

**NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR/MISSILE THREATS AND THE
EFFICACY OF THE U.S.-SOUTH KOREAN ALLIANCE IN
SHAPING REGIONAL SECURITY ORDER***

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Abstract

The 1950-53 Korean War ended through a truce, not any formal peace treaty, leaving the peninsula divided and in a state of war. As a result, inter-Korean relations for the past six decades have produced an atmosphere of mutual distrust, suspicion, tension, fear, and hostility. This paper makes a critical appraisal of the complex layers of this estranged relationship and its implications for order and stability in Northeast Asia. The study explores the combined role of the United States and its staunch ally South Korea in addressing such a challenging and volatile situation. In particular, the paper makes an attempt to assess the depth, strength, and limitations of the U.S.-South Korean alliance and its potential to pool political, diplomatic, and military resources in deterring an unapproachable and intimidating North Korea and also in anchoring stability on the Korean peninsula and beyond. Given North Korea's conduct of three nuclear tests in 2006, 2009, and 2013 and its formidable advancement of long-range ballistic missile programs, policymakers in Washington and Seoul consider such measures by Pyongyang not only as confrontational but also as critical security challenges to the region. It is against this backdrop that this paper advances an argument that a revitalized U.S.-South Korean understanding, and their overlapping political and strategic visions are central to the viability and credibility of the alliance.

Introduction

The Korean peninsula is one of the fiercely militarized and intensely volatile areas in the world that engenders political tension and intractable conflict in Northeast Asia. Two diametrically opposed and irreconcilable societies – the

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communist/authoritarian Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) and the capitalist/democratic Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) – live under a fragile armistice. As the region carries a bitter legacy of the cold war, the military and security situation there is extremely unpredictable and multifaceted. This has led to a vast military development and a formidable deployment of a wide array of troops on both sides. For some observers and analysts, the spot is obviously a dangerous flashpoint in the Asia-Pacific region. At least two factors contribute to this confrontational situation – North Korean nuclear and missile capabilities and the enigma centering the DPRK regime.

The two Koreas remain locked in a state of war as the 1950-53 Korean War ended with a truce, not a peace treaty. As a result, inter-Korean relations in the past six decades have been drawn into a vortex of mutual recrimination, bitterness, aversion, antagonism, and malevolence. In fact, North Korea's overt bellicosity fuels South Korea's security concerns and activism, and constitutes a key factor in the U.S.-South Korean security calculations. Pyongyang's ever more threatening nuclear and ballistic missile programs have catalyzed an extraordinary shift in Seoul's security outlook augmenting direct military cooperation with the U.S. and greater defense self-sufficiency. Indeed, the U.S.-South Korean alliance has been a major component of America's bilateral alliance system in Asia since the end of the World War II.

The focus of this paper falls on the North Korean security threats and the response from and efficacy of the U.S.-South Korean alliance. Drawing upon a body of literature dealing with alliance politics and management, the paper sets out a conceptual framework to raise some critical questions for alliance relationships into the wider context of U.S.-South Korean security configuration. The study posits that Seoul's relationship with Washington is, in large measure, a product of its security concerns vis-à-vis Pyongyang while for the Americans, South Korea ranks high in geopolitical considerations and also in shaping their strategic thinking as they see ROK as a critical counterbalance to DPRK. Given the strategic importance of the U.S. and South Korea to each other, both have developed one of the most constructive and viable alliance relationships in the world. The paper takes a perspective that although the U.S.-ROK alliance is subject to strident and consistent criticisms, it represents more than shared military objectives, structures, and operations; it is the political glue that binds the two states together in ways that go beyond traditional strategic concerns and goals. Also, the study explores the perspectives, policies, and priorities of the new leadership in South Korea under President Park Geun-hye

and her conservative Saenuri party in consolidating and advancing the U.S.-ROK alliance. In the final analysis, the paper contends that a revitalized U.S.-South Korean understanding, and their overlapping strategic and political interests and goals are central to the viability and credibility of the alliance.

Theorizing Alliance Relationships: Management and Maintenance

Alliances play a crucial role in the international system as they are integral to statecraft. As George Liska once stated, it is impossible to contemplate international relations without invoking the notion of alliances.¹ Indeed, alliances have been a fixture of international affairs since antiquity.² In today's world, alliances are generally touted as a path to security, peace, and prosperity.³ More pointedly, alliances fulfill – among many others – two essential functions: deterrence and assurance.⁴ This section explores the concept and theories of alliance relationship with a focus on the question of alliance persistence and management to meet security needs of the participating nations.

Alliances in the contemporary world are strategic vehicles that solidify harmony among countries enjoying special relationships. Nations forge alliances for the reason that such coalitions/partnerships promise better outcomes they expect in a turbulent world.⁵ Throughout history, great powers and the lesser ones commonly formed and acted through alliances. The most comprehensive database on alliances, based on the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) project, lists the existence of around 648 alliances between 1815 and 2003.⁶ It shows that alliance diplomacy characteristically features in foreign relations.

Alliances can be defined in various ways. Ole R. Holsti *et al.* look at an alliance as a formal agreement between two or more nations to work in partnership on

¹ George Liska, *Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), p. 3.

² John R. Deni, *Alliance Management and Maintenance: Restructuring NATO for the 21st Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), p. 9.

³ Brandon Valeriano, *Becoming Rivals: The Process of Interstate Rivalry Development* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 37.

⁴ Brett Ashley Leeds, "Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 47, No. 3, July 2003, p. 427.

⁵ Alastair Smith, "Alliance Formation and War," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 1995, p. 419.

⁶ John S. Duffield, Cynthia Michota and Sara Ann Miller, "Alliances," in Paul D. Williams, ed., *Security Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 292.

national security affairs.⁷ Arnold Wolfer defines an alliance as “a promise of mutual military assistance between two or more sovereign states”.⁸ As stated by Stephen M. Walt, an alliance is “a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states”.⁹ Patricia Weitsman views alliances as “bilateral or multilateral agreements to provide some element of security to the signatories”.¹⁰ Glenn Snyder is of the opinion that the primary function of the alliances is to pool military strength against a common enemy, not to protect alliance members from each other.¹¹ As Jacob Bercovitch maintains, an alliance is a collaborative agreement between two or more states to join together for a stipulated period for pursuing common political, economic, or security interests.¹² In the words of Emerson M.S. Niou and Peter C. Ordeshook, an alliance is

a collective security arrangement among states in which all members of the alliance agree to not threaten each other, to punish defectors from this agreement whenever possible, and to threaten countries outside of the alliance whenever it is in their individual interest to do so.¹³

It is evident from the above viewpoints and perspectives that states enter into alliances for multiple purposes – to counter potential threats, to fend off aggression, and to forge political and economic cooperation. An alliance is, therefore, more than a mere treaty and more than simply a military relationship; it covers an entire web of relationships – joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, political understanding, economic preferences, and the like. Thus, an alliance epitomizes the fundamental interests, intentions, commitments, obligations, and responses of its member states. There is a compelling and convincing logic for launching and joining an alliance as states are

⁷ Ole R. Holsti, P. Terrence Hopmann, John D. Sullivan, *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances: Comparative Studies* (New York: John Wiley, 1973), p. 4.

⁸ Arnold Wolfer, “Alliances,” in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 268.

⁹ Stephen M. Walt, *Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 1.

¹⁰ Patricia A. Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 27.

¹¹ Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 4.

¹² Jacob Bercovitch, “Alliances in International Relations: Aspects of Performance and Problems of Management”, in Jacob Bercovitch, ed., *ANZUS in Crisis: Alliance Management in International Affairs*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 8.

