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Moving the U.S.–ROK Alliance into the 21st Century

About this report

In early 2005, the United States and the Republic of Korea launched the Strategic Policy Initiative, a cooperative effort aimed at updating the alliance to meet the security threats of the post-9/11 world, restructuring the U.S. presence on the Korean Peninsula, and adjusting command relationships within the alliance. To support official negotiations and assist in the development of policy options, the Department of Defense established an unofficial advisory body, the Policy Research Group, supported jointly by the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) and the National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS).

Convened initially in the spring of 2005, the group was chaired by Kongdan Oh Hassig of IDA and James Przystup of INSS. Its initial membership included William Drennan, independent scholar; Balbina Hwang, assistant adjunct professor at Georgetown University; Phillip Saunders, INSS; and Scott Snyder, the Asia Foundation. Michael Green, Georgetown University, joined the group in 2006 after leaving the National Security Council.

The group gratefully acknowledges the financial support of IDA and INSS. The opinions expressed in this report should be attributed solely to the members of this group and not to any organizations with which they are affiliated.

Summary

For over half a century, the U.S. bilateral alliance structure in East Asia has served as the foundation for regional peace and stability. The U.S.–Republic of Korea (ROK) alliance has been a central link in this alliance structure. The alliance has deterred the outbreak of a second Korean war and contributed to South Korea's emergence as a world-class economic power and trading nation.

While the primary purpose of the alliance remains the deterrence of North Korea, threat perceptions in both the United States and Republic of Korea have changed since the late 1990s. The key issue confronting the alliance today is the strategic dissonance regarding North Korea, but other challenges face the alliance: the rise of China, threats to international order posed by terrorists, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as the need to restructure the alliance to meet changing international and domestic realities in both countries.

In considering how best to meet these looming challenges, adherence to the status quo is not a viable option. Yet alternative future pathways pose stark choices of their own. Conceivably, four future scenarios present themselves: alliance termination, alliance without U.S. presence, alliance modification, or alliance transformation.

Overall, we judge alliance transformation the best option to address both the military and political dimensions of the alliance. Transforming the alliance, including the transfer of wartime operational control, will not only strengthen the alliance

politically but also open new avenues for security cooperation.

We believe that a transformed alliance will safeguard peace on the Korean Peninsula, support the process of Korean unification, and contribute to a stable and peaceful Asia-Pacific region.

The Legacy

For over half a century, the U.S. bilateral alliance structure in East Asia has served as the foundation for regional peace and stability. In Northeast Asia, U.S. alliances with Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) give the United States a firm geostrategic foothold in this critical and dynamic region. The U.S.–ROK alliance, based on the 1953 U.S.–ROK Mutual Defense Treaty, places the United States on the Asian mainland, contributing a continental weight that would not otherwise exist if the United States relied solely on an offshore alliance with Japan.

On the Korean Peninsula, the alliance addresses one of the last legacy threats of the Cold War: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The alliance has been a key factor in preventing a recrudescence of the Korean War, thereby paving the way for Korean reconciliation and eventual reunification. But the alliance has provided additional benefits to South Korea. The security guarantee freed up scarce South Korean resources, allowing them to be devoted to developing a strong and modern civilian economy. The ROK economic "miracle" was further assisted by significant U.S. assistance in the postwar period and, more recently, U.S.-led financial backing that

enabled Korea to quickly emerge from the 1997 financial crisis. The United States, by keeping North Korean military forces at bay both conventionally and through extended nuclear deterrence, has created a secure environment that has allowed South Korea and others in the region to prosper.

The ROK military, at one time no match for the superior North Korean forces, is today one of the strongest and most modern in the world, with a force of over 600,000. Largely supplied with U.S. weapons systems acquired through military assistance programs and sales, ROK officers and soldiers have benefited from U.S. military training and guidance during a half-century of side-by-side service.

For its part, the ROK government has provided land, facilities, and, in recent years, billions of dollars in operating support for U.S. forces stationed in Korea. Fifty thousand ROK troops fought alongside Americans in Vietnam, and 3,600 joined U.S.-led coalition forces in operations in Iraq in 2004. The ROK also made contributions to military operations in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Somalia, and Afghanistan. The alliance is, in fact, a military relationship tested and bound by blood.

Purposes and Priorities

Despite its record of successes, the alliance today faces significant practical and conceptual challenges. While the United States and the Republic of Korea share common interests with regard to deterring war, ending North Korea's nuclear weapons program, and preserving stability on the Korean Peninsula, policy priorities are ordered differently in Washington and Seoul.

