

## **ROK Military Transformation and ROK-US Security and Maritime Cooperation: MD, PSI and Dokdo Island**

Taewoo Kim  
Korea Institute for Defense Analyses

### **ABSTRACT**

In the last decade the ROK-U.S. alliance has soured as the two ideologically slanted predecessor administrations of Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun brandished 'idealist policy experiments' over issues critical to the alliance. Under the banner of 'autonomy,' the Roh administration initiated the 2007 decision to separate operational control (OPCON) and dismantle the Combined Forces Command (CFC) by 2012. The Defense Reform 2020 was a decisive masterpiece to placate the conservative realists critical to the Roh's leftist experiments. The task of redressing the vestige of distortions belongs to the newly elected Lee Myung Bak, who already began restoration of the bilateral relations since the two summits in 2008, which promised to forge a 'strategic alliance.' If the 2007 agreement over OPCON and CFC is irreversible, the Lee administration has no other choice but to formulate a new security cooperation while utilizing the Defense Reform as the highway leading to military transformation and upgraded ROK-U.S. cooperation in that regard. The rationale is that the U.S. will remain a critical partner even after the transfer of OPCON in all defense areas such as collaboration upon a Korean contingency, purchase of new weapon systems, and interoperability. There are other critical issues that need mutual adjustment and understanding. For South Korea, more active participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) is worth a try. The U.S. needs to understand South Korea's hesitation to fully participate in the U.S.-initiated TMD. Technically, the proximity to North Korea's high speed ballistic missiles may nullify the South's missile defense efforts. Politically, such participation will irritate China and Russia. Particularly, U.S. recognition of Japan's claim over Dokdo (Takesima) island, if any, will pour cold water on ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral maritime cooperation, and dishearten 'ordinary South Koreans' who pin high expectations on the 'strategic alliance.'

**KEY WORDS:** ROK-U.S. alliance, Dokdo Island, Takesima Island, military transformation, missile defense, PSI, defense reform, operational control, and maritime cooperation

### **Motives behind ROK Military Transformation**

In the United States, the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) movement gave way to military transformation in the 1990s. Similarly though later in time, South Korean strategic planners started their own debates on the RMA and military transformation by benchmarking American examples and ratiocination. Nevertheless, the military transformation spurred on in the U.S. and that which occurred in South Korea differ greatly in motives and process.

In the U.S., the term 'military transformation' dates back to the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), while the 2001 terrorist attack served as a real catalyst that gave stimulus for the military transformation to proceed in full scale. In fact, the 9.11 attack sent to the historical junkyard the traditional assumptions that "Terrorists create a sense of terror for political purposes and do not necessarily have motives for mass killing," and that "non-state terrorist groups lack in system and capability to induce mass killing." The 9.11 attack, in which terrorists purposefully committed promiscuous killings, fashioned America's global strategy. Under the new strategies, Washington's main enemy was not Russia but the 'rogue states,' and henceforth the U.S. attached more importance to the protection of America and its allies from terrorist attacks than it had previously.

America's new global strategy brandished three prongs: reserving the right to a first-strike, forming new alliances, and undergoing military transformation. First-strike strategy was repeatedly emphasized by President George W. Bush despite controversies over its legitimacy in the context of an international debate. A key to the new alliance strategy was to step up global cooperation with allies to isolate the terrorists. Meanwhile, military transformation originated from the will to consolidate U.S. military superiority by constructing capability-based military forces.

For this purpose, the Bush administration disclosed through the 2001 QDR its plan to comprehensively reform and improve the basic concept of military forces, capability, systems and manpower. Through military transformation, the U.S. sought to construct mutually intertwined and network-centric military capabilities to secure victories in critical wars. In sum, military transformation in the United States was initiated by concrete and urgent goals to 'protect America from the terrorist threat' and its importance and inevitability have been openly elucidated.

### **Separation of Operational Control**

In contrast, in South Korea military transformation took shape amid the Roh Moo Hyun government's attempt to subdue and muffle the risks

attached to his idealist policy experiments. Rather than running on literal objectives as supposed by the term, military transformation was envisaged by ‘Defense Reform 2020’ that the Roh government came up with to silence opponents to his policy experiments.

Under the banner of idealism, the Roh administration espoused the following key values: ‘equality’ in domestic affairs ‘Korean solidarity’ in policies toward North Korea and ‘autonomy’ in foreign policy. Under the ideal of ‘equality’ it placed equal distribution above economic growth. In its North Korea policies, ‘Korean reconciliation’ dominated all other policies but without sufficient self-introspection. In foreign policy, ‘autonomy’ brought about the consequence of further fueling xenophobic sentiments and anti-Americanism among the younger generation, which not only hurt the traditional ROK-U.S. alliance and ROK-Japan relations, but also somewhat soured ties with China and Russia that had been fostered ever since rapprochement in the early 1990s. It was against this backdrop that the Roh government initiated the decision to separate the operational control (OPCON) and dismantle the Combined Forces Command. Thus, many South Koreans evaluate the five years of Roh government to have sought to experiment with idealist leftist politics.

