



Seeking Stability: Young Leaders  
Look at the U.S.-ROK Alliance



edited by  
Brad Glosseman

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## Pacific Forum CSIS

Based in Honolulu, the Pacific Forum CSIS ([www.pacforum.org](http://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 arenas. 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.

The Young Leaders Program invites young professionals and graduate students to join Pacific Forum policy dialogues and conferences. The program fosters education in the practical aspects of policy-making, generates an exchange of views between young and seasoned professionals, promotes interaction among younger professionals, and enriches dialogues with generational perspectives for all attendees. Fellows must have a strong background in the area covered by the conference they are attending and an endorsement from respected experts in their field. Supplemental programs in conference host cities and mentoring sessions with senior officials and specialists add to the Young Leader experience. The Young Leaders Program is currently supported by the Freeman Foundation, the Luce Foundation, and the Yuchengco Group, with a growing number of universities, institutes, and organizations also helping to sponsor individual participants. For more details, see the Pacific Forum CSIS website, [www.pacforum.org](http://www.pacforum.org), or contact Brad Glosserman, director of the Young Leaders Program at [bradgpf@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:bradgpf@hawaii.rr.com).

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## Introduction

South Korea's political pendulum continues to swing. While the left appeared to be in the ascendancy four years ago, momentum has shifted since the election of Roh Moo-hyun as president, and Korea today seeks a new political center of gravity. Fears of a break with the United States have receded, but the two governments continue to grope to find a new foundation for their alliance. The views and outlook of the next generation in both South Korea and the U.S. will be instrumental in shaping the future of the alliance.

South Korea's evolution was foremost in mind when the Pacific Forum CSIS established the Young Leaders program. The first conference to include Young Leaders was the April 2004 U.S.-ROK meeting, the seventh in a series of annual meetings that we have held with the New Asia Research Institute. Events since then – in South Korea and in the Young Leaders program – have convinced us that this effort is both timely and important.

This year, discussions focused on the bilateral relationship and aimed to lay out the basis for a partnership that surmounted the changes and challenges the two countries face. The Young Leaders component of our meeting was especially fruitful, for several reasons. First, most participants were veterans of the program, which helped focus discussion and hone in on key issues. Second, Young Leaders had considerable experience in both countries; most have lived in the other country for an extended period. This familiarity elevated our discussion. Finally, and uniquely among conferences, almost half our Young Leaders were Americans of Korean descent. As a result, they had a keen interest in, and familiarity with, the political and cultural changes occurring in both countries; they also had a strong desire to maintain close relations between the two countries.

Young Leaders agreed that North Korea is a fundamental problem for the alliance. That is not to say that all Young Leaders agreed on the nature of the North Korean threat; some thought the regime in Pyongyang was a palpable, traditional, threat to South Korean security, while most felt the real concern was instability in the North. But they agreed that devising a cooperative and coordinated approach for dealing with North Korea was critical to the alliance's survival. Young Leaders concurred that the top priorities of the Kim Jong-il regime are survival and prestige. There was consensus that the country's nuclear weapons program was an attempt to secure both. From that premise, they argued that the U.S. should not play up the North Korean threat, as it only empowered the regime in Pyongyang and gave it more leverage; there was also, however, agreement that the Seoul government should not ignore North Korean misbehavior. They also believed that the North Korean regime was rational and susceptible to the usual tools of statecraft, such as deterrence – when properly used.

As members of a younger age group, they were acutely aware of, and somewhat cynical about, the impact of the news media. Several Young Leaders noted that their peers do not pay much attention to the mainstream media. While they accepted some degree of politicization of the media, they decried the Japanese media's fixation on the fate of the abductees, arguing that it distorted Japan's perception of the situation on the Korean Peninsula. One Korean Young Leader warned that Koreans tend to follow trends, which also rendered them susceptible to media manipulation.

This segued into discussion of anti-Americanism in South Korea and its impact on the alliance. Most U.S. Young Leaders, and those of Korean descent in particular, were concerned about the phenomenon. Most South Korean Young Leaders, like the more senior conference participants, felt the danger was overblown. They asserted that anti-Americanism is largely a result of education, and is restricted to a small portion of the population. “Education is the key,” said one Korean participant. Realism comes with age, counseled another. Moreover, ROK government policy has been more consistent and more pro-alliance than some high-profile statements might suggest. There is little sign of anti-Americanism in official ROK policy.

Americans were not so sanguine. One warned against “being lulled into complacency” about anti-Americanism. Since the younger generation in Korea knows the U.S. well, ignorance is hardly an excuse. Equally worrisome is the lag in U.S. understanding of the new post-2000 summit reality in South Korea. The political center has shifted in Seoul and, while a majority may favor continuing the bilateral security alliance, the partnership has to be restructured to reflect new realities. The failure to appreciate the new mood in Korea could create a backlash in Washington; one American warned that Congress senses ingratitude among South Koreans.

There was near agreement on what the two countries could do to smooth bilateral relations in the future. First, both governments have to do more to sell the alliance to South Koreans. Seoul must speak out more strongly on behalf of the alliance, while the U.S. should conduct more community outreach. As one South Korean Young Leader explained, anti-Americanism tends to correlate with the presence of U.S. military forces. Second, the U.S. military must do more to shrink its footprint, to be a good neighbor, and to convince South Koreans that the U.S. military is not designed to be an obstacle to reunification.

Third, all agreed that the U.S. should push to include South Korea in the visa waiver program (VWP). The visa application process is time-consuming and can be humiliating. ROK ineligibility for the VWP sends the wrong signal to South Koreans, especially when countries such as Japan do qualify. While the qualification process is somewhat mechanical – the refusal rate for nonimmigrant visas for citizens must be less than 3 percent – the two governments can work together to help Seoul qualify. This should be a priority for Washington and Seoul.

Finally, a U.S. Young Leader argued the two countries need a bold vision for their alliance. The decision to proceed with a bilateral free trade agreement is an important step in this direction, but he wants more. He called for a document like the Nye-Armitage report, which produced a framework for the U.S.-Japan alliance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A similar report would demonstrate the U.S. commitment to an enduring alliance and demand a similar step by South Korea. The papers that follow are, as always, full of similar policy suggestions. This sort of forward thinking validates both the U.S.-ROK alliance and our Young Leaders program.



# Americans for Korean Unification: A New Ordering Principle for Washington's Korea Policy

By Leif-Eric Easley

There are three major problems for international relations of the Korean Peninsula. They are: the North Korean regime itself, the growing perception gap between South Korea and the United States on how to deal with North Korea, and finally, the uncertain role of China in Korea's political future. This essay focuses on the second, because the best way for the U.S. to address all three is by strengthening the U.S.-ROK alliance. The prescription for doing so is simple: the U.S. should declare and follow an active and genuine pro-unification policy. This will productively reorder U.S. diplomatic tools for dealing with Pyongyang, bring Seoul and Washington on to the same page, and compel Beijing to play a more transparent and productive role in the political future of the Korean Peninsula.

Increasing disparity between South Korean and U.S. policy visions is inhibiting productive coordination on North Korea's nuclear program, international criminal activities, human rights violations, and nascent economic reforms. All these matters have great bearing on peace and security in Northeast Asia, and are better met with U.S.-ROK cooperation than a lack thereof. It is possible to level numerous criticisms against the Bush administration's Korea policy, the Roh administration's strategy for balancing alliance maintenance with North Korean engagement, and even China's role as facilitator of the Six-Party Talks. But it is important to recognize that the principal problem is the North Korea regime. Arguments to the contrary distort reality. It is also time to recognize, however, that the U.S. emphasis on the evils of the Kim Jong-il government is not helping the U.S. or South Korea. North Korea's distinction as a rogue state and Cold War enemy is no longer a useful ordering principle for U.S. Korea policy. Waiting for the Kim regime to implode has proved an ineffective strategy. Aggressively pushing for regime change is too expensive and risky. A new tack is necessary.

The new U.S. diplomatic approach should focus on bringing Washington and Seoul onto the same page, without any serious costs to the U.S. or compromise U.S. security interests. For example, economic appeasement of Pyongyang or accepting North Korea's nuclear program are not options. But there are other possibilities. To improve the U.S.'s diplomatic position and advance the strategic objectives it shares with allies in East Asia, it is first important to consider: what is at the root of diverging U.S.-ROK views on North Korea? We must appreciate that South Korea is consolidating an impressive list of transitions: from developing to developed country, from autocracy to democracy, from the object of historical geopolitical rivalry to an important international player. South Korean national identity has undergone great change in the process.

The most important change for the international relations of the Korean Peninsula is the shift in South Korea's view of the North. After the Korean War, the South's identity vis-à-vis the North was focused on differentiation and denial – competitive development while deterring and preventing unification by the force of another invasion by communist North Korea. In this South Korean worldview, the U.S. was a clear ally, a resource for development, and a necessary protector. Gradually after the end of the Cold War, and especially since the inter-Korean summit

of June 2000, South Korean identity vis-à-vis the North has radically changed. Today, South Korean national identity is increasingly inclusive of North Korean “blood brothers,” viewing the North less as threat and more as a destination for charity and source of uncertainty to be carefully managed.

The South Korean government now actively suppresses bad news about North Korea, in stark contrast to its anti-communist propaganda of the past. The government strategy now is one of enticement and incrementalism – opening up the North and growing its economy so that a Korean confederation and eventual unification does not mean bankruptcy for the South. But because of the speed of change in South Korea’s identity and Seoul’s policy toward the North, Washington appears sluggish to adjust. Suddenly, the U.S. looks like an impediment to unification instead of a guarantor of South Korea’s independence and prosperity.

Anti-Americanism has long existed in South Korea, but mostly as a function of unfortunate incidents involving U.S. troops on Korean soil and perceived heavy-handed behavior by the U.S.<sup>1</sup> Like any proud people, Koreans resent being told what to do, and as a deep sense for a tragic history meets newfound confidence from rapid development, South Korea is less concerned with aligning its policy with the U.S. in the post-Cold War strategic environment. This is why present expressions of South Korean national identity are more serious than past anti-Americanism and why the U.S.-ROK alliance will drift if Washington does not adjust to the post-summit reality on the Korean Peninsula.

Making Washington’s Korea policy effective in light of South Korea’s reorientation toward the North requires a new ordering principle, a new fundamental doctrine that frames U.S. policy. The basic position that North Korea is an evil, threatening regime should be replaced with U.S. support for Korean unification. The U.S. would announce that it stands squarely behind South Korea’s desire for unification through gradual reconciliation, that it hopes the two Koreas can work out their differences as partners, and that the future configuration of the Korean Peninsula is up to Seoul and Pyongyang. The immediate result of adopting and practicing this new ordering principle would be decreasing perceptions of the U.S. telling Koreans what to do. More importantly, it would put Seoul in the position of telling Pyongyang what it needs to do (stand down on nuclear weapons development, implement economic reforms) instead of painting the U.S. as the bad cop in inter-Korean relations. The U.S. would rhetorically assume a new role of unification supporter, instead of the post-Korean War role of South Korean guarantor, or the present perceived role of obstacle to inter-Korean reconciliation. A pro-unification ordering principle will allow U.S. policy to advance U.S. interests in light of the new South Korean identity, instead of making the United States a growing target of Korean nationalism.

This policy change is relatively cheap for the U.S. to implement because it would not require much in the way of economic or security measures than what Washington would do anyway. The major difference would be in the conduct of diplomacy, and how policy is framed and presented. The U.S. pro-unification stance can be pursued in three steps:

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<sup>1</sup> For background on associated alliance politics, see Leif-Eric Easley, “U.S.-ROK Interaction in the Security Alliance: Modeling the Impact of SOFA Incidents and the North Korean Threat,” unpublished manuscript, available through the author.

- First, we need to bring together a group of Korea scholars to author an Armitage-Nye style report for U.S.-ROK relations.<sup>2</sup> This report will spell out how current U.S. policy is suboptimal because it has yet to adjust to the post-summit reality on the Korean Peninsula. It will emphasize the vast overlap in U.S. and South Korean values and interests. The report will be bi-partisan and published in 2007 ahead of the U.S. presidential campaign to provide a vision for the next U.S. president and a list of Korea specialists from which the next administration can draw advisors.
- Second, the next U.S. president should host the next ROK president at the White House for a state dinner and announce the United States' genuine hope and committed support for Korean unification. Washington need not mention that it is in favor of a process of reconciliation and eventual reunification on Seoul's terms rather than Pyongyang's – this goes without saying. Instead, the U.S. should be careful to avoid providing the Kim Jong-il regime with ammunition (e.g. "axis of evil" style statements) to smear U.S. intentions. Before the announcement, Seoul and Beijing could signal to Pyongyang that a major opportunity for better relations with the U.S. is forthcoming, and North Korea should avoid squandering it.
- Third, support of unification will be consistently used to frame the United States' Korea policy. For example: the U.S. opposes North Korea's nuclear weapons program because it threatens regional stability and the international nonproliferation regime, and stands as an obstacle to Korean unification. The U.S. is concerned about the lack of freedom in North Korea because of rampant violations of human rights and the impediments they cause for North-South reconciliation. And the U.S. supports economic reform and gradual opening of the North Korean economy to hasten and facilitate Korean unification. Even the transformation of U.S. troop deployments should be placed under the new ordering principle: USFK movements are aimed at reducing tensions along the DMZ and developing a climate for inter-Korean reconciliation by focusing the USFK on regional stability rather than countering North Korea.

I presented this three-step proposal at the ninth annual "New Directions in the ROK-U.S. Relationship" conference and appreciated the quantity and quality of feedback. Young Leaders generally received the proposal as a natural way to shore up the alliance and a relatively low cost adjustment for U.S. foreign policy. In contrast, senior participants tended to respond with more caution, no doubt because of their experience. But I believe that the concerns they expressed, which I outline below, could be addressed with careful diplomacy in the U.S.-ROK relationship.

