



Pacific Forum CSIS



Comparative Connections



Special Annual Issue
"Alliance and Alienation:
Managing Diminished Expectations
for U.S.-ROK Relations"

By Scott Snyder

August 2004

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Pacific Forum CSIS

Based in Honolulu, Pacific Forum CSIS (www.csis.org/pacfor/) operates as the autonomous Asia-Pacific arm of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC. The Forum's programs encompass current and emerging political, security, economic, business, and oceans policy issues through analysis and dialogue undertaken with the region's leaders in the academic, government, and corporate areas. Founded in 1975, it collaborates with a broad network of research institutes from around the Pacific Rim, drawing on Asian perspectives and disseminating project findings and recommendations to opinion leaders, governments, and members of the public throughout the region.

An international Board of Governors guides the Pacific Forum's work; it is chaired by Brent Scowcroft, former Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. The Forum is funded by grants from foundations, corporations, individuals, and governments, the latter providing a small percentage of the Forum's \$1.2 million annual budget. The Forum's studies are objective and nonpartisan and it does not engage in classified or proprietary work.

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Our Special Annual Issue provides an in-depth review of key Asia-Pacific relationships. This year, Scott Snyder, Senior Associate at the Pacific Forum CSIS and The Asia Foundation, assesses the future of ROK-U.S. relations. He argues that the U.S.-ROK alliance is undergoing dramatic changes as both sides adapt to an evolving strategic environment in Northeast Asia. While there is strong rationale for sustaining the alliance, it is possible to imagine that the security alliance will be substantially revised or even ended in the near future. His work draws on a recent conference on U.S.-Korea relations, the latest in a series of discussions hosted by the Honolulu-based Pacific Forum CSIS and the Seoul-based New Asia Research Institute (NARI). This is an unofficial dialogue between policy specialists and pundits in the field to discuss U.S.-Korea relations.

Comparative Connections also provides quarterly coverage of the region's key bilateral relationships. Bilateral relationships in East Asia have long been important to regional peace and stability, but in the post-Cold War environment, these relationships have taken on a new strategic rationale as countries pursue multiple ties, beyond those with the U.S., to realize complex political, economic, and security interests. How one set of bilateral interests affects a country's other key relations is becoming more fluid and complex, and at the same time is becoming more central to the region's overall strategic compass. *Comparative Connections*, Pacific Forum's quarterly electronic journal on East Asian bilateral relations edited by Vivian Brailey Fritschi and Brad Glosserman, with Ralph A. Cossa as Senior Editor, was created in response to this unique environment.

We cover 12 key bilateral relationships that are critical for the region. While we recognize the importance of other states in the region, our intention is to keep the core of the e-journal to a manageable and readable length. Because our project cannot give full attention to each of the relationships in Asia, coverage of U.S.-ASEAN and China-ASEAN countries consists of a summary of individual bilateral relationships, and may shift focus from country to country as events warrant. Other bilateral relationships may be tracked periodically (such as various bilateral relationships with India or Australia's significant relationships) as events dictate.

Our aim is to inform and interpret the significant issues driving political, economic, and security affairs of the U.S. and East Asian relations by an ongoing analysis of events in each key bilateral relationship. The reports, written by a variety of experts in Asian affairs, focus on political/security developments, but economic issues are also addressed. Each essay is accompanied by a chronology of significant events occurring between the states in question during the quarter. An overview section, written by Pacific Forum, places bilateral relationships in a broader context of regional relations. By providing value-added interpretative analyses, as well as factual accounts of key events, the e-journal illuminates patterns in Asian bilateral relations that may appear as isolated events and better defines the impact bilateral relationships have upon one another and on regional security.

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Executive Summary

The U.S.-ROK alliance relationship is undergoing dramatic changes as both sides adapt to a changing strategic environment in Northeast Asia. While there is strong rationale for sustaining the alliance, it is possible to imagine that the security alliance will be substantially revised or even ended in the near future. It is ironic that with the full flowering of South Korea's democratization, the United States and South Korea now have greater shared values and more common experience than ever before, yet internal and external pressures and regional developments may threaten the future of their alliance. Although there exists a comprehensive economic partnership, strong people-to-people ties, and growing respect for Korea and its economic capacity among Americans, maintaining strong political and security ties will take a greater investment than has been the case.

There are good reasons for both sides to continue strong cooperation on shared issues, even if the relative importance of the United States and South Korea to each other has declined in light of changes in the global context and differences in strategic perceptions of North Korea. But it will take strong political leadership to make that case to the American and Korean people – leadership that has too often been absent in recent years. The veneer of shared interests and objectives is cracking as the United States and South Korea increasingly find themselves with divergent perspectives vis-à-vis North Korea and other emerging challenges to the Northeast Asian regional security order. As the region adapts to new circumstances, contradictions are piling up, and the U.S.-ROK security alliance itself may now be at stake.

This essay reviews the accumulating contradictions at the global and regional levels, in the respective psychologies of Koreans and Americans, and the domestic political factors that have complicated future U.S.-ROK alliance cooperation. It identifies several critical scenarios or potential security developments related to the six party talks and analyzes their potential impact on future alliance cooperation. In this context, it calls for the appointment of a senior special envoy to focus attention on the diplomatic process, along with more pro-active involvement by the current and next U.S. administration and by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Finally, it proposes a number of policy recommendations as follows:

United States

- 1) Together with the ROK government, review and reaffirm the long-term strategic objectives of the U.S.-ROK alliance.
- 2) Employ a diplomatic strategy that recognizes and appeals to the Korean public; invest in relationship building fundamentals and cross-cultural understanding.

- 3) Work with South Korea as an ally as the first step in containing North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

Republic of Korea

- 1) Determine the relative importance of the United States as part of South Korea's long-term diplomatic strategy.
- 2) Close the gap between South Korean government and public perspectives on the North Korean nuclear issue and the U.S.-ROK alliance.
- 3) Offer a positive vision of South Korea's capacity to contribute to regional and global stability in proportion to its economic strength.

Alliance and Alienation: Managing Diminished Expectations for U.S.-ROK Relations

by Scott Snyder
Senior Associate, Pacific Forum CSIS/The Asia Foundation

The 50th anniversary of the founding of the U.S.-ROK alliance in 1954 has been the occasion for many scholarly conferences but little official fanfare. Most gatherings have paid homage to the idea of rock-solid U.S.-ROK alliance cooperation and the success of deterrence in preventing renewed military conflict on the Korean Peninsula, while barely acknowledging that the future of the alliance is increasingly unclear. While the alliance has been characterized by high tension and quarrels at many times in the past, there are increasing doubts that the strategic underpinnings of the alliance will be sustained in the future.

The United States and South Korea have gradually diverged in recent years in their respective perceptions of North Korea and of the intentions of the leadership in Pyongyang. President Bush's public insults toward Kim Jong Il and his characterization of North Korea as part of the "axis of evil" came at the very time South Koreans were poised to advance the cause of inter-Korean reconciliation, making President Bush's policy a target of public criticism in South Korea and a perceived obstacle to North-South reconciliation. These public statements dramatized the gap that has emerged in American and South Korean perceptions of North Korea, contributing to a starkly negative South Korean public perception of U.S. objectives in its policy toward the Korean Peninsula. South Korea's rapid progress in its own economic and political development over the decades has also resulted in greater national confidence and a desire for a more equal and mutually respectful relationship with the United States. With the second North Korean nuclear crisis and the emergence of heightened public criticism of the United States during elections in South Korea in December 2002, the relationship with the U.S. has become politicized in South Korea to an unprecedented degree. A whole range of contradictory developments has developed to the point where both Americans and South Koreans have begun to take a hard look at the future of their relationship.

The transition in the global and regional strategic environment in Northeast Asia, the emergence of differing priorities and threat perceptions between the United States and South Korea, and South Korea's own domestic political transformation are feeding contradictions and raising questions at every level as to whether the U.S.-ROK alliance will be justifiable or sustainable in the future. It is ironic that with the full flowering of South Korea's democratization, the United States and South Korea now have greater shared values and more common experience than ever before, yet internal and external

pressures and new regional developments threaten the future of the alliance. The veneer of shared interests and objectives is cracking as the U.S. and South Korea increasingly find themselves with divergent perspectives vis-à-vis North Korea and other emerging challenges to the regional security order in Northeast Asia. These are differences that North Korea has tried to exploit in its quest to overcome unprecedented economic challenges and its own diplomatic isolation. As the region adapts to a new set of circumstances, contradictions are piling up at every level, and the durability and desirability of the U.S.-ROK security alliance itself may now be at stake.

