in South Korea. For example, as a result of a recent a series of accidental incidents and environmental pollution around US bases, South Korea's perception of the unfairness of the SOFA has become a serious stress on the alliance relationship and may drive the alliance to divorce. Overall, the current SOFA with South Korea, as revised in 2000, is no less equitable than any other SOFA the US hold with other countries.⁵⁶ However, both countries need to make efforts to resolve the imbalance in a wide range of fields including criminal jurisdiction and environmental protection.

An 'inequitable' perception of the SOFA induces persistently anti-Americanism among the public and must be addressed. Under mutual understanding, timely and more frequent coordination for improving the SOFA provisions between the two partners in the alliance is therefore required. It is particularly important to show to the Korean people that the operation of the SOFA is being substantively improved in order to dispel popular misconceptions that the terms of US' SOFA with South Korea includes more privileges and immunities than the other SOFAs of the US.

⁵⁶ Korea Net, "Facts and Current Developments of Korea-US Status of Forces Agreement," http://www.korea.net/news/news/NewsView.asp?serial_no=3097&part=101&SearchDay=; Internet; accessed 12 March 2008.

In addition to efforts to reduce the likelihood of friction between the allies through revising the SOFA, steps also need to be taken to establish more active common mechanisms to prevent a mishap. In this context, a wide range of joint measures can be examined with respect to reducing present anti-Americanism. These include but are not limited to: rebasing in a less populated area; improving the local environment for a kinder presence; strengthening the soldiers' code of conduct and upgrading coordination for military exercises with the local authorities. Through these efforts, the US presence in South Korea could be seen in a more positive light, rather than as an unavoidable burden.

Bridge the gap in perception: Adjust priorities and the perception of North Korea

Due to different security realities, the allies cannot have identical priorities in their respective threat perceptions or in their strategies to deal with North Korea. What really matters is whether they can devise an alliance strategy that accommodates both side's concerns and interests in a mutually agreeable manner. Differing priorities in handling threat perceptions at the global, regional, and peninsular levels should be fully discussed and reflected in an alliance strategy. Currently, to deal with threats over North Korea, special attention should be paid to the need to accommodate both sides' concerns.

In fact, the primary concern to South Koreans is that of a conventional conflict breaking out on the peninsula. This means that South Koreans places a strong emphasis on peaceful talks with North Korea in order to address the removal of this military threat. While for the US, the concern associated with the proliferation of WMD in general, as well as WMD transfer to terrorists in particular, means that, for the foreseeable future, they will be preoccupied mainly with this task, and that all other issues will become secondary. Thus, these priorities should be treated with equal sensitivity. To reduce the

perception gap between South Korea and the US as to the current North Korea crisis, the US should be prepared to commit to a peaceful resolution and South Korea should show more understanding for the tougher measures taken towards North Korea by the US as part of its global strategy.

Peace and nonproliferation should be the alliance's guiding pillars for the stability and prosperity in the Korean peninsula as well as Northeast Asia. It should be noted here that peace is not just a means to a higher objective, but an end in itself for the South Korean. Accordingly, the allies should devise a strategy that will convince the South Korean that, before taking any forcible measures, such as sanctions or military provocation, all other avenues to preserve peace will have been tried and exhausted. If the gap between the two countries on the issues of perception and priorities associated with North Korea can be overcome, then the alliance would no doubt be strengthened both now and into the future. Both countries must stop trumpeting the 'difference' between South Korea and the US on their perceptions and policies toward North Korea.

Redefine the alliance rationale: A comprehensive regional partnership

In the post cold war world, a viable alliance must move toward a more comprehensive partnership.⁵⁷ Dealing with diverse threats requires broadening the alliance focus and redefining its rationale. But the real challenge is how to redefine the rationale in a manner that accommodates both partners' seemingly conflicting priorities. The new rationale should specify joint goals for the alliance to achieve on the Korean

⁵⁷ James J. Przystup and Kang Choi, *The U.S.-ROK Alliance: Building a Mature Partnership*, Special Report for the Institute for National Strategic Studies National Defense University(Seoul: INSS, March 2004), 3.

peninsula, in the Northeast Asian region, including China and beyond, through common ground.

Such redefinition can be done in a positive way, in order to achieve something, rather than in a negative manner, intended to work against or prevent something. For example, today the alliance can no longer ignore China. China has become a key variable in the strategic calculation of the alliance. Therefore, allies must not view China in the anachronistic cold war context, rather both countries should seek a shared strategic interest with China to achieve the goals of alliance. In this manner, the impact of a growing Chinese-Korean relationship should be manageable. For the alliance, it will be far more effective to base the redefinition of the alliance rationale on common values to secure broad support, not only for the peoples of both countries but also for the international community, including the major powers in the region.

