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How Korea Could Become a Regional Power in Northeast Asia: Building a Northeast Asian Triad

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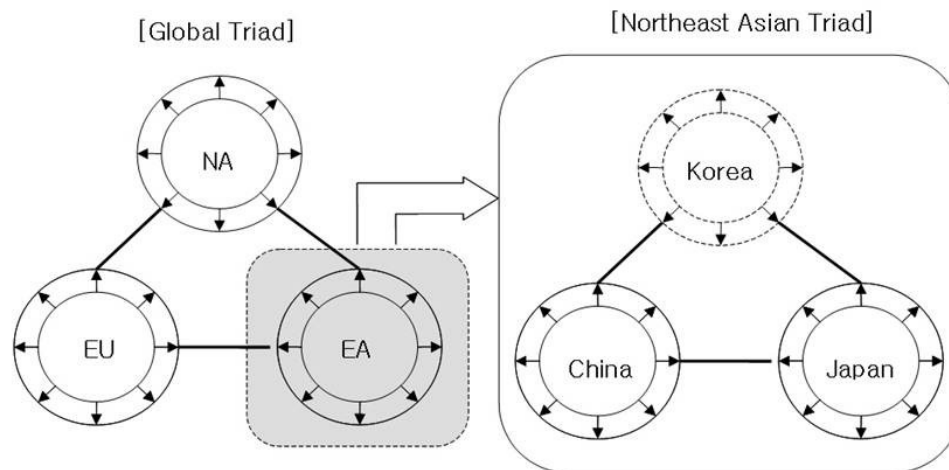
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INTRODUCTION

A major trend of globalization today is the concentration of global production networks, trade, technology transfer, and financial flows into three key geographic regions: North America, the European Union, and Northeast Asia. Economic globalization, especially, exemplifies this regional convergence of the structures of production, trade, and finance. (Axtmann, 1996:119) Similarly, the technological, economic, and socio-cultural integration among these three regions is more diffuse, intense, and significant than integration between these three regions and lesser developed states, or even among lesser developed states in general. This trend is what has led Richardo Petrella to conclude that modern globalization is actually “triadization,” or “truncated globalization.” (77)

South Korea has the geopolitical and geoeconomic fortune to belong to one of the regions forming this new global triad, that is, Northeast Asia. Northeast Asia today – China, Korea, and Japan – has become the global center of manufactured goods, producing one-fifth of global production, and a leader in information technology. Additionally, more than 1.6 billion people live in the region, a population four times that of the European Union. However, of the three countries of this region, Korea is also the smallest and weakest. It does not have the economic or military power to counterbalance China, which has the fastest growing economy, or Japan, which leads in information technology development and skilled labor. Additionally, Korea’s geographic location, sandwiched between its regional rivals, has been the cause for alarm for many Koreans. As Tanisha Fazal tested in *State Death in the International System*, buffer states are more vulnerable in terms of security than non-buffer states. South Korea is no exception. As a typical buffer state, it has well-founded and frequently tested security concerns. Compounding its geographic vulnerability, the “North Korean question” poses another serious threat to South Korea’s security and stability. Therefore, in order to maintain peace and prosperity both on the peninsula and in the region in general, South Korea must develop effective strategies of survival by means of both internal and external balancing.¹



This paper explores visions and strategies for bringing the relative power of the Northeast Asian Triad into balance. These strategies move away from traditional “hard power” (military and economic power) and internal balancing methods, and place greater emphasis on “soft power,” “smart power,” and external balancing. It presents a grand strategy for South Korea consisting of three “strategies of solidarity”: 1) creating a “soft alliance” with Northern Crescent states stretching from Cambodia to Mongolia; 2) establishing the Korean peninsula as an integrated economic community of 70 million people; and

¹ Internal balancing relies on a state’s relative power. With internal balancing, a state tries to bring its power into balance with rival states through its own domestic resources, such as military strength or economic development. On the other hand, buffer states can counter threats from rival states by means of external balancing in which buffer states form alliances with other countries in order to mobilize external power resources. (Fazal, 2004: 315-316)