The primary purpose of the alliance has been to deter another North Korean attack on South Korea. However, threat perceptions on both sides of the U.S.–ROK alliance have changed since the late 1990s. These changes pose profound challenges for Americans and Koreans alike, as both grapple with reconciling old and familiar insecurities within the context of a new regional environment marked by the rise of China and an international environment defined by the threats of international terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The key issue confronting the alliance is the strategic dissonance between the two allies regarding North Korea. For the United

States, North Korea's aging conventional force is no longer the primary menace; U.S. and ROK forces are clearly superior in every capability. The more urgent threats posed by North Korea to the United States are its

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unconventional arsenal of missiles that are capable of reaching U.S. territory and nuclear weapons that could be transferred to state or nonstate actors hostile to the United States. Consequently, the risks North Korea poses to U.S. security interests cannot be dismissed.

In contrast, a growing segment of the South Korean public believes North Korea is not an enemy but rather an impoverished, weak, and highly insecure power. Some even believe that North Korea's continued belligerency is attributable to U.S. policies, which South Koreans view as isolating and threatening the North. This view is reinforced by the ROK government, which, in the wake of the historic June 2000 inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang, has refrained from identifying North Korea as an enemy in its official defense White Paper.

This shift in attitude is not just naiveté or wishful thinking borne out of decades of successful deterrence but reflects a more profound and possibly irreversible shift in South Korean public opinion. Empathy and sympathy began replacing animosity and fear as South Koreans learned about the suffering and death of millions of North Koreans during the famine of 1995–1998. Pictures of starving children rapidly replaced images of menacing North Korean soldiers in the minds of most South Koreans, creating an emotional tie to their “blood brothers” in the North. Such emotions were spectacularly heightened and reinforced by the June 2000 inter-Korean summit meeting, which brought together then-president Kim Dae Jung and chairman Kim Jong-il.

Although many South Koreans remain wary of and frustrated by the North Korean

regime, they are almost universally concerned about avoiding war on the Korean Peninsula. This has led many to accept policies aimed at conflict avoidance at almost any cost, including sustaining the North Korean regime. In one headlining public opinion poll conducted in South Korea in early 2004, the United States ranked as a bigger threat to ROK security than North Korea, largely because of the fear that the United States, in pursuit of its nonproliferation goals, might launch an attack against North Korea that would embroil the entire peninsula in war. This fear was heightened by the George W. Bush administration's adherence to a defense policy that includes preemptive military action as one of its tenets in a post-9/11 environment. Although subsequent polls in the ROK have usually revealed more trust in the United States and more skepticism toward North Korea, there can be no doubt that a dramatic change has occurred in the perceptions of a majority of South Koreans, particularly the younger generation.

Given the longstanding hostility of the North Korean Kim regime toward the United States, the prevailing view held by many Americans is that the only way to eliminate the North Korean threat permanently is to replace or transform the regime.

In stark contrast, the Roh Moo-hyun administration in South Korea has pursued policies to avoid weakening the Kim regime in order to prevent a catastrophic economic collapse in the North. Both the ROK and United States are focused on addressing the sources of the North Korean threat, but their policies are remarkably different. While the United States is focused on the continuing *strength* of the North Korean regime, South Korea's attention is concentrated on the regime's potential *weakness*. As such, this bifurcated focus has generated significant tension in the alliance, whose *raison d'être* vis-à-vis North Korea remains unchanged.

In terms of actual policy, however, the difference in the approaches toward North Korea has not been as stark as might be expected. South Korea has demonstrated a consistent determination to provide economic assistance to the North despite its lack of reciprocity. But, at the same time, Seoul has strongly voiced its stance that it will not accept North Korea's nuclear ambitions. Similarly, despite Washington's

clear prioritization of nonproliferation and the continued insistence that all options are on the table regarding North Korea, official policy has explicitly shied away from military attack or other instruments aimed at forced regime change in Pyongyang. And both Washington and Seoul have committed to a negotiated solution of the nuclear issue, tacitly agreeing that the costs of a second Korean war are prohibitive—for South Korea and the United States as well.

Beyond differing South Korean and American perceptions of security priorities on the peninsula, a similar gap exists with regard to regional and international security threats. In some respects, this divergence has always existed in the alliance due to very different historical experiences. Unlike the United States, whose territorial integrity has been secure during most of its short history, Koreans have been victims of repeated invasions—some 900 or more—and domination by foreign powers. The interests of China, Russia, and Japan have drawn them to the peninsula. From 1905 to 1945, Japan imposed a harsh colonial rule on the Korean people. The most recent scar was the North Korean invasion in June 1950, which resulted in the division of the peninsula itself.