¹³ Emerson M.S. Niou and Peter C. Ordeshook, *Alliances in Anarchic International Systems*, Social Science Working Paper 161 (Pasadena: California Institute of Technology, 1991), p. 7.

interdependent and hence, cannot act in isolation in a competitive world.¹⁴ In general, defensive/military alliances are formed in response to perceived threats and since the international system is not adequately equipped to guarantee security, the potential benefits of a collective provision of security through alliances are tremendous.¹⁵ An alliance, according to Robert Osgood, reflects a

latent war community, based on general cooperation that goes beyond formal provisions and that the signatories must continually cultivate in order to preserve mutual confidence in each other's fidelity to specified obligations.¹⁶

However, the war functions of the alliances may not only be latent but also manifest and the alliances may operate both in peacetime and in time of conflict/war.¹⁷ It is apparent that alliances are largely outwardly oriented, intended to augment the security of their members vis-à-vis external parties with aggressive designs.¹⁸

An alliance is an external source of confidence and strength which enables small or weak states to preserve and protect their core values and interests. It is central to the pursuit of national security and is the product of threats emanating from the foreign front that is often difficult for any country to eliminate. In other words, an alliance is designed not only to raise the costs of aggression against alliance members but also to ward off threats to their independence and territorial integrity. Conventionally, alliances have been seen as tools that either add to power or repel aggression by opposing states.¹⁹ Nevertheless, alliances are powerful only when they are credible and dependable.²⁰

Evidence from contemporary alliances indicates that ideological affinity is a significant determinant for the foundation of alliances. In the opinion of Jacob

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Robert E. Osgood, *Alliances and American Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 19.

¹⁷ Francis A Beer, "Introduction," in *Alliances: Latent War Communities in the Contemporary World* ed., Francis A Beer (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1970), p. 4.

¹⁸ John S. Duffield, Cynthia Michota and Sara Ann Miller, "Alliances," in Paul D. Williams, ed., *Security Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 292.

¹⁹ Brandon Valeriano, *Becoming Rivals: The Process of Interstate Rivalry Development* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 37.

²⁰ Brett Ashley Leeds and T. Clifton Morgan, "The Quest for Security: Alliances and Arms", in Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, Paul F. Diehl and James D. Morrow, eds., *Guide to the Scientific Study of International Processes* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 140.

Bercovitch, a shared ideology or a common socio-political system helps distinguish potential friends from potential enemies.²¹ Indeed, ideological resemblance is central to alliances which give them endurance, discipline, and a degree of unity needed for collaborative actions to promote and protect common interests. In addition, alliances are set up in order to level out perceived imbalances in the distribution of international power. Hence, alliances are seen as effective tools for managing regional and global balance of power.

An oft-cited reason for alliance formation is balance of power theory.²² It posits that since an unbalanced power alone poses a threat to less powerful ones, states join alliances in order to balance the power of other states, especially when they cannot balance power through their individual efforts or when the costs of such internal balancing exceed those of alliance membership. Therefore, a relatively weak state confronted by a more powerful state, will decide to ally with a dominant power. An important refinement of balance of power theory is balance of threat theory. Stephen M. Walt addressed this issue by making a case that states form alliances in response to common threats, not just power.²³ Nonetheless, a decline in the level of threat posed by an adversary will result in the weakening or dissolution of the alliance.²⁴

With the intention of boosting strength and protecting security, vulnerable states develop a propensity toward building alliances with influential states that possess impressive military capabilities. At one end, states at risk opt for alliances when they seek protection and defense against strong states. At the other end, strong states show interest in alliances to oppose and counter other strong states for the purpose of maintaining balance of power. It is generally assumed that alliance members would provide military and diplomatic assistance in times of conflict and war.²⁵

Theorizing about why states form alliances has led to expectations about who allies with whom. In particular, theories suggest that in deciding whether to

²¹ Jacob Bercovitch, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

²² Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979), pp. 117-123.

²³ Stephen M. Walt, *Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987)

²⁴ John S. Duffield, Cynthia Michota and Sara Ann Miller, *Op. cit.*, p. 296.

²⁵ Sangit Sarita Dwivedi, "Alliances in International Relations Theory," *International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research*, Vol. 1, Issue 8, August 2012, p. 224.

form alliances and with whom, states should consider: (i) their own power and the threats they face; (ii) their potential ally's power and the threats the ally faces; (iii) the extent to which they share policy goals with their potential ally; and (iv) the credibility of the alliance.²⁶ As George Liska maintained, small/weak powers ally with stronger powers to attain security, stability, and status.²⁷ Given their perceived defenselessness, alliance with great powers can enhance small/weak states' strength and confidence. For smaller states with limited military capability, dependence on alliances is a choice for survival. In view of this, forming alliances and bringing them into play is a logical response to the dangers of aggression and the opportunities for aggrandizement. From discernible trends, it turns out that military alliances contribute to bolstering the cohesion and integrity of each bloc through which a regional security system progressively takes shape.²⁸ Such alliances are designed to provide security to member states and thus to respond prudentially to their national interests.²⁹

The effectiveness and value of the alliances exist in the perception of a common strategic environment and a common threat. When the perceptions of the allies do not coalesce, the efficacy and utility of an alliance may be in question.³⁰ In fact, the main purpose of most alliances is to pool the members' capabilities in a way that advances their interests. States join alliances in order to supplement each other's strengths and capabilities. If alliances are understood as the vehicles that aggregate capabilities, stronger states would have more allies.³¹

On the other side of the spectrum, membership in alliance engenders a strong feeling of involvement/obligation, complicity, and often a compromise over sovereignty.³² Undeniably, the commitment in an alliance is mutual, reciprocal, and equitable among partners. This means that each of the alliance members

²⁶ Brett Ashley Leeds and T. Clifton Morgan, "The Quest for Security: Alliances and Arms", in Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, Paul F. Diehl and James D. Morrow, eds., *Guide to the Scientific Study of International Processes* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 140-141.

²⁷ George Liska, *Op. cit.*

²⁸ Ki-Jung Kim and Myongsob Kim, "The United States and the East Asian Regional Order: Historical Recasting and Forecasting", in G. John Ikenberry and Chung-in Moon, eds., *The United States and Northeast Asia: Debates, Issues, and New Order* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), p. 320.

²⁹ Robert Jackson, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 118.

³⁰ Jacob Bercovitch, *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

³¹ Brett Ashley Leeds and T. Clifton Morgan, *Op. cit.*, p. 141.

³² Jacob Bercovitch, *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

cannot only expect rewards of external assistance in the event of a severe threat but also the drawbacks of the risk of getting entangled in conflicts of the partner(s) and, thus, of paying high costs should this risk materialize. There is a broad agreement among scholars that alliances inherently involve risks and dangers.³³ In a similar vein, alliances are the key triggers for rivalry process and are responsible for the outbreak of complex wars.³⁴ Put differently, alliance membership entails both potential benefits and costs. The costs are in the form of creation of dependence and hence, a compromise over sovereignty.³⁵

In recent times, balancing between the need for protection and the desire for keeping independence intact has been one of the dilemmas of alliance maintenance and management. It has been observed that while small states seek security, they are not ready to be treated as the appendages of great powers. However, the legitimacy of such attitudes is questioned on the ground that the small states cannot expect to act as mere consumers of security or any other collective gain as long as they stay in the alliance. In fact, they are treaty-bound to contribute to the overall performance of an alliance and share the burden of retaining the status quo. Besides, they are to respect alliance commitments and to remain united in the wake of any dissension.

