

**U.S.-Korea Security Alliance in Transition:
A ROK Perspective**

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1. Introduction: Necessity of New Approach in New Era

Is the ROK-U.S. alliance relationship in crisis or at a turning point where it can be transformed into a more resilient alliance? Is there simply a semantic debate raising questions at the moment or is the alliance suffering a real crisis? Most observers worry about the alliance's future, and many experts consider that the alliance relationship is in a transitional period: to be redefined and restructured to meet new requirements for the 21st century on the Korean peninsula and in the Asia-Pacific region more generally. At present, the Republic of Korea and the United States need to prepare for the future. In light of various challenges to their security alliance, future prospects do not seem bright. This article is an attempt to do three things: to analyze various challenges to the ROK-U.S. alliance relationship and to consider the strategic implications for the future of the alliance in the Asia-Pacific region; to explore more effective ways to develop a new relationship for the 21st century; and to search for a more appropriate method to make the alliance "unique" in the Asia-Pacific while remaining comparable with the U.S.-Japan alliance and other treaty relationships.

The challenges to the ROK-U.S. alliance have resulted from various internal and external factors. The task at hand now is to shape an effective policy and strategy to maximize the possibility of peace and stability in the Northeast Asian region as well as on the Korean peninsula. It is time to give serious thought to making the institutional arrangements more suitable for "post-post cold war era,"¹ which is characterized by the spread of asymmetric, "hybrid threats,"² Many experts in particular recommend that in the new strategic environment, the ROK-U.S. military alliance which was formed in the cold war era must be redefined and restructured in accordance with the strategic environment of the 21st century.³

The ROK-U.S. alliance during the past 50 years has significantly contributed to the maintenance of peace, security, and stability in the Northeast Asian region as well as on the Korean peninsula. It has done so by deterring the North Korean military

threats, blocking North Korea's attempt to proliferate weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), preventing the possibility of an arms race among major regional powers, and checking the emergence of a regional hegemonic power. Few in South Korea would deny that the half-century-old ROK-U.S. alliance stands as one of the most successful security relationships ever. Most Koreans appreciate the American policies which have served to enhance the peace, security, freedom and defense of the ROK and her people. However, amid a political turn to the left in Seoul and a mounting WMDs threat--including nuclear programs from North Korea, the ROK-U.S. security cooperation today faces challenges in the form of a possible rearrangement of the alliance partnership for a new era.

In the summit meeting between newly-elected South Korean President, Roh Moo-hyun, and U.S. President George W. Bush on May 14, 2003, both leaders pledged to work together "to build a *comprehensive and dynamic alliance relationship* (emphasis added) for the continued peace and prosperity on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia." Both leaders also "welcomed the growing bilateral U.S.-ROK cooperation on international security challenges *beyond the Korean Peninsula*" (emphasis added). They also "pledged to work closely together to modernize the ROK-U.S. alliance," and agreed to "relocate [the] Yongsan garrison at an early date" and talked about the relocation of U.S. bases north of the Han River. They also "reiterated their strong commitment to work for the complete, verifiable and irreversible elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons program."⁴ President Bush, on November 26, announced that the U.S. was stepping up discussions with key European and Asian allies about the overhaul of U.S. global military deployments. The American President said in the statement that "we will ensure that the right capabilities [are found] in the most appropriate locations to best address the new security environment," where rogue nations, terrorism, and weapon proliferation are the biggest threats.⁵ The rearrangement of U.S. overseas military bases have also figured into the calculations. To date, negotiations between South Korea and the United States have been on-going for more than a year over the relocation of American forces on the peninsula. The talks have been conducted under the name of the "Future of the Alliance Policy Initiative (FOTA)." The 10th meeting held in July agreed on the basic policy of the land partnership plan.

Furthermore, the turning moment for an realignment of the alliance came in Washington's suggestion to eventually withdraw as

many as one third (12,500) of the 37,000 U.S. soldiers now serving in South Korea and transfer more than 3,000 U.S. combat troops from Korea (USFK) to Iraq in the summer of 2004.⁶ The significant reduction U.S. forces in Korea will force the two nations to work to reshape the longstanding alliance. Therefore, South Korea is now pressed for critical decisions, more so than at any time since its opening alliance relationship with the U.S. in 1953. South Korea may well accede to the new U.S. global and regional strategy, thereby wishing to remain part of the transformation process, or it may choose to go more independently through the adoption of a strategy of independent balancing, alternative alliance-making, or multilateral action.

The U.S. military strategy, concentrating on home security, counter-and non-proliferation, and anti-and counter-terrorism, will mold a different strategic environment in dealing with the North Korean nuclear crisis, restructuring the ROK-U.S. alliance and potentially confusing and worrying the South Korean people. In this circumstance, what strategic options does South Korea seem to be following and what should it do about the realignment of the ROK-U.S. alliance relationship to enhance “cooperative self-defense”⁷ for the new era? Before exploring alternative options, it will be useful to examine the perceptions of South Korea’s public and leadership groups along with various policy positions.

2. Internal Challenges to the ROK-U.S. Alliance Relationship

(1) Generational Politics and the “386 National Assembly”

In South Korean society, the year 2004 marks revolutionary, not evolutionary, changes in every aspect of the national way of life, including national politics. These revolutionary changes are derived from the younger generations’ total resistance to the “old” values and institutions. They believe change equals innovation. Clearly they think that these changes will contribute to a more democratized and purified politics and more equal society; however, these radical changes will throw the nation into confusion and isolate it from international society.

The December 2002 presidential election of Roh Moo-hyun and the general elections on April 15, 2004, when the pro-government Uri party became the majority ruling party, showed a distinct gap between generations supporting different parties. Also evident was an acute regionalism. Following these two elections, radical and left-leaning younger generations have entered the

mainstream of Korean politics. The so-called “386 generation”—those who are in their 30s, attended college in the 1980s and were born in the 1960s-joined with the N-generation (Net generation: born after the late 1970s and familiar with the Internet) to defy the established structure of Korean politics. All have experienced unique historical transitions: industrialization, democratization and the emergence of a free flowing information age. Accordingly, they reflect distinctive political and social views.⁸ Members of the 386 generation developed their political views in street rallies and provided much of the momentum for generational politics during the last two elections. Now, they are beginning to turn 40, and by backing the Uri Party and the Democratic Labor Party (both progressive parties) in the April election, they clearly showed their ideological orientation once again. However, unlike the 386 generation, N-generation’s loyalty and solidarity are incredibly weak and is constantly changing, as shown in the April election. Those in their early 20s slipped into the conservative camp during the general elections, a trend which is likely to continue.⁹ Experiencing the age of globalization, democratization and the internet information, the younger generations are resisting rigid authoritarianism and trying to make a new paradigm in Korean politics.