This tragic history has bred profound sentiments of insecurity, injury, and distrust of external powers among Koreans on both sides of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Ironically, both North and South Koreans—due to their relative weakness—have had to rely on foreign powers to augment their security, which has only served to increase feelings of resentment.

Despite the protection and assurances provided by the security alliance, South Korea has been unable to shed its insecurity completely. Fear of U.S. abandonment became particularly acute during periods of significant shifts in the regional and global environment. To a skittish South Korea, several American policy decisions—the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, which placed primary responsibility for the defense of Asian countries on their own forces; the U.S. rapprochement with China and withdrawal from Vietnam; and the 1977 Carter administration's proposal, never implemented, to withdraw the Second Infantry Division—raised questions about the permanence of U.S. security guarantees.

In 1990, in response to the ending of the Cold War, the United States initiated a 10-year plan for a drawdown of U.S. forces on the peninsula and removed its tactical nuclear weapons as well. After an initial force reduction, further cutbacks were suspended in 1991 as a result of the emerging nuclear challenge posed by North Korea. Most recently, in response to the dramatic transformation of the global security environment following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the Bush administration reduced U.S. forces in Korea from 37,000 to 25,000 and repositioned remaining U.S. troops from the DMZ to areas south of Seoul. Reflecting South Korean insecurities as well as anti-American sentiments, this redeployment was criticized on the right as a unilateral retreat that would jeopardize ROK security and on the left as a first step in preparations for a unilateral attack on the North.

Although most South Koreans have lived all their lives under the protection of U.S. forces, they are increasingly ambivalent about the need for a continued U.S. troop presence. Younger Koreans, lacking experience of the war and feeling prouder and more confident of their country's strength, question the very necessity of the alliance. In particular, they chafe at U.S. requests for support in war efforts beyond the region, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, while the prospect of U.S. troop reductions from the peninsula instills a sense of general insecurity in South Koreans, it is bracketed by their simultaneous desire to take control of their own defense and to have a stronger voice in formulating policy toward North Korea. We believe these desires can no longer be ignored. Those who hold them are no longer a minority; many, in fact, have and are moving into positions of power in Seoul.

Today, many South Koreans believe that their government's strategy of engaging North Korea is working. Tens of thousands of South Koreans have paid brief but controlled visits to the North, where they have met regime-selected North Koreans. Because Pyongyang has been unable to feed its people, it has allowed South Korea to engage in limited economic activities in the North, in particular with the Kaesong industrial zone project and the Mount Kumgang tourism project. This limited opening is broadly interpreted by South Koreans as a harbinger of economic reform. Meanwhile, Pyongyang is officially

dismissive of the South Korean government, still characterizing it as a puppet regime. Since the June 2000 inter-Korea summit, the South has preferred to overlook this characterization and to explain it away as the understandable reaction of an insecure state. After decades of living under authoritarian military governments and having successfully transitioned to democracy, South Koreans hold out the hope that North Koreans will eventually be able to replicate their experience.

Peaceful unification is the ultimate goal of a vast majority of the South Korean people; however, given the dire economic condition

to a skittish South Korea, several American policy decisions raised questions about the permanence of U.S. security guarantees

of present-day North Korea and projected costs of unification, South Korea's strategy is to play for time. This policy is based on a number of assumptions: that engagement will contribute to an economic revival in the North, gradually raise standards of living, reduce tensions, contribute to North Korea's denuclearization, and, over time, allow for peaceful, less costly unification. The danger of such a long-term strategy is that Pyongyang may use the billions of dollars in aid (including hundreds of millions in cash) that it receives from the South to strengthen its military and police organizations and to reward the small cadre of elite North Koreans who support the regime, thus extending the life of the dictatorship and its WMD arsenal.

The long-term focus of ROK strategy conflicts with near-term focus of U.S. strategy on expeditiously resolving issues related to North Korea's nuclear weapons program and ending the threat of WMD proliferation. As perceived by many South Koreans, Washington's apparent willingness to pressure Pyongyang could destabilize the North and lead to its untimely collapse, resulting in massive refugee outflows and imposing staggering financial burdens in managing reunification—or worse, to a second Korean

war. Neither reigniting conflict nor allowing Koreans north of the DMZ to starve is seen as an acceptable means to achieve unification.

