The *Cheonan's* Long Shadow:
The Second US-ROK Strategic Dialogue

Issues and Insights
Vol. 10-No. 22

Honolulu, HI
August 2010

Pacific Forum CSIS

Based in Honolulu, the Pacific Forum CSIS (www.pacforum.org) operates as the autonomous Asia-Pacific arm of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC. The Forum's programs encompass current and emerging political, security, economic, business, and oceans policy issues through analysis and dialogue undertaken with the region's leaders in the academic, government, and corporate areas. Founded in 1975, it collaborates with a broad network of research institutes from around the Pacific Rim, drawing on Asian perspectives and disseminating project findings and recommendations to opinion leaders, governments, and members of the public throughout the region.

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Key Findings/Recommendations

The Pacific Forum CSIS brought together a small, select group of South Korean and US security specialists for the second time to discuss threat perceptions and concerns about the changing strategic environment in East Asia and the nature of extended deterrence. The following are the key findings from this off-the-record dialogue:

– Despite growing rhetoric about a "global outlook," South Korean threat perceptions remain focused on Northeast Asia, and North Korea in particular. ROK security analysts believe the North Korean threat has grown in recent years; they intimate that the US does not appreciate the severity of this "asymmetric" threat and, in particular, concerns about "nuclear blackmail" or increased North Korean adventurism (a la *Cheonan*), given Pyongyang's perception about its nuclear deterrent.

– Pyongyang is seen as unstable in the short term, but resilient. The ROK has doubts about the capacity of the US and South Korea to manage uncertainty in the North, and great concern about possible Sino-US contingency planning for the North that does not include Seoul.

– There is a divergence in how the US and South Korea characterize the North Korean nuclear threat: Washington sees North Korea primarily as a proliferation problem; Seoul views its conventional, nuclear, and special forces capability as a direct threat to its physical security. While coordination with Seoul has reduced initial fears that the Obama administration might be more conciliatory toward the North – and the general assessment is that bilateral ties have improved since Obama took office – there are periodic complaints that the US is content to "manage" North Korea's nuclear capability rather than roll it back.

– There is little hope that the Six-Party Talks will bring about denuclearization of North Korea. Nonetheless, there is consensus on the need for the talks: they are the only venue in which Pyongyang has agreed (previously) to give up its nuclear weapons; they serve as a vehicle to coordinate policy among the US, South Korea, and Japan; and they keep pressure on China and Russia and facilitate building international consensus regarding the DPRK.

– Korea (unlike Japan) does not view China as a nuclear or strategic military threat. However, there is growing frustration with Chinese policy on a range of issues, most pointedly regarding North Korea. Koreans see China as more conciliatory toward Pyongyang and more inclined to accept a nuclear North Korea and a divided peninsula. Moreover, there is concern about increasing Chinese political and economic influence in North Korea.

– ROK security professionals view Japan as a necessary partner, but continue to view Tokyo with resentment, anger, and frustration, and believe that Tokyo has primary responsibility to fix the problems in the relationship. Koreans are also troubled by recent tensions in the US-Japan alliance and worry about the potential impact on US support for Korean contingencies.

– There was little if any support among security professionals in South Korea for the transfer of wartime OPCON in 2012. South Koreans seek to delay and postpone that transfer until after the North Korean threat is diminished. 2012 is particularly troublesome given the number of elections taking place that year, which is also the target date for North Korea becoming a "strong and prosperous nation."

– While South Koreans do not explicitly doubt the US commitment to their defense, their arguments often seem to imply as much. Many see OPCON transfer and especially the dissolution of the Combined Forces Command (CFC) as a sign of dwindling US support. OPCON transfer was characterized as "going from US/ROK to ROK command." Other troubling signs from a ROK perspective were the US desire for "strategic flexibility," language in the QDR calling for reduced nuclear forces, and the Nuclear Posture Review's reduced reliance on nuclear weapons. This is especially worrisome at a time when most South Koreans see the North as increasingly belligerent.

– South Koreans want reassurance. Official US acknowledgment in the NPR (and elsewhere) of the need to balance the goal of a nuclear free world with the defense and deterrence of allies has not eliminated ROK concerns; nor did the explicit "carve out" of North Korea regarding negative security assurances in the NPR. While acknowledging (and appreciating) close US coordination during the NPR's development and ROK official government endorsement of the end product, some Korean analysts still complained of a "downgrading of allies' concerns" in the NPR.

– Koreans want more operational discussions of deterrence – not necessarily targeting, but how it works in particular circumstances. South Koreans want to focus on how a nuclear North Korea would impact US planning. In addition, South Koreans seek US support for ROK acquisition of conventional deterrent capabilities, including ballistic missiles, submarines, and fifth generation fighters.

– Both countries see increased opportunities for US-ROK cooperation in the field of civilian nuclear technologies. Seoul's hosting of the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit provides a frame for bilateral cooperation but could also place new strains on the relationship if Seoul approaches the NSS from a peninsula/regional rather than global perspective.

– South Koreans insist that the renegotiation of the civilian nuclear agreement with the US (which expires in 2014) must conclude with Seoul's right to reprocess. They believe their approach toward pyro-processing should satisfy Washington's proliferation concerns. This need is driven by the growing percentage of ROK energy needs met by nuclear sources, a correspondingly growing amount of nuclear waste in South Korea, and

the desire for equivalent treatment with Japan (which is allowed to reprocess.) In the latter context, the word "discrimination" is often used: "We want to be treated like Japan, not like Iran."

– South Koreans insist that they will not subordinate proliferation concerns to national pride (i.e., growing popular support for an independent ROK nuclear weapons capability) or commercial interests as they seek to expand their nuclear energy capability. The US argument-- that permitting the ROK to reprocess as it insists on restricting other nations' access to that technology would send the wrong signal -- is not persuasive.

Recommendations

– The US and South Korea should intensify discussions on deterrence in general and the nuclear deterrent in particular to further reassure South Koreans about the US commitment to the South's defense.

– OPCON transfer concerns need to be addressed now. If ROK officials are seriously concerned about the ROK military's ability to shoulder this responsibility or believe follow-on command arrangements are inadequate, Seoul should officially request a delay or postponement and Washington should honor this request.

