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Research Essay

**Strategic Support for Stability  
on the Korean Peninsula**

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, the international security order can be characterized as a “Uni-Multi- polar structure”<sup>1</sup> where the US wields super power over world affairs; yet where the European Community, China, Russia and Japan can exert influence, to some extent, on their own interest issues.

In this changed environment of international security, each nation is taking political measures and diplomatic endeavors to deter war, prevent the spread of nuclear/ biological/chemical weapons, stop the armament competition, and strengthen international cooperation that will serve mutual interests. These efforts appear to be successful to some extent with a decreased threat of world scale war. In some regions, however, it is stirring up new regional disputes in the area of ethnic, religion, territories and resources which were potential factors of trouble during the Cold War. Some representative local conflicts of the post-Cold War in Africa and East Europe (Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo) have shown us how difficult it is to get international intervention and cooperation for dealing with issues because of the entanglement of related causes.

Among the possible conflict areas which are potential threats to world peace and security, the Korean peninsula may be the most dangerous place, in terms of its geo-political situation, because the interests of four major power states - US, Japan, China and

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<sup>1</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein, “Are we living in the world of uni-polar, bi-polar and multi-polar security order?” The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identified in Politics, (Columbus University Press), 1996, Abstract.

Russia - intersect on the Korean peninsula<sup>2</sup>. If any local conflict occurs on the Korean peninsula, it might plunge the entire East Asia region into a major military catastrophe which would disrupt several of the region states, including the economic gains which have been achieved over the last decades.

Considering that North Korea (NK) still poses a significant military threat for reunification of the peninsula via military conquest and NK's latest unstable domestic situations (economic collapse, increasing number of defectors and agitation of social structures) the possibility of war breaking out on the Korean peninsula has not been diminished at all. In spite of the very strong bilateral military relationship for the defense of the Korean peninsula between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States, some of NK's recent attempts (submarine infiltration (1996,1998)), launch of a new modified multi-stage missile and construction of suspicious nuclear facilities (1998) have been serious threats to the stability on the peninsula and the security of East Asia .

This paper will review the security environment and military trends of region states around the Korean Peninsula, and identify strategic supportive means to contribute to the stability in the region.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert B. Zoelick, "Economic and Security in the Changing Asia-Pacific" Survival VOL 39 #4 Winter, 1997-1998, pp. 37-38.

## SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND PROSPECTS OF REGION STATES

Historically, Korea, China and Japan have maintained mutual relationships, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, Japan's invasion of China and Korea, and China's military interference in support of NK during the Korean War, created negative impressions within relevant countries in the region<sup>3</sup>. Despite the latest improved mutual relationships which have contributed to the economic growth in the region, the memory of the past Japanese imperialism and China's armed interference still exist as emotional obstacles to increased mutual confidence in this area. Notwithstanding, in this post Cold War era of rising multi-lateralism and economic interdependence, East Asia has already entered a new era where economic pragmatism as a guiding principle for foreign policy has become a major factor in dissolving historical antagonism and friction in favor of the economic benefits<sup>4</sup>.

Over the last few decades, the East Asia region has achieved extraordinary economic growth and regional security. Many observers recognize that this economic growth and stability were possible because of two strategic factors: a too often deadly but nevertheless stable security environment; and a world economic system that promoted open markets<sup>5</sup>. In particular, the continuous US military presence in East Asia under the bilateral relationships with ROK and Japan is widely seen as a prime contributor to the regional peace and stability (even China acknowledged the considerable benefit of the US

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<sup>3</sup> Kyung-Won Kim, "Maintaining Asia's Current Peace" Survival, VOL 39, #4 (Oxford University Press) Winter 1997-1998, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph A. Cossa and Jane Khanna, "East Asia: Economic Interdependence and Regional Security", International Affairs VOL73, #2, April, 1997, p. 219.

<sup>5</sup> Zoelick, p. 30.

military presence and role)<sup>6</sup>. The economic growth of the East Asia states was able to be achieved only from the regional stability and conversely, it has become the main pillar of security in the region<sup>7</sup>. The increasing amount of economic activity within the region demonstrates the increasing interdependence of regional economics and the necessity for regional stability.