Unification is a deeply emotional issue for South Koreans, one whose depth many Americans, separated from the peninsula by the vast distance of the Pacific Ocean, fail adequately to appreciate. At the same time, the differing perspectives on policy priorities and timelines for their realization have given rise to strains between Seoul and Washington. Exacerbating these differences, and complicating the alliance, are increasingly divergent views of Japan and China. Among a vast majority of Koreans, memories of the Japanese occupation and concerns about Japan's future direction remain present-day preoccupations.

Although aware of China's long history of meddling in Korean affairs and wary of its long-term interests on the peninsula, South Koreans recognize that China will play an important role in the process of North Korea's denuclearization and in the reunification process. In contrast, the United States considers Japan a key ally not only in deterring North Korea but also in managing common interests in the region and beyond. This strategic dissonance complicates Washington's management of its most important Northeast Asian alliances.

Politics and the Alliance

The U.S.–ROK security alliance has been in place with only minor changes since 1953. In part, this reflects the unchanging nature of the North Korean regime and the threat it poses to the security of South Korea. In contrast to the economic decline and deterioration of living standards experienced in North Korea, over the past half century South Koreans have transformed a desperately poor, war-ravaged country into the world's 13th largest economy and a member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. In the process, a prosperous middle class has emerged, democracy has firmly taken hold, and national pride has skyrocketed, propelled by the Seoul Olympics in 1988 and the co-hosting of the 2002 World Cup. Always a nationalistic people, South Koreans see themselves as the equals of Americans, no longer their dependent younger brothers.

South Koreans' sense of their country's enhanced international standing conflicts with the presence of tens of thousands of U.S. Soldiers living in their midst, using their land, and occasionally committing crimes against South Korea's citizenry.

Indeed, the single most serious outburst of anti-Americanism in recent years was precipitated by the deaths of two South Korean schoolgirls who, in the summer of 2002, were accidentally killed in a traffic accident involving a U.S. military vehicle. Overwhelmingly, South Koreans believed that the United States had failed both to

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deal with the incident in a timely manner and to offer a sufficient apology. The incident was exploited by anti-American elements, spurred on by election-year politicking, and gave rise to massive street demonstrations. The intensity of the protests threatened to overwhelm years of goodwill and to obfuscate the enduring practical benefits of the alliance.

A small but vocal contingent of younger South Koreans, susceptible to North Korean propaganda, has always existed. These elements subscribe to and support Pyongyang's unification formulation, which calls on Koreans to unite "by their own efforts"—which is code for ending U.S. "interference" in sovereign Korean matters and expelling the American military presence. Believing Korea's past 50 years would have been better had North Korea reunified the peninsula in 1950, these radical fringe groups today advocate tearing down the statue of General Douglas MacArthur that commemorates the Inchon landing of U.S. forces. While mainstream South Korean society does not share such extreme views, the silence of the majority has allowed the vocal fringe to claim greater legitimacy.

The election of President Roh Moo-hyun in December 2002 stoked the embers of anti-Americanism. A political outsider, Roh ran on a progressive, anti-establishment platform. His core constituency consisted of the younger generation of South Koreans, in particular the so-called 386 generation (those in their 30s, educated in the 1980s, and born in the 1960s), whose formative years were shaped by political oppression under authoritarian political rule. Rather than the Korean War, their historical experience and political point of reference is the 1981 Kwangju Incident, during which South Korea's military rulers used the ROK army to suppress antigovernment demonstrations, resulting in the deaths of many civilian protestors. Today, many Koreans still mistakenly believe that the United States was ultimately responsible for this tragic loss of life.

Roh played to his constituency with statements that were perceived as anti-American and, following his election, brought into his administration advisors who were determined to address long-perceived grievances in the U.S.–ROK relationship. The overall tone of Roh's term in office has been strongly nationalistic and at times anti-American, raising questions and concerns in both countries about the alliance and its future.

Reflecting nationalism and growing ambivalence toward the United States, South Korean society is deeply divided on the issue of a continuing U.S. military presence in the South. While many Koreans remain strong supporters of the alliance and U.S. presence, there is undeniably a basic and growing desire for greater equality and maturity in the U.S.–ROK relationship. This trend is reflected in issues related to the relocation of U.S. forces from the Yongsan base in downtown Seoul, the transfer of operational control, and changes in policy approaches to North Korea.

Looking Ahead

Taking these issues into account, and with changes in political leadership pending in both countries, the time to reflect on the direction and future of the alliance is now. Neither side views the status quo as a viable option.