– Separating OPCON transfer from the disestablishment of the CFC could help alleviate concerns. OPCON transfer, whenever it occurs, must be perceived as shifting from US/ROK to ROK/US command, if stability, reassurance, and deterrence are to be maintained.

– The Joint Vision Statement signed last year by Presidents Lee and Obama needs to be operationalized. More discussion is also needed on the rationale for the alliance, both today and post-reunification.

– The US and South Korea must remain in lock step in dealing with Korean Peninsula denuclearization and broader Peninsula security concerns and should expand trilateral cooperation with Japan on regional and Korean Peninsula contingencies. A "Korean Steve Bosworth" should be appointed and the two should work and travel together to build consensus among the other six-party participants.

– Seoul's hosting of the next Nuclear Security Summit provides a golden opportunity for increased ROK-US cooperation. To avoid tensions, the US and the ROK should develop an action plan for civilian nuclear cooperation to be used as a framework to assess progress between the two Nuclear Security Summits.

- Washington must fully support – and been seen in Korea as fully supporting – whatever measures Seoul decides to pursue in reaction to the *Cheonan* attack.

The Second US-ROK Strategic Dialogue
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Conference Report

Security relations between the US and South Korea have improved significantly over the past several years. In June 2009, the Joint Vision signed by Presidents Lee Myung Bak and Barack Obama reflected a continuing commitment to the bilateral security alliance. While implementation of the commitment "to ensure a peaceful, secure, and prosperous future for the Korean Peninsula, the Asia-Pacific region, and the world" has been slower than some had hoped, bilateral relations remain on a positive trajectory. That could change, however, as the two countries deal with a host of issues, such as the recent sinking of the ROK Navy corvette *Cheonan*, Korean perceptions of the US commitment to extended deterrence, the consolidation of US forces south of the Han River, the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) of ROK forces, and the Korea-US (KORUS) free trade agreement (FTA). How each side handles these issues could have an important influence on prospects for realizing the commitment in the Joint Vision.

To better understand the security relationship, the Pacific Forum CSIS, with support from the Advanced Strategic Concepts Office (ASCO) of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), convened the second US-ROK Strategic Dialogue, April 28-30, 2010 in Hawaii. Officials from both governments (attending in their private capacities), joined policy analysts and academics to discuss, off the record, the two countries' perspectives on the strategic security environment, security dynamics on the peninsula, the role of nuclear weapons and extended deterrence in regional security, and the state of the alliance. In addition, 14 Pacific Forum CSIS Young Leaders attended the meeting to provide a next-generation perspective on the agenda. The report that follows reflects the views of the chair; while other participants have reviewed it for accuracy and completeness, it is not a consensus document.

Perceptions of the Strategic Security Environment

Success in sustaining the alliance relationship is based on the ability of both sides to share perceptions of the security environment and accept the other's response to security threats. In the first session, both presenters focused on the global security environment and its impact on the region and the bilateral security relationship.

In the leadoff presentation, the US presenter argued that the Obama administration had not yet developed an overarching security strategy and has taken an "instrumental" approach to dealing with security issues. This involved identifying problems and seeking practical solutions rather than trying to develop a comprehensive approach to global and regional security issues. The five primary focus areas were 1) Afghanistan (with Iraq as a subset); 2) nonstate actors, where violent extremism and

nuclear nonproliferation had received most attention; 3) state actors, with most of the attention on containing Iran and North Korea; 4) nontraditional security and especially climate change, where the administration has worked to promote common interests and create a framework for cooperation; and 5) US defense alignment, with a focus on making US forces leaner and more responsive to asymmetric threats.

All the while, the US has sought to maintain balance in Asia. While recognizing China's increasing role as a regional leader, the Obama administration has reached out to rising states such as Indonesia and Malaysia and emphasized the importance of multilateral organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. The speaker argued that the "hub and spoke" system of bilateral alliances has received less attention. This has meant that despite a generally positive mood in US-ROK relations, there has been little practical action to pursue the common interests expressed in the 2009 Joint Vision.

The South Korean presenter focused on China's role as a regional power and the notion of a G2 of the US and China. While acknowledging that the G2 concept is premature in a global context, he argued that the idea is of growing importance at the regional level, and is evident in the growing US acceptance of China as a key regional player. (In contrast, South Korean relations with China have been tactical and focused on practical cooperation.) While the US and China both emphasize the importance of cooperation, both are dissatisfied with the other for a variety of reasons. This uneasy relationship elevates the importance of Japan's role – our speaker expressed disappointment, if not dismay at Tokyo's readiness to step up – and makes necessary sustained US-ROK cooperation to balance an increasingly confident (and sometimes arrogant) China.

Fortunately, the US-ROK relationship has been marked by close coordination over approaches to North Korea and cooperation in several areas including nonproliferation, Afghanistan, national defense reform, and the Six-Party Talks. Upcoming challenges for the alliance include the pending OPCON transfer, the perceived importance of the Korean Peninsula for the US in its security strategy, policies toward North Korea, and responses to the *Cheonan* incident.

The presentation ended with recommendations. They included the need to reinforce the role of China and Japan in promoting security cooperation in Northeast Asia, the importance of "capturing the hearts" of core nations, and realizing the 2009 Joint Vision. Specifically, the two sides should work to ratify the KORUS FTA, ensure consistency in policies toward North Korea – which requires a "grand design" rather than a "grand bargain" – and satisfactory resolution of the wartime OPCON transfer issue. Most important is a concerted effort to allay fears within South Korea over the US commitment to the country's defense and a narrowing of the gap in threat perceptions between the two.

Much of the discussion focused on the degree to which the Obama administration's Asia policy reflected change or continuity. While the claim to be "back

in Asia" suggests a departure from the Bush years, participants agreed that there was more continuity than change in US policy – and credited that with allaying some of the fears that had arisen in the region when candidate Obama talked of extending a hand to potential adversaries.

To the extent that there is change, it is evident in the attempt to extend that legacy, build new partnerships, and forge a new security agenda focused on increased cooperation. That effort has been stymied by the internal preoccupations of key partners, Japan and China in particular. Pyongyang's determination to be a spoiler is another obstacle to progress in charting a new regional security agenda, although it has presented opportunities to work together on a shared challenge – to mixed results. The political tumult in Tokyo was especially worrying given the role played by the US military in Japan in a Korean Peninsula contingency. Korean participants voiced frustration toward Japan when addressing traditional sore points in that bilateral relationship such as history and territorial disputes. But in a comment reflecting more resignation than anger, one ROK participant noted that he couldn't even see Japan on the world or regional stage.