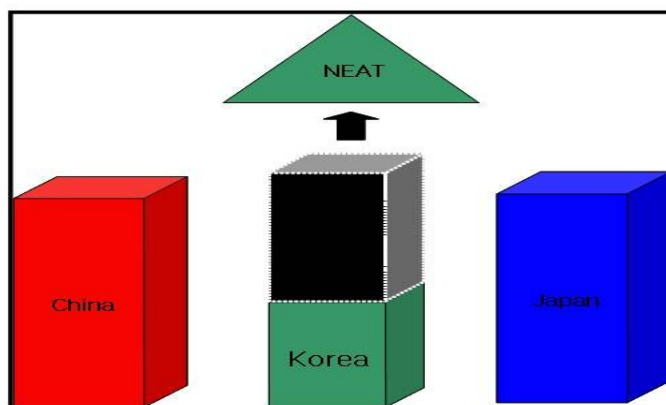
3) renewing and redefining the nature of the U.S.-ROK alliance.

External “Soft Balancing”

South Korea does not have the economic or military resources to counterbalance Chinese and Japanese power exclusively through internal balancing. Therefore, in order to reduce the power gap among the Northeast Asian Triad (NEAT) states, South Korea must look outside of its domestic power resources and pursue external balancing strategies, such as military and non-military alliances, strategic cooperation, and joint ventures with other countries in order to gain standing in NEAT.²

Pursuing an external balancing strategy means that South Korea must lessen its historical reliance on “hard balancing” or the use of “military build-up, war-fighting alliances, or transfer of technology to an ally.” It simply does not have the arms, technology, or military personnel to match that of China or Japan on its own, much less to be competitive against them. China has the second largest and strongest military behind the U.S., and Japan’s defense spending is second only to the U.S. Therefore, South Korea must, instead, place more emphasis on “soft balancing” or non-military “soft power” such as “territorial denial, entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening, and signaling of resolve to participate in a balancing coalition.” (Pape, 2005: 36)

[Northeast Asian Triad and Soft Balancing]



In pursuing a soft balancing approach, South Korea is less likely to provoke hostility from its NEAT rivals, China and Japan, while taking the measures necessary to increase its own power and influence in the region. This approach also offers potentially enticing opportunities for other Asian countries, such as Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Cambodia, to join South Korea in a loose, non-military coalition, expanding South Korea’s access to resources, markets, and overall diplomatic standing.

THREE STRATEGIES OF SOLIDARITY

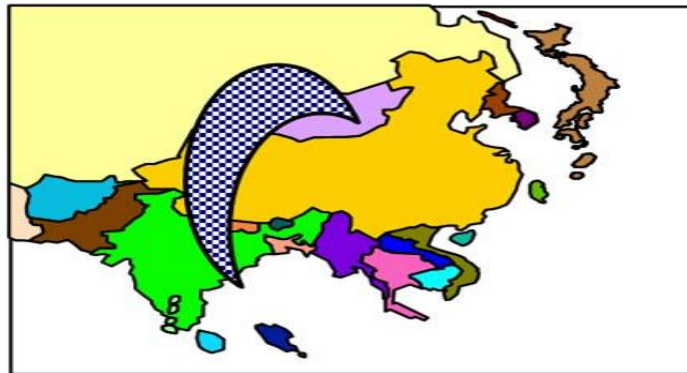
Continental Asian Soft Alliance System: an “Asian Crescent of Peace and Prosperity”

If South Korea were to secure diplomatic support from nearby, continental Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia, these Central and Southeast Asian countries would create a sphere of Korean influence around China. By forming a soft alliance with these countries and establishing an “Asian Crescent of Peace and Prosperity,” not only would South Korea be able to diversify its import sources of energy and raw materials, but it would gain important leverage for expanding economic, cultural, and political exchanges and cooperation with China as well.

