

PROMOTING JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA'S ROLE IN EAST ASIAN SECURITY

BY

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PROMOTING JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA'S ROLE IN EAST ASIAN SECURITY

by

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ABSTRACT

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The extended deployment of our nation's military to Iraq and Afghanistan has stripped away forces once dedicated to the Asia-Pacific Theater, a volatile region of significant political and economic importance. This has created a void in regional security that countries like China and India may try to fill, and others such as Japan and South Korea may be forced to fill. It is possible that a reduction in U.S. forces, coupled with a lack of political focus in the region will lead to less desirable outcomes which may run counter to U.S. goals and objectives for the region. The rise of China, economically, militarily, and politically has caused some concern particularly amongst other countries in the region. North Korea continues to defy international convention and threaten our allies. In order to meet these challenges, the U.S. must expect Japan and South Korea to take on an increasing role for security in the region. Although an historical animosity between both countries will make a cooperative relationship difficult, it is in the interests of both Japan and South Korea to ensure a secure and stable environment that allows for peaceful co-existence and continued development.

PROMOTING JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA'S ROLE IN EAST ASIAN SECURITY

The Asia-Pacific Theater and particularly East Asia is an area of substantial political and economic importance. East Asia, comprised of the People's Republic of China, Mongolia, Taiwan, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) contains both dynamic growth and latent instability. Japan has the second largest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the world and China has the third largest¹ and continues to rise. As a declared nuclear power, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and a rising global influence, China is beginning to assert itself in regional and world affairs. Its unresolved conflict with Taiwan and territorial claims in the South China Sea remain a source of tension in the region. As an undeclared nuclear power with a history of erratic behavior and contempt for international convention, North Korea remains a source of regional instability and international concern.

In the last century, the U.S. has fought three major wars in the Asia-Pacific region and much of the security apparatus that was created in the wake of those conflicts remains in place today. The U.S. – Japan alliance remains a cornerstone of security and stability in the region as does the U.S. – ROK alliance on the Korean peninsula. Both countries have modern militaries, particularly Japan, which is highly capable of conducting effective security operations in the area. However, historical grievances relating back to Japanese imperialism inhibit the development of a fully cooperative relationship between Japan and South Korea, and raise suspicions and hostility amongst other countries in the region.

As the U.S. continues to focus its diplomatic and military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan and on global terrorism in general, U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific region has diminished. U.S. troop strength in East Asia and the Pacific has dropped from nearly 100,000 personnel in the 1990s² to less than 75,000 in 2009,³ with many of those forces deployed at any given time to other theaters of operation. With this reduction in U.S. security presence, it is imperative for the U.S. to rely more heavily on its allies in the region, specifically Japan and South Korea, to ensure U.S. goals for the region are met and security, stability, and prosperity are maintained in the region. As articulated in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, the emerging security landscape requires a more widely distributed and adaptive U.S. presence in Asia that relies on and better leverages the capabilities of our regional allies and partners.⁴ This paper will focus on U.S. policy and strategy in East Asia and promoting cooperation between Japan and South Korea to more capably assist in providing a secure environment for each country's mutual benefit and the benefit of other countries in the region.

U.S. Policy in East Asia

The current U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) highlights the importance of East Asia to U.S. national interests because of the region's enduring tensions and its growing economic influence. It articulates the need for sustained engagement in the region. It envisions robust partnerships supported by a forward defense posture supporting economic integration through expanded trade and investment and promoting democracy and human rights. It supports new and existing institutions that promote security and stability as well as prosperity.⁵ The National Security Strategy also identifies challenges posed by specific countries in the region. It outlines specific goals

for China stating the need for China to be a “responsible stakeholder.” In that sense, the U.S. encourages Chinese development as well as “reform and openness.” At the same time the U.S. continues to hedge against possible Chinese threats to security.⁶ This risk hedge includes forward presence, advanced weapons technologies, and maintaining security alliances and obligations in the region. The NSS also identifies the threat posed by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and articulates methods to counter that threat – Six Party Talks, and “all necessary measures” to protect our national and economic security.⁷