- Many Korean participants' comments seemed to reflect a concern for how China would perceive and respond to a U.S. pro-reunification policy. I replied that by bringing South Korea and the U.S. onto the same page, a change in ordering principle from "North Korean threat" to "Korean unification" will encourage China to update its role from that

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<sup>2</sup> The Armitage-Nye report was a "bipartisan action agenda aimed at creating an enduring alliance," upgrading the U.S.-Japan relationship from its Cold War status to meet post-Cold War challenges. "The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership," *INSS Special Report*, October 2000. An analogous U.S.-ROK initiative would focus on upgrading the alliance from post-Korean War terms to an effective partnership for the post-Kims summit Korean Peninsula.

of intermediary to that of partner in dealing with North Korea. In other words, being a “responsible stakeholder” would come to include supporting Seoul’s vision for a reunified Korean Peninsula. I argued that balance of power expectations for a re-run of Cold War tensions – with North Korea, China, and Russia on one side and South Korea, Japan and the U.S. on the other – are outdated. An obvious reason is that Russia is a much more benign actor than the Soviet Union. But more importantly, the PRC-ROK relationship has changed. Beijing sees its relations with Seoul as increasingly important, while relations with Pyongyang have become focused on managing a source of uncertainty and instability. PRC willingness to protect and support North Korea at the risk of Chinese development is low. Beijing can be expected to manage its relations with Pyongyang and Seoul in a way that best serves its own security interests and aspirations for economic influence on the Korean Peninsula. But it appears that China has not yet decided on a precise strategy. A new ordering principle for U.S. policy, one that makes South Korean and U.S. approaches to North Korea complementary, is more likely to see Beijing’s strategy develop in cooperation with Seoul and Washington because the primary interest in stability is shared by all three and Beijing is unwilling to isolate itself for the benefit of Pyongyang.

- A second point of concern, expressed by both Korean and U.S. participants, was that Washington should not change its policy for the sake of aligning with Seoul’s because the ROK approach to North Korea is dangerously flawed. Some Korean participants suggested Seoul’s policy looks too much like appeasement and effectively sacrifices global norms in dealing with Pyongyang particularly when it human rights. Several Americans stressed that the U.S. should not overreact to domestic criticisms by allies and should focus on policy consistency rather than trying to please volatile Korean public opinion. I found these points to be locked in the current (and unproductive) Bush-Roh dynamic, which is exactly what my proposal seeks to transcend. My proposal is not for the U.S. to support South Korean “appeasement” of the North. Rather, it aims to reassure Seoul that Washington supports its long-term vision for the Korean Peninsula so that South Korea can demand more reciprocity in its relations with Pyongyang. Moreover, I am not suggesting that Washington allow its Korea policy to be written by South Korean public opinion. Rather, the U.S. needs to adjust its policy in light of the new South Korean identity. Naturally, there was disagreement at the conference about the content, trajectory, and implications of South Korean identity. But I maintain that this new identity features more confidence in the ROK position in the world and a greater sense of “one-ness” on the Korean Peninsula, both of which are increasingly expressed in ROK policy and which the U.S. should account for in its diplomacy.
- The third set of apprehensions focused on domestic politics in the U.S. and South Korea. Several U.S. participants argued it would be politically impossible for a U.S. administration to be so deferential to South Korea’s policy until North Korea gives up its nuclear weapons programs. Korean participants expressed concerns for how the “new left” in the ROK would respond, suggesting that progressives would make accusations that the new U.S. policy is a veiled attempt at destabilizing North Korea. Discussions of these political considerations made me realize that in addition to a new ordering principle, U.S. policy needs to further engage Seoul’s approach on specific points. It is

unlikely that Washington will buy into a roadmap that looks too much like a second Agreed Framework. That said, I think it is possible for the U.S. and South Korea to put in motion pieces of the Sept. 19, 2005 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks. In particular, the U.S. and ROK could articulate policy details and make preparations for the following: new opportunities for trade and investment with North Korea (perhaps including U.S. support of Gaeseong and U.S.-ROK discussion with the PRC regarding the development model China is encouraging the North to adopt); ROK direct provision of electric power to the North; and protocols for negotiations on a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

While further policy coordination will be necessary and require sustained attention, these efforts will be energized by a new U.S. diplomacy toward the Korea Peninsula. The key implication of making Korean unification the guiding principle of U.S. policy is to bring Washington and Seoul onto the same page with complementary, although certainly not identical, views of North Korea. U.S.-ROK relations will be revitalized and their dealings with Pyongyang will be mutually reinforcing and more effective. Without compromising on U.S. security interests, the next administration can undertake bold change in U.S. policy on the Korean Peninsula by clearly articulating support for reunification. There may be a diplomatic risk, as benefits from the change will hinge upon responses from both Koreas. But a steadier and more effective partnership with post-Roh South Korea is well worth the risk since the U.S.-ROK alliance is important for the interests of both countries and indispensable for stability in Northeast Asia.



# The Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance: Divorce or Reconciliation?

By Catarina Kim

At a recent seminar in Washington D.C., Kurt Campbell, former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asia and the Pacific, likened the U.S.-ROK alliance to a royal marriage on the brink of divorce.<sup>1</sup> It does seem that increasing policy differences between Seoul and Washington are causing a widening rift between the two allies. But does not seeing eye-to-eye on issues necessarily imply an end to the alliance? This paper attempts to answer this question and others related to the sustainability of the U.S.-ROK alliance by examining factors that present a potential threat to the relationship in the next decade. I offer a few proposals on how the U.S. can deal with the changing dynamics of its relationship with South Korea.

## Threats to the continued viability of the U.S.-ROK alliance

In the past half-century, the U.S.-ROK alliance has experienced a multitude of challenges that have essentially transformed the nature of the relationship from that of a military alliance to a more comprehensive alliance that includes political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Thus, issues that challenge the alliance today not only cover military aspects of the relationship, but also a wide spectrum of issues related to North Korea, “Strategic Flexibility,” free trade agreement negotiations, and social change in South Korea. Let me provide a realistic assessment of the current situation, as well as an evaluation of the consequences of these issues.

### *Diverging Perspectives on North Korea*

The cornerstone of the U.S.-ROK alliance has been the notion of two countries united against a common enemy – North Korea. This is no longer the case, however, due to the fact that the U.S. and South Korea have developed opposing viewpoints of the North. The differences are apparent not only in the external aspects of diplomacy, such as language and tone, but on more substantive levels of policy-making as well. For example, while South Korea refers to the North with extremely friendly terms, such as “North Korea, the country of our fellow brothers and sisters,” the U.S. has publicly denounced the country, labeling it a “criminal state” and a member of the “axis of evil.” The contrast is evident on the policy level as well. While South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun has adhered to the Sunshine Policy’s principles of peaceful cooperation and reconciliation in his dealings with the North, President Bush has taken a hardline stance in his North Korean agenda.

The two allies’ differences of opinion do not just exist in the abstract realm of language and principles. They also cover very tangible ground. Two issues come to mind: North Korea’s nuclear weapons program and allegations of North Korean counterfeiting activities. Regarding the first issue, the U.S. has staunchly advocated the “complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement” (CVID) of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program at the Six-Party Talks, while South Korea has taken the more moderate engagement-first policy at the negotiation table. In terms of the second issue, the Bush administration has made great efforts to impose significant financial pressure on Pyongyang and its foreign exchange channels due to recent Treasury

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, Kyo-kwan. “Seoul and Washington closer to divorce,” *Asia Times*, March 7, 2006.

Department findings that North Korea counterfeited U.S. currency.<sup>2</sup> The South Korean government, however, has been reluctant to show full support for the U.S. action and has urged the Bush administration to ease financial sanctions (via the Chinese government) against Pyongyang.

### *“Strategic Flexibility”*

“Strategic Flexibility,” a component of the Bush administration’s new defense strategy (the Global Posture Review, or GPR), is the term used to refer to the deployment of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) to areas beyond the Korean Peninsula. In real terms, in the event of a security crisis in the region, USFK could be dispatched to nearby areas, such as the strait between mainland China and Taiwan. Until recently, Seoul firmly objected to the policy on legalistic grounds and on the basis that it does not want to get involved in a military standoff between the U.S. and China. However, after three years of deadlock on the issue, the South Korean government announced its decision to accept a limited version of “strategic flexibility” this year. The two allies agreed that Washington is obligated to obtain permission from Seoul before deploying USFK to other areas in the region. However, there has been strong opposition from domestic lawmakers and policymakers in South Korea. The political discord between the allies reached a point where U.S. Gen. Leon LaPorte, commander of both USFK and South Korea-U.S. Joint Forces, expressed concerns over the difficulty he has securing training grounds for USFK in South Korea.<sup>3</sup>

### *Films and rice: deal breakers in the U.S.-Korea FTA?*

In mid-February of this year, South Korea and the U.S. announced the launch of free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations, emphasizing the strong ties between the two allies, the mutual economic benefits that both nations could reap with a FTA, and the development of deeper economic links between North America and Northeast Asia.<sup>4</sup> While the event was largely heralded by the two governments as a way to reinforce the U.S.-ROK alliance, there was also a significant show of opposition to the FTA talks in South Korea. Nationwide demonstrations were staged by members of the film/entertainment industry and the agricultural industry on the potential damaging effects that a FTA with the U.S. could have on the domestic economy. In particular, there was a flood of protests against two preconditions in the FTA negotiations; the first being the proposal to eradicate or weaken the screen quota system, which acts as protective barrier for the domestic film industry, and the second being the proposal to open the domestic agricultural industry, which could have damaging effects on South Korea’s rice market.

### *Dynamic social change in South Korea*

A surge in democracy, nationalism, and anti-American sentiment has taken hold of South Korea in the past few years. Experts believe that South Korea’s democracy is experiencing maturation and change. As a result, Korean netizens<sup>5</sup> are voicing opinions on a multitude of

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<sup>2</sup> “Treasury Warns Against North Korean Money Laundering,” Dec. 19, 2005. <usinfo.state.gov>

<sup>3</sup> Lee, Kyo-kwan. “Seoul and Washington closer to divorce,” *Asia Times*, March 7, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> “U.S.-Korea Free-Trade Pact Expected To Foster Sustainable Growth,” Feb. 14, 2006, <usinfo.state.gov>

<sup>5</sup> A term used in South Korea to refer to citizens on the net or the web.



political and social issues and engaging in cultural exchange with the world through new forms of technology. The ROK government has also adopted new mediums of communication – the internet and blogs – in an attempt to be more transparent and engage in greater dialogue with the public.

In terms of the rise in South Korean nationalism, many experts contribute this to the sense of identity and pride that was generated from hosting the 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup. However, critics say this topic needs to be observed and studied more before it can be considered more than a superficial phenomenon.

Finally, numerous factors have influenced the growth of anti-U.S. sentiment in South Korea since the 1980s. In the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, or what was widely known in South Korea as the “IMF Crisis,” various social problems emerged due to banking reforms and downsizing/restructuring of companies. With unemployment on the rise and fierce competition from global markets, South Koreans started to blame institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and multinational corporations for their social and economic woes. Several other incidents instigated anti-U.S. sentiment in the past five years; the two young schoolgirls who were accidentally killed by a U.S. military tank in 2002 gained the most coverage.

### **Viability solutions for sustaining the U.S.-ROK alliance: a roadmap for the U.S.**

Whether the U.S.-ROK alliance ends in divorce or reconciliation will depend on whether the two allies will compromise on these four issues. Both countries need to recognize the political, social, and economic changes that are taking place at home and abroad. Sociopolitical attitudes are shifting, governments are seeking new directions in foreign policy, and economic growth and development are transforming East Asia in unexpected ways. Thus, it is natural that the nature of the U.S.-ROK alliance is considerably different from that of a half-century ago. If U.S.-Korean relations once could be characterized as being extreme asymmetric dependency and a military alliance, it can now be described as an alliance between two political and economic partners whose national interests may not necessarily be congruent. As a result, the U.S. must invest greater resources into fostering open and honest dialogue with South Korea’s political organizations, as well as its civic groups so that it can understand the social phenomena occurring in South Korea from a grassroots level. For example, both nations could host NGO and civic group exchanges on a state level, as well as locally. The two countries’ embassies could also devote a specific amount of time to community outreach with the help of the younger generations, or organize a “Year of U.S.-ROK Political and Social Exchange” project. The latter proposal would be a strategic attempt to move away from the sole use of cultural exchange in educating the public about the changing dynamics of the relationship.

In addition, since national interests and policy perspectives are diverging between Seoul and Washington, both countries need to do a better job in their diplomacy. At a time when the U.S.-ROK alliance is being scrutinized by the world and being considered tenuous, it is not good diplomacy for either side to emphasize irreconcilable differences over mutual interests. Thus, the Congress should consider a FTA with South Korea to not only further its economic partnership with an ally, but to secure its role in Asia and equalize the rise of China and India’s booming

economies. Washington will also need to explore new policy alternatives on North Korea. Bringing CVID to the Six-Party Talks has all but brought the negotiations to a standstill. In order to successfully bring about structural change in North Korea, the two allies will have to work with each other to find new common ground in their North Korean policy initiatives. This could be achieved with the use of more bilateral committee-level meetings on specific technical issues related to North Korea, rather than the use of ministerial talks, the technique that is being used in the Six-Party Talks. There is a great need for the U.S. and South Korea to engage in dialogue that goes beyond lip service when negotiating North Korea policies. Finding common ground on this issue will lead to the resolution of other challenges for the alliance. In this sense, it is imperative that Seoul and Washington have a unified voice on North Korea.

The timely resolution of the four issues outlined here will contribute to the continued viability of the U.S.-ROK alliance. However, mutual national interests, regional security threats, and effective diplomacy is what has kept and what will continue to keep this marriage together.