² Internal balancing can be made through “rearmament or accelerated economic growth to support eventual rearmament,” while external balancing can be made through “organization of counterbalancing alliances.” (Pape, 2005:15)

Increased economic cooperation with these former socialist states in Central and Southeast Asia could also have a positive influence on North-South Korean relations. The lessons learned while transitioning from socialist to capitalist economies by these Asian countries, could offer important insights for the economic reform and opening of North Korea, as well as for building a prosperous North-South economic community.

[Asian Crescent of Peace and Prosperity]



In order to establish this “Asian Crescent of Peace and Prosperity,” South Korea would need to expand the existing programs of Overseas Development Aid (ODA) and the Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF). These two programs would give South Korea the means to support its allies’ efforts to increase their development expertise, build systems and infrastructure, and improve their technological capacity. The programs could also aid in the development of energy and mineral resources, and in building social infrastructure, such as highways, ports, railroads, and airports.

Increasing cultural exchanges and economic aid to these countries, countries which are largely unfriendly towards the United States, also increases South Korea’s “smart power” within the region, and establishes South Korea as a very attractive, “sticky” state.³ With both soft power and smart power bases in the Asian Crescent, South Korea inherently becomes a stronger strategic ally for the U.S. which strives to maintain its status as the regional hegemon.

Finally, in order to facilitate greater exchange and cooperation in the region, Korea should push for the establishment of an “Organization for Seoul Consensus (OSC).” The OSC would be a regional, intergovernmental organization which governs and manages cooperation on security, economic development, and cultural exchanges. The appeal of such an institution would be for Asian Crescent countries still in the process of economic modernization and democratization to gain access to South Korea’s economic, technological and cultural resources. Moreover, because Korea does not pose a formidable military threat to these countries, the OSC would prove to be competitive against and help counter the influence and reach of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), attracting many of the same member or observer states, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Russia, and Mongolia; thus contributing to the overall containment of Chinese power in Asia.

Creating and Integrated Economic Community

The second soft balancing strategy is to bolster South Korea’s economic status to competitive levels with China and Japan by transforming the Korean peninsula into an integrated economic community of 70 million Koreans. Economic integration of the two Koreas is by no means an undaunted path. When dealing with North Korea, caveats and complications are attached to almost every interaction. For instance, pursuing the policy of the “three tongs” (free passage of persons, free passage of goods and services, allowing telecommunication between North and South Korea including internet and mobile phones)

³ According to Joseph Nye, “hard power” means military power and economic strength, and “soft power” means the power to persuade through diplomacy, cultural influence, and moral suasion. “Smart power” then, is a synthesis of hard and soft power which combines military and economic strength and a country’s cultural and ideological appeal. (Nye, 2004) Walter Russell Mead further divides hard power between “sharp” (military) and “sticky” (economic) power; and divides soft power into “sweet” (cultural) and “hegemonic” (the totality of American agenda setting power). (Mead, 2004)

with North Korea would allow South Korea to expand the existing Gaesung Industrial Complex and construct additional industrial complexes in Sinuiju, Nampo, Haeju, and Najin. This type of North-South economic cooperation holds great potential for strengthening the North's economy, introducing the principles of market economy to the North Korean people, and allowing South Korean companies to capitalize on cost efficient labor resources. However, the degree to which these complexes can succeed is largely dependent whether or not the goods produced therein are treated as South Korean goods and thus, qualify for the preferential custom tax rates provided in the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA). Moreover, the ability to transport goods in a cost-efficient manner depends on the connections of railroads and highways between North and South Korea. Inter-Korean railways would not only aid the transport of goods throughout the peninsula, but would also act as a gateway to the Trans-Eurasia Railroads and the so-called "Iron Silk Road."

Economic integration of the two Koreas also plays an important role in containing China's rise to hegemony in Asia. Solidifying ties between North and South Korea helps prevent North Korea from falling under Chinese influence and being absorbed into China's economic sphere, while eventually building a formidable Korean economic community. As a combined entity, Korea's strategic value to the U.S. increases, offering opportunities for partnership toward the common goal of limiting China's power.

However, beyond the logistical challenges of integrating the two economic systems, North Korea's reputation as a global security threat stands in the way of any sustainable economic cooperation. Until a lasting resolution to the North Korean nuclear issue can be found, there is little prospect of North Korea's acceptance into the world economic system and thus, for the integration to succeed.