President Obama’s recent statements made during his visit to China in November 2009 emphasize our current policy towards China. He stated there was no need to change the “one-China” policy.⁸ He further stated the U.S. welcomes China’s rise as a new power and has no interest in trying to contain it.⁹ This policy was further articulated in the 2010 QDR which states that the U.S. welcomes a strong, prosperous, and successful China that plays a greater global role. However, lack of transparency and the nature of China’s military development and decision-making processes raise questions about its intentions in Asia and beyond. The report recommends a relationship with China that is multidimensional; enhancing confidence while reducing mistrust in a manner that reinforces mutual interests.¹⁰

A recent report on Asia-Pacific strategy published by the Pacific Forum Center for Strategic International Studies suggests a security strategy for the Obama Administration that clearly articulates purpose and vision for the U.S. role in the region. It recommends that the U.S. reaffirm and reinvigorates the network of U.S. alliances, maintain strategic equilibrium while integrating rising powers, retard the proliferation of

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), and actively participate in the region's multilateral economic, political, and security structures. The U.S. can achieve this by reasserting U.S. strategic presence, maintaining and strengthening bilateral ties, articulating a realistic and pragmatic China policy that stresses its "responsible stakeholder role," and engaging more intensively in combating terrorism by winning hearts and minds in the region through a more effective combination of hard and soft power and public diplomacy.¹¹

Threats to Regional Security

North Korea. Since the initiation of hostilities in 1950 which started the Korean War, North Korea has remained a threat to regional security in East Asia. Exacerbating the situation is the fact that the Korean War was ended by an armistice and no formal peace treaty has ever been enacted. This has led to continued tensions between the north and south and the assignment of United Nations forces near the demilitarized zone. These tensions often escalate into violent conflict as recently evidenced by a naval engagement between North Korea and South Korea in early November 2009.¹²

North Korea's defiance of international convention on nuclear weapons development as well as its long-range missile tests continues to be major contributors to regional tensions. North Korea has conducted two atomic weapons tests in the last four years and numerous medium and long-range missile tests. International condemnation of their actions has brought United Nations sanctions and even further defiance by the rogue nation. Their refusal to re-engage in Six-Party Talks after condemnation for a long-range missile launch caused North Korea to unilaterally back out of the multilateral talks in April 2009 and has complicated matters further. Initiated in 2003 after North

Korea's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), North Korea initially agreed to give up its nuclear program in exchange for major aid, diplomatic ties with Washington and Tokyo, and a permanent peace pact on the peninsula.¹³ Although, the talks have broken down on a number of occasions, the U.S. and others are currently working to bring the country back to the negotiation table. North Korea's release of two American journalists to former President Bill Clinton in August 2009¹⁴ may have signaled an easing of tensions between the two countries. U.S. Special Envoy on North Korea, Stephen Bosworth, travelled to Pyongyang in December 2009 to persuade North Korea to return to the Six-Party Talks. As in the past, further talks will undoubtedly be necessary to bring North Korea back to negotiations in a multilateral forum.

In the past, North Korea has also been linked to criminal and terrorist activities, to include numerous assassination plots against South Korean officials, abduction of Japanese civilians, counterfeiting of foreign currency (particularly U.S. currency), exporting of WMD technology purportedly to Syria and Iran, as well as arms trafficking. Most recently, an aircraft en route from North Korea carrying 35 tons of weapons including heavy weapons, rockets and explosives was seized by Thai authorities when it stopped in Bangkok for an unscheduled refueling. The destination of the weapons was most probably Africa however there appear to be links to major Serbian and Russian arms dealers. The latest round of United Nations sanctions against North Korea, passed in June 2009, in the wake of its second nuclear weapons test in May, prohibit the country from exporting anything except light weapons.¹⁵

North Korea poses a significant conventional threat to South Korean and U.S. Forces on the Korean peninsula. It maintains the fourth largest standing armed forces in

the world, with approximately 1.19 million active duty personnel and 7.7 million in the reserves.¹⁶ However, its most significant threat comes from its ballistic missile, nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons capability which threatens all of East Asia. North Korea has conducted numerous missile launches over the last four years demonstrating a capability to target U.S. and allied forces and populations in South Korea and Japan.¹⁷ A recent example was the successful launch of a modified Taepo-Dong-2 Missile named Unha-2 in April 2009. The flight path of the missile travelled over Japan and crashed into the ocean 800 miles off of Japan's eastern coast. Although North Korea claimed that it was conducting a satellite launch, the trajectory and payload of the missile open the possibility for weapons delivery.¹⁸ This type of capability highlights the urgency for effective deterrence and weapons counter-measures in the region. It is inherently in the best interest of the U.S., South Korea, and Japan to cooperate in order to mitigate this very real threat from North Korea.