This essay seeks to review the accumulating contradictions that have complicated U.S.-ROK alliance cooperation, to identify critical scenarios or potential security developments deriving from the current situation on the Korean Peninsula, to analyze their potential impact on prospects for alliance cooperation, and to propose policy recommendations for how to improve the U.S.-ROK alliance in response to regional developments in Northeast Asia.

Contradictions Influencing the U.S.-ROK Alliance

1) A Changing Global and Regional Context

The U.S.-ROK alliance – alongside the U.S.-Japan alliance – has been a primary vehicle for pursuing the U.S. objective of ensuring peace on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia. These alliances have been an effective means by which to accomplish U.S. security interests in Asia throughout the Cold War. But with the end of the superpower confrontation there began to emerge divergences in the perceptions of the United States and South Korea regarding North Korea's strategic intentions and prospects for accommodation and reform. These differences have grown larger since the early 1990s.

The inter-Korean summit in the year 2000 catalyzed a change in perspective within the region and especially in South Korea, led by ROK President Kim Dae-jung's call for the "dismantling of the Cold War structure" on the Korean Peninsula. Although Kim Dae-jung himself called for a continued U.S. presence on the Korean Peninsula, some in South Korea have interpreted this phrase as a euphemism for a diminished role for the U.S.-ROK alliance, the weakening or elimination of which they viewed as a prerequisite for inter-Korean reconciliation. The perception in some quarters that the United States Forces, Korea (USFK) is an obstacle to inter-Korean reconciliation or is increasingly superfluous to Korea's security needs has eroded public support in South Korea for a continued U.S.-ROK security relationship.

The end of the Cold War has also brought about a structural change in South Korea's perceived geostrategic significance from the perspective of U.S. policymakers. While the Soviet Union was around, the Korean Peninsula was considered a frontline state in the bipolar confrontation and received special attention from U.S. policymakers. The collapse of the Soviet Union dissipated America's focus on the Korean Peninsula as a geostrategic priority, while the rise in concern over proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction ensured that North Korea would remain a functional priority – part of America’s global agenda – as long as the DPRK continues to pursue a nuclear weapons development program. This may help to explain the diminished priority of U.S. relationships with South Korea and Turkey, two countries no longer specially privileged in their relations with the U.S. by their perceived geopolitical significance as frontline states.

North Korea’s nuclear weapons program has assured continued American interest in the Korean Peninsula, but the functional nature of that interest has led to friction in the alliance because American global priorities have taken precedence over regional considerations in shaping U.S. responses to the North Korean problem and have begun to supersede alliance cooperation with South Korea as the primary referent for managing policy toward North Korea. An early example of this development was the decision of the Clinton administration to negotiate bilaterally with North Korea during the first nuclear crisis, leaving South Korea outside the negotiating room on issues that were critical to the ROK’s national security interests. Global concerns about proliferation and North Korean nuclear weapons development efforts, Pyongyang’s refusal to allow IAEA special inspections, and the then-impending global Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference were the primary drivers of the first North Korean nuclear crisis. The second North Korean nuclear crisis has also illustrated the dominance of nonproliferation concerns over regional strategy in shaping U.S. policy toward the Korean Peninsula.

The U.S.-ROK alliance is no longer preeminent in shaping policy toward the Korean Peninsula at the same time that the United States has become the world’s only superpower. The United States is seemingly less constrained by the need for alliance cooperation, and much less influenced by the desire for “equality” that South Korea now seeks in its relations with the United States. The Bush administration has turned to “coalitions of the willing” over alliances as a primary vehicle for implementing U.S. global policy, particularly in the context of the Bush administration’s post-9/11 handling of international security affairs. In this formulation, the obligations of partners to join with the United States in pursuing its global objectives are not well defined, but it is assumed that good relations with the United States are so critical to America’s partners in a unipolar world that those partners will feel constrained by their interests – and by the risks of possible retaliation or non-cooperation by the U.S. on issues critical to them – that they will join Washington in pursuing global objectives to the extent that they are able. This creates what Pacific Forum President Ralph Cossa has described as “coalitions of the reluctant,” where allies like the ROK feel compelled to take politically unpopular steps (such as deploying troops to Iraq) in the name of alliance maintenance (i.e., being a good ally).

The quality and importance of alliances are judged not so much by mutual commitments as by the extent to which an ally demonstrates loyalty to Washington’s immediate policy priorities, with little reciprocal obligation from Washington to listen to or understand the domestic political or strategic context or concerns of traditional allies and partners. Frustration with the perceived one-sidedness in alliance relationships with the world’s

sole superpower first surfaced during the Clinton administration at which time Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's description of the United States as the "indispensable" nation rubbed many the wrong way. But the Bush administration's implementation of "coalitions of the willing" operationalized this concept as a central feature of U.S. foreign policy. In South Korea, this has meant that calls for greater "equality" in the relationship are occurring at the very moment when the United States feels less obligated to pursue balance or "equality" as a component of alliance management in its relationships around the world.

Another example of how functional issues are taking precedence over alliance considerations is the U.S. global posture review (GPR), a process that is redefining U.S. military strategy around the world. This process is mitigating U.S. dependence on alliance cooperation in favor of efforts to maximize a robust, flexible, efficient military capacity. The upgrading of U.S. military capacity through the application of the revolution in military affairs (RMA) has lessened the need for American cooperation in the military sphere. The implications of this doctrine are that the U.S. presence should be hindered to the least extent possible by constraints and mutual commitments that alliance cooperation may impose at the expense of efficiency in operations. The GPR will require changes in the requirements for cooperation with allies and partners at the local level. It will have an impact on perceptions of the role and purpose of U.S. forces abroad, as the imperatives of flexibility to deploy off the Korean Peninsula conflict with the traditional operational concepts inherent in a relationship, where the two countries have traditionally been solely focused on taking joint action against a common threat. One of the implications of the GPR for the Korean Peninsula is that the U.S. military no longer has the luxury of deploying forces solely in response to a common threat from North Korea. U.S. forces must be available for other missions in the region and globally as required. If a host country fails to offer that flexibility, the alliance relationship may become an obstacle and an unnecessary burden from a strictly operational perspective. In the local theater, it is natural that the development of such flexibility might be perceived as coming at the cost of a reduced commitment to the objectives and needs of the local host and/or partner.

In practice, these changes are being driven by necessity. There is a need to revise and update U.S. global military strategies that have remained unchanged since the end of the Cold War. In addition, there has been a longstanding need to complete the transition from a leading to a supporting U.S. role on the Korean Peninsula that had been envisioned and agreed upon from the early 1990s. At the same time, it is necessary to realize that the rising influence of global priorities may impinge on the prerogatives and spirit of the alliance relationship, diminishing its role and influence on the policies of any set of alliance partners.

The thickening of regional economic relations in Northeast Asia also poses an implicit challenge to alliances as the basis for organizing security in the region. The primary driver and focal point for economic growth in Northeast Asia is the emerging role of China as the world's engine for manufacturing. China's central role among suppliers eager to take advantage of the PRC's competitive labor costs has brought every country

in Northeast Asia closer to China, elevating economic priorities over security concerns for the time being and providing a new, non-alliance based organizational structure for regional stability and prosperity, implicitly challenging American alliances as the critical guarantor of regional stability. China has surpassed the United States as South Korea's number one trading partner this year, providing a new centrifugal force that distracts from the U.S.-ROK alliance and lessens South Korea's perceived dependence on the United States.

Another factor likely to put stress on the U.S.-ROK alliance is the reality of Korea's geographic relationship with China. According to Michael McDevitt, "unlike other close U.S. allies in the region, a united Korea will share a border with China. That means that if China wants to exert military influence on the peninsula they need only walk or drive to the frontier, a much easier task than if they have to cross a body of water or a third nation." In other words, Korean reunification would fully restore Korea's place as a continental nation, whereas the geostrategic realities of the Cold War – following South Korea's accidental exclusion from the U.S. defense perimeter in Dean Acheson's 1950 speech – unnaturally made South Korea into an essential partner for America's maritime interests and strategy in the region. American analysts are increasingly viewing South Korea or a reunified Korea as strategically redundant compared to the value of Japan's contribution to U.S. forward deployment in Northeast Asia. The implication is that coping with future challenges for the U.S.-ROK alliance is like swimming upstream, against the prevailing political currents that exist today.