# The Dissemination of Anti-Americanism: A Threat to the U.S.-ROK Alliance

By Hyun Ah Julia Kim

The United States and the Republic of Korea continue to affirm that their alliance is important and indispensable to deterring North Korean aggression and preserving peace on the Korean Peninsula. And while concern about North Korean nuclear and security issues has sustained the alliance for 56 years, the alliance has evolved into relationship that not only stabilized Northeast Asia, but also reaped mutual political and economic benefits. As the two countries strive for greater benefits, a deepening alliance is inevitable. In the beginning of this year, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea Alexander Vershbow, reaffirmed the U.S. view of the alliance as critical, noting

“while our military alliance and security issues dominated our past and continue to shape our present, the future belongs to economic and social cooperation and exchange. I am happy to report that it is in these fields that we continue to see the most rapid growth in the U.S.-R.O.K. relationship”<sup>1</sup>

Attaining a mutually supportive and beneficial alliance is achievable. However, obstacles must be scrutinized and resolved in an efficient and timely manner. Besides the friction in dealing with North Korea and in military- and trade- related issues, the escalation of anti-American sentiment in Korea poses the greatest barrier to deepening current relations, and is the greatest threat to the viability of the U.S.-ROK alliance.

## **Political, economic, and social significance of the alliance**

“The U.S-South Korea alliance has weathered numerous storms and crises in the past 50 years, some of them very serious,” said Balbina Hwang, a Northeast Asia policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, after the Korean War, the alliance has been essential to the democratization, economic recovery, and growth of South Korea. The alliance is more than half a century old and has rested on the common ground of shared values of peace, freedom, and security. As the U.S. leads the fight against terrorism, the Republic of Korea was one of the early contributors to Operation Iraqi Freedom, and deployed 3,400 troops, “making it the third-largest peacekeeper in Iraq that pledged an additional \$200 million in assistance through 2007.”<sup>3</sup> The substantial overseas development assistance provided by the ROK government demonstrates that this partnership is vital to the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State. (Jan. 4, 2006). “U.S.-Korean Relations: 2006 and Beyond.” Alexander Vershbow, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, Remarks to the Korean-American Association. Retrieved April 9, 2006, from <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/58893.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ser, Myo-ja. (April 25, 2005). “The alliance: Is it in trouble?” *Joong Ang Daily*. Retrieved April 9, 2006, from <http://joongangdaily.joins.com/200504/24/200504242300387939900090309031.html>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State. (May 2, 2005). “Evolution of the U.S.-Korea Alliance and the Future of Northeast Asia.” Evans J.R. Revere, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Remarks at the Korean Economic Institute. Retrieved April 9, 2006, from <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2005/45576.htm>

Furthermore, only through bilateral efforts can the North Korean issue be addressed. The ROK can play a significant role in persuading North Korea to dismantle its nuclear weapons programs while Seoul reaffirms the United States' commitment to international cooperation and security.

The alliance also has economic and social importance. A free trade agreement (FTA), a "win-win proposition," will lead to increased job opportunities and better welfare for both countries. "The Republic of Korea is the United States' seventh-largest trading partner with two-way goods trade in 2005 valued at \$72 billion, and is a key geostrategic partner in Northeast Asia. The economic impact of the FTA will be significant to the two countries. The Republic of Korea's real GDP will increase by as much as 2 percent; for the United States, 0.2 percent GDP growth is expected."<sup>4</sup> According to President Bush, "A free trade agreement with the Republic of Korea will provide important economic, political, and strategic benefits to both countries and build on America's engagement in Asia. Completing a free trade agreement can only make the bilateral U.S.-Korea relationship even stronger."<sup>5</sup>

Equally important is the academic, labor, and cultural exchanges between two very different societies. American universities host 65,000 Koreans making the Republic of Korea the "third-largest source of foreign students studying in the United States."<sup>6</sup> The possibilities for U.S. and Korean students to engage and collaborate through research will maximize new breakthroughs, especially in the fields of science and technology, two important sectors that will shape the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, through academic exchange, students have the capacity to spread awareness and appreciation of their cultures, which will lessen friction and foster deeper ties between the U.S. and the ROK. The bilateral alliance also contributes to the exchange of skills and expertise in the labor force. It was recently reported that a contract will be signed to supply an "unprecedented 10,000 Korean nurses" to New York.<sup>7</sup> The nurses will begin working in 36 hospitals after they receive three months of free English instruction. The two countries' people-to-people interactions have gone beyond tourism and academia, and now incorporate the labor force.

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of State. (Feb. 14, 2006). U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement: A Path to Sustainable Growth. Alexander Vershbow, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, Address to the Institute for Global Economics. Retrieved April 11, 2006, from <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/61857.htm>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State. (Feb. 7, 2006). U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement Talks: Meeting the Challenge. Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, Remarks at the 2006 New Year's Networking Dinner Hosted by the Korea International Trade Association and American Chamber of Commerce in Korea. Retrieved April 11, 2006, from <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/60625.htm>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of State. (Jan 12, 2006). President Bush's Foreign Policy and the Future of U.S.-Korean Relations. Alexander Vershbow, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, Remarks for the Korean Human Development Institute's CEO Forum for Human Development. Retrieved April 11, 2006, from <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/59503.htm>

<sup>7</sup> (2006, April 14). "Korea to Send 10,000 Nurses to U.S." *Digital Chosunilbo*. Retrieved April 16, 2006, from <http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200604/200604140013.html>

## **Shortcomings of U.S. public diplomacy**

Anti-American sentiment has always existed in the ROK, from “criticism of specific U.S. policies to a more general condemnation stemming from nationalist or ideological roots.”<sup>8</sup> In the past this has not been a great threat because those sentiments were marginal compared to the favorable opinion of the general public. Of course, the level of popularity increased and decreased according to events. However, there was always a general consensus among Koreans, regardless of age, that relations with the U.S. were more beneficial than not. In the past few years, anti-American sentiment has escalated among the younger generations of Koreans. Their perception of North Korea as a brother to be helped clashed with that of the Bush administration, which proclaimed North Korea a member of the “Axis of Evil.” Younger generations, differing from older generations who lived through the Korean War, perceive the abrupt change of policy toward North Korea as aggressive, and they feel that it has interfered with improved North-South relations made possible by the Sunshine Policy. They interpret U.S. policy toward North Korea as hostile and preventing reunification of the Korean Peninsula and the emergence of an independent Korea.

These sentiments have disseminated beyond the younger generations of Koreans. In South Korea, after the 2002 U.S. military accident, candlelight protests and mass rallies proliferated against the U.S. and the U.S. military presence. The protests have continued, and most recently have been against the FTA. Massive numbers of trade unionists, farmers, students, and actors have expressed discontent, particularly over negotiations over agriculture and the screen quota. Furthermore, suspicion and public resentment toward foreign funds have been growing with recent scandals involving U.S. firms in the Republic of Korea. The charges include tax evasion and speculation with other allegations under investigation. The Korean Chamber of Commerce and Industry reported, “speculative short-term foreign capitalists have drained at least \$6 billion of national wealth since the financial crisis.”<sup>9</sup>

## **Solutions to anti-Americanism**

Creating a positive image in the Republic of Korea is a high priority. If anti-American sentiment continues to escalate, popular opinion will block talks with the U.S. aimed at strengthening relations, and will endanger the alliance.

The greatest cause of anti-Americanism is policy differences toward North Korea. The U.S. and the Republic of Korea, through bilateral efforts, should persuade North Korea to return to the Six-Party Talks, but the conflict with North Korea has to be addressed with the involvement of the international community. Tensions over North Korea need to be reduced. Instead attention needs to focus on solving anti-American sentiment so that goals, such as concluding the FTA and building a stronger partnership, can be achieved.

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<sup>8</sup> Scalapino, Robert. (2005). *America's Role in Asia-The Evolution Required*. Retrieved April 16, 2006, from <http://www.keia.org/2-Publications/2-3-Monograph/Monograph2005/Monograph-Contents05.html>

<sup>9</sup> Lee, B.J. (Nov. 28, 2005). “South Korea: A Buyout Backlash.” *Newsweek International*. Retrieved April 17, 2006 from <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/10117470/site/newsweek>

Fixing the poor image of the United States in Korea needs to be addressed by reaching out to civil society, and by educating Koreans about how the alliance benefits both countries. The U.S. Embassy in Korea can promote the alliance by establishing more Information Resource Centers around the country and by collaborating with NGOs to educate students at schools and universities and young professionals. More interaction between Korean civilians and U.S. civilians and military should be encouraged through programs such as the successful Joint American-Korean Saturday Tours to increase cultural understanding and appreciation. Community festivals in the areas where U.S. forces are stationed are another way to reach out to Korean communities.

Outreach programs will enhance the Korean people's understanding of the U.S. The recognition that the alliance is strong and dependable justifies concessions. The alliance has to be solidified to create a balance in Asia and to align political, economic, and social interests.

### **In retrospect**

Our conference discussions addressed security, political, and economic issues critical to sustaining the U.S.-ROK alliance. Interestingly enough, most participants showed less concern about anti-American sentiment and some did not even consider it a threat to the alliance. One presenter argued anti-American sentiment in South Korea is not pervasive and can only be a problem if it plays into domestic politics. He stated that this issue has been dramatized by the Pentagon and by the media. Consequently, the general public perceives the situation as worse than it really is.

Nevertheless, anti-American sentiment exists and there is a dangerous potential for the situation to worsen. Thus, it is imperative to formulate solutions to alleviate even the smallest amount of anti-American sentiment in South Korea. I am convinced that anti-American sentiment poses the greatest challenge to a lasting U.S.-ROK alliance and relations can be improved through public diplomacy.

# **New Challenge for the U.S.-ROK Alliance: Possible Threats from the North's Collapse and the Proliferation of Mercenaries**

By Jang-Wook Lee

It is easy to associate North Korea's collapse with German unification. The collapse of Kim Jong-Il's regime would not be unalloyed good news for the ROK-U.S. alliance, as it would signify the collapse of the world's fifth-largest military. Its demobilization needs adequate management. Two cases of ill-managed demobilization were witnessed in the former Soviet Union and post-Saddam Iraq. The Red Army demobilization promoted the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). A U.S. report said that uncountable rifles and RPGs of Saddam's forces were handed to resistance groups in Iraq and it caused serious problems in countering the insurgency. Without adequate demobilization and disarmament procedures, this could happen in North Korea too. I would like to mention an undesirable consequence for the Korean Peninsula – the proliferation of mercenaries.

## **Ugly scenarios**

The collapse of the world's fifth largest military could pose serious security threats in East Asia. North Korea has almost 1 million military personnel and the world's largest special forces, with between 80,000 and 100,000 special forces personnel.

Serious problems would be caused by ex-professional soldiers. For them, North Korea's collapse would mean unemployment. Unlike conscripts, professional soldiers would face a much harder time finding new jobs. The bigger issue would be dealing with the members of the special forces. China and Japan will not want the new government of the Korean Peninsula to have such a large special force. It is quite possible that China and Japan might ask for the CVID (complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement) of the North's special forces. Thus, reemployment opportunities as special force agents will be limited.

The characteristics of special forces duty would also cause ex-soldiers to have a hard time adjusting to civilian life. Their skills would not be suited to civilian life. Joining the police or the military of the new government would be a useful alternative, but there would not be jobs for all of them.

In addition to difficulties finding new jobs, some work would not be acceptable to the new government or the world. Such jobs include:

- resistance fighters fighting for the defunct Kim Jong-il government;
- plunderers involved in piracy, or banditry, or;
- joining private militias.

These jobs assume ex-agents would remain on the Korean Peninsula. This would create a counterinsurgency in a unified Korea or the newly organized North Korea. But there are other options:

- bodyguards of criminal syndicates. Russian and Chinese mafias or drug syndicates in Latin America might employ them as bodyguards. This might promote the syndicates' growth and result in the escalation of international crime;
- dogs of war: some would join military organizations of other countries. Some African states might be interested. In the mid-1980s, North Korea sent special forces to Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria. These countries know the North Korean special forces' capabilities very well. Terrorist groups might contact them. They would deliver services such as combat support, training, and strategic/tactical advice to the countries or terrorist groups.

Becoming mercenaries could be an attractive option, as it is a job with which they are familiar.

Proliferation of mercenaries would pose serious problems. The world witnessed how “forgotten soldiers” made civil wars possible during the 1990s in Africa. Ex-soldiers who were abandoned by their respective new governments were the instigators of many *coup d'états* and civil wars. The armed forces of many under-developed states are weak or are in turmoil. They are quite small in size, ill-equipped, and ill-disciplined. As a result, the regional balance of power in those areas might be altered when skilful and well-disciplined soldiers are introduced. The stability of the new government on the Korean Peninsula and some regions of the world would depend on how the demobilization of North Korean special forces is handled.

The U.S.-ROK alliance has a common interest here. The U.S. worries about North Korean special forces' demobilization because it fears they will engage in mercenary activities. It is also critical to ROK national security because it could create an insurgency – very difficult to respond to – on Korean Peninsula.

### **One option: private military company**

The ROK has a plan for the unification of two Koreas' military forces in the event of a regime collapse and has studied the German case. But there are many differences between the German and Korean cases. The combined Korean military is larger than that of the two Germanys during the Cold War– 700,000 vs.1.7 million. Neither did East and West Germany have large special forces as do the two Koreas.

There are specific plans for a Korean military reorganization based on the German model. However, these plans are only focused on the dismantlement of military structures, which may be not enough to deal with specific reemployment procedures. Considering the large-scale personnel reduction that will follow the North's collapse, the chance of reemployment will be limited for many former soldiers. Thus, creating employment for ex-special forces is key. As mentioned, becoming a mercenary would be attractive to these soldiers because they would like



to find new jobs similar to their old ones. If becoming a mercenary is unavoidable, we could think about a Private Military Company (PMC).

Current U.S. military forces depend heavily on PMCs. By 2005, 25,000 military contractors were working for U.S. military forces in Iraq – from room cleaning to fire fighting. A PMC is not a military force, but it delivers military or security services for governments, multinational corporations, and NGOs. PMCs are called the proxy of foreign policy, “good dogs of war,” and contract warriors. Some optimists argue that PMCs should support United Nations peacekeeping operations and humanitarian aid missions. They criticize the UN’s inability to deal with these situations and insist that PMCs can deliver protection for humanitarian missions in many regions in Africa.

