

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

TRANSFORMING THE ROK-US ALLIANCE

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ABSTRACT

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Since the 1990s, North Korea's nuclear and missile programs have increased tension on the Korean peninsula. China and Russia established diplomatic and economic relations with South Korea and consequently left North Korea with less financial backing. North Korea's isolation from western nations and its economic disarray accentuated the instability of the peninsula. Although these factors would seem to support a continuation of the ROK-US alliance in its present state, other trends point to fundamental changes within the alliance in the near future. South Korea's policy toward the North has dramatically changed during the course of the last two presidencies. The US is reviewing its military overseas presence, including USFK's force posture. The issue is further complicated by the current ROK social dynamics, politics, and improved military capability. The net impact requires the ROK government to expand its role and transform relationships with the US. This paper reviews the background of the ROK-US alliance, major powers' policies in the region, and examines ongoing US military changes affecting Korea. It analyzes challenges and gaps between the ROK and US. Finally, this project will propose appropriate policy directions available for both nations to transform the ROK-US alliance for the future.

TRANSFORMING THE ROK-US ALLIANCE

Since the early 1990s, the Korean Peninsula has experienced significant developments. North Korea's nuclear and missile programs have caused the Korean peninsula to be one of the world's most unstable regions. After the Cold War, China and Russia established diplomatic and economic relations with the Republic of Korea (ROK), which has left the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) with less financial backing. Furthermore, North Korea's isolation from western nations and its economic disarray, which is reflected in its shortages of food and energy, accentuated the instability of the peninsula.

Although these factors would seem to support a continuation of the ROK-US alliance in its present state, other trends point to major changes within the alliance in the near future. South Korea's policy toward the North has fundamentally changed since the beginning of the Kim Dae-Jung government. The US is reviewing its military overseas presence, including USFK's force posture, which has caused many Koreans to be concerned about the US commitment to the ROK. The issue is further complicated by the current ROK social dynamics, politics and improved military capability. The net impact requires the ROK government to expand its role and transform relationships with the US. This paper reviews the background of the ROK-US alliance, the policies of Northeast Asia's major powers, and ongoing US military changes affecting South Korea. It analyzes challenges and gaps between the ROK and US and, finally, proposes a South Korean perspective on appropriate alliance transformation policies available for both nations.

Background of the ROK-US Alliance and USFK's Missions and Roles

Following the independence of Korea, the ROK-US military relationship originated on September 7, 1945 with General MacArthur's Proclamation No.1, which established ROK-controlled territory south of the 38th parallel. This modified the original organization of Korea's Defense Structure. Until the foundation of the Korean government on August 15, 1945, the Korean Armed Forces were organized into 5 brigades and 15 regiments.¹ During the US stabilization period, the ROK-US had a one-sided relationship with the US controlling the ROK Armed Forces at first. In 1948, after US combat troops completely pulled back from Korea, the Joint US Military Advisory Group remained in Korea to provide military support.

On June 25, 1950, North Korea's sudden attack caused prompt US reaction. The US perceived North Korea's attack both as a larger scheme to communize the world and as a challenge to the United Nation's (UN) legitimacy.² Additionally, the US considered Korea as an important facet of Japan's security. On July 7, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 84

which established a unified command³. United Nations Command (UNC) was formed in Tokyo with General MacArthur as Commander.

By the early summer of 1953, UN Forces and the North Korean military had been negotiating for an armistice. Before acquiescing to the agreement, President Rhee asked the US government to sign a Mutual Defense Treaty with Korea and provide economic aid to ROK. After the Korean War, the ROK-US Mutual Defense Treaty, which institutionally permitted US forces to be stationed in Korea and provided legal grounds for the combined defense, was officially signed on October 1, 1953.⁴

The Mutual Defense Treaty resulted in US forces stationed in Korea to deter another Korean war. Initially, the US troop strength was approximately 300,000.⁵ By 1955, US Army had reduced its forces to a single corps (US I Corps) consisting two divisions.⁶ In the early 1970s, President Nixon reduced the US Army further by withdrawing one of the two divisions in Korea in accordance with the Nixon Doctrine, which encouraged the ROK to take a larger role in its own defense.⁷ Combined Forces Command (CFC) was formed in 1978, and this ROK-US organization has primary responsibility for prosecuting any future Korean War. By 1979, after President Carter abandoned a plan to withdraw all US ground forces from the ROK, the Army strength leveled off at 38,000. After the end of the Cold War, the US initiated a plan to reduce US Forces in Korea (USFK) by stages, as called for by the 1989 Defense Authorization Bill (the Nunn-Warner Amendment). After the Army withdrew the initial two thousand soldiers in its initial phase, further withdrawals were ceased as North Korean nuclear issues arose in 1994.⁸ By 2003, within the framework of the ROK-US alliance, the ROK Army had accepted primary responsibility for defending its nation while the US Army, in effect, was in a reserve role.⁹ Other US capabilities, especially aerospace and maritime power, would likely comprise the main early US contributions. A US general continued to command CFC to provide leadership and enable warfighting synchronization within the ROK-US alliance. In 2004, 2d Infantry Division's 2d Brigade Combat Team deployed to Iraq and subsequently redeployed to the continental United States (CONUS). Thus, the US currently stations about 32,500 troops in South Korea and plans incrementally to scale back its troop level even further to 25,000 by 2008.¹⁰ This combination of USFK and Korea's Armed Forces has contributed to deterrence and stability on the Peninsula and in Northeast Asia; some are concerned that excessive cutbacks could violate the principle of "if it isn't broken, don't fix it."