On the whole, the North Korean nuclear issue has been predominately a bilateral issue between the United States and North Korea. The first North Korean nuclear crisis took place when North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1993 and since then, North Korea's nuclear ambitions have posed an international security threat affecting North America, Northeast Asia, as well as the Korean peninsula as a whole.

This issue found temporary resolution in 1994 with the Agreed Framework between the U.S. and North Korea. Under the Framework, North Korea was obliged to come into full compliance with IAEA safeguard measures prior to the promised delivery of a light water reactor. The goal of the Clinton administration in brokering this agreement was to achieve three policy objectives: 1) end North Korean nuclear development; 2) prevent a sudden collapse of the failed socialist state; and 3) open North Korea while providing a soft landing for Kim Jong Il. In October 1999, a team of policy analysts, led by William Perry, reviewed and made suggestions on U.S. policy toward North Korea. The Perry Report primarily supported engagement towards Pyongyang and called for the U.S. to take steps towards comprehensive normalization with North Korea in exchange for Kim Jong Il's regime foregoing its nuclear weapons and long-range missile programs.

The Clinton administration's engagement policy toward North Korea advanced in accordance with South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's "Sunshine Policy," which purported the end of hostile confrontation and the pursuit of reconciliation and coexistence between North and South Korea. Under the Clinton administration, it was not difficult for the U.S. and South Korea to agree on North Korean policy because both governments presumed a soft-landing strategy for the North Korean regime through external opening, market reform, and the friendly engagement of North Korea. At the end of the Clinton administration, U.S.-North Korean relations had improved to the point of exchange visits of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to Pyongyang and North Korean General Cho Myung-rok to Washington.

President Bush, however, did not continue this approach to North Korean relations. Since his inauguration in 2001, the Bush administration has pursued a drastically different relationship. After conducting a "comprehensive review" of U.S. policy toward North Korea, the Bush administration set forth a new policy which included improved implementation of the Agreed Framework, verifiable constraints on North Korea's missile programs, a ban on its missile exports, and conventional arms control on the Korean peninsula.

President Bush and neoconservatives were acting primarily to establish distance with the previous administration – a policy

of “anything but Clinton” (ABC). Neoconservatives had a perception of North Korea contrary to that of Sunshine Policy advocates. The “Sunshiners” saw North Korea’s erratic and hostile behavior as stemming from a sense of insecurity, and believed that engagement should be directed to soothe North Korea’s perception of threat vulnerability. But neoconservatives argued that engagement with North Korea would do nothing but extend Kim Jong Il’s dictatorship. They also asserted that the North Korean regime was basically incompatible with Western values and would never give up its hostility in exchange for its survival. In other words, the problem was not Pyongyang’s instability per se, but rather its bad intentions. According to neoconservatives outside the administration, the option of removing Kim Jong Il and his cronies was the only lasting solution to ending North Korean threats. Neoconservatives called for intensifying diplomatic pressure, emphasizing such issues as military and human rights issues, ending foreign subsidies (including the U.S. supply of heavy fuel oil that was part of the Agreed Framework), encouraging a mass exodus of people from North Korea, and sustaining deterrence against North Korean military threats.

The Bush administration then implemented neoconservative recipes for an aggressive containment policy toward North Korea. Soon after North Korean officials revealed its uranium enrichment program to James Kelly in October 2002, the Bush administration stopped providing heavy fuel oil to North Korea, captured a North Korean ship, and redeployed U.S. forces in Korea. Neoconservatives in Congress raised concerns about worsening human rights conditions in North Korea and passed a bill to support North Korean refugees, a move that some speculate was intended to induce spontaneous regime collapse through a mass exodus of the North Korean people.