Despite the possible risks of being members in an alliance, there is ample evidence indicating that small states find the benefits derived from such a partnership are rewarding and hence, go beyond its costs and dangers. However, small states need to contribute their share to the overall functions of an alliance and to the creation of a viable security arrangement. An alliance thus promises a reciprocal relationship or a form of assurance against external aggression.³⁶

Alliance between less powerful states and great powers demonstrates a realist approach that differs with the idealist aspirations of many small states. In most cases, cooperation between alliance members and integrative tendencies within alliances are results of internal cohesion and collaborative spirit. The higher the degree of alliance cohesion and collaboration, the greater the chance of acting in unison. When cohesion and concord diminish, disintegrative forces rise.³⁷ Nonetheless, it is difficult to measure the capabilities and intentions of states

³³ Brett Ashley Leeds and T. Clifton Morgan, *Op. cit.*, p. 140.

³⁴ Brandon Valeriano and John A. Vasquez, "Identifying and Classifying Complex Interstate Wars", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 2, 2010, pp. 561-582.

³⁵ John S. Duffield, Cynthia Michota and Sara Ann Miller, *Op. cit.*, p. 295.

³⁶ Jacob Bercovitch, *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

with any degree of precision and this difficulty gives rise to uncertainty about what exactly constitutes a winning alliance.³⁸

The views of scholars and experts on the efficacy of alliances are at variance. While some argue that vigilant handling of military alliances to create countervailing coalitions will deter potential aggressors and prevent war,³⁹ others assert that alliance commitments can serve to provoke and expand war.⁴⁰ The mutual defense pact is an example of the most common alliance. In such a treaty, the parties promise one another sturdy military support in the event one or more is attacked.⁴¹ Examples demonstrate that defensive alliances with no offensive component are more durable and credible. Moreover, scholars have suggested that alliances among liberal democratic states are likely to be especially strong and resilient.⁴²

Indisputably, states would presumably not form or maintain alliances if they were not thought of advancing the interests of member states in ways that were otherwise impossible or less cost-effective.

Acrimony between the Two Koreas and the Northern Military Buildup

One of the most protracted, complex, and bitter tensions in Northeast Asia emanates from the relationship between North and South Korea. The two countries are currently at loggerheads over a number of critical issues. Even though they share a common history, language, religion, tradition, and culture, they are two hostile countries with entirely different political and economic systems. More than six decades of conflicting political ideologies have shaped peoples' outlooks and living standards, pitching the impoverished and virulently nationalistic/militaristic North in stark contrast to the capitalist/industrialized South.

³⁸ Steve Chan, *International Relations in Perspective: The Pursuit of Security, Welfare, and Justice* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1984), p. 136.

³⁹ See, Edward V. Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1955); Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967); and Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979).

⁴⁰ See, Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 1990, pp. 137-168; Randolph M. Siverson and Harvey Starr, *The Diffusion of War* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991); and John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁴¹ Brett Ashley Leeds, *Op. cit.*, p. 430.

⁴² Kurt Taylor Gaubatz, "Democratic States and Commitment in International Relations," *International Organization*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 1996, pp. 109-150.

Since no peace treaty was concluded to end the Korean War, small-scale military clashes recurrently flare up along both land and sea borders of the two countries. Apprehensions and sporadic low intensity military conflicts characterize this relationship. As a result, mutual prejudice, mistrust, suspicion, and animosity between the two countries run deep and wide. In fact, North Korea has a long history of ratcheting up pugnacious rhetoric and posing dreadful threats against South Korea and its allies – the U.S. and Japan.

For the preceding sixty years, North Korea has constituted endemic difficulties for South Korean and American policymakers. Pyongyang's relations with Seoul and Washington have been notoriously confrontational, with periods of negotiated peace continually disrupted by Northern intimidations. The DPRK is called by analysts as one of the most enigmatic states of the world with a huge standing army and conventional weapons arsenal, a chemical and biological warfare capability, a long-range missile program, and an ambitious nuclear program.⁴³ The country's governance is shaped by the national mottos of *Juche*⁴⁴ and *Songun*⁴⁵ focusing respectively on the ideas of revolutionary communism and militarized society. While North Korea once enjoyed an economic advantage over South Korea,⁴⁶ now the country suffers from an ailing economy, and chronic food crisis continues to plague the country since the 1990s.⁴⁷

Historically, North and South Korea perceive each other as enemies and the DPRK has a horrifying record of targeting the ROK – in 1968, Pyongyang dispatched commandos to the presidential Blue House in Seoul in an abortive attempt to assassinate South Korea's president Park Chung-hee; the 1983 North

⁴³ Larry M. Nicksch, "North Korea's Weapons of Mass Destruction", in Young Whan Kihl and Hong Nack Kim (eds.), *North Korea: The Politics of Regime Survival* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2006), p. 107. See also, Ravi Shekhar Narain Singh, *Asian Strategic and Military Perspective* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 2005), p. 235.

⁴⁴ *Juche* means that popular masses are the "masters" of revolution. It is typically interpreted as a self-oriented, self-reliant, and independent ideology. In fact, it implies a philosophy of strict domestic control and international independence.

⁴⁵ *Songun* is translated as "military first" which prioritizes the armed forces in the state affairs and allocates resources to the army first. The *Songun* doctrine was introduced by Kim Jong Il.

⁴⁶ Steve Grunau, "Negotiating Survival: The Problem of Commitment in U.S.-North Korean Relations." *Journal of Public and International Affairs*, Vol. 15, Spring 2004, p. 106.

⁴⁷ Stefano Felician, North and South Korea: A Frozen Conflict on the Verge of Unfreezing?, IAI Working Papers 11, Rome, August 2011, p. 6.

Korea-orchestrated bombing killed 17 high profile South Korean officials while they were on a state visit to Myanmar; and agents from the North were held responsible for bombing a South Korean airline in 1987.⁴⁸ While a full-blown war is not an option for each side, tit-for-tat reprisals occur periodically which heighten the risk of escalation that could trigger a war.

For many years now, North and South Korea have been locked in conflict and rivalry and have not been able to close their differences. Paradoxically, they have deliberately restricted contacts since 1953. The most disastrous humanitarian consequence of this bitter partition is that in 1997 there were an estimated ten million divided family members who have had no chances to contact each other, in stark contrast to the case of Germany prior to the country's unification in 1990.⁴⁹

In recent years, North Korean attitudes reflect how desperate and belligerent the country's leadership is – in 2009, Pyongyang announced that it no longer had any obligation to the 1953 armistice which ended the Korean War. Tensions between North and South Korea peaked significantly leading to the sharp worsening of relations following the sinking of a South Korean warship – the *Cheonan* – by North Korean torpedo/mine attack in March, 2010 which caused the death of forty-six sailors. More alarmingly, the North Korean shelling of the small South Korean-held island of Yeonpyeong (which houses military installations and a small civilian population) in November, 2010 wrecked the fragile Korean equilibrium killing several people, including ROK marines. This tragic episode was called the worst military incident since 1953 that set off a severe crisis on the Korean peninsula and beyond. Consequently, the U.S. and the ROK started a new round of military drills that were intended to project the scale, credibility, and strength of their bilateral alliance relationship. Indeed, the sinking of the *Cheonan* and the shelling of Yeonpyeong amply demonstrate the persistent volatility and danger of the current less-than-peace situation on the peninsula.

⁴⁸ A former North Korean spy recently revealed fresh details of the 1987 Korean Airlines flight bombing in an interview with Australia's ABC News. The bombing mission was personally instructed by North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, the spy said, in an effort to discourage visitors from attending the 1988 Seoul Olympics. See, Ann Hui, "Ex-North Korean spy sheds new light on fatal 1987 Korean Airline bombing", *The Globe and Mail*, April 11, 2013.

⁴⁹ Gabriel Jonsson, *Towards Korean Reconciliation: Socio-Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), p. 55.