In addition to the presidential election, the most radical and “revolutionary” change in representative democratic politics has resulted from the 17th general election on April 15. As a result of this election the new national assembly consists of 171 “progressive-oriented party members” (152 from Uri Party, 10 from Democratic Labor party, 9 from the Peace & Democratic Party) compared with 108 in the 16th national assembly and 126 Conservative Party members (122 from the Great National Party) compared with 165 in the 16th national assembly. Of the total of 299 members, 187 (63%) were elected for their first term.¹⁰ The majority consists of the so-called “386” generation, who have radical, leftist political orientations. Thus, they dominate the national assembly. The young national assembly members, especially the “386” generation, will try to reform and revolutionize every aspect of national policies, to question some existing laws and institutions, and to demand various unrealistic policy changes, such as the withdrawal of U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK) and the adoption of a more autonomous and “self-reliant” national defense posture, greater equality with the United States, a

reversal of the previous plan to dispatch Korean troops to Iraq, and reconciliation with an assistance to North Korea.

(2) Anti-Americanism and Anti-American Sentiments in South Korea

One of the most significant challenges to the ROK-U.S. alliance is the growing sense of anti-Americanism in particular and anti-American sentiments in general within Korean society,¹¹ both of which support demands for the dissolution of the alliance relationship and the withdrawal of U.S. troops in Korea. This is particularly true for the younger generations in general as they seek a break from the past in foreign and national security policies. They are xenophobic and nationalistic in group-orientation, even though their personal orientation tends to be global-internationalistic. Consequently, their foreign policy outlook emphasizes autonomy from external influences. These anti-American attitudes have also increased in response to North Korea's tactics which seek to drive a wedge between Seoul and Washington.

Anti-American sentiments have originated in and been exacerbated by various sources and, in particular, a series of events related to the U.S. military presence on Korean soil which have heightened demands for the revision of the Status of Force Agreement (SOFA). Among the contributing factors are "crimes" committed by the U.S. troops during the Korean War, demands by civil activists for closing the U.S. troop bombing range at Maehyang-ri, the alleged environmental pollution by the USFK, the "Kim Dong-Sung incident" at the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, the F(X) fighter selection issue, the death of two female middle-school students by American tanks, demands for removing U.S. military bases from downtown Seoul to the outskirts of the capital city, and demands by civil activists for the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from the peninsula. When anti-American sentiments are exacerbated within South Korea society, it could become a political burden to the United States as well as South Korea.

As for today, only one serious problem in the ROK-U.S. security relationship stems from younger people's anti-Americanism. The current mood of anti-Americanism is now widespread present and dangerous. A new rising tide of anti-Americanism is truly a serious problem in the ROK-U.S. alliance, an "ideological" anti-Americanism rather than the "sentimental" anti-American feelings of earlier times. The former may be much

more dangerous but very limited number (limited to less than 3% of the young people), while the latter is more widespread but not necessarily a real threat to ROK-U.S. relations.¹² The latter group has simply emphasized national pride, national self-reliance, self-respect, and equal relations on the basis of "romantic" nationalism. "Impulsive" or "emotional" anti-American feelings are historically natural, and, therefore, this tide will likely be alleviated sometime in the near future. Ideological anti-Americanism, by contrast, raises a serious threat and will continue because it is handled by pro-North Korean radical leftists. Today's anti-Americanism in Korea is largely political and led by such left-leaning radical activist groups such as labor unions, radical student activist organizations, and radical civic groups.

The Anti-Americanism movement has flared up recently in a call for greater democratization since the Kwangju incident of 1980s. Recently, it has been stimulated under Kim Dae-jung government's "sunshine policy" toward North Korea. The leftist ideological groups have intensified anti-Americanism in their effective organization and mobilization of the younger generations by combining calls for Korean democratization with nationalism. Most recently, a tragic traffic accidents in which two teenage girls were killed by a U.S. armored vehicle on June 13, 2002, while on routine military exercise, gave great momentum to the rapidly expanding anti-American feelings, and more importantly and decisively, contributed to Roh Moo-hyun's victory in the presidential election of December 19, 2003. The ideological appeal has been effective with desperate students and workers. Today this mood has been integrated with "populist nationalism," particularly since the World Cup Soccer Game in 2001 and the candlelight protest movement. Therefore, the problem at this time is that ideological anti-Americanism, though small in numbers, seeks to make coalitions with others holding anti-American feelings or sentiments. The result is the growth of "organized anti-Americanism."¹³

It's helpful in understanding Korean attitudes and perspectives regarding the ROK-U.S. alliance to examine the results of several opinion polls and surveys conducted during the past and current year. The various polls reveal strong anti-American sentiments. According to a survey conducted by Research & Research in January 2004, 39 percent of the South Korean people (58% of those in their 20s) answered that the most threatening state

to Korean security was the United State. Only 33% cited North Korea, and 20% of those in their 20s pointed to North Korea). This result of the poll is very shocking when it is comparing with a 1993 Gallup Korea Poll which showed an opposite trend: 44% saw North Korea as the clearest threat with 15%, Japan; 4%, China,; and 1%, the United States.¹⁴

The growing tendency toward a pro-Chinese atmosphere in South Korean society is also a very important point to consider. According to a Korean Research Center poll on May 2, 2004, the majority (48.3%) of South Koreans surveyed answered that China is more important than the United States in terms of diplomacy and national security matters, while 38.1% indicated the United States was more important. In the same poll, 28% favored China over the United States (22.8%) Compared with a December 24, 2001 survey, the percentage of the population favoring the United States decreased by about 8%, from 30.2% to 22.8% (30.2% in 2001, and 29.5% in 2004 for China).¹⁵ In a survey poll conducted in February 2003, 53.7% of the South Koreans answered that they did not like the United States.¹⁶ In another survey by the Korea Research Center (KRC) on May 22, 2004, 44% of the South Koreans indicated that the ROK-U.S. alliance relationship was weaker than before (32.5% answered that it is not charged). Furthermore, 44.5% wanted to reduce USFK and 54% said that a withdrawal of USFK would not make them feel insecure.¹⁷