However, neoconservatives were not always able to implement their hawkish policies toward North Korea. In response to a worsening situation in the Iraq War and international pressure for talks to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis, President Bush eventually turned toward dialogue with North Korea. He made public his intention to resolve the North Korean issue diplomatically in his 2003 State of the Union Address, and since then, has insisted on multilateral talks to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. The first Six-Party Talk was held in August 2003 in Beijing and included the U.S., South Korea, North Korea, China, Japan, and Russia. Since then, the Six-Party Talks have served as the first major multilateral security institution in East Asia, even though its mission has been limited to resolving the North Korean nuclear issue.

[Two Track Crescent Strategy]



Even though the six-party process has not been able to reach a comprehensive solution to the North Korean nuclear issue to date, it has played an important problem solving role each time the North Korean nuclear issue has risen to crisis level. On September 19, 2005, the six-parties reached an agreement outlining basic principles for denuclearizing North Korea, including multilateral cooperation for denuclearization and mutual respect of sovereignty between North Korea, the U.S. and Japan. But the September 19 Agreement was soon retracted when the U.S. froze North Korean accounts at Banco Delta Asia in Macau. In response to U.S. sanctions, North Korea replied with two provocative actions: missile firings in July and an underground nuclear test in October 2006. However, U.S.-North Korean bilateral talks in January 2007 paved the way for

the Six-Party Talks to reach an agreement on February 13, 2007 which established initial steps toward the denuclearization of North Korea. According to the new agreement, North Korea was to shut down and disable its nuclear facilities and make a complete declaration of all its nuclear programs in exchange for supply of heavy oil from the five countries. It also included a commitment from the U.S. to remove North Korea from the list of terror-sponsoring states, and to terminate the Trading with the Enemy Act with respect to North Korea. In addition, the Six-Party Talks succeeded in establishing working groups for such goals as the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, normalization of U.S.-North Korea relations, Japan-North Korea relations, economic and energy cooperation, and Northeast Asian peace and security. The February 13 Agreement made great advancements towards establishing regionalism in Northeast Asia, and towards the incorporation of North Korea into a capitalist world economy through the normalization of relations with the U.S. and Japan. If the Six-Party Talks were to successfully achieve this objective of dismantling the North Korean nuclear program, the most significant barrier to establishing an integrated Korean economic community of 70 million would be removed.

Although the economic integration of North and South Korea cannot be truly effective until there is substantive resolution of North Korea's nuclear issue, the reality is that these should not be sequential strategies. Even once an agreement is reached, the denuclearization of North Korea will be a long and arduous process, met with many obstacles along the way. Economic integration of the two Koreas, as different as their economies are, is an equally, if not more time consuming and painful a process and cannot wait until after the nuclear issue is fully resolved in order to commence. Instead, these two tracks – denuclearization of North Korea and accelerated economic cooperation and exchange between North and South Korea – should be pursued simultaneously.

Strengthening the U.S.-ROK Alliance: “New Partnership for a New Era”

Historically, the U.S. has had a dominant presence in East Asia. The regional order during the Cold War was characterized by “vertical unilateralism,” a system where the U.S. served as the “hub” and Northeast Asian countries as the “spokes.” (Cumings, 2002: 167; Calder, 2004; Im, 2006) Within this system, South Korea in particular, relied heavily on the U.S. to bolster its own economic and military capabilities in order to compete with China and Japan. However, this alliance with the U.S. has weakened in the past few years due to such differing opinions as how to engage North Korea. Since South Korea's most important method of external balancing has been aligning itself with the U.S., going forward, it is in South Korea's best interests to pursue a “neorealist” foreign policy and strengthen its relations with the U.S.⁴

There are many conditions present to indicate the need for a renewal of, as well as a redefinition of the U.S.-ROK alliance. For starters, the power paradigm in East Asia is gradually shifting away from the old “hub and spokes” system of the Cold War era, to a new, more flexible and agile system of bilateral alliance-building between the U.S. and individual East Asian countries. Within this new system, the nature of U.S. relations with South Korea is directly related to and affected by the nature of U.S. relations with China and Japan. For instance, in a scenario where the U.S. were to perceive a rising threat from China that would effectively challenge U.S. hegemony, it is likely that the U.S. would respond by strengthening its bilateral ties to East Asian littoral states, such as Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea, in order to counter and contain that threat. (Lampton, 2004) In such a case, where the national interest of China and the U.S. conflict with each other, South Korea's best option would be to strengthen its ties to the U.S. and limit the expansion of Chinese influence over the Korean peninsula. Beyond its traditional role of deterring North Korean aggression, a strong, redefined U.S.-ROK alliance could give South Korea important leverage against China's rising global economic and political influence.⁵