Nevertheless, the Roh government’s initiation of the OPCON decision faced vehement accusations from the realist conservatives. The realists argued that a system facilitating the prevention of war and the achievement of swift victory in such a case should be above autonomy. They also maintained that the transfer of OPCON and dissolution of the CFC would dilute the U.S. will to intervene should a Korean contingency arise, making a full utilization of advanced U.S. military forces impossible. With these diametrically opposed views, former defense ministers took to the street. However, the Roh’s government, supported by liberals who were dominating internet debates, never succumbed to conservative pressure. Roh’s attempt to separate OPCON was accommodated by U.S. decision makers who, under the banner of ‘strategic flexibility,’ desired to downsize the overseas U.S. military presence. In the 38th Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) held in October 2006, both nations agreed to separate OPCON by 2009-2012. In February 2007, the newly-appointed ROK Defense Minister, Jangsu Kim, visited Washington and signed a final agreement with his American counterpart to separate OPCON as of April 17, 2012.

### **Self-reliant Defense and Defense Reform 2020**

The concept of ‘self-reliant defense’ was the Roh government’s first attempt to silence its conservative opposition. The expression ‘self-reliance in defense’ itself seemed tantalizing, but was soon confronted by

realist defense experts. It then lost persuasiveness when realists pointed out that no nation is purely self-reliant in defense and that no nation seeks perfect autonomy in the modern world wherein countries trade under the principle of comparative advantage and maximize their security interests through alliance politics. This necessitated the Roh government to reconfigure the term into ‘cooperative self-reliance in defense.’

Defense Reform 2020 was Roh’s ambitious endeavor to materialize ‘cooperative self-reliance in defense’—a decisive masterpiece to placate critics and realize ‘autonomy.’ The crux was to allot 621 trillion won (some \$600 billion) of defense budget by 2020 to construct highly mobile and scientific military forces by improving weapon systems and force structure while decreasing troop levels from 670,000 to 500,000. Pushing aside the Roh government’s motives, Defense Reform 2020, despite miscellaneous pitfalls, was reflective of general trends in military transformation within the U.S. and a decreasing birth ratio and diminishing human resources in South Korea, thus highlighting an apt trajectory for South Korean military forces. For this purpose, Defense Reform Law was enacted on December 28, 2006.

### **OPCON and Strategic Alliance**

Victory for Lee Myung Bak in the 2007 presidential elections heralded the terminus of the idealist policy experiment launched by President Roh and his followers. Since his inauguration in February 2008, President Lee has begun to push ahead with the restoration of ROK-U.S. relations as a top priority in national goals. In the summits of April and August, the two leaders agreed on ‘trust, value, and construction of peace’ as the future vision along which the mutual alliance should pursue, and subsequently promised to build a ‘strategic alliance.’

Immediately after President Lee’s inauguration, some realist conservatives renewed their demand for the renegotiation of the OPCON decision. Nevertheless, many obstacles ambushed them. Washington was unruffled by the bilateral agreement, with more than a few U.S. military officials retorting, “Is this not what South Korea wanted?” The resignation of South Korean military officials was clear to those who saw the OPCON agreement as having crossed the ‘point of no return’ and were instead in a feverish rush to map out independent operational plans in preparation for the separation of OPCON. President Lee, who refuses to represent conservatives despite owing his landslide victory in the presidential election to the faction and instead focuses on economic pragmatism, is not likely to make a desperate attempt to undo what has been already done over the OPCON issue, amid a variance of economic

crises such as the upheaval over importation of American beef, skyrocketing oil prices, and unstable foreign exchange rates.

It is noteworthy that different groups see Defense Reform 2020 through different eyes, depending on the personal objectives they harbor. During the Roh government, Defense Reform 2020 was used as a tool to encompass ‘autonomy,’ functioning as a shield against conservative accusations. Rather than exerting energy on renegotiating the OPCON agreement, the Lee government seems more likely to utilize the Defense Reform 2020 and accordant military transformation for multiple purposes such as intensifying ROK-U.S. relations, achieving the fruition of the ‘strategic alliance’ he has pledged to support, and removal of the conservatives’ misgivings. To pure strategic planners, the reform program is likely to serve as the highway leading to military transformation.

