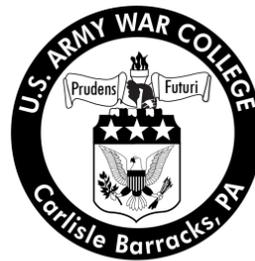


Strategy Research Project

The United States-Republic of Korea Alliance: The Way Forward

by

Colonel L. Wayne Magee, Jr.
United States Army



United States Army War College
Class of 2012

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: A

Approved for Public Release
Distribution is Unlimited

This manuscript is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 13-03-2012		2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Project		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The United States-Republic of Korea Alliance: The Way Forward				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel L. Wayne Magee, Jr.				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Colonel Jeffrey L. Meeker Center for Strategic Leadership				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution: A					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT Since the 1953 Armistice Agreement ending active hostilities in Korea, the United States has maintained a military presence in the Republic of Korea in order to deter an attack by the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea. This paper examines the security alliance that exists between the United States and the Republic of Korea in the context of the Northeast Asia region. It will examine the capabilities of the five major players in the region: The Republic of Korea, the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea, the Peoples' Republic of China, Japan and the Russian Federation. This paper will also address the military operational control transfer between the United States and the Republic of Korea scheduled for 2015 and examine the viability of significantly restructuring the American military forces based in Korea following this historic transition.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Republic of Korea (ROK), Alliance, South Korea, North Korea, Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK), United States Forces Korea (USFK), Korea Command (KORCOM)					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)
			UNLIMITED	44	

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**THE UNITED STATES- REPUBLIC OF KOREA ALLIANCE:
THE WAY FORWARD**

by

Colonel L. Wayne Magee, Jr.
United States Army

Colonel Jeffrey L. Meeker
Project Adviser

This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Colonel L. Wayne Magee, Jr.
TITLE: The United States-Republic of Korea Alliance: The Way Forward
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project
DATE: 13 March 2012 **WORD COUNT:** 9,943 **PAGES:** 44
KEY TERMS: Republic of Korea (ROK), Alliance, South Korea, North Korea, Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK), United States Forces Korea (USFK), Korea Command (KORCOM)
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

Since the 1953 Armistice Agreement ending active hostilities in Korea, the United States has maintained a military presence in the Republic of Korea in order to deter an attack by the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea. This paper examines the security alliance that exists between the United States and the Republic of Korea in the context of the Northeast Asia region. It will examine the capabilities of the five major players in the region: The Republic of Korea, the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea, the Peoples' Republic of China, Japan and the Russian Federation. This paper will also address the military operational control transfer between the United States and the Republic of Korea scheduled for 2015 and examine the viability of significantly restructuring the American military forces based in Korea following this historic transition.

THE UNITED STATES-REPUBLIC OF KOREA ALLIANCE: THE WAY FORWARD

There is a Korean expression that describes our sixty-year partnership: "*katchikapshida*". In English, it means "We go together." Yes. We have been going together for sixty years.

—President Lee Myun-bak¹

For fifty-eight years, American military forces have looked north across the thirty-eighth parallel, poised to repel an attack initiated by the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK) on the Republic of Korea (ROK). Tied by the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty, the United States (US) currently maintains 28,500 service members in the ROK.² Born out of Cold War politics, the alliance between the US and the ROK served as a bulwark against Soviet and Chinese expansion and a deterrent against renewed North Korean aggression.³ Six American presidents have sought to remove all or at least substantial portions of the forces based in South Korea, most have settled for incremental decreases. As the United States prepares for a major force realignment, we must re-examine the need for forward-basing a large, predominantly ground force military contingent.

The US presence on the peninsula has been a physical demonstration of commitment to the security of the ROK and the stability of the Northeast Asian region as a whole. When viewed strictly numerically, the potential impact of US combat forces is small in comparison to the ground forces of South Korea: two brigade combat teams versus twelve divisions. Stationing US forces along projected invasion routes guaranteed an American response: these forces served as a tripwire. When the 2nd Infantry Division repositions from Camp Casey, fifteen miles south of the DMZ, to Camp

Humphreys, ninety-five miles from the DMZ, the logic that the presence of American troops during a North Korean attack ensures US future action falls apart. The presence of US forces in South Korea has also helped to fashion a close relationship with the government in Seoul that would be vital during a crisis. South Korea provides over 40 percent of the total cost of maintaining U.S. forces on its soil and provided \$4 billion in construction to better realign forces to the evolving mission.⁴

The Korean peninsula, a land area roughly the size of Great Britain, lies at a strategic crossroads in Northeast Asia. It is an ancient and abundant land, coveted at various times by China, Russia, and Japan. This peninsula is home to two vastly different countries whose people share a common history, language and traditions but who have been separated by a heavily armed border for the past 66 years. Occupying the northern half of the peninsula, the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea is the last surviving Stalinist state. The DPRK is a closed society, ruthlessly ruled by the family of Kim Il-sung with a failed economy and poor record of human rights. The southern half of the peninsula is home to the Republic of Korea an emerging world power, culturally vibrant and boasting the world's thirteenth largest economy.

The United States- Republic of Korea Alliance

In 1945, as the Japanese Empire collapsed, the United States established a presence on the Korean Peninsula, designed to temper the influence of its wartime ally, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The thirty-eighth parallel was established as the temporary border between military forces in a manner similar to the arrangement that partitioned Germany. Nation-wide elections were promised but never materialized. Instead, the Cold War politics of the late 1940s resulted in the establishment of two separate nations: to the south, the Republic of Korea: to the north the Democratic

Peoples' Republic of Korea. In 1948, the United Nations recognized the government of the Republic of Korea as the legitimate government of the entire Korean peninsula. The creation of the Republic of Korea did not sit well with Kim Il-sung and his Soviet-backed government in Pyongyang, who declared the birth of the DPRK in September 1948. When US Secretary of State Dean Acheson omitted the Republic of Korea from his speech to the National Press Club on January 12, 1950, implying that the US would not militarily defend South Korea⁵, Kim Il-sung further pressed Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Premier, to support military operations to reunite the Korean peninsula by force. On June 25, 1950, the forces of the DPRK attacked across the thirty-eighth parallel.

The US has stationed forces in the ROK since the end of World War II. As the occupation troops departed in 1949, a small American Military Advisory Group remained in South Korea, advising and assisting the fledgling South Korean military. When the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea invaded the ROK in June 1950, the U.S. sent forces to support them under the auspices of the United Nations. In the confusion resulting from North Korea's surprise attack, South Korean leaders placed their military forces under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, who initially served as the United Nations commander. In 1954, after the armistice between the United Nations Command, the Korean Peoples' Army (DPRK) and the Chinese Peoples' Army (Peoples' Republic of China), the United States and the Republic of Korea signed a Mutual Defense Treaty. This treaty committed the US to the ROK's defense and remains in force today. This treaty and its associated policies codified a command structure in South Korea where ROK military forces would fall under the command of the United Nations commander in the event of renewed DPRK hostilities. In the

succeeding six decades, this command structure has been modified three times with the South Korean government gaining increased operational control (OPCON) of its military forces with each subsequent change. “Given to the United Nations Command at the outset of the Korean War, OPCON was transferred to the US Combined Forces Command (CFC) in 1978, and is to return to South Korea in April 2012. The ROK regained peacetime control of its troops in 1994.”⁶ Ultimately, South Korea is scheduled to regain full wartime OPCON of its forces in 2015.

The 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty authorized the basing of US forces in the ROK to deter renewed DPRK aggression. US foreign policy during the Cold War was heavily dependent upon the idea of containing communist expansion. Forward basing of American military forces was the outward manifestation of the containment policy. If American forces were based in close proximity to communist regimes, they could rapidly detect and respond to any aggression. Further, forward basing demonstrated American commitment to allies and ensured that US forces did not face the prospect of fighting their way into a theater. In South Korea, this policy ensured that American ground combat forces would stand toe to toe with forces from North Korea. It further guaranteed any North Korean attack would shed American blood, an event that would rally American resolve to the defense of the South Korean people.