< TABLE 1: STATUS OF TRADE IN THE REGION >

SUBJECT	COUNTRY RELATION	1994(US \$MIL)	1996(US \$MIL)
STATUS OF TRADE(IMP/EXP)	CHINA-JAPAN	47,904	60,058
	KOREA-CHINA	11,720	17,992
	JAPAN-KOREA	38,912	47,214

\* Source:The Europa World Year Book, 1998 VOL 1, 2 (Europa Publications LTD)

\* Russia and North Korea's data are not available

The United States, as a global super power and best trading partner with each state in the region, generally seeks a stable, non threatening security environment that will enable ongoing economic and political development.

With respect to security and peace on the Korean peninsula, the US appears to have achieved some success in the shaping the strategy of NK, mainly through the 1994

<sup>6</sup> Strategic Assessment Engaging Power for Peace(Asia) 1998, (Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defence University), 1998, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> Cossa, p. 219.

Geneva US-NK nuclear agreement and “Four Party Talks” in 1997<sup>8</sup>. Although severely criticized at the time, the US-NK nuclear agreement in 1994 has been successful in keeping NK under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) membership, allowing International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection at the expense of providing light-water reactors to replace the NK’s graphite-moderated reactors, including supplies of some heavy oil until the new facilities are ready. The Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) was established to deal with relevant issues in which the ROK, the US, Japan, and EU participate. KEDO and NK signed the light water reactor supply agreement in 1995 (total cost: US \$ 5.18 billion). “Four Party Talks”, which were suggested originally by the US and ROK for reducing tensions and building confidence on the Korean peninsula, were convened for the first time between the US, ROK, China and NK in Geneva on 9 December 1997. Although the achievement of the talks has not been significant yet, due to NK’s insistence on withdrawal of US forces from Korea, the talks have been considered as a meaningful step forward to permanent stability on the Korean peninsula in terms of providing official channels for discussion among the participants.

Besides political contacts with NK, the US has participated to help NK’s economic difficulties through humanitarian assistance, responding to international appeals issued by organizations, such as the World Food Program (WFP) institution. Basically, the US and

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<sup>8</sup> James Cotton, Bilateral Accomplishment and Multilateral Tasks in Northeast Asian Security, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) August, 1998, pp. 4-7. See also Strategic Assessment (Asia) 1998, p. 48.

ROK do not want to see the collapse of the North with the dangers for chaos on the peninsula and the threat of an unintended war<sup>9</sup>.

Regarding the issue of the American's expectation for Japan's new role in sharing the security burden in Asia, the US and Japan could reach joint-agreement easily, since Japan had wanted to seek a proactive role in the post Cold War era as a "normal state", free from the constraints imposed upon it after WWII. The April 1996 joint declaration on security focused the US-Japan alliance away from the defense of Japan and toward cooperation in maintaining regional security. Subsequent revision of the guidelines for US-Japan defense cooperation in 1997, can be seen as a significant step toward a greater political and military role for Japan in regional affairs<sup>10</sup>.

Japan, as the world's second largest economy, is vigorously seeking ways to increase its political role in establishing a more stable international security environment, including United Nations Peace Keeping Operation(PKO) activities<sup>11</sup>. In particular, Japan has expanded the actual defense cooperation scope of the US-Japan relationship for the effective combined operation, to respond not only to attacks against Japan, but also to other contingencies near Japan, based upon the revised guidelines for US-Japan defense cooperation. In spite of the emotional obstacles, Japan has maintained close relations

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<sup>9</sup> Strategic Assessment (Asia), p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> "Interim Report on the Review of the Guide lines for U.S.- Japan Defence Cooperation", [http://www.state.gov/www/regions/eap/japan/rpt-us-japan\\_defence.970607.htm](http://www.state.gov/www/regions/eap/japan/rpt-us-japan_defence.970607.htm). See also Strategic Assessment(Asia), pp. 38-51.

<sup>11</sup> "Introductory Survey" The Europa World Yearbook, 1998, VOL 1, 2(Europa Publication LTD), P. 1870



with ROK in the political and economic area since the 1960's. If any conflict were to occur on the peninsula, Japan would support the ROK/US alliance by providing forward bases for the augmenting forces and logistic materials<sup>12</sup>.