### **Military Transformation in Defense Reform 2020**

Key components of military transformation now under way in the U.S. are divided into three areas: transformation of technologies and weapons, configuration of military structures, and conversion in force operation.<sup>1</sup> If this categorization is applied to South Korea, one can easily find the Defense Reform 2020 already inclusive of many of the components of general military transformation. To implement the reforms, the Roh government, with enactment of the Defense Reform Law, disclosed a 15-year blueprint for which some \$600 billion will be pumped into the cause by the end of 2020.

Components of Defense Transformation

Area	Components
Transformation of Technologies and Weapons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information system and grids</li> <li>• Technologies and subcomponents</li> <li>• Legacy weapon systems</li> <li>• New platforms</li> <li>• Smart Munitions</li> </ul>
Configuration of Force Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combat force structures and Organization</li> <li>• Logistic support and mobility</li> <li>• C4ISR</li> <li>• Domestic infrastructure and bases</li> <li>• Overseas presence and assets</li> </ul>
Conversion in Force Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Networking of forces</li> <li>• Joint doctrines</li> <li>• Service doctrines</li> <li>• Regional commander in chief’s operation plan and campaign plan</li> <li>• Interoperability</li> </ul>

In the configuration of force structures, the Ministry of National Defense would downsize the force levels from 670,000 to 500,000 and slash the size of reservists from 3 million to 1.5 million, with the 550,000 men-strong Army reduced to 360,000, while the Air Force and Navy will be conversely strengthened from 64,000 and 67,000 to the 70,000 level, respectively. By doing so, the Army-Navy-Air Force ratio will be altered to 70:15:15 from the current structure in which the overgrown Army dominates all other services. The Ministry of Defense has suggested reducing the number of generals from 440 to 380-390 in an attempt to streamline the command systems. For high efficiency in combat command, the Ministry also disclosed plans to replace the current 1st and 3rd Army with Ground Operation Command, reshuffle the 2nd Army Corps into Rear Area Operation Command, and decrease the number of divisions from 49 (including two marine divisions) to 20. For an effective response to the threat of North Korean artillery forces deployed in the truce line, the Army decided to establish Guided Missile Command (GMC).<sup>2</sup> All in all, the Defense Reform 2020 predicts extensive transformation in force structures.

The decision to separate OPCON gave South Korea new tasks pertaining to the development of independent doctrines as well as new command cooperation systems. Purchase of new weapons systems to support a configured force structure and doctrine should be an integral part of any defense reform. In this vein, pursuant to article 22 of the Defense Reform Law,<sup>3</sup> the Ministry of Defense mapped out an ambitious plan to achieve what strategic planners would call 'transformation of technologies and weapons.' The following are new weapons systems to be secured under the 'Mid-term Defense Plan 2007-2011' which covers the initial period of the Defense Reform 2020.

Currently, the Defense Reform 2020 is making steady progress. Surely, there have been hiccups, like a glitch in budget acquisitions owing to an exaggerated expectation in economic growth rate,<sup>4</sup> a petty merit-system mindset clouding reformers, and unilateral troop reduction goals disregarding the insecurity from North Korea's nuclear threat. However, the Defense Reforms 2020 has now become an irreversible national program.

It is interesting that each of different groups view the Defense Reform 2020 with a self-centered slant, promoting that group's own interest. To the architects of the Roh government, Defense Reform 2020 was a useful populist slogan to carve out 'Korean nationalism' and gain 'autonomy' from U.S. influence, while to the Lee government, the reforms may be utilized as a cooperation channel leading to a 'strategic alliance.' To the students of national defense, it will be dubbed a precious opportunity to

Technologies and Weapon Systems  
in the Mid-term Defense Plan 2007-2011

Categories	Components
Surveillance and Reconnaissance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-purpose satellite (2009)</li> <li>• AWACS (2012)</li> <li>• Satellite Communication (2011)</li> <li>• Middle and High Altitude (UAV)</li> <li>• Tactical Reconnaissance and Alligence System</li> </ul>
Precision strike	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addition of Aegis Ships</li> <li>• Addition of F-15K fighters</li> <li>• Mid-air refueling planes</li> <li>• Large Transportation planes</li> <li>• Landing ships (LPX)</li> <li>• Middle-size submarines</li> <li>• Maneuvering Helicopters</li> <li>• Addition of K-9 self-propelled howitzers</li> <li>• Addition of K-1 Tanks</li> <li>• Other PGMs</li> </ul>
Intelligence, Information and Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Korea Joint Command Control System (KJCCS)</li> <li>• Military Information Merging System (MIMS)</li> <li>• Korea Combat Training Center (KCTC)</li> <li>• Improvement of military communication infrastructures through BTL (Build-Transfer-Lease)</li> </ul>

achieve scientific military forces through military transformation. Here, one may easily detect the meaningful difference between the Lee government and its predecessor. For the Lee government and its strategic planners alike, successful implementation of Defense Reform 2020 needs alliance cooperation as a precondition. This is because the U.S. will retain its seat as a critical partner, even after the eventual separation of OPCON in almost all defense areas such as collaboration upon a Korean contingency, purchase of new weapon systems, and interoperability.