Based on the tasks ahead, the scope of the ROK-US alliance should ultimately go beyond the military. Should the threat from North Korea disappear in future, the existing ROK-US alliance must become part of an expanded regional security alliance that works to avert rivalry between China and Japan. Regional instability would threaten both South Korea and US interests. South Korea would assume a higher profile as the host for US forces essential to both US and regional stability.⁵⁸ The US will likely favor such a new form of alliance in Northeast Asia that retains bilateral ties with South Korea but refocuses them from checking the North Korea to a broader regional security network for

⁵⁸ Robert Dujarric, *Korean Unification and After: The Challenge for US Strategy*, (Indianapolis: Hudson Institute, 2000), 56.

stability throughout the region. This would effectively harmonize the US' global strategy with South Korea's national strategy.

In keeping with the trend towards globalization, it is probable that both countries will become involved with regional and global issues in various fields, the future of the alliance should be designed to deal with various sources of potential threats. The elaboration of bilateral ties into a regional security network should be done. Of considerable importance to regional security will be ensuring that any ROK-US alliance creates and maintains a stable regional strategic landscape on the peninsula as well as in the Pacific region, under which both countries' interests will be protected and promoted.

Finally, to the extent to which the alliance will be revitalized will depend on how the allies jointly deal with the internal stresses and address the external factors on the alliance. The alliance should present a redefined rationale for the alliance for the long haul that looks beyond the Korean peninsula, is in tune with the South Korean people's changing perceptions, and takes into account evolving US global security imperatives. This requires a comprehensive partnership to present a vision that looks beyond the presence of an asymmetrical alliance.

Conclusion

The ROK-US alliance has endured, with impressive achievements and resilient adjustments, over the last fifty years. The alliance clearly has a strategic implication contributing to peace and prosperity for South Korea and the Northeast Asian region. However, the alliance today is under greater strain than ever before. On the South

Koreans side, the country's economic growth and frictions involving USFK has transformed South Korean's perceptions of themselves, and of their relationship with the US, their most important ally.

Consequently, the alliance is now in a state of transition. The challenges are to ensure that the rising anti-Americanism does not become a barrier to future progress, and that the two countries try and align their strategic interests in dealing with the issue of North Korea's nuclear capabilities and WMD and support to terrorist groups. Additionally, China's growing role on the Korean peninsula has become an important factor in South Korea's strategic calculations as well as imposing a significant pressure on the alliance. These challenges are in part related to the asymmetrical attribution of the alliance, are intertwined, and result in a negative synergistic effect on the alliance. Ultimately the challenges may cause the alliance relationship to drift apart. If both countries can not heal the frictions resulting from these issues, the inability to do so may fundamentally erode the foundation of the traditional bilateral ties that have proven to be beneficial to both sides.

Ultimately, the alliance requires complementary or shared interests to be sustained over time. Sustaining the alliance relationship for the long haul will require a focused effort to adapt it to the changing environments. The allies should strive to address the current sources of stress related to the SOFA and the perception gap as it applies to North Korea's intentions and regime. It is now time to readjust, redefine, and envision the alliance not only from a perspective of the peninsula situation, but from broader terms linked to the maintenance of geopolitical equilibrium in Northeast.

Considering the importance of the ROK-US alliance and its benefits to both sides, neither the US nor South Korea can afford to risk jeopardizing the basic tenants of the alliance. For South Korea, the alliance is vital for its survival and stability in the future. Therefore, the tasks suggested above should be stressed in devising a new paradigm for revitalizing the alliance as a vehicle for peace and prosperity on the Korean peninsula, as well as in Northeast Asia. The goal should be to create a community of allies that have the responsibility for the health of the alliance, reinforced by a framework that helps them address the challenges that will arise over time.

If the alliance is to continue to grow and to meet its core commitments, then each side must be cognizant of the needs and desires of its alliance partner. South Korea must recognize that the alliance has a comprehensive context which must meet both its needs and the needs of those with whom it is in partnership as well as those stakeholder countries surrounding it and on the Korean peninsula. While continuing to address future alliance issues, the US also needs to address a broad set of issues relating to the management of the alliance today. The alliance should not be a source of strain but rather a key foundation for the relationship with mutual benefits to both states.

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