USFK's primary mission is, along with the ROK Armed Forces, to deter aggression against the Republic of Korea and, if necessary, fight and win decisively.¹¹ Other responsibilities include: to support the UNC and CFC; to coordinate planning among US

component commands in Korea; to exercise operational control (OPCON) of assigned US forces as directed by Combatant Commander, United States Pacific Command (USPACOM); to coordinate US military assistance to the ROK; to function as US Defense Representative in Korea; and to oversee US governmental administrative coordination as provided for in USPACOM Instruction 5400.20E.¹² The US, with the world's most powerful military, plays a major role in multiple current operations and contingency situations. Practically, USFK complements the ROK military by providing intelligence collection and early warning means.¹³ In addition, the US provides augmented forces and a nuclear umbrella to deter any North Korean intent to invade South Korea. USFK contributes to the ROK economy by reducing Korea's national security budget and helping to foster stability. US Korean-related military expenditures are significant, when one considers equipment, personnel, material, operational costs, and programs such as the ammunition and other material included US War Reserve Stocks for Allies-Korea (WRSA-K). For Korea the resources required to offset the US contribution would be enormous—in the billions of dollars.

Although some might favor a USFK withdrawal, and some in the US are developing more of a regional focus for US military forces in Northeast Asia, USFK should remain on the peninsula. It is a symbol of the ROK-US Security Alliance and it secures the stability in the region while enabling the ROK to maintain its sovereignty. Furthermore, regarding Korea's geographic location, the ROK-US alliance helps to guarantee cooperative relationships with neighboring nations. This preserves stability, which contributes to managing the process of peaceful unification on the Peninsula.

Major Players' Policies in Northeast Asia

The United States

In an effort to cope effectively with diverse and unforeseen future threats, the US has formulated new national security strategies. The US National Security Strategy requires that “we work with South Korea to maintain our vigilance towards the North while preparing our alliance to make contributions to the broader stability of the region over the longer term....”¹⁴ The US national interests in the Asia-Pacific region and Korea are reflected in the National Security Strategy.¹⁵ They may be paraphrased as :

- a stable, peaceful region with free and open societies
- a prosperous region based on free markets and free trade
- a region that poses no military threat to the United States

- a ROK-US alliance that is vigilant toward the North while contributing to the broader stability of the region over the long term

The US has designated the following as its four primary defense objectives to implement such strategies:¹⁶

- secure the United States from direct attacks
- secure strategic access and retain global freedom of action
- strengthen alliances and partnerships
- establish favorable security conditions

To accomplish these objectives, the US is securing the capacity to :

- assure allies and friends
- dissuade potential adversaries
- deter aggression and counter coercion
- defeat adversaries

Of particular note, the US does not rule out the possibility of waging preemptive attacks against countries or terrorist organizations that constitute a threat to its security; this moves beyond its long-established focus on deterrence and defensive posture.¹⁷

On its Northeast Asian axis that includes the ROK-US and US-Japan alliances, the US is seeking the role of a balancer between US alliances and communist countries in Northeast Asia. To ensure economic stability in the Asia-Pacific region and prevent the emergence of any regional hegemonic power that can directly threaten the US and its allies, the US is shifting its strategic focus from Europe to Asia. This shift also reflects US efforts to grapple with new security threats including terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

Accordingly, the US is adjusting the size and role of USFK within the framework of its Global Defense Posture Review (GPR) in line with US global military strategies. Meanwhile, the US is actively trying to deter nuclear development by North Korea. In relation to such efforts, the US is attempting to defuse the North Korean nuclear impasse peacefully by cooperating with regional countries within the six-party talk framework.