Since 1953, the US military presence has fluctuated from 360,000 at the conclusion of active hostilities to the current level of 28,500. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, force levels remained stable at approximately 60,000, including two combat divisions. Shortly after his inauguration, President Kennedy signaled that he was considering significantly decreasing military assistance to South Korea and withdrawing

one combat division. At the time of his assassination, the Kennedy administration had not finalized these plans. President Johnson, increasingly embroiled with Vietnam, promised the South Korean government that he would continue military assistance and maintain US force levels in return for a South Korean commitment of soldiers to assist in Vietnam. From 1965 through 1973, South Korea deployed approximately 320,000 soldiers to the Vietnam Theater.⁷ The election of Richard Nixon in 1968 heralded changes as the United States struggled to disengage from the Vietnam War.

In July 1969, President Nixon articulated a policy of nonintervention. Central to this new policy, referred to as the Nixon Doctrine, was the idea that American allies must assume more responsibility for their own defense and for preserving their regional stability. The United States would provide economic and military assistance but the ally would provide the actual manpower. If called upon, the US would consider providing limited naval and air support but not ground forces. Within the ROK, this policy was met with great concern. In 1968 the Department of Defense published a memorandum recommending that ground force levels in South Korea needed to be bolstered by 8,500 soldiers to counter increased North Korean infiltration and provocation. In spite of this, President Nixon ordered the withdrawal of the 7th Infantry Division, ultimately decreasing troop levels to approximately 40,000.⁸

The decade of the 1970s ushered in increased pressures to withdraw US forces from South Korea and for South Korea to take a more active role in its own defense. The American public was weary of the Vietnam War, increasingly suspicious of its government in the aftermath of Watergate and supported some level of retrenchment in Asia. When it was revealed that South Korean intelligence and business officials had

engaged in influence peddling with several members of Congress, stationing of US forces in South Korea became a 1976 Presidential campaign issue. Then candidate Jimmy Carter pledged to remove all US ground forces from Korea by 1981. As President, he immediately initiated a study to determine how to drawdown forces. "The President's plan calls for a phased withdrawal of all US ground forces from Korea over a five-year period, with the first group returning to the United States by the end of 1978."⁹ The study and subsequent troop withdrawals were very controversial in the US and within the South Korean government. In an attempt to promote greater South Korean military independence, the bilateral Combined Forces Command (CFC), was created in 1978 as the warfighting headquarters answering to the United Nations Command. The CFC staff was completely integrated with US and ROK officers and noncommissioned officers. Every aspect of the CFC was integrated: the commander was a four-star American general and his deputy was a Korean general of equal rank. This pattern was repeated throughout the command: an American officer served as a staff principle while a South Korean officer served as the deputy and vice versa. The CFC commander was given peacetime, or more correctly, armistice operational control of only those ROK forces required to enforce the 1953 Armistice Agreement. Operational control of all other South Korean forces reverted to the ROK Ministry of Defense and the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff. In 1994, armistice OPCON of all South Korean military units returned to the ROK government, a fact not well understood in South Korea or the United States. The South Korean government was now unequivocally involved in defense planning. However, in the event of hostilities with the DPRK, the CFC retained wartime control of all South Korean military forces.

By July 1979, the US had withdrawn 3,600 military personnel when satellite intelligence revealed that North Korean forces were more numerous and formidable than previously believed. Politically embarrassed over this intelligence failure, overcome with the Iranian Revolution and struggling with the protracted domestic recession, President Carter abandoned his withdrawal plans in South Korea. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, US force levels in South Korea remained fairly constant at 37,000, partially due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War and a mutual desire to maintain the status quo. The balance of power between the two Koreas gradually shifted as North Korea experienced a series of economic and agricultural failures while South Korea's economy began its meteoric rise.

The South Korean government, moving from military rule to a representative democracy, began to explore the idea that deterrence of the DPRK must be augmented by some type of engagement. Elected in 1998, Kim Dae-jung announced his Sunshine Policy making reconciliation and cooperation with North Korea the central goal of his government.

The administration formally predicated its policy on three Basic principles: no toleration of North Korean armed provocations, no South Korean efforts to undermine or absorb the North, and active ROK attempts to promote reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas.¹⁰

President Kim's intent was to communicate to North Korea that while South Korea would not pursue or provoke regime collapse, it would continue a strong deterrent posture. Kim's administration further pursued a policy of flexible reciprocity with North Korea: a gesture from South Korea would be met with a concession from North Korea.

By this it meant not a strict quid pro quo or even a simultaneous process of "give and take." Rather, it meant a "flexible, relative, and time-differential" approach in which the ROK, as the stronger "elder brother," would be patient and allow North Korea to reciprocate South Korean

measures at an undetermined time, and in some undetermined way, in the future. “Give first, get something later” is not an inaccurate characterization.¹¹

South Korean-provided humanitarian assistance would be exempt from any reciprocal expectations.

By the early 2000s, relations between the United States and the Republic of Korea were showing signs of strain. President Kim’s Sunshine Policy and its limited success was directly at odds with the Bush administration’s more hard-line approach. In South Korea, the public debate over the Sunshine Policy had revealed sharp divisions along political, ideological and regional lines. A younger generation of South Koreans began questioning the utility of a military alliance with the United States. When a US military vehicle hit and killed two South Korean children in 2002 and the soldiers involved were absolved of negligent homicide charges, anti-American feelings reached an all time high.

President Roh Moo-hyun was elected in 2003 on the heels of the large anti-American protests resulting from the 2002 incident. He continued the pursuit of conciliatory relations with the DPRK and stated his desire for the ROK to play a larger “balancing role” in the region. Almost immediately after President Roh’s inauguration, the Bush administration pushed for changes in the military alliance: “the deployment of South Korean troops to Iraq with political and diplomatic support, a significant reduction of U.S. troops in South Korea (USFK), and a wide-ranging readjustment of the U.S.-ROK alliance.”¹² President Roh’s administration countered with a roadmap that sought to fundamentally change the US-ROK alliance, making it more of a horizontal and balanced relationship. The Roh administration also pressed for a leading role in planning and executing the defense of South Korea.

In 2004, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld authorized a realignment program that would reduce the size of the military force and relocate them on the peninsula. That year, for the first time in the history of the alliance, the Department of Defense deployed a combat brigade from the ROK to operations in Iraq. At the conclusion of its deployment, this brigade relocated to Fort Carson, CO.¹³ By September 2008, U.S. forces were projected to decrease from 37,000 to 25,000. Additionally, the remaining forces would relocate to areas south of the Han River and consolidate in 48 different installations, down from a previous high of 107. In 2008, based on changes in the international security environment and after consultations with the South Korean government, Secretary of Defense Gates halted force withdrawals at 28,500, where it remains today.

In 2007, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun expressed concern regarding the command relationships between the US and the ROK as set forth in the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty. He believed that in the event of DPRK aggression, South Korean forces should be commanded by a South Korean. This issue to him was a matter of state sovereignty. As a result, later that year, the two countries reached an agreement which laid out a plan where the ROK would assume operational control (OPCON) of its forces by 2012. The US military would remain in the ROK, reorganizing from United States Forces Korea (USFK) to US Korea Command (KORCOM), an organization designed to serve as a supporting command to the Republic of Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).