The structural changes deriving from global and regional trends detailed above have clearly lessened the centrality of the U.S.-ROK alliance when it comes to pursuing mutual interests in security and stability on the Korean Peninsula. To a certain extent, it is inevitable that both sides must manage the adjustment to a new situation in which each has lower expectations for the other. In this respect, it will be much better if both sides coolly recognize and adjust to new strategic realities rather than responding emotionally with bitterness or accusations that might put the entire relationship at risk. While the U.S.-ROK alliance relationship is less important to each country now than in times past as a factor in managing security and economic relations in the region, it remains an important vehicle for promoting both nations' national security interests.

2) Divergence in Strategic Perceptions of North Korea

Public perceptions of North Korea in the United States and South Korea have also grown apart dramatically in the past few years, creating further difficulties for U.S.-ROK alliance coordination. These differences have occurred in the broad public perception of the relationship and have affected the psychology and emotion of public opinion related to North Korea in both countries, creating new obstacles to alliance coordination on North Korean issues.

In South Korea, the inter-Korean summit in June of 2000 clearly had a deep emotional and psychological effect on South Korean views of North Korea. For the first time, a South Korean leader, ROK President Kim Dae-jung, traveled to Pyongyang and met with his counterpart in the North, Central Defense Committee Chairman Kim Jong-il. The inter-Korean summit and the June 15 summit declaration dramatically shifted the political ground in South Korea and changed South Korean public perceptions of Kim Jong-il, who for the first time became a real person for many South Koreans through TV images from Kim Dae-jung's visit. South Koreans even heard Kim Jong-il's voice recorded in polite banter with President Kim Dae-jung, making Kim Jong-il seem more like an eccentric temporary visitor or dinner party guest than an arch-enemy. (North Korean television summit coverage, in contrast, never played recordings of Kim Jong-il's voice, instead showing scenes of the summit to the usual emotional and strident tones of a North Korean narrator speaking of Kim Jong-il's leadership in reverential terms.) Regardless of whether the Sunshine Policy was aimed at changing North Korea and inducing it toward reform, Kim Dae-jung's visit to the North did much to change South Korean perceptions of the North.

Kim Dae-jung's visit accomplished several tasks as the images from the trip were constantly replayed on television and absorbed by the South Korean public. Most immediately, it turned Kim Jong-il into a South Korean pop-star, as college kids held Kim Jong-il look-alike contests, bought Kim Jong-il-style sunglasses, and beauty parlors offered Kim Jong-il haircuts, South Korean vendors sold animated Kim Jong-il action figures, and pictures of the Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il shaking hands became standard background pictures in many government offices and the subject of some annual calendars. There was public euphoria over a thawing of the inter-Korean relationship in the initial months following the summit until the momentum of controlled cultural exchanges subsided and the scenes of strictly controlled but highly emotional family reunion gatherings became routinized as part of the Korean media coverage. An inter-Korean symphony concert in Seoul was broadcast live nationwide in August 2000 at which South Korean soprano Jo Sumi appeared momentarily to have taken priority in the heart of her North Korean tenor counterpart from Kim Jong-il, but even this dramatic image of North-South reconciliation lasted only a moment!

Behind the scenes there were problems. Some North Korean symphony members threatened not to perform because the South Korean government had callously placed pictures of Kim Jong-il and Kim Dae-jung shaking hands outside with no covering to keep rain from falling on them. The thought of the Dear Leader's image being soaked was a sign of disrespect that was just too much for these North Korean professionals, and the inter-Korean concert was nearly canceled as a result. Many South Korean leaders came to project their hopes onto Kim Jong-il in the initial months following the summit, presuming without hard evidence that Kim had decided or would decide to emulate Park Chung Hee's economic policies as a vehicle for achieving North Korea's economic recovery.

Another important development was a tour of Korean broadcast and print media chairmen that took place in August of 2000. This tour was important because the South Korean media voluntarily agreed in a personal meeting with Kim Jong-il to limit negative coverage of North Korea. One result is that bad news about the North Korean leadership, refugees, human rights violations, or other illegalities is downplayed or barely covered in the South Korean vernacular press. As a result, the contrast between South Korean media coverage of North Korea and international, American, or Japanese media coverage of the North is quite striking. Most South Koreans have come to view the North Korean nuclear program with fatigue, recognizing that the nuclear issue is getting in the way of inter-Korean reconciliation, and in more than a few cases, they continue to downplay negative stories about North Korea and resent the American and international media for “sensationalizing” coverage of North Korean nuclear weapons efforts. Since the inter-Korean summit, many South Koreans have become more concerned whether U.S. security policy toward the Korean Peninsula could become an obstacle to inter-Korean reconciliation.

The American public, on the other hand, was hardly aware of the inter-Korean summit and certainly did not feel the emotional pull. It is hard for Americans to understand how deeply Koreans were affected – psychologically and emotionally – by the achievement of the inter-Korean summit. This inability of Americans to understand or feel the deep impact of the inter-Korean summit or to understand the psychological impact of Korea’s division constitutes one-half of the divergence of opinion between Americans and South Koreans over North Korea’s future prospects or nuclear intentions. Americans still see a very different Kim Jong-il, a caricature who appears in editorial cartoons with his wild bouffant hairdo in scenes reminiscent of Dr. Strangelove, demanding to be taken seriously by American policymakers because of his accomplishments in building a nuclear weapons program.

Likewise, the Korean public has not fully absorbed the deep psychological significance of 9/11 for the U.S. public. The U.S. media focused for months on the shock of the events, the first time that the U.S. mainland has been subject to a direct attack from outside in almost 200 years. The psychological wounds of these attacks were deep, and led to strong U.S. support for wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as an ongoing global war on terror. Despite casualties, U.S. public support and resolve to persist in stabilizing Iraq and to defend against terrorist attacks have remained relatively strong. For Americans, the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon changed the world and have been accompanied by changes that have affected their daily life and travel. These are changes that Americans have accepted despite some inconvenience and limitations on their personal freedoms. North Korea’s inclusion in the “axis of evil,” its pursuit of nuclear weapons, and American public concerns with proliferation of weapons of mass destruction following the 9/11 attacks have raised U.S. public concern about Kim Jong-il as a potential source of nuclear materials that could fall into the hands of non-state terrorist groups.

The Korean public and the rest of the world were initially deeply affected by the 9/11 attacks, but for most Koreans, the attacks were quite spectacular and seemed more like a movie than a real event. Some Koreans even identified with the attackers, praising them and analogizing them to South Korean independence figure An Jung-kun, who tried to assassinate Japanese Governor-General Ito Hirobumi in the early stage of Korea's colonization by Japan. The Korean public has for the most part not been directly affected by the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan or Iraq, and the overall tone of Korean broadcast media coverage of these wars has been rather negative toward the U.S. Whatever sympathy might have been available to Americans in the immediate aftermath of the attacks has worn thin in Korea, as President Roh Moo-hyun's decision to send Korean troops to aid Iraq's reconstruction has stimulated a protracted, divisive public debate over the morality of the war and whether South Korea should honor Roh's pledge as a sign of commitment to the alliance with the United States.

The growing divergence in South Korean and U.S. perceptions of the Bush administration and its leadership in the global war on terrorism has also led to differences over public perceptions of the desired policy approach toward North Korea. Although the six party talks have provided a venue for U.S.-ROK official cooperation that has helped to bridge and obscure differences in South Korean and U.S. public perceptions, any solution is likely to be bitterly contested and will throw into sharp relief continuing differences between U.S. and South Korean perceptions of North Korea.

3) The Politicization of the Alliance Relationship with the United States

A third trend that has had negative implications for the U.S.-ROK alliance has been the recent politicization in South Korea's domestic discourse of the relationship with the United States which occurred during the 2002 South Korean presidential campaign. This development had its roots in deep ideological divisions in South Korean politics over the results of ROK President Kim Dae-jung's visit to Pyongyang. The summit catalyzed a series of important cultural exchanges in inter-Korean relations, but it also unleashed a sharp debate over policy toward North Korea (the development of the so-called "South-South" division in Korean politics). On the one hand were progressives who wanted to make pursuit of Korean reunification and national unity the number one priority in inter-Korean relations. On the other side were conservatives, labeled in the debate as "anti-reunification" forces, who were cautious about reconciliation with North Korea, especially if such reconciliation were achieved on terms that would require the sacrifice of South Korea's hard-won efforts to achieve democracy through the ceding of freedom of expression or personal rights. Over time, the political debate expanded to include the alliance relationship with the United States, which was pitted against better relations with North Korea in a zero-sum contest as a central feature of the "South-South" division.