China. China's political and economic power as well as its regional and international influence has increased substantially over the last several decades. With a GDP of over 4.3 trillion U.S. dollars in 2008,¹⁹ many predict that China is on a path to overtake the U.S. as the leading economic power before the middle of the century. China has the largest armed forces in the world with approximately 2.25 million active duty personnel and one of the largest defense budgets at approximately 60 billion U.S. dollars in 2008. China's defense budget has demonstrated a two-decade trend of double digit percentage increases which surpasses its increase in overall economic growth.²⁰ This does not include "off budget" increases not always visible to the public.

This rapid growth is making numerous countries question the motivation for this increase in military spending.

China is pursuing a path of military modernization with emphasis on asymmetric warfare, power projection, and area/access denial technology and strategy. In particular, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues to acquire and develop long-range bombers, cruise missiles, anti-ship ballistic missiles, modern destroyers, and submarines.²¹ With a focus on Taiwan, the PLA has worked to develop capabilities specifically with an eye toward supporting an amphibious invasion of the island. These capabilities include a joint logistics system, improved command and control for multi-service operations, naval capabilities to challenge and delay the U.S. Navy in key areas, and the development of airpower and precision strike capability for localized conflict.²²

China has begun to integrate additional military capabilities into its strategic posture as well. These include ballistic missiles tipped with conventional rather than nuclear weapons, counter-space attack capabilities (as demonstrated by a successful anti-satellite missile test conducted in January 2007), and even non-kinetic means for damaging critical nodes at very long distances.²³ As identified in the U.S. Department of Defense Ballistic Missile Defense Review, China continues to develop new Short-Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBMs), Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs), and Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs). These missiles will be capable of reaching not just important Taiwan military and civilian facilities but also U.S. and allied military installations in the region.²⁴

The above is in keeping with the strategic-level missions and objectives assigned to the PLA which are: Defending national territory and sovereignty; Securing the

nation's maritime rights and interests; Maintaining the unity of the motherland; Ensuring internal stability; and Maintaining a secure and stable external environment, especially on China's periphery.²⁵

Although tensions between China and Taiwan have eased considerably over the past year with expanding trade, financial ties, and the initiation of direct air travel between the two, Taiwan sovereignty remains a highly contentious issue within the PRC. Taiwan independence is a primary security concern of the PRC and the basis for much of its military modernization.²⁶ Separatist movements in Tibet and Xianxiang Provinces contribute to China's determination to re-unite Taiwan with the mainland and maintain one unified country. The Chinese regard any U.S. support for Taiwan as interference in their internal affairs.

China and the U.S. are also at odds on allowable activity in China's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). An EEZ is the area that extends from edge of the territorial sea (12 nautical miles from shore) out to 200 nautical miles. Although this is not considered sovereign territory, as is the territorial sea, a country has exclusive rights to resources in that area. This came about as a result of numerous claims and territorial disputes over resources, pollution, commercial, and military activity in the waters beyond a state's coastline. It was codified in the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982.²⁷ Although the U.S. has not ratified this convention primarily due to objections over provisions for seabed exploration beyond territorial waters and the EEZ, it has complied with all other aspects of the convention. China accuses the U.S. of conducting spying operations in its EEZ. The U.S. argues that while unauthorized fishing or exploitation of seabed resources is prohibited within a state's EEZ, the zone remains

open to all other regular foreign commercial and military traffic including route surveillance making them in effect international waters.²⁸ Although the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea dictates that prior consent is required from a coastal state for any scientific activity within the EEZ, it does not specifically restrict military activity.