According to the Pew Research Center in 2002, South Korea ranked eighth among the 44 countries surveyed in terms of unfavorable attitudes toward the United States: 53% were favorable and 44% unfavorable, and 72% opposed the US-led war on terrorism.¹⁸ A opinion survey conducted by the Samsung Economic Research Institute (SERI) in January 2003, found that favorable attitudes toward the U.S. among Koreans had dropped by 11% (from 36% to 24.5%, and their negative feelings toward the U.S. increased by 20% (from 21.7% to 41.9%) over the two years from 2001 to 2003.¹⁹ Many other surveys have also revealed the fact that Korean attitudes toward the United States have deteriorated. The most recent opinion poll of respondents in their 20s and 30s (1,000 samples) conducted by Seoul Sinmun and the Korea Social Science Data Center (KSDC) on July 6-8 indicates that young South Koreans like China (18.1%) better than the United States (8.1%) or Japan (11.4%), and that 42% expressed dislike for the U.S. in contrast to 17.9% for China and 41.1% for Japan.²⁰

Recent anti-American feelings about current U.S. policies have rapidly increased through the widespread use of the Internet. Opinion polls also support recent evidence of increasing resentment towards the U.S. (more than 50%). This trend reflects a new self-confidence among young Koreans with specific grievances and resentment toward the Bush administration's policies towards the North Korea and the recent Iraqi War. But this nationalistic mood stems from a misperception and a misunderstanding about the Bush administration's pragmatic engagement policies towards North Korea and the legal system of the U.S.

One of interesting findings in public opinion in Korea is that by the spring of 2003, anti-Americanism was gradually ebbing. The ongoing talks on relocating and reducing USFK troops contributed to quieting the anti-U.S. protesters and, in fact, seemed to increase public support for maintaining the USFK in South Korea.²¹ A survey conducted by the *JoongAng Inbo* newspaper in June 2003 indicated that Korean attitudes toward the U.S. had actually improved by mid-December 2002, when candlelight rallies protesting the deaths of two schoolgirls were in full swing: although 64 percent of the Koreans supported full revision of the U.S.-ROK SOFA in 2002. The percentage declined to 20 percent in June 2003. Koreans favorable toward the U.S. also increased from 13.0% to 25.4% and unfavorable views toward the U.S. declined from 36.4% to 27.6%. Korean support for the USFK presence also increased from 48% (50.9% supported gradual or immediate withdrawal) to almost 60% (proponents of withdrawal decreased to 40%) over the same period. Support for strengthening the U.S.-Korean alliance also increased from 20.4% to 32.0%, and the percentage of Koreans seeking "autonomy" from the U.S. decreased from 28.1% to 17.6%.²²

As far as the withdrawal of USFK, according to a poll conducted by Gallup Korea on December 14, 2002, the majority (54.8%) of South Koreans still did not want U.S. troops to leave (62.2%) in 1992, while 31.7% did (21.3% in 1992 poll).²³ One of most recent student polls, a survey of 1,270 college students conducted on June 2 by the Advisory Council on Democratic and Peaceful Unification, a presidential advisory body, showed that 49.1% believed the United States the most antagonistic country toward the possible unification of the two Koreas, while 38.3% answered that China would have the most favorable view of reunification. A May 19-22 poll also found that 87.1% of the

respondents believed that existing South Korea-U.S. relations were unfair, but 73.1% were in favor of stationing U.S. troops in Korea to safeguard security (emphasis added). As for views about North Korea, 49.8% thought that Seoul should engage and accommodate Pyongyang, but 40.9% said although the communist country remained the key enemy of the South, its people were their compatriots.²⁴

On the issue of dispatching Korean troops to Iraq, the opinion poll conducted by Research and Research (R&R) just after the brutal murder of Kim Sun-il by terrorists in Iraq (July 4) showed that 54.3% of the South Koreans agreed with sending the troops (50.2% in an April poll), while 36.7% disagreed (31.4% in April).²⁵ But radical politicians continued to demand that those troops not be sent.

Summing up the results of these public polls it becomes apparent that, despite strong anti-American sentiments, the majority of South Koreans do not want USFK to leave the Korean peninsula. It also means that if South Korea and the U.S. make positive efforts through education and common works, anti-American sentiments can be lessened. For example, education (classroom lectures) on behalf of the ROK-U.S. alliance had a positive effect on the younger generations.²⁶ Results of one survey indicated that the majority of Korean leaders who directly or indirectly exert influence on national foreign and security policy still believe that the ROK-U.S. alliance relationship is the most important security mechanism available and that the U.S. forward deployment on the Korean peninsula continues to play a critical role in maintaining regional stability.²⁷

This is a meaningful trend for the future of the ROK-U.S. alliance. Despite South Korea's economic development and its own significant military modernization, most South Koreans are not confident of their ability to handle Pyongyang without U.S. assistance. They particularly see themselves at a major disadvantage against North Korea's weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). They thus support a continued U.S. military presence in Korea as indispensable to Korean security.²⁸ Recent opinion polls reflect this view and these attitudes of the majority of South Koreans. The current situation inside South Korea, therefore, is probably better than generally portrayed. North Korea's ambition to possess WMDs together with the sharp polarization inside South Korea over appropriate policies toward Pyongyang reinforces

general South Korean reluctance to seek dramatic short-term changes in the ROK-U.S. security relationship. North Korea's continuing refusal to deal with South Korea as a legitimate negotiating partner on security issues further bolsters South Korean incentives to maintain close security cooperation with the United States.²⁹

One of the most effective ways to alleviate anti-American sentiments is to revise SOFA, which has been the primary target of Korean civil (mainly leftist-oriented) activists for reducing its "inequality." The key, heated debate over revision centers on questions of legal jurisdiction and environmental pollution by the USFK. On major crimes, both sides agreed, in the second revision in 2000, to advance the timing for transferring accused SOFA personnel to Korean authorities from the previous understand, "upon completion of all judicial proceedings," to the newly-phrased substitute ("at the time of indictment").³⁰ However, civil activists feel that this revision is insufficient and have requested the complete transfer of legal jurisdiction to Korean authorities. On this issue, if the United States takes Korean grievances into account, it can concede a little more.

The proud and emotional nature of Korean society leads Korean citizens to be sensitive to any apparent U.S. obstruction, particularly in North-South Korean affairs, humiliation through treatment as less than an equal alliance partner, or casual disregard on issues of national well-being (including environmental pollution) and sovereignty.³¹ As for strategic interests, however, the younger persons' anti-Americanism should be gradually alleviated with the joint efforts of ROK and US leaders. According to some observers, anti-American sentiments have been triggered by events of the day with few long-term side effects, so that this anti-Americanism sometimes seems to be symptomatic rather than structural. It is, therefore, not surprising that China has come to enjoy the "reflectional benefit" that in a recent poll gives it a 10% edge over the U.S. as the country toward which Koreans feel the greatest affinity.³²

The basic features of ROK-U.S. relations, therefore, should not be changed in spite of increasing anti-Americanism within South Korean society. The high tide of anti-American feelings can be alleviated by enhancing mutual understanding between Seoul and Washington. Thus, both South Korea and the U.S. should work together towards minimizing the negative sentiments that arise from

different approaches towards North Korea to achieve “real” peace on the peninsula. Koreans want to be treated more “equally.” The critical bench mark is Japan. Given emotional anti-Americanism, enhancing the ROK-U.S. alliance to make it equal to the U.S.-Japanese alliance may provide a realistic and reasonable option. This could be the basis of a new and far more satisfactory alliance for both the Americans and South Koreans.