This false choice between the U.S. and North Korea was actively perpetuated as part of the political strategies of both the ruling party and the opposition in the run-up to national elections in December 2002. The tragic accident involving the roadway deaths of two South Korean middle-school girls who were run over by a U.S. military vehicle in June 2002 and the subsequent trial and acquittal of the U.S. military vehicle operators in

November 2002 (one month prior to the South Korean presidential election) occurred in this polarizing political environment. Both presidential candidates spent much of the campaign positioning themselves on the acquittal of the schoolgirls and utilized the issue to show how each candidate might deal with the United States in the future.

A further factor that exacerbated the politicization of the relationship with Washington was the welcome given to South Korean presidential hopeful and opposition Grand National Party leader Lee Hoi-chang in Washington in early 2002. By allowing him to see senior officials including Vice President Dick Cheney, the Bush administration gave the clear impression that it was taking sides in the South Korean presidential contest. Some might also trace the beginnings of this division to Kim Dae-jung's failed summit meeting with a newly elected President Bush in March 2001. Many South Koreans were offended by perceived disrespectful treatment and skepticism with which President Bush greeted President Kim in one of his earliest meetings with a foreign leader following his election as president.

The political debate in South Korea cast the United States on the side of South Korean conservatives, who hoped to pursue a hard-line policy toward North Korea – if only South Korean conservatives could return to office and restore a close working alliance and seriousness of purpose with Washington in pursuit of such an objective. While it is true that some in the Bush administration did hold those hopes, the zero-sum nature of the South Korean political debate obscured the fact that many aspects of the Roh Moo-hyun platform were favorable to U.S. interests in strengthening the overall relationship with South Korea. These points included Roh's anti-corruption pledges, desires to see a reformed corporate governance structure in Korea that would make the South Korean economy more open and competitive in international markets, and, ironically, the desire to achieve a peaceful solution to tensions with North Korea, President Bush's rhetoric about Kim Jong-il notwithstanding.

The politicization of the relationship with the United States in South Korea's domestic political debate, continued factional infighting, and efforts to score political points from the handling of the U.S.-ROK relationship on a wide range of issues – from the reconfiguration of U.S. military forces and closure of Yongsan base to assessments of the quality and effectiveness of government-to-government consultations to incidents involving personnel reshuffles in which people are fired for being “too close to the United States” or categorized as “America worshippers” – have been corrosive to the U.S.-ROK relationship. However, these incidents also reflect a serious political debate that is emerging within the South Korean body politic over the importance of the future relationship with the United States. This debate is necessary for South Korea. It should occur openly on the merits and should be settled as quickly as possible based on a careful assessment of South Korea's national interest. Protracted divisions over whether South Korea continues to support the relationship with the United States will have a negative effect on alliance cooperation as U.S. officials will continue to doubt the reliability and commitment of South Korea as a long-term alliance partner.

The politicization of the relationship with the U.S. has hampered effective communication between the U.S. and South Korea. South Korean progressives too often assume that politics in the United States are exactly the same as politics in South Korea and that if the Democrats return to power in Washington, all problems in the U.S.-ROK alliance relationship will be resolved. That perspective fails to recognize that the overall mood in the United States, especially regarding North Korea, has shifted as a result of the breakdown of the 1994 U.S.-DPRK Geneva Agreed Framework. U.S. analysts attribute the breakdown not to the Bush administration's decision to confront North Korea over its covert highly enriched uranium (HEU) program, but to the fact that North Korea cheated on the agreement in the first place. Arguably, a Democratic administration in Washington would be even more sensitive to this issue because the DPRK's actions led to the failure of an agreement that had been negotiated by the Democratic Clinton administration. Most recently, the House of Representatives unanimously passed the North Korean Human Rights Act, while some progressive National Assembly members have argued that the United States is interfering in North Korea's domestic affairs by passing this bill. The respective responses to this legislation provide further evidence of the growing divergence in opinion over North Korea between the two countries.

Despite the growing divergence between the United States and South Korea and the potential and actual areas of conflict identified above, it is important to recognize that the overall relationship between the two countries remains vibrant. South Korea and the U.S. remain active and vital economic partners, especially in the sectors that are important to Korea's growth and development as a mature industrialized economy. Americans are truly impressed with South Korea's dramatic economic accomplishments and its transformation over the past few decades, and appreciate the technological advances and reliability of new Korean products. South Korea continues to benchmark the United States in many key areas, seeking to close any economic gaps and to borrow from and often improve on American products and processes in almost every field where the United States has something to offer. Despite growing anti-Americanism, large numbers of Koreans still want to visit the United States and even to emigrate to America. There are about 2 million Korean immigrants in the U.S., and second-generation Korean Americans are rising to make critical contributions in every area of American life, in most cases further contributing to a positive image of Korea in the U.S.

U.S.-ROK Alliance Coordination and the DPRK: Current Situation and Future Scenarios

Despite the changes outlined in the previous section, the level of alliance cooperation to deal with North Korea's nuclear weapons development efforts through the six party talks mechanism remains quite strong. In fact, U.S.-ROK coordination as part of the six party talks has strengthened perceptibly since August 2003, despite the impression of overall discord between the U.S. and South Korea that has been projected in the South Korean media. In addition, U.S. policymakers are genuinely pleased that South Korea is standing by its commitment to provide assistance to Iraq's reconstruction despite continuing opposition from South Korean NGO activists who are a part of President Roh's political base. Although some aspects of the Future of the Alliance talks regarding the

reconfiguration of the USFK have been contentious and despite initial resistance to the U.S. plans for Korea under the GPR, those issues have been ironed out and the two governments have succeeded in outlining the steps that will allow the United States to consolidate its forces and move the center of its operations from Yongsan to Osan-Pyongtaek by 2008. Official cooperation on the Future of the Alliance initiative has been striking, especially because some conservative critics of the Roh administration long associated with the U.S. have opposed the troop reconfiguration and have – according to working-level Pentagon officials – become sources of friction and frustration in the relationship.

Despite early South Korean criticisms that the U.S. has not been sufficiently forthcoming in the six party talks, the proposal the U.S. offered in the third round of the talks in June 2004 originated in South Korean recommendations. In the absence of an effective inter-Korean channel to address North Korea's nuclear development efforts, South Korea has tried to utilize the six party talks as the primary vehicle for addressing North Korea's nuclear development program. Through this mechanism, the ROK government has spent great efforts to achieve a deal that would bring both the United States and North Korea together. A workable and comprehensive solution that achieves the objective of a denuclearized Korean Peninsula and resolves the U.S.-DPRK confrontation remains strongly in the South Korean interest.

However, many in South Korea have criticized the Bush administration's perceived complacency toward the six party talks. The time it has taken for the Bush administration to come up with a mutually satisfactory negotiating proposal that bridges the gaps in approach between Washington and Seoul has provided North Korea with an opportunity to further develop its nuclear weapons capacity unhindered by constraints from the international community or obligations to the International Atomic Energy Agency or Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. While the U.S. and others may be right to insist that ultimately the DPRK must come into compliance with these international norms before it can expect to gain full acceptance from the international community, the progress North Korea has been allowed to make in its nuclear weapons development efforts as a result of the delay will be increasingly difficult to reverse. Thus, it is necessary to consider the missing elements that may be required to make the six party talks effective and the possible consequences of failure of the talks for U.S.-ROK alliance coordination.

1) Making Six Party Talks Effective

The six party talks have emerged as the primary diplomatic vehicle for keeping North Korea from becoming a nuclear weapons state. All parties to the six party talks have agreed that a nuclear North Korea represents a threat to regional stability and have identified dismantlement as their shared objective. It is not yet clear, however, whether all the participants in the talks can agree on a satisfactory solution to North Korea's nuclear weapons pursuits. The situation has been made more difficult as a result of revelations in late 2003 of a covert suppliers network of nuclear parts and materials to nonnuclear weapons states, many of whom were using loopholes in the current nonproliferation regime to pursue their programs. The focal points of concern to the

global community have been North Korea, Libya, and Iran, three states known to have received nuclear supplies and equipment through the network of Pakistan's A.Q. Khan. The discovery of this trading network in support of nuclear proliferation has galvanized international concerns over the future of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

If the six party talks mechanism is to be effective, all parties must take steps to upgrade the talks and to treat the dialogue with greater urgency. Such an approach will require much more intensive efforts at a higher level from the parties concerned. The PRC has already initiated a regular ad hoc bilateral dialogue with the DPRK through which it has been possible for senior party and military officials, including Kim Jong-il, to exchange views on progress in the six party talks. Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's personal involvement has proved helpful as a result of his one-day visit to Pyongyang in May 2004, but the primary focus of that visit was the abduction issue, Koizumi's number-one domestic policy objective. A side benefit of those meetings was that it provided Kim Jong-il with the opportunity to indirectly convey his desire to resolve the nuclear issue and improve the DPRK relationship with the United States, a message that Koizumi was able to convey to Bush at the Sea Island G-8 Summit in June 2004.