China's territorial claims in the South China Sea have placed it at odds with countries in the region and threaten freedom of movement in the global commons. China has included both the Spratly and Paracel Island groups in its 1992 "Law of the People's Republic of China on its Territorial Waters and their Contiguous Areas," which gives the Chinese military the right to repel by force any foreign incursion into the stipulated islands and area.²⁹ The Spratly Islands are currently claimed by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines³⁰ while the Paracel Islands are claimed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam.³¹ If China controls both the Spratly's and the Paracel Islands, according to the provisions in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, it will either have economic rights or outright sovereignty over the vast majority of the South China Sea.³²

In recent years China has sought improved relations with countries in the region through bilateral engagement such as high level political visits to Japan and South Korea and through multilateral forums such as the Association of South East Asian Nations Regional Forum (ARF). Some argue that China's "charm offensive" is allowing it to displace the U.S. as the dominant power in East Asia.³³ Others argue that China's growing presence and interactions with U.S. allies and security partners are not fundamentally transforming the security order in the Asia-Pacific and most maintain concerns over China's long-term intentions.³⁴

Strategic Allies in East Asia - Japan

U.S. - Japan Relations. Modern U.S. and Japanese relations began at the conclusion of World War II with the defeat and occupation of Japan. An alliance between the two countries was formed shortly thereafter and is codified in the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the U.S. and Japan, signed in 1960. Since that time the U.S. – Japan alliance has remained critical to security in the Asia-Pacific region, in general and East Asia in particular. The U.S. maintains bases in Japan and has a substantial forward presence in the country; currently there are approximately 36,000 troops for which Japan provides substantial host-nation support.

In 2006 the U.S. and Japan concluded a Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) which facilitated the realignment of U.S. bases in Japan, promoted greater integration of U.S. forces and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), and opened the way for the U.S. to utilize its bases in Japan for projecting power globally.³⁵ The DPRI was initiated in late 2002 in order to transform the U.S. - Japan Alliance to better meet the challenges of the post-9/11 world and address the increased tensions created by U.S. presence on mainland Japan and Okinawa.³⁶ To ease the burden on Japan, the U.S. agreed to relocate approximately 8,000 troops from Okinawa to Guam. However, the current government of Japan under Prime Minister Hatoyama has since slowed the momentum of security reform initiated under the Koizumi administration. It has yet to begin implementation of the 2006 DPRI's plan to relocate MCAS Futenma to Nago in Okinawa by 2014, which has halted U.S. movement of forces from Okinawa to Guam. Prime Minister Hatoyama does not agree with the narrow interpretation of the DPRI and desires to look at possible alternatives to the current plan.³⁷ However, sticking points on

the relocation of troops and basing has not slowed other areas of mutual security interest. As an example, the U.S. continues to work closely with Japan on ballistic missile defense cooperation to mitigate the medium and long range missile threat posed by North Korea.

Japan's Security Interests. As the second largest economy in the world, Japan has a national interest in maintaining a stable security environment in East Asia in order to maintain its economic growth and prosperity. Both North Korea and China figure prominently as major security issues in Japan's Defense White Paper published in 2009. Specifically, Japan's government sees North Korea's proliferation of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles as a threat to the peace and security of Japan.

Furthermore there is concern over the China's lack of transparency associated with the modernization of its military, its rapid and continuous increase in total defense spending, and how that will influence the regional state of affairs and the security of Japan.³⁸

Japan maintains that its long term security interests are best served through a strong U.S. – Japan alliance and continued engagement and cooperation with countries in the region.

Strengths and Weaknesses. Japan possesses a highly modernized military with considerable capability in each component of their Self-Defense Force (ground, air, and maritime). The SDF are perhaps the most advanced and well-equipped military in East Asia.³⁹ Although their personnel numbers are well below that of China and North Korea, what it lacks in numbers, it makes up for in capability. Japan is focused on building up qualitative capabilities to create a more mobile force capable of power projection. This has included the development of a light weight tank TK-X MBT designed for anti-

guerrilla operations, as well as procurement of attack and CH-47JA transport helicopters. The Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) established a Central Readiness Group (CRG) in 2007 to act as a rapid reaction force which incorporates a Special Operations Group (SOG) established in 2004.⁴⁰

The Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) has procured the F-2 fighter/bomber, the KC-767 tanker for aerial refueling, as well as the E-767 AWACS radar to improve capabilities to counter cruise missiles. Japan is also upgrading its inventory of F-15's and is actively pursuing the procurement of either the F-22 *Raptor* or the F-35 *Joint Strike Fighter* from the U.S. The Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) has procured three *Osumi*-class transport ships, with flat decks for the landing of transport helicopters and an integral rear dock for the operation of hovercraft capable of landing tanks. Two new DDH (Destroyer-Helicopter) *Hyuga* class vessels are currently under construction. They are further seeking a replacement for the P-3C patrol and surveillance aircraft,⁴¹ which may be an export version of the Boeing P-8 *Poseidon* currently under development for the U.S. Navy.