For stability on the Korean peninsula, Japan has tried to improve the relationship with NK by expanding official contacts. But the attitudes in Japan have been 'sour' badly toward NK due to its recent launch experiment of a modified long range missile in August 1998. In response, Japan is asking strongly for NK to stop the long-range missile development project entirely, by delaying the agreement for the support of the KEDO Fund<sup>13</sup>.

With respect to China, the US recognizes that China already plays a defining role in regional affairs, and its influence will increase in the region. In spite of the growing US-China economic cooperation, the relationship between the US and China is not smooth in political and security areas. From the US point of view, there is concern that, as China's comprehensive national strength increases, China will challenge the US's regional and global leadership. The US, however, has wanted to keep close relations with China to ensure regional security through a policy of engagement. They also seek to have China integrated in the pursuit of their common interests in the region through continuous political and diplomatic contacts, including the meeting of the two presidents in 1997<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Strategic Assessment (Asia), p. 48

<sup>13</sup> The ROK White Paper(ROK MND), 1998, p. 36.

<sup>14</sup> Strategic Assessment (Asia), pp. 41-43.

Historically, China has been the most influential country in Asia and has taken a leading role with the US in maintaining the current stability in the region. However, China is extremely suspicious of the US's strategic intentions, and its policy of containing China. The recent expansion of the US-Japan security alliance has served to increase China's vigilance and increase suspicion of the US's intention. As a result, China is seeking ways to exclude US influence from the region as much as possible, for instance, by emphasizing multilateral security structures. This new approach is risky for China because it flies in the face of overwhelming regional satisfaction with the present security structure. However, China doesn't want to alienate the US, nor does it want to deteriorate the current improving relations with the US and prejudice China's real national interest – economic growth<sup>15</sup>.

Fortunately, China is showing a very positive response toward the security issue on the Korean peninsula, and is increasing coordination including nuclear issues and participation in Four Party Talks with the US for dealing with NK issues. Considering its continuous economic development, China appears to want to maintain stability on the peninsula and in the East Asia region, and there is a growing realization that such stability may help to establish a balance between the wishes of the US, ROK, and NK.

Although it is not able to concentrate on the region as much as before due to its own domestic issues, Russia continues to have a strong influential power in the region. Lately, Russia has been seeking ways to recover its regional influence through various

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<sup>15</sup> Strategic Assessment(Asia), p. 44.

approaches such as a Border Agreement with China, territorial talks with Japan, expanding official exchanges with the ROK and new Mutual-Treaty discussions with NK, and so on. Russia is seeking to play a positive role in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)<sup>16</sup>, hosting in April, 1996 the “ARF track two conference” in Moscow, and is also seeking to play a more active, positive role in the Korean Peninsula peace process<sup>17</sup>. Russia will likely take a key role for the foreseeable future, to ensure stability on the peninsula and to effect peaceful reunification of Korea in the long term.

As one of the concerned parties on the Korean peninsula, the ROK’s basic strategy for the execution of the security objectives is to maintain strong alliance with the US, while adhering to an independent security posture, and promoting a cooperative relationship with neighboring states, while also pursuing a peaceful coexistence with NK. As long as NK’s military threats remain, strong ROK-US security cooperation is needed, not only to counter NK’s provocation against the ROK, but also to induce international cooperation in the process of Korea unification. Considering the recent trend of reestablishing bilateral and multilateral relations among the four major powers in the region, the ROK is promoting a strong cooperative relationship including military exchanges with previously hostile countries such as Russia and China. After the former Soviet Union and China recognized the ROK in 1990 and 1992 respectively, the improved relationships and mutual exchanges among these countries have also contributed directly to the regional security and economic growth. The current relations

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<sup>16</sup> Reference: ARF was established in order to engage all Asia-Pacific states including China, Russia and the U.S. for the first time in a structured dialogue on wide-ranging Asian security issues.

<sup>17</sup> Cossa, p. 222.

among the region states are much more positive than they were during the Cold War era<sup>18</sup>.

In spite of current strong economic and political strong ties, the relationship between the ROK and Japan cannot be expressed as totally positive, due to the historical rivalry and Japan's brutal colonial policy toward the Korean people between 1910-1945. The ROK government, however, has tried to improve real partnership with Japan including public cultural exchanges<sup>19</sup>.