Most discussion of PMCs has focused on the issue of efficiency. However, we need to see, or at least acknowledge, the other merits of PMCs. They can absorb unemployed military professionals.

One might think the PMC is a radical and a defective option. There is anxiety that PMCs could be undesirable for total demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DD&R) because it could make DD&R procedures more complicated. There are also undesirable consequences of PMCs: contract dilemmas and the problem of oversight. Yet, this option might be better than other possibilities – joining rogue states or terrorist organizations. The PMC option is just one option to counter the proliferation of mercenaries. The key is to provide employment for ex-military professionals. If PMCs cannot solve the problem, other alternatives for ex-professionals should be created through U.S.-ROK cooperation.

## **Conclusion**

The U.S.-ROK alliance has focused on deterring and winning the next war on the Korean Peninsula. Now it is the time to think not only about the next war but other contingencies that may arise on the Korean Peninsula. They include the spread of WMD and related technologies to other “rogue states” resulting from the collapse of North Korea.

What should be done to respond to future threats? Two factors are important.

### *The world system in transition*

The most impressive part about the Pacific Forum CSIS-NARI conference 2006 was “understanding the change of the world system.” President Sang-Woo Rhee’s notion of the “post-Westphalia era” was useful to understand current and future affairs. In the post-Westphalia era, other issues as human rights, enlargement of democracy, and proliferation of WMD will be more significant than sovereignty itself; sometimes sovereignty can be violated to achieve policy goals. Unlike the Westphalian era, today’s nation-states should consider many external factors when they design domestic policy. Sometimes, nation-states confined to Westphalian thinking see human rights as form of interventionism. The debates over human rights and regime change between the U.S., China, and South Korea is based on their views of the Westphalian system.

Post-Westphalian thinking is also important to counter the proliferation of mercenaries after the collapse of Kim Jong-Il's regime. Some nationalists in South Korea think North Korean issues are domestic ones and have more closed attitudes when discussing reunification. They insist that all issues related to reunification should be solved by the two Koreas and would insist the same logic apply to the dismantlement of North Korea's special forces. This insistence on sovereignty could cause discord in U.S.-ROK relations and the reunification of the two Koreas.

To cooperate in the complex post-Westphalian era, the U.S.-ROK alliance needs to study the history of cooperative security between the U.S. and East European countries in the 1990s. The experience since the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the 1990s would guide policymakers on how to coordinate domestic problems (building new governments) and international security (countering proliferation).

### *South Korea's apathy toward the North Korea threat and anti-U.S. sentiment*

At this year's conference, U.S. participants worried about South Korean apathy toward the threat from North Korea. I think this apathy resulted from a powerful U.S.-ROK alliance. For over 50 years, the alliance provided the foundation for countering the North Korean threat. In the mid-to late-'80s, there was domestic instability in the South due to the assassination of President Park Jung Hee. Nevertheless, a North Korea attack was deterred by the alliance and the presence of U.S. troops in the South, thus bringing stability to the region.

Yet, this solid alliance between the two countries paradoxically has resulted in security apathy for much of the Korean public. Despite the fact that the world's most highly militarized zone is only 30 kilometers from Seoul, more than 10 million citizens residing in the city go about their daily lives without difficulty. The problem is that much of the Korean public fails to perceive the fact that this normalcy is based on the U.S.-ROK alliance. I realized through this year's conference that not only is anti-U.S. sentiment the main threat to the alliance, but the failure to acknowledge the benefits that the alliance brings causes problems as well. How can security apathy in South Korea be resolved? A fundamental way of tackling the issue would be through education, yet even in schools there are ideological confrontations.

The problem should be resolved by approaching the matter through civilian organizations that could bring about public awareness of the problem. A model case in this regard is the cooperation between U.S. and Korean NGOs on the issue of human rights for North Koreans in 2004.

# Dilemma of the U.S.-ROK Alliance and a Peace Regime

By Julia Joo-A Lee

Discussion of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula has resumed as way to stabilize the region. Most parties involved in this process – the two Koreas, the United States, and China – agree that there should not be military action or armed conflict to solve disputes. However, the idea of a peace regime is still controversial: not only because it is unlikely that it can overcome the security dilemma in Northeast Asia, but also because it will require a change in the status of the U.S.-ROK alliance. Thus, it is inevitable that a peace regime can either destabilize the alliance or provide an opportunity for enduring peace. Here, I examine whether the alliance and the peace regime are compatible, and then look at what roles and steps South Korea can take.

## An alliance at the crossroads

The U.S.-ROK alliance has been considered successful, but it has become shaky. This alliance came into existence because both the U.S. and South Korea seek security from a similar threat, North Korea. This has changed because the U.S. and South Korea have different perceptions of the North Korean threat, which could cause conflict over how they deal with North Korea and setting goals for the peace regime.

U.S. foreign policies toward North Korea have been based on the assumption that North Korea is a dangerous revisionist country and a source of global and regional instability. U.S. strategists use a “capabilities-based” approach to assess potential challengers to U.S. national interests, rather than an “intentions-based” approach. Capabilities are usually “measurable and relatively slow to change,” while intentions may quickly change or are “relatively easy to disguise.”<sup>1</sup> The U.S. government is serious about dealing with challenges to its counter-proliferation policy and has been an alliance priority, especially after the CIA made public its suspicion that North Korea was engaged in a nuclear weapons program in the early 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Measuring the North Korean nuclear capability is still an area of uncertainty, but even defensive steps of a suspect like North Korea can be perceived as “an aggression, or a preparation for an attack.”<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the South Korean government places greater emphasis on North Korean intent rather than capabilities.<sup>4</sup> The South Korean government still believes that there has

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<sup>1</sup> A capability is defined as “the ability to execute a specified course of action. An intention is an “aim or design to execute a specified course of action” according to the DoD Dictionary of Military Terms, <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/index.html>, accessed Oct. 30, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Chamberlin, Paul F., “ROK-U.S. Interests and Alliance in a New Era,” *Korea and World Affairs: A Quarterly Review*, (Vol. XXIX, No. 4, Winter 2005)

<sup>3</sup> Suh, J. J., “Bound to Last?: The U.S.-Korea Alliance and Analytical Eclecticism,” in *Rethinking Security in East Asia: identity, power, and efficiency*, ed. J. J. Suh, Peter J. Katzenstein, and Allen Carlson, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004)

<sup>4</sup> Lee, Chung Min, “Reassessing the ROK-US Alliance: Transformation Challenges and the Consequences of South Korea’s Choices,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, (Vol. 57, No. 2, 2003) pp. 281-307

been “incremental progress” after the 2000 South-North summit and thus should engage North Korea with the Sunshine policy.<sup>5</sup> The South Korean government tends to think that North Korea is not a threatening revisionist state, but rather is a status-quo state that wants to survive. Many Koreans fear that the U.S. may attack North Korea’s nuclear facilities using its policy of preemption.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, the U.S. and the ROK have disagreed on engaging the North, especially under the Roh administration. President Roh advocated the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Korea when he worked as a labor activist and human rights lawyer. Roh’s election victory was largely the result of young voters who have liberal perspectives and anger at or resentment of the U.S. Judging from the young voters’ impact on his election, Roh was expected to push for the revision of SOFA, and voters expected more autonomy in the relationship with the U.S. More evidence can be found in debates over South Korea’s “main enemy.” The term “*jujeok*” or “main enemy” was used by the Ministry of National Defense (MND) to refer to the DPRK in Defense White Papers. In 2003, however, MND announced that publication of the annual Defense White Paper would be postponed because supporters of Sunshine criticized the use of the term. More recently, President Roh was defiant despite an escalating spat between his government and the U.S. over sanctions Washington has taken against North Korea. In his New Year’s press conference, he said, “the Korean government does not agree with some opinions in the U.S. that apparently want to take issue with and pressure the North Korean regime, sometimes hoping for its collapse... if the U.S. government attempts to resolve the problem that way, there will be friction and disagreements between Seoul and Washington.” This is significant evidence that alliance will be maintained only if there is a shared purpose – a common threat perception of their enemy.

### **The peace regime revisited**

Since the 1990s, North Korea has consistently claimed that establishment of a peace regime requires the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea. Four-party talks started in 1997 but failed because North Korea wanted the U.S. and South Korea to give up their alliance. (Jeon, 7) The North’s strategy in the ‘90s was to isolate South Korea from the U.S. and China, but the U.S.-ROK alliance was solid enough to keep this from happening.

In July 2005, however, North Korea proposed a peace regime with a new focus on the inter-Korean relationship. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> CSCAP study group meeting on WMD proliferation, the North Korean delegation argued that the DPRK, ROK, and the U.S. should be signatories for the peace agreement, and not China. The inclusion of South Korea as a partner might have been strategic, because North Korea is more likely to take advantage of the change in South Korea and its relation to the alliance – in particular, Seoul’s claim to be a “balancer” in the region. South Korea’s favorable attitude toward the North and China can be a burden to the U.S. in the process of establishing a peace regime. Moreover, young liberals in South Korea argued that the alliance

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Lee, Chung Min, “Reassessing the ROK-US Alliance: Transformation Challenges and the Consequences of South Korea’s Choices,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, (Vol. 57, No. 2, 2003) pp. 281-307

and the peace regime are not compatible.<sup>7</sup> They view the U.S.-ROK alliance as a barrier to reunification and that it should be removed to make way for the peace regime.

From the U.S. perspective, there are two requirements to realize a peace regime; peaceful resolution of North Korea's nuclear crisis and normalization of relationship between the U.S. and North Korea.<sup>8</sup> Even though the U.S. officially supports the peace regime, the U.S. priorities are fighting terrorism and proliferation. Therefore, the U.S. will focus more on dealing with the nuclear weapons program for now, rather than pushing for a peace regime.

Given that the U.S. and North Korea have different ways to get to the peace regime, it is even more important for South Korea to develop a careful strategy and coordinate with the U.S. In order for South Korea to avoid radical and destabilizing changes in the security environment in East Asia, the top priority of foreign policy will remain unchanged; (1) confidence-building with North Korea should be accomplished first and, (2) the U.S.-ROK alliance should be maintained even after establishment of the peace regime. In addition, for the alliance and a peace regime to be compatible, it is important for both South Korea and the U.S. to agree on how to set priorities between denuclearization and a peace regime. At the conference in Maui, one of the Korean participants argued that Seoul and Washington may have different approaches on whether a peace regime is a "condition" for denuclearization or an "outcome" of denuclearization. Despite challenges, South Korea should remember that the strategic underpinnings of the alliance are important to the national interests of both countries.

## **Recommendations**

The coexistence of the alliance and a peace regime might be considered impossible, but the discussion is inevitable. Consequently, it is important to understand that the alliance and the peace regime cannot replace each other,<sup>9</sup> but are complementary and should work together to ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula. The two countries should:

- Build a common strategic vision: in keeping with its desire to become a more prominent actor in the region, South Korea should play a more active role in peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, and combating WMD proliferation. Deepening and widening the alliance can contribute to regional stability in the long term.
- Understand the peace regime is beneficial: the U.S. should understand that it will gain more from the peace dividend from the peace regime in the long run,<sup>10</sup> and will be able to focus on other issues like the war on terrorism. South Korea should recognize that getting support from the U.S. will be indispensable.

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<sup>7</sup> Lee, Sang hyun, "Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula and ROK-U.S. Alliance," Korea and World Politics (IFES), (Vol. 22, No.1, Spring 2006)

<sup>8</sup> Lee, Sang hyun, "Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula and ROK-U.S. Alliance," Korea and World Politics (IFES), (Vol. 22, No.1, Spring 2006)

<sup>9</sup> Lee, Sang hyun, "Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula and ROK-U.S. Alliance," Korea and World Politics (IFES), (Vol. 22, No.1, Spring 2006)

<sup>10</sup> Lee, Sang hyun, "Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula and ROK-U.S. Alliance," Korea and World Politics (IFES), (Vol. 22, No.1, Spring 2006)



# Adding a New Reality: The U.S.-ROK Alliance Puzzle

By Jaehwan Lim

The U.S.-ROK military alliance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century presents a puzzle to realists who view power balance as the basis for an alliance. At its formation in the 1950s, the U.S.-South Korea alliance was justified on the grounds that U.S. power was needed to restore balance to the peninsula caused by Pyongyang's advantage, which was amplified by the alliances North Korea had forged with the Soviet Union and China. Throughout the intervening decades, however, there have been such profound shifts in the power distribution that the North's power advantage has been neutralized, if not replaced, by the South's superiority.

North Korea's material capabilities continued to decline in absolute and relative terms during the 1990s. If realists are right, the U.S. and Korean governments should have begun and accelerated the process of alliance reduction throughout the 1990s, thereby bringing the alliance in line with a shift in the power balance. Yet the U.S.-Korea alliance not only persisted but increased its military capabilities. To be sure, realists might cite North Korea's nuclear capability as a palpable material factor that justifies the alliance. However, it is dubious that continuing U.S. "conventional" forces in the ROK, mostly designed to repel a massive land assault, would moderate the "nuclear crisis" on the Korean Peninsula.

In addition, realists might endorse the persistence of the U.S.-ROK alliance by suggesting that there has been a substitution of the threat against which the alliance is balancing. The most likely new threat would have to be China. It is certain that throughout the 1990s, Washington and Beijing have been engaged in a complex strategic tango in which they push and pull each other, gauging each other's strength and intentions. But it would be a stretch of the imagination to argue that the United States has implemented a plan to "contain" Beijing and reconfigured the U.S.-Korea alliance to counterbalance China's rise. More important, there is no consensus yet as to who is the new threat: some, particularly in the U.S., point to China, whereas others, especially from Korea, to Japan.

So why does the U.S.-Korea alliance persist? Constructivist ideas can help shed light on the puzzling consistency of the U.S.-Korea alliance. That is, if we understand the military alliance as a political practice, the representational practice of the alliance, which specifically brought about the reality of "the missile threat" and "the nuclear threat" and reproduced the image of "the dangerous North," then this establishes the alliance as a natural framework which is privileged over other alternative security arrangements, thereby contributing to the persistence of the U.S.-Korea alliance<sup>1</sup>.