In assessing alternative paths, it is essential to recall that the security alliance serves broader purposes than deterring North Korea. For the ROK, the security provided by

the alliance has contributed to the stability of Northeast Asia. The alliance has fostered an environment favorable to commerce and foreign investment, spurring South Korea's economic development and contributing to its present-day prosperity. In a secure environment backstopped by the alliance, the people of South Korea were able to modernize their economy and solidify their own democracy. Looking ahead, the continuation of a strong and enduring alliance relationship will enhance Seoul's ability to manage challenges of reunification and to deal, over the long term, with Korea's powerful neighbors.

For the United States, the alliance stands as a key element in a bilateral alliance structure that has served as East Asia's informal security architecture. Today, the continued growth of China's military capabilities presents the United States and Northeast Asia with a future challenge against which a sound alliance structure, based on a balance of forces, stands as the ultimate guarantee of long-term stability and security. While Japan and the U.S.-Japan alliance remain the foundation for the U.S. security strategy toward the Asia-Pacific region, negative perceptions within the region regarding Japan's past behavior and concerns over its growing security role do not serve U.S. interests.

During the history of the U.S.-ROK alliance, the international security environment has changed. At times, it has done so dramatically—with the collapse of the Soviet Union and, in the aftermath of 9/11, the emergence of threats to security posed by international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. On the peninsula, North Korea remains weakened and isolated but nevertheless a country with a demonstrated nuclear capability. As noted above, perceptions with regard to this changing security environment, and the continuing need for the alliance, have grown increasingly complex and diverse within and between the alliance partners.

Thus, it is only natural for alliance partners to reflect on these changes and to adjust and adapt the alliance accordingly. In Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has evolved in response to the post-Cold War, post-9/11 security environment. In Asia, the U.S.-Japan alliance has transitioned toward a more mature and equal partnership in support of international stability and security.

Today, the U.S.-ROK alliance is also in the process of adapting to change.

As both countries move toward the election of new governments over the next 2 years, we believe that the time has come for a fundamental, zero-based review of the alliance, its purposes, and objectives. We would propose for consideration and debate four future scenarios for the alliance.

Scenario 1: End the Alliance.

Despite increased ambivalence on the subject, surveys of South Korean public opinion indicate that most South Koreans still support the alliance. We believe this comports with an inherent understanding of the value and benefits of the alliance. North Korea remains a closed society governed by a ruthless, one-man dictatorship and, as such, is inherently unpredictable. Against its outmoded but still dangerous conventional strength, its arsenal of chemical and biological weapons, and its demonstrated nuclear capability, the alliance serves to deter a repeat of North Korea's aggression. At the same time, the security provided by the alliance extends beyond the military realm to include economic benefits, serving to nurture development, encourage commerce, and sustain a climate attractive to foreign investors. Not to be overlooked, the alliance provides Seoul with the future certainty of committed support in managing the reunification process.

For the United States, a continuing military presence on the peninsula is of significant geostrategic value in keeping the United States on the Asian mainland. The U.S. presence also supports both American and South Korean interests in maintaining a balance of power in Northeast Asia, which will be of increasing value in a future unified Korea. Clearly, South Korea's generous host-nation support to U.S. forces stationed on the peninsula serves to offset the financial costs of overseas deployments. Finally, a U.S. presence on the peninsula demonstrates to Japan and the Japanese public that their hosting of U.S. forces is not a singular burden.

In the immediate future, the sole beneficiary of a ruptured alliance would be North Korea, while in the mid- to long term, China would also benefit. China's interests on the peninsula do not necessarily correspond to those of present-day South Korea or to those of a future unified Korea, much less the United States.

For the United States and South Korea, the end of the alliance would be a "lose-lose" outcome.

Scenario 2: Keep the Alliance but Withdraw the Troops. In this model, the alliance would continue to exist, but almost all U.S. forces would be withdrawn from the peninsula, leaving behind a small liaison force. U.S. forces would return for joint training exercises, but the effectiveness of operating together closely would be put at risk. From a security perspective, this is a suboptimal option.

For countries not in immediate danger of invasion, this model—alliance without presence—may be politically satisfactory. However, on the peninsula, the threat posed by the North is immediate, and the U.S. presence has been a key factor in the deterrence equation. A significant withdrawal of U.S. forces would weaken deterrence and potentially create a security vacuum in the region. Under such conditions, an attack by North Korea would be well under way before U.S. forces could effectively redeploy to the peninsula. Moreover, political and bureaucratic processes in both countries could further slow a response.