The largest procurement item currently is the Ballistic Missile Defense system. The MSDF has acquired one Standard Missile-3 Block IA system and seeks to fit BMD capabilities to a total of six Aegis-equipped *Kongo* and *Atago* class destroyers. This maritime BMD capability is further enhanced by the deployment of U.S. SM-3 capable ships to Japan. Japan is also involved with the U.S. in the co-development of a next-generation SM-3 interceptor, called the Block IIA.⁴² Additionally, the ASDF has completed the deployment of four Patriot Advanced Capability-3 terminal interceptor batteries at bases surrounding Tokyo. Japan has also initiated a space program and in

2007 introduced a new Basic Law for Space Activities. This law mandated the establishment of a Strategic Headquarters for the Development of Outer Space.⁴³ Undertaken in the wake of China's anti-satellite test in January 2007, this was a clear assessment by Japan of the evolving security environment in the region. All of these defense improvements and planned procurements highlight Japan's resolve to meet evolving security challenges in the region primarily posed by China and North Korea.

Although it constrains itself to a yearly defense budget that does not exceed 1% of its GDP, this is still a considerable amount. Japan's military expenditures for 2007 totaled nearly \$42 billion U.S. dollars, the sixth largest in the world.⁴⁴ Included in its expenditures is host-nation support for U.S. forces in Japan as well as operational support for U.S. military activities that support Japan's defense. Host nation support for U.S. forces is estimated at \$4.4 billion U.S. dollars annually.⁴⁵ Japan has actually increased the budget for its paramilitary Japanese Coast Guard (JCG) and has found budgetary flexibility through the use of deferred payments for the procurement of weapons systems.⁴⁶ Japan's current and planned military acquisitions, growing power projection capabilities, focus on military space activities, and ballistic missile defense allude to an incremental approach to military modernization.⁴⁷ This incrementalism is designed to modernize its military without causing alarm amongst countries in the region that may fear what some may term a re-militarization of Japan.

Japan's biggest weakness is self-imposed. The country's interpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution which states that "*...the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes...*"⁴⁸ prevents it from what we would consider

normal military activity. This entails avoidance of any military activity that could be interpreted as anything other than self-defensive in nature. This restrictive policy primarily exists to appease a domestic constituency that leans toward non-violence as well as appease Japan's neighbors in the region who still harbor substantial resentment toward Japan for aggression, occupation, and atrocities committed during in the first half of the 20th century. China, South Korea, and numerous countries in Southeast Asia are very sensitive to any substantial increase in Japan's military capability. This is an obstacle to Japan's military normalization that has yet to be overcome. It is an issue which Japan is very sensitive to and has resulted in continued dependence on U.S. defense capabilities, off cycle defense spending, and incremental defense modernization. Japan remains keenly aware of the regional fallout that may occur from sudden surges in military capacity and effectively negotiates the balance between ensuring credible self-defense and preventing hostility and alarm. Japan does not wish to initiate a security dilemma in the region that may cause other countries to balance its military power.

Possibilities for an Increased Role in Regional Security. Japan's, as well as most East Asian countries, military spending has not increased at the same pace as its share of global GDP; in other words they are not growing their military spending as fast as they are growing their economy.⁴⁹ This is interpreted by some as a "free ride" by Japan, which has the economic capability but lacks the political will to take on a larger role in its national defense as well as regional security. This has to change in order to keep up with the growing security requirements of the region. It is a point that has been emphasized by U.S. Ambassadors to Japan as well as U.S. Department of Defense

officials on numerous occasions. Japan's interpretation of its constitution also has to change, if Japan is to remain relevant in the future. The Japanese Prime Minister's Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for National Security published a report in June 2008 which urged the revision of the constitutional interpretation on four types of activities: (i) protection of U.S. forces on the high seas; (ii) ballistic missile defense; (iii) use of force by the Self-Defense Forces engaged in peacekeeping and other international operations; and (iv) logistical support for other countries engaged in peacekeeping and other international operations. The panel went on to state that "...the current interpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution is no longer appropriate in light of the drastically changed international situation and Japan's position in international society."⁵⁰

Currently the most effective security apparatus in the region remains the U.S. bilateral alliance system. In order to adequately meet future challenges and threats in the region, there is a need to expand these alliances. The Tokyo Foundation, a Japanese think tank in Tokyo, has advocated developing the current bilateral alliances into a network of alliances among all nations in the region with close security ties. This web-like security system will be able to handle more complex and new kinds of challenges effectively, and, at the same time, contribute to a reduced burden for the U.S., and enhance security among U.S. allies in the region.⁵¹ Initiatives such as the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, signed in March 2007 and expanded maritime training between the US, Australia, and Japan are steps in a positive direction.