### **Unending Agony over Missile Defense**

#### **South Korea's Missile Defense Capability**

North Korea has a 40-year-long history of missile development since it emulated Russian and Chinese technologies. North Korea, now with its

own capability of developing middle and long-distance missiles, deploys formidable ballistic missiles. To South Korea, the North's missile power is an integral part of the nuclear threat. If North Korea decides on a nuclear attack against the South, Scud-B (300 km), Scud-C (500km), Scud-D (700km) and Rodong-1 (1,000km) will be the most likely delivery vehicles. Deapodong-1 (2200km) and Daepodong-2 (5.000-6.000km) now under development will be a significant addition to its delivery capability. In addition, North Korea can use planes like IL-28, MIG-21, MIG 23, MIG-29 for nuclear attack purposes.

North Korea's Missile Bases



Source: FAS(Federation of American Scientists)  
<http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/dprk/facility/>

U.S. Interception Missiles

Interception Missiles	PAC-2	PAC-3	SM-2 Block IV A
Weight	900kg	320kg	1,450kg
Speed	Mach 5	Mach 5	Mach 3.5
Highest Altitude	24,000m	15,000m	33,000m
Interception Distance/Plane	70-160 km	15-90km	Range 240km
Interception Distance/Missile	15-20 km	15-30km	

While South Korea is exposed to the North's nuclear threat, its missile defense capability is severely limited. Currently, South Korea is mulling over the purchase of 48 PAC-2 AMT missiles now deployed in Germany and SM-2 Block IVA missiles for three Aegis ships under the SAM-X project<sup>5</sup>

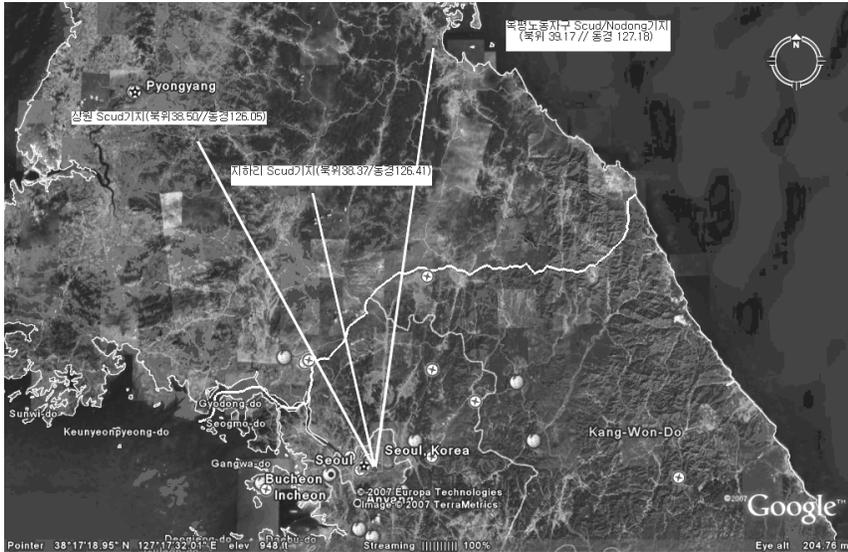
The above interception missiles will have only limited defense capability. Currently, the USFK deploys PAC-2s and PAC-3s in South Korea with the purpose of protecting U.S. bases. In case of a Korean contingency, the U.S. may dispatch Aegis ships armed with SM-3s. Hence, South Korea's SAM-X system, if applied in parallel to general ROK-U.S. cooperation, may accrue some defense capability. Nevertheless, such a system is by no means effective in interdicting North Korea's high speed ballistic missiles, although this does not mean that the SAM-X system will be useless since it is to deal with various threats from the air.

### **ROK-US Missile Defense Cooperation**

Currently, the U.S. is developing a three-phased missile interception system for Theater Missile Defense (TMD). The U.S. is developing airborne laser (ABL) systems for boost phase interception and testing Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) systems and Navy Theater Wide (NTW) missiles like SM-3s for in-flight phase interception. For terminal phase interception, it deploys SM-2 Block IV for ships and PAC-3s on ground. For TMD the U.S. is collaborating with Japan and Taiwan, while SM-3 missiles are now co-developed by the U.S. and Japan. South Korea, however, is not participating in the U.S.-initiated missile defense. South Korea's passive attitude stems from both technical and political reasons.