With a firm commitment to peace and openness, the ROK has developed a policy of engagement vis-à-vis the North, named the "Sun Shine policy"<sup>20</sup> which may induce NK to take off its "over coat" voluntarily. The goal is to free the two divided parts of the peninsula from the wasteful hostilities of the Cold War, and to build in its place a regime of peaceful coexistence. The bottom line of the policy is meant to coax the North to open up and change its ways with offers of incentives, while maintaining a solid security posture and readiness to meet all contingencies<sup>21</sup>.

Lately, NK revised their constitution which appointed Kim Jong Il, as the chairman of the national defense committee, the actual head of the state, through the first session of the 10<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly on September 5, 1998. Because Kim Jong Il has

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<sup>18</sup> ROK White Paper, pp. 51-62.

<sup>19</sup> Korea "Yon Hap" News, February 28, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> "Sun Shine Policy" is a name of the ROK's engagement policy toward NK, which is using to improve relationships with NK and induce NK to participate in international society.

<sup>21</sup> Soon-Young Hong, "Substance, Principle, Independent Thinking Stressed in Foreign Policy" Korea Times, February 24, 1999.

been involved in all major decision making processes since the early 1980s, he will likely wield considerable power as the supreme leader of the state. Via his 1998 New Year's joint media editorial and the slogan "constructing a great and powerful state", Kim Jong Il emphasized that the military is the "Pillar of Revolution and the Principal Force" and has tried to enhance the military's morale and combat capability under the military-first policy. Currently, the social control system of NK is being weakened significantly by economic difficulties and starvation; thus the North needs new policies to stabilize its system and to recover from economic hardships. Unfortunately, however, due to its own structural contradictions (such as the "closed policy" over 50 years and "JUCHE" regime which has been a traditional slogan of self-fulfillment policy of the North) Pyongyang can not pursue policies of reform and openness, but depends solely on the military to maintain the regime<sup>22</sup>.

Despite Seoul's attempts to embrace the North through the "Sun Shine" policy, if changing circumstances in the South make it vulnerable (e.g. withdrawal of US forces from the peninsula) or the North considers its internal situation as a serious threat to its regime, it is very likely the North would make all-out war or conduct limited provocations for political purposes. However, it is important to note, that lately, Pyongyang has shown some appeasement gesture toward Seoul including the partial opening of the Mt. Kumgang tourist area in 1998. This was the first time that NK opened its territory to ROK civilians.

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<sup>22</sup> ROK White Paper, pp. 34-47.

Apart from the military threat, NK is currently pursuing a pragmatic diplomacy for economic assistance and regime survival. In particular, Pyongyang is making every effort to maintain US-NK channels of communication and to improve diplomatic relations with Japan, including economic assistance (however, the current atmosphere for the NK-Japan normalization is not favorable, due to NK's 1998 modified missile experiment). On the other hand, NK has maintained the traditional alliance relationship with China, and is negotiating with Russia to replace with a new Treaty, the old Mutual Assistance Treaty between Moscow and Pyongyang which ended in 1996<sup>23</sup>.

Generally, the overall security climate in the East Asia region is favorable and, as a result, most nations are striving to achieve economic benefits and political stability. However, the economic collapse and unpredictability of NK provides a moderating affect to this.

## MILITARY TRENDS IN THE REGION

While the economic growth and mutual cooperation of East Asia states have been supporting the stability of the region positively, the strength of military power (high force levels) and current trends are not helpful. Because there are many potential flash points in the region; the military confrontation of South-North Korea, the issue of Taiwan's independence, and disputes over territory and maritime resources, the possibility of conflict has not been reduced yet, even in the post Cold War era. In particular, the instability of the Korean peninsula remains the most significant potential flash point in the region because of its strategic geo-political position between continental and maritime

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<sup>23</sup> Yahoo Korea News, February 22, 1999.

powers. The ideological confrontation which has persisted for over half a century on the Korean peninsula, still continues in very unstable conditions resulting from the NK's unpredictable activities and military provocations against the ROK, such as attempts to infiltrate by submarine.