3. New Challenges to the ROK-U.S. Alliance

(1) Perception Gap and Differences in Policy Orientation between the ROK and U.S.

The ROK-U.S. security relationship is currently being severely tested. On the Korean side, rising nationalism and broader political, generational, and social changes are creating new demands for a more “equal” relationship and a “self-reliant” national defense, while there is weakening support in the United States for a continued heavy U.S. role in South Korea’s defense. Generational politics and anti-American sentiments are also contributing to an expanding perception gap and differences in policy orientation between Seoul and Washington, particularly, toward North Korea.

These differences stand in contrast to those of the past in several ways. First and most importantly, the governments of South Korea and the United States seem to be far apart on how serious the North Korean WMDs threat is, including the nuclear weapons program and how to deal with it. Some South Korean officials have expressed the view that a North Korean nuclear program does not threaten South Korea because the North would never use nuclear weapons against their fellow Koreans.³³ In the past both sides agreed that the primary threats on the peninsula came from the possibility of a North Korean surprise attack and the proliferation of WMDs. Nowadays, South Korea may be underestimating the North Korean threat because of Seoul’s interest in reconciliation. The United States continues to worry over such threats as North Korea’s nuclear weapons and other WMDs, including chemical and biological weapons, missiles, conventional forces, and human rights violations. A broader divergence in the two countries’ threat perceptions is fueling questions on both sides about the continuing value of and rationale for the security relationship.³⁴

Second, in relation to differences in threat perceptions, there is the question of how to cope with the threats, the *raison d’être* and the role of the alliance. The ROK government has

emphasized the importance of a peaceful and diplomatic approach, while the United States prefers to place all options on the table, even though it agrees, in principle, with the Roh Moo-hyun government on the need for a peaceful and diplomatic resolution.³⁵ Without a common understanding of the threat posed by North Korea, it is unlikely that they will be able to agree on a common policy for dealing with that threat.³⁶ In the past one of the most significant dangers stemmed from a common perception of North Korean military threats. But today, South Koreans, particularly the leftist group, emphasize the need for a more comprehensive and dynamic cooperative role for the alliance in the broader geographical scope of the Pacific region as the way to carry out more effectively a counter-terrorist war, one not confined within the peninsula. For the mutual satisfaction of both sides there is a need to develop a new alliance relationship. The most immediate challenge to the ROK-U.S. alliance is the challenge posed by North Korea and its nuclear program.³⁷ Coordinating policy toward North Korea, therefore, has the highest priority, given the current predicament on the Korean peninsula.

Conflicting views toward North Korea stem from the divergence of policy priorities. The disclosure of Pyongyang’s secret uranium enrichment program in October 2002 and the subsequent breakdown of the 1994 agreement only served to highlight the growing perception and policy gap between the two countries.³⁸ The South Korean government has remained more concerned about how to ease tensions and promote reconciliation between the two Koreas at the peninsula level, whereas the Bush administration is keen on preventing the proliferation of WMDs in the context of the global war against terror.³⁹ In short, the ROK government has adopted the “Sunshine Policy” (i.e., more comprehensive engagement policy), intended to eliminate the source of threats to national security through economic assistance to Pyongyang. The Bush administration, by contrast, has, since its first days in office, adopted a more pragmatic but a much tougher stance toward North Korea: that the bad behavior of Pyongyang should not be met with invitations to meetings nor with food as the payoff for attending such meetings.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Bush included North Korea as a potential military target among the three states he dubbed the “axis of evil” in his January 2002 State of the Union Address. Fortunately, despite the failure of Kim Dae-jung’s sales efforts regarding his “Sunshine Policy” during his visit to

Washington D.C. in March 2001, the ROK-US Joint Declaration has reaffirmed the strength of the two countries' security alliance.⁴¹ This policy was reconfirmed during the Bush-Kim meeting at the APEC summit in Shanghai and Seoul in March 2002.

Even though there are some hopeful signs in the six-party talks, the three meetings in Beijing have produced no positive results. It is not clear that they have brought any meaningful negotiations with North Korea. And while North Korea is willing—even eager—to meet with the United States, it is not clear that the North Koreans are willing to give up their nuclear weapon programs beyond the level of a nuclear freeze. Even if they do agree to give up this program, it is also not clear whether they will accept the intrusive inspections demanded by the Bush administration.⁴²

(2) Impact of the Transformation of the U.S.'s Global Military Strategy.

The ROK-U.S. alliance can be regarded as one of the strongest models among the existing bilateral security alliances in the world.⁴³ The strength of a security alliance is based on the belief by each partner that the benefits obtained via the alliance outweigh the costs incurred. U.S. strategic interests will not be substantially changed in the post-post cold war era, although elements of the U.S. strategic approach, such as its regional force presence and alliances, will logically come under review. Fundamental U.S. strategic interests in the region have not been reduced and perhaps will become more central during the tenuous period of uncertainty and instability in the future.⁴⁴ Overall, the United States recognizes its enormous interests and stakes in the stability and security of East Asia as a whole, including the Korean Peninsula. The expansion and promotion of market economies and open sea- lanes of communications (SLOCs), which are essential for the free flow of resources and trade into and within the region, will remain a core U.S. national security interest.

The strategic interests of South Korea are not significantly different from those of the U.S. Whether unified or not, South Korea will continue to have vital strategic interests in preserving stability and peace in the Asia-Pacific region as well as on the peninsula to promote its economic and political goals. At present, South Korea conducts more than two-thirds of its trade within the region. The amount of current ROK trade through the Asian sea lanes reaches over 40% of its total trade, and about two-thirds of its

energy supplies flow through the South China Sea.⁴⁵ South Korea thus does not have an interest in developing or deploying weapons of mass destruction as such an act would likely spur a regional arms race and create tensions within the international community over nonproliferation.