Japan

Japan has long had the US-Japan security system as the foundation of its defense policies, and in 1976 formulated its first "National Defense Program Outline."¹⁸ Since its 1995 revision, Japan has been building up its military power in line with its mid-term defense force realignment plan implemented every five years. After September 11, 2001, Japan adopted the

"New National Defense Program Outline" in December 2004, reconstructing the existing initiative into the "Multi-Functional Flexible Defense Capability Initiative."¹⁹

On the basis of its alliance with the US, Japan's 2004 defense expenditure of about \$45.8 billion was the world's third largest, following the US and China.²⁰ Japan is attempting to expand the regional military influence of its Self-Defense Forces by bolstering its defense forces and adhering to its exclusively defensive policies. In particular, Japan is seeking to establish a future-oriented partnership with the ROK and improve its relations with North Korea, while trying to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue via close tripartite cooperation with the ROK and the US. Although Japan is arguably America's most important ally, Korea and other countries which were occupied by Japan worry about Japanese military expansion. These countries would prefer that Japanese officials refrain from visiting Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine, reflect on its past, and acknowledge its wrongdoing in order to usher in an era of cooperation between the nations of the Asia-Pacific region.²¹

China

According to its 2004 defense white paper,²² China is pursuing both peaceful development and a defensive national defense policy. China's national defense guarantees for the survival and development of the nation. China's main defense priorities are modernization of its armed forces, safeguarding national security and unity, and progressively building a prosperous society in all sectors. In order to implement these tasks, China adopted such defense policies as the creation of a professional military, expansion of defense expenditures to build up the military, and objection to Taiwan being included in the US Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system. A core strategy is to prevail in local wars with advanced technology, which translates into the formation of elite ground forces and improvement of the long-range projection capability of its Navy and Air Force. In particular, abiding by the principle of "One China,"²³ the paper describes cross-strait relations as grim and says the Chinese army has a sacred responsibility to crush Taiwan if it declares independence. The paper also blasts US policy toward Taiwan, especially its weapons sales to Taipei.

Recognizing security in Northeast Asia as a prerequisite to accomplishing its national goal of modernizing the country through economic development, China espouses the policy of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula to maintain peace and stability. At the same time, by taking advantage of its geographic location as a neighboring country having diplomatic ties with both Koreas, China is engaged in a pragmatic diplomacy of balance. Accordingly, China is taking a position to promote inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation and oppose nuclear

possession by either of the two Koreas. China is also concerned that a North Korean collapse or implosion would jeopardize the desired regional stability, with severe effects upon China, and consequently pursues policies that may be perceived as supportive of the North Korean regime.

Russia

In its "New Military Doctrine" unveiled on April 21, 2000,²⁴ Russia designated "advance prevention as well as reduction and neutralization of military threats against the Russian Federation" as the basic goals of its defense policies. In addition, the "New Military Doctrine" clearly states possible preemptive use of nuclear weapons in a situation where not only Russia, but other members of the "Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)"²⁵ are put in a position of jeopardy. The doctrine espouses "Offensive Defense Strategies" regarding local disputes that threaten the solidarity and maintenance of the Russian Federation, such as the Chechen war.

Russia is actively participating in the process of resolving the North Korean nuclear issue in an effort to expand its role in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly Northeast Asia. Russia wants to restore its influence on the Korean peninsula, which had waned in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990.

South Korea

While major powers surrounding the Korean peninsula pursue their own national interests, the ROK's Participatory Government (as developed by the Roh Moo-Hyun Administration) defined Korean constitutionally-based national interests as:²⁶

- ensuring national security
- promotion of liberal democracy and human rights
- economic development and promotion of public welfare
- peaceful unification of the Korean peninsula
- contribution to world peace and shared prosperity for mankind

In order to attain its national interests and security goals, the ROK military established three national defense objectives:²⁷

- to defend the nation from external military threats and invasion
- to uphold peaceful unification
- to contribute to regional stability and world peace

In order to attain the national security objectives in the face of a rapidly changing and ambiguous security environment, the ROK military is poised to respond immediately to any military threat and aggression and maintains a firm defense posture at all times. In particular,

the ROK government has adapted a "Cooperative Self-reliant Defense Policy" which includes the development of capabilities that enable the ROK to take the initiative in deterring war provocations by the North. Simultaneously, the policy promotes the ROK-US alliance from a future-oriented perspective and proactively takes advantage of multilateral security cooperation.²⁸ The ROK military's transformation programs (including the ROK Defense Reform 2020,²⁹ Defense Improvement Plan (DIP), and the new Mid-Term Defense Plan for 2006–2010³⁰) emphasize state-of-the-art technology to enhance its capabilities

Recently, Korean societal evolution has produced two distinct generational cultures. The older Koreans who had experienced a brutal Japanese occupation and the horrific Korean War have very positive memories of America's help in rebuilding Korea. However, over two-thirds of the population have no personal recollection of the Korean War and limited memories of poverty and destruction. They are very nationalistic and increasingly intolerant of what they view as American domination and occupation of the ROK. This group believes that cooperation with North Korea is more important than that with the US or any other country.³¹