Assuming the relevance of constructivist insights in accounting for this persistence, it can be said that the U.S.-Korea alliance is now faced with two major threats undermining the very social reality that enables and privileges the alliance. First, changing social identities in Korea pose a deep challenge to the alliance. South Korea, one of the most loyal U.S. allies, became

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<sup>1</sup> Suh, J.J. "Bound to Last? The U.S.-Korea Alliance and Analytical Eclecticism," pp. 150-164, in Katzenstein, Peter, ed. *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power, and Efficiency*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, (2004).

increasingly critical of the U.S. military presence, while its citizen's attitudes toward the North diverge widely. In a dramatic change in the perception of U.S. identity, a majority of South Koreans believed, probably for the first time since the Korean War, that the United States had become a source of insecurity. This dramatic development was aided by a more benign perception of their Northern brethren to which the 2000 summit and subsequent exchanges contributed.

Another source of threat is the rise of China. From a long-term perspective, Korea's alliance with the United States over the past half century can be perceived as a unique departure from Korea's traditional security paradigm. That is, Korea has spent centuries adjusting to and resisting China's influence and it seems to face much higher costs in balancing China than other nations situated more geographically distant. With China enhancing its presence in the region, some policy analysts even claim that the question for South Korea in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is whether it should strive to prolong its alliance with the U.S. or seek "strategic accommodation" with its traditional, pre-20<sup>th</sup> century patron, China. Although such a claim represents only a small part of the debate in Seoul, it appears that South Koreans, including policy-makers at the core, are beginning to imagine security frameworks other than the U.S.-Korea alliance.

What can be done about these challenges to the continued viability of the U.S.-ROK alliance? At the bilateral security seminar in Maui, many Korean and U.S. participants seemed to agree that the U.S.-ROK alliance is at a turning point and some changes are unavoidable given the rapid changes in the regional and global security environment and the evolving attitudes on both sides concerning the relevance of the alliance. However, there was little consensus among participants over *how* and *to what extent* the alliance should be changed. For some, the change means "enlarging" the alliance, an attempt to move the relationship beyond an alliance based on the convergence of needs brought about by the threat of North Korea. This includes efforts to broaden the alliance's focus to address comprehensive security issues.<sup>2</sup> For others, the change indicates "deepening" the alliance, which is aimed at making the alliance something like "security community" based on the sense of shared values.

There was considerable skepticism about the possibility that South Korea would move *rapidly* toward a new strategic alliance with China. Although, as a participant pointed out, most South Koreans understand China's growing importance and want to maintain good ROK-PRC relations, many public opinion polls reveal that the overwhelming majority of them remain committed to the U.S. alliance. After all, the China issue is no less complex in South Korea than in other nations.<sup>3</sup>

At the conference, there was a great deal of discussion on implications of changing social identities in South Korea as well. Most striking was the perception that South Korea is caught between two conflicting identities: the alliance identity that sees the United States as a security

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted, however, that some (mostly Korean) participants expressed a concern that any effort to "enlarge" the alliance could antagonize China, or at least send wrong signals, causing ripple effects that could be detrimental to all in the region.

<sup>3</sup> One manifestation of the complexity of the China issue in South Korea is the increasing apprehension about China's growing economic and political influence on North Korea.



provider and the nationalist identity that pits Korean identity against the United States. However, they seemed quite cautious about the policy implications of the current identity situation for the U.S.-ROK alliance. A Korean participant claimed that the social base of liberalism, which tends to lean toward an anti-U.S. identity, is growing among the younger and the more educated, but it is also vulnerable, volatile, and unstable, and that there is more variance than coherence among the supporters of liberalism, particularly in terms of policy preferences. In the same vein, a U.S. participant divulged his impression, which I believe suits well reality, that most Koreans see talk of “true independence” as being more about Korean nationalism than about realistic policy, and that views appear to have become more pragmatic and realistic even on the left side of the spectrum.

All in all, what became clear through this seminar is that the social reality that has maintained and supported the U.S.-Korea alliance for the past 50 years is still working, or to be more exact, is enduring by the force of inertia. What is needed, therefore, is for the two countries to add a new reality to the alliance, which will in turn contribute to making up for the critical divergence on views of North Korea. In this light, building an FTA, although it will never mean concessions on security matters, could be a way to test the strength of the existing social reality underlying the alliance, and construct a new one.



# Modernizing the U.S.-ROK Alliance

By Wayne Mei<sup>1</sup>

After more than 50 years, one would expect the U.S.-ROK alliance to have found footing solid enough to ensure that disagreements between the two countries could be worked out without posing a serious threat to the partnership. But growing resentment on both sides of the Pacific have contributed to a mutual sense of doubt about the future of the alliance.

Knowing what's at stake, it should be plain that any further slippage is unacceptable. Turning things around won't be easy, but easing doubts and reassuring respective partners that vital interests are being taken into consideration isn't unprecedented. As in all relationships, revitalizing bonds usually begins with the acknowledgment that discontent won't disappear on its own. Taking the time to figure out the sources of disappointment and moving forward with the understanding that a significant change in attitudes and behavior will be required on both sides is always a good place to start.

## Adjusting the alliance to post-Cold War exigencies

Times have changed since the U.S. and the ROK began cooperating for their mutual benefit. Whether political, social, economic, or security-related, each partner has taken on new perspectives and the alliance needs to be recalibrated accordingly.

Although the nuts and bolts of recalibration – developing new mechanisms for bilateral consultations – is vital, the basic challenge is essentially a confidence building exercise. The alliance partners need to be reminded that each side has shown itself to be reliable and committed, each “coming through” for the other at critical times and both stand to lose if the relationship withers away.

This “re-courting process” should be aimed at establishing new bonds of trust through three layers of mutual reinforcement:

1. Emphasize the Right Messages – Policymakers must emphasize that the alliance is based on interdependence, common purpose and mutual respect. The message must be “We can't be successful without you.”
2. Establish Proof Points – Simply saying the right things isn't enough. Washington and Seoul can gain confidence by working cooperatively on issues such as energy security, free trade and regional security. Successful engagement in these areas can establish a positive feedback loop.
3. Prevent Escalation – Both sides need to anticipate problems and be more attuned to possible distortions in public debates about the alliance. Specifically, the alliance needs

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<sup>1</sup> These are personal views of the author and not representative of U.S. government policy or those of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

to ensure that there are avenues of redress so that grievances can be aired in a constructive manner.

Managing sensitivities in the alliance through this framework is important, but early efforts should be focused on clarifying U.S. and ROK expectations regarding terms of cooperation, and specifically respective roles and how the two governments will work together to achieve shared gains.

### **An equitable, mature partnership – new roles**

With status comes responsibility. As the world's 11<sup>th</sup> largest economy, South Korea now has the means and a greater stake in taking a higher profile in advancing and defending the international system in East Asia.<sup>2</sup>

When U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick introduced his concept of “responsible stakeholder” in September 2005, he was setting an expectation of China.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the benefits of a stable international system don't just belong to the PRC – South Korea's economic miracle was as much a product of the opportunities afforded by an open global market. From the U.S. view, the ROK could do more to defend the international economy by jointly working with it to clamp down on the theft of intellectual property and counterfeiting and, more broadly, by taking an active role in combating the common threats of WMD proliferation and global terrorism.

Given South Korea's rising self-confidence and desire to adopt a global posture more fitting its new strengths, the U.S. call for ROK leadership should be seen as a welcome opportunity. Also, in view of Seoul's aim to reach per capita income of \$20,000, the country simply can't afford to be passive about defending an international system that has enabled it to do so well so fast.<sup>43</sup>

For its part, the U.S. can help encourage South Korea move beyond a perceived “junior partner” status by taking steps to ensure Seoul gains a greater sense of ownership over its own strategic direction – Seoul's command and control over its military forces during peacetime and wartime is one area where Washington can promote greater consultation. Promoting freer trade through a U.S.-ROK Free Trade Agreement would also be a strong confidence building measure.

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<sup>2</sup> “The World Economy at the Start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Remarks by Anne O. Krueger, First Deputy Managing Director, IMF at the Annual Gilbert Lecture, Rochester University, New York. April 6, 2006. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/2006/040606.htm>

<sup>3</sup> “Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility?” Remarks by Robert B. Zoellick, Deputy Secretary of State to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, New York City. Sept. 21, 2005. <http://www.state.gov/s/d/rem/53682.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Cha, Victor D. “A Peninsula in Crisis and Flux.” *Strategic Asia* 2004-05. The National Bureau of Asian Research. Pg. 140.

## **New challenges, shared security interests**

Washington's approach to North Korea and U.S. military basing decisions is viewed as indicative of U.S. unilateralism and insensitivity to South Korean interests.

What should be emphasized is that increased transparency and engagement in decision making can alleviate much of the strain associated with these issues. The 2004 Future of the Alliance (FOTA) process and the establishment of the U.S.-ROK Security Policy Initiative (SPI) are examples of how official consultative mechanisms can help reduce anxieties and misunderstandings between the two countries.<sup>54</sup>

Ideological "Axis of Evil"-like simplifications of the DPRK security threat can only widen the policy gap between Washington and Seoul and distract from the work of achieving the shared objectives of North Korea's denuclearization and return to the NPT. That said, new strategies of "toughness" may need to be employed if conciliatory gestures have no substantive results. As the case of Iran shows, hesitation to act will permit prohibited activities to go forward, for violators to make technological progress, and make resolution of the situation even more difficult.

In the end, the U.S. military presence in South Korea and a coordinated approach to confronting the North Korean threat remain vital for ensuring both South Korean and regional security. Through closer collaboration and evidenced-based decision-making, bilateral issues can be resolved in a manner agreeable to both partners.

## **Conclusion**

U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea Alexander Vershbow had it right when he explained to members of the Korean Military Academy's Association of Graduates that, "One of the greatest challenges facing our alliance is how to enhance public awareness, both in Korea and the United States, of the changes taking place in each other's society."<sup>65</sup>

Maintaining the alliance in the post-Cold War environment means taking notice of developing anxieties, accommodating new interests, and addressing points of concern at the soonest opportunity. The importance of this was made even more vivid through the Maui dialogue's discussions of South Korea's "386" generation. With their growing influence, this new generation has pressed for a modernized U.S.-ROK alliance, one markedly different from the pact made by previous generations of leaders whose perspectives had been set by the fault lines of the Cold War. These new interests will have to be taken into consideration during policy consultations between Washington and Seoul.

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<sup>5</sup> "Evolution of the U.S.-Korea Alliance and the Future of Northeast Asia." Remarks by Evans J.R. Revere, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs at the Korean Economic Institute. Washington, DC. May 2, 2005. <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2005/45576.htm>

<sup>6</sup> "The U.S.-ROK Alliance: A History of Cooperation." Address by Alexander Vershbow, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea to the Korean Academy Association of Graduates. March 22, 2006. <http://seoul.usembassy.gov/emb20060322.html>

In essence, the partner each committed to over 50 years ago is significantly different from the partner it is today – the principal reason why U.S. and South Korean publics need to be reminded that they remain better off as partners than alone. The future of the U.S.-ROK alliance will be based on a common understanding, common purpose, and equitable burden sharing. Both countries will have to work earnestly to maintain and strengthen this longstanding relationship.

# Living with the U.S.-ROK Alliance

By Sun Namkung

The conference “New Directions in the ROK-U.S. Relationship” made clear that the divergence in threat perceptions between the U.S. and the ROK over North Korea poses the greatest danger to their alliance. The U.S.-ROK alliance has been defined for more than half a century by military obligations under the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty. With warming relations between North and South Korea, the *raison d’etre* for the alliance has come under scrutiny, at least for South Koreans. The South Korean public no longer sees North Korea as the bogeyman of Northeast Asia, but it is not yet comfortable with North Korea. Hence, many South Koreans see U.S. forces as a hedge against a DPRK invasion. The U.S. sees North Korean counterfeiting and weapon sales as a threat to the U.S. But the fact remains that the DPRK has positioned most of its 1.2 million person army along the demilitarized zone. The military situation has not changed much on the North Korean side, while U.S. and South Korean forces have been adapting to a new reality, the war on terror. Both the U.S. and South Korea need to communicate to each other and to their respective peoples the need for the alliance that is defined by its military component. Without this effort, the alliance will fall apart and the U.S. will lose a foothold in Northeast Asia. Economics is not sufficient glue to keep the South Koreans on the U.S. side as China has overtaken the U.S. as South Korea’s number one trade partner. The U.S.-Japan alliance cannot compensate for the loss of the U.S.-ROK alliance as Japan has been given the cold shoulder by its neighbors as a result of disputes over history and territory.

## Influencing threat perceptions

Several factors – mostly domestic trends (in the U.S. and South Korea) – alter the threat perceptions of the allies. On a domestic level, isolationism anti-U.S. feelings, and ROK nationalism are changing threat perceptions. On a regional level, China’s rise, the situation in the Taiwan Strait, and Yasukuni Shrine are testing the boundaries of the U.S.-ROK relationship.

### *Domestic considerations*

#### 1. U.S. isolationism

Historically, the U.S. has avoided entangling alliances, taking George Washington’s farewell address to heart. He warned that the nation should avoid permanent alliances and rely on temporary alliances for emergencies. This line of thought made the U.S. favor non-interventionism until the start of the Cold War in 1947. Isolationist rhetoric creeps back into the U.S. body politic when events go contrary to U.S. goals, as is occurring in Iraq, the Six-Party Talks, and the Doha Round of global trade talks. According to this logic, the less the U.S. is involved with the greater world, the less of a target the U.S. will be.