An alternative view suggested that the US was struggling to deal with a changing regional context – a shift in the balance of power – that demands new thinking. China's rise is an ongoing story but it takes on added significance when the US is distracted by problems in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and at home, and Washington's primary counterweight – Japan – is dealing with its own issues. The rise of the G20 is another signal of a shift in global decision making, at least on economic issues. One participant lamented the lack of attention given to economic matters when assessing the security outlook, especially given the importance of free trade agreements in linking partners and providing a level of assurance and commitment. (There was unanimity that KORUS should be approved, while acknowledging that US domestic politics make that difficult, perhaps proving the point about distractions.)

These shifts underscore the centrality of the Korean Peninsula to regional security and the importance of the US-ROK alliance when dealing with security concerns. The Peninsula continues to be a "traditional" security flashpoint and the ROK is actively engaged in the new cooperation agenda in East Asia. Bumps in the US-Japan alliance highlight the importance of strong US-ROK ties, a relationship that should serve as the cornerstone of cooperation with other governments, such as Japan and China, when preparing for contingencies on the peninsula. This was a not-so-oblique way of reminding US participants of ROK nervousness about multilateral discussions that do not include South Korean representatives, (such as trilateral dialogue among US, China, and Japan) especially when the subject is an issue of concern to Seoul.

Rhetoric about a "global Korea" notwithstanding, ROK security thinking remains focused on the Korean Peninsula. Korean participants argued that the North Korea threat in general and its asymmetric capabilities in particular, are growing. The *Cheonan* incident is seen as proof of this new trend. While several Ministry of National Defense committees are working to ensure the ROK military is prepared for these threats, there was concern that the US was not sufficiently cognizant of these developments.

Korean Peninsula Dynamics

In the second session, discussion narrowed to the security landscape on the Korean Peninsula. For our Korean presenter, peninsular security means North Korea because it is a failing state, which has made it more desperate and less predictable. Kim Jong-il's failing health and the challenge of political succession have created a situation where North Korean decision making is driven more by domestic political considerations than foreign policy needs. Bold decisions such as revaluing the currency and shutting down consumer retail markets have not halted the economy's deterioration, making the country more volatile still. The New Year's editorial published in the three major North Korean newspapers signaled the revival of a 1950's-style mobilization campaign to revive the economy, suggesting that the government has abandoned reform.

South Korea has tried several approaches to deal with North Korea, but none have worked. While the engagement policies of two previous administrations held early promise, the North ultimately failed to reform. Dependence on the South grew, but Pyongyang's failure to acknowledge that assistance undermined support for aid in the ROK. The North is likely to continue to seek assistance from the South without reciprocating, or it will turn to China for aid. Pyongyang could also try to create a crisis as a means to stave off collapse. Each of these scenarios is likely to increase tensions on the peninsula.

Given these dynamics, it is imperative that the North's slide be halted and South Korea's national defense capabilities improved. This demands strategic continuity and close tactical coordination, especially between the ROK and the US, to address contingencies in the North and prepare for provocations. That is difficult if the two countries have different perceptions of the North Korean threat. Like the 9/11 incident in the US, the *Cheonan* incident may galvanize ROK efforts to bolster defense preparedness. The ROK government has taken steps to undertake a comprehensive review of its security posture and preparedness.

For our US presenter, the force driving security dynamics on the peninsula is the effort by all parties to maintain an unsustainable status quo and a hesitation to prepare for the leadership transition that will occur in the North in the near future. The hope that the Six-Party Talks will succeed even though the North's nuclear program is a tool to promote domestic political legitimacy is evidence of this dynamic. Ironically, the effort to maintain cohesion among the five other parties in the face of North Korean intransigence serves to further inhibit regional cooperation on developing plans for contingencies in the North. Therefore, trilateral coordination among the US, South Korea, and Japan remains the cornerstone to any possible success in the Six-Party Talks or any other regional initiative, as coordination adds weight to the position taken by the three parties.

In the past year, close coordination between the US and the ROK on policies toward North Korea reduced concerns about a fundamental tension between the alliance and North-South reconciliation. The alliance is now seen as a mechanism for moderating relations of both the US and the ROK with the North. In this context, the current

challenge for the alliance partners is to establish threshold criteria for action or intervention in the North in response to collapse or instability. This challenge is complicated by the fact that each country likely has different criteria for action. Moreover, the ROK and Japan may have different expectations of the US in such a crisis. If that wasn't complicated enough, any effort to create a peace regime on the peninsula must also address Chinese interests. This is likely to mean that the US will need to provide strategic reassurance to China to gain Beijing's cooperation in dealing with a recalcitrant North Korea. But that risks a backlash in the ROK and Japan, obliging Washington to ensure that all agree on a vision for the end-state on the peninsula. This will not be easy.

Peninsular security dynamics could change if there was solid evidence of North Korean proliferation or collaboration with Iran. This is a longstanding concern and there are indications of such behavior with Syria and Burma. If evidence is found, the US would likely change its policy of treating Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs as separate problems, which could create new splits in approaches among key players.

The consensus view is that North Korean instability is increasing. Several participants reminded us, however, that this does not mean a North Korean collapse is imminent. Instability has triggered a shift in ROK thinking regarding the threat from the North. Following the 2000 North-South summit, the ROK security posture moved from "defense" to "deterrence," an evolution that had implications for both procurement and organization of the ROK military. This is likely to change again in the aftermath of the *Cheonan* incident, with increased emphasis on improving intelligence capabilities and more effective responses to future provocations. There was general agreement that this new shift would require collaboration with the US as its alliance partner to establish joint criteria for responses to provocations or unexpected events in the North. An ROK participant offered three basic criteria to guide engagement with the North: ensuring the safety of South Koreans working in the North, adhering to global standards, and transparency of the internal distribution of relief goods in the North.

The discussion explored South Korean views of unification, perhaps the most important peninsular dynamic. For some, growing instability in and uncertainty surrounding North Korean decisionmaking has led to a shift in South Korean perceptions of the desirability of unification over coexistence with the North. Next generation participants demonstrated less enthusiasm for unification than their elders. They see two states on the Korean Peninsula and the family ties that spanned the 38th parallel have weakened and frayed.