South Korea's anti-American sentiment is a growing phenomenon. Although it had existed in the Cold War years, this deep sentiment became very pronounced with subsequent revelations about US failure to intervene in the 1980 Kwangju massacre and incidents of deliberate killing of civilians during the Korean War. A dramatic upsurge in anti-American violence began in summer 2002 as a result of public outrage over a traffic accident in which two South Korean school girls were killed by a US military vehicle. More recently, in September 2005, a simmering dispute over the statue of General MacArthur in Incheon exploded in violent confrontation between conservative and progressive people. This demonstration to remove MacArthur's statue is just one contemporary part of the larger anti-American movement. Some members of the anti-MacArthur group would believe that "if it were not for him, our country would not have been divided as it was."³²

North Korea

The North Korean government is tightening its military grip over the country with a "Military First Policy (*seung-gun*)" which elevates the military's organization and function to North Korea's highest priority.³³ With the recent deterioration of relations with the United States, this policy allows North Korea to deal internationally from a position of strength and, from its perspective, maintain an effective deterrent posture against possible US aggression. Additionally, the North Korean government is trying to keep the country under tight control by maintaining a state of

continued tension within the country by such means as staging nationwide anti-American rallies. Moreover, the *seung-gun* policy rationalizes North Korea's deprivations to its citizens.

On December 12, 2002, North Korea announced it would restart its nuclear program; ever since, it has resorted to such "Brinkmanship Tactics" as announcing the withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty on January 10, 2003.³⁴ At the same time, North Korea has also been focusing on negotiations with the US, demanding a non-aggression pact as a means to ensure regime survival.³⁵ While North Korea's participation in the 6-Party Talks offers hope for a peaceful closure of the nuclear issue, the differences between North Korea and the US still cloud the prospects for resolution.

Despite a slight improvement in economic conditions since 1999, North Korea is still plagued by persisting food and energy shortages. Due to the structural vulnerability of the socialist economic system, limitations in technology and capital, limited measures to open the economy, and the *seung-gun* policy, the country is unable to achieve economic rehabilitation. Since the announcement of the "economic management improvement measures" in July 2002,³⁶ North Korea has attempted various economic reforms including the Gaeseong Industrial Complex project.

As regards to inter-Korean relations, North Korea is continuing its rapprochement strategy with South Korea; it is calling for the implementation of "the June 15 Joint Declaration,"³⁷ conducting government talks and civilian exchanges, and sustaining pragmatic North-South cooperative projects such as linking inter-Korean railways and roads.³⁸ To cement implementation of "the Jun 15 Joint Declaration," the North-South meeting of Defense Ministers was held on Cheju Island in late September 2000. In 2004, military talks resulted in a military Hot-Line for direct communication between Pyongyang and Seoul.³⁹ However, North Korea continues to develop weapons of mass destruction and improve its conventional military force; it apparently has not renounced its strategy to communize the South, as evidenced by its lukewarm response to the ROK's offers to discuss military confidence building measures.

Ongoing US Military Transformation in South Korea

During the Future of the Alliance (FOTA) talks through 2005, the ROK and US agreed to further develop the ROK-US alliance into a more dynamic and comprehensive one and expand the ROK Armed Forces' role in defending the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁰

Progressive Adjustment of USFK Base Structure and Force Reductions

The first talks on relocation of the USFK Yongsan Garrison started in June 1990. However, the project had been virtually put on hold since June 1993, because of its excessive

relocation expenses. The two countries eventually worked out the issue, and finally agreed to the principle of early relocation at the ROK-US Summit Talks held in May 2003.⁴¹ The ROK government started the relocation project to the Pyeongtaek area in full scale, including UNC and CFC. Yongsan's relocation will be concluded by the end of 2008, and the relocation of other USFK bases located north of the Han River will be carried out in two phases. First, USFK bases north of the Han River will consolidate into the Dongducheon area by 2006. Second, USFK bases will ultimately integrate into the Pyeongtaek area south of the river. The timing of such relocation will be judiciously determined, in consideration of the political, economic, and security situation on the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia.⁴² After the June 2004 US announcement of USFK force reductions,⁴³ approximately four months' negotiations led the two sides to a final agreement that USFK would be scaled down by 12,500 troops in three stages by 2008.⁴⁴ In terms of the reduction in military assets, the two sides agreed that major combat equipment, counter-fire assets including MLRS and counter-battery radars would be excluded from the original withdrawal plan and would remain in the ROK to ensure flexibility.

Transfer of Military Missions and Development of Combined Military Capabilities

Keeping pace with the development of combined military capabilities, the two countries agreed that the US would gradually hand over ten missions, including guarding the Joint Security Area (JSA), and counter-fire operations headquarters to the ROK military.⁴⁵ These transfers, to be completed by 2006, reflected the ROK's expanded military capabilities symbolized the ROK military's leading role in defending the nation. The phased transfer accommodated the ROK Armed Forces evolving capabilities and also allayed public uneasiness about the possible weakening of the US commitment to Korea's security. One major remaining issue is the ROK-US combined command and control structure. During the 37th Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) held in October, 2005, Korea and the US agreed to appropriately accelerate discussion on CFC's wartime operational control, which currently rests with the US Army four star-general who is multi-hatted as the Commander of CFC, USFK, and UNC.⁴⁶ Many believe that since the ROK provides the preponderance of CFC's forces, a Korean should be in command of any combined force.