In 2008, South Koreans elected Lee Myung-bak as President. Since taking office, President Lee has espoused policies that are more demanding and less

conciliatory towards North Korea. His relationship with President Obama is much different and appears closer and more collegial than with previous administrations. As noted by Su-Hyun Lee and Sang-Hun Choe, “the two men have also built a personal bond, with Mr. Lee being among a small number of leaders who seem to have pierced the president’s reserve. At a lunch in Seoul in November 2009...the two spent much of the time discussing education, not least the role of parents in schooling their children.”¹⁴

In June 2009, both presidents released the Joint Vision Statement of the United States of America and the Republic of Korea. This statement reaffirmed the importance of the Mutual Defense Treaty in the security alliance stating that “we will maintain a robust defense posture, backed by allied capabilities which support both nations...in advancing this bilateral plan...the Republic of Korea will take the lead role in the continued defense of Korea, supported by an enduring and capable U.S. military presence”¹⁵ One year later, President Lee requested that the OPCON transfer be postponed until 2015. South Korea’s struggles to recover from the 2008 global economic crisis and North Korea’s increased provocative actions and rhetoric culminating with the March 2010 sinking of the South Korean naval vessel, *Cheonan*, increased concerns about the timing. Postponement of operational transfer resulted in a new roadmap titled “Strategic Alliance 2015.”

In the past eighteen months the security situation on the Korean Peninsula has resembled a rollercoaster ride from the most tense period following the North Korean shelling of Yeongpyong-do to a high following the October 2011 resumption of the Six Party talks. During this period, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the former and

current Secretaries of Defense Robert Gates and Leon Panetta have publicly reaffirmed the US commitment to the Republic of Korea and maintenance of current force levels.¹⁶

The Northeast Asia Security Environment

Northeast Asia is a region in transition but one that is critical for future U.S. security and economic strength. After six decades of European centered defense policy and following a decade of intense focus on the Middle East, the United States is looking to the Asia-Pacific region.

U.S. economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia, creating a mix of evolving challenges and opportunities. Accordingly, while the U.S. military will continue to contribute to security globally, *we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region.* Our relationships with Asian allies and key partners are critical to the future stability and growth of the region. We will emphasize our existing alliances, which provide a vital foundation for Asia-Pacific security. We will also expand our networks of cooperation with emerging partners throughout the Asia-Pacific to ensure collective capability and capacity for securing common interests.¹⁷

Most economic analysts estimate that the countries of Northeast Asia will generate twenty percent of the world's gross national product. The region contains five of the world's largest economies, four of the world's largest militaries and accounts for approximately \$742 billion in annual trade between Northeast Asia and the US.¹⁸

The past decade has witnessed dramatic changes in the relations, desires and capabilities of the countries in Northeast Asia. As General Walter Sharp, former commander of the UNC/CFC/USFK stated, "it has become a major economic region, it is also a region characterized by uncertainty, territorial disputes, competition over access to resources, and in some cases struggles for regional hegemony."¹⁹ The Republic of Korea and the Peoples' Republic of China²⁰ have experienced impressive economic growth and desire for larger regional roles. The Russian Federation,

emerging from the decade of confusion following the collapse of the former Soviet Union, is once again casting its gaze east and exploring economic growth potential. Japan, a long time U.S. ally, was the first nation to emerge following the devastation of World War II but is now experiencing economic slowing coupled with an aging population. Further, the country is still reeling from the after-effects of the March 2011 earthquake and resulting tsunami. The true economic toll of these disasters coupled with the resulting nuclear disaster is yet to be determined. In addition to expanding their economies, each of these nations is set upon a course of military transformation and reform. Two of these nations, Russia and China belong to the nuclear club. The remaining two nations, South Korea and Japan, have pledged not to develop nuclear weapons and exist under the United States' nuclear umbrella; however, these nations possess the economic, industrial and scientific resources to rapidly develop and field nuclear weapons.

Within this dynamic and evolving region sits the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea with a young, unknown and untested leader. The desires and actions of Premier Kim Jong-eun and his followers have the potential to fundamentally change the dynamics and destiny of Northeast Asia.

Republic of Korea

The transformation of the Republic of Korea from a war-torn and ravaged land to an emerging global leader is nothing short of amazing. As President Obama has noted "Once a recipient of aid, South Korea has become a donor nation, supporting development from Asia to Africa."²¹ South Korea has firmly staked its position on the international stage, co-founding the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and hosting a score of international events ranging from the 1988 Summer Olympics to the

2002 FIFA Soccer World Cup to the 2010 G20 Seoul Summit. In the past two decades, South Korea has deployed elements of its armed forces to support United Nations peacekeeping missions in Africa and supported stability operations in the Middle East. In March 2011, South Korea deployed several search and rescue teams and humanitarian assistance packages to Japan in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami. It is the world's thirteenth largest economy, exporting numerous internationally respected brands and home to the entertainment juggernaut known as *Hallyu* or the Korean Wave. A nation with a longstanding respect for education, South Korea boasts a larger percentage of college graduates than the United States and as many American school districts lay off teachers, South Korean schools are hiring to fulfill high parental expectations. Fully ninety percent of South Korea's citizens have access to high-speed broadband internet networks compared to sixty-five percent in the United States.²²

The Republic of Korea has a population of just over 48 million, with approximately half living in the Seoul metropolitan area. At 38,368 square miles, the country is roughly the size of Virginia. The nation maintains an active military force of 650,000 troops with 3.3 million in reserve status making it the sixth largest military in the world. Military service is compulsory for all South Korean males between the ages of 20 to 30 years. The current term of service ranges from twenty-one months for the ROK Army and Marines to twenty-four months for the ROK Air Force. Young women are eligible to enlist but are banned from ground combat functions. For the past decade, South Korea has been upgrading and modernizing its equipment. Principle weapons systems include approximately 3,500 main battle tanks, 2,500 armored personnel carriers, 4,500 heavy artillery pieces, 600 air defense guns, over 500 combat aircraft

and over 100 attack helicopters.²³ Modernization has not been confined to upgrading ground forces as South Korea is transforming its navy from a coastal patrol to a blue water fleet with purchases of advance aircraft and construction of new vessels. South Korea has also been increasing its surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, functions traditionally handled by the US forces. Although the South Korean military is smaller than that of North Korea, “as measured by static equipment indices, South Korea’s conventional forces would appear superior to North Korea’s. When morale, training, equipment maintenance, logistics, and reconnaissance and communications capabilities are factored in, this qualitative advantage increases.”²⁴

In 2005, the ROK Ministry of National Defense conducted a study to determine the path to build an advanced and elite military force and eliminate inefficiencies in the Korean defense system. The plan, known as Defense Reform 2020, would be implemented in phases and is based upon a desire to transform the South Korean military from a personnel-intensive organization to one based on technological advantage.

The essence of the long-term vision of the Defense Reform 2020 realizes the self-reliant and advanced defense which can assure peace and prosperity of the Korean Peninsula. The ROK will be able to achieve a self-reliant military force and establish an advanced defense management system by completing technology-intensive military structure and force systems to be able to actively cope with future security situations and future warfare.²⁵

As the South Korean military transformed, it would decrease from an initial force of 680,000 in 2005 to a final force of 500,000 servicemembers. The total number of military installations throughout South Korea would decrease from 1900 to 700, increasing both planning and training efficiencies. Since 2005, the Defense Reform Plan 2020 has been revised and modified to address North Korea’s increased belligerence.

