

The Role of the Republic of Korea-U.S. Alliance in Peaceful Unification of Korea

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Abstract

In the process of unification, the Republic of Korea (ROK)-United States (U.S.) alliance would face enormous challenges that would have a direct influence on the security of a unified Korea and the viability of the alliance as well. Given increasing unpredictability concerning the future of North Korea, the ROK-U.S. alliance should deepen the level of cooperation over how and what to prepare for in the event of abrupt changes in North Korea, e.g., regime collapse. In addition, considering the resilience of the U.S. and the prospect of the future security environment in the post-unification era, the ROK-U.S. alliance should be the main pillar of unified Korea's national security strategy.

Unification will create a wholly new domestic and international structure and the alliance needs to evolve so that its viability is maintained. The evolutionary process needs to be carefully envisioned, shared, and managed by the ROK and the U.S. For this purpose, it is imperative that the ROK and the U.S. have a shared vision and framework for the evolution of the alliance. Without a guiding vision, the alliance might drift in the middle of strategic uncertainty and struggle to contain the flames of nationalism.

This study presents a logically and practically connected, three-phased evolutionary framework. The framework divides the whole process of unification into three time periods: (1) from the present to the beginning of the unification process, (2) during the unification process, and (3) after unification. In each phase, this study identifies a key vision, essential roles, and specific tasks.

Keywords: ROK-U.S. alliance, peaceful unification, Korean Peninsula, Northeast Asian Security, Comprehensive Strategic Alliance

Introduction

The Korean Peninsula has been divided for almost 70 years. Despite significant threats of conventional and asymmetric provocations from

North Korea, South Koreans have never forgotten the lofty goal of peaceful unification on the Korean Peninsula.

Although the necessity for proactive pursuit and preparations for a peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula has been discussed for quite some time, the task of articulation of the roles to be played by the ROK-U.S. alliance is becoming increasingly more important.

This is especially so given the number of recent developments in regional politics. First, the situation in North Korea appears to be becoming unstable, showing some symptoms of a possible contingency in North Korea, which may ultimately lead to an implosion of the Kim Jung-un regime. Second, the resilience of the U.S. has also become noticeable. The powerful thesis of China's rise and the U.S.'s relative decline, a widely shared assumption among many international analysts, needs to be re-examined in the wake of the U.S.'s booming economy. This is an important factor to consider as South Korea attempts to adjust its national security strategy to a changing security environment, especially in the post-unification era. Third, China and Japan are increasing and modernizing their military capabilities, which will pose a serious challenge to South Korea even after unification. These developments in the present and future security environment demand a fresh look at the enormous tasks that the ROK-U.S. alliance will have to face and navigate in order to materialize unification and create favorable conditions for lasting peace and stability in the post-unification era.

What should guide these essential efforts is a shared vision of the alliance between the ROK and the U.S. It is necessary for the ROK and the U.S. to have a revolutionary approach for the alliance so that the two countries can successfully adapt to the shifting security environment for ensuring its enduring relevance even after unification while effectively managing the problems they must tackle. Unless carefully managed, unification will pose enormous challenges that may bring about the clash of national interests between the ROK and the U.S. and ultimately lead to the disintegration of the alliance.

This study presents a three-phased evolutionary framework. The three phases in the framework are intended to be logically and practically connected. The framework divides the whole process of unification into three time periods: (1) from the present to the beginning of the unification process, (2) during the unification process, and (3) after unification. In each phase, this study identifies a key vision, essential roles, and specific tasks for the ROK and the U.S. These visions, roles,

and tasks will be geared toward a successful evolution of the alliance that is critical for maintaining the peace and prosperity of the region during and after unification. The ROK-U.S. alliance should carefully design, share, and manage this evolutionary approach for its enduring relevance even in the post-unification era.

Renewed Assessments of the Northeast Asian Security Environment

An effective national security strategy should be based on realistic assessments of the security environment. Strategists need to constantly search for meaningful changes in the environment and revise the strategy accordingly. Here, the current and future Northeast Asian security environment will be assessed in three areas, which are assumed to have significant ramifications on the vision, roles and tasks of the ROK-U.S. alliance in the process of peaceful unification and afterwards.