Yet, having closely studied the German example, we were assured that the ROK appreciates the importance of a gradual unification process; one Korean participant estimated there would be a 10-year transition period under a "two states, one system" formula. The current administration in Seoul is focused on first seeking to ensure the welfare of the North Korean people before proceeding with any effort to address the issue of regime change. (This patience notwithstanding, one American noted that South Koreans seem much more favorable toward unification than in the past.)

China has a central role in peninsular dynamics, but it is unclear if Beijing is part of the problem or part of the solution. Despite its avowed commitment to a nonnuclear Korean Peninsula, the consensus view is that Beijing prefers a nuclear North Korea to a unified nonnuclear Korea. Moreover, China appears to put priority on managing the situation in the North rather than "solving" it. In practical terms, this means avoiding the worst case, North Korean instability and possible collapse, and the continuation of the current regime in Pyongyang, even if that means a North with nuclear capabilities. One participant concluded that this policy will not change until there is fundamental change in China itself.

Global Nuclear Dynamics

The third session focused on the threat of nuclear proliferation and how to best support the global nonproliferation regime. The growing importance of nuclear energy and the perceived need for better management of spent fuel in South Korea obliged us to address the issues of enrichment and reprocessing. The Korean presenter argued that the lack of international nonproliferation cooperation was one of the main reasons why North Korea was able to develop a nuclear capability. He warned that North Korea's continued development of nuclear capabilities and collaboration with Iran would have profound effects on the region and the world.

Sanctions haven't influenced North Korean decisionmaking; our Korean presenter insisted that they must be combined with better coordination to leverage other nonproliferation mechanisms such as IAEA safeguards, export controls, the Proliferation Security Initiative, and better information regarding nuclear materials. Ultimately, however, halting the proliferation of nuclear weapons depends on eliminating the motivation to acquire such capabilities and providing incentives to remain nonnuclear. A commitment to nuclear disarmament as is being promoted by President Obama and others will facilitate this effort, but there is also a need to retain a strong commitment to nuclear deterrence in the face of intransigence by countries such as North Korea and Iran.

The growth of nuclear energy as an alternative source of energy has created the need for new approaches to dealing with nuclear waste. South Korea faces this problem as its nuclear power industry has developed; its storage facilities will be full to capacity by 2016. The presenter suggested that creating a regional or global multilateral fuel bank would reduce incentives for countries to develop indigenous reprocessing capacity and enhance the nonproliferation regime.

For the US, Iran's nuclear program is the top concern. Coupled with nuclear terrorism and potential instability in Pakistan, Syria, and North Korea, the Obama administration shows continuity again with the Bush policies by emphasizing the need to counter the threat of nuclear terrorism and promoting nonproliferation. A major difference, however, is that it has also demonstrated a commitment to disarmament and working toward "global zero" as long-term goals to build support for nonproliferation goals.

The Obama Prague speech in 2009, the US-Russia Strategic Arms Treaty (START), and the US Nuclear Posture Review are core elements of the US strategy. The Prague speech recognized the importance of disarmament while acknowledging that the US must retain a deterrent posture for both itself and its allies. The Nuclear Posture Review recognized the need to reduce the importance of nuclear weapons in US security strategy – as did its predecessor – and identifies five key policy goals: preventing nuclear terrorism, reducing the role of nuclear weapons, maintaining an effective deterrent with a reduced number of nuclear weapons, strengthening reassurance with allies and partners, and maintaining a safe and secure nuclear arsenal. The New START includes significant cuts in the arsenals of both countries while avoiding undesirable constraints on missile defense and development and deployment of a new class of non-nuclear offensive strategic weapons referred to as the Conventional Prompt Global Strike (CPGS) system.

In evaluating the implications of these policy initiatives for extended deterrence and the US-ROK alliance, the presenter suggested that US policymakers have emphasized the need for close coordination with allies and partners and sought to balance reduced reliance on nuclear weapons with a strong commitment to expanding the role assumed by conventional capabilities in the extended deterrence equation. The US recognizes that South Korea has been a strong alliance partner and is a model country for promoting the global nonproliferation regime. Accordingly, the US would seek ROK support for promoting universal application of the IAEA Additional Protocol and harsher penalties for countries that fail to comply with their Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty obligations.

Finally, the presenter believed that the US would accept limited research and development cooperation in pyro-processing by South Korea as a way to reduce nuclear waste material, as long as the ROK remained committed to not pursuing commercial reprocessing. This is similar to the commitment made by Japan as it established a reprocessing capability.

Discussion focused on Korean reactions to the US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) and implications of the growing ROK interest in becoming a supplier of civilian nuclear power facilities. While acknowledging (and appreciating) close US coordination during the NPR's development and ROK official government endorsement of the end product, some Korean analysts still complained of a perceived "downgrading of allies' concerns" in the NPR. Official US acknowledgement in the NPR (and elsewhere) of the need to balance the goal of a nuclear-free world with the defense and deterrence of allies has not eliminated ROK concerns; nor did the explicit "carve out" of North Korea (and Iran) regarding negative security assurances in the NPR. One Korean participant insisted that the NPR limited the US commitment to protecting its allies, arguing that the specific reference to responding to chemical or biological attacks with nuclear weapons had been weakened from previous versions of the NPR. Koreans were not reassured by the other solutions offered in the NPR – ballistic missile defense, export controls, improved conventional capabilities, and condemnation of violators – and preferred a more explicit

threat of nuclear retaliation.[1] Korean participants suggested that it was important for Seoul to be able to send Pyongyang a strong message that it had the capability to respond to any nuclear provocation. Although South Korea has the capability to develop nuclear weapons, it has chosen instead to support the global nonproliferation regime and rely on US extended deterrence guarantees. Any sign of a weakening of that guarantee in a world of "bad actors" makes South Korea feel more vulnerable.