Both the ROK and US are improving their military capabilities on the peninsula. The US is investing \$11 billion in 150 areas to upgrade Korea-related capabilities; this includes force modernization, enhanced intelligence capabilities, increased stockpiling of precision munitions, and improved deployment capabilities.⁴⁷ The ROK Armed Forces, in accordance with their force improvement programs, are reinforcing their own capabilities by enhancing core areas

such as intelligence capabilities, long-range strike, and precision munitions. The modernization efforts of the two countries, along with continued emphasis on ROK-US interoperability, will fortify the robust defense posture on the peninsula.

Analysis: What are the Gaps and Challenges of the ROK-US Alliance

The most significant gaps in and challenges to the ROK-US Alliance are: increasing Pan-Nationalism and anti-American sentiment in South Korea; concern about USFK's role and USFK force reductions; the North Korea threat perception gap and differing policies toward the North; Chinese factors; and differing perspectives on Japan's roles. These gaps and challenges cause increasing friction between the South Korean and the US.

Increasing Pan-Nationalism and Anti-American Sentiment in South Korea

The maturation of South Korea's democracy has resulted in an open struggle between the conservative and progressive parties to define Korea's vision for the future, including the relationship with the US. The polarization of Korean society has highlighted the existing tensions in the relationship. In particular, the young progressive generation believes that North Korea would not attack South Korea and that the aggressive North Korean weapons policy is more a reaction to hard-line US diplomacy. According to a poll conducted by Joongang-Ilbo on April 4, 2005, about 50% of Koreans, including 62% in their twenties, answered that cooperation with North Korea is more important than that with the US to solve the North Korea nuclear issue.⁴⁸ The 1988 Olympic Games, the 2002 World Cup, and the 2002 award of the Nobel Peace Prize to President Kim also supercharged a nationalistic feeling and a belief that Koreans could now solve their own problems without the dominance of the US.⁴⁹

Anti-American sentiment is based on a growing perception that the US has historically mistreated Korea through unilateralism and unequal treatment. South Koreans cite many examples, including unilateral US decisions to withdraw its troops, the accidental death of two middle school girls in 2002, and disputes over gold medals during the 2002 Winter and 2004 Summer Olympics. On January 20, 2004, an article by Cho Se-hyon in the Korea Herald reported that "...39 percent of South Koreans cited the United States as the nation that is threatening the security of the country most." Only 33 percent saw North Korea in the same light. Even worse, "58 percent of those in their 20s said that the United States posed the greatest threat to the country while a mere 20 percent thought North Korea" was.⁵⁰ As mentioned previously, there currently are tensions in the relationship and anti-American sentiment has increased significantly, but most Koreans still view the US as the most important country for its bilateral alliance."⁵¹

Concern about USFK's Roles and Force Reductions

Some South Koreans worry that USFK troop reductions may cause a "security vacuum" and that the USFK may be losing its focus on deterring North Korea. As the FOTA talks transitioned to the Security Policy Initiative (SPI) talks in February 2005, South Koreans appeared to be developing a more cautious approach to the talks. Their initial priority appeared to be gaining US assurances that the primary mission of USFK remains focused on deterring aggression of North Korea.⁵² Many Korean officials seemed to avoid detailed discussions about possible regional roles for USFK and suggested that an ambiguous regional role was necessary to de-politicize the issue. During the 1st ROK-US Ministerial Strategic Talks held on January 19, 2006, the ROK and US agreed to the principle of "strategic flexibility" of the USFK⁵³ which implies that USFK forces could be deployed to trouble spots elsewhere. However, the US recognized the ROK's position on strategic flexibility, which is that "The ROK will not be involved in any North East Asian disputes against its public's will..." South Koreans still worry about USFK's involvement in a regional conflict, with a USFK involvement in the Taiwan Strait as the most problematic. Moreover, if any USFK forces deploy to fulfill regional roles, additional US forces should flow into the region to maintain credible deterrence against North Korea. The US also should closely consult with the ROK prior to deployment of USFK assets from the Peninsula, because this may have serious implications for Korea.⁵⁴