Therefore, the ROK-U.S. security alliance not only offers protection against a North Korean threat, but also provides insurance against Korea's stronger neighbors. And it facilitates greater ROK military self-reliance, while enhancing Korea's power projection capability and regional military role. Close security ties with the U.S. also bolster prospects for continued economic growth and political stability, while providing Korea extensive access to U.S. leaders.⁴⁶

Given common strategic interests, U.S. bilateral alliance treaties and security partnerships, backed by capable, forward-stationed and forward-deployed armed forces, remain the indispensable framework for deterring aggression and promoting peaceful developments in the region. The U.S. has approached security relations in Asia as a "hub-and-spoke" arrangement with the U.S. at the center of bilateral ties among nations that, in turn, have limited, if any, bilateral military interactions and security arrangements with each other.⁴⁷ The U.S. has played the part of "balancing wheel",⁴⁸ or "spoke of a fan".⁴⁹ Overall, current U.S. security arrangements in Asia provide the support for U.S. forces to maintain a deterrence posture. The U.S. has the capability to be able to reinforce allies successfully to defeat aggression.

The most recent challenge to the ROK-U.S. alliance, however, has arisen from the overall transformation of the American global military strategy, including the relocation and reduction of its overseas bases. In South Korea a serious shock has been felt from the official announcement on June 4 that Washington would withdraw one third (12,500) of its 37,000 troops from the Republic of Korea by the end of 2005, in addition to the earlier announcement on May 14 that Washington would transfer 3,600 combat troops from South Korea to Iraq. Even though the news was not completely unexpected in light of the United States' announcement in November 2003 that it would rearrange its overseas bases according to the Global Defense Posture Review (GPR), it has been a serious shock to Korean public.⁵⁰ The 34th Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) between the ROK and U.S. in December 2002, had earlier emphasized "adapting the alliance to

changes in the global security environment,” with an emphasis on “the need to continue to maintain a U.S. troop presence on the Korean peninsula.”⁵¹

Furthermore, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in Singapore for a June 2-5 conference of Asian and Pacific defense ministers reportedly said: “We want to have our forces where people want them. We have no desire to be where we’re not wanted.”⁵² In light of his remarks, withdrawal from Yongsan Garrison may be an emotional response to anti-American sentiments within Korean society. And in addition to anti-Americanism in Korea, politically the “unreasonable” delay of Roh government in dispatching 3,000 Korean troops to Iraq seems to have created a perception that South Korea may not be a reliable ally in the eyes of the American public as well as to the Bush administration. Opposition party members and conservatives in South Korea have attacked the Roh government, saying that the recently-disclosed U.S. plan to reduce its forces in Korea by 12,500 soldiers reflects a serious crack in the half-century alliance between two nations. The majority of overseas Koreans are worried about a weakening alliance, according to the report: “True independence does not form by rejecting the alliance. U.S. assistance might be less crucial to us now but when the alliance breaks down all at once, especially at an unstable time like this, Korea will suffer.”⁵³

Korean experts in America seem to regard the planned reduction of 12,500 U.S. soldiers from the Korean peninsula, even though this is the largest drawdown of American forces from Korea since the end of the Korean war -and the most significant since 1992, when 7,000 troops left – as a win-win situation for both countries because of the following rationale:⁵⁴ First, despite the upcoming decrease in American soldiers in South Korea, U.S. firepower will actually increase due to expected improvements in the American force structure over the next several years, according to the Pentagon’s plans, with an \$11 billion modernization investment in some additional 150 military capabilities over the next four years. According to the Pentagon, the U.S. force reduction will be matched by an increase in USFK’s military capabilities.

Secondly, it is useful for both sides to reduce the visibility and footprints-that is, the size and number of bases – of U.S. forces because of anti-American sentiments by the Korean public. Instead, shifting U.S. troops away from the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and

south of the Han River will improve the maneuverability and flexibility of U.S. forces, increase their deterrent effect and fighting capabilities. This can contribute to enhance more flexibility in deploying U.S. troops to global hot spots and to Seoul’s desire for a bigger role in its national defense. And, in addition, the reduction of U.S. forces may help reduce North-South Korean tensions, because this reduction can be seen as a gesture of goodwill to North Korea.

The implications of the planned withdrawal of one-third of the 37,000 U.S. troops from South Korea are as much as political as military. For a half-century USFK troops have played roles as both “linchpin” and the real “trip-wire.” The role of “linchpin” can be maintained and even enhanced by modernization, the improved maneuverability of USFK, and a reinforcement plan for contingencies, in spite of the force reduction. The role of the “symbolic” but real “tripwire,” however, seems likely to disappear with the relocation of U.S. forces south of the Han River. This change will increase the psychological as well as the military instability. Some American experts regard the trip-wire analogy as a false and anachronistic concept,⁵⁵ and say the troop reduction should not be viewed as a weakening of America’s resolve. The American side emphasizes the fact that the real trip-wire is the Mutual Defense Treaty itself, not the number of U.S. troops in the Republic of Korea.⁵⁶ And the fact that 25,000 American forces will remain on the peninsula, and the fact that tens of thousands of Americans will be in Seoul will be enough to be a pretty compelling trip-wire. They emphasize that any Korean attack on the ROK would surely result in a full-scale American reinforcement and combined offensive with the ROK, and having 12,500 fewer troops will not make a major difference in America’s ability to respond. Therefore, they think the trip-wire concept remains sound.⁵⁷

As for trip-wire effect, in spite of the American arguments, the majority of Koreans do not feel comfortable without the real trip-wire function of U.S. forces deployed along the DMZ. Many South Koreans worry that the U.S. plan to relocate the most USFK forces south of the Han River is being contemplated to avoid the trip-wire effect and also to be able to strike, if necessary, targets in the North with minimum casualties to U.S. troops.⁵⁸ It is, therefore, still meaningful in terms of deterrence to continue to provide some form of trip-wire, even if it means maintaining a smaller and less visible forward presence.⁵⁹ Many South Koreans are concerned about the wisdom of initiating significant U.S. force reductions in

terms of timing, pace and scale, while North Korean threats remain real. In this sense the United States should reconsider or delay the relocation south of the Han River until there is further evidence of South-North reconciliation. Therefore, timing, pace and the number of U.S. forces being withdrawn from Korea could be also rescheduled and rearranged. It is better policy to use the relocation and reduction of USFK as negotiating card with North Korea.