Discussion of reprocessing quickly inflames Korean sensitivities. As the US and the ROK begin talks on a new civilian nuclear agreement, Japan is the benchmark and ROK participants noted that any "discrimination" between the capabilities allowed Japan and the ROK would undermine public support for the alliance in South Korea. South Koreans note that their country has faithfully honored its nonproliferation commitments even though it has not been able to exercise its "sovereign right" to reprocess. As one ROK participant put it, "we are Japan, not Iran." Seoul's selection as the host of the next global nuclear summit in 2012 cuts two ways in South Korea. It underscores the country's nonproliferation record – and one ROK participant noted that the meeting would be used to send a signal to Pyongyang – but it also increases pressure on negotiator for civilian nuclear energy cooperation agreement to ensure that the conclusion of their talks does not send the wrong signal.

Thinking about Deterrence

Extended deterrence has been a pillar of the US-ROK alliance strategy and is a key symbol of the US commitment to the defense of South Korea. Our South Korean presenter argued that the nuclear component of that strategy has been gradually reduced as a result of South Korea's decision to not pursue a nuclear weapons program in the 1970s and the unilateral withdrawal of US nuclear weapons in early 1990s. At the same time, however, North Korea has pursued a nuclear weapons capability to neutralize the US-ROK alliance. Our South Korean presenter warned that this creates vulnerability in the ROK and should make both it and the US wary of any peace settlement with the North that does not resolve the nuclear imbalance on the Korean Peninsula.

From this perspective, the negative security assurance contained in the US Nuclear Posture Review, which says that the US will not use nuclear weapons against a state that signs the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and does not use nuclear weapons, weakens the US commitment to the defense of South Korea. Our ROK presenter argued that this negative security assurance means that if North Korea says it will give up its nuclear weapons, the nuclear umbrella for the ROK will disappear even though North Korea retains other asymmetric capabilities including chemical and biological weapons.

The US presenter argued that in a security environment where Iran and North Korea are pursuing nuclear weapons programs, China is expanding its nuclear capability, and there is a growing impetus for nuclear disarmament, deterrence planning will become a more important focus for US strategists. This seems paradoxical as the growth of

[1] In a subsequent discussion in Seoul, a government official flatly disavowed this interpretation, insisting that the ROK government was very happy with the NPR.

nuclear programs implies that deterrence is not working. In fact, however, the focus of current policy is reversing proliferation rather than deterring it.

The presenter underscored the growing role assumed by conventional capabilities in the "deterrence package." He noted that the growing reliance on conventional strategic deterrence in US strategy as outlined in the new NPR should be seen as an extension of the policy introduced by the Bush administration in 2002 when it introduced the "new triad." This is part of a longstanding trend: for over two decades the US has demonstrated that conventional capabilities have a strategic and deterrent effect. Nuclear deterrence is deterrence by punishment – increasing the cost of action beyond that which is acceptable. Conventional deterrence is deterrence by denial – persuading the enemy not to attack by convincing him that his attack will be defeated. On the Korean Peninsula, alliance managers must determine how to sustain that perception in the North and avoid decisions that would detract from a strong conventional posture in the South.

In the discussion, one participant suggested that the US play the "South Korean nuclear card," threatening the North that it could no longer prevent South Korea from going nuclear. That was dismissed as dangerous by those who felt that bluffing risked unintended consequences. Another participant argued that deterrence was a Cold War concept with little contemporary relevance on the Korean Peninsula, where the North was able to take provocative action while avoiding outright confrontation. There was agreement that in the post-Cold War era, more attention should be paid to how both parties in the alliance can contribute to deterrence rather than merely assuming that the smaller power would rely on a deterrent provided solely by the larger power. This is a potentially rich area for consideration and collaboration.

Throughout the discussion, Korean participants expressed skepticism about the US commitment to providing a deterrent on the peninsula, even after being reminded of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' warning that "all bets are off if the North uses WMD in a crisis." Participants from both countries conceded that the record of responding to North Korean provocations is not good. One ROK participant explained that while the joint vision includes a statement promising that the US will provide extended deterrence to the ROK, the Quadrennial Defense Review says US forces will be reduced and the NPR decreases reliance on nuclear weapons. It is clear that the idea of a nuclear umbrella is easier to understand than extended deterrence, which requires more operational discussions on how it will work in particular circumstances, and how a nuclear North Korea will impact US planning. It was also clear that South Koreans see the need for enhanced conventional capabilities; the critical question now is to what degree those concerns will shape the revisions of the Defense 2020 plan.

Nuclear Policy Dynamics

In the fifth session, the group examined global and regional nuclear dynamics in more detail. The Korean presenter argued that South Korea tends to view nuclear issues, as in its more general security outlook, as regional first and global second. This contrasts with the US view, which starts from a global perspective and then moves to the regional.

For South Korea, nuclear policy is shaped by two potentially contradictory considerations: the North Korean nuclear weapons program and the growing demand for nuclear energy. Reconciling these two imperatives obliges Seoul to prevent nonstate actors from gaining access to nuclear materials or components while satisfying demands for nuclear energy in a safe and secure manner. This requires cooperation between the US and ROK on both the regional and global level as was called for during the recent summit between Presidents Lee and Obama and in the Joint Vision statement; implementation of this task is still pending. Part of the problem in South Korea is that nuclear policymaking is fragmented among different ministries including Foreign Affairs, Defense, Commerce, and Science and Technology.

Our ROK presenter argued that an effective response to the North Korean nuclear weapons program demands a better understanding of North Korea strategy and objectives as well as more consistency from the ROK and the US. Policy and operational discussions are needed between the partners to enhance cooperation and promote a better understanding of how to ensure that deterrence works. A critical element of this assignment is forging a common, comprehensive assessment of likely scenarios in the North. To do this, the two should not focus only on the nuclear issue but should develop a "grand design" for dealing with the North based on a common understanding of the desired end state; indeed, that approach should not be limited to dealing with North Korea but should guide security thinking more generally. While encouraging the two countries to do more and acknowledging the shortcomings of current policy, our presenter insisted that the ROK is not hedging; nor is it contemplating a more self-reliant strategy.

The US presenter characterized US nuclear policy as "preemptive engagement." The US has engaged in dialogue with potential adversaries guided by the understanding that this will help establish prerequisites and build the consensus needed to take a firmer response if diplomacy fails. The markers of this approach are the Prague speech, which laid out President Obama's long-term vision, and the Nuclear Security Summit, which provided a platform to tackle one element of the nuclear threat, and yielded specific commitments from a surprisingly large number of participants. While the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference remains important, any substantive outcome demands a consensus. Since the details are highly contentious, it is largely seen as an aspiration. A key element in the evolution of US thinking is the ongoing shift from deterring nuclear attack to galvanizing the world against nuclear terrorism.