One of the most important issues related to USFK reductions and strategic flexibility is operational control in wartime. Wartime command was originally transferred to the US-led UNC in 1950. Established on November 7, 1978, the CFC has operational control over all services of both countries, and is commanded by a four-star US general.⁵⁵ If wartime control is transferred to the ROK, South Korea can expect some benefits including: a more self-assertive military doctrine and command structure which retains independence in military operations; a strengthened will for a self-reliant defense by reducing dependency on the US; and a lowering of criticism regarding the loss of sovereignty, which would in turn reduce anti-American sentiment. In contrast, the ROK might accept some risks which include: a likelihood of more US troop withdrawals and a weakening US defense commitment; an extensive increase in ROK defense budgets; difficulties in managing contingencies regarding the North; and an increased likelihood of Pyongyang's misjudgment.⁵⁶ On other hand, because the US is able to deploy its military power rapidly and has the capability to destroy targets from long distances, it thinks stationing its forces in overseas bases and retaining operational control over all coalition forces are less important than before. Its recent coalition experiences have required that the US be flexible in accommodating the command relationship preferences of its coalition partners, and

the US is familiar with the Korean situation. In addition, with efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue now showing signs of making headway, the establishment of a peace mechanism on the Korean peninsula in the near future is all the more likely. This would inevitably involve troop reductions, and Korea's subsequent assumption of a leadership role would require that it possess wartime operational command over ROK forces at a minimum.⁵⁷ Of course, the adequate ROK military capability would be a key prerequisite for retaining wartime command of its forces.

The North Korea Threat Perception Gap and Differing Policies toward the North

The young Korean generation regards the North Korean conventional military threat as diminishing, and downplays the significance of the North Korean asymmetric warfare threat, including that from Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).⁵⁸ Seoul regards Pyongyang as a "partner," not as "evil," and views inter-Korean reconciliation and peaceful reunification, not regime change in Pyongyang, as the only viable long-term solution to the North Korean security threat and nuclear crisis. Moreover, the ROK public is increasingly worried about the possibility of the US unilateral use of force against North Korea. Nevertheless, most South Koreans still view North Korea as a major potential threat and one of the ROK's national defense objectives is to defend the nation from direct military threat from North Korea. On the other hand, the US has referred to the North as part of an "Axis of Evil" or a "Dangerous Regime" and regards its nuclear program with alarm.⁵⁹ The most glaring example of the widening perception gap is President Roh's keynote speech on North Korea's nuclear program in Los Angeles on 12 November, 2004.⁶⁰ He urged the United States to take "new measures" to guarantee the security of North Korea so the nuclear standoff can end. He added it was "understandable" for North Korea to seek a nuclear deterrent as a "self-defense" measure to cope with external threats. South Korea thinks the North Korean issue is a matter of national survival for Korea, whereas it is a non-proliferation or human rights issue for the US. In addition to WMD, the perception gap regarding other possible North Korean threats—such as counterfeiting, drug trafficking, espionage, and terrorism support—has patently widened.

The China Factor

China remains an important factor in South Korea's strategic calculations. Recent wide differences between the United States and South Korea have prompted South Korea to move away from past dependent relations with the United States and adopt a more assertive, independent, and broader foreign policy, including its ties with China. The Roh administration still remains committed to the US-ROK alliance but also wants friendly relations with China.

China's rise in Asia and its particular importance to South Korea have significantly affected ROK's foreign policy orientation.⁶¹ For most South Koreans, the positives in recent Sino–South Korean relations clearly outweigh the negatives. Closer ties with China provide an alternative to the past dependent South Korean relationship with the US. However, developments such as various economic disputes and China's recent claims to the history of Koguryo—an ancient Korean Kingdom that extended into northeast China—have caused many in South Korea to rethink the future role of China in the Korean peninsula.⁶² Despite these potential friction points, South Korea should maintain its robust bilateral alliance with the US, but should also foster closer ties with China, to further ROK national interests.

The US-PRC relationship at present is relatively stable and satisfactory, but many intractable bilateral issues remain. The most serious of these is Taiwan, which South Korea prefers to avoid, but which may jeopardize Sino-US relations. China objects to US arms sales to Taiwan, arguing that these sales embolden Taiwan separatism and make war more likely.⁶³ Strategic competition continues to underlie relations between the two powers, even in areas of apparent common interest such as counter-terrorism and the North Korean nuclear weapons crisis. Recently, some economic issues are producing bilateral tensions, particularly on the American side, which complains about rule infractions, lack of protection of intellectual property rights, the under-valuation of the Chinese currency, and China's massive trade surplus with the United States.⁶⁴

US-Japan-Korea Relations

South Korea is concerned about US efforts to expand the US-Japan security alliance. While the US views a stronger Japan as a contributor to deterrence, the ROK and other Asian nations consider Japan's military buildup as a potential threat. Koreans believe the pace of change in Japan's security posture is too fast, and they fear its status as America's most important ally in the region will result in an inevitable downgrading of Korea's own status and wonder whether this is happening to counter China. South Korea is concerned about rising tensions between Japan and China. South Korea would prefer to accept a US command structure that controls USFK from a headquarters located in Hawaii instead of in Japan. Although cultural exchanges between Korea and Japan have advanced significantly over the last several years, South Korea appears to be wary of Japanese attempts to strengthen bilateral security relations with the US. South Korea will continue to resist US initiatives to expand US-Japan-ROK security cooperation. This is in part because of its historical legacy with Japan, but

also to avoid antagonizing China or North Korea, which could result in undesired isolation of Pyongyang.