The US which has contributed to secure regional stability since WWII, continues to play a leading role for peace in the region. Washington's major military concerns in the East Asia region are centered on maintaining peace on the Korean peninsula and, along with its strong allies-ROK and Japan, in concentrating on preventing any conflicts in the region. If such efforts fail to deter war, the US will reinforce its stationed forces with large-scale augmenting forces, thus playing out its strategy designed to win two simultaneous theater wars; one in the Middle East and the other on the Korean peninsula. The US recognizes that the Korean peninsula's stability is directly linked to its own national interest, so it puts emphasis on the defense of the ROK and Japan to ensure the safety of the sea line of communications in the South East Asia region. Of the 100,000 US troops stationed in Asia region, 35,000 are stationed in the ROK which includes one infantry division and two fighter wings. To implement their strategy, the US is striving to improve the strategic mobilization capacity of its rapid deployment forces (more than 640,000 troops) and is seeking a variety of ways to cope with threats, including Chemical/Biological weapons and long range artillery. The combined operations of the US and ROK for the defense of the peninsula will be carried out by Combined Forces

Command (CFC) which was established in 1978 with the designated ROK forces and US forces in Korea<sup>24</sup>.

The cornerstone of the Japanese defense policy includes not only its own force realignment, but also maintaining a close partnership with the US. In November 1995, Japan adopted the new national defense program outline to upgrade its defense capabilities, designed for a new security environment and its new tasks in the post Cold War era. It issued the US-JAPAN joint declaration on security in April 1996, and a revised version of the guidelines for US-Japan defense cooperation in September 1997. Based upon the guidelines, the US and Japan expanded the actual defense cooperation scope of the two countries for effective combined operations, including responding to contingencies near Japan<sup>25</sup>. Emphasizing its proactive role in establishing a more stable security environment, Japan is concentrating on promoting mutual trust with neighboring states through various security-related diplomatic activities including the President's meeting with China (1997) and the ROK (1998). The degree of political/military tension between China and Japan about the expanded US-Japan relationships, however, is not yet well defined. The basic concept of the Japanese defense policy calls for the use of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) for small-scale warfare, but would require US-Japan combined military forces in major military contingencies. Putting the emphasis on building a high-quality force capability equipped with ultra-modern weapons, Japan has executed its modernization program since 1976. The program has allowed Japan to enhance its military capability by acquiring F-15 fighters, AEGIS destroyers (4) and

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<sup>24</sup> ROK White Paper, pp. 61-62

<sup>25</sup> "Power Game" Asia 1998 Year Book, P. 19.



AWACS. In addition to the planned military modernization program, Japan is striving to enhance its intelligence functions and capabilities by acquiring spy satellites and an additional AEGIS destroyer, following NK's missile launch in 1998<sup>26</sup>.

China, which has the largest number of military troops in the world has also increased its military expenditures for its modernization since 1989. It concentrates on military modernization and its capability to respond to local war such as maritime territorial disputes, by acquiring force deployment and long range maritime operation capabilities. To build a modern, technology-intensive military, China reorganized its command structure in 1998, and is in the process of reducing their present force of 2,700,000 by 500,000 troops by the year 2000. For strategic systems, such as nuclear weapons and missiles, China is conducting studies to increase their power and accuracy, range, and mobility. China's latest military trend is raising the security concerns of its neighboring states - Japan, the ROK and South Asia countries, because its modernization trend can be considered as a direct threat to each country<sup>27</sup>. However, with the advent of a new international security environment emphasizing mutual confidence between neighboring states, including economic cooperation, China is striving to develop and enhance confidence with them too. Commensurate with its growing status in the international community, China is appearing to expand its positive roles for the security of the world through such efforts as participating in UN Peace Keeping Operations (PKO) and participating in multilateral security cooperation dialogues including ASEAN

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<sup>26</sup> Tokyo "Yon Hap News", February 21, 1999. See also the ROK White Paper, pp. 28-29.

<sup>27</sup> Military Balance(London, IISS), 1998, pp. 165-169.

Regional Forum (ARF), and the Council on Security and Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP)<sup>28</sup>.

Russia is in process of military reform and reduction from their present force of 1,700,000 to 1,200,000 troops by the year 2000. Although Russia is suffering from its own domestic problems and economic difficulties, it has maintained some 330,000 troops in the region with the nuclear power which is able to seriously affect the stability of the region<sup>29</sup>. Lately, Russia, in the recognition of its geo-political significance, is striving to enhance relationships with regional states through military exchanges, joint exercises and technology cooperation.