Japan's participation in regional security forums, such as the Six Party Talks, ASEAN Regional Forum, and cooperation on piracy and other regional threats will remain essential. Japan's participation in regional multilateral exercises, such as Cobra Gold, can further interoperability and cooperation amongst countries in the region. Further, an expanded power projection capability at sea can assist in keeping Strategic Lines of Communication (SLOCs) open and enable other missions such as escort and refueling operations for the U.S. and its allies which Japan has been conducting in the Indian Ocean in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. It has also allowed for the deployment of Japanese destroyers to the Gulf of Aden in March 2009 in support of anti-piracy operations. However, it should be noted that these types of mission sets are controversial amongst the Japanese populace. This type of force projection and involvement in overseas training and operations runs counter to current interpretations of Japan's constitution and underscores the need for constitutional change in the country.

Strategic Allies in East Asia - Republic of Korea

U.S. - ROK Relations. The U.S. – ROK alliance in essence, began in 1950 with the start of the Korean War. It was codified in 1953 with the signing of the U.S. – ROK Mutual Defense Treaty. Since then the alliance has been critical to maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. As in Japan, the U.S. has a considerable presence in South Korea with numerous bases and approximately 28,500 troops. Although the alliance was strained during the late 1990s – late 2000's under presidents Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo-hyun, who both favored a conciliatory stance toward relations with North Korea, today there appears to be more cooperation between the

U.S. and South Korea specifically in dealing with North Korea. South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, who was elected partly due to his tough stance on North Korea, appears to be in agreement with President Obama's policy on North Korea.⁵² The U.S. is currently engaging North Korea with the consent of the south, in an attempt to re-start Six Party Talks. Although the alliance continues to become stronger, one sticking point in relations is U.S. reticence to sign a Free Trade Agreement with South Korea (agreed upon 2 years ago) due to concerns over trade imbalances.⁵³

South Korea has played an active role in supporting U.S. operations abroad since the U.S. initiated a War on Terror. Beginning in 2004 with the deployment of the Zaytun Division to Iraq, South Korean soldiers participated in civil-military operations until December 2008. Although South Korean Forces were supporting the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan they withdrew following the Taliban's abduction of South Korean missionaries in 2007. The country currently has plans to deploy a military contingent to Afghanistan as early as July 2010.⁵⁴

The importance of the Asia Pacific region as well as the U.S. – ROK alliance was underscored by Secretary of State Clinton in her first official overseas trip in February 2009, of which a visit to South Korea figured prominently. This was followed by President Obama's visit to the country in November 2009 which further accentuated the importance that the U.S. places in the U.S. – ROK alliance and to security on the Korean peninsula now and in the future.

ROK's Security Interests. As a country with the 15th largest GDP in the world, South Korea also has an interest in maintaining a secure and stable environment in East Asia to further their economic growth and development. Living in a state of near

constant tension with North Korea since the beginning of the Korean War, South Korea views the north as the primary threat to its national security. As articulated in its annual Defense White Paper, South Korea also views cross strait tensions between China and Taiwan as a source of instability in the region.

Furthermore, South Korea views continued tensions with Japan as a concern. Highlighting historical enmity between the two countries brought about through years of occupation, enslavement of citizens to include “comfort women,” distortion of history books, visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, as well as territorial disputes over the Takeshima / Dokdo Islands (islands in the East Sea / Sea of Japan claimed by both countries) all are viewed as potential sources of regional instability.⁵⁵

Strengths and Weaknesses. South Korea has been increasing its military spending over the last decade at a slow but steady rate. From 2003-2007 they have averaged an 8% growth rate annually to reach a decade high of 2.8% of GDP.⁵⁶ South Korea’s \$22.3 billion U.S. dollar defense budget for 2009 makes it one of the region’s major powers, with only China and Japan spending a larger amount.⁵⁷ They have recently published their vision for transformation of their armed forces, released in January 2009 and are pursuing an expanded role for their military on the Korean peninsula.