On the other hand, while the US thinks the ROK is a very important ally, Japan is also one of the most vital in the Pacific. Admiral Fargo has said that, "Without these [ROK and Japanese] forces, it would be very difficult to meet our commitments both to Japan and to the rest of the region."⁶⁵ Both the nations of East Asia and the Japanese public have strong memories of Japanese aggression in the early 20th century; in order to promote peace and stability in Northeast Asia, the US needs to ask Japan to convince its neighbors that it does not intend to threaten other nations.

Recommendations : Appropriate Policies for Both Countries

The ROK-US must use all elements of national power to achieve their mutual interests regarding the alliance and regional stability. ROK Armed Forces modernization coupled with USFK's transformation enable a major force structure re-design that would strengthen the alliance and provide a great opportunity for further troop reductions in the aggregate. This would improve the overall US military capability, enhance the alliance, and reduce the social friction by reducing US military footprint. The ROK and US government and opinion leaders need to reenergize the ROK-US alliance by drawing a new blueprint that is more suitable and robust for the future.

Active Participation in Security Initiatives

The transformation of USFK can provide momentum to strengthen the alliance. South Korea can more actively participate in US security initiatives in the region, including missile defense, the Proliferation Security Initiative, and response to the North Korean nuclear issue. Also, both countries can attempt to expand the alliance beyond a military alliance. To do this, South Korea should have a more active role for its defense and should actively provide both strategic and logistical support for the USFK when it deploys to non-Northeast Asian areas of conflict. While the ROK may acknowledge an expanded USFK role and various US initiatives, it would nevertheless retain its sovereign perspective and act in accordance with a careful calculation of its own national interests. The South Korean government should always clarify when and how South Korea might provide support for extra-peninsular USFK activities. Within Northeast Asia, South Korea would act to promote its interests, while considering its close relationship with the US as well as other factors.

In addition to strengthening bilateral relations with the US, South Korea may seek to forge a closer trilateral alliance with the US and Japan. South Korea should show active support for

the US's role in the region and promote joint projects for the three countries. Since it is not easy for South Korea to initiate cooperation with Japan, the US must also consider using its influence to broker Korea-Japan reconciliation. In the long term, this would help greater regional cooperation and friendships by removing friction between the two nations.

Transforming Combined Military Capabilities

USFK's force posture should reflect a new strategy that takes advantage of modernization within both the ROK and US militaries. To complement regional dynamics and provide for maximum global force flexibility, the US should maintain and even expand aerospace and maritime capabilities in the region. USFK ground forces should consist of a division-level headquarters and the complement of combat service support units that would support deployment during a contingency. Appropriate ground combat forces might consist of a permanent STRYKER Brigade on the Peninsula and other units that would cycle in for training rotations. This would reassure US allies and adversaries regarding continued US commitment to deterrence while enhancing USFK's strategic flexibility.

Since USFK realignment includes force reduction and base repositioning, it accelerates the ROK Government's policy of "Cooperative Self-reliant Defense." Indeed, reports of USFK's restructuring plan alleviated harsh criticisms of the current administration's "Self-reliant Defense Policy." If the ROK Ministry of National Defense (MND) maintains modernization momentum, it can enhance its military capabilities qualitatively without public opposition. The ROK military's transformation includes force structure changes, acquisition of new weapons systems, and enhanced interoperability with the US. These features of the "Cooperative Self-reliant Defense Program" will provide enough military power to deter North Korea and other threats.

Given the current security situation, combined command structure, and ROK military capability, it is understandable for the CFC commander, a US Army 4-star general, to exercise operational control. However, if the ROK builds sufficient military capability, it should retain wartime operational control of its forces. One approach would be to appoint a ROK commander of all CFC forces (or rotate the position between the two countries). In this case, in-place USFK assets would likely be slashed drastically and US wartime reinforcements might also be reduced. A second approach is to transform the present combined structure into a parallel arrangement, whereby Korea and the US would generally control their respective armed forces. The latter approach would be the end of Combined Forces Command in its current form, although some type of coordination or control agency would likely remain. Either case would mean a significant change in USFK.⁶⁶ Regardless of the approach adopted, the ROK should

regain the Combined Delegated Authority (CODA)⁶⁷ currently exercised by CFC commander as an interim major step leading to the eventual transfer of wartime control, and examine an option in which a ROK General exercises a temporary operational control during joint exercises. Furthermore, the ROK should increase its defense budget to facilitate its force improvement programs. Simultaneously, the US needs to examine the security situation around Korean peninsula and support development of ROK's military capabilities for self-defense and deterrence from external aggression. The two countries should closely coordinate and resolve the issue without harming the ROK-US relationship and without degrading combined their military capability.

An agreed approach should be implemented gradually and transparently, while mitigating any North Korean miscalculation. Considering the fact that one of the main obstacles to rapprochement with North Korea has been USFK's presence, South Korea can utilize USFK's downsizing, CFC's reorganization, and the ROK's manpower reductions as bargaining chips for arms control negotiations with North Korea.