Increasing Instability in North Korea

The stability of the North Korean regime is expected to have a huge influence on the pace, steps, tasks, and even feasibility of a full Korean unification. Considering past experiences, the stability of the North Korean regime may indicate that the entire process of unification, if it ever realizes, would require a long-term approach. On the contrary, quite the opposite can be true; North Korea may feel no need for unification due to the very fact that the regime is stable and survivable. This is why many analysts have searched for ways to bring the unwilling North to the negotiation table in hopes that reconciliatory efforts will lead to a peaceful unification.¹

Many observers believe that North Korean leader Kim Jung-un has been successful in managing the transition of power, but recent events hint at a different story. The scale and brutality of personnel actions in North Korea, which began mainly in 2012 and has lasted up until now has been unprecedented. In the aftermath of the death of Kim Jong-il, about half of the 218 leading officials in major North Korean institutions—namely, the party, government, and the military—were replaced between 2012 and 2013. One notable instance of purge and executions that shocked the world included the execution of Jang Sung-taek (then Vice-Chairman of the National Defense Commission).

In early 2015, observers also heard the shocking news that North Korea's dictator ordered the execution of his defense minister, Hyon Yong-chul, for disloyalty. What made this instance appalling was the

way Kim Jung-un killed him. It was reported that Hyon Yong-chul was executed by anti-aircraft gun in front of hundreds of people, who were forced to watch his death.² With the brutality of Kim Jung-un mounting in North Korea, an increasing number of political and military elites are escaping North Korea to save their lives.

What do all of these instances mean for the stability and future of North Korea? Although getting a clear picture of the state of affairs in this notoriously opaque regime has always been nearly impossible, what has been observed these days indicates that the future of North Korea is becoming ever more uncertain. If Kim Jung-un's iron fist causes a backlash, an abrupt change in North Korea or even a regime collapse may be forthcoming. An increasing number of purges, executions, and defections of high-ranking North Korean officials indicate that Kim Jung-un, in his fourth year of reign, is viewed as a tyrant who is paranoid rather than effective. It seems that North Korea is stepping into the fog of uncertainty, which makes preparations for a North Korean contingency critical in the near future.

The Resilience of the United States

In the wake of the U.S.'s booming economy, the assumptions of an American decline and the rise of China need to be revisited. The relative power balance between these two countries has been one of the most important structural factors for South Korea to consider when it devises with a security strategy to preserve and enlarge its national security strategy.

The 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States, released in February 2015, reflects a reinvigorated confidence in the American economy. America's strong recovery from the financial crisis is what most distinguishes the 2015 NSS from the 2010 NSS in terms of security environment. A White House press release made this clear when it said, "Now, America's resurgence is real—we are stronger than we've been in many years." The new strategy also mentions that the U.S. economy has "rebounded from a global recession by creating more jobs in the United States than in all other advanced economies combined."³ The confidence the 2015 NSS reflects a notable change in the global energy market. As of 2015, the U.S. is the largest oil⁴ and natural gas⁵ producer in the world. According to one source, it will retain its top-producer ranking until at least the early 2030s.⁶

The increase of domestic oil production in the U.S., largely due to the Shale Revolution,⁷ and the ensuing change in position from the largest importer of oil⁸ to the largest global oil producer in the coming years⁹ has had, and will have, very significant ramifications for international relations. First, the U.S. could reduce its dependence on foreign oil and natural gas, giving the U.S. more leeway and influence in its foreign policy. As Russell Gold argues, “For generations, the United States has used its military might to keep oil flowing, fighting wars and patrolling sea lanes. Maybe this era will now come to an end.”¹⁰ The plunge of the price of crude oil over the past several years and the economic difficulties of such oil-producing countries as Russia and OPEC members are some repercussions of the U.S. energy resurgence.¹¹

More importantly, the resurgence of the U.S. suggests that we reexamine the widely shared assumption of the relative decline of the U.S. in Northeast Asian politics. The concept of a rising China and an ailing U.S. in the aftermath of the global financial crisis symbolically initiated by the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy has firmly settled in the minds of many international observers and decision makers, including those in South Korea. It seemed that China has steadily grown to become a member of the G2 and it is only a matter of time before China would finally overtake the U.S. to become the largest economy in the world.¹²

Increasing amounts of recent literature on global politics, however, tell a different story.¹³ They challenge the myth of America’s gradual decline, pointing out that demographic configuration,¹⁴ energy independence,¹⁵ military might,¹⁶ technological edge, and raw materials of the U.S. that they maintain will lay the ground for American leadership in the coming years and even decades.