Under the potential threat of NK's military invasion, , the military goal of the ROK is to suppress NK's military provocation toward the South and to repel a full-scale invasion through the ROK-US Mutual Defense Treaty while pursuing a peaceful coexistence with NK. The ROK military consists of some 690,000 active troops and reserve forces of three million who are obliged to serve in the reserve force for eight years after their active military service. Considering the recent trend of reestablishing bilateral and multilateral relations among the four major powers in Asia, the ROK is also promoting political, economic and military cooperative relations with neighboring countries, such as China and Russia, which will no doubt play an important role in keeping the regional stability and facilitating peaceful unification on the Korean

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<sup>28</sup> CSCAP is a multilateral grouping of regional research institutes, security specialists and former and current government officials.

<sup>29</sup> ROK White Paper, pp. 31-33.

peninsula. Additionally, the ROK is seeking ways to contribute to world peace through participating in UN PKO and ARF activities, publication and disclosure of defense white papers, exchanges of military personnel and education programs, and cooperation between members for UN PKO activities<sup>30</sup>.

Despite serious economic difficulties and internal complaints, NK's military-first policy has been accentuated under the Kim Jong Il regime, and its war capability has been incessantly supplemented. North Korea's military strategy toward the South is assessed to be a short-term Blitzkrieg, which would aim at creating great panic in the South in the early stage of a war by launching simultaneous attacks in the forward and rear areas, advancing quickly and deeply into the South with maneuver forces to take the initiative in the war, thus sweeping the entire South before US military reinforcements arrive. Considering the ROK-US military capability and the intervention of the UN, the Blitzkrieg operation is regarded as the only strategy it could use for a war. Ending the war before the allied forces reinforcement's arrive, the North would try to justify its actions by distorting international opinion and preventing UN and allied intervention. Because Pyongyang regards the US Forces in Korea as the greatest obstacle to this plan, it incessantly insists on the withdrawal of the USFK from the peninsula. The NK military consists of 1,160,000 troops with 62 infantry divisions, 440 ships, 850 fighters, and 7,450,000 reserve forces. In particular, NK maintains 100,000 Special Operating Forces trained to infiltrate simultaneously into the front and rear area to demolish communications lines and major facilities such as airfields. ROK and US intelligence

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<sup>30</sup> ROK White Paper, pp. 51-108.

officers estimate suggest that 65% of NK's armed forces, including up to 80% of its artillery, are within 60 miles of NK's southern border (Seoul is within range of medium artillery)<sup>31</sup>. Besides their conventional weapon system, NK has concentrated on developing a nuclear weapons potential, biological/chemical weapons and long-range missiles. These are a serious threat not only to the stability on the Korean peninsula but also the stability of the entire region. Furthermore suspicions regarding NK's nuclear capability have not been cleared yet, in spite of the US-NK agreement to freeze NK's nuclear weapon development and its refusal to join the international activities to control Strategic Weapons: Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Chemical Weapons Convention, Biological Weapons Convention, Missile Technology Control Regime, etc. NK's recent efforts in force development, and its increase in weapons of mass destruction, are becoming a big concern in International circles. Despite Seoul's policy to embrace the North through humanitarian aid, economic cooperation and expanding civilian exchanges, the threat of an all-out war has not been diminished due to the NK's military first policy and its belligerence.

## STRATEGIC SUPPORT FOR STABILTY ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

Based upon the U.S. strategic assessment about the instability on the Korean peninsula, the policies of four Major States – US, Russia, China, and Japan appear to work, if only coincidentally, to limit the likelihood of conflict. For example, Russia has

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<sup>31</sup> Military Balance, p. 166.

served notice that it will not support Pyongyang automatically in the event of conflict. China has used its influence to help control NK's nuclear weapons program and has encouraged the U.S. to approach Pyongyang diplomatically including Four Party Talks. China also provides one-third of its foreign aid, thus helping to reduce the possibility of any conflict on the peninsula<sup>32</sup>. Despite the favorable atmosphere around the Korean peninsula, NK's economic difficulty and instability of the regime itself and its military-first policy, including an asymmetric military threat (potential nuclear/chemical/biological weapons and missile threat), are still threats to the regional security. Even the risk of an unintended war caused by the internal friction in the North, is threatening the stability on the peninsula<sup>33</sup>.