Should U.S. forces leave the peninsula, the ROK must be fully prepared to respond to any contingency with its own resources. Over time, it may be possible to achieve this capability; even then, any response would entail much greater loss of life and property than would be the case with U.S. forces in place. As a security model for the ROK, this option is seriously flawed.

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Scenario 3: Modify the Alliance.

Modifying the alliance would allow some of its more troublesome aspects to be addressed, including renegotiating the status of forces agreement, relocating U.S. forces from the Yongsan garrison in downtown Seoul to Pyongtaek in the countryside, as well as reducing the numbers of U.S. forces deployed in the ROK. The latter two steps are now

under way as part of the U.S.–ROK Security Policy Initiative.

These changes are long overdue. The modifications outlined above are focused on the alliance as it actually operates on the Korean Peninsula and within the ROK political context. They are necessary but not sufficient to address growing political pressures within the ROK body politic for greater equality within the alliance. We do not believe such modifications will be sufficient to sustain the alliance politically over time in the ROK or to meet the demands of the post-9/11 international security environment.

Scenario 4: Transform the Alliance. We believe alliance transformation is both timely and long overdue. In the East Asian Security Initiative of 1990, the administration of President George H.W. Bush recognized the need to adjust the alliance relationship in light of post–Cold War changes in the international security environment. Central to the initiative was the decision by the United States to move from a leading to a supporting role in the defense of South Korea and recognition of the need to adjust command relationships as part of the process. (In 1994, the United States transferred peacetime operational control of ROK forces to the ROK military.)

A decade later, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, testified to the emergence of a new global security environment, one defined by the threats posed by international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. For the United States, meeting this global challenge called for a fundamental transformation in the structure of the U.S. military. This required moving from a Cold War posture of stationary, heavy divisions toward an expeditionary force that would be lighter and more readily deployable.

The new security environment imposed a new military requirement on U.S. forces deployed on the Korean Peninsula. In addition to being prepared to meet the threat posed by North Korea, U.S. forces were to be ready to deploy from the peninsula to meet threats posed by international terrorism.

At the same time, prudent alliance management requires that both surging Korean nationalism and a desire for greater equality in the alliance be taken into account. President Roh and his administration have also pushed for major changes in

the alliance, including the transfer of wartime operational control of Korean forces to ROK command. This will require substantial changes in the way the alliance operates. The demand for restructuring the alliance will not disappear with the inauguration of a new ROK president in February 2008.

Meeting both the challenges of the post-9/11 international security environment and the demands for greater equality within the alliance will require a fundamental structural change in its nature. We judge this to be the only option that addresses both the military and political dimensions of the alliance. Transforming the alliance and transferring wartime operational control will not only strengthen it politically but also open new avenues for security cooperation.

Our support for alliance transformation is anchored in the belief that the ROK military is fully capable of carrying out its role in a conventional defense of the Republic of Korea under its own leadership as a full partner. The ROK military is a modern, disciplined force well equipped with high-tech weaponry and well trained in its use. Necessary upgrades in command and control, as well as communications, computers, and intelligence capabilities will be acquired under the ROK 2020 Defense Modernization Plan, with the United States providing necessary bridging capabilities through 2020.

A more equal, more mature U.S.–ROK alliance relationship will serve to strengthen deterrence on the peninsula and enhance stability in Northeast Asia. This is in the interests of both the United States and Republic of Korea.

Guidelines for Transformation

Step 1: Identify and Articulate Common Interests. To set the foundation for alliance transformation, the United States and Republic of Korea should identify common interests served by the alliance and then clearly articulate them to the publics of both countries. It is our belief that the interests of the two countries in terms of regional and global stability and security are overwhelmingly complementary. Acknowledging that not all interests are identical, efforts should be made to narrow the gaps in those areas where the two nations

differ. The agreement on the concept of *strategic flexibility*—the post-9/11 imperative that U.S. forces stationed across the globe be prepared to deploy to counter threats to international security—stands as a case in point. Similarly, broadening the purpose of the alliance by defining the United States

the ROK military is fully capable of carrying out its role in a conventional defense of South Korea under its own leadership

Forces Korea (USFK) role as preserving peace and stability in East Asia could defuse disagreements over whether North Korea should be viewed as the main enemy. At the same time, within the alliance, recognition of a broader regional and global role for the ROK would comport with its interests in contributing to international stability and security, as manifested by the deployment of ROK forces to Iraq.