Although the thesis of American resilience needs to be carefully observed and assessed, it certainly poses a challenge to the assumption shared by many that the U.S. is in relative decline and China is on the rise. This assumption has had a significant influence on our perspective of what kind of future we will be facing and how to prepare for it. Table 1 illustrates how strong this assumption is in the security and defense community. Even though the authors made a very important contribution in suggesting policy recommendations for the future of the ROK-U.S. alliance in the process of reunification and post-reunification, what is also interesting is their view on the future of Northeast Asia in 2030. They presented five scenarios and concluded the first two are more plausible than the rest.

Here, we need to pay a close attention to the commonality and differences between scenarios [1] and [2]. Scenarios [1] and [2] both agree on the rise of China, but differ regarding the projected pace of China’s growth in political, economic, and military clout. The common assumption of the relative decline of the U.S, however, was so pervasive that it was shared by all five scenarios. The possibility of U.S. resilience cannot be found in their analysis. The assumption of the rise of China and the relative decline of the U.S. is so pervasive that it is easily found in other analyses.¹⁷

Table 1. Five Scenarios on the Future of Northeast Asia¹⁸

Scenario	U.S.-China Relations	Northeast Asian Order
[1]	China’s economic superiority; U.S. political and military superiority.	China’s influence increases, but the status quo as we know it continues. Cooperation in competition
[2]	China’s economic superiority; political and military parity between China and the U.S.	A relatively new order comes into being under China’s growing influence and with consent from the U.S. Military tensions, and others, over regional hegemony increase in Northeast Asia. China’s superiority, amid intensifying tensions.
[3]	China’s political, economic, and military superiority; U.S. decline.	Northeast Asia’s order is reorganized with China at its center. New order led by China.
[4]	China’s political and economic decline; U.S. superiority restored.	Return to the international order seen in the late 1990s and early 2000s. U.S. hegemony restored.
[5]	China’s growth stalled; U.S. decline ongoing; India and other emerging economies rising.	No single state can claim hegemony. Multi-polar and multi-power system.

If we accept the resilience of the U.S. as fact, what does it mean? Foremost, it is expected that the U.S. will remain engaged in Asian politics as strongly as it has been before. This also signifies the enduring

importance and relevance of the U.S. as an ally to South Korea. The assumption of U.S. decline has created a false perception that U.S. influence, capabilities, and commitment to Asia and specifically the Korean Peninsula will be reduced in the long run. Although the U.S. has tried to alter this image by actively promoting the so-called “rebalance to Asia,” it seems it has had limited impact, at least in Korea. Some observers of Korea are worried about the possibility that Korea is becoming a ‘swing state’ which vacillates between powerful countries.

When it comes to preparations for unification, the assumption of U.S. decline may have generated negative consequences. Given that unification requires a concerted effort of the ROK-U.S. alliance to navigate an enormous amount of diplomatic, economic, social, and military challenges, mutual mistrust between allies may hinder honest talks over possible conflicting interests. A renewed and realistic assessment of U.S. resilience will lay the groundwork upon which specific tasks are identified and discussed between the ROK and the U.S.

Prospects of the Future Security Environment in the Post-Unification Era

Another factor to consider in identifying roles and tasks for the ROK-U.S. alliance is the prospect of the future security environment in the post-unification era. Although unification on the Korean Peninsula is expected to resolve some serious impending security challenges—most importantly, the conventional and asymmetric threats from North Korea—a unified Korea would still have to deal with diverse security concerns. An ideal evolution of the ROK-U.S. alliance from today to post-unification should be based on a shared perspective between the two countries on what the future security environment of Northeast Asia would look like.

It is a common view that unification will make unified Korea stronger, although it will come with a huge price tag.¹⁹ With a population of 75 million, a unified Korea would be able to utilize the north’s abundant and competitive labor force and national resources.²⁰ In addition, the demographic configuration of North Koreans would help South Korea resolve the problem of an aging society.

A strong and unified Korea, however, would still be facing more formidable neighbors, mainly China and Japan. In addition to their economic clout, both countries have been trying to increase and improve the size and quality of their military capabilities. Although some analysts

raise doubts about China's long-term growth stability, it is very likely that a unified Korea would be squeezed between these two bigger powers.

Designing an Evolutionary Framework: Enhancing the Connection between Today and Post-Reunification

The most important conclusion we can draw from assessments of the Northeast Asian security environment is twofold. First, given the increasing unpredictability concerning the future of North Korea, the ROK-U.S. alliance should deepen the level of cooperation on how and what to prepare for in the case of abrupt changes in North Korea, e.g., regime collapse. Both countries need to be prepared ahead of time so they can maximize the benefits and minimize the harmful effects unification could bring about.