## 2. Anti-U.S. sentiments

The U.S. is tired of being seen as the cowboy with the black 10-gallon hat. The U.S. public wants to be thought of as the good sheriff with the white cowboy hat and the shiny badge. It is shocking for Americans to learn that the U.S. is perceived negatively in many parts of the world. Anti-U.S. sentiment in South Korea is especially difficult to understand as it comes from an ally. Anti-Americanism seems to ebb and flow, but there has been an undercurrent of suspicion in Korea ever since the 1905 Taft-Katsura Memorandum recognized Japan's sphere of influence over Korea.

## 3. ROK nationalism

As South Korean economic power grows, South Koreans are realizing that there is worth in themselves and in their country. The thinking that South Koreans should manage their own security has an impact on the military alliance. The U.S. and the ROK militaries are studying the return of wartime control of the ROK military to the ROK. National pride has also revised perceptions of North Koreans. Many South Koreans view North Koreans as family – blood is thicker than water – and not as potential adversaries. This thinking would make the current military alliance defunct. But there are more pragmatic policy makers in Seoul who realize the situation hasn't changed; rather it is merely South Korean perceptions that are shifting and that is due to the Sunshine Policy. The DPRK regime that invaded the South is still in power.

## 4. Generational perception shift

The third ROK domestic factor that has had a major effect on the U.S.-ROK alliance is the rise of the younger generation. The Korean War generation generally sees the alliance as positive and necessary for the well-being of the ROK. A generation born after the 1960s tends to see the alliance as unnecessary and a burden. U.S. forces are seen as occupiers taking up valuable real estate and causing problems, such as pedestrian casualties by military vehicles.

### *Regional considerations*

#### 1. China's rise and growth

China's continued double-digit growth is putting pressure on all relationships within the region. There are concerns over raw materials acquisition, labor costs, trade deficits, environmental degradation, over-reliance on China as producer and consumer, and more. South Korea and the U.S. alike have trepidation about the future of China. The alliance can be used as a hedge by both countries. The U.S. will have an ally on the continent and the ROK will no longer be pushed around by China, as it was during the Joseon era when it was a tributary kingdom.

#### 2. ROK's role in a Taiwan Strait conflict

Growth allows China to fund increases in its military budget. This becomes a concern for the U.S. as the modernization of the Chinese military is not transparent and there is the issue of Taiwan. The ROK has stated in numerous ways that it does not want to be involved in a U.S.-



China confrontation over Taiwan and the U.S. should not expect the ROK to join as would be expected under the Mutual Defense Treaty. Such statements signaled to China the limits of ROK recognition of U.S. “strategic flexibility” on the Korean Peninsula as the U.S. restructures its forces around the world.

### 3. Yasukuni Shrine, history, and territorial disputes

The U.S. is in an unenviable spot between its two Northeast Asian allies, Japan and South Korea. Some in South Korea believe that the U.S. is encouraging Japan to be intransigent over its wartime past and war crimes as symbolized by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro’s repeat visits to Yasukuni Shrine. Koizumi states the visits are to honor the fallen who died for Japan and that he does not honor the war criminals, but South Koreans and most of East Asia do not share that view. In the more recent standoff over the Dokdo/Takeshima islets in mid-April, the ROK and Japan almost came to blows. At the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, both sides retreated; a resolution of the territorial dispute has not been reached.

## **U.S. opportunities to strengthen the alliance**

When threats arise, there are usually opportunities to mitigate them. The State Department has made a good start in its “transformational diplomacy” directive, but more specific actions can be taken to build a healthy U.S.-ROK alliance.

### 1. Public diplomacy

The U.S. embassy does a lot of outreach to South Korean nongovernmental organizations, but there needs to be outreach to the public more generally. It can begin in classrooms at the primary, secondary, and college levels. Visits by U.S. embassy and consular officials to promote the U.S. and its culture to students have a very positive effect. In promoting the U.S., emphasis should be put on the importance of the alliance to the U.S. and why it should be important to South Korea, as well. The threat needs to be spelled out. There is no longer a sense of a common threat emanating from North Korea.

A big plus for the alliance would be a visa-waiver program. South Korea would like to be treated as an ally and not just any other country. As with any members-only club, there should be benefits for allied nations. The waiver program would be a tangible reminder to ordinary South Koreans that the U.S. values the U.S.-ROK alliance as much as the U.S.-Japan alliance and most importantly, trusts South Koreans.

### 2. SCAP expansion

The U.S. should suggest that the Strategic Consultation for Allied Partnership (SCAP) be expanded to a “2+2” format that is used for U.S.-Japan consultations. The inclusion of the Defense Department would underline that the meetings are alliance-related discussions and not just another bilateral. Formal ministerial-level meetings will signal that complacency has not set in regarding and that Washington and Seoul do not take each other for granted. Perhaps at some point, there should be three-way consultative meetings among the U.S., Japan, and South Korea

over regional concerns, but the alliance should not be expanded at this point as there are several contentious issues that South Korea and Japan have to work through. Trilateral consultations will help deal with regional concerns such as China's rise and Taiwan. The history issue has to be worked out between the ROK and Japan. The U.S. has its own historical biases and will probably find it difficult to referee.

### 3. People exchanges

People-to-people contact is needed and necessary for the alliance. For example, the U.S. Second Infantry Division based north of Seoul helps farmers with their rice harvest. The farmers get a chuckle out of these exchanges as the modern equipment is put away and the soldiers harvest the rice by hand. Afterward, soldiers and the farmers share a meal. The interaction helps both sides become familiar with each another and diminishes friction when the two groups meet. The key is to show that the alliance is not just about abstract ideas, but can help people with their lives.

Student exchanges usually are positive experiences that help the younger generations understand the country that they are visiting. Most students are able to see that the other side has the same hopes and dreams. As these exchanges continue there is a cross-fertilization of values. Long-lasting alliances are value-based rather than interest-based. The U.S. is competing not just with China, but also with Australia and New Zealand for the affection of the younger generations. Hosting South Korean students will make South Korea as familiar as Japan to the U.S. public and it is difficult to be nonchalant about the security of a friend that is in danger. This U.S.-ROK friendship has already been baptized in blood.

### 4. Comprehensive alliance creation

The free trade agreement (FTA) will help to make the alliance more comprehensive and tangible to publics in both the U.S. and the South Korea. However, there is a downside: should the FTA fail to materialize, the U.S.-ROK alliance shrinks back to being clearly defined and limited to a military alliance. It is important that the FTA passes Congress so that the alliance can grow with developments in the U.S.-ROK relationship.

## **The alliance still holds relevance**

The alliance is still relevant to the U.S. and the ROK since the conditions that gave it birth still exist. Though some conditions may have changed since 1953 when the Mutual Defense Treaty was negotiated, such as the integration of China into global institutions like the UN and the WTO and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the DPRK regime survives and has the fifth largest military and China is still a communist nation. Until these conditions change, the U.S.-ROK alliance remains relevant to regional and global stability. Successful conclusion of an FTA will help the alliance stay relevant as certain military missions become obsolete. (There seems to be a consensus that at some point the North and South will evolve into a confederation or be unified; then the Mutual Defense Treaty will certainly be reexamined.)

# An Alliance Worth Saving: Threats and Solutions for Both the ROK and the U.S.

By Jiyon Shin

Finding the “biggest” threat to a generally sound relationship between two allies involves determining whether the threat is internal or external. Potential problems include 1) surging nationalism and its impact on decision-making; 2) the emergence of other powers that provide alternatives in the event of the failure of the existing alliance; 3) a shift in power politics from liberal to conservative (or vice versa); or 4) repeated disagreements in the process of actualizing policies for both countries. In other words, determining the ultimate threat – which will solve all problems, if resolved – is almost impossible because threats are intermingled. In a world of globalization and increasing interdependence, threats are interwoven, recurring, and continuously present in different forms.

The alliance between the Republic of Korea and the United States is vulnerable in this era of fluctuation; the threats are so numerous it would be futile to try to find among them a single overriding concern. A number of issues threaten the alliance. One issue requiring particularly close scrutiny is growing nationalism in South Korea, especially given the changing geopolitical context.

## **Growing nationalism in a changing world**

*Tilting to the North (DPRK and China), shifting away from the U.S., hating Japan*

The ROK has achieved remarkable economic growth (it now has the 11<sup>th</sup> largest economy) and became a democratic country over the past few decades; it is natural that Seoul has developed a sense of confidence, as well as a strain of nationalism. Whereas Koreans once viewed themselves as dependent on the U.S., now many Koreans believe they have matured into a partner of equal standing.

However, the ROK-US alliance is based on the blood shed during the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Iraq reconstruction. With accelerated nationalism favoring engagement with North Korea after the 2000 Kim Dae-jung-Kim Jong-il summit, South Koreans are ceasing to consider North Korea as a threat. As a miserable standard of living cripples North Korea and as the Sunshine policy overshadows the military tension across the DMZ, South Koreans’ general attitude toward the U.S. military alliance is changing. Rather than being viewed as a deterrent to North Korean provocation, the military alliance is now seen as a burden.<sup>1</sup> In other words, South Koreans do not want to shed any unnecessary blood. Furthermore, many South Koreans do not sympathize with the U.S.-led war on terrorism. The role of the ROK in containing<sup>2</sup> rogue states (with obvious concern for North Korea) is perceived as irrelevant.

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<sup>1</sup> Anti-American sentiment was widespread when South Korea decided to dispatch troops to Iraq in 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Most significantly, the Proliferation Security Initiative, which South Korea has refused to join.

Making matters worse is that the ROK-U.S.-Japan relationship is faltering. ROK-Japan relations continue to deteriorate over a number of issues, including the Japanese prime minister's repeated visits to Yasukuni Shrine, territorial disputes (Dok-do or Takeshima), Japanese textbook versions of history, and recurring remarks by ultra-conservative Japanese officials, highly publicized in the Korean press, which offend South Koreans (not to mention Chinese). The stark contrast between the manner in which Japan and Germany<sup>3</sup> have redressed war crimes enrages South Koreans. The government of the United States has not made any official comments on the diplomatic feud between the two countries. This conspicuous omission is a source of frustration to Koreans who believe that the U.S., as an ally, should support Korea's case, or at least make attempts to mediate the situation. This mediating role is critical at a time when ROK President Roh Moo-hyun is questioning his country's "Silent Diplomacy" toward Japan, especially after the Japanese government authorized Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Forces to take measurements within the Exclusive Economic Zone of what is considered South Korean territory around Dokdo.<sup>4</sup>

Another less frequently voiced concern is that South Korea could shift its allegiance to China, with which it has had diplomatic relations for thousands of years. With continued animosity toward Japan, and warmer feelings toward North Korea, it almost could be said that South Korea shares more interests with China than with the U.S. Yet, South Koreans are wary of China because of the Dae-Dong Buk A Kong Jung project,<sup>5</sup> as well as cases when Koreans were executed in Chinese jurisdiction without notifying the Korean government. However, in the long run, China's status as a viable ally could affect Korean perceptions of the ROK-U.S. alliance.

South Korea's nationalistic attitude could become an impediment to positive and consistent foreign policies. Changes in the geopolitical scene make for a volatile political climate. If this continues, there will be a diplomatic chasm in East Asia between China, the ROK, and North Korea vs. Japan and the U.S. The gap between the ROK and the U.S. will be difficult to mend if the situation deteriorates to that point.

### **Solutions for both sides**

Thus, it is time that both countries make an effort to strengthen the alliance.

#### *Republic of Korea: curing myopic nationalism*

The South Korean government should actively engage in public diplomacy to convey the importance of the alliance and of the policies that the alliance is working on – instead of portraying an image that the government is “drawn into” decisions, as a victim of entrapment. The three months spent deliberating whether to dispatch troops to Iraq was detrimental to both

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<sup>3</sup> David Stout (April 20, 2006). Germany agrees to open secret Holocaust files. *The Sydney Morning Herald* Germany openly criticizes its history in text books, and is allowing further access to a vast trove of information on what happened to more than 17 million people who were executed, forced to labor for the Nazi war machine, or otherwise brutalized during the Holocaust

<sup>4</sup> Young-tae Lee (April 20, 2006). President Roh “The Point to Re-evaluate Silence Diplomacy.” *National Briefing*

<sup>5</sup> The project involved a distortion of history; China falsely claimed Koguryo – an ancient Korean Kingdom— as a Chinese kingdom. The project was interpreted as an attempt to control ethnic Korean groups near North Korea in case Korean unification stirs up nationalism within these groups.

domestic opposition and to an ally in need of help. Active public diplomacy will alleviate the unnecessary emphasis on disagreements produced in negotiations over issues such as the Free Trade Agreement, the relocation or reduction of the USFK, and the SOFA. These are vital issues that should be addressed and given public attention. However, misinformed (or less informed) citizens are likely to form opinions that could obstruct policies designed to serve the country's interests. In this context, the national anger over the FTA shows how the South Korean government fell short in its public diplomacy on the FTA, which was not a sudden deal, and which was not the U.S.'s enthusiastic idea in the first place.<sup>6</sup>

South Koreans should not interpret such negotiations along the lines of a World Cup soccer game where ego is dependent on the outcome; it is not a match for victory or shame. More broadly speaking, South Korean citizens will have to be aware that myopic nationalism blurs the vision of a positive future for East Asia. To be more respected in the international arena, South Korea should utilize that nationalistic energy to build its diplomatic, economic, and military capability within the realm of international law.

Lastly, South Koreans should beware of reproducing its hyper-nationalism in North Korea. Mearsheimer (1990) highlights the significance of the "teaching of honest national history... since the teaching of false, chauvinist history is the main vehicle for spreading hyper-nationalism." He emphasizes that "States that teach a dishonestly self-exculpating or self-glorifying history should be publicly criticized and sanctioned." South Koreans should take note of Mearsheimer's warning: South Korean textbooks describe North Korea as a harmless poor brother that should be taken care of. According to the Ministry of Education's website (in April 2006), textbooks, from elementary to high school, do not contain incidents such as the North Korean infiltration in 1999 (Yunpyung Sea fire exchange) and 2002 (West Sea fire exchange), where both North Korean and South Korean casualties occurred. Though some might regard the event as being too recent, the textbooks underline other significant events such as the 2000 Summit between the two countries. There are teachers' guidelines for how students should be taught about North Korea through cultural and political approaches, but the guidelines fail to address military issues.