Technically speaking, the proximity to North Korea nullifies the South's missile defense efforts, as North Korea's missiles can strike targets in South Korea within 3-7 minutes. Missiles launched near the truce line can penetrate Seoul in less than a minute. It is technically not feasible for a South Korean defense system, if any, to detect and interdict the incoming missiles like Rodongs or Scud-Cs, more than half of whose flight is exo-atmospheric, and occurs in the blink of an eye. South Korea's SAM-X program, when completed, will exercise limited defense capability for only terminal phase interception.

Given the sensitivity of inter-Korean military relations, it is not possible to attempt boost phase interception by an air-born laser which is the only feasible way to proceed. While ABL is not yet a completely perfected technology, it is unthinkable to deploy such a mechanism over the North's airspace. In addition, the fact that North Korea has other



DPRK Missile Flying Time to Seoul

NK's Missile Base	Distance to Seoul	Flying Time
Okpyung	191 km	5 minutes
Jihari	127 km	3 minutes
Sangwondong	168 km	4 minutes

ways of launching a nuclear attack via commando infiltration or dirty bomb sprays renders South Korea's missile defense investments even more unattractive.

Political sensitivity is another reason South Korea underplays MD. South Korea's full participation in the U.S.-initiated TMD will never fail to irritate China and Russia, both of whom are already hypersensitive to the Eastward expansion of NATO and U.S. cooperation with Eastern European states on missile defense. Phrased differently, full participation in the U.S. MD initiative will be a political burden for South Korea for which China and Russia are important neighboring powers. Domestically, voices of some NGOs that equate full-scale MD cooperation with the U.S. as the nation's subordination constitutes another grave political obstacle.

### Future Tasks

Nevertheless, an ironclad rule for South Korea is that the nation can not stay helplessly vulnerable to the North's WMD threat indefinitely. In this sense, South Korean strategic planners pay attention to the fact that

intensification of MD cooperation with the U.S. will help infuse vitality to the alliance and construct a strategic alliance. They are also aware that such cooperation will contribute to a military transformation. This is why Seoul's strategic planners scrutinize ways to reinforce the terminal phase interception capability, and despite the problematic technical feasibility and political burden, examine possibilities for an upgraded ROK-U.S. cooperation over in-flight interception system. There is also exploration into efforts to consolidate intelligence cooperation with regard to missile defense. Some strategic planners are critical of the current defense-oriented missile policy and argue that South Korea should develop its own offensive missiles to offset the threat from the North. Likewise, whether and how to step up missile defense cooperation level with the U.S. remains a homework for South Korean security policy makers.

### **Issues in Maritime Cooperation: PSI and Dokdo Island ROK-U.S.-Japan Maritime Cooperation**

The 9.11 terrorist attacks actuated changes in American maritime strategies. For example, Admiral Vernon E. Clark has identified enlarged capabilities for 'sea strike,' 'sea shield,' and 'sea basing' as what the U.S. requires in the 21st century ('sea power 21'.)<sup>6</sup> For enlargement of sea strike capability, he proclaims an efficient combination of C5ISR (command, control, communication, computers, combat systems, intelligence, and reconnaissance), precision and secrecy. Admiral Clark seeks global sea control power pertaining to a sea shield, while with regard to sea basing, he emphasized a sea logistics system that guarantees a speedy supply of war materials. Admiral Clark's ideas contributed to molding the current U.S. maritime strategy with its emphasis on forward presence, deterrence, sea control, and efficient power projection.<sup>7</sup> Cooperation with allies should be a prerequisite in order for the U.S. to have a good command of such strategies, and ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral cooperation should be essential to U.S. strategies in East Asia.

South Korea and the U.S. have long confirmed solidarity through regular joint exercises. Currently, the two nations implement Ulji Freedom Guardian Exercise to be prepared for separation of the OPCON in 2012 and the Key Resolve Exercise to double-check the Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (RSOI) system.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, ROK-Japan joint exercises have been limited to purely search and rescue operations. For example, the SAREX (Search and Rescue Exercise) has been conducted every other year since the ROK-Japan Navy Conference agreed to do so in 1999. Most recently, the maritime police of the two nations held joint exercises on rescue and sea contamination in 2007.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral exercise has never been held in spite of frequent track 1.5 debates on the necessity of such joint exercises.

In contrast to the frequency of ROK-U.S. and U.S.-Japan joint exercises, there has been a dearth of ROK-Japan and ROK-U.S.-Japan exercises. This reflects the reality that South Korea and Japan rarely interact in a direct bilateral alliance, though both states are spokes in a wheel of alliances with the U.S. as center. Viewed from a long-term perspective, this reality should be improved upon, and trilateral exercises should lead to the betterment of trilateral sea cooperation. In this regard, matters related to PSI and Dokdo Island take on added importance in trilateral maritime cooperation.