The involvement of senior leaders in discussions on North Korea's nuclear development efforts outside the six party talks process helped the third round of talks to move forward in late June of 2004. Those conversations set the stage for a three-step U.S. offer to allow the DPRK to receive benefits from the international community in return for a verified freeze of its current nuclear weapons development efforts as the first step toward dismantlement of the North Korean nuclear program. It also promised the prospect of a removal of the DPRK from the U.S. list of states sponsoring terrorism and continued dialogue on how to improve other aspects of the relationship. While the DPRK has publicly rejected the initial U.S. offer, it is expected that future rounds of the six party talks might close the gap in the U.S. and DPRK positions regarding the scope and timing of verification and other steps toward a North Korean freeze and eventual dismantlement of its nuclear program.

In order to succeed as a viable venue for negotiations, the six party process – and U.S.-ROK alliance coordination as part of the process – must be strengthened through the appointment of a U.S. special envoy responsible for managing full-time diplomacy with all members of the talks. The special envoy would report directly to the president and would be empowered to lead international coordination with all concerned parties to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. Most probably, such an appointment would be most effective if it were made at the earliest date possible following the U.S. presidential elections in November 2004, either as part of the new Kerry administration or a second George W. Bush administration. Such an appointment would achieve five objectives: a) demonstrate that the president sees the North Korean nuclear weapons threat as a priority and to dispel the perception that the U.S. policy toward North Korea is neglect and hope for regime change; b) to ensure that the Bush administration speaks with one voice on policy toward North Korea; c) to discuss with South Korea practical steps toward international financial assistance toward the rehabilitation of a nonnuclear North Korea and to hold South Korea to a principled position that a resolution of the North Korean

nuclear issue is a necessary prerequisite for broader engagement with North Korea; d) to ensure that the commitment of all parties to a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula goes beyond rhetorical statements to actions designed to deny nuclear weapons components and fissile material from entering or leaving North Korea, i.e., promotion of effective and practical Proliferation Security Initiative-type measures involving all five of the six parties at the negotiating table; and e) to be available to go to Pyongyang and to deliver President Bush's messages and directives on six party talks directly to North Korea's top leaders as necessary.

The appointment of a U.S. presidential special envoy for the six party talks might have a particularly positive impact on the U.S.-ROK alliance relationship as it would demonstrate to South Korea the seriousness with which the U.S. regards the North Korean nuclear issue and would provide a vehicle for U.S.-ROK alliance coordination to resolve the crisis. A presidential special envoy should make coordination with South Korea one of his main priorities through active consultations with top South Korean counterparts. At the same time, it will be important for the special envoy to take into consideration South Korean concerns and policy objectives as part of a strengthened coordination process. A precedent for this type of cooperation already exists through the efforts that former Secretary of Defense William Perry made in 1998 and 1999 that led to the establishment of the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG). That mechanism provided important institutional support for effective alliance coordination in the face of the second North Korean nuclear crisis. Another benefit of Secretary Perry's efforts as a special envoy is that it effectively raised the level of high-level dialogue among the United States, South Korea, and Japan at a time of high suspicion regarding the possibility that North Korea was pursuing covert nuclear development efforts at Keumchangri.

The United States should take the following additional steps to enhance the likelihood of success through the six party talks mechanism. First, the U.S. should continue to demonstrate the attractiveness of the "Libyan model" through expanded economic engagement measures. The U.S. has announced diplomatic normalization with Libya and should find other ways to support Libya's expanded economic integration with the international community. European partners may have a special role to play here by increasing opportunities for trade and economic assistance with Libya and by expressing the willingness to do the same with Pyongyang once the nuclear issue is satisfactorily resolved. Second, the IAEA should maintain a firm stance with Iran on enforcement of the Additional Protocol and abandonment of uranium enrichment as the basis for Iran to maintain a positive relationship with the international community. The IAEA must walk a fine line diplomatically in its relationship with Iran, but will only be successful as long as the international community shows a united front. Showing resolve in the Iranian case will also be important as an object lesson for North Korea in the six party talks. Third, the IAEA Board of Governors – and by extension the UN Security Council – should publicly indicate support for the six party talks as the right vehicle for addressing the North Korean nuclear issue. Six party talks verification measures clearly must turn to the IAEA to play its proper inspections and verification role, as has been the case in Libya and Iran. Such an endorsement, following Kim Jong-il's own endorsement of the six

party talks, might help repair the IAEA's past difficult relationship with the DPRK and would set the stage for the six parties to request technical assistance in verification and inspections from the IAEA to implement the outcome of the talks.

Beyond the immediate diplomacy designed to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, the six-party process has already been recognized by many of the participants as having the potential to make an ongoing contribution to regional stability as the first official sub-regional dialogue in Northeast Asia. This consultation mechanism might in principle play an important role as part of an expanded dialogue on other regional security issues in Northeast Asia beyond the North Korean nuclear crisis; however, thus far the six party talks have been driven solely by diplomacy surrounding the North Korean nuclear issue, with little if any practical consideration given to developing a broader formal discussion on other security issues facing the region. The development of ASEAN Plus Three discussions among China, Japan, and South Korea appears to be the most effective sub-regional vehicle for pursuing regional cooperation, focusing primarily on cooperation in non-security areas. U.S. policymakers should take these developments into account as they consider how to most effectively preserve future U.S. influence in Northeast Asia.

2) Implications of a Nuclear North Korea for Regional Stability and U.S.-ROK Alliance Cooperation

The six party talks are currently premised on the idea that either the DPRK has not achieved nuclear weapons status or that the DPRK has neither the capability nor the intent to make that status irreversible. But the DPRK may already be a nuclear weapons state, and may be unlikely under current circumstances to renounce its nuclear option. If this is the case, it raises the question of whether the six party talks are simply a vehicle for preserving the collective illusion of a non-nuclear North Korea. For this reason, there is an urgent need for diplomacy designed to close the gap between the rhetorical consensus that a nuclear North Korea is unacceptable and the concerted actions the five parties surrounding North Korea are willing to take to deny Pyongyang a viable route to declared nuclear weapons state status. To the extent that neighboring states already regard North Korea as having achieved nuclear weapons status, it weakens the possibility that the six party talks might actually be able to achieve the objective of ensuring a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula. At the same time, it is not in the interest of any of the states in the region for North Korea to test and thus remove ambiguity regarding its nuclear program. Such actions would heighten tensions, influence strategic realities in the region, and might make North Korea's status as a nuclear weapons state irreversible.

The current situation has been described by Professor Satoshi Morimoto as the "Israeli model," a situation in which all parties believe that North Korea is a nuclear weapons state but North Korea does not proceed with testing that would confirm that status. One alternative is that North Korea might follow the "Pakistan model," openly testing on the premise that it can survive as a nuclear weapons state. Kim Jong-il may look at the events of 1998 in South Asia and decide that he can successfully achieve declared nuclear weapons status without danger to his regime. Given the fact that North Korea already faces economic sanctions, Kim Jong-il's feeling may be that further international

economic sanctions are not much of a threat. However, any change in the relationships with China and/or South Korea may have a significant impact on North Korea's economic prospects. Declared nuclear weapons status would jeopardize and delay North Korea's prospects for economic reform or integration with the region and would pose critical dilemmas for China and South Korea: they would feel pressure to impose sanctions to punish the regime but would not want to take actions that might lead to North Korea's destabilization and collapse.

North Korea's nuclearization could nudge Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan toward nuclear status and will alter the landscape of Northeast Asian security for the worse. The likelihood of a fully nuclear-armed Northeast Asia would increase the dangers of a regional nuclear war, but might also stabilize and reinforce the current regional order. The region would have to learn to manage conflicts in much the same way that the United States and the Soviet Union managed international conflicts during the Cold War, but would also carry the risk that crisis escalation could lead to miscalculation that would endanger not only regional but also global stability. South Asia's nuclearization has reinforced the standoff between India and Pakistan and has made the existence of that conflict more dangerous as a matter of global concern. Thus far, the biggest international concern has been with command and control issues and a desire to ensure that proper protections are in place for ensuring the security of India and Pakistan's respective nuclear establishments. U.S.-PRC coordination efforts to manage potential regional crises would grow more important if North Korea tests a nuclear weapon, and there would be a need for strengthened great-power cooperation and dialogue to manage potential conflicts in the region.