#### *United States: catching up with post-Cold War ROK*

Of course, to consolidate the alliance, the first obligation of the U.S. is to react to South Korea's new confidence with sincerity. Although a number of people were baffled by the sudden anti-U.S. sentiment in an ally, Washington should demonstrate patience with sporadic anti-U.S. outbursts, for this sentiment stems from a deeper socio-cultural source. It will help consolidate the ROK-U.S. alliance if Washington shows a clearer stance on supporting Korea in the diplomatic feud between Japan and the ROK. Before the chasm in East Asia deepens, the U.S. should take swift measures to mediate between the two. Furthermore, negotiations on the FTA, SOFA, and USFK relocation or reduction, and even approaches to North Korea, should take cultural sensitivities into consideration.

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<sup>6</sup> See more in: Pyong-il Choi, International Economics Professor at Ewha Woman's University (April 19, 2006) *Han.Mi FTA SeongKong Wehae Yi-nyumeui Cha-EE Twee-eo Numja* (For the success of an ROK-U.S. FTA, Let's leap beyond ideological differences). National Briefing

Second, it is important for the U.S. government to make a stronger, more persuasive case for the need to deter international terrorism by developing an approach geared toward the South Korean mentality. Only by persuading South Koreans that terrorism is relevant to their own lives can the Bush government hope to win them over. This aim might be accomplished by highlighting North Korea's shadowy military equipment and drug trades, as well as the proliferation of dual-use materials being smuggled around the Asia-Pacific region.

Eventually, the United States will have to realize that South Korea has changed since the Cold War. America is a country with an incredible amount of resources, a vast landmass, and an enormous population of 286 million people; it is a world in itself. Nevertheless, this does not allow it to be oblivious to other countries. The U.S. must be aware of post-Cold War dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region. It will have to understand the roots of anti-Americanism and acknowledge Korea's advanced international standing if a better alliance is to be created. The example of students in Illinois learning from textbooks that ends with the Reagan era is a lesson in how *not* to proceed toward better understanding.<sup>7</sup>

In the end, both countries share the same goal: maintaining peace in East Asia. Considering the strained relations in East Asia, the future of a "happy East Asian Union" is dubious. In the midst of East Asian and other international political turmoil, what is clear is that the ROK-U.S. alliance has been and will continue to be worth preserving for decades to come. To salvage this valuable relationship, both parties will bear responsibilities.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the *Chicago Tribune* (April 16, 2006) 80 percent of 50 schools in Illinois are using textbooks at least eight-year old, 22 percent are using at least 15-year old textbooks. *U.S. Illinois Textbooks, Still in the 'Reagan Era'*

# Trading Stability for the Future: The Risks of Deepening an Alliance

By Troy Stangarone<sup>1</sup>

On Feb. 2, 2006, U.S.-Korean relations began a quick and potentially arduous journey toward ever-deeper relations by announcing the commencing of negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) between the two nations. At the press conference, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Portman stressed that an agreement between the two countries was more than a simple commercial agreement. Korean Trade Minister Kim Hyun-chong echoed these remarks by referring to the FTA as the most significant development since the signing of the military alliance in 1953.

Are these men wrong? Most assuredly not. An FTA between the world's largest and 10<sup>th</sup> largest economies is clearly a significant development. In economic terms, this FTA will be the largest by the United States since NAFTA. However, such a significant step by its very nature also entails great difficulty.

While the length of this paper is insufficient to give weight to all potential issues such a development will bring to the fore, it will touch on three areas of significance for the FTA and the future of the U.S.-Korean alliance: (1) the reasons for and benefits of an FTA; (2) the changes in the U.S.-Korean relationship the process is bound to bring to the surface; (3) and, the costs of failure.

## **The rational for a U.S.-Korea FTA**

If there is any truism that history teaches policy makers and nations, it is that change is constant, and that, by corollary, nations that close themselves off from the world will be consigned to its dustbin. This can be seen through the rise and fall of powers, specifically powers such as the Soviet Union that isolate themselves (economically) from the world.

While much of the U.S. has been focused on the change brought about by Sept. 11, a perhaps more significant change has been occurring in East Asia. China has gone from being a nation for which *The Economist* in 2000 could claim "is neither an economic power, nor yet a military one," to being the undisputed economic center of the region. At the same time, APEC has become largely moribund, while China has worked through the ASEAN + 3 process to create a new trading order in East Asia that excludes the United States from the most economically dynamic region of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

For the U.S., benefits to specific industries could be significant – autos and agriculture specifically come to mind – but there is a larger picture. An FTA with Korea, the seventh largest trading partner of the U.S., and Malaysia, its tenth largest trading partner, would serve as bridges in creating deeper trading ties with East Asia. Perhaps more importantly, it could spur greater

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<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed in this piece reflect the author's views and should in no way be construed to reflect upon his employer.

economic openness in China and Japan, (and it should be noted that one of the most interested observers of the negotiations is Japan).

For Korea, the FTA is part of its long-term economic strategy. As a nation whose economy is primarily based on trade, ensuring access, including the preferential kind, is important. Korea is currently negotiating or exploring negotiations with a wide range of countries that include Canada, Mexico, India, Japan, and China.

Korea is also aggressively pursuing a plan to transform itself into the financial hub of Northeast Asia. With this in mind, Korea sees an FTA with the U.S. as an additional impetus for the reforms needed in its financial services sector to make this happen.

Economically speaking, due to the size of the U.S. economy, studies show the overall effect on GDP to be less than 1 percent. However, a study by the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy has shown that an FTA with the U.S. could add upward of 2 percent to Korea's GDP.

The FTA could also play a significant role in improving and deepening U.S.-Korea relations. What began more than 50 years ago as a lopsided military alliance would grow into a fuller and more mature political, economic, and military alliance. A successfully negotiated FTA would also remove many of the trade irritants in the relationship. This new pillar of the relationship would provide extra support as the two nations' policies continue to diverge over the handling of North Korea.

### **Bubbling not so beneath the surface**

In recent years, there has been much talk about the strain in the U.S.-Korea alliance, and pushing for an FTA, which by its very nature would deepen that alliance, will bring some of those strains front and center.

Recent events in both the U.S. and Korea have revealed increased reticence about free trade. At the Hong Kong WTO ministerial, Korean farmers drew the greatest notice; they also disrupted a public hearing on the FTA in Korea. In the U.S., the Central American Free Trade Agreement, which was economically insignificant to the U.S., passed by only two votes in the House of Representatives and there is growing concern that trade promotion authority will not be renewed when it expires at the end of June 2007.

Moreover, there has clearly been a change in how Koreans view the U.S. A June 2005 poll by *JoongAng Ilbo* shows that 57 percent of Koreans view relations with the U.S. as weak or very weak. However, 86 percent of those polled did not see this as desirable. Over 57 percent blamed this outcome on the government's policy toward the U.S. In contrast, a March 2005 *Dong-A Ilbo* poll found that 54 percent of South Koreans do not have an opinion of the U.S., and of those who did, a majority held an unfavorable opinion (24 percent). These two polls, along with growing public discontent with the U.S., suggest that South Koreans are unsure of how they view the U.S.



Perhaps of concern to the Korean side is that the temperature reading in the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations surveys shows Korea consistently in a neutral position. However, a similarly themed Harris poll found a steady increase in U.S. perceptions of Korea as an ally.

As the FTA progresses, it is likely that opinions on both sides will begin to crystallize. Should the growing sense of apprehension about free trade on both sides swing opinion, much of that undecided segment of each populace could end up in the unfavorable columns. Such a swing of negative opinion would both hinder the FTA negotiations and place additional strain on the alliance.

### **The price of reaching higher**

As realist political theory would point out, nations make alliances as common interests or threats converge. While the “special relationship” between the U.S. and the UK is often mentioned, it is easy to forget that prior to World War II, that relationship was not so special.

While there is clear economic benefit for both nations, it is also true that both Korea and the U.S. see the FTA as a means to move the relationship beyond an alliance based on the convergence of needs brought about by the threat of North Korea. So, when considering an alliance of a more substantive nature, it must be placed on something more than mere mutual interest, as interests are transitory. Ever-growing business ties are a good place to start, but there also needs to be an understanding that, in democratic societies, there must be a general will among the populace in both sides for lasting ties.

To a significant degree, both countries are placing the future of those ties in the hands of the FTA. Should the negotiations fail or, more significantly, should one legislature reject the FTA, a rupture would no doubt develop. Failure to reach an accord would be disappointing for both sides, but it would be a manageable setback, especially given the short negotiating timeframe created by the expiration of Trade Promotion Authority in the U.S. at the end of June 2007.

However, rejection of the FTA by one side would have significant consequences. The most likely immediate outcome would be an intensification of trade disputes in sectors dealing with autos, agriculture, and Korea’s screen quota. The intensification of these, along with other trade disputes, would place political strain on the relationship. It would undermine the trust between the two sides and accelerate a downgrading of the relationship in both capitals. This outcome would most likely place a greater pressure and spotlight on the one area that has served as the bedrock of the relationship, the threat posed by North Korea. In this changed dynamic, the different perspectives held by the two sides on how to handle North Korea, and more specifically the nuclear issue, would be placed under much greater scrutiny and tension.

### **Breathing life into a more substantive alliance**

The most important step each side can take in developing a deeper alliance is to put in the work needed to explain to stakeholders and legislators in each country that this agreement is about more than trade and why a deeper relationship is in the interest of both countries. In the

near term, both sides must work to ensure that members of their respective legislatures are well informed and do not reject a much larger alliance because they dislike one aspect of the trade deal. Context and the broader picture are more important than the mundane details of a trade deal and special sectoral interests. In the long run, each nation must reach out to the populace of the other country and work on building substantive relations that can only occur over time.

If successful, something else Trade Minister Kim said at that first press conference may be shown to be true – that all great ideas begin as crazy ideas. A deeper alliance, that spurred greater trade and cooperation between Asian nations and the U.S., would be an idea of significance and benefit to both nations for decades to come.

# An Appropriate Time for Alternative Measures

By Dorothy Stuehmke

For the past five and a half decades, the U.S.-ROK alliance has been the keystone of stability and security in Northeast Asia. From the United States' involvement in the Korean War and continued U.S. troop presence on the Korean Peninsula to the social and cultural ties that have evolved between the two countries, a close bond has emerged; bilateral trade between the two countries exceeded \$56 billion in 2003, over 1 million ethnic Koreans now live in the U.S., and the democratization process of the 1980s, which has made South Korea one of the most vibrant democracies worldwide, further underscores the political values both countries share.

Nonetheless, the alliance is under strain. The most visible manifestation of this strain is the diverging U.S. and ROK approaches to dealing with the North Korean nuclear crisis. While it is important for both countries to find a way to harmonize policies with regard to North Korea, it is imperative that this issue not continually overwhelm the alliance. Therefore, it is crucial that both countries look beyond this point of contention and identify alternative issues that can set the U.S.-ROK alliance back on a positive track.

## **An overwhelming focus on North Korea**

Despite both countries' commitment to achieving a denuclearized Korean Peninsula, the contrasting policy approaches to the nuclear weapons crisis continue to take center stage. The most important factor influencing these divergences and the continued success of U.S.-ROK relations is domestic change in both countries. While both view North Korea as a threat, the ROK has chosen a diplomatic approach to solving the issue while the U.S. has maintained a more confrontational hardline policy. The result of this clash is that the North Koreans refuse to rejoin the Six-Party Talks, in protest over U.S. sanctions imposed for alleged financial crimes.

So where can the U.S. and ROK go from here? It is unlikely that the rhetoric of the Bush administration will change enough to allow room for a less confrontational policy toward North Korea for the remainder of Bush's term. Similarly, South Korea will not change its engagement approach anytime soon. Therefore it is imperative that the U.S. explore other avenues of mutual interest with South Korea to set the bilateral relationship on a much-needed new path.

## **Alternative measures:**

### *1) Free Trade Agreement*

Every effort should be made to make the U.S.-ROK bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA), announced in early February 2006, a reality. The FTA could have an immense effect on both countries. For Korea, the 11<sup>th</sup> largest economy worldwide as well as the seventh largest trading partner for the U.S., eliminating tariffs on manufactured goods will not only create conditions that will generate greater levels of economic cooperation, but it will also elevate Korea's share in the U.S. market. Furthermore, as Korea's imports of capital goods from the U.S. are expected to rise, this could contribute to technological progress in Korea's capital goods

industry, which will make Korea more competitive with a rising China. The FTA is one way that the U.S. can stay engaged in the region amid the integration that is taking place there, ensuring a U.S. presence and influence in Northeast Asia.

Establishing an FTA will not be easy and will be met with domestic opposition in both countries. The FTA faces opposition among farmers and civic groups in South Korea, as well as skepticism in the U.S. (the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) barely passed Congress in 2005). Additionally, as Congress largely supports the North Korean Human Rights act, it is highly unlikely that it will support the inclusion of the Gaesong Industrial Park, a special economic zone in North Korea with significant South Korean investment, as part of the FTA. However, despite these hurdles, the FTA in the long-run presents a opportunity for the U.S. and ROK to commit to a new mutually beneficial agreement outside the Six-Party Talks. The U.S. should promote this initiative by working closely with and gathering support from the business community, as the cooperation that could result from this effort could renew the alliance.

## 2) *Visa Waiver Program*

Admitting the ROK to a Visa Waiver Program will also help. A Visa Waiver Program would allow South Koreans to travel to the U.S. on business or as tourists for 90 days or less without having to obtain a visa. Allowing South Koreans to move more freely between the U.S. and South Korea will coincide with the bilateral push to have goods flow more freely between both nations. Finally, for Korea, a Visa Waiver Program could lessen some of the anti-U.S. sentiment in the ROK, most recently seen in the controversy over the MacArthur statue in Incheon. Eliminating the need for South Koreans to obtain visas would do away with the unnecessary inconvenience, frustration, and humiliation they currently experience trying enter the U.S.

