

Korean Unification and the Role and Future of the ROK-US Alliance

Korea National Diplomatic Academy (KNDA)

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| Rapporteur | JEONG Hye-yeong Researcher, KNDA |

Scott SNYDER

The United States and South Korea announced the “Joint Vision for the Alliance of the Republic of Korea and the United States” in June 2009, in which they expressed their commitment to the peaceful reunification of Korea on the principles of democracy and market economy. The U.S. reaffirmed its support for the South-led reunification, emphasizing that the security of Korea as well as the region’s stability is its top priority.

The U.S. puts the stability of the Korean Peninsula before anything else, although relations could become uncomfortable if Korea pushes for reunification too actively.

Washington believes that maintaining the alliance even after the two Koreas are reunited is desirable in terms of its strategic interests. The future of the alliance appears to depend on the necessity of guaranteeing stability on the Korean Peninsula and neighboring region as well as the ROK-US (Republic of Korea – the U.S.) alliance.

The U.S. intervention in reunification brings controversy over its legitimacy, but the ROK-US

alliance will likely continue to be crucial, because Korea expects the U.S. to get involved in rebuilding projects after the two Koreas reunify.

From the long-term perspective, Northeast Asia’s political climate is expected to be influenced by changes in intra-regional relations, but the two countries will continue to maintain their security alliance by organizing multilateral mechanisms.

CHENG Xiaohe

Beijing is holding an antagonistic view on the ROK-US alliance, although it has strategically cooperative ties with Seoul and Washington, respectively. This makes it probable that the rivalry between the U.S. and China will continue even after two Koreas reunify. China is deeply concerned about the future ROK-US alliance.

A reunified Korea will likely go through a transition period for over a decade before it becomes stabilized. It is also expected to be in turmoil, providing justification for the presence of U.S. troops on the Korean Peninsula.

The defensive role of the ROK-US alliance is to



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protect most cities in South Korea, which are well within range of North Korean missiles. It is also capable of intervening in the inter-Korean affairs in case of contingencies resulting from the implementation of sanctions on North Korea by the United Nations Security Council and follow-up measures to apply pressure on North Korea.

I do not think Washington will pull out the U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula if the process of reunification continues to be deadlocked, but Beijing is expected to insist on the pullout of the U.S. soldiers from Korea.

It seems unlikely that the ROK-US alliance will collapse even after the U.S. and China improve relations further after Korean reunification, because it has been built to meet their shared security needs and is the result of decades of friendly relations between the two countries.

KIM Hyun-wook

In the event of a North Korea contingency, it will not be so easy for Washington to opt to intervene in it, given the circumstances of Northeast Asia, in which Washington and Beijing are maintaining the balance of power.

The future the ROK-US alliance after Korean reunification depends on how the two Koreas will be reunited. It is desirable that South Korea lead the unification process for the continued presence of U.S. Forces on the Korean Peninsula.

The two Koreas are divided over how to reunite themselves. South Korea calls for an economic unity and confederation formula, while North Korea favors a federal system.

After Korean reunification, other regional or global factors than North Korea would be perceived as

a threat to the ROK-US alliance, and South Korea will no longer consider China a threat.

The U.S. and South Korea need to draw up a post-unification roadmap to retain their alliance. The scale and deployment of the U.S. troops, strategic flexibility and the authority of military command will top the agenda of their discussions.

After reunification, the ROK-US Combined Forces Command will be dissolved, and the command’s operational control over South Korean troops is not expected to be transferred to U.S. Forces Korea, but turn into the parallel command structure as seen in the U.S. Forces Japan and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces.

Various changes are expected from the reunification, including a shift in U.S. military strategies, the dissolution of North Korean threats and the reduction of U.S. Army troops in Korea. Given the possible relations between a reunified Korea and China, it would not be possible to relocate the U.S. Forces Korea to the North. It appears reasonably possible for the armed forces of a reunified Korea to be stationed on the northern part of the Korean Peninsula.

Junya NISHINO

What matters most to Japan is that the Korean reunification is achieved peacefully. Ultimately, however, I support South Korea-led reunification, no matter how it is achieved.

If a contingency arises on the Korean Peninsula, Japan has no control over it, but South Korea does. South Korea should take the initiative in managing the situation.

North Korea’s repeated nuclear tests and long-range missile tests are providing an excuse for

Japan to beef up its capabilities to respond to the North Korean threats. Tokyo is holding close discussions on this issue with Seoul and Washington.

Trilateral cooperation between Korea, Japan and the U.S., which is central to deterring North Korea's provocations, has greatly contributed to engaging with North Korea since the 1990s.

Given Seoul's sensitive reaction to Tokyo's move to boost its self-defense capabilities, Japan should increase the transparency of its policy through security cooperation with South Korea.