The primary approach to maintain stability on the peninsula is to promote reconciliation and increase mutual-confidence between South and North. Most of these issues are already included in the "South-North Basic Agreement" which was signed in 1991 to convert from the current state of armistice into a solid peace regime<sup>34</sup>. However, the "South-North Basic Agreement" has been not continuously smooth due to several reasons: the change of political situations after the NK's leader Kim Il Sung's death (1994), NK's continuous military provocations toward the South, and mutual-distrust including NK leaders' concern about the South's attempt to absorb NK. That is why the new ROK government has been pushing ahead with the "Sun Shine policy" which

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<sup>32</sup> Strategic Assessment(Asia), p. 41.

<sup>33</sup> Asia 1998 Year Book (Review Publishing Company LTD, Hong Kong), Dec 1997. p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> Cotton, p. 6. "A 25 article agreement(The Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression, Co-operation and Exchanges between South and North) was signed to build institutions to facilitate a wide range of contacts between the two, including military and security confidence-building measures."

features the pursuit of Inter-Korean “Mutualism” or reciprocal cooperative steps. With more realistic expectation for peace and openness, the ROK has put forward a policy of engagement vis-a-vis NK. The ROK’s sole engagement policy toward NK, however, is not enough to induce the North’s openness and participation in the international society in terms of its limited geo-political relations with China and Russia, the possible temptation to use its military power, the existence of South-North mutual-distrust, and North Korea’s lack of confidence in the benefits of openness. Considering NK’s situation and latest economic hardships, neighboring states around the Korean peninsula and some advanced countries of the world are expected to support the ROK’s engagement policy and help NK’s “soft landing” through humanitarian aid and economic support. It may be of considerable importance to seek a supportive way through the multinational economic organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), to restart NK’s agriculture and industry. If neighboring states want to have stability in the region and are serious about preventing a collapse of NK which may result in chaos and an unintended war that would likely ensue, it is necessary to provide some kind of economic aid for the soft landing, and diplomatic endeavors for persuading NK to open the door.

In terms of the commitment level of engagement, the US policy toward NK appears to be a little bit different from the ROK approach. According to the Wall Street Journal, William Perry, who is working as Washington’s North Korea policy coordinator, is poised to recommend a two-phased approach to the Clinton Administration. It reported: *“the U.S. would offer North Korea a final chance to engage more vigorously, holding out*

*the possibility of dropping the U.S. trade embargo and expanding economic, political and cultural ties. If that doesn't work, the U.S. would radically curtail contacts, ignoring Pyongyang to the extent possible, and attempt simply to contain Pyongyang militarily until the troubled North Korean economy collapses and the Stalinist regime with it”<sup>35</sup>.*

Although Seoul has welcomed Washington's first-phase actions, it has expressed deep concerns over the second-phase approach because it can be a direct potential threat to all Korean peoples' life and prosperity. From the US point of view, it may be the simple issue of punishment of a rogue state, North Korea, to ensure international security order. However, if we consider NK's military strength and its abnormal belligerence, NK's potential supporters (China, Russia) and Seoul's location within the NK's artillery range, the necessity of a persistent engagement policy can be accepted easily. If NK initiates a local conflict or total war, a major catastrophe may be inevitable for the Korean peninsula and its people. Lately, even an unidentified “Conspiracy Theory” is now being widely spread among some people in Korea that the Clinton administration will make North Korea a scapegoat in dealing with its domestic political problems. Although there is no doubt that ROK-US alliance has sufficient ability to overwhelm any NK's provocation, the ROK government and its people prefer “the peace and stability” to victory through war. Considering the Korean people's concern about repercussions, US policy makers should be very careful with NK issues so as not to make it worse. Although some debates about the American's policy toward NK have continued among those US strategists<sup>36</sup>, most Korean people expect the US to support the ROK engagement policy and re-

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<sup>35</sup> The Wall Street Journal, Feb 25, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Former Secretary of State, James Baker's insistence for “Strong containment Policy(NYT, 19 MAR 1999)” and CSIS William Taylor's insistence for “Engagement Policy(Los Angeles Times, 26 MAR 1999).

activation of the South-North Basic Agreement indirectly by adopting “Engagement Policy” and providing a favorable diplomatic atmosphere including proactive humanitarian aid for long term regional stability.