This process presents distinct challenges of its own for the US, prime among them is the need to develop the conventional capabilities of its allies through an enhanced regional architecture and improving its own strategic conventional capabilities as it decreases its reliance on nuclear weapons. This demands reassurance on two levels: so allies are not alarmed by the diminished US reliance on nuclear capabilities, and so they don't worry that the US drive to increase their role signals a diminished US commitment to their defense. The implications of these changes were foreshadowed in the Quadrennial Defense Review and will be further articulated in the upcoming National Security Strategy and National Intelligence Estimate. Critical to the success of this

policy approach will be recognition of the precedents established through diplomatic efforts and the acceptance of reduced reliance on nuclear weapons by allies. An early example of the difficulty was evidenced when Japan (under the previous LDP government) reportedly lobbied heavily to dissuade the US from retiring its Tomahawk Land Attack Missile – Nuclear (TLAM/N).

Efforts to promote the complete elimination of nuclear weapons have been further complicated by the unwillingness of India and Pakistan to see the move toward global zero as applying to them. Rather, they have taken the current push for reductions as an opportunity to expand their nuclear capabilities to achieve a self-defined minimal deterrent. India wants to reduce the gap with China, which creates a problem for Pakistan, pushing it to establish closer ties with China. China has also remained silent about its arsenal under the guise of maintaining a minimal deterrent, insisting that the US and Russia should take the lead in disarmament.

Progress depends on the US convincing other states, and especially China, that it is committed to both disarmament and nonproliferation and is not using disarmament to merely muster support for its nonproliferation agenda, or to "trap" other nations in multilateral talks. Finding the right balance between disarmament and nonproliferation demands a viable verification regime for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and an effective enforcement mechanism for controlling fissile material: neither is in sight yet.

Discussion explored the tensions in South Korea's two nuclear goals: halting and rolling back North Korea's nuclear program and promoting safe nuclear energy technology. While many see Seoul's selection as host of the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit as an opportunity to showcase ROK policy and develop deep cooperation with the US, it could expose divisions between the two. South Koreans argued the worst case would not materialize. They insist that commercial ambitions will not trump proliferation concerns. Pyro-processing, from a ROK perspective, should be a non-controversial issue; nonetheless, it was described as "the hope of the Korean people." A US participant suggested that the 2012 Summit could frame the US-ROK civilian nuclear energy cooperation agreement, reaffirming the country's nonproliferation credentials and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's supremacy on nuclear policy issues. Nonetheless, there remains a constituency in Korea that demands the country assert its "sovereign right" to reprocess as long as the process is transparent and is based on commercial interests.

Time was also devoted to the significance of the growing gap in conventional capabilities. While some see the US lead in this field as a plus for regional security and the bilateral relationship, others wondered whether it would make other countries skeptical about reducing their own nuclear arsenals. As one participant noted, it is tempting to see US interest in denuclearization as an attempt "to make the world safe for US conventional dominance."

The Alliance

The US-ROK alliance has shown its resilience in recent years. While differences persist, the generally positive assessment of the relationship was attributed to several factors that have reinforced the mutual benefit of the alliance to each partner. For the South Korean presenter, four issues will have a critical influence on the alliance in the near term. They are the transfer of operational control (OPCON), a common understanding of extended deterrence, developments stemming from the sinking of the *Cheonan,* and negotiation of the US-ROK civilian nuclear agreement.

OPCON transfer remains a very sensitive issue in South Korea. Given that the decision to make the transfer in 2012 was justified with reference to national pride and sovereignty without seeking popular approval, the ROK presenter insisted that reconsideration of the decision is in order. First, it is important to separate operational control from the issue of sovereignty. Second, there remains a serious gap in the C4I capability in the ROK military and a combined warfighting center is a much more efficient way to operate than through liaison offices. Third, statements by visiting US officials about disbanding the Combined Forces Command (CFC) and moving the 2nd Infantry Division south have strengthened the perception that OPCON transfer will weaken the alliance. Therefore, it is important to continue discussing the desirability of the decision, especially its timing, given deteriorating security on the peninsula and increasing asymmetric capabilities of the North.

South Koreans worry that there is no common understanding between the US and the ROK about what extended deterrence means. This gap takes on additional weight at a time when North Korea's nuclear capability makes the South more dependent on the North – and South Koreans see "loopholes" in the NPR, especially when dealing with a chemical or biological attack. Our ROK presenter argued that the US should recognize that as long as North Korea is using its nuclear capability to threaten the South, the legal status of the nuclear umbrella should be elevated. He endorsed measures such as joint exercises to demonstrate a commitment to deterrence on the Korean Peninsula and assistance to the ROK to augment its indigenous deterrent capabilities through the procurement of advanced armaments such as fifth-generation fighters, strategic submarines, and ballistic missiles. This, he argued, would ensure fulfillment of the ideas expressed in the US-ROK Joint Vision.

The sinking of the *Cheonan* is a signal event for security on the peninsula. Concluding that North Korea was responsible, the presenter argued that any response must follow two principles. First, there must be a strong signal that this kind of provocation will not be allowed in the future. Second, care must taken to protect South Korea prosperity. The US can help South Korea by ensuring the incident is on the international agenda by promoting strong action by the United Nations Security Council and getting the support of China; a demonstration of strong military capability in the region is also required. Some argue that this will be a paradigm-shifting event in South Korea: it will transform popular perceptions of the nature of North Korea and the value of the alliance.

The US presenter highlighted the growing strength of the US-ROK alliance both generally and in comparison with the US-Japan alliance. This change was attributed to several factors: 1) after years of diverging views of the threat from North Korea, the US and ROK are now much more closely aligned; 2) a shift in South Korea regarding the value of the alliance – debate over OPCON contributed to a shift in thinking; 3) the enduring strength of the alliance infrastructure despite political differences; 4) the change in personalities in Seoul and Washington created a more favorable attitude on both sides. These factors created the framework for renewed efforts to move the alliance forward and contributed to finalization of the Joint Vision in 2009. The only problem is that the US is prepared to move forward with implementation, but South Korea seems less enthusiastic. So far, coordination over the *Cheonan* incident has gone well as the US and South Korea have both demonstrated restraint in drawing conclusions pending completion of the investigation by the multinational team of experts. However, there is potential for a divergence as South Korea insists that it will not return to the Six-Party Talks until the *Cheonan* incident is resolved; for its part, the US is committed to returning to the Six-Party Talks based on North Korea's commitment to denuclearization. While the US has expressed support for the South Korean position, the specific findings of the investigation could be problematic: for the US, dropping the demand for North Korea to return to the talks is a Catch-22: it might assuage ROK anger, but it could signal implicit acceptance of the North as a nuclear power (as the Six-Party Talks are the only forum in which Pyongyang has committed to denuclearization.)