### **PSI**

The proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) was established in May 2003 under a U.S. directive to interdict WMD and WMD-related cargoes by 'rogue states' like North Korea and Iran. Of special note is the fact that the PSI exemplifies 'international action' rather than an organization. Currently, the 17 participating members are the U.S., Canada, Denmark (not in core group), France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Turkey, England, Australia, Japan, and Singapore, while 60 or so countries including South Korea and China, though not direct actors in the exercise, do support the PSI in theory. PSI has, since September of 2003, completed 32 interdiction exercises, with conspicuous achievements. For example, interdiction in the BBC China—a ship delivering centrifuge parts to Libya—definitively spurred on Libya's decision to abandon its WMD program.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, in order to maximize interdiction within international waters, the U.S. has finalized Ship Boarding Agreements (SBA) with countries such as the Marshall Islands, Liberia, Panama, Croatia, and Cyprus. An additional 10 countries are currently undergoing similar negotiations.

Albeit not a member of the PSI, South Korea does support the principles underlying it, and thus, partially participate when it can. Specifically, South Korea has already incorporated a WMD interdiction drill as part of its ROK-U.S. military exercise, listened in on PSI briefings, and over the course of five exercises, participated as an observer. Despite numerous attempts to bring South Korea on board and request for Korea to provide material support to the PSI cause, South Korea is quiet on the subject.

The main reason for South Korea's reservations against active PSI participation relates to the inter-Korea relationship. Earlier, it was unheard of for South Korea to consider such activities under the

Sunshine Policy during the Kim Dae Jung administration. However, the same issue has become more salient as the goal of constructing a strategic alliance with the U.S. has become a national priority. Recognition of and setting aside cases strictly relegated to the nature of inter-Korea relations, contemplation on membership is worth a try. By 'cases,' this would mean recognition of South Korea's right not to partake in situations involving a North Korean vessel. This discretionary power and flexibility should nullify previous sensitivities about joining.

### **Dokdo Island**

On July 22, 2008, the United States Board of Geographical Names decided to mark Dokdo as 'undesignated sovereignty territory,' to the dismay of South Koreans. The decision was undoubtedly shocking to the 'ordinary South Koreans' who regard the ROK-U.S. relationship as a bulwark for their national survival and prosperity. Ordinary South Koreans discern the two faces of North Korea: security threat and fellow Koreans (consanguinity). For this reason, they identify the need to pursue a continual policy of reconciliation with the North, but also to be vigilant on the security front. For them the ROK-U.S. alliance provides not only protection from a nuclear-armed North, but also access to markets for economic prosperity and a safety blanket for the unpredictable future. These South Koreans have fought against other South Koreans who accuse the ordinary people as being 'anti-reunification forces 'kowtowing' to great powers.

The general timing of the decision on Dokdo was misplaced. The Lee Myung Bak administration had been susceptible to many alarm bells at the diplomatic-security frontline on top of the candlelight demonstration in protest of importation of American beef, the death of a South Korean tourist at the Mount Geumgang resort, the lack of diplomatic adroitness shown at the ASEAN Regional Forum, as well as Japan's reiterated challenge to sovereignty over the small island of Dokdo—all marking the smoking gun of the nation's diplomatic frailty. Thus, the U.S. naming board's initial decision on Dokdo completely sapped the 'ordinary South Koreans' of life, and threatened the very reason for their existence.

On July 30, however, acting on distinct instructions from President George W. Bush, the Board reinstated Dokdo to South Korean territory. Though Japanese political leaders showed restraint, calling the move 'nothing but a gratuitous token ahead of the U.S. President's visit to South Korea,' the flip-flop represented an opportunity for the 'ordinary South Koreans' to rejuvenate and revive their spirits. These ordinary South Koreans hoped that the U.S. would return to the basics and

maintain the original intentions it harbored when the World War I was over.

To trace the issue historically, on January 29, 1946, the General Headquarters of the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers in Japan (SCAP) issued SCAPIN-677 in which it clearly excluded Dokdo Islands from the Japanese territories.<sup>11</sup> On June 22, 1946, SCAP designated the so-called 'MacArthur Line,' by issuing SCAPIN-1033 that prohibited any Japanese vessels or crews from entering 12 nautical miles from the coastline of the Dokdo Islands. On June 20, 1951, the USFK sent a letter to South Korea's Prime Minister requesting permission for use of the islands for U.S. Air Force shooting training. The directives and the letter were clear evidence of U.S. recognition of the tiny islets as those belonging to South Korea.