A nuclear North Korea may be more likely to miscalculate that it can expand its threats and blackmail to the outside world, and would most likely delay prospects for inter-Korean reconciliation and Korean reunification. Humanitarian aid that once flowed to North Korea as charity would be demanded as tribute to North Korea's nuclear leadership. Arguments about appeasement that ring hollow in light of North Korea's poverty and weakness might ring true in the context of nuclear braggadocio, driving South Korea and Japan to match North Korea's arsenal and igniting a new regional nuclear arms race. Japan examined the nuclear option in 1994 but decided otherwise; in the current Japanese domestic environment that is so consumed by North Korean abductions and other threats, the same restraint might not prevail.

The possibility of Japan's nuclearization would have ramifications for the U.S.-Japan relationship and lead to greater tensions between Tokyo and Beijing. The core dilemma for the government in Japan in considering how to respond to a nuclear North Korea would center around whether Japan retains confidence in the U.S. nuclear umbrella as a means of deterring a North Korean nuclear attack on Japan. To the extent that Japan feels that it is more directly threatened by potential North Korean aggression than the United States, Tokyo may be tempted to consider developing its own nuclear potential. The differing assessments between the United States and Japan in the aftermath of North Korea's 1998 *Taep'odong* missile launch are a good example of the types of circumstances and responses from the United States that could create Japanese doubts

about the relationship. However, U.S.-Japan alliance cooperation has grown considerably stronger following 9/11 with Japan's support in the global war on terrorism. At this moment, Japan prefers to manage regional security issues involving North Korea and China through the framework of the U.S.-Japan alliance and would not pursue nuclear weapons.

Likewise, a nuclear North Korea would have implications for the inter-Korean relationship, the South Korea-Japan relationship, and the U.S.-ROK alliance. It would be hard to imagine that South Korea would continue to accept the non-nuclear commitments it made as part of the North-South Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula if North Korea were to become a declared nuclear weapons state. South Korea-Japan relations have improved, but there is a deep underlying distrust on both sides when it comes to questions related to nuclear weapons development. North Korean nuclear threats could strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance if South Korea were to move closer to the United States as a means of shoring up extended deterrence and firming up reliance on the U.S. nuclear umbrella. In the context of six party talks, the escalation of concern about North Korea's nuclear threat has already had this effect to some degree. But it is also possible to imagine that a more assertive and nationalistic South Korea might want to match North Korean nuclear capabilities so as to remove any perceived advantage that the North may appear to have gained from developing nuclear weapons. Another possibility, in light of inter-Korean reconciliation, is that the North might simultaneously try to use its nuclear capabilities as a threat and enticement to South Korea, underscoring the utility of nuclear capability to ensure independence of the Peninsula as a strategic deterrent against the U.S., Japan, or other potential enemies and cajoling South Korea to move toward a policy of strategic independence as part of a policy designed to ultimately pursue Korean reunification.

A North Korean nuclear test would almost certainly trigger stronger U.S. diplomatic efforts to isolate North Korea. This would include putting pressure on China and South Korea to take actions to isolate the North and cut off economic cooperation. Such pressures would likely increase tensions in the U.S.-ROK alliance, particularly given South Korean public perceptions that the United States is somehow using the nuclear issue for its own strategic purposes to the detriment of Korean national interests. Thus far, the South Korean government has abdicated its responsibility to explain to the public the extent to which it is seeking cooperation with the U.S. in the six party talks or the strategic implications for South Korea of North Korea's nuclear weapons pursuits. The two governments also should cooperate more closely to minimize the collateral impact of any instability in North Korea and to insulate South Korea from any spillover, including preparations to manage the humanitarian, military, social, and political dimensions of such instability.

3) Implications of Inter-Korean Economic Integration for Regional Stability and U.S.-ROK Alliance Cooperation

The launching and acceleration of the inter-Korean reconciliation process, especially while U.S.-DPRK relations are blocked by the nuclear crisis, will have profound implications for the U.S.-ROK alliance. The implementation of the June 15, 2000 Joint Declaration was the starting point for such a process, and President Kim Dae-jung declared following his visit to Pyongyang that his visit had removed the prospect of another war on the Korean Peninsula. Gradually expanding inter-Korean exchanges have changed the public perception of North Korea, to the extent that opinion polls in early 2004 showed that the U.S. is now viewed as a greater potential source of threat than the DPRK.

Public momentum in South Korea is building in favor of moving forward with inter-Korean reconciliation as the North Korean nuclear issue drags on. An overwhelming majority of new members of the 17th National Assembly favored expanded engagement with North Korea, although there has been a dramatic shift toward support of the ROK-U.S. alliance with the development of a historical spat with China over whether the Koguryo kingdom is a part of Korean or Chinese national history. Although the ROK government has pledged not to initiate new projects with North Korea so long as the nuclear issue casts its shadow on the inter-Korean relationship, the Kaesong project has expanded considerably and is moving forward more rapidly than many had expected given the atmosphere surrounding the North Korean nuclear issue. The first South Korean businesses are expected to open operations in Kaesong by the end of 2004, but there is currently no reason to believe that the North Korean nuclear crisis will be over by that time.

The resumption of inter-Korean talks on security issues, including the resumption of military dialogue and two rounds of talks in late May and early June, has given South Koreans further hope for peaceful coexistence on the Korean Peninsula. These talks were more successful than anticipated: they achieved a mutual agreement to remove propaganda signs, institute a hotline, and to jointly develop a communications system to help avoid accidental conflicts in the Yellow Sea (West Sea). The results represent a significant step forward from October 2000, when senior leaders from the two militaries met with each other briefly in Jeju Island but could not find a sufficient basis for cooperation or confidence-building measures. The existence of an inter-Korean security dialogue opens the way for additional reconciliation measures, many of which will have a bearing on public perceptions in both the United States and South Korea on issues such as the reconfiguration of the USFK's basing arrangements in South Korea, the size and scope of future military-to-military cooperation, and the differing assessments of the governments regarding North Korea's nuclear program and how to respond to it.

The Kaesong Industrial Park project has reached a point where additional significant progress would represent a ratcheting up of South Korean economic assistance to North Korea, including areas that some analysts feel may benefit Kim Jong-il despite the DPRK's intransigence on nuclear issues. At the same time, some analysts have made

strong arguments that leading North Korea toward economic reform along the lines of the Chinese model is essential to integrating North Korea with its neighbors, neutralizing North Korea's threat, and easing its security dilemma to the extent that Pyongyang may no longer deem nuclear weapons essential to its survival. There are also a variety of complicated sanctions, export control arrangements, customs and point of origin rules under the World Trade Organization that would likely affect the U.S. capacity to import goods made in North Korea. These factors may affect the six party talks and could become sources of future conflict in the U.S.-ROK relationship.

As the inter-Korean reconciliation process proceeds, the U.S. should determine at what point Washington will consider the alliance in the context of peaceful coexistence on the Korean Peninsula. Given that the rationale for the U.S. presence on the Korean Peninsula has long been geared toward a threat from the North, it is important both to develop a convincing rationale for the continuation of the alliance and to develop a properly sequenced adjustment or exit strategy that recognizes the successful completion of the defense of South Korea against the threat from the North.

Although many analysts have argued convincingly that the continuation of the U.S.-ROK security alliance is in South Korea's national interest – given its geostrategic position surrounded by larger powers – the orientation and public preferences of a unified Korea – or even a South Korea that no longer fears invasion from the North – remain to be seen. South Koreans must reevaluate their own interests, identity, values, and position in Northeast Asia as part of the process of reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula. This is likely to be an incredibly time-consuming task, and it comes at a time Koreans are focused on domestic affairs to the exclusion of international relationships. This task is all the more complex as a result of the fact that South Korea feels pulled in opposite directions as it leans toward China as its leading economic partner while maintaining strong security ties with the United States.