Since late 2012, North Korea has initiated a new series of provocations and war propaganda that once again brought the peninsula to the brink of open conflict and that dashed hopes that the new DPRK leader Kim Jong-un would lead his country in a new direction. After successfully launching a long-range, multi-stage rocket (under the guise of a satellite launch) on December 12 – the second in 2012 – Pyongyang conducted its third and the biggest nuclear test on February 12, 2013 and stepped up its fiery rhetoric against South Korea and the U.S. to include the threat of pre-emptive nuclear strikes.⁵⁰ These weapons tests moved the DPRK closer to its goals of developing a viable nuclear weapon and a long-range delivery vehicle in an attempt to secure recognition from the international community as a nuclear weapons state. The DPRK's Central Military Commission (CMC) outlined these goals in a February 21, 2013 statement that claimed, "the underground nuclear test... represented a great political and military victory as it made the international community confidently recognize the status of the DPRK as a strategic rocket and nuclear weapons state."⁵¹ In fact, the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates estimated in January 2011 that North Korea was within five years of being able to develop an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) capable of striking the United States.⁵²

A noted American expert on North Korea's nuclear and missile programs recently stated that the North has by now developed a deliverable nuclear warhead for its intermediate-range ballistic missiles.⁵³ If there is any authenticity in this claim, this means that population centers and U.S. bases in Japan and South Korea could already be within the range of a North Korean nuclear strike. Although ballistic missiles would be the preferred delivery system for a North Korean nuclear weapon, it is not known whether the regime is capable of designing and testing a warhead that would be small enough and sufficiently reliable for placement on the tip of a missile.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Emma Chanlett-Avery and Ian E. Rinehart, *North Korea: U.S. Relations, Nuclear Diplomacy, and Internal Situation*, Congressional Research Service, April 2013, p. 1.

⁵¹ "N. Korea claims winning international recognition as nuclear weapons state," Yonhap, February 21, 2013, Available at: <<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2013/02/21/52/0401000000AEN20130221010400315F.HTML>>

⁵² Elisabeth Bumiller and David E. Sanger, "Gates Warns of North Korea Missile Threat to U.S.," *New York Times*, January 11, 2011, Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/12/world/asia/12military.html?_r=0>

⁵³ David Albright, "North Korean Miniaturization," *38 North*, February 13, 2013, Available at: <<http://38north.org/2013/02/albright021313/>>

⁵⁴ Greg Thielmann, "Sorting Out the Nuclear and Missile Threats from North Korea", Arms Control Association (ACA) Threat Assessment Brief, Washington, DC, May 21, 2013, p. 5.

The development of ballistic missiles by North Korea have long been seen by the U.S. and its allies in Northeast Asia as a key security threat and a source of regional volatility. Moreover, the political developments in North Korea since Kim Jong-un's assumption of power in 2011 indicate a renewed focus on advancing its missile capabilities. The most alarming development is the DPRK's deployment of an estimated 600 short-range ballistic missiles capable of striking parts or all of South Korea, and perhaps 150-200 medium-range Nodong missiles which could potentially hit South Korea and Japan.⁵⁵ Experts believe the North has over 200 Nodong missiles⁵⁶ that could reach most of Japan. In fact, North Korea has developed a formidable war machine as it possesses a vast defense system. The unified Korean People's Army (KPA) now ranks the fourth largest in the world, behind the forces of the U.S., China, and India.⁵⁷

As some reports suggest, North Korea has nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and is currently developing missiles of all ranges.⁵⁸ A recent unclassified U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report reveals that the North currently has nuclear weapons capable of delivery by ballistic missiles.⁵⁹ As Bruce Klingner of The Heritage Foundation wrote in 2011, the DIA Director Lieutenant General Ronald Burgess testified that North Korea "may now have several plutonium-based nuclear warheads that it can deliver by ballistic missiles and aircraft as well as unconventional means."⁶⁰ In early 2013 the U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel stated that the North Koreans had nuclear capacity with missile delivery capacity.⁶¹ However, the intelligence debate

⁵⁵ An Overview of North Korea's Ballistic Missile Program, The National Committee on North Korea (NCNK) Issue Brief 2013, Washington DC, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Cited in Ernest Z. Bower, Victor Cha, Karl F. Inderfurth, Christopher K. Johnson, Gary A. Powell and Stephanie Sanok, U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012), p. 26.

⁵⁷ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2011* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 205.

⁵⁸ Mark B. Schneider, "Does North Korea Have a Missile-Deliverable Nuclear Weapon?," The Heritage Foundation Commentary, May 22, 2013.

⁵⁹ Reuters, "Pentagon Says North Korea Can Likely Launch Nuclear Missile," April 11, 2013, Available at: <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/11/us-korea-north-usa-idUSBRE93A15N20130411>>

⁶⁰ Bruce Klingner, "North Korea May Have Nuclear Warheads," The Heritage Foundation Commentary, March 15, 2011.

⁶¹ "Remarks by Secretary Hagel at the National Defense University, Ft. McNair, Washington, D.C.," April 3, 2013, available at: <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=5213>.

continues and intensifies on whether North Korea has built the capacity to miniaturize nuclear warheads for ballistic missile delivery.⁶²

Eventually, Pyongyang nullified the 1953 armistice with Seoul in early 2013 and announced that it was withdrawing from all non-aggression pacts with South Korea, shutting down joint border crossings, and disconnecting the hotline between the two Koreas. On March 30, 2013 Kim Jong-un announced that his country was in a “state of war” with South Korea and vowed to close the Kaesong industrial complex, a joint venture between the two Koreas.⁶³ In fact, this industrial zone is one of the last remaining sites of peaceful engagement between North and South Korea, and is often considered a symbol of cooperation between them. Moreover, Kim Jong-un repeatedly stresses that North Korea’s nuclear weapons are no longer negotiable.⁶⁴

Despite harsh economic sanctions and vigorous diplomatic efforts by regional/global powers, Pyongyang has continued to develop a nuclear weapons capability, with quantities of plutonium sufficient to produce nuclear warheads and a uranium enrichment program of unknown but potentially greater capacity.⁶⁵ Its rocket launch in December, 2012 and its nuclear detonation in February, 2013 occurred in flagrant defiance of the U.N. Security Council resolutions prohibiting such activities. Besides, North Korea breached the Leap Day Agreement, 2012 signed with the U.S. in which it agreed to return to the negotiating table and freeze nuclear and missile tests in exchange for substantial food aid.⁶⁶ Likewise, Pyongyang announced in March 2013 that it would reconstruct the Yongbyon reactor, which had been closed in 2007 and partly

⁶² Chung Min Lee, “The Park Geun-hye Administration’s Foreign and Security Policy Challenges”, Korea Chair Platform, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington, DC, May 1, 2013.