Step 2: Address Bilateral Points of Contention. Efforts to address the key areas of contention in the overall bilateral relationship are critical to providing positive sustenance to the alliance. These include successful passage of the U.S.–ROK Free Trade Agreement in the Congress and National Assembly; inclusion of the ROK in the U.S. Visa Waiver program, which would eliminate visa requirements for Korean visitors to the United States; and an expansion of the unofficial-official dialogue (Track 1.5) meetings in which government officials and scholars can meet regularly to narrow policy gaps on contentious issues.

Putting the relationship on a solid long-term footing will require both perceptive and active public diplomacy, with a particular focus on improving public perceptions in both countries. On the part of the United States, this begins with recognition of the need to address the growing demands for transparency and accountability on alliance issues among the South Korean public. This recognition should translate into an active public diplomacy that is prepared to deal with the many voices of South Korean civil society

and media, including less conventional outlets such as the Internet. Likewise, USFK in particular needs to enhance communication ties to the South Korean media to tell its story effectively and to correct misinformation and misperceptions immediately.

For its part, the ROK government must be prepared to assume responsibility for the difficult alliance policy decisions that affect the lives of its citizens. Shirking responsibility by publicly alleging that unpopular decisions have had to be taken because of U.S. pressure serves not only to mislead the public but also, ultimately, to put the alliance at risk. South Koreans should recognize that bouts of anti-Americanism in the ROK hold the potential of creating a political backlash in the United States, and South Korea's political leadership should acknowledge its responsibility to manage difficult alliance-related issues rather than attempt to shift the onus to the United States. Similarly, the South Korean media bear a responsibility to report accurately and to avoid sensationalism.

Step 3: Cultivate a Better Understanding of Responsibilities.

The widespread popular perception in both the United States and South Korea that the security alliance is a one-way commitment is politically unsustainable. It is essential that the ROK government and citizenry recognize that the defense treaty is mutual. That is, the treaty obligates the ROK to assist in countering threats to the United States, not simply banking the security benefits that accrue to the ROK. Today, strategic flexibility has raised concerns among South Koreans that the ROK could become entangled in a U.S. national security agenda of little relevance to Korea.

In fact, under certain circumstances, ROK involvement in regional conflicts is a treaty obligation. As the treaty now reads, "the Parties will consult whenever, in the opinion of either of them, the political independence or security of either of the parties is threatened by external armed attack. . . . The Parties will maintain and develop appropriate means to deter an armed attack." The "global war on terror" casts the treaty and its mutual obligations in a new light. In the war on terror, any number of contingencies could trigger U.S. military involvement in support of international security and the deployment of U.S. forces from the peninsula. Given the congruence of national interests in both the

United States and ROK, the United States will undoubtedly look to its ally for support. President Roh recognized the changed nature of the international environment and the need for international cooperation in his decision to support the United States in Iraq.

At the same time, America should not forget that the ultimate goal of all Koreans is peaceful reunification. To this end, the United States must avoid being perceived as either obstructing or ignoring the inter-Korean reconciliation process, while working closely with the ROK to ensure that deterrence remains proportionate and effective in addressing North Korean military capabilities.

Step 4: Harmonize Understanding of the Strategic Situation.

In the short term, steps need to be taken to address misperceptions that foster unnecessary ill feelings between alliance partners. Because alliance issues are political as well as military, at least four bureaucratic actors need to be involved in this endeavor: the U.S. Departments of State and Defense, and the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Ministry of National Defense. But beyond the engagement of diplomats and government officials, the active engagement of political leadership, including members of Congress and the National Assembly, is essential. Without it, no alliance can long be sustained.

It is important for Koreans to understand that the U.S. military presence is not an occupying force and that U.S. forces are prepared to leave the peninsula if that is the will of a majority of ROK citizens. (This point was made in the Philippines: when asked to leave by the Philippines government, U.S. forces left.) At the same time, in both countries the present and future benefits of the alliance must be publicized. This is a responsibility of political leadership. It is not sufficient to call on Koreans to express gratitude for the role that the alliance has played in the distant past; instead, political discourse should be focused not only on the present but also on inevitable challenges.

Central to the present and future status of the alliance is an honest discussion about the nature and intentions of the North Korean regime. On the political level, this discussion must be carried out with the clear acknowledgment that neither the United States nor ROK has a monopoly of understanding when it comes to North

Korea. Rather, the starting point should be the recognition that, however weakened, North Korea does in fact pose a threat to the security of the ROK and to the stability of Northeast Asia. To develop mutually reinforcing strategies toward North Korea, the coming administrations in the ROK and the United States should center their policies, diplomatic and military, on the alliance.