While the relationship with the United States may provide the “security blanket” that would be necessary for South Koreans to have the luxury of sorting out these issues at a time of extraordinary political and social transition on the Korean Peninsula, it will be difficult for Americans to have many hopes for the relationship without knowing what values and interests South Koreans identify with and stand for as part of their own national identity. It will be considerably more difficult to explain to the U.S. public why it is necessary for U.S. troops to remain in Korea if indeed true peaceful coexistence is achieved on the Korean Peninsula or, alternatively, if it becomes clear that South Koreans perceive their values and interests as different or opposed to American values in a global context. The perceived divergence of shared values will make an alliance relationship much harder to manage; one example is the South Korean criticisms of the U.S. House of Representatives for its unanimous passage of the North Korean Human Rights Act. This leads to perceptions that the U.S. and South Korea, despite enjoying a democratic system, have great differences in perceptions on issues of values such as the meaning and application of human rights and the unacceptability of totalitarian oppression around the world.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Developing a Shared Vision for the Future

The U.S.-ROK alliance relationship is undergoing dramatic changes as both sides adapt to a changing strategic environment in Northeast Asia. It is possible to imagine that the security alliance will be substantially revised or ended in the near future. It is ironic that as the U.S. and South Korean societies have converged as dynamic democracies and market economies, that a divergence in threat perceptions would develop, endangering alliance coordination. Although there exists a comprehensive economic partnership, strong people-to-people ties, and growing respect for Korea and its economic capacity among Americans, maintaining strong political and security ties will take a greater investment than has been the case. There are good reasons for both sides to continue strong cooperation on many shared issues even if the relative importance of the United States and South Korea to each other as alliance partners has declined in light of changes in the global context and differences in strategic perceptions of North Korea. They must seek ways of redefining and reaffirming the alliance, resting it on a renewed public consensus in both countries over the value of the relationship, a commitment to mutual respect, and the affirmation of shared values. But it will take strong political leadership to make that case to the American and Korean people – leadership that has too often been absent in recent years.

If the security relationship is to be repaired, both governments will need to take bold steps to reaffirm the viability and relevance of alliance cooperation. Many of these steps will be difficult and can only be done through firm commitment at the presidential level. Otherwise, the divergences that have increasingly beset alliance cooperation will result in a relationship that fails to live up to its full potential – or one that is in need of revision because it simply can not live up to the high expectations required of alliance partners. Even under circumstances in which the two countries deemphasize their security relationship, there are still many areas in which the United States and South Korea are likely to work together, even if neither party is in the inner circle of the other. It is in the interest of both governments to manage any changes in the relationship in an amicable and mutually respectful way, avoiding circumstances in which the relationship is unduly negatively influenced by emotions or short-term domestic political responses that obscure opportunities for cooperation. Here are recommendations for consideration by both sides:

United States

- 1) Together with the ROK Government, Review and Reaffirm the Long-Term Strategic Objectives of the U.S.-ROK Alliance

The United States must determine whether it wants to work through and empower the existing alliance with the Republic of Korea to meet current problems such as the North Korean nuclear issue, or whether it prefers to take an alternative approach that might alienate traditional allies and lessen potential cooperation with those who have traditionally been closest to American views on many regional and global issues. An important consideration is whether the United States has the capacity to accomplish its

strategic objectives in Asia outside the existing alliance framework. Do the burdens of alliance cooperation with South Korea encumber the United States and prevent it from achieving its strategic objectives? Does a security relationship with South Korea offer any strategic advantages in the newly emerging security order in which China is likely to be a central player in regional affairs? These are among the hard questions American policymakers must weigh as they look at the future U.S. relationship with South Korea.

If the United States and South Korea remain committed to an alliance framework, perhaps the only way to dispel the doubts that have been created in recent years is for the two presidents to reaffirm the alliance relationship and to renew their commitment to joint cooperation in the near- to mid-term. Increasingly, it is likely that only a reaffirmation of the alliance relationship at the presidential level will restore confidence in the security relationship and provide the momentum necessary to implement the kind of cooperation that can manage divergent priorities and threat perceptions over North Korea.

Any such affirmation is likely to take place through a working-level process that requires both sides to review the fundamental scope, purposes, responsibilities, and costs of alliance cooperation. A similar process took place in the mid-1990s between the United States and Japan, resulting in the 1996 reaffirmation of the U.S.-Japan alliance between President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro, but no such review of the U.S.-ROK security alliance has ever taken place. There is clearly a need for deep discussion and development of a shared rationale for alliance cooperation to clarify scope, purposes, and strategic foundations of the alliance. This discussion should pay particular attention to whether there is a role for continued basing of U.S. forces in South Korea under conditions of peaceful coexistence or Korean reunification. Absent a shared rationale, the alliance is doomed to failure or a premature end. The Future of the Alliance talks have been focused on logistical matters related to the reconfiguration of the U.S. military footprint in South Korea, but such discussions presuppose some level of continued alliance cooperation. An explicit discussion that affirms the scope of continuing cooperation in the face of new post-Cold War challenges is long overdue and several specialists have advocated the need for such a review and reaffirmation over the past five years.

2) Employ a Diplomatic Strategy that Recognizes and Appeals to the Korean Public; Invest in Relationship Building Fundamentals and Cross-cultural Understanding

The United States has had such a strong relationship with a Korean war generation that has been truly grateful for American friendship and willingness to come to South Korea's defense in time of need. But as Korea's economic and industrial strength has risen and authoritarian governments have been replaced by a vibrant democracy, the younger generation has tended to view the U.S. not as a defender of Korea but as complicit with forces that suppressed democratic expression in South Korea for decades. Much of this thinking has been fanned by past government suppression of labor and teachers unions such as *Chungyojo* that have become powerful critics of the United States and are well-entrenched in the Korean school system.

The United States has often relied on the South Korean government to make its case, and has not developed ties with a younger generation of Koreans, many of whom resent U.S. heavy-handedness as one manifestation of growing Korean nationalist sentiment. Anti-American sentiment in Korea is faddish and not deep-seated, but its existence requires a more active effort to communicate directly with young Koreans through nontraditional means. If the U.S. is going to communicate its positions effectively to the South Korean public, it must not only develop a media strategy but must also renew short-term exchange opportunities, develop active cultural outreach, and more actively support education about the United States in Korean high schools and universities. One important way of reaching Korean youth is to develop a more active Korean language internet presence where accurate information on U.S. policy initiatives can be made widely available.

The reconfiguration of the U.S. footprint in South Korea will hopefully reduce conflicts between American forces and the local populations in South Korea, many of which have extended to surround U.S. military bases. Urbanization near many of those bases – and the continuing irritant posed by the U.S. military occupying such a prominent place in South Korea’s capital at Yongsan – created an unwelcome reminder of Seoul’s dependence on the United States for its security, even while South Korea’s economy has grown. However, the reconfiguration of U.S. troops alone will not be sufficient to minimize conflicts with Korean neighbors; it will also be necessary to invest in building local community relations, in new infrastructure to ensure quality of life at Camp Humphreys in Osan-Pyeongtaek, and in cross-cultural sensitivity training and other measures to help American soldiers adapt to a Korean cultural and social environment. For many years, the U.S. presence in South Korea has been sustained without making the comparable investments that have been made in the case of U.S. bases in Germany. If the U.S. presence in South Korea is to be sustainable, the requisite investment in relations with the local community in South Korea is necessary. Otherwise, it would be better in the long run for American forces to close shop and pursue strategic goals through means that do not require a continuous local presence in South Korea.

3) Work with South Korea as an Ally as the First Step in Containing North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons Program

The U.S. strategy in containing North Korea’s nuclear weapons has suffered from a divergence in priorities and perspectives between the senior leaders of the United States and South Korea, but it has suffered even more from the perception in Washington that South Koreans are no longer responsible or reliable allies. Yet the likelihood that the United States can achieve its strategic objective of eliminating the North Korean nuclear program without close cooperation from South Korea is quite low. In fact, one of North Korea’s objectives as it pursues its nuclear weapons development efforts is to weaken the alliance and divide South Korea and the United States.

Rather than pursuing a strategy that relies primarily on Beijing’s diplomatic efforts to bring North Korea under control, the United States needs to upgrade its strategic dialogue with South Korea on the future of the alliance and the future of nuclear weapons on the

Korean Peninsula. This will require an intensified dialogue with South Korea on a number of sensitive topics. It will also require a recognition of South Korea's desire to transform North Korea through support of the North's economic reforms. Most importantly, the United States needs to listen carefully to South Korean security concerns and consider whether it is possible to satisfy those concerns and achieve a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula. Given the broader strategic environment in Northeast Asia, it is hard to imagine that it will be possible to keep the Korean Peninsula non-nuclear absent a U.S. security guarantee and the promise of reliance on the U.S. nuclear umbrella to protect Seoul from potential aggression from either China or Japan.