⁶³ Global Voices, “South and North Korea in a State of War”, 3 April, 2013 Available at: <<http://globalvoicesonline.org/2013/04/03/south-and-north-korea-in-state-of-war/>>

⁶⁴ Hanns Günther Hilpert and Oliver Meier, “Charting a New Course on North Korea’s Nuclear Programme? The Options and the Non-Proliferation Treaty”, *SWP Comments 19*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, June 2013, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Cited in the Institute for Science and International Security’s (IISS) *The North Korean Plutonium Stock Mid-2006* Available at: <<http://isis-online.org/publications/dprk/dprkplutonium.pdf>>

⁶⁶ Hanns Günther Hilpert and Oliver Meier, “Charting a New Course on North Korea’s Nuclear Programme? The Options and the Non-Proliferation Treaty”, *SWP Comments 19*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, June 2013, p. 3.

dismantled. It also continues to construct a light-water nuclear reactor which it claims will be used for civilian power generation starting in 2014.⁶⁷

As a close ally of South Korea, the U.S. has also been threatened by North Korea to be “dissolved” if it becomes a party to the inter-Korean conflict. The latest threat includes North Korea targeting South Korea and the U.S. mainland as well as its military installations in Hawaii and Guam.⁶⁸ While North Korea’s periodic nuclear threats are not new, the scope, magnitude, and frequency of such threats have vastly increased during 2012-13. These have commonly included threats of thermonuclear attack on the U.S. and its allies, a verbal declaration of war, and repeated statements that the 1953 armistice has ended.⁶⁹

The U.S.-South Korean Alliance and Deterring the Northern Threat

The U.S.-South Korean alliance, based on the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1953, has been the capstone of the six-decade old bilateral relationship. It is one of the most integrated, robust, and durable military alliances in the world. This strategic cooperation is often called “blood alliance” which is fundamental to South Korean national security and integral to America’s policy toward Northeast Asia. In effect, the U.S.-ROK security alliance is at the core of American presence, power, and prestige in the Asia-Pacific region while for most South Koreans, the alliance is beneficial – even indispensable – for the country.

Under the alliance agreement and principles, the U.S. and South Korea have built up one of the strongest and most impressive combined defense postures in the world. The alliance stands out as a strong pillar for regional peace and stability by concurrently containing North Korea and projecting American military power into Northeast Asia. It is a distinct arrangement as it rests on a strong edifice of security imperatives, politico-economic interests, and shared values. It is in this context that the weekly *Economist* in a 2012 issue dubbed South Korea as “a model American ally”.⁷⁰

The U.S. has maintained a constant, and vigilant military presence on the peninsula since the inception of 1953 treaty and focused on supporting South

⁶⁷ Greg Thielmann, “Sorting Out the Nuclear and Missile Threats From North Korea”, Arms Control Association (ACA) Threat Assessment Brief, Washington, DC, May 21, 2013, pp.4-5.

⁶⁸ Choe Sang-Hun, “North Korea Calls Hawaii and U.S. Mainland targets”, *The New York Times*, March 26, 2013.

⁶⁹ Mark B. Schneider, *Op. cit.*

⁷⁰ *The Economist*, “Obama’s Most Improved Bilateral Alliance”, March 31, 2012.

Korea reconstruct its economy and also on establishing a resilient alliance through close political and military collaboration. Currently, the North Korean threat is at the top of the U.S.-ROK alliance agenda and the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) is committed to the defense of South Korea and has been critical in deterring North Korean aggression and attacks.

As stated before, the U.S. has been devoted to averting and defeating North Korean aggression against South Korea since 1953. This commitment has consistently been given by American policymakers as an issue directly linked to U.S. security – a vital interest – and not merely a formal commitment to support an ally under threat.⁷¹ Born out of conflict at the peak of the cold war, the U.S.-ROK alliance is now the linchpin of American efforts not only to defend South Korea against any aggression from the North but also to shape the larger strategic equilibrium in the Asia-Pacific region. The U.S. presently maintains about 28,500 troops in South Korea and Seoul is included under Washington’s “nuclear umbrella”, also known as “extended deterrence” that applies to other non-nuclear U.S. allies too.⁷²

Any outbreak of conflict on the Korean peninsula or even the instability/collapse of the regime in Pyongyang could upset the status quo in the region.⁷³ Against this backdrop, a number of Korea specialists have identified several factors that drive the scope and state of the U.S.-South Korean alliance:⁷⁴ (i) the challenges posed by North Korea, particularly its weapons of mass destruction program and perceptions in Washington and Seoul of whether the despotic regime constitutes a threat, through its belligerence and/or the risk of its downfall; (ii) the growing aspiration of South Korean leaders to use the country’s middle power status to play a greater regional and global role; (iii) China’s increasing influence and leverage in Northeast Asia, which is a critical issue in U.S.-South Korean strategic thinking; (iv) the transformation of South

⁷¹ Thomas L. Wilborn, “U.S. Security Policy for Northeast Asia: Handmaiden for Export Promotion?”, in Tae-Hwan Kwak, ed., *The Major Powers of Northeast Asia: Seeking Peace and Security* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), p. 150.

⁷² Mark E. Manyin, Emma Chanlett-Avery and Mary Beth Nikitin, U.S.-South Korea Relations, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report, May 15, 2012, p. 18.

⁷³ Emma Chanlett-Avery and Ian E. Rinehart, North Korea: U.S. Relations, Nuclear Diplomacy, and Internal Situation, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report, April 2013, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Mark E. Manyin, Emma Chanlett-Avery and Mary Beth Nikitin, U.S.-South Korea Relations, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report, May 15, 2012, p. 7.

Korea into one of the world's leading economies; and (v) South Korea's vibrant democratization which has given people voice in the country's foreign policy.

The ROK has espoused a modernization plan for the military and crafted a new vision for the U.S.-ROK alliance as crucial elements of its security strategy in response to a multitude of challenges and its aspiration to play a greater role in regional and global security. The South Korean government is in the process of implementing two important reform initiatives: Defense Reform 2020 – a 15-year, \$550 million program passed by the National Assembly in 2006 and planned to reduce ROK force levels while promoting more modernized military hardware and technology to augment war fighting capability; and Defense Reformation Plan 307 – a complement to Defense Reform 2020 designed to strengthen coordination among the services and building capabilities to engage in military activities short of full-scale war in response to future threats, provocations, and attacks by North Korea similar to the 2010 *Cheonan* attack.⁷⁵ The bases for this modernization plan are the 2009 Joint Vision for the U.S.-ROK alliance, an extensive strategic document/plan for bolstering defense cooperation between the U.S. and South Korea,⁷⁶ and Strategic Alliance 2015, a roadmap for the alliance that specifies the transition to two independent commands for the U.S. and the ROK after a proposed transfer of wartime Operational Control (OPCON) of South Korean forces to the ROK government in December 2015.⁷⁷

Rationale, Strength, and Resilience of the U.S.-ROK Alliance

Obviously, South Korea's relationship with the U.S. is, in large measure, the product of its security fears vis-à-vis the DPRK. The American commitment has not only been indispensable to the survival and progress of South Korea, it also reflects an ethical dimension – the U.S., having virtually created ROK in 1948, assumed obligations to the truncated country.

⁷⁵ Ernest Z. Bower, Victor Cha, Karl F. Inderfurth, Christopher K. Johnson, Gary A. Powell, and Stephanie Sanok, *U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2012), p. 27.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ As per the current arrangement, which is a legacy of U.S. involvement in the 1950-1953 Korean War, South Korean soldiers would be placed under the command of U.S. forces in the event of the outbreak of a war on the peninsula. See for details, Ernest Z. Bower, Victor Cha, Karl F. Inderfurth, Christopher K. Johnson, Gary A. Powell and Stephanie Sanok, *U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012), p. 27.