China has a definite interest in both easing ongoing tensions on the Korean Peninsula and ultimately in maintaining a divided Korea. With a recent history of droughts, floods, and overall poor infrastructure and planning, it is believed that much of North Korea is experiencing food shortages. North Korea's nuclear ambitions have also left it cut off from aid from many of

⁴ Conventional realism stresses internal balancing, while neorealism predicts a central role for external balancing. (Fazal, 2004: 315)

⁵ A strengthened U.S.-ROK alliance could ameliorate security dilemmas between the U.S. and China and between the U.S. and Japan and thus, play a key role in maintaining stability in Northeast Asia. Therefore, a strong U.S.-ROK alliance offers long-term benefits to both countries.

donor countries. Already, there are thousands of North Koreans crossing the border into Manchuria in search of food and relief. As there is already a sizable concentration of Korean-ethnic Chinese in Manchuria along the North Korean-Chinese border, China fears that massive inflows of North Koreans could potentially spur Korean nationalism and possible separatist movements in Manchuria. Should the North Korean government collapse, this would only compound the problem by multiplying the numbers of North Koreans potentially seeking refuge in China. Furthermore, China uses North Korea as a shield against further U.S. expansion into Northeast Asia and benefits from having a communist ally in the region. At the same time, China realizes that a unified Korea with a population of over 70 million, even if not in the immediate future, holds the potential to become a regional powerhouse and close the power gap among NEAT countries.

A strong U.S.-ROK alliance is also critical for South Korea in that it prevents Northeast Asia's geopolitical makeup from forming into one where the U.S. is aligned with Japan against China. As things stand, the stronger the U.S.-Japan alliance gets, the more Japan's self-defense forces are allowed to expand. Given the historical animosity and rivalry between China and Japan, a re-arming of Japan is likely to cause great tension in the region and force South Korea into a precarious situation of being forced to choose between siding with either China or the U.S.-Japan alliance, neither of which serve Korean interests well. In such a scenario, a weakened alliance with the U.S. and the withdrawal of American troops from South Korea could likely embolden both China and Japan to reveal their territorial ambitions, as have been evidenced by recent Chinese efforts of "sinifying the history of the Goguryeo Kingdom," one of the ancient Three Kingdoms on the Korean peninsula, and of Japan's assertion of sovereign rights over Dokdo Island. However, a strengthened U.S.-ROK alliance could play a pivotal role in deterring China's grab for regional dominance or even a re-armed Japan. The U.S. as a unique empire which does not have territorial aspirations, has the capacity to serve as a benevolent ally and a stalwart bulwark against neighboring countries with territorial ambitions.⁶

A strong U.S.-ROK alliance is also necessary for pursuing effective engagement policies toward North Korea. The U.S. has the power to guarantee North Korean regime survival and to elicit economic aid for North Korea from the international community. National cooperation between the two Koreas (*minjok gongjo*) cannot be realized without prior consensus between South Korea and the U.S. on inter-Korean economic cooperation. Moreover, the U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK) act as a deterrent against North Korean attack and lend both gravity and credibility to South Korean engagement of the North.

Beyond the Korean peninsula, U.S. support can also prove helpful for South Korea to establish itself as a hub of peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia in general, supporting efforts to maintain regional stability. Should the Koreas be reunified, the role of the USFK could shift to deterring threats from China and to dampen the tensions in the Korea-Japan relationship. As has been shown in the case of U.S. forces in Greece and Turkey, and Israel and Egypt, keeping U.S. forces in two quarrelsome countries of Korea and Japan would not only help secure U.S. interests in those countries but also contribute to maintaining peace between Korea and Japan. (O'Hanlon and Mochizuki, 2003: 150-152) Similarly, U.S. backing would lend credibility to Korea to serve as a mediator between China and Japan if and when disputes between the two nations should arise.