Japan believes that the ROK-US alliance will provide a foundation for peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula during and after reunification.

IN Nam-sik

Common threats must be identified to maintain the ROK-US alliance after reunification. China's rise to superpower status might be seen as a threat, but it is important that we strike a balance between the threat and economic opportunity that China poses.

What counts in the discussion on the future of the ROK-US alliance is mutual understanding of each other. It is important for us to precisely predict the future, as the U.S. leadership and foreign policies are standing at the crossroads amid the Trump phenomenon.

As the ROK-US alliance after reunification may develop into a trilateral security alliance between Korea, the U.S. and Japan, or a trilateral cooperative mechanism for regional cooperation, Korea should prepare its vision for the multilateral relations.

Jim BOLGER (former Prime Minister of New Zealand)

It is important to have long-term and short-term goals for reunification so that it may be possible to achieve the goals stage by stage.

It will also be important to set goals for South and North Korea to live on together sustainably.

A positive role of a third party in inter-Korean talks should be considered.

[Q & A]

Q. Jim BOLGER It is a worry that Donald Trump's "America First" policy could push America backward. Do you think it will have a great effect on the ROK-US alliance?

Q. PARK In-kook (Secretary-General, Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies) China said it would put "maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula" before "denuclearizing the peninsula," when it unveiled its policy on the Korean Peninsula in 2009, which I believe has led North Korea in the wrong direction. Isn't it about time for Beijing to readjust its policy priorities to focus on the denuclearization of North Korea?

Q. SHIN Dong-ik Professor Cheng Xiaohe said a unified Korea will experience a transition period for about ten years, during which the withdrawal of U.S. troops will not be necessary. Is there any reason for giving it ten years?

A. Snyder History shows, as Trump claimed, that Seoul and Washington have discussed on and off the issue of pulling U.S. troops out of Korea. I think they will reach a point sometime in the future where they should conclude this discussion. According to opinion polls in the U.S., more Americans are showing a tendency of sticking to conservatism, which I believe is indicative of internationalism, not isolationism.

A. Cheng In China's policies on the Korean Peninsula, there are some underlying contradictions between three factors: peace and stability, denuclearization and settlement through dialogue. Not only China but also other countries should find ways to achieve both goals on the Korean Peninsula - peace and stability and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is a precondition for peace and stability. Priorities will be readjusted over time, but China's stance on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula won't change. The transition period after the reunification can last over ten years or fifteen years. They are given for the sake of convenience with no particular reason.

Towards New Cooperative Leadership in Asia: Theory and Practice

East Asia Foundation

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| Moderator | PARK Cheol-hee Professor, GSIS, Seoul National University |
| Presenter & Discussant | WANG Yong Professor, Center for International Political Economy, Peking University John NILSSON-WRIGHT Head of Asia Programme, Chatham House John DELURY Professor, GSIS, Yonsei University |
| Rapporteur | CHOI Ha-eun Fellow, East Asia Foundation Global Asia |

Strategic dialogue among national leaders constitutes a critical platform for peace and stability in Asia. However, conflicts in security interest, and diverging economic interests and cultural values produce conflicts among national leaders, thus making diplomatic situations uneasy and unstable. This session looks at realistic ways of enhancing cooperation among leaders in Asia under newly-unfolding strategic contexts.

- **Park** This session will discuss sub-topics under the main theme of the Jeju Forum, "Asia's New Order and Cooperative Leadership," with three distinguished experts. In fact, regional cooperation in Asia is a frequently discussed subject at the Jeju Forum, which means it is such a significant issue and, at the same time, an abstract one that eludes a clear answer. In today's session, we will explore concrete ways to forge cooperation in the region amid the rise of China, Japan's military and security alliance with the U.S. and North Korean provocations.
- **Wang** There has been a lot of discussion about the rise of China, but many are misguided by exaggerated facts. It is right to call it a rise of all of

Asia, not China, alone. The rise of Asia is one of the most important developments in international relations over the last 20 years after the end of the Cold War. Major Asian countries, including Korea, China and Japan, share more common interests and are integrated on a higher level. On the other hand, the region faces diverse challenges such as territorial disputes, history issues and competition in security affairs, resulting from the changes in the regional order due to the sudden rise of China after the financial crisis of the world in 2008. Therefore, we should recognize the new order in Asia and seriously consider how to restructure this after setting common goals. Departing from the legacies of the Cold War and pro-U.S. lines, we should realize that Asia is divided into the Pivot to Asia strategy and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Without repeating the past, such as ideological confrontation, we should be more open and tolerant toward each other, and make concerted efforts to build a new regional order. China, too, has to be more responsible as a rising state, approach other countries more cautiously, and listen to them. Recent Chinese foreign policies, like the Asia Infrastruc-