If it is willing to go to extra lengths to seek a peaceful solution to North Korea's nuclear weapons development efforts and support concrete measures intended to promote inter-Korean reconciliation in the near-term, the U.S. will find it easier to strengthen alliance coordination to face less palatable scenarios. However, such a strategy would require intensive diplomatic efforts and a willingness to make the Korean Peninsula a priority at the highest levels of the U.S. government. Because of the continuing focus on Iraq, the United States has thus far done little beyond pro forma six party consultations to draw South Korea into a more active partnership to respond to North Korean nuclear weapons development efforts.

The strongest rationale for South Korean economic engagement with North Korea is that it can help to induce North Korea's economic dependency on the South, thereby reducing the likelihood of military conflict. But the United States has put little energy into developing a strategy for neutralizing North Korea's nuclear program that would also meet core South Korean security concerns, including diminishing collateral damage that would result from a military conflict with North Korea. The military and economic costs that would accompany such a conflict – even if it is unavoidable – remain unthinkable for most South Koreans. Increasingly, however, there is quiet recognition among some South Korean officials that it may be impossible to peacefully block North Korea from its nuclear development efforts, or that prudence requires proper contingency planning if diplomacy fails.

Republic of Korea

1) Determine the Relative Importance of the United States in South Korea's Long-Term Diplomatic Strategy

On the South Korean side, the critical prerequisite for progress in reaching the full potential of the U.S.-ROK relationship is for South Korea to arrive at a bipartisan consensus on the type of relationship that South Korea wants to have with the U.S. The relationship with the United States is now contested in South Korean society with the emergence of new political forces that oppose the alliance relationship and feel that it is time to reduce South Korean over-dependence on the United States for its security. Others feel that the United States has become an obstacle to reconciliation with the North or the United States actually endangers South Korea's security through its hostile policy toward the DPRK.

South Korea's political divisions have been exacerbated by partisan bickering and politicization of many key issues related to the relationship with the United States. The issue of South Korea's troop dispatch to Iraq has been viewed primarily through the lens of the alliance relationship, with relatively little attention given to the situation and needs in Iraq. The opposition has attempted to portray the reconfiguration of U.S. troops in Korea as a symbol that the United States has somehow lost faith in the Roh administration, despite close consultations between the Pentagon and the Blue House on these issues. The development of a bipartisan consensus within the National Assembly on the importance of the relationship with the United States – if it is attainable – would depoliticize the relationship and remove it as a hot button issue and target for South Korean media and civil activists who often criticize the United States as a proxy for dissatisfaction with the policies of the South Korean government.

The emergence of China as a source of dynamic economic growth has provided South Korea with an economic counterweight to dependence on the United States and has weakened South Korean perceptions of the importance of the U.S. economy. South Korea's diversification of its economic relationships and its increasing economic dependence on China raises the possibility that in the event of U.S.-PRC political tensions, South Korea's economic interests and its political interests may be perceived to conflict. Already South Korea shows much greater deference to China on cross-Strait issues and the Dalai Lama and has been willing to bury its political priorities, including handling of refugees from North Korea; however, the emerging Sino-Korean dispute over the historical significance of the Koguryo Kingdom may become the first significant political dispute between the two countries. One early effect of the dispute has been to restore support in the South Korean National Assembly for maintaining a strong relationship with the U.S.

2) Close the Gap Between the South Korean Government and Public Perspectives on the North Korean Nuclear Issue and the U.S.-ROK Alliance

One of the biggest frustrations for U.S. officials over the years has been the unwillingness of the ROK government to take responsibility with its own public for negotiated outcomes or other consultations between the two sides. While it is true that the United States has not always consulted adequately and has occasionally pressured Korean counterparts on some issues, it has been easy for the ROK government to play the role of victim by feigning surprise or ducking its share of responsibility on a number of issues on which it has been fully informed or to which it has agreed. For the sake of the future of the relationship and in the context of increasingly negative Korean public sentiment toward the United States, the ROK government should take responsibility for jointly agreed courses of action, even at the cost of public criticism.

The closeness of current U.S.-ROK coordination on the North Korean nuclear issue is not reflected in Korean media reports on the issue. The South Korean media's reporting on North Korea has downplayed the North Korean nuclear issue and the implications of North Korea's nuclear development, leaving a significant gap between public perceptions of the issue and the government's assessment. This gap could pose a serious problem if

the crisis escalates. The South Korean public is capable of making an informed judgment on the range of policy options toward North Korea if it is supplied with sufficient accurate information on the situation. But the agreement between Chairman Kim Jong-il and the major South Korean media outlets not to report negative information about the North provides an opportunity for leaders in Pyongyang to manipulate South Korean public opinion.

It is fair to ask whether the alliance is sufficiently important to South Korea's security interests that the Roh administration will defend it against public attack. During his first visit to the United States, President Roh made a number of brave comments in support of the relationship, but was criticized harshly by progressive student groups and other Roh supporters upon his return to South Korea. The decision to publicly defend the alliance at the time was a courageous step by the president; however, he has been much less vocal on the importance of the relationship with the United States since his return to Seoul. Some critics say that Roh is good at saying what his audience wants to hear, changing his message to appeal to different audiences. But as president, Roh does not have the luxury of delivering different messages to different constituencies. Although there has been good official cooperation between the U.S. and South Korea, President Roh is rarely heard on alliance issues these days. President Roh's consistent and public attempts to depoliticize the relationship with the United States and forge a domestic consensus in favor of continued alliance cooperation would go a long way toward stabilizing the U.S.-ROK alliance.

3) Offer a Positive Vision of South Korea's Capacity to Contribute to Regional and Global Stability in Proportion to Its Economic Strength

South Korea's co-hosting of the 2002 World Cup was a great opportunity for South Korea. The South Korean support for its soccer team was on full display, and the vitality and excitement won the admiration of the region and the world. The World Cup was a tremendous opportunity for South Korea to reach out and play a leading role on the global stage. As the world's 12th largest economy, a vivacious democracy, and a successful market economy that aspires to transition from manufacturing-led growth to knowledge and innovation-led growth, South Korea has much to offer the world. Increasingly, South Korean companies are known globally and their products have earned a reputation for quality and reliability. There is no doubt that South Korea has come a long way, and the U.S.-ROK alliance has helped create the stable environment that has facilitated South Korea's tremendous economic advancement.

South Korea also aspires to be at the center of the region's tremendous economic growth. As China's economy continues to develop and Japan's economy revives, there are many opportunities for South Korea to continue to grow and be a primary contributor to the region's economic growth. Up to now, the U.S.-ROK alliance has been the main platform that has provided the stability and security necessary to achieve prosperity. The United States and South Korea – long-time partners and now fellow democracies and market economies – have the opportunity to extend their partnership to support and stabilize other parts of developing Asia and the world.

Thus, it is fair to ask a younger, idealistic, more nationalistic generation of South Koreans a fundamental question, especially given the remarkable accomplishment of South Korea's development over the past few decades: what should South Korea stand for in the world today? For what accomplishment or distinctive experience should South Korea be internationally known? What part of South Korea's own experience might it contribute to the rest of the world?

South Korea now has a significant stake in maintaining regional and global stability, and is fully capable of taking up some of those burdens, either in partnership with the United States or through some other vehicle. South Korean contributions certainly no longer must be identified or defined solely through its relationship with the United States, but the U.S. can continue to support South Korea's contributions to international stability, prosperity, and well-being since a strong partnership with a dynamic, prosperous, democratic South Korea is manifestly in the U.S. interest. The task for South Korea's political leadership is to define these opportunities concretely and to take hold of a new vision that does not risk what the country has already gained, but rather extends stability and prosperity throughout the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia.

About the Author

Scott Snyder is a Senior Associate with the Pacific Forum CSIS and a Senior Associate at the Asia Foundation, who has just completed four years of service as the Asia Foundation's representative in Korea. Previously he served as an Asia specialist in the Research and Studies Program of the U.S. Institute of Peace and an Abe Fellow, a program administered by the Social Sciences Research Council. While at USIP he completed a study as part of the Institute's project on cross-cultural negotiation entitled *Negotiating on the Edge: North Korean Negotiating Behavior*. Snyder has written extensively on Korean affairs and has also conducted research on the political/security implications of the Asian financial crisis and on the conflicting maritime claims in the South China Sea. Snyder received his B.A. from Rice University and an M.A. from the Regional Studies-East Asia Program at Harvard University. He was the recipient of a Thomas G. Watson Fellowship in 1987-88 and attended Yonsei University in South Korea.