For many years, the catchphrase for the U.S.-South Korean alliance has been *Katchi-Kapshida* (We Go Together). This Korean phrase carries an appeal of longstanding and intimate relationship between the American military forces and those of South Korea. The USFK members frequently use the phrase to signify the weight and value of the U.S.-South Korea alliance.⁷⁸ Seoul, on its part, has proven on core issues of Washington's concern that it is a trusted and dependable alliance partner. To cite an example, ROK's support for the 2003 Iraq war reflects the country's alliance commitment since the government justified the decision as an alliance obligation rather than an international obligation.⁷⁹

Looking ahead, the question remains whether the U.S.-South Korean alliance will sustain in a vastly altered political and strategic environment. The defenders of the alliance argue that the alliance is no less important now as it was in the past. Not only do they claim that the U.S.-ROK alliance is essential to prevent the resurgence of the instability that spawned intractable conflicts in the Northeast Asian region, they also contend that the continuation of Washington's alliance leadership role symbolized by the continued stationing of American troops in South Korea is imperative as well. Since the alliance is an important pillar for U.S. influence in the region, many assert that any U.S. retrenchment would severely jeopardize South Korean and American politico-security interests in the region. In fact, the *Cheonan* attack and Yeonpyeong island shelling of 2010, DPRK's rocket launching of 2012, and nuclear test of 2013 – all have sharpened the South Korean threat perceptions reinforcing and legitimizing the U.S.-South Korean alliance.⁸⁰

However, the U.S.-South Korean alliance, largely successful for more than half a century, has been under strains and stresses for the last several decades. There are several reasons for a downturn in Korean people's attitudes toward American military presence. As pointed out by G. John Ikenberry, as democracy thrived and populist politics entrenched in South Korea, it is now easier for that country's leaders to question its client status and dependence on

⁷⁸ Lee Tae-hoon, "USFK commander too media shy for own good", *The Korea Times*, April 18, 2012.

⁷⁹ Daniel F. Baltrusaitis, *Friends Indeed: Coalition Burden Sharing and the War in Iraq* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2008), p. 223.

⁸⁰ Jim Garamone, "Cheonan Tragedy Strengthens U.S.-South Korean Alliance", U.S. Department of Defense, July 21, 2010, Available at: < <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=60103>>

alliance with America.⁸¹ Others like Seung-Hwan Kim maintain that the U.S. military bases in ROK, South Korean media's prejudice against the U.S., and a resentment of U.S. global policy evoke anti-American sentiments.⁸² Further sources of anti-Americanism in South Korea include historical perceptions, cultural differences, America's dealings with North Korea, the neoliberal prescription for the Asian Financial Crisis, and the influence of South Korean left-wing political leaders.⁸³ Some other sources of anti-Americanism are anti-western sentiment, anti-capitalism, the fear of a nuclear war, and an antipathy toward the hegemonic power.⁸⁴

Considering the above facts, both the U.S. and South Korean policymakers have adopted several measures to overhaul the alliance in order to project a better image of the alliance performance, in particular and the U.S. role, in general. During the George Bush presidency (2000-2008), the U.S. decided to pull out 12,500 of the 37,000 American troops stationed in South Korea by the end of 2008, while agreeing to provide \$11 billion to augment the deterrence and defense capabilities of the remaining U.S. forces and the ROK military.⁸⁵ The U.S. also agreed to return the Yongsan base in Seoul to South Korea and to eventually relocate all U.S. forces, including the Second Infantry Division along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), to south of the Han River – in an apparent attempt to ease tensions with local citizens.⁸⁶

A confluence of factors contributed to the above decisions. Among the main reasons were a prudent review of the U.S. global defense posture, American troop needs elsewhere in the world in response to the global war on terror, and the South Korean military's increased capability to defend the country.

⁸¹ G. John Ikenberry, "A New Order in East Asia?", in Kent E. Calder and Francis Fukuyama (eds.), *East Asian Multilateralism: Prospects for Regional Stability* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 218.

⁸² Seung-Hwan Kim, "Anti-Americanism in Korea," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Winter 2002-03, p. 111.

⁸³ Chang Hun Oh and Celeste Arrington, "Democratization and Changing Anti-American Sentiments in South Korea," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 47, No. 2, March 2007, p. 329.

⁸⁴ Gi-wook Shin, "South Korean anti-Americanism: A Comparative Perspective," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 36, No. 8, August 1996, p. 789.

⁸⁵ Randy Schriver, "The U.S.-ROK Alliance: Regional Challenges for An Evolving Alliance", in Kurt M. Campbell, Victor D. Cha, Lindsey Ford, Nirav Patel, Randy Schriver, and Vikram J. Singh, eds., *Going Global: The Future of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance* (Washington, DC: Center for New American Security, 2009), p. 50.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Moreover, the U.S. experienced strong anti-Americanism in South Korea, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s, which saw the rise of the “3-8-6 Generation”.⁸⁷ This generation, which tended to strongly support former president Roh Moo-hyun, held less favorable views of the U.S. based on a convergence of factors: diminished memory of the Korean War and American contributions to South Korean security in the height of the cold war, resentment of the lack of U.S. support for the South Korean democratization movement, and a low-keyed threat emanating from North Korea.⁸⁸

Of course, at the official level, South Korea considers its alliance relationship with the U.S. at the forefront of the country’s national security agenda. There were concerns among South Korean policymakers when in an academic writing former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice regarded South Korea a “global partner” but Japan and Australia as “allies”.⁸⁹ However, after assuming office in 2009 president Barack Obama prioritized building up a strong and productive relationship with ROK – a traditional ally and military partner. While only a few years ago many analysts were envisaging the dissolution of the U.S.-ROK alliance during the presidency of South Korea’s progressive leader Roh Moo-hyun, the alliance has successfully weathered the obstacles and challenges.⁹⁰

A 2012 opinion poll indicates that despite a declining support for sustaining U.S. military budget and bases overseas, there is a full-throated support for American bases in South Korea, with a majority (60%) of the Americans in favor of continuing long-term military bases there⁹¹ whereas South Koreans overwhelmingly continue to see the U.S.-ROK alliance as indispensable in the future (95%), even after a potential reunification with North Korea (84%). They are also supportive of the U.S. military presence (67%), perhaps because a considerable number of South Koreans do not think they alone are sufficiently

⁸⁷ A label coined in South Korea in the late 1990s for people in their 30s who attended university in the 1980s and were born in the 1960s.

⁸⁸ Randy Schriver, *Op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

⁸⁹ Condoleezza Rice, “Rethinking the National Interest: American Realism for a New World”, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2008.

⁹⁰ Scott Snyder, “Expanding the US-South Korea Alliance”, in Scott Snyder, ed., *The US-South Korea Alliance: Meeting New Security Challenges* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012), p. 2.

⁹¹ The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Working Paper on the U.S.-ROK Alliance, December 2012, p. 2, Available at: <http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/Task%20Force%20Reports/2012_CCS_US-ROKConferenceReport.pdf>

capable of deterring (24%), or defeating (26%) North Korea.⁹² On the other hand, a recent poll conducted by the Seoul-based influential Asan Institute shows that 91% of the South Koreans believe the alliance is strongly justifiable, and 75% consider the alliance relevant and necessary even after the unification of the two Koreas.⁹³

However, questions linger about how well positioned and equipped the U.S.-ROK alliance is to cope with emerging regional issues beyond the Korean peninsula. In the present-day world, South Korea finds itself in a challenging security milieu where a host of developments continue to occur transitioning into an uncertain and chaotic future – the relative decline of U.S. power and the post-9/11 stress on “strategic flexibility”; the demise of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il and succession; a rising and ambitious China and its increasingly assertive foreign policy; political crisis in Japan; and global economic recession. All these beg a fundamental question – how effectively and to what degree can South Korea respond to the changing political and security conditions under the U.S.-ROK alliance system?