Narrowing the Gap about North Korea Threat Perception

Perhaps the most important issue is the need to regain convergence in ROK and US perceptions of the North Korean threat. Koreans are divided about the greatest threat; historically the dominant concern was potential North Korean aggression, contemporary polls reflect greater concern about US unilateral military action against North Korea that escalates into a large conflict. Americans have also traditionally focused on North Korea's intentions and capabilities for renewed aggression against the ROK, but recently have emphasized North Korea's WMD and missiles and, increasingly, the possibility that North Korea would proliferate WMD to terrorist groups. Many Americans and "conservative" Koreans criticized the ROK government for failing to term North Korea as the "Main Enemy" in the Ministry of National Defense's (MND's) "2000 Defense White Paper," although Pyongyang was described as "the Most Important Threat." The ROK "2004 Defense White Paper" stated that one of the National Defense Objectives is to defend the nation from direct military threats from North Korea,⁶⁸ which appears to indicate a South Korean desire to narrow the threat perception gap with the US. The US government should try to understand ROK's dilemma of maintaining its vital alliance with the US on the one hand, while simultaneously engaging its North Korean brethren to enable eventual peaceful unification. With this understanding, the US can avoid actions or statements that increase peninsular tensions which the ROK seeks to avoid. It is in both countries' interests to narrow the North Korea policy gap publicly as quickly as possible. This will give more room

for diplomacy to resolve the regional crisis and should improve America's image in South Korea. It is also important for both sides to do more to correct the perception that US hard-line policy toward the North may be an obstacle to North-South reconciliation.

Overcome Anti-American sentiment in Korea

South Koreans are not actually "anti-American;" what they oppose is perceived US heavy-handedness and unfairness. Anti-American sentiment in Korean society today should be understood in the context of broader social and political changes in South Korea. Korea's anti-American sentiment is not based on a left-wing ideology rejecting capitalism or globalization. It is rooted in the dynamic social and political change of South Korea, which has been experimenting with alternative ideas and values. South Koreans truly desire respect and more equal status from the US. This is likely to happen over time as Korea continues to mature and both sides work to improve their communications. Leaders in the United States would do well to undertake a more careful examination of Korean society today. The two sides also have to carefully monitor the implementation of Yongsan relocation and combined military capability to ensure that it occurs smoothly and according to plan. In addition, the joint study to determine the rationale and the vision for the future of the ROK-US alliance needs to occur through close consultation and the results should be announced at the Presidential level to demonstrate clearly the two countries' commitment to the future of the alliance. The US must also be patient and mindful of Korean perceptions of Japan and its security calculations concerning China. The United States needs to make greater efforts to curtail souring Korean attitudes toward the US and gain support in the media, NGOs, university campuses, and other public and private organization to be vigorous in expanding the relationship. All this will require recognition of current tensions and the political will to improve communications and promote closer consultations at all levels. It is encouraging to know that many South Koreans recognize the importance of the alliance and welcome greater interaction to promote mutual understanding and trust between the two allies. An alliance is a mutual relationship, not a uni-directional one.

Conclusion

The US has supported stability in the region successfully in the past, by establishing bilateral alliances with ROK and Japan and developing close working relationships with both China and Russia. The USFK transformation is currently taking place, which involves the modernization of US forces on the peninsula and modifications to the alliance itself.⁶⁹ The US needs convince major countries in Northeast Asia, including North Korea, that USFK reductions and its adoption of a strategically-flexible role does not diminish US commitment in the region.

Korea needs to be more vigilant regarding its peninsula defense responsibility. The ROK's "Cooperative Self-reliant Defense Capability" should explore new areas for ROK and US combined military operations in accordance with their mutual interests. At the same time, both countries should also seek to improve their relationships with North Korea to reduce regional tension and solve the nuclear issue peacefully. Even though the Bush Administration continues to refer to North Korea as a "dangerous regime" and views it through a prism of anti-terrorism and counter-proliferation,⁷⁰ it is South Koreans who are most vulnerable to threats from North Korea. US statements and actions can cloud prospects for success in the six-party nuclear talks; consequently, South Koreans must take the initiative to improve its relations with North Korea. Peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula is vital to South Koreans while critical to Americans.

Over the past five decades, the ROK-US alliance has contributed to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, as well as the Northeast Asia region, and it will do so into the future. The next fifty years may bring tremendous opportunities for the region in terms of economic and democratic growth. The US can begin to shape this future environment by engaging and nurturing multinational efforts to eliminate some of the other obstacles that undermine stability. It is imperative that the United States enhances its robust military alliance with the ROK to ensure a stable region with continued economic growth and political cooperation. With the emergence of new security challenges, a transformed alliance characterized by more cooperation, consultation and flexibility is necessary and desirable. No one can meet these challenges alone.

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