Another possible complementary alternative to secure stability in the region is to form a multilateral security organization in East Asia. Because there is no multilateral security cooperation system in the region, the Korean Armistice Agreement signed in July 1953 and the ROK-US bilateral security alliance (“Mutual Defense Treaty” signed in 1953) have contributed to sustain the peace on the peninsula, but have also resulted in wasteful armament competition and antagonistic military confrontation. So, the stability on the peninsula has been sustained under unstable conditions such as the former Soviet Union and China’s potential threat as well as North Korea’s direct invasion threat. Since peace and stability on the peninsula is directly related to stability in the East Asia region, it is thus necessary that all problems be discussed within the frame work of multilateral regional security talks. Currently, multilateral security dialogues in operation in the Asia-Pacific include the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) at the governmental level and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region (CSCAP) at the non-governmental level. The US’ active support for ARF<sup>37</sup> and China’s new participation in ARF and CSCAP is being accepted as a green light for the positive role of these multilateral settings. If a stronger multilateral security system can be established in East Asia where the interest of the four major states intersect, it could make a much better contribution in fortifying the long-term security environment and dealing with all kinds

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<sup>37</sup> Clarence A. Robinson, Jr. , “Essential Asia-Pacific Region’s Security Framework Emerges” Signal : VOL 52, #3(Official Publication of AFCEA, November, 1997. P. 53.



of potential disputes, including territorial problems within the region. Although China wants to use the concept of the multilateral security organization to some extent, as an effective means of circumscribing the US-JAPAN security alliance, fostering the development of multi polarity within the region and undercutting the US's primacy in regional security affairs<sup>38</sup>, a multilateral security organization, such as the West European Union (WEU), is really needed to deal with uncertain potential disputes issues and to reduce the possibility of escalating conflict within the region. It is true that the necessity for a new multilateral security structure is not coincident with the US' present policy with reliance on bilateral security alliances and forward military deployments. The US' concern about maintaining regional leadership, however, can be complemented by the sustained bilateral relations with traditional allies, ROK and Japan, similar to the case of the US-CANADA NORAD treaty or as members of NATO. Furthermore, since most Korean people recognize the necessity of the US military presence for regional security, even after Korean's reunification<sup>39</sup>, the US can continue to maintain the military strength needed as the potent symbol of U.S. commitment on the peninsula. Considering the many potential dispute issues in the region and neighboring states' concerns about the instability of NK, the new Japanese military role and China's increasing military power, a multilateral security structure or cooperative organization in the East Asia area should be established to ensure permanent peace in the region.

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<sup>38</sup> Strategic Assessment(ASIA), p. 44.

<sup>39</sup> "ROK KIDA/US RAND joint research" Korea Cho Sun Il Bo(17 January, 1996)

## CONCLUSION

The Korean peninsula is one of the most probable areas of conflict in the world, and a flash point in East Asia. The instability of NK is making the situation more complicated. Despite economic hardship, the NK has maintained its Military-first policy and has not changed its strategic goal of unification by military conquest since the Korean War. With the goal of stability on the peninsula, the ROK has committed to an engaging policy vis-a-vis NK, and there are some positive signs of change, such as Four Party Talks, the various US-NK talks (issues of opening liaison offices, return of remains of US Korean War participants, survey of suspicious nuclear facilities, etc), opening of Mt. Kumgang tourist area and the enactment of a new constitution which introduced some elements of a market economy. To engage NK, to help its soft landing and to enable it to join the international society, neighboring states and international advanced countries are being asked to support the ROK "Sun Shine policy" and to provide humanitarian aid/economic support to NK for the rebuilding of its ordinary economic activities. In the long term, to secure the permanent peace and to obtain mutual-restraints among major states in the region, a multilateral security organization which can deal with all potential regional dispute issues (including territorial friction) is being proposed to establish sustainable current bilateral relations.

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