The U.S. commitment to South Korea stretches beyond the concept of assuring security and stability. America’s alliance with South Korea and the forward presence of its military forces have become a symbol of U.S. engagement in this region. This U.S. military presence has constituted a dominant force not only in the ROK security paradigm but also in Northeast Asian power politics. Most importantly, the current U.S. strategy focuses on the elevation of the U.S.-ROK security alliance from the defense of South Korea to one that more actively involves Seoul in maintaining and managing regional security. While the alliance fulfills the security needs of South Korea and addresses its other concerns, it opens up new frontiers of cooperation and collaboration between the two allies. Since 2009, the two partners have initiated measures to transform the U.S.-ROK alliance, enlarging it from its key purpose of defending against North Korean attack to a regional and global partnership.⁹⁴

⁹² The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Working Paper on the U.S.-ROK Alliance, December 2012, p. 4, Available at: <http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/Task%20Force%20Reports/2012_CCS_US-ROKConferenceReport.pdf>

⁹³ Ernest Z. Bower, Victor Cha, Karl F. Inderfurth, Christopher K. Johnson, Gary A. Powell and Stephanie Sanok, *U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012), p. 26.

⁹⁴ Mark E. Manyin, Emma Chanlett-Avery and Mary Beth Nikitin, U.S.-South Korea Relations, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report, May 15, 2012, p. 19.

Victor D. Cha, one of the most authoritative and influential scholars in the field, holds an extremely positive view that the U.S.-ROK alliance has outperformed expectations in many respects since its foundation in 1953. In view of the rapid changes in world politics, he suggests the following principles to rationalize the alliance and to make it more effective and sustainable in future:⁹⁵

First, the alliance should be seen as standing for shared visions and values, rather than just standing in opposition to North Korean antagonism and aggression. The democratic values, free market economy, rule of law, and respect for human rights would synchronize the global objectives of Washington and Seoul. Second, as the alliance expands in scope and function, its leaders need to inject intrinsic values, not only strategic values into the alliance. As a democratic South Korea plays an important and constructive role in global affairs, the alliance proves intrinsically valuable. Thus, the U.S.-ROK alliance would sustain logically and consistently even after the end of the North Korean menace. Third, the men behind the alliance need to find out new frontiers of cooperation where their interests converge which would help define the alliance outside the peninsular context. The global war on terror is a case in point where Seoul has already showed the alliance's extra-peninsular context. The ROK played a major and distinct role in Iraq, supplying the third largest ground contingent, and in Afghanistan, where it extended logistics and medical support. In addition, South Korea's shining record of peacekeeping operations in different parts of the world such as South Sudan, East Timor, Cyprus, and Lebanon shows that Seoul is capable of playing an inspiring role in other areas of instability. The ROK navy is now capable of delivering important regional tasks to preserve freedom of navigation in Asian waters. For instance, South Korea earned much international recognition when in January 2011 its naval commandos stormed one of the country's cargo ships hijacked in the Arabian Sea and rescued its crew members defeating the pirates of Somalia.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Victor D. Cha, "Outperforming Expectations: The U.S.-ROK Alliance", in Kurt M. Campbell, Victor D. Cha, Lindsey Ford, Nirav Patel, Randy Schriver, and Vikram J. Singh, eds., *Going Global: The Future of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance* (Washington, DC: Center for New American Security, 2009), pp. 9-10. For an analysis along these lines, see Scott Snyder, "Expanding the US-South Korea Alliance", in Scott Snyder, ed., *The US-South Korea Alliance: Meeting New Security Challenges* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012).

⁹⁶ Justin McCurry, "Eight Somali pirates killed as South Korea rescues freighter crew", *The Guardian*, January 21, 2011.

Obviously, the U.S.-ROK alliance entitles South Korea to an active and wider leadership role in shaping regional/global agendas. The vitality, strength, and relevance of this alliance relationship lies in former South Korean president Lee Myung-bak and U.S. president Barack Obama's references to a "Global Korea" – a country that looks beyond the security of the peninsula to address the world's problems.⁹⁷ This labeling not only elevates South Korea's global profile but also creates avenues for the country's contribution to global peace and development. In recent years, South Korea has stepped up its efforts to demonstrate leadership role in multilateral global forums by hosting the G20 summit in Seoul in November 2010, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) High Level Forum in Busan in November 2011, and the nuclear security summit in Seoul in March 2012.⁹⁸ Hence, South Korea emerges more of a producer of global security than a mere consumer of security. With its newfound capacity and willingness, South Korea now plays an important role in securing its own defense and increasingly contributes to the areas of peacekeeping, overseas development assistance (ODA), anti-piracy, counter-proliferation, and post-conflict stabilization.⁹⁹ As a recent study of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reveals, South Korea had the twelfth largest military expenditures in 2010 which exceeded that of Australia and Canada, representing an expansion of capacity that has enabled its contributions to international security beyond the peninsula.¹⁰⁰ In terms of gross domestic product (GDP), South Korea's current military spending is 2.6% which is larger than that of China, Japan, and Brazil.¹⁰¹ Thus, a stable peninsula would favor South Korea's goal of meeting the specific international needs within the U.S.-ROK alliance framework. This will help both the partners adjust

⁹⁷ *The Economist*, "Obama's most improved bilateral alliance", March 31, 2012.

⁹⁸ Scott Snyder, "Overview", in Scott Snyder, ed., *Global Korea: South Korea's Contributions to International Security* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2012), p. 5.

⁹⁹ Scott Snyder, "Expanding the US-South Korea Alliance", in Scott Snyder, ed., *The US-South Korea Alliance: Meeting New Security Challenges* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012), p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Cited in Scott Snyder, "Overview", in Scott Snyder, ed., *Global Korea: South Korea's Contributions to International Security* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2012), p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Ted Galen Carpenter, "On North Korea, Keep Calm and Carry On", *U.S. News and World Report*, April 11, 2013. Also see, *The Economist*, Obama's most improved bilateral alliance, March 31, 2012.

the re-orientation of the alliance from the one confined to the peninsula toward a greater regional and global posture.

Future Directions in Park Geun-hye's Alliance Policy

In the projected future, the troubled stand-off between the two Koreas and the frustratingly slow progress in inter-Korean reconciliation process will continue to stress the U.S.-South Korean alliance partnership. As the alliance has long been an anchor of the American strategic role in Northeast Asia undergirding its national security strategy, and as the alliance provides South Korea a maneuvering room in dealing with its neighbors – particularly China and North Korea – both Washington and Seoul find a strong ground to further consolidate and advance the alliance. Hence, any disbanding or weakening of the alliance could result in a power vacuum and imbalance inviting fierce arms race that could cause upheaval and instability in the region. Moreover, in the absence of the alliance and American retrenchment, it would be extremely difficult for South Korea to find a replacement of the U.S. who could offer credible extended deterrence using full range of military capabilities, including nuclear umbrella, conventional strike, and missile defense capabilities.

It is important to see in what ways the recent developments and trends in South Korean domestic politics are connected to the functioning and future sustenance of the U.S.-ROK alliance. In December 2012, Park Geun-hye of the conservative Saenuri (New Frontier) Party (NFP) was elected as the president of South Korea. On the surface, with Park's election victory there was a sense of euphoria and optimism among the Koreans and a great deal of confidence was gained in relation to U.S.-South Korea relationship. During the election campaign, Park Geun-hye's contestant Moon Jae-in of the progressive Minjoo (Democratic United) Party (DUP) declared certain policies which, had he been elected, could put U.S.-ROK relations on risk – specifically, he was in favor of re-negotiation of provisions of the 2007 Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA) and South Korea's unconditional engagement with North Korea which ran counter to U.S. policy and Six-Party Talks principles of conditionality, reciprocity, and transparency.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Bruce Klingner, Conservative South Korean Victory Will Affirm Strong U.S. Alliance, *The Daily Signal*, December 20, 2012. See also, Matthew Winkler and Sangwon Yoon, Moon Sees United Opposition Front in S. Korea President Race, *Bloomberg News*, October 9, 2012.