In the past, the military alliance between the U.S. and Korea had maintained a symmetrical balance with the political alliance between the U.S. and Japan. However, as the main purpose for Korea's military alliance was grounded in staving off a North Korean attack, the urgency for this military alliance has waned as North-South relations have improved. Thus, in the 21st century, where the U.S. is focused on a more comprehensive security strategy for East Asia, it has become ever more difficult for the U.S. to maintain such a delicate balance between its Korea and Japan alliances. As such, the likely tendency would be for ties to Korea to fall subordinate to U.S.-Japanese interests. Though, this does not mean that Korea does not hold geostrategic importance in a new cooperative security regime. On the contrary, the U.S., by upgrading its alliance with Japan

⁶ American empire is a unique non-territorial empire compared to European empires in the 19th Century. American empire is "the empire of bases" which maintains 700-1000 military bases all over the world. But these bases are not intended to manage overseas territories, but rather are part of a military network for the protection and security of American interests, American allies, and military cooperation around the world. Therefore, the American empire is also a "network empire."

to a “power projection hub” (PPH) in East Asia and establishing “main operating bases” (MOB) throughout East Asia, Korea included, develops the capability to deploy military forces rapidly from the Korean peninsula to Indian Ocean. In order to capitalize on this new opportunity, the U.S.-ROK military alliance should be restructured from that of a conventional deterrent force against North Korean aggression and security leverage vis-à-vis China, to a comprehensive alliance with renewed objectives and visions that are appropriate for the strategies and visions of both the U.S. and South Korea in the 21st century.

In order to reinvigorate the U.S.-ROK alliance, there are four strategies that South Korea should pursue. First, the U.S.-ROK alliance should move toward a comprehensive alliance. For the last 50 years, this relationship has focused almost solely on deterring attack from the North, constraining the nature of U.S.-ROK interaction. Thus, in order to strengthen ties to the U.S., the fundamental basis for the alliance needs to evolve from that of a threat-based alliance, deterring common threats, to a values-based alliance, pursuing common interests based on shared values. The objectives for a forward looking U.S.-ROK alliance should include such new areas as prevention of regional conflict, cooperative security against international terror and drug trafficking, cooperative security against nuclear proliferation, as well as promotion of accelerated U.S.-ROK economic cooperation.

Among the new objectives of this new comprehensive alliance, I would like to emphasize the importance of and potential for economic cooperation. South Korea, the eleventh largest economy in the world, is America’s seventh largest export market, while, at the same time, the U.S. is Korea’s second largest export market. The bilateral trade in both goods and services has experienced robust growth and enthusiasm for continued cooperation, and exchanges have grown remarkably with the settlement of the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA). If the KORUS FTA is ratified by the U.S. Congress and the Korean National Assembly, South Korea could upgrade the level of economic cooperation with the U.S. from commodity trade to service trade and foreign direct investment (FDI). Even though the U.S. will benefit more from the FTA than will South Korea in terms of export increases, the KORUS FTA would give South Korea important leverage in negotiating future FTAs with China and Japan, which could then propel South Korea into a leading role in the making of a Northeast Asian free trade community. The KORUS FTA would also strengthen America’s commitment to maintaining a strong presence on the Korean peninsula and thus, reduce “the fear of abandonment” that currently exists among many Koreans.

Moreover, South Korea needs to cast off the impression that the U.S.-ROK alliance is solely a military alliance and to invest more heavily in developing the political aspects of the relationship. For the transition from a military to a comprehensive alliance, political leaders from both countries will have to build new partnerships and to share universal values of democracy, market economy, and human rights. More cultural exchanges and vibrant public diplomacy by businessmen, scholars, and NGOs would also likely increase the level of mutual understanding.