The shift in ROK thinking about the alliance has led to rethinking on both sides of the wisdom of completing the OPCON transfer in 2012. While it is not possible for the US to suggest a delay, the presenter felt certain that if South Korea made the proposal, the US would agree. Further attention should also be given to the idea of separating the OPCON transfer and dissolution of the CFC.

Compared to last year's dialogue, there was a significantly greater interest in postponing the OPCON transfer beyond April 2012. There was a long list of justifications for delay: the *Cheonan* incident demonstrates that this is no time for command shifts of this magnitude; South Korean military capabilities lag in the areas of intelligence, logistics, and command and control; the transition of US forces to Pyeongtaek and the realignment of facilities that were part of the transfer had been pushed back as well; and some argued that dissolution of the CFC had been linked to the transfer of wartime OPCON and since a combined force is a more effective command structure, transfer should be delayed. (There was agreement that the current CFC is the best way to handle North Korea.) This speculation leads to the conclusion that the real risk in completing the transfer is dissolution of the command rather than the transfer itself.

Ultimately, there is a fear that OPCON transfer signals the decoupling of the US-ROK relationship and a diminished US commitment to extended deterrence. While Americans see the transfer as moving from US/ROK to ROK/US control, one senior Korean described it as moving from US/ROK to ROK alone, pointing out that dissolution of the CFC is seen as removing America from the direct equation. This mindset must be recognized and addressed. Regardless of the outcome, there was general agreement that

the decision would ultimately be a political one and that the military is prepared to implement it as planned. The consensus view was the question is now when the decision to announce the delay in OPCON transfer would be made rather than *if* it should be made. All agreed that whatever changes are made, they cannot be allowed to diminish the capabilities of the alliance.

Several participants reminded the group that while the relationship between the US and South Korea is experiencing an upswing, the recent past and the current decline in US-Japan relations are a warning that trajectories can change abruptly. Both sides should recognize the importance of promoting a stronger commitment to the alliance relationship and work to manage issues such as passage of the KORUS free trade agreement and demonstrate cooperation in responding the *Cheonan* incident. A US participant suggested that an international response is the best way forward on this matter, and pointed to the United Nations investigation of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri as an example. A South Korean participant reminded us again of the need to remain sensitive to fears of "Korea passing" as the US deals with North Korea, especially as Washington attempts to engage Beijing on this issue.

Future of the Alliance

The final session focused on the future of the alliance and ensuring that both sides make it more effective. The US presenter argued that the strong bond between the partners has greatly improved with the Joint Vision announced in 2009. By addressing all the key aspects of the relationship from the common commitment to the values of democracy, free markets, and human rights to the desired end-state of unification on the Korean Peninsula under those principles, the Joint Vision will serve as a roadmap for future relations. Even without the vision statement, however, the US and ROK have compatible interests and are not strategic competitors even as South Korea emerges as a global economic power.

Key to the future of the relationship is reconciling the tensions between a growing and dynamic Korea and a more mature – some argue "declining" – United States. As domestic politics assume greater prominence in each country, both countries have to remain vigilant to and tolerant (within limits) of divergences. This has been particularly evident during discussions on the KORUS free trade agreement and alliance burden-sharing. Another challenge is improving ROK-Japan relations; history and territorial disputes continue to impede much-needed cooperation. Nevertheless, creating a "strong arc between democratic partners" in the region should remain a goal. Our US presenter urged Korea to take the high road and not lower itself to the level of the Japanese right wing.

The South Korean speaker echoed his US counterpart by endorsing the importance of the Joint Vision and the commitment to democracy and free markets. For him, sustaining the alliance demands contributions by both sides – and each must be seen as doing so. This is best done by a strong bilateral and bipartisan commitment to the

alliance and by dealing honestly with each other, especially in the areas of cost-sharing and economic relations. This partnership could be expanded gradually to deal with global issues, but only as the North Korean threat diminishes. A successful alliance will require that South Korea is integrated into the decision-making process and its role should shift from one of supporting US global initiatives to one of a more equal partnership.

This strategic partnership would also create opportunities to engage China rather than respond to it in an overly defensive way. Because South Korea remains a "shrimp among whales," it will continue to avoid having to make a choice between standing with the US and accommodating China.

Finally, while acknowledging that OPCON transfer was focused on defense against North Korea and did not directly impact the global vision, our South Korean presenter underscored its implications for the alliance. The original discussion of transfer was aimed at the anticipated reduction in US forces on the peninsula and the need for strategic flexibility for Korea-based US forces. Both sides must understand that South Korea is being called on to contribute more and that a strong command and control system is critical to continued success. Therefore, our presenter argued that a better solution would be to retain the CFC and develop a system where command was alternated between the US and South Korea.

Discussion focused on the role of the Joint Vision. While all consider it a success and agreed with the terms of the document itself, implementation is lagging. Some participants blamed a failure of alliance supporters on both sides to "sell" the alliance to their respective publics. Others suggested that it didn't provide sufficient detail regarding roles and missions associated with unification, especially if that is a joint objective. Perhaps it is time to reintroduce the concept of South-North "peaceful coexistence" as a step toward that end.

One participant felt that there was still a lack of understanding in South Korea regarding strategic flexibility and a better understanding of the alliance role in unification. Of course, it is difficult for South Koreans to embrace the idea of unification as long as the North Korean threat remains as ominous as it is. We were also cautioned to view the alliance as part of a broader system of regional relations, and in particular, to watch developments in Japan and the evolution of its relations with the US. A US participant warned about the prospect of a vacuum emerging in Northeast Asia as Japanese power and influence wane. This should spur both governments to reach out to Tokyo. Several others echoed those sentiments, suggesting specific ways to improve interaction between the US, South Korea, and Japan with joint exercises and improved coordination. Nonetheless, most Koreans seemed to believe that, when it comes to improving ROK-Japan relations, the ball is very much in Tokyo's court.