Step 5: Reshape the Alliance. To strengthen and preserve the alliance as the enduring foundation for a special relationship will require firm commitments at the highest levels of government. In recent years, politicization of alliance issues, especially in South Korea, has served to distort the rationale for continued cooperation. Among alliance supporters in the United States, this politicization has raised concerns over the South Korean commitment to the alliance. While it is difficult to forecast the specific challenges that will confront the alliance, the task of reshaping it should begin today with the reaffirmation that it aims to enhance mutual security, protect and promote democracy, and

to develop mutually reinforcing strategies toward North Korea, the coming administrations in the ROK and United States should center their policies, diplomatic and military, on the alliance

secure a free market economy—the highest priorities and interests of both countries.

To ensure the long-term health of the alliance and protect against short-term political calculations, the task of articulating a new vision for the alliance should be high on the agenda of the administrations that will take office in Seoul and Washington over the next 2 years. An early commitment by the two new governments to undertake a priority review of the alliance would signal the importance attached to the relationship.

At the operational level, reshaping the alliance begins with implementing the

decisions made on the transfer of wartime operational control of ROK forces to ROK military authority by 2012. Central to the success of this process will be the U.S. provision of necessary bridging capabilities and the ROK's making necessary but politically difficult budget decisions that will realize Defense Reform 2020. Collectively, these decisions will result in the ROK assuming the leading role in its own conventional defense. Reshaping the alliance will also require the ROK government to take all legal and financial steps to effect the realignment of U.S. forces on the peninsula, in particular the Yongsan-Pyongtaek relocation of USFK headquarters. Finally, reshaping the alliance will require replacing the current Combined Forces Command with a new structure that will maintain the military effectiveness of the alliance.

Step 6: Resolve Troop Issues.

The worldwide transformation of the U.S. military has affected U.S. deployments across the globe. On the peninsula, by mutual agreement, U.S. forces will be reduced by approximately one-third, from 37,000 to 25,000, by 2008. U.S. forces will also redeploy from the DMZ and Seoul to Pyongtaek, south of the Han River, an acknowledgment that the former "trip-wire" rationale for deployment along the DMZ is no longer an effective use of U.S. forces. Reductions in the U.S. presence will largely come from infantry and artillery personnel.

Nevertheless, the U.S. Army will remain the largest and most visible American military presence in the ROK. The remaining U.S. force presence should be adjusted to the needs of the alliance as it evolves toward a partnership in which U.S. troops play a supporting role. In the near term, U.S. Special Forces, strategic analysts, and command and control, communications, computers, and intelligence personnel will add the most value to the

alliance. The United States should continue to support education and training courses for ROK military personnel. This will enhance South Korean military competence, allowing ROK forces to conduct major operations as the leading force in a combined team. U.S. training programs will also serve to prepare the South's next generation of military strategists and technical experts.

For its part, the ROK government must work to provide USFK personnel and their families with a safe and hospitable environment in which to live and work, free from public harassment. At the same time, ROK judicial procedures must be improved to allow South Korea to extend its legal authority expeditiously over U.S. military personnel involved in serious crimes against ROK citizens. Likewise, the South Korean government must improve its public communications capabilities. The ROK military has generally good relations with its U.S. counterparts, but unless this fact is strongly and frequently communicated, misunderstandings on the part of the Korean public will not be remedied, and the alliance will be damaged.

Much has changed since the alliance came into being in 1953. On the Korean Peninsula, the people of South Korea, under the security provided by the alliance, have

been able to transform a war-ravaged land into the world's 13th largest economy and to evolve and firmly anchor a middle-class democracy. Meanwhile, in 1989, the Cold War bipolar structure of international relations ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and a brief post-Cold War era came to a close with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Today, the threat of international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction challenge governments across the globe.

What has not changed on the peninsula is the North Korean regime and the threat it represents to the security of the ROK. That threat has intensified following the North's October 2006 nuclear test. Moreover, North Korea, as a WMD proliferator, stands as a threat to international stability and security.

We believe that the alliance remains relevant to the security interests of both the United States and Republic of Korea, both on the peninsula and beyond. We also believe that, if it is to prosper politically in the years ahead and deal effectively with current and future security challenges, the alliance must be transformed to reflect the evolving political and military relationship between the alliance partners.

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