In contrast, Park Geun-hye is widely credited for being a strong advocate of and voice for the U.S.-South Korean alliance. Arguably, much of the current U.S.-South Korean understanding owes to the policies of her predecessor Lee Myung-bak, who attached highest priority to this relationship. Park looks at the U.S.-ROK relationship through Lee's lens and finds the alliance as the bedrock of ROK's national security agenda. In recognition of the value and importance of the U.S.-South Korea relationship and the need for building credibility, trust, and cooperation, Park chose the U.S. as the first destination of her overseas trip in May 2013 which also marked the sixtieth anniversary of the U.S.-ROK alliance. During her meeting with President Barack Obama she mentioned that the alliance should continue to serve as a linchpin for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and in Asia.¹⁰³ In her statement, Park asserted that North Korean provocations, including nuclear and missile threats, would not succeed if South Korea was backed by the power of the alliance.¹⁰⁴ In fact, adroit handling of North Korea, as Park maintains, is an overriding strategic element in the U.S.-South Korean alliance partnership. Under the Lee Myung-bak and Barack Obama presidencies, the two countries' policies toward North Korea converged. However, before the election Park Geun-hye campaigned on a platform of *trustpolitik*¹⁰⁵ that is based on retaining robust deterrence and defense capabilities with the simultaneous promise of humanitarian assistance to North Korea provided Pyongyang denuclearizes and abides by the agreements concluded with South Korea and the international community.¹⁰⁶ President Park pursues a different approach – with Washington's support – toward Pyongyang than that of Lee Myung-bak who, in the wake of *Cheonan* and *Yeongpyeong* disasters, devised an unyielding/hardline policy toward the

¹⁰³ Samantha Stainburn, "Park: South Korea-US alliance 'a linchpin for peace in Asia'", *Global Post*, May 7, 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Terry Atlas, "South Korea's Park Sees Strong U.S. Ties as Key in Facing North", *Bloomberg Businessweek*, May 8, 2013, Available at: < <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2013-05-08/north-korean-provocations-won-t-succeed-south-korea-s-park-says>>

¹⁰⁵ For details on *trustpolitik* see, Park Geun-hye, "A New Kind of Korea: Building Trust between Seoul and Pyongyang", *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, *The North Korea Problem and the Necessity for South Korean Leadership*, Policy Report, Stanford, March 4, 2013, p. 4. Also see, Robert A. Manning, "Park-Obama summit bolsters US-ROK alliance", *East Asia Forum*, May 16, 2013

DPRK which was a reversal from the previous ‘sunshine policy’¹⁰⁷ of President Kim Dae-jung. However, it remains to be seen to what extent Park’s *trustpolitik* succeeds in coordinating Washington and Seoul’s North Korea policies.

South Korea, under Park Geun-hye, is now wedded to a policy of advancing and revitalizing the U.S.-ROK alliance. Park’s credentials give her considerable political leverage and leeway for such an effort. In fact, in the presidential election Park gained a majority of voters’ support securing more than fifty percent of the votes since the end of autocracy and restoration of democracy in South Korea in 1987.¹⁰⁸ So, she has the domestic constituency and popular mandate to shore up and sustain the alliance.

The U.S.-ROK alliance remains one of America’s most durable and valuable security partnerships. By all measures, the alliance has proved its efficiency and validity. On the plus side, the U.S.-South Korea alliance has evidently outgrown the patron-client status that once characterized the relationship.¹⁰⁹ Although the U.S. has given the highest level of assurance about its commitment to South Korea, there will be uncertainties on the resilience of America’s “extended deterrence” and the degree of U.S. support for South Korea’s capability to field more defense forces on the peninsula. At the same time, a more “equal” alliance is an issue that continues to echo in U.S.-ROK relationship and narrowing this perception gap is one of the major goals that Park Geun-hye needs to work toward.¹¹⁰ In fact, Park administration’s alliance management capabilities would depend on how judiciously and sensibly it handles the emerging issues relating to the alliance relationship.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Sunshine policy’ was an offer of aid and cooperation to North Korea in return for dialogue for compromise and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula. During the two liberal administrations of ROK, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, the relationship between Washington and Seoul vitiated as South Korea favored “sunshine policy” towards North Korea. The George Bush administration was very skeptical about this policy, which it considered an appeasement of North Korea. See for details, Sook-Jong Lee, “Allying with the United States: Changing South Korean Attitudes,” *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 2005, pp. 81-104.

¹⁰⁸ *The Washington Post*, December 20, 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Scott Snyder, “Expanding the US-South Korea Alliance”, in Scott Snyder, ed., *The US-South Korea Alliance: Meeting New Security Challenges* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012), p. 11.

¹¹⁰ Chung Min Lee, “The Park Geun-hye Administration’s Foreign and Security Policy Challenges”, Korea Chair Platform, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington, DC, May 1, 2013.

In spite of everything, alliances should be assessed by their successes and achievements over a reasonable amount of time, not by their short-term activities. There are moments of dissension in all alliances; alliances experience periods of crisis and friction during which the tone in the relationship is unpleasant – the U.S.-Britain, U.S.-New Zealand, U.S.-Australia, U.S.-Japan, and U.S.-Israel relationships have all had their odd moments. What is important is whether agreements can be negotiated, bargained, and hammered out in those critical times and whether the alliance partners are still agreeable to work in unison.¹¹¹ On balance, the U.S.-South Korean alliance appears to be a successful one.

Concluding Reflections

Irrefutably, South Korea's alliance with the U.S. has been a double-edged sword which has both costs and benefits. As is seen, it is hard to downgrade/discount the magnitude and significance of this alliance. While it has, at times, endured unpopularity and disapproval in South Korea, and pressures to trim down U.S. overseas defense expenditures, the U.S.-ROK alliance not only succeeded in saving South Korea from North Korean invasion for the past six decades but also contributed to the advancement of industrialization and democratization in the ROK. For the U.S., the alliance has seemingly preserved the much-sought peace and stability in Northeast Asia and averted nuclear ambitions of some Asian powers. What is more, the alliance has been an important counterweight to the growing but alarming influence of China.

By all indications, the U.S.-ROK alliance has to be redefined and reshaped to fit the changing realities of global politics and to preserve trust and mutual confidence. Both Washington and Seoul show sensitivity to this requirement recognizing the value and the vulnerability of the relationship. Of late, the U.S.-ROK alliance has spawned a large area of overlapping interests – extending both to economic collaboration and off-peninsula security cooperation. The two allies are now poised to reset and revitalize the alliance and in this process they have initiated a step to enlarge the strategic aperture for alliance-based cooperation and commitment to emphasize on pressing global agendas. As a

¹¹¹ Victor D. Cha, "Outperforming Expectations: The U.S.-ROK Alliance", in Kurt M. Campbell, Victor D. Cha, Lindsey Ford, Nirav Patel, Randy Schriver, and Vikram J. Singh, eds., *Going Global: The Future of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance* (Washington, DC: Center for New American Security, 2009), p. 12.

result, the alliance now branches out into the areas of peacekeeping, overseas development assistance (ODA), anti-piracy, counter-proliferation, climate change, energy security, and post-conflict stabilization.¹¹² These new fields of alliance cooperation are not meant to replace North Korea as the prime focus of the U.S.-ROK alliance, but they greatly broaden the scope and justification of the alliance to prominent world issues that had previously not been addressed by it. If the alliance is now upgraded to a multi-faceted strategic level, it would turn into a stronger, broader, and more comprehensive arrangement.

¹¹² Mark E. Manyin, Emma Chanlett-Avery, Mary Beth Nikitin and Mi Ae Taylor, U.S.-South Korea Relations, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report, November 3, 2010, p. 6.