According to GPR, the function of U.S. overseas bases seem to be classified into four mission categories: “power projection hubs (PPH),” “main operating bases (MOB),” “forward operating sites (FOS),” and “cooperative security locations (CSL).”⁶⁰ As Michael O’Hanlon has pointed out, the U.S. brigades in Korea have not been very usable for other regional contingencies. Because they are essentially anchored in and committed to Korea, they are among America’s least flexible military units in the entire U.S. forward deployment. When USFK troops are deployed from bases in Korea to other Asia-Pacific contingency areas, their flexibility will decrease. It is better for USFK to largely focus on the Korean contingency.⁶¹ In this case, the trip-wire effect could be much enhanced, even after the relocation and reduction of U.S. forces outside Korea. In order to bring about this new change, both states should closely cooperate and explore ways to bring about an appropriate realignment of the ROK-U.S. alliance.

4. An Alternative Approach to the Alliance: a Bi-Multilateral Arrangement

(1) Multilateral Approach: Possibility and Limitation

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been an increasing number of proposals calling for a “multilateral” approach to achieving security in the Asia-Pacific region. At the broadest level, numerous officials and analysts from Asian countries and the outside world have advanced the idea of a pan-Pacific analog to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (i.e., a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Asia, or CSCA). At the region-wide level, authorities from Asian states have proposed a hexagonal mechanism, a great power dialogue of 4 or 6 parties, or more.⁶² For more military-oriented cooperation, some propose alternative approaches to developing regional, multilateral arrangements for common security challenges. They emphasize that the most effective method is to develop policy coordination, including combined military cooperation, on a particular regional

security issue or a series of related security issues.⁶³

According to multilateralist perspectives, the main problem is zero-sum, balance-of-power mindsets and ambiguous intentions, fueled by ethnic and religious zeal and historical fears and grievances. With this in mind, the Asia-Pacific region must move more from measuring differences to measuring progress.⁶⁴ Accordingly, a fundamental security challenge in the Asia-Pacific region is to transform the balance-of-power approach proposed by those who advocate a multicolor global power structure into one that instead aims to produce “security communities” in which disputes are not resolved by threats or the employment of force.⁶⁵

In the long-run, there is a proposal for a more comprehensive collective security organization (i.e., “Northeast Asian Security Organization, or NEASO”) which is based upon some combination of modified alignments and “neutralism” as the most promising route for Korea and for the region as a whole.⁶⁶ Another idea would be “the Northeast Asia Treaty Organization (NEATO),” which would not be organized so much to counter a threat from the outside, but rather to counter the imagined possibility of a danger from any one or more of its members against any of its own members. NEATO is more comprehensive than NATO in scope and functions, and it would go far beyond military matters.⁶⁷ Projecting into the foreseeable future, these ideas are desirable, but distant and rather imaginary for the time being.

A collective security structure may well fall far short of being an ideal security organization, but it may nevertheless be one of the best options because it provides more security and stability than alternative structures. A collective security system provides for better balance against aggressors and more effectively dampens the sources of aggression than other types of security systems.⁶⁸ It strengthens deterrence by reducing the uncertainties of coalition formation. It also facilitates the identification of aggressor states.⁶⁹ However, an ideal collective security system assumes a very high degree of congruent interests among its members. If successful, this collective security arrangement, as comprehensive coalition, would replace victor and vanquished, allies and opponents, with a community of powers that could deter aggression, sanction violations, and sustain shared, peaceful norms.⁷⁰ Is it possible to establish such a comprehensive collective security arrangement in Northeast Asia?

In principle, the alternative of multilateral security

cooperation is indispensable in containing and eventually resolving the myriad of bilateral disputes in a region that can spin out of control.⁷¹ A full-inclusive, multilateral economic and security structure can be an important solution for the Northeast Asia-Pacific security community. A security community that shares dependable expectations of peaceful change will erode zero-sum approaches to regional security by creating habits of cooperation and demonstrating the benefits of participation.⁷² Keeping the desirability of multilateralism and the remaining effectiveness of bilateralism in mind, we can move toward another alternative which combines the benefits of both way and will be discussed below.

(2) A Bi-Multilateral Framework in the Regional Context

Multilateralism should not be a substitute for bilateralism. Examples of Asia-Pacific regionalism and multilateralism, such as APEC and ARF, are no more than supplementary mechanisms to the “*hub-and-spoke approach*” (emphasis added) of the U.S. that is founded upon bilateral alliance networks. The bilateral security relationship serves as a pillar for the U.S. alliance system, designed to maintain regional stability and prevent the rise of regional powers that might threaten neighboring nations.⁷³ Therefore, a bilateral alliance, as a main mechanism for maintaining a stable peace, should be reinforced, while multilateralism should be considered as a supplementary mechanism. It is, in the end, necessary to create an inclusive regional community based on the concept of “cooperative security.”

The new framework would not be designed to supplant or even unify U.S. alliances but initially would act as a confidence-building measure, providing a venue for discussion and information exchanges, and opening the prospect for more powerful institutional evolution over the long-term. But a strong alliance should be the basis for this initiative. Otherwise, pursuing a regional community might undermine bilateral ties.⁷⁴ The strategic option, therefore, will be the multiplication of bilateralism, moving toward multilateralism. The process will be one of building upon bilateral security relationships to form a web of regional relationships and capabilities that reinforce security for individual states, discouraging armed aggression as a way of settling disputes. Institutionalizing security communities helps develop habits of regional military cooperation and professional military behavior.⁷⁵

South Korea’s younger generations who stubbornly insist

on national autonomy and a self-reliant defense strongly demand a South Korea which acts as a partner in an interdependent relationship with the United States. Thus, they prefer the model of overlapping and interlocking institutions, which resembles a *spider-web* (emphasis added) of bilateral relationships in each sector of national power, *rather than the hub and spokes* model, which provides a direct relationship between a militarily weak provider of resources and a resource-hungry dominant actor as guarantor of security.⁷⁶ The new generations do not like the fact that the security of nations at the end of each spoke depends on the strength of their protector at the hub. They want to forge a more equal relationship that is in sync with domestic, regional and international realities. However, in point of fact, the distinction between hub-and-spokes and spider-web models seems too artificial. Playing a leading role a nation needs of necessity a cooperative body to work effectively. So, equality in an alliance relationship can be enhanced by establishing an institution which assures effective consultation between the two allies rather than an equal distribution of resources or roles. One idea for making such an institution effective is to establish a pattern of annual or semi-annual meetings of foreign and defense ministers similar to the 2+2 U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Australia-meetings and other higher working-level meetings.⁷⁷ Many Koreans prefer that such meetings be used more to “consult” with the U.S. than for Washington to “inform” others of its unilateral decisions.