In light of the facts, the United States needs to be well-advised over the magnitude of the Dokdo issue. Washington is well aware of the cruelty of past Japanese colonial rule, and the fact that Japan is far from repenting its past. Historical evidence and South Korea's upper-hand on the issue aside, the United States knows Japan's claims to Dokdo are shameless impudence to a neighbor country it harmed in the past. It was perhaps based on this understanding that the U.S. specifically denied Japanese rights over Dokdo in the SCAPIN No. 677 and 1033. Today, Dokdo Island may be a trivial entity to economically-powerful Japan. To South Korea, however, it is a symbol of national pride as well as its painful colonial history.

Given the extremely combustible nature of the Dokdo issue, U.S. recognition of Japan's claim will have enormously negative impact on the ROK-U.S. alliance. In the short-term, 'ordinary South Koreans' would inevitably perceive their nation as a second-rate ally to the United States and might be forced to rethink its national survival strategy based on its strategic coalition with the sea power. In the long-term, the entire U.S. alliance structure in Asia would succumb to the vulnerabilities created by the souring ROK-U.S. relationship. If this scenario is a nightmare for Washington, and if the U.S. would like to buttress 'ordinary South Koreans' as allies, Dokdo should not be treated as a trivial back-burner issue boiling over at a far away nation.

The United States role over the island should be to bring allies together and mediate between them. An important principle in this regard is that the one who tied a knot must untie it. While ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral maritime cooperation becomes increasingly important, the issue over Dokdo Island still looms as a stumbling block.

### **Conclusion: Towards a Strategic Alliance**

Along several spectrums, the ROK-U.S. alliance has taken a beating. The two administrations of Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun that exhibited a comparable ideological slant, and their Sunshine policy, was fundamentally at odds with the nature of the ROK-U.S. alliance. There existed a stark incompatibility between the base assumption of the Sunshine policy that extolled North Korea as the other half of one nation and as that of a partner, and the ROK-U.S. alliance that viewed the North as a principal common threat. The ‘Korean nationalism’ and ‘autonomy’ espoused by the Roh government only worked as a spark plug to inflame anti-American sentiments. The situation in South Korea coincided with changes within the U.S., irrevocably acting as a multiplier for national perceptions and feelings. Post-9.11, the U.S. initiated its new strategy of adopting the term of strategic flexibility, reducing the USFK in parallel to its deployment to Iraq in 2003. These changes by the U.S. happened to coincide with the dissemination of anti-Korean inclinations within the U.S.

However, a majority of Koreans believe in upholding such ideals as democracy, a market economy, and human rights. To these very people, a strategic partnership with a major sea power is a basic tenet of Korea’s survival. These were the same groups that rejected Roh Moo Hyun’s followers and elected President Lee Myung Bak in 2007. Now that the Lee cabinet has specifically called for consolidating a strategic alliance as the nation’s highest diplomatic priority, the ROK-U.S. alliance will probably take on a different shape than in the past. However, there are various tasks ahead towards that goal, both conceptual and administrative.

From the conceptual standpoint, the task of adding specificity to the construct of ‘Global Partnership’ agreed to during the ROK-U.S. summit in April of 2008 demands urgency. Moreover, outlining in detail the co-vision of both states encompassing the ideas of trust, value, and bolstering peace through the alliance needs attending. In addition, both countries should recognize the strategic worth of each other and reaffirm the reason for the very existence of the alliance.

On the administrative points requiring mutually-beneficial solutions, there are several deserving note— participation in PSI; elucidation of mutual assistance on anti-terror/nonproliferation efforts; expansion of activities in Missile Defense; coordination in ROK-U.S. command in preparation for OPCON transfer; construction of an Allied Military Cooperation Center (AMCC) that takes into account the requirements of the Korean peninsula and the world;<sup>12</sup> finalization of development on the conceptual planning of 5029 that remain unresolved since the Roh administration;<sup>13</sup> bilateral agreement on the method of calculation and scope of burden-sharing on USFK defense costs; conclusion of USFK

base reallocation and the resolution of environmental pollution issues related thereof;<sup>14</sup> systemization of ROK-U.S.-Japan collaboration through Track-1.5 route;<sup>15</sup> and judgment on future UN Command in Korea.<sup>16</sup>

During such process, South Korea's pursuit of Defense Reform 2020 along with military transformation will magnify mutual cooperation and directly oil the wheels of the ROK-U.S. strategic alliance—the same applies to the successful resolution of the PSI, MD, and Dokdo Island issues. As for the PSI, South Korea will have to do more, or will need to expand the ROK-U.S. collaborative spirit by switching antiquated tactics, while the MD will require greater understanding from the U.S. on South Korea's position. The Dokdo Island matter will need to be deliberated scrupulously by the U.S. with the aim of reinforcing its alliance system in Asia by including maritime cooperation among the ROK, the U.S. and Japan.