The challenge that the Korean’s face is that their organization and disposition of the army remains essentially unchanged from the end of the Korean War in 1953 this is also reflected in their tactical and operational doctrine. However, it now appears that South Korean forces are finally gaining an unqualified advantage over the north in terms of modern weapons, widespread mechanization, and net centric C3I, thereby allowing

non-linear maneuver options vice attrition warfare. With adequate resources, and a changing threat environment, the Republic of Korea has embarked on a comprehensive effort to build a fully modern armed force, including the introduction of a broad range of sophisticated weapons, with an emphasis on achieving self-reliance in the defense sphere through the active development of a capable domestic defense industrial base. Highlights of this modernization effort include the internal production and acquisition of Main Battle Tanks, a Korean Infantry Fighting Vehicle, a Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS), a Korean manufactured rifle, Korean Attack Helicopters, and Korean Utility Helicopters for the ROK Army.⁵⁸

Within the ROK Air Force, there is a plan to procure next-generation fighters (F-22s or F-35's) from the U.S., purchase additional F-15K strike fighters, as well as conduct upgrades of aircraft to accommodate GPS-aided bombs, Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) and the Joint Stand-Off Weapon (JSOW). They are purchasing Airborne Early Warning and Control versions of the Boeing 737 from the U.S., Green Pine Early Warning Radar systems from Israel, as well as the Patriot Missile System from Germany (South Korea is currently not participating in collective ballistic missile defense proposed by the U.S. in order to maintain self-reliance).⁵⁹

The ROK Navy is working on building a blue water navy capable of responding to distant threats and crises affecting the national security and economic well-being of South Korea. This translates into a balanced fleet with overlapping capabilities, including; ballistic missile defense, precision land attack, anti-air, anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare, amphibious operations, special operations, peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. To facilitate this transformation the ROK Navy is building or

procuring Air Independent Propulsion submarines, Aegis-equipped destroyers, *Ulsan*-class Frigates, *Gumdoksuri*-class high speed patrol craft equipped with guided missiles and radar-evading stealth technology, LPX multipurpose amphibious ships, and P-3B Maritime Patrol Aircraft and MH-60S Black Hawk helicopters from the U.S.⁶⁰

South Korea's weaknesses from a U.S. standpoint include a limited ability for successful dialogue with North Korea outside of multilateral forums (such as the Six Party Talks), a limited ability as well as limited public appeal to get significantly involved in supporting U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, frequently shifting public support for U.S. forces in Korea and U.S. policy in the region, an unwillingness to cooperate on theater ballistic missile defense, and an inability to perceive China as a real threat to regional security. It is interesting to note that although China's backing of North Korea figured prominently in the Korean War and exacerbated tensions between the north and south for most of the post-war period, South Korea seems reticent to identify them as a threat to their national security. This is undoubtedly a pragmatic diplomatic maneuver on the part of South Korea given the proximity of the two nations and the disproportionate national power inherent in the relationship. Another weakness seems to be South Korea's historical animosity towards Japan. The dysfunctional relationship remains a stumbling block towards full security cooperation between the two countries.

Possibilities for an Increased Role in Regional Security. With a draw down in U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula, and restructuring of the Combined Forces Command to allow South Korea command of its own forces in the event of conflict, South Korea is increasing its leadership capacity and responsibilities in the security of the peninsula which in-turn impacts security in the region. These changes are expected

to be complete by 2012. South Korea's participation in regional security forums, similar to Japan, is also critical to taking on a larger security role in the region. Their continued force modernization and participation in bilateral and multilateral exercises with U.S. allies and partners will continue to assist in preparedness and act as a deterrent for irresponsible behavior in the region.

Promoting Japan and ROK Defense Cooperation

Japan and ROK defense cooperation is essential to East Asian security, particularly in light of the increasing security challenges in the area combined with a decreased U.S. presence. Both strategic allies to the U.S., Japan and South Korea are said to be in the state of a virtual alliance via the U.S. but direct security cooperation between the two countries is yet to be developed.⁶¹ Since the signing of the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea in 1965, relations have been cordial and pragmatic but always strained. However in today's environment, the linkages due to common security interests in the region make cooperation between Japan and South Korea essential to meeting future challenges effectively.