Within this framework combining bilateralism and multilateralism, the ROK-U.S. alliance system can be re-adjusted and re-defined to maintain in the near future regional peace and stability. To achieve this goal, the United States should re-adjust and re-define the strategic role of U.S. forces in Korea, to act not only from the perspective of the Korean peninsula but also from the broader framework of maintaining the geopolitical equilibrium, or balance of power, in Northeast Asia.⁷⁸ From the Chinese perspective, the ROK-U.S. alliance is a stabilizing force that restrains South Korea against the North and reassures Japan as well.⁷⁹ If the primary goal of the U.S. strategy in Northeast Asia is to achieve regional stability and security, Washington must strengthen and consolidate its bilateral alliances with South Korea and Japan, so that North Korean threats can be deterred and the regional peace maintained. The U.S. military presence in South Korea is therefore closely associated with American strategy for

Northeast Asia. Even after the realization of peaceful coexistence between the two Koreas and eventual national unification, U.S. forces should continue to maintain themselves on the peninsula as a deterrent to the potential regional hegemony of China or Japan, and as an effective apparatus for encouraging cooperative efforts to resolve regional issues. This will certainly benefit Korea.⁸⁰

Today the U.S. military presence in both South Korea and Japan plays an important role in dampening the potential for tensions arising from regional armed competition.⁸¹ The strongest mechanism to achieve the ultimate goal of more permanent regional peace is certainly to institutionalize a more comprehensive regional collective security organization (i.e., NEATO). But if it is not possible to achieve this end in the immediate future, it is possible and desirable to expand the positive aspects of the bilateral alliance into a broader regional framework. If the bilateral networks based upon the United States' closer security ties with South Korea and Japan can be "quasi-multilateralized," it will help induce other countries, including China, to participate more actively in regional, multilateral structures, such as ARF and the Northeast Asia Security Dialogue (NEASED).⁸² This process of "quasi-multilateralization" of the existing alliance system can be seen as expanding a "virtual alliance" network of U.S. allies. The creation of a "virtual alliance" can be achieved by maintaining the U.S. – Japan alliance, the U.S. – South Korean alliance, and strengthening the bilateral security cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul. Such necessary and achievable steps can contribute to the interests of preserving the long-term peace and stability of the region.⁸³ In creating an inclusive regional security community based on the concept of "cooperative security," the United States will be exercising its leadership.

The U.S. Department of Defense plan to establish "a Northeast Asia Command" as a Korea-U.S.-Japan Unified Command as reported by media sources can be seen as a prominent example of this leadership.⁸⁴ The idea which Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced at a US Senate Hearing on February 13, 2003, which included the "relocation of USFK south of the Han River" and the "replacement of ground forces with Marines and Naval forces" is based on the concept of establishing an independent Northeast Asia command. According to this initiative, the ROK military is to become a member of such swift reaction forces to secure the stability of the region in an emergency, while

focusing on the defense of Korea under its own independent command and control structure, action that would meet the Bush administration's "global coalition against terrorism" initiative.⁸⁵

As more win-win solutions for the two allies emerge as the result of newer thinking, Tong-whan Park recommends the concept of "security co-management" to enhance the development of a NATO-like arrangement beyond the level of collective defense. According to him, in such an arrangement the United States and South Korea would be able to cooperate in three theaters-peninsular, regional, and global, because the nature of a security co-management regime would be more flexible for both Washington and Seoul, and because, with more security co-management, the two sides would learn to think and act together.⁸⁶ This security co-management concept would eventually be succeeded by the more comprehensive bi-multilateral arrangement.

Furthermore, as the ROK-U.S. alliance confronts new challenges with an expanding security agenda, it is imperative that it expand its scope and role. In linking the ROK-US alliance with a regional security structure, we need to revise it in the direction of a more comprehensive alliance system, including non military elements. At the February 2002 summit meeting, President Kim Dae-jung and George W. Bush, according to press release by President Kim, "recognized that the Korea-U.S. alliance is indispensable, not only for stability on the Korean Peninsula, but also in Northeast Asia as a whole." "Furthermore," both leaders, "expressed satisfaction that [the] bilateral alliance is not limited to cooperation in security matters, but that the comprehensive partnership has expanded and developed to all areas, including political, economic and diplomatic arenas."⁸⁷ New ROK President Roh Moo-hyun and U.S. President Bush agreed on May 14, 2003, to build a "*comprehensive and dynamic alliance relationship*" "*beyond the Korean peninsula*" (emphasis added).⁸⁸ The significance of this transformation from a bilateral to a regional alliance is underscored by the fact that both nations have shared interests in such a structure to discourage hegemonic competition among the regional powers, maintain cooperative relations for coping with regional issues, and ensure the protection of sea-lanes of communication (SLOC) for the security of maritime transportation.

A new form of alliance in Northeast Asia, including more comprehensive elements and promoting a broader regional security network, means to move from the current bilateral alliance aimed at

checking North Korean threats toward a more regional focus for ensuring peace and stability in Northeast Asia as a whole. This would effectively harmonize Washington's new global security strategy with Seoul's national security strategy.⁸⁹ To achieve these goals, both nations should re-define and re-adjust the status and role of their existing alliance. In view of Korea's primary interests, it would be desirable to restrict the scope and role of the ROK-U.S. alliance to the Northeast Asia-Pacific area immediately surrounding the Korean peninsula. In this case, the status of the USFK would expand toward this area to playing a balancing role.

In expanding the role of U.S. forces in Korea, it will be necessary to resolve issues related to force structure. Possible scenarios related to the restructuring of U.S. forces in Korea include a complete withdrawal of those troops from Korea to form a "political alliance" without U.S. forces; a pullout of U.S. air and naval forces, including some strategic and intelligence forces, to enhance the "flexibility of the alliance"; and the continued presence of U.S. air force and naval forces plus a reduced number of ground troop to strength the existing alliance.⁹⁰ As for today and the immediate future, it will be possible with better efforts to develop the alliance relationship in a more flexible way without damaging the traditional friendly relationship. As far as the reduction of USFK, it is necessary to call to mind the USFK reduction plan based on the revised proposal of 1989 by then-Senator Sam Nunn and Senator John W. Warner that adjusted the USFK in according with a three-staged plan.⁹¹ Completing the last stage, the USFK was to have responsibility for regional stability then as sole and direct deterrent against North Korea after the North Korean threat disappeared. In this case, U.S. ground forces in Korea would be reduced. However, naval and air force units could be reinforced instead for the global counter-terrorist war, in cooperation with recent U.S. government plans for relocating the USFK and enhancing strategic flexibility, maneuverability and agility.