### Notes:

---

<sup>1</sup> Hans Binnendijk, *Transforming America's Military* (Washington: National Defense Univ. Press, 2002), p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> The Guided Missile Command (GMC) was established in 2006, the Rear Area Operations Command (RAOC) in 2007, while the Ground Operations Command (GOC) is expected to be operational by 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Korea must transform itself from a quantity and human resources-based conventional military force to that of a quality and skill-based force capable of independent information gathering and management and equipped with high-technology and modern equipment in order to effectively respond to various threats.

<sup>4</sup> Currently, there are tentative talks on possibly extending the original deadline from 2020 to 2025, taking into consideration the difficulty of obtaining the initially-projected budget procurement plan.

<sup>5</sup> SAM-X is the codename for the ROK's program in the future upgrading of a surface-to-air missile system, enveloping plans in acquiring early-warning ballistic missile systems, Aegis destroyers, and PAC-2 ATM.

<sup>6</sup> Vernon E. Clark, "Sea Power 21: Projecting Decisive Joint Capabilities, (2002).

<sup>7</sup> Christopher P. Cavas, "US Rolls Out New Maritime Strategy," *Defense News*, October 17, 2007. Taken from Lee Suh Hang, "The U.S. Maritime Strategy and Asia-Pacific Security," *Strategy 21*, summer 2008, Vol. 11-No. 1, pp. 122-149.

---

<sup>8</sup> For example, the 2008 Key Resolve exercise involved the USS Nimitz—world’s largest nuclear-powered aircraft carrier—as well as roughly 30,000 U.S. military personnel.

<sup>9</sup> The ROKN-JMSDF meetings have been held every two years since 1999, yielding results in systemization of SAREX, establishment of bilateral naval emergency hotlines, mutual state visits by respective Chief of Naval Operations and interaction between forces.

<sup>10</sup> The German-registered BBC China, carrying centrifuges and headed for Libya, was intercepted through the cooperation of the U.S., U.K., Germany, and Italy, and forced to reroute to a port in Italy for the confiscation of related cargo.

<sup>11</sup> Article 3: “For the purpose of this directive, Japan is defined to include the four main islands of Japan (Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu and Shikoku) and approximately 1,000 smaller islands . . . excluding Utsuryo (Ullung), Island, Liancourt Rocks (Take Island: Dokdo), and Quelpart (Cheju Island). . . .”

<sup>12</sup> The author views the decision to transfer OPCON by 2012 as a blunder by the Roh administration, and would like to see either an effort at renegotiation with the U.S. through comprehensive review and debates, or at least a consideration in push-back of the eventual deadline. See Taewoo Kim, “Separation of War-time Operational Control and Dissolution of ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command: Reflection and Resolution,” presented at “Future Direction of Development in ROK-U.S. Alliance” Seminar, July 11, 2008. co-sponsored by Korea Retired Generals & Admirals Association, The Council on Korea-U.S. Security Studies and Korea Defense Forum.

<sup>13</sup> In 2006, after the SCM adopted the strategic choice to construct conceptual plan 5029 in order to prepare for a sudden transition within North Korea, the ongoing ROK-U.S. debate came to a halt as the Roh administration viewed such plan as U.S. intervention in internal state affairs and an infringement of sovereignty. This author is of the opinion that such operational plans are a necessity for stability on the Korean peninsula, and judges that such efforts should be reinstated with preparation related to such issues as a mass North Korean exodus or natural disasters to be led by South Korea and those pertaining to removal of WMDs by the U.S.

<sup>14</sup> Domestic NGOs are raising the problem of environmental pollution in 66 of the USFK bases that are set to be returned to South Korea by 2012. However, in light of the fact that no country in which the U.S. forces have been stationed for a long period of time (Japan, Germany, etc) has ever pushed the U.S. for environmental restoration, and the incompatible alliance mindset of holding the U.S. up to the Environmental Law constituted in 2003 despite the contribution of the USFK to Korea’s security for over half a century, this author believes that South Korea should find its own way and direction in resolving the issue.

<sup>15</sup> With impetus from Lee Myung Bak government’s intent to reinforce relations with the U.S., there were talks of reinstating a collaboration system akin to the

---

TCOG. However, for fear of consequentially consolidating the tripartite coalition among North Korea-China-Russia, taking Track-1.5 was deemed the most beneficial.

<sup>16</sup> Inevitably, the separation of wartime operational control and the dissolution of the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command will spill over to the UN Forces Command, but for South Korea, change should be deferred until the North Korean nuclear problem has been completely resolved and a security regime fully rooted.