The U.S.-ROK alliance needs to also move from an asymmetric alliance toward a more balanced and equal alliance. The future alliance must reflect the changed power relations of the post-Cold War era. Even though most Koreans believe in the virtue and importance of this alliance, they have often thought to have been treated unfairly by the U.S. and fueled anti-Americanism in Korea, especially in 2002 and 2003. Consequently, in order to ease these tensions, the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) should be amended to establish a more equal relationship between Korea and the U.S. The transfer of wartime operational control from Combined Forces Command to Korea should be understood in terms of making a more balanced and symmetrical U.S.-ROK alliance. Even though South Korea has assumed control of its military during peacetime since 1994, wartime control has still remained in U.S. hands since the Korean War. (Miles, 2005)

Moreover, a strong alliance between the U.S. and South Korea can facilitate the establishment of a multilateral security regime in Northeast Asia. Korea’s strategic positioning, along with the support of USFK lend Korea the military capacity to serve as a balancer or stabilizer within the region. Thus, after the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, the U.S.-ROK alliance should be transformed from a collective defense organization aimed solely at deterring North Korea to a regional cooperative security regime that would promote and maintain peace and stability in Northeast Asia. The USFK can play a similar role that American troops stationed in European countries have done for securing a multilateral peace

community, such as NATO. Bilateral alliances between the U.S. and Northeast Asian countries would not only complement multilateral security regime, but also bind loose ties of the regional security networks.⁷

Many have said that the existing bilateral alliances might act as barriers to multilateral dialogues in Northeast Asia. But I believe the contrary, that the existing bilateral alliances could be complementary to multilateral security cooperation, and vice versa. Strong bilateral alliances and bilateral trust can serve as the foundation for greater multilateral cooperation among partner countries. Northeast Asian countries that have pressing needs for multilateral security cooperation, may encourage their bilateral partners to participate in a multilateral security framework, not to replace bilateral cooperation, but to increase the scope and reach of what can be accomplished toward mutual goals. (Han Yong Sup, 2005)

Finally, the U.S.-ROK alliance needs greater institutionalization. The Mutual Defense Treaty made between Korea and the U.S. in 1954, is the foundation for the current U.S.-ROK alliance. Although the political, economic, and security environments around the U.S. and South Korea have undergone significant changes since 1954, the institutional framework of the alliance has remained intact. Thus, the U.S.-ROK alliance needs to redefine the nature and structure of its relationship in line with the priorities, goals, values, and vision of 21st century cooperation.

In pursuing further institutionalization of the U.S.-ROK alliance, the U.S.-Japan alliance provides a good model. In the mid-1990s, Japan had a similar “drifting” relationship with the U.S., or what Yoichi Funabashi termed, “alliance adrift.” As Japan became an economic superpower, trade friction deteriorated, and the American presence in Okinawa became problematic. Many Japanese questioned Japan’s absolute dependence on the U.S. for protection and demanded the readjustment of its alliance. In April 1996, President Clinton and Prime Minister Hashimoto signed a new security pact, the “Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security: Alliance for the 21st Century,” to better address the changing political and security environment of the Asia Pacific region. The Declaration reaffirmed the importance of defense cooperation and allowed Japan an expanded military role outside its borders. After the Declaration, Japan and U.S. made “The Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation” in September 1997 and are now preparing new defense guidelines to change the framework of Japan-U.S. military cooperation in line with military transformation and redeployment of U.S. forces abroad under the Bush administration.

South Korea needs to follow a similar path and redefine its role to the U.S. given the current economic, political, and security environment in Northeast Asia. Formalizing and institutionalizing this new conception of U.S.-ROK cooperation through a joint declaration or a Joint Defense Guideline will help ensure that the U.S.-ROK alliance regains strength and South Korea is prepared to compete within a new era. The Declaration or Guideline must be comprehensive and include a redefinition of the identity, vision and values of the alliance. It must also clearly outline new objectives and force innovation in the Korean military, strategic planning, and a new command structure. (Kang Choi, 2004)

⁷ When it comes to China, Korea is perceived to be a less hostile country than the U.S. or Japan. Therefore, Korea can play the role of mediator among U.S., China, and Japan, and consequently, could facilitate friendly relations within Northeast Asia in the pursuit of regional peace and stability.

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