What is needed is a new security regime in the East Asian area; one that solidifies bi-lateral cooperation between Japan and South Korea. According to renowned political scientist Robert Jervis, four conditions are necessary for security regime formulation: (1) a desire by each country to establish a regime; (2) that each is convinced that the other shares their underlying values which support mutual security cooperation; (3) the regime cannot form if one of those involved is seeking gains at the other's expense; and (4) that conflict or individual security is more costly than

collaboration.⁶² Although Japan and South Korea appear to meet these conditions, mistrust continues to be a stumbling block.

Empirical evidence supports the case that Japan – South Korea relations are making steady progress towards deeper, heightened, and multilayered cooperation.⁶³ This evidence includes increasing number of high-level diplomatic visits, dramatic increases in tourism and travel between the two countries, economic interdependence, increasing security cooperation due to U.S. leadership and involvement in U.S. bilateral alliances, and membership in multilayered and multifunctional regional and international institutions.⁶⁴ Undoubtedly there are obstacles to be overcome, historical enmity and territorial disputes figuring most prominently. But some believe that Japan and South Korea have “gotten past” some of their past to arrive at a new relationship. A return to previous levels of enmity could only occur through direct conflict between the two, which at the present is a remote possibility.⁶⁵ The evolving challenges to each country’s security make cooperation an imperative for the future.

The North Korean threat to both countries continues to grow with advances in nuclear weapons technologies, missile delivery systems, and regime belligerence. Although China may not pose an immediate threat, the future is more unpredictable. Some foreign policy experts predict that after a period of rapid expansion and foreign policy accommodation, China will shift into a new stage of growth that focuses more on foreign policy confrontation. This shift has the potential to threaten regional and global stability which will require a coordinated multilateral effort that responsibly balances China’s growing power.⁶⁶ Japan and Korea working in conjunction with the U.S. are in the best position to affect that balance.

In order to promote further cooperation between these two countries, high level U.S.-Japan-ROK talks need to be reinvigorated.⁶⁷ There is evidence that this is indeed taking place. Following the last Defense Trilateral Talks in November 2008, Defense Minister Hamada held the first trilateral defense ministers meeting with U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates and ROK Minister of National Defense Lee Sang Hee, in which views were expressed on North Korea's nuclear test and the significance of close trilateral cooperation.⁶⁸ Military exercises involving the U.S., Japan, and South Korea need to be expanded to enhance cooperation and facilitate interoperability. Diplomatic efforts need to be taken by the U.S. to settle territorial disputes over the Takeshima / Dokdo islands and to settle historical grievances (comfort women, historical interpretations, etc...) between Japan and South Korea in the interest of furthering cooperation. Current Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) need to be reinforced and new ones initiated in order to increase transparency and build trust. Low-level CBM's such as military visits, personnel exchanges, and talks need to mature to joint doctrine development, annual combined exercises, and mil-to-mil cooperation in real world contingencies and operations.⁶⁹ The U.S. should encourage participation in multilateral forums involving both countries. However, the U.S. should seek inclusion in multilateral forums that may be counterproductive to U.S. interest such as the Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit Meeting, which recently met in Beijing in October 2009. The key element is to continue to expand contact and cooperation. Only through continued dialogue, exposure, interdependence, and planned activity between Japan and South Korea, fostered through the U.S., can real progress be made in security cooperation in East Asia.

Conclusion

East Asia continues to be a region of prosperity balanced with potential conflict. It will undoubtedly continue to grow in importance as well as volatility unless there exists sufficient security mechanisms to meet future challenges. It is in the interest of the U.S. to promote a larger role for its principal security partners in the region to meet those challenges. That means advocating and pursuing an expanded security relationship between Japan and South Korea – the U.S.’ two strongest allies in the region. This will take an active effort by the U.S. on multiple fronts, using all elements of national power (diplomatic, information, military, economic). It will take a change in mindset in Japan and South Korea who have grown accustomed to the U.S. lead in regional affairs. We need to convince these two countries that a more equitable security role is in their national interest and will eventually lead to a more stable environment. The challenges of the 21st century cannot be met while suspicion and enmity are harbored over events that took place over a half-century ago. It is time to move forward in order to effectively secure the future.

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