Second, given the resilience of the U.S. and the prospect of the future security environment in the post-unification era, the ROK-U.S. alliance should be the main pillar of unified Korea's national security strategy. This does not necessarily mean the current structure and mechanism of the alliance should remain intact. Unification will create a wholly new domestic and international structure, and the alliance needs to evolve so that its viability is maintained.

The evolutionary process needs to be carefully envisioned, shared, and managed by the ROK and the U.S. For this purpose, it is imperative that the ROK and the U.S. have a shared vision and framework for the evolution of the alliance. Without a guiding vision, the alliance might be drifting in the middle of strategic uncertainty and the flames of nationalism.

There are two important considerations when designing an evolutionary framework for the ROK-U.S. alliance. First, it is imperative that the present and the future alliance after the unification should be logically connected. The process of unification will inevitably be accompanied by a recalculation of national interests. In order for the alliance to survive and evolve in the aftermath of unification, both countries need to find a new rationale to garner domestic support. In this sense, it is necessary that the nature and form of the evolving alliance are designed to maximize the national interests of both the ROK and the U.S. and minimize concerns about each other. Unless carefully planned and discussed in advance, the future ROK-U.S. alliance may become quite weak and loose. The two countries should make discussions about an

evolutionary concept of the alliance the top priority for the viability of the alliance in the post-unification era.

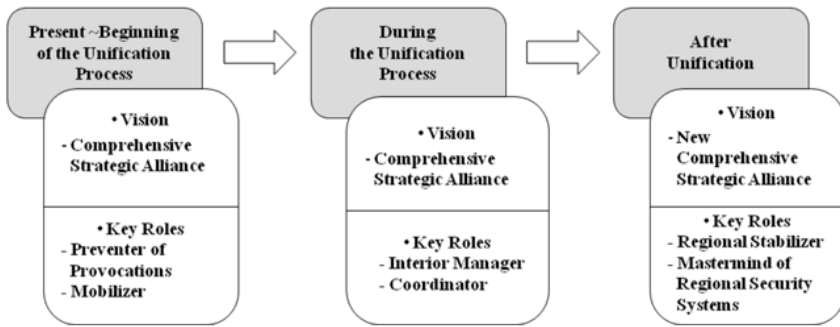
Second, it is recommendable that the ROK and the U.S. take a phased approach to the evolution of the ROK-U.S. alliance. An evolution, by definition, is a continuum. In order to make it manageable, however, the implementation plan needs to be divided into concrete phases. It is necessary for the two countries to set a vision and identify key roles and major tasks specifically tailored for each stage. Figure 1 presents an evolutionary framework for the ROK-U.S. alliance that the two countries can take into consideration when developing future vision and implementation plans. The framework divides the evolutionary process into three phases and recommends the vision and key roles for each phase.

The main thrust of the evolutionary concept of the alliance is maintaining and updating the concept of “Comprehensive Strategic Alliance.”²¹ Comprehensive Strategic Alliance (CSA), which was agreed to by the leaders of the U.S. and South Korea in 2009²², has been officially accepted by the Park Geun-hye administration and has made important progress since its inception. The main achievements of CSA were two-fold. First, it expanded the scope of alliance cooperation, transforming the ROK-U.S. alliance from a security-centric one with the main purpose to defend against North Korean aggressions to a new alliance now covering economy, culture, nuclear cooperation, etc. Secondly, CSA sought to expand the agenda for alliance cooperation to promote international peace and security at the regional and global levels.

The concept of CSA presents some positive aspects as a leading concept for the evolution of the alliance into the era of unification. First, it presents a vision for a unified Korea, making it clear that unification on the Korean Peninsula will be pursued based on principles such as liberal democracy, market economy, and human rights. Secondly, CSA broadens the scope of alliance cooperation from a purely military nature, fixated on the Korean Peninsula, to other important areas such as regional and global issues. This is a meaningful development, especially for the evolution of the alliance in the future. CSA has had a positive influence on the public discourse about the policy directions of the alliance by reminding people of the necessity and importance of the alliance to make contributions to regional and global stability and prosperity. Despite these positive aspects of CSA, it has an important

limitation that should be carefully examined and amended. CSA does not visualize how the alliance would evolve during and after unification. This may be because it is hard to come up with an overarching framework to guide diverse scenarios of unification. Political sensitivity, difficulty of forecasting the future, and the huge weight of imminent threats from North Korea—conventional and WMDs—might have inhibited the ROK and the U.S. from having a candid dialogue over the vision, roles and