In closing, there was general recognition that despite differences, participants from both countries were in general agreement that relations had improved dramatically over the past year. The alliance is currently on an upward trajectory and should be

nourished to enable the rhetoric contained in the Joint Vision and promote better understanding between the two countries.

Recommendations

This report is filled with policy recommendations generated by individual speakers or commentators during the discussion. No attempt will be made to summarize all of them here. Instead, a few key policy-related suggestions will be highlighted for further consideration:

– The US and South Korea should intensify discussions on deterrence in general and the nuclear deterrent in particular to further reassure South Koreans about the US commitment to the South's defense.

– OPCON transfer concerns need to be addressed now. If ROK officials are seriously concerned about the ROK military's ability to shoulder this responsibility or believe follow-on command arrangements are inadequate, Seoul should officially request a delay or postponement and Washington should honor this request.

– Separating OPCON transfer from the disestablishment of the CFC could help alleviate concerns. OPCON transfer, whenever it occurs, must be perceived as shifting from US/ROK to ROK/US command, if stability, reassurance, and deterrence are to be maintained.

– The Joint Vision Statement signed last year by Presidents Lee and Obama needs to be operationalized. More discussion is also needed on the rationale for the alliance, both today and post-reunification.

– The US and South Korea must remain in lock step in dealing with Korean Peninsula denuclearization and broader Peninsula security concerns and should expand trilateral cooperation with Japan on regional and Korean Peninsula contingencies. President Lee should appoint a Special Presidential Envoy to engage in senior-level dialogue on Peninsula denuclearization issues and he/she should work and travel together with US Special Presidential Envoy Stephen Bosworth to build consensus among the other six-party participants.

– Seoul's hosting of the next Nuclear Security Summit provides a golden opportunity for increased ROK-US cooperation. To avoid tensions, the US and the ROK should develop an action plan for civilian nuclear cooperation to be used as a framework to assess progress between the two Nuclear Security Summits.

– Washington must fully support – and be seen in Korea as fully supporting – whatever measures Seoul decides to pursue in reaction to the *Cheonan* attack.

The Second US-ROK Strategic Dialogue
April 29-30, 2010

Agenda

April 28, 2010 – Wednesday

6:30 PM Welcome Reception and Dinner

April 29, 2010 – Thursday

9:00 AM Opening Remarks

9:30 AM **Session 1: Perceptions of the Strategic Security Environment**
This session explores each country's view of the security environment to identify issues, and highlight shared and divergent concerns. What are the principal strategic challenges to each country and to regional security and stability? How have these perceptions and concerns evolved? How are these challenges best addressed? How do US and Korean perceptions overlap? How are they different? How can the United States and the ROK best work together to address perceptions that may indicate divergent interests or lead to competing strategies?

11:00 AM Coffee Break

11:15 AM **Session 2: Korean Peninsula Dynamics**
This session focuses on security relations on the Korean Peninsula. How does each country characterize Korean Peninsula dynamics? How do they characterize the state of the Six-Party Talks? What influence do North-South relations and unification policies have on the US-ROK alliance? How do US-DPRK relations and six-party negotiations impact the alliance? What role should multilateral institutions such as the Six-Party Talks have in defining security relations on the Peninsula? How should the US and ROK deal with a potential collapse in North Korea? What role should China, Japan and/or the U.N. play in security relations on the peninsula?

12:30 PM Lunch

1:30 PM **Session 3: Global Nuclear Dynamics**
The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the spread of nuclear weapons in particular has been called one of the world's top security challenges. Does the ROK share this assessment? How are we individually, as well as in the Alliance, affected by the nuclear proliferation challenge? How does each country assess the effectiveness of the nonproliferation regime? What could be done to make it more effective? What are likely to be the key issues at the NPT Review

Conference? How do nuclear energy issues – in particular, the perceived ROK need for enrichment capabilities – fit into the broader nonproliferation agenda?

3:00 PM Coffee Break

3:15 PM **Session 4: Thinking about Deterrence**
The session explores national thinking about deterrence. How does US extended deterrence factor in ROK national defense calculations? What are the key components of US extended deterrence? How are they maintained? Will deterrence remain as important post-unification? How can it be made more effective?

5:00 PM Session adjourns

6:30 PM Reception and Dinner

April 30, 2010 – Friday

9:00 AM **Session 5: Nuclear Policy Dynamics**
How does each country understand the impact of global and regional nuclear dynamics? What are the key forces driving changes in nuclear dynamics? What is the relationship between regional and global developments? How does each country articulate its concerns, formulate policies, and explain them to domestic and international audiences. How do other strategic systems such as BMD and improved conventional capabilities shape nuclear policy? Will a nonnuclear security umbrella suffice? Is this view changing? Is the ROK contemplating more self-reliant or 'hedging' strategies? How does each government view the prospect and possible impact of movement toward zero and nuclear disarmament? How could movement toward zero impact the alliance and global nuclear dynamics?

10:30 AM Coffee Break

10:45 AM **Session 6: The Alliance**
This session focuses on views of the bilateral security alliance. How do Koreans and Americans rate the health and mutual respect of the alliance? What are the two countries' respective roles and responsibilities within the alliance? What does each country identify as the major problems in alliance relations? How can they be fixed? What is each side's view of the roadmap for OPCON transfer in 2012? Is the ROK prepared to assume the lead role? Is the US prepared for the ROK to assume the lead role? Will the US commitment be (or appear to be) diminished?

12:30 PM Lunch

2:00 PM **Session 7: The Future of the US-ROK Alliance**

This session will focus on the future of the alliance and ways to make it more effective. Do the two countries share a common vision of the alliance's future? What is it? What are the key challenges to the realization of that vision? How can the two countries ensure that the alliance contributes to national defense and regional security? How can the alliance work with other US allies – in particular, Japan but also Australia – and partners, such as India? How can it engage China? How can both work together toward a safer nonnuclear world?

3:30 PM **Session 8: Conclusions and Wrap Up**

4:00 PM Conference adjourns

The Second US-ROK Strategic Dialogue
April 29-30, 2010

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