In the past and at present, the presence of U.S. ground troops has constituted the most powerful evidence of the political determination of the U.S. to act as a real trip-wire. But the presence of U.S. ground troops, even though reduced in size and number, along with naval and air force units, and the stationing of the USFK in the southern region of the peninsula, will bolster the ROK-U.S. alliance beyond its status as simply a regional alliance. For this purpose the nature of U.S. capabilities can evolve from a heavy,

dug- in force focused on the peninsula security to a lighter, more mobile, expeditionary presence that can be deployed quickly and effectively elsewhere in the region and thus can carry out "rapid decision operations" and a global defense-in-depth rather than "defending forward," according to the new military doctrine.⁹² En route to the Defense Ministers' Meeting at Singapore on June 3, 2004, U.S. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld reconfirmed that "the U.S. will make fundamental changes in its troop presence on the Korean peninsula as well as in Europe, where U.S. defense [forces] have stood guard against threats that have disappeared or no longer require such a large force, and it is time to adjust those locations from static defense to a more agile and a more capable and a more 21st century posture."⁹³ According to American officials, the realignment of USFK, already instated under the framework of the ROK-U.S. "Future of the Alliance Policy Initiative (FOTA)," is designed to transfer more of the responsibility for South Korea's defense to the South Koreans and provide a transition for a reduced, but continuing, U.S. military presence and a more expeditionary, regional security orientation.⁹⁴ This redefinition and restructuring of the ROK-U.S. alliance and the status and role of the USFK will contribute to stabilizing the security situation on the peninsula and alleviating anti-American sentiment within Korean society in the process of peaceful unification.

In order for the ROK-U.S. bilateral alliance to expand into a more comprehensive regional alliance, the Armistice Agreement of 1953 should ultimately be transformed into a more permanent peace mechanism by the signing of a formal peace treaty to end the Korean War between two Koreas. This should include a new treaty between the U.S. and North Korea, or a trilateral treaty among the ROK, the U.S. and North Korea, or treaty between the U.N and North Korea. Although the United States should remain committed to its alliance with South Korea as the core of its security approach to the peninsula, the Washington should help establish the trilateral framework for dialogues to promote trust and transparency concerning the ROK-U.S. alliance in the regional context. Signing a formal treaty should be seen as a significant confidence-building measure among the major interested parties in addition to serving as a precondition for any future agreement.⁹⁵ This will be a more effective way to establish a more permanent peace regime on the peninsula, to provide a smoother transition to the creation of a comprehensive regional security alliance system. The "Joint

Declaration of New Regional Security Cooperation,” acting as a “virtual” trilateral alliance, could also be an effective way to enhance higher level cooperation among the ROK the U.S., and Japan in the near future along the lines of “redefining” and “restructuring” of the alliance.

7. Conclusion

The ROK-U.S. alliance relationship today is faced with serious challenges from North Korea’s WMD threats, international terrorism, and particularly the overall transformation of the United States’ global military strategy; it is not, however, currently in crisis. As it approaches a significant turning point, an enormous transformation to realign the U.S. global military posture is underway to cope with evolving security threats.⁹⁶ Therefore, it is time to adapt it to the new global and domestic conditions. Major issues of challenge are the redefinition and restructuring of the alliance, including its role and scope, a more equal relationship between Seoul and Washington, command relationships (operation control), a trilateral consultation mechanism with South Korea, the U.S., and Japan, and coordination of the inter-Korean engagement and the ROK-U.S. security relationship.

After the tragic terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the 21st century’s international security environment has become more complex and dangerous than that we had expected at the beginning of the post-cold war era ten years ago. As a result of sweeping globalization, the information revolution, and, most importantly, a technical military revolution and increasing proliferation of weapons of massive destruction, the current security agenda contains much more complicated issues than before. Thus, the 21st world still needs America’s “resolute sheriff” role⁹⁷ beyond the borders of the United States. Major challenges should be focused on not only bilateral but also multilateral arrangements.

The coincidence of the vital strategic interests of both nations makes the position of the ROK-U.S. alliance “unique” in the Northeast Asia-Pacific region. In order to make this bilateral alliance “unique,” both states should strive to develop a “comprehensive alliance” that encompasses common values and human security and deeper economic cooperation beyond political and military security concerns, and to expand the bilateral alliance into a regional, multilateral organization. Military ties should be supplemented by a broader security agenda.⁹⁸ This is a new kind of

alliance, not simply a military alliance but a permanent political relationship more akin to relationships the U.S. has developed with its European allies.

Therefore, the new U.S.-ROK alliance should develop into a multilateral “comprehensive and dynamic” alliance, in addition to the existing bilateral alliance, to enhance the common interests of each signatory beyond the boundary of the Korean peninsula. Its objectives should also go beyond simply being against North Korea or other regional powers. In keeping with its interest in becoming a more prominent actor in the region, Seoul should play a more active role in peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, piracy and drug smuggling operations and combating the spread of WMDs.⁹⁹ This approach can assure its long-run survival by upgrading its military alliance without being suspected by other regional powers.¹⁰⁰ This is the feasible and effective way to develop a mature partnership based upon a more equal relationship and close consultation between South Korea and the United States. With increasing challenges for the ROK-U.S. alliance, South Korea must try to make the alliance more “equal and reciprocal” by departing from a “patron-client” relationship.¹⁰¹ South Korea needs to develop a comprehensive ROK-U.S. alliance as a best way to enhance equality in the alliance relationship. It is also the most desirable and feasible way to resolve North Korea’s WMDs threats in adopting a “bold and comprehensive” approach in the bi-multilateral framework within the regional context.

The year 2003 marked the 50th anniversary of the ROK-U.S. alliance partnership created by the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1953. That alliance has emerged as a prosperous and militarily-robust relationship between two democratic countries with market economies. Today, the ROK-U.S. alliance represents a model of success within the Cold War context, an example of what that conflict was all about.¹⁰² In order to add a new chapter in the history of the alliance, both nations should not only strengthen and reinforce the existing bilateral security ties, but also redefine and readjust their respective roles and responsibilities for the new security environment of the region, i.e., bi-multilateral framework. By adjusting the ROK-U.S. security partnership for the 21st century, both nations will contribute to preparing the relationship for challenges on the Korean peninsula and beyond.

The ROK-U.S. alliance is a partnership forged in blood and valor. It is strengthened by the shared values of freedom,

democracy, open markets and the millions of Koreans who have come to America's shores as immigrants. The alliance has successfully deterred North Korean aggression, provided for peace and stability in Northeast Asia, and fostered the growth of freedom and prosperity in South Korea for over 50 years. It should do so for as long as needed because it continues to be in interests of both nations.¹⁰³ That is our task for the ROK-U.S. alliance relationship in the 21st century.

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