The Plan now states that the ROK military “will upgrade its counter-battery strike and surface-air missile defense capability against DPRK long-range artillery threatening Seoul; establish a unit dedicated to international peacekeeping duties.”²⁶

Clearly, the Republic of Korea is an emerging world leader, determined to expand its role. The government has three main long term policy goals including increasing free market trade, strengthening South Korean leadership in key world concerns including human rights, nuclear disarmament, environmental protection and economic assistance and finally pursuing “peaceful and gradual” reunification with the North. While their reunification rhetoric has mellowed over the past six decades, South Koreans see this issue as central to Korea’s future success on the international stage. Immediately following cessation of hostilities in 1953 continuing through the early 1980s, unification of the Korean Peninsula, by force if necessary, was the primary goal of each successive government. As South Korea’s economy began its rise and a post-Korean War generation entered adulthood, attitudes began to change, showing a “growing tendency in the South Korean public to regard North Korea more as a lifestyle threat-in the sense of South Korea being overwhelmed by refugees or having to bear the astronomical costs of unification- than as a military security threat.”²⁷ Government officials want to avoid the social and economic chaos that West Germany faced when East Germany suddenly collapsed in 1990. President Lee’s administration has repeatedly maintained that North Korea’s economy must be developed and expanded for reunification to proceed without placing undue and unacceptable strain on South Korea’s population and economy.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

If, as Winston Churchill quipped, the Soviet Union was a riddle wrapped in a mystery, then the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK) is an incomprehensible cipher wrapped in a riddle, hermetically sealed in a black box.²⁸ It is one of the world's most closed and authoritarian countries; obtaining reliable information about its leader's intentions and its precise military capabilities is incredibly challenging.

On December 19, 2011, the world learned of the death of Kim Jong-il, leader of the DPRK. Foreign policy experts immediately began speculating about succession. What had been a largely academic discussion, reserved for policy think tanks and military planners, suddenly became reality. The transfer of power from a leader to his successor is often fraught with uncertainty. When a power transition occurs in a politically and socially isolated nation in possession of the world's fourth largest conventional military and a fledgling nuclear weapons program, the world worries. When the hand-picked successor is a twenty-something with no previous experience, the world watches and hopes for the best.

The late Kim Jong-il governed the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea for seventeen years, after inheriting his position from his father in 1994. Chairman Kim's assumption marked the first time that a socialist country transferred power in dynastic fashion rather than through an election process. Kim spent over two decades before his rise essentially serving as his father's apprentice. Inheriting a country experiencing economic stagnation and beginning to suffer from the loss of funding following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kim espoused a *songtan* or military first policy. He also set the goal to be a "strong and prosperous nation" by 2012, the 100th anniversary of his father's birth. In 2008, Chairman Kim virtually disappeared from public view for several

months and reappeared looking visibly frail. Experts who watch North Korea speculated that he had suffered a stroke. In 2009, Kim unveiled his youngest son, Kim Jong-eun, as his heir apparent and began his political grooming process. North Korea's increasingly belligerent tone coincided with these events, fueling speculation that the elder Kim was giving his successor firsthand experience in crisis diplomacy. The sinking of the South Korean corvette, *Cheonan*, in March 2010 and the shelling of Yeongpyongdo in November 2010 are commonly viewed as vehicles to burnish the younger Kim's credibility with the North Korean military.²⁹

There is a well-known nighttime satellite photo of the Korean Peninsula. On the southern half of the peninsula, brightly lit, large metropolitan areas stand out. There is a line at the peninsula's midline, then a dark void with one or two small pinpricks of light. On the northern edge, there is another moderately lit line. The dark void is the DPRK with a population of approximately 23 million people and occupying a land area of 47,918 square miles, approximately the size of Mississippi. The land is primarily mountainous yet contains a wealth of valuable mineral deposits. Established on September 9, 1948 by then-Premier Kim Il-sung, who had been mentored and supported by the Soviet Union. For much of its early history, North Korea was the recipient of extensive military and economic assistance from the Soviet Union and China. This support allowed North Korea to recover economically and militarily from the ravages of the Korean War much faster than South Korea.

North Korea maintains one of the world's largest standing militaries, with an estimated 1.2 million personnel on active duty supported by a conscription system. Service lasts from five to twelve years for the army, five to ten for the navy and three to

four for the air force. Further, the DPRK possesses between 600-800 ballistic missiles and 250 long range artillery systems capable of targeting the Seoul metropolitan area and threatening the Japanese main islands. The North Korean army has an absolute numerical advantage over South Korea in tanks, artillery pieces and armored personnel carriers. In addition to its conventional forces, the North Korean military boasts one of the world's largest special operations forces, specifically trained to infiltrate across borders and strike deep into South Korea. North Korea stations the majority of its forces, seventy percent by some estimates, along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). North Korea has also conducted tunneling operations under the DMZ. Four were discovered between 1974 and 1990. With the close proximity of the DMZ to Seoul, South Korean and US forces would have limited warning if North Korea mounted a conventional ground or artillery attack.

As formidable as the North Korean military seems, it exists in a country experiencing serious problems with the basic necessities of food, fuel and medicine. In December 2008, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization and the World Food Program estimated that 40 percent of North Korea's population, approximately 8.7 million people, mostly young children, pregnant and nursing women and the elderly were in need of urgent food assistance.³⁰ In fact, when one looks across the DMZ from the south, the first range of hills are denuded of foliage, not strictly for military purposes but rather because local North Koreans villagers are forced to gather firewood for warmth. On the South Korean side, the forest is pristine, teeming with vegetation and wildlife.

Kim Jong-il's *songtan* policy channeled the lion's share of North Korea's resources to military infrastructure. The military has not been completely immune from the regime's economic and agricultural failures however. Some experts, including Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute and Larry Nicksch of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, speculate that ordinary North Korean soldiers are demoralized and suffer the physical after-effects of malnutrition. "Food supplies for North Korean rank and file forces are marginal even in peacetime...the bulk of North Korean rank and file soldiers are physically weak and undoubtedly mentally deficient as the products of years of malnutrition."³¹ Much of the military's equipment is believed to be aging and obsolete. "At first glance, the KPA's (Korean Peoples' Army) force structure seems nothing more than a collection of Cold War military platforms. With the exception of its Mig-29s, the majority of platforms are models designed and produced during the 1960s or earlier."³²

The breakup of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s deprived North Korea of extensive military and economic support. The support North Korea received from China also declined as Chinese leaders no longer sought to counter Soviet influence over the Kim regime. Aside from the recent provocations in 2010 and limited special operations incursions, the bulk of the military has no recent experience conducting large scale military operations, other than winter training. Soldiers and units are routinely used for construction projects and harvesting crops. Unlike the South Korean military that experienced major combat duty in Vietnam and has deployed in support of operations in the Middle East, the North Korean military has not seen combat since 1953. However as Ryo Hinata-Yamaguchi cautions "ever since Pyongyang constructed its ideological

stronghold on the Korean Peninsula, the North Korean government has been ingrained with the belief that modernization isn't so much about technological innovation, but innovation in the use of existing technology.³³

Many analysts do not believe that North Korea will deliberately set out to begin a set piece conventional war. According to Anthony Cordesman, "both the DPRK and ROK...operate in a security environment where the risk of dragging the US and China into a conventional conflict (and the dilemma this would create for Japan) tends to limit the scope of any given conventional war."³⁴ Instead, they believe that North Korea will aim to create as much civilian damage as possible, seize Seoul quickly then open negotiations, potentially using its nuclear weapons program as a bargaining chip.

North Korea's nuclear program began in the 1950s while allied with the Soviet Union and China. A joint Soviet-North Korean team assembled a Soviet model research reactor at what was to become the Yongbyon nuclear site in 1965. Two more reactors followed in 1974 and in 1980. During these decades North Korea's program appeared to be centered on power generation. In late 1991, North Korea signed the Joint Declaration on Denuclearization after the United States withdrew its nuclear weapons from South Korea and South Korea certified that it did not possess nuclear weapons. The Joint Declaration forbade both nations from testing, manufacturing, receiving, storing or using nuclear weapons. Further, neither nation could possess nuclear processing or uranium enrichment facilities.

The death of Kim Il-sung in 1994 heralded a major change in North Korea's nuclear aspirations, a shift not completely appreciated until 2002 with the discovery that the DPRK was pursuing a uranium enrichment program for nuclear weapons

development. On July 4-5, 2006, North Korea launched seven ballistic missiles including one with possible intercontinental range. The United Nations Security Council resoundingly condemned the action and demanded that the DPRK cease its ballistic missile program. Three months later, North Korea tested another nuclear device. The United Nations again condemned North Korea's actions and passed a resolution which imposed sanctions on luxury goods, trade of military units and missile –related parts. Undeterred, North Korea continued its weapons program and again conducted missile launch tests, this time in April 2009 with a Taepo Dong-2 missile launched over the Sea of Japan. After a denunciation from the United Nations and a counter denunciation of the United Nations by North Korea, the North Korean government expelled the International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors who had been monitoring the Yongbyon nuclear site and withdrew from the Six Party denuclearization talks.³⁵ One month later, North Korea again announced another nuclear device test and disclosed its intent to reactivate its nuclear facilities. Current intelligence reports estimate that the DPRK possesses enough enriched uranium to produce six to eight nuclear warheads. In late 2010, North Korea publicly displayed a uranium enrichment facility at the Yongbyon site. Although touted as a production facility for fuel to power a light water reactor, this facility gives North Korea the capability to produce fissile materials for warheads. At his Senate confirmation hearings in 2011, General James Thurman cautioned that “North Korean ballistic missile and nuclear programs pose a direct threat to security in Northeast Asia. The Kim Regime continues to use these two programs to shape conditions to gain leverage during negotiations, to extract concessions, and ensure regime survival.”³⁶

By all measures, North Korea's economy is disastrous. The government retains centralized command and control, planning and resource allocation and resorts to frequent rationing. Workers frequently go months without pay.

Of course, given that the state cannot pay workers for months at a time, this population would by any other definition be considered unemployed. But this does not lead to idleness because most workdays are spent devising coping mechanisms to subsist. The average factory worker at a state-owned enterprise might choose not to continue to work at the factory because he is not getting paid, but he will not quit his job. Instead, he will report to work in the morning, punch the time clock, and then bribe the foreman to allow him to spend the day trying to catch fish or forage for scrap metal that he can sell on the black market.³⁷

Most heavy industry is degraded, often beyond reasonable repair. Workers manage to continue operations only through improvisation, leading to very inefficient use of factor inputs. The nation's military stands first in line for all resources, leaving the civilian population with the remnants. As evidenced by the extensive and disastrous famines of the 1990s, the environment in North Korea is severely degraded. Poor land use management and schemes to increase food production have left large portions of the country vulnerable to cycles of drought and flooding. Unreliable power production, primarily through hydroelectric and coal-fired plants has led to widespread black and brownouts in areas outside the Pyongyang metropolitan area. In the past decade, Kim Jong-il did permit a limited shadow economy of small scale food and service markets to operate but repressed them periodically to prove his power, control corruption and discourage the emergence of a truly independent economy. In 2009, the government attempted to reform its currency, wiping out the savings of much of the population. The reform was so unpopular and disastrous that the central government repealed the policy.

The repeal of the currency reform was significant due to the closed nature of North Korean society.

North Korea is saturated with state propaganda and little else. Outside radio signals are jammed, while radios blasting state messages are installed in every home and impossible to turn off. Fax machines and internet access are both illegal except for a small cadre of trusted elite. Computers must be registered with the police as if they were hunting rifles. Schools double as indoctrination centers.³⁸

Victor Cha and Nicholas Anderson of the Center for Strategic and International Studies maintain that this unprecedented action may have resulted from Kim Jong-il's concern about eventual leadership transition. While Kim Jong-il may have been able to keep himself firmly in power through creating a loyal inner circle through bribery and political favor, "this loyalty lasts only as long as the regime can continue the handouts...the inability of China to forever backstop the regime will take its toll...favorites will have to be chosen."³⁹ As Kim Jong-eun develops his government, he will have to choose who receives favor and who does not, giving opportunity to some but taking opportunity from others, leaving them disaffected. The fear of faction power struggles, political implosion and the human toll these events could create is not far from the minds of North Korea's regional neighbors.

People's Republic of China

The 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics announced to the international community that the Peoples' of Republic of China (PRC) was ready and capable to assume a greater role in world affairs. For the past two decades, the PRC has steadily engaged in a course of economic development that has raised the standard of living of average Chinese citizens and has made possible a wide-ranging military modernization program encompassing ground, air, sea and space and cyber capabilities. Under the leadership

of President Hu Jintao, China is assuming new international roles, including international peace-keeping and humanitarian assistance missions. In 2011, in a historic move, China pledged \$250 million to Pakistan to assist with flood relief efforts, constituting China's largest humanitarian aid package to a foreign nation. China's rise is making its neighbors nervous: for South Korea, Japan and the United States, the key question becomes, is China an ally or a competitor?

The PRC has the world's third largest military with active forces exceeding 2.28 million and a reserve of 800,000. In a country with a population of 1.3 billion people, the Chinese government possesses an almost limitless potential military pool. Military service of two years duration is required for all 18 to 24 year old men. Eighteen and nineteen year old women may also be selected for mandatory military service provided they meet the criteria for select jobs. Since 1949, China has evolved its forces from a massive, lower technology ground force to a more agile, mobile and technologically advanced force. The government is currently working to completely overhaul the military by 2020, leading with the production of its J-20 stealth fighter program and pushing forward with naval development, including construction of the nation's first aircraft carrier. China is spending a reported \$160 billion yearly with an existing inventory of almost 23,000 land-based weapons, 600 ships and more than 4,000 aircraft. The US Department of Defense projects that by the end of the current decade "China will likely be able to project and sustain a modest-sized force, perhaps several battalions of ground forces or a naval flotilla of up to a dozen ships, in low-intensity operations far from China."⁴⁰

China's ability to project and sustain a large force in high intensity conflict operations is unlikely prior to 2020. Chinese leaders firmly believe that the future of their country is closely tied to the future of the international community itself. With a modernized military, China may be able to gain diplomatic advantage or favorably resolve disputes.

China shares an 880 mile long land border with North Korea and is one of the three signatories to the 1953 Armistice Agreement. Chinese direct intervention in the Korean War in late autumn of 1950 ensured the future survival of Kim Il-sung's North Korean state. In 1961, the DPRK and the PRC signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, codifying a mutual security alliance similar to the US-ROK alliance. Although China is North Korea's largest trading partner and the two countries share many interests, their relationship is not without conflict.

These mutual affinities began to diverge in the early 1980s when the PRC initiated economic reforms and market mechanisms under Deng Xiaoping's leadership and in 1992 when Beijing established full diplomatic ties with South Korea.⁴¹

With its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile testing in May 2009, North Korea may have crossed a line, as Chinese leaders had previously believed that the DPRK was pursuing its nuclear activity primarily as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the United States. Since that event, the PRC has substantially increased its support for denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Many experts, including Dick Nanto and Mark Manyin of the Congressional Research Service, believe that China's overarching goal regarding the Korean Peninsula is the preservation of stability within the DPRK. "However unpredictable and annoying the North Korean government may be to Beijing, any conceivable scenario

other than maintaining the status quo could seriously damage PRC interests.”⁴²

Preservation of a stable North Korea preserves regional stability, preventing the Chinese nightmare scenario of North Korean implosion followed by an overwhelming refugee crisis. Leaders within the PRC also view North Korea as an important buffer zone, from the American and South Korean military forces deployed south of the Demilitarized Zone. Should a North Korean refugee crisis occur, it is likely that China would establish a security zone along their border in order to protect China’s military-strategic environment, maintain border stability and sustain the economic development in its northeast provinces in the border region.

The collapse of North Korea could also result in the reunification of the Korean Peninsula under the governance of South Korea, a development that China dreads. In recent years, South Korea has challenged the legitimacy of the current border between the Korean Peninsula and China itself, citing the legacy of Koguryo. Koguryo was an ancient Korean kingdom whose rule included portions of modern-day China. This disputed region is home to hundreds of thousands of ethnic Korean-Chinese who may welcome a newly unified Korea’s territorial claims.

China's economy is the second largest in the world after that of the United States. During the past 30 years China's economy has changed from a centrally planned system that was largely closed to international trade to a more market-oriented system that has a rapidly growing private sector. A major component supporting China's rapid economic growth has been exports. In fact, China is South Korea’s largest trading partner.

Japan

Japan was the first economic powerhouse to emerge in Northeast Asia and is considered the world's third largest economy. From the middle 1960s through the early 1990s, Japan experienced some of the highest economic growth rates in the world. As the country's economy has matured and slowed in the past decade, the Japanese government and public have developed a greater interest in regional security issues and increasing the capabilities of the Japanese Self Defense Forces. This newly expressed interest has caused concern among Japan's neighbors.

While small in size, Japan has one of the most technologically advanced militaries in the Northeast Asian region. It is also the only country in the region with a purely defense oriented military. The Japanese constitution explicitly prohibits the Japanese government from using force to settle international disputes. Established in 1954, the Japanese Self Defense Forces (SDF) are an extension of the country's police force and are internationally recognized for their high level of training. In the past quarter century, Japan has deployed teams from the SDF to assist with peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, reconstruction/stabilization missions in Iraq and disaster relief efforts following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The SDF maintains an active force of 244,000 with a reserve of 46,000.

Since Japan's military is constitutionally constrained, it is allied with the United States for broad –based international and regional security by the 1960 US-Japan Security Treaty. The goals of the US-Japan security alliance are very similar to those of the US-ROK alliance: meet direct threats to Japan, provide a framework for cooperation and regional stability and provide a framework that contributes to global security. “The US-ROK alliance has played an important role in buttressing the US-Japan alliance by

dispersing the US force presence beyond Japan, as well as lightening the burden on Japan of managing instability on the Korean Peninsula.”⁴³ Under the terms of this treaty, the United States maintains approximately 38,000 military forces at bases throughout the Japanese main islands and in the prefecture of Okinawa.

The relationship between Japan and its neighbors is complicated and tempered by the nation’s recent imperial past. On the Korean Peninsula, relations between the ROK and Japan have improved over the past two decades. In August 2010, Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan formally apologized to South Korea on the 100th anniversary of Japan’s annexation. His apology was an acknowledgement of the legacy of suffering and mistrust that resulted from the thirty-six year occupation and an effort to bring the two nations together by overcoming the legacy of the past. There are large tourist flows and increasing trade between the two countries. Younger generations of South Koreans are not as affected by the history of colonization as the older generations and are more likely to accept a closer ROK-Japan relationship.

The Russian Federation

Russia occupies a unique and special geopolitical position, bridging Europe and Asia. For most of its history, Russia has focused on its European connections but it has had a long history of interest in the Korean peninsula, dating to late 1800s. One can easily assert that Russia is North Korea’s oldest ally. In fact, while China’s intervention in the Korean War is well known history, the Soviet Union also provided crucial military support. “Soviet pilots contributed to the air defense of North Korea, including the defense of the strategically vital Yalu River bridges...these pilots shot down 1,300 American aircraft in combat over North Korea, including about 200 U.S. B-29 ‘Flying Fortress’ bombers.”⁴⁴ While diplomatic recognition did not change with the birth of the

Russian Federation, the nature of the alliance between the two nations altered dramatically. In a stunning reversal shortly after its birth, the Russian Federation formally recognized the government of the Republic of Korea and moved to establish relations.

Russia's interests in Northeast Asia are primarily economic. The region has a potential of becoming a gateway for Russia's entrance to the global economy. Rich in natural resources, Russia stands to contribute to satisfying the region's growing demand for energy and modernizing its own domestic economy along the way. Assuming a reduction of the current nuclear tensions on the Korean peninsula, Russia is interested in three developments: the link of the Trans-Siberian Railroad to the Trans-Korean Railroad (the so-called "iron silk road"), the East Siberian gas pipeline from Irkutsk's gas-condensate field, and the supply of electricity from the Russian Far East. All three projects potentially tie the three nations together, thereby diversifying Russia's ties in the region and preparing the ground for a smoother future unification of Korea.⁴⁵

As a net petroleum and natural gas exporter, Russia seeks new and expanded outlets for this resource. The rapidly growing demand for energy resources by the nations of Northeast Asia presents Russia with an opportunity to exploit new markets and develop new oil and natural gas resources and expand infrastructure. For the economies of China, Japan and South Korea, Russian oil presents a more stable source, untroubled by the instability and posturing of Middle Eastern oil exporting countries. Russia has constructed the East Siberian-Pacific Ocean Pipeline transporting oil from its Siberian fields to China and the Pacific Region. The pipeline went into operation in December 2009. Russia is currently planning an expansion of this

pipeline-the Trans Korea pipeline- that would parallel the eastern coast of North Korea and terminate just south of the DMZ in South Korea. Political stability on the Korean peninsula is both a prerequisite and an ongoing requirement for the success of this project.

North Korea's nuclear weapons program threatens Russia's aspirations. Russia's leaders view denuclearization as a vital event. They have no intention of recognizing North Korea as a legitimate nuclear state and seek a diplomatic solution. Since their inception, Russia has participated in the Six Party talks, although sometimes in a more passive manner than US leaders may desire. The negotiated approach well suits a core Russian strategy based on national interests and put it in concert with its "strategic partner" – China. It is also useful to contain potentially hostile Western ambitions, widely interpreted as expansion of US ballistic missile defense capabilities, in a vital area where Russian positions have never been strong enough. This accounts for Russia's seeming "passivity"... Deep in the heart of many Russian policy makers is the belief that the idea of a nuclear North Korea is less appalling than that of a destroyed North Korea.

The Russian military is also undergoing a transformation process. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, as Russia struggled to establish its new identity, many military assets were allowed to decline. The government virtually defunded all military research and development. An estimated 85 to 90% of all Russian equipment is Soviet-era. The current reform program aims to make the Russian military more mobile and maintain units at a more permanent readiness state rather than relying on the mass mobilization model favored by Soviet leaders. Russia currently maintains an active

strength of 1.2 million with 745,000 in reserve. The military maintains almost 23,000 tanks, 233 ships and 2,100 aircraft.

Strategic Alliance 2015 and Beyond

The original framework for the transfer of wartime operational control originated in 2007 as the Strategic Transition Plan. Leaders within President Roh's Ministry of National Defense and President Bush's Department of Defense set a target end date of April 2012. At the highest political levels in both countries, leaders viewed this move through the prisms of national sovereignty and alliance burden sharing. They did not seriously consider issues of military readiness or preparation time and the effect they may have on deterrence.⁴⁶ In 2009, after leadership changes in the US and ROK, Presidents Obama and Lee resolved to move the alliance into new directions. In their 2009 Joint Vision statement, they acknowledged the importance of the historic security relationship but sought to broaden bilateral cooperation on economic and social issues and coordinate on a host of regional and global challenges. In the early summer of 2010, concerned about North Korea's nuclear program and embarrassed over the sinking of the *Cheonan*, President Lee formally requested the delay of OPCON transfer. By the autumn of 2010, planners had crafted Strategic Alliance 2015 (SA 2015), the new transition roadmap.

SA 2015 represents a synchronized approach to changes within the US-ROK military alliance, incorporating wartime OPCON transition, the Land Partnership Program and the Yongsan Relocation Plan along with addressing Strategic Communications, Tour Normalization and Exercise and Certification Plans.⁴⁷ It is significant to note that the SA 2015 plan does not include any projected US force draw downs.

When wartime OPCON transition occurs in April 2015, the Combined Forces Command will disestablish and the ROK and US will stand up separate, complementary national commands. Rather than the current combined system, in which both the ROK and US provide forces to a single combined command, the ROK JCS will become the supported, or lead, command and the newly created US Korea Command (KORCOM) will be the supporting command. The plan calls for numerous coordination cells between the national commands and directs KORCOM to provide critical enduring and bridging capabilities to the ROK until South Korea fully develops and masters these areas. While not all-inclusive, bridging capabilities include intelligence gathering and global communications

Senior leaders within the US military have hailed Strategic Alliance 2015 as a historic milestone, a demonstration of confidence and faith. South Korea becomes an equal partner in the alliance rather than remaining in the US's shadow.

The transition to KORCOM is a positive step forward in balancing not only available resources, but also strategic visibility. KORCOM will allow the South Koreans to become more visible, and possess a greater role in their own defense. KORCOM allows them to portray in a sense legitimacy to the nation, the region and global factions. This new structure will enhance the South Korean defense, while reducing the constant American "thumbprint" on any future agendas after the year 2015⁴⁸

According to COL Michael Ferris, former 8th Army Liaison Officer to First and Third ROK Armies, "the South Koreans are prepared to demonstrate to the world that they can defend their homeland. They are committed to flawlessly executing this transition."⁴⁹

Change in any alliance can be difficult. When change is this fundamental and occurs in an unstable world environment, controversy is never far way. Some South Korean policy makers have expressed concerns about the US commitment to ROK security and are concerned about the costs associated with new military structure. The

original Defense Reform 2020 plan called for an increase of military spending from 2.7 to 3.2 percent of GNP. South Korea policy makers worry that SA 2015 may derail their own military modernization plans. Members of the US Congress are also expressing concern about the costs for relocating the approximately 10,000 soldiers of the 2nd Infantry Division to Camp Humphreys and for supporting the increased numbers of family members stationed in South Korea due to Tour Normalization. The Senate Armed Services committee has directed that Secretary of Defense Panetta look at these costs and report in June 2012. Further, as the United States grapples with a substantial military realignment following ten years of constant conflict in the Middle East, questions abound about the utility of forward basing military forces overseas.

The alliance between the US and the ROK grew out of the need to counter the North Korean military threat. Any reassessment of the military forces based in South Korea must simultaneously address this fact and the expanded nature of the US-ROK alliance. General Walter Sharp, former USFK commander, cautioned the alliance must re-envision itself to remain resilient.

Without a new ROK-U.S. strategy North Korea will continue the past patterns of unrelenting development and proliferation of nuclear weapons and technology, improvement of ballistic missile and SOF capabilities, deterioration of human rights conditions for the general North Korean public, and a failed economy. This combination is very dangerous to the Korean peninsula and the free world.⁵⁰

There are many questions about North Korea's future actions and intentions—will Kim Jong-eun remain in power and if so, how much real influence will he have? Will he maintain the policies of his father or will he choose to chart a different course? If the Kim regime does not survive, does this mean a state collapse?

In near term, the responsible choice is to carry out OPCON transition and further develop the economic ties binding the two nations. The ratification of the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement in December 2011 is a positive step in this direction. Carrying through with SA 2015 also lets South Korea know that we are not deserting them and sends the message to our allies that we honor our commitments and desire the maintenance of regional stability.

Once operational control transfer is complete, we must reexamine the forces based in South Korea. This reexamination must address the current security situation on the Korean peninsula and within the region. It must take into account the resources each nation is willing to commit. Most senior leaders, including General Thurman, seem to believe that 28,500 is the correct aggregate force number to provide flexibility for meeting unforeseen events.⁵¹ The key issue centers on the appropriate force mix, is a ground combat force necessary or should forces be capabilities based? Many Korea experts, including General Sharp, lean heavily to the latter option.⁵² I believe the United States should consider dramatically decreasing ground combat forces, beginning with removing the remaining brigade combat team of the 2nd Infantry Division(2ID) followed by removal of those 2ID units that do not provide enduring or bridging capabilities. This decrease should then be offset by increased air and naval forces and ground forces tailored to provide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, theater opening assets and logistical prepositioning support. Command and control and coordination capabilities must also remain.

The alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea has weathered many storms and matured. "It has grown from one singularly focused on the

defense of a valued ally, to one of shared intrinsic values like democracy, free-market economics, and human rights.⁵³ Contacts between the two nations have grown significantly over the past six decades with tens of thousands of American citizens living, working and visiting South Korea and hundreds of thousands of South Korean citizens living and working in the United States. As the alliance moves forward into the twenty-first century, it must confront both new challenges and old realities.

Endnotes

¹ Lee Myung bak, Address to Congress 14 October 2011. <http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/Lee%20Myung-bak%20address%20to%20Congress.pdf>, (accessed November 25, 2011).

² The breakdown of the 28,500 force includes 20,000 Army, 8,000 Air Force, 400 Navy/Marines and 100 Special Operations Forces.

³ While properly known as the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea, the two countries sharing the Korean Peninsula are commonly referred to as North Korea and South Korea respectively. This paper will use proper and common names interchangeably.

⁴ Scott Snyder, "Pursuing a Comprehensive Vision for the U.S.-South Korea Alliance," Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009, p 34 and Ron Wallace, "Tour Normalization, (Peninsula Engineer Conference)," briefing slides with scripted commentary, Seoul, ROK, United States Forces Korea, Feb 16, 2011.

⁵ James I. Matray, "Dean Atcheson's Press Club Speech Reexamined," *Journal of Conflict Study*, Vol XXII, No. 1, Spring 2002, <http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/JCS/bin/get.cgi?directory=spring02/&filename=matray.htm> (accessed December 3, 2011).

⁶ Ben Hancock, "US Forces OK in ROK-for now," March 2, 2010, <http://the-diplomat.com/2010/03/02/us-forces-ok-in-rok-for-now>, (accessed January 2, 2012).

⁷ I was fortunate to serve with two retired ROK officers who had served in Vietnam. They were extremely proud of their contribution and the fact that they served alongside their US allies. They believed that this was a way to repay the US for its sacrifices during the Korean War and its support for the reconstruction of the ROK. It is unfortunate that most Americans, including American soldiers have no knowledge of this.

⁸ B. E. Spivy, "Increase of the US Army Forces in Korea" 21 February 1968.

⁹ Congressional Budget Office, "Force Planning and Budgetary Implications of the U.S. Withdrawal from Korea," May 1978, <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/67xx/doc6712/78-CBO-004.pdf> (accessed 4 December 2011).

¹⁰ Norman D. Levin and Yong-sup Han, "Sunshine in Korea: The South Korean Debate over Policies Toward North Korea," Arlington, VA: The Rand Corporation, 2002, p. 24.

¹¹ Ibid, p.25.

¹² Sun-won Park, "Strategic Posture Review: South Korea" The Brookings Institute, March 17, 2010, http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2010/0317_korea_park.aspx, (accessed January 30, 2012).

¹³ Mark E. Manyin, Emma Chanlett-Avery, Mary Beth Nikitin and Mi Ae Taylor, "U.S.-South Korea Relations," Washington, DC: U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, November 3, 2010, p.12.

¹⁴ Su-Hyun Lee and Sang-Hun Choe, "South Korea," The New York Times, <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/southkorea/index.html>, (accessed December 5 2011).

¹⁵ Barack Obama and Lee Myun-bak, "Joint Vision for the Alliance of the United States of America and the Republic of Korea," June 16, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Joint-vision-for-the-alliance-of-the-United-States-of-America-and-the-Republic-of-Korea/ (accessed 28 Oct 2011).

¹⁶ Elisabeth Bumiller, "Panetta Offers Support in South Korea" New York Times, October 27, 2011. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/900594274?accountid=4444>. (accessed October 30, 2011).

¹⁷ Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century Defense," Washington, DC, January 5, 2012, p. 7.

¹⁸ James D. Thurman, "Sustaining a Strong Alliance in the Morning Calm," Briefing Slides, Washington, DC, Institute of Land Warfare Panel, Association of the United States Army, October 12, 2011.

¹⁹ Walter L. Sharp, "Statement before the House Armed Services Committee, April 6, 2011, www.usfk.mil, (accessed November 26, 2011) p.2.

²⁰ Officially the Peoples' Republic of China, this paper will use the country's official and common (China) name interchangeably.

²¹ Barak Obama, "Remarks by President Obama and President Lee of the Republic of Korea in a Joint Press Conference" October 13, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/10/13/remarks-president-obama-and-president-lee-republic-korea-joint-press-con> (accessed 14 December 2011).

²² Su-Hyun Lee and Sang-Hun Choe, "South Korea," The New York Times, <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/southkorea/index.html>, (accessed December 5 2011).

²³ Information concerning South Korea and North Korea military capabilities was derived from several sources but primarily The International Institute for Strategic Studies "Conventional Military Balance on the Korean Peninsula," <http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/north-korean-dossier/north-koreas-weapons-programmes-a-net-asses/the-conventional-military-balance-on-the-kore/> and Anthony H. Cordesman, with Andrew Gagel, Varun Vira, Alex Wilner and Robert Hammond, "The Korea Military Balance: Comparative Korean Forces and the Forces of Key Neighboring States," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC. July 2011,

²⁴ Bruce W. Bennett, "A Brief Analysis of South Korea's Defense Reform Plan," National Defense Research Institute (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation), 2006.

²⁵ South Korea Military Guide, GlobalSecurity.Org, www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/rok/doctrine.htm (accessed December 27, 2011).

²⁶ Peter Hayes, "North-South Korea Elements of National Power," Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, April 27, 2011, <http://www.nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/reports/north-south-hayes>, (accessed January 15, 2012).

²⁷ Norman D. Levin and Yong-Sup Han, "Sunshine in Korea: The South Korean Debate over Policies Toward North Korea," Center for Asia Pacific Policy (Arlington, VA: Rand Corporation), 2002, p 11.

²⁸ The original quotation "I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest." was from a radio address Sir Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister, delivered in October. <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/31000.html>1939 (accessed December 2, 2011).

²⁹ Sung-Chool Lee, "The ROK-U.S. Joint Political and Military Response to North Korean Armed Provocations," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, October 2011, www.csis.org (accessed November 1, 2011)

³⁰ Jayshree Bajoria, "North Korea after Kim," Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/north-korea/north-korea-after-kim> , (accessed December 26, 2011)

³¹ Larry A. Nitsch, "The Opcon Military Command Issue Amidst a Changing Security Environment on the Korean Peninsula," Remarks presented at the KORUS Forum at the Embassy of Korea, March 24, 2010.

³² Ryo Hinata-Yamaguchi, "The Real North Korea Threat," The New Leaders Forum, Pacific Forum CSIS, <http://the-diplomat.com/new-leaders-forum/2011/11/29/the-real-north-korea-threat/>, (accessed December 4, 2011).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Anthony H. Cordesman, with Andrew Gagel, Varun Vira, Alex Wilner and Robert Hammond, "The Korea Military Balance: Comparative Korean Forces and the Forces of Key Neighboring States," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC. July 2011, p xii.

³⁵ The Six-Party Talks began in August 2003 with the goal of ending North Korea's nuclear program through negotiations. The talks involve representative from China, the United States, North and South Korea, Japan, and Russia. The talks had broken down several times prior to North Korea's 2009 nuclear test, when North Korea withdrew.

³⁶ James D. Thurman, "Advance Policy Questions for General James D. Thurman, USA Nominee for Commander, United Nations Command, Commander, Republic of Korea-United States Combined Forces Command, and Commander, United States Forces Korea," <http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2011/06%20June/Thurman%2006-28-11.pdf> (accessed February 2, 2012).

³⁷ Victor D. Cha and Nicholas, "A North Korean Spring?" The Washington Quarterly, Winter 2012, http://twq.com/12winter/docs/12winter_Cha_Anderson.pdf, (accessed February 10, 2012).

³⁸ Max Fisher, "Gulag of the Mind: Why North Koreans Cry for Kim Jong-il," The Atlantic, December 22, 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/12/gulag-of-the-mind-why-north-koreans-cry-for-kim-jong-il/250419>, (accessed December 23, 2011).

³⁹ Victor A Cha and Nicholas D. Anderson, "A North Korean Spring?" The Washington Quarterly, Winter 2012, http://twq.com/12winter/docs/12winter_Cha_Anderson.pdf, (accessed February 10, 2012).

⁴⁰ Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2011 , http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2011_cmpr_final.pdf, p.27

⁴¹ Dick K. Nanto and Mark E. Manyin, "China-North Korea Relations," Congressional Research Service, December 28, 2010, www.crs.gov, p 6

⁴² Ibid, p.7.

⁴³ Balbina Y. Hwang, "America's 'North Korea Poble' and US-Japan Relations," in Yuki Tatsumi, ed. North Korea: Challenges for the US-Japan Alliance, Wahington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2010.

⁴⁴ Dr. Alexander Vorontsov, "Current Russia-North Korea Relations: Challenges and Achievements," The Brookings Institute February 2007, <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/cnaps/papers/vorontsov2007.pdf>, (accessed December 2, 2011).

⁴⁵ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Russia's Interests and Objectives in East Asia," *Northeast Asia and the Two Koreas: Metastability, Security, and Community*, edited by Hyung-Kook Kim, Myongsob Kim, and Amitav Acharya. Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2008, pp. 199-224.

⁴⁶ Tara O, "US-ROK Strategic Alliance 2015," Center for U.S.-Korea Policy, The Asia Foundation, Vol 2, No 8, September 2010, www.centerforkoreapolicy.org, (accessed December 2, 2011).

⁴⁷ The Land Partnership and Yongsan Relocation Plans were both conceived in 2002 and 2003 respectively and designed to reduce the physical footprint of American forces within South Korea. They were being executed independently of the 2008 Strategic Transition Plan. Tour Normalization is the current initiative designed to make tours in Korea resemble those in Europe. Tour Normalization would open up thousands more positions for command sponsored family members.

⁴⁸ COL Victoriano Garcia, US Army, Director, Plans Division, C/J4, United States Forces Korea, telephone and email interview by author, November 20, 2011.

⁴⁹ COL Michael Ferris, US Army (Retired), Eight Army Liaison to First ROK Army and Third ROK Army, telephone interview by author, November 20, 2011.

⁵⁰ Walter L. Sharp, "A Free North Korea," Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 12, 2012, <http://www.csis.org/program/korea-chair>, (accessed February 15, 2012).

⁵¹ LTC David Dutcher, US Air Force, Deputy, C/J4 Transportation Division, USFK, telephone and email interview by author, November 21, 2011. LTC Dutcher routinely attends numerous briefings and discussions with senior USFK and CFC officers regarding SA 2015 and the future plans for the US-ROK alliance.

⁵² Walter L. Sharp, "Statement before the House Armed Services Committee, April 6, 2011, www.usfk.mil, (accessed November 26, 2011) p.2.

⁵³ James D. Thurman, "Remarks to the East Asia Institute Conference, October 21, 2011, <http://rokdrop.com/2011/10/22/usfk-commander-speaks-about-the-future-of-the-us-rok-alliance/> (accessed February 2, 2012).