For the U.S., a Visa Waiver Program with the ROK would lessen the high costs the U.S. Embassy in Seoul incurs, allowing those resources to be transferred to higher-risk countries. According to the U.S. Commerce Department, more than 626,000 Korean citizens visited the U.S. in 2004, up 3 percent from 2003, and spent over \$1 billion in 2005. This figure would only increase as the U.S. Embassy in Seoul is the busiest visa-issuing post in the world, processing a reported 2,000 visas per day.

Admission into the Visa Waiver program will not happen overnight. Korea's visa application rejection rate is 3.2 percent. If Korea keeps this rate under 3 percent for two consecutive years (a requirement by the U.S. for inclusion in the program), Korea will be admitted into the program in 2008 at the earliest. While Korea must be responsible for bringing this rate down, the U.S. is in a position to approve Korea's inclusion in the program, as a resolution to designate South Korea as a program country under the Visa Waiver Program was introduced to the House of Representatives last year. South Korea's current status adds strain to the bilateral relationship; a Visa Waiver Program is an excellent way to ease bilateral tensions.

## **Conclusion**

Establishing a Free Trade Agreement and admitting Korea into a Visa Waiver Program can help reinvigorate the alliance at a time when the world has been concerned with North Korea

and when internal domestic forces are impacting public sentiment and nudging foreign policy in both countries in different directions. To have both efforts fail would damage an already strained alliance. The FTA faces real obstacles. Should it not work out, the U.S. must do all it possibly can to move the Visa Waiver Program forward. This would send a strong signal that the U.S. trusts the ROK and that the alliance can weather current difficulties. The U.S.-ROK alliance has survived difficult times, President Jimmy Carter's decision to pull all U.S. troops out of Korea, which eventually was cancelled, showed the alliance's strength at a critical time during the '70s. The U.S. should do as much as possible to push for an FTA and Visa Waiver Program, so that both sides can be reminded of the importance, strength, and resilience of the U.S.-ROK alliance.



# An Evolving Alliance

By Corrine Thompson

The alliance between the United States and South Korea was established during the Cold War. Its primary function was deterring North Korean aggression. As South Korea improves its relationship with the North, the U.S.-ROK relationship must evolve to stay relevant in a changing security environment. In December 2005, then ROK Unification Minister Chung Dong-young stated “The US-ROK alliance is no longer just a military alliance: it is evolving into a comprehensive, dynamic and mutually beneficial alliance based on the common values of democracy, market economy, freedom and human rights. Korea's vision for peace and economic prosperity conforms to America's values and interests in maintaining peace and stability in Northeast Asia.<sup>1</sup>”

As the alliance evolves, so do the threats to and challenges of maintaining that alliance. There are three prominent threats to the U.S.-ROK alliance. The first threat is the terms of the security alliance, in particular the U.S. troop presence in South Korea. The second is the equality in the alliance, and the third threat is the differing perceptions of North Korea. To ensure the viability of the alliance the U.S. should take four steps.

## **1. Explain the security alliance to the ROK public and continue negotiations.**

The security arrangement between South Korea and the U.S. is intended to serve the Korean people through the provision and improvement of the ROK's defense. Benefits for the ROK include improved training, weapons systems, and intelligence sharing. However, the presence of U.S. troops has proven to be a significant source of tension in the alliance, particularly at the domestic level in the ROK. To improve the relationship between the U.S. troops and the Korean population, communication centers could be opened to answer questions, hear complaints, and provide a forum for debate and discussion. It is also important that Korean officials articulate, rationalize, and explain the security alliance and defense priorities to the Korean people, with particular attention paid to the importance of the U.S. troop presence.

Negotiations should continue between the U.S. and ROK to address security issues. Positive efforts include the Future of the Alliance process and the Security Policy Initiative; they should be continued. Specific measures that could be taken to improve the alliance are moving bases from urban areas, increasing joint exercises between the American and South Korean militaries, and increasing the number of shared facilities (as well as establishing civilian-military dual-use facilities).

## **2. Increase cooperation and coordination between the U.S. and ROK on global issues.**

Equality in the relationship can be improved by increasing cooperation and coordination on a range of global issues. Disaster relief, crisis management, humanitarian assistance, terrorism, health issues, and nonproliferation would benefit greatly from increased cooperation. Foreign Minister Ban and Secretary of State Rice met in Washington in January to conduct the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/en/EPA/EPA0301R.jsp>

first “Strategic Consultation for Allied Partnership.” During the consultation, both governments agreed to increase consultations on these issues and others. However, to ensure the viability of the alliance, actual consultation will have to take place. Then the two governments must implement plans for increased cooperation and coordination.

### **3. Support reunification and allow South Korea the leading role in dealing with North-South issues.**

In March 2006, U.S. Ambassador to the ROK Alexander Vershbow stated “It is clear that the North Korean issue, of all the areas in which the United States and the ROK cooperate closely, presents the greatest challenge.”<sup>2</sup> A Harris Poll from February 2004 showed that 86 percent of respondents felt that the conflict between North Korea and South Korea was either a critical or important threat to the vital interests of the U.S. in the next 10 years. Threat perception of North Korea is a source of conflict between the ROK and the U.S. Some conference participants noted that there appears to be a fundamental gap between the U.S. and South Korean assessments.

Peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula is in the U.S. national interest. Support for this outcome costs the U.S. little, and the benefits are impressive. Supporting South Korean efforts demonstrates confidence and trust in South Korea. The Ministry of Unification states reunification “makes clear the plan to concentrate on resolving the North Korean nuclear issue and establish a firm peace regime, thus eliminating any security threat and possibility of war on the peninsula.”<sup>3</sup> North Korea’s nuclear program, human rights violations, poverty, oppression, and criminal activities are all causes for concern for the U.S. Reunification between the North and South will not happen until the North and South are able to resolve these issues. Supporting reunification is in fact supporting the resolution of these issues. Simply put, reunification defuses the North Korea threat. Part of this effort includes supporting South Korea’s efforts to engage the North and giving South Korea the leading role in dealing with North-South issues.

Comments made by Ambassador Vershbow and the State Department indicate that the U.S. supports peaceful reunification and South Korean engagement with the North. “On North Korea, let me add that the United States supports South Korean efforts to improve the lives of North Korean citizens through inter-Korean engagement, as a step toward reconciliation and, eventually, the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula.”<sup>4</sup> This message may be getting lost behind other comments made by U.S. officials: for example, naming North Korea as part of an axis of evil. The U.S. government needs to work toward a more consistent message to clarify its position on North Korea and North-South relations. As was noted by conference participants, U.S. involvement in reunification issues could be problematic. Anti-Americanism and North Korean distrust of U.S. intentions make direct involvement and action potentially counter-productive. Instead, the U.S. needs to make clear that reunification is a domestic issue in Korea and only voice support for Korean efforts toward peaceful reunification, avoiding direct involvement and interference in the domestic affairs of South Korea. The U.S. should only so more at the request of the South.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/63911.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/en/EUP/EUP0501I.jsp>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/58893.htm>



The North Korean nuclear crisis poses a threat to international security and every effort must be made to find a peaceful resolution. The time has come for an honest discussion and consensus-building between officials from the U.S. and the ROK on contingency planning in the event of the failure of the Six-Party Talks. Options need to be developed and more effort needs to be made to discover stakeholders' interests to develop a viable and sustainable agreement.

#### **4. Public diplomacy**

According to a Harris Poll conducted in August 2005, only 25 percent of respondents felt South Korea was a close ally of the U.S.; 31 percent felt that South Korea was friendly, but not a close ally, while 20 percent felt that South Korea was neither friendly nor an enemy. Fourteen percent of respondents felt South Korea was unfriendly and was an enemy to the U.S. This poll indicates a general misunderstanding of the U.S.-ROK relationship. To rectify this problem, U.S. officials should better explain the importance of the relationship on a more regular basis in a more public forum. Anti-Americanism in South Korea was repeatedly noted as a threat to the U.S.-ROK relationship during the conference. As such, South Korea also needs to explain the importance of the relationship to its citizens, and avoid using anti-Americanism as a tool for domestic political support.



# North Korea: a Threat to the U.S.-ROK Alliance

By Ana Villavicencio

The U.S.-ROK alliance continues to be in good shape despite recent developments that include worsening Japan-ROK relations and anti-Americanism surging in a small slice of South Korean society. Indeed, U.S-ROK relations are growing stronger as seen by both countries' efforts to build a free trade agreement. But, the way that the two perceive North Korea is one of the biggest challenges their alliance faces. If the U.S. does not better understand and appreciate South Korean views of North Korea, the alliance could deteriorate.

ROK-DPRK relations are changing. All diplomatic relations are dynamic and are affected greatly by the nature of the government in power. Different generations are exposed to different challenges and internal developments have a great impact on relations between countries. South Korea is a great example of how relations with other nations, particularly the U.S and North Korea, have changed as a younger generation takes power.

The perception of North Korea has changed in South Korea. Although older generations in South Korea clearly remember the Korean War and the division of their nation, younger South Koreans see the war through the lens of history with little influence on society and politics. This generation cannot relate as its elders did to the suffering the nation endured during the Korean War.

In the U.S, on the other hand, North Korea is seen as a serious threat. Most Americans' view of the DPRK has remained relatively unchanged from generation to generation. Perhaps older Americans still fear North Korea's ideology, but society as a whole sees the North Korean totalitarian regime as a threat to international peace and security.

In general, ideologically, neither the U.S. nor South Korea sees communism as the main threat from North Korea anymore. The DPRK does not pose the ideological threat that it did during the Cold War, when the spread of communism was one of the top concerns of U.S. foreign policy, but it is still perceived as a serious threat due to the DPRK nuclear program. This program reinforces the U.S. feeling that North Korea is a serious threat to Northeast Asia and the world.

For many South Koreans, the DPRK poses a threat to the South Korean economy and social stability. If the DPRK regime collapses or if it continues to suffer economic problems, immigration from the North might overwhelm the South. This is why the ROK is willing to try to work with North Korea and provide economic and humanitarian aid.

Although North-South relations will improve, reunification is a distant goal. Korean reunification will not happen in the next 10 years and therefore it will not affect the U.S.-ROK alliance in the near future. Even though relations between the two countries might be improving, neither side is ready to take such a monumental step.

## **What the U.S. needs to do to keep the alliance strong**

The main U.S. concern is North Korea's nuclear program and the possibility of nuclear proliferation. Nuclear weapons development is a threat to international security no matter which nation is involved. U.S. nonproliferation efforts are vital but if the U.S. continues to pressure North Korea, this could weaken the U.S.-South Korea alliance. South Korea is approaching North Korea differently and trying to build a relationship with the DPRK. South Koreans see U.S. actions toward the DPRK as too aggressive. South Koreans worry that U.S. policy toward the DPRK might diminish security, making North Korea less willing to cooperate. The U.S. needs to move away from its focus on nuclear proliferation and consider concerns South Korea has when dealing with North Korea.

Continuing disagreement between the U.S. and South Korea on how to deal with North Korea could lead to stronger anti-Americanism in South Korea. Currently, anti-Americanism is not a significant threat to the alliance, but the split over policy toward the DPRK could boost anti-Americanism, causing a wider rift in U.S.-ROK relations.

Healthy relations between these two countries require a better understanding of the way each perceives threats associated with North Korea. The U.S. needs to change its rigid policy toward the DPRK and negotiate more with the North Koreans. The fight against nuclear proliferation should not be abandoned, but a gradual change in U.S. policy toward North Korea could have a positive impact on U.S-ROK relations. This change in policy could be achieved easily with a change in the U.S. government. The next U.S. government should put more emphasis in building diplomatic relations with the North.

## About the Authors

**Leif-Eric Easley** is a Ph.D. candidate in East Asian International Relations at the Harvard University Department of Government. His dissertation explores theoretical ties between national identity and security policy with empirical focus on Japan, Korea and China.

**Brad Glosserman** is executive director at the Pacific Forum CSIS. He is also the director of the Pacific Forum's Young Leaders Program.

**Catarina Kim** is a National Security Education Program Fellow in the Korean Flagship Program at the University of Hawaii. She has a B.A. in International Affairs from the George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

**Hyun Ah Julia Kim** is a National Security Education Program Fellow in the Korean Flagship Program at the University of Hawaii. She received her B.A. in International Affairs from the George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

**Jang-Wook Lee** is a researcher at the South Korea-based New Asia Research Institute.

**Julia Joo-A Lee** is an intern with the International Crisis Group's Seoul office and a B.A. candidate at Korea University. She has interned in the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington.

**Jaehwan Lim** is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Tokyo.

**Wayne Mei** is the East Asia action officer at the Office of Global Security Engagement & Cooperation of the National Nuclear Security Administration in the Department of Energy.

**Sun Namkung** is a research assistant at the Pacific Forum CSIS. She holds an M.B.A. from the College of Business Administration at the University of Hawaii Manoa and received her B.A. in Art History from Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

**Jiyon Shin** is a senior advisor at the Korean University Students' Politics & Diplomacy Research Association (KPDRA), and an intern at the Pacific Forum of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

**Troy Stangarone** is the director of congressional affairs and trade at the Korea Economic Institute based in Washington, D.C. Prior to joining KEI. He served as chief administrative aide to Senator Robert Torricelli (NJ) and as aide to the governor of New Jersey.

**Dorothy Stuehmke** is a program associate at the Korea Society in New York. Ms. Stuehmke completed a two-year Korean language fellowship with the National Security Education Program National Flagship Language Initiative at the University of Hawaii.

**Corrine Thompson** is a visiting fellow at the Pacific Forum CSIS. She received her B.A. in International Relations and French from Eckerd College. She is currently pursuing her M.A. in International Policy Studies at Monterey Institute for International Affairs.

**Ana Villavicencio** is the Development Assistant at Pacific Forum CSIS. She received her B.A.s in Environmental Studies and International Relations from Hawaii Pacific University and an M.A. in Political Science with a focus on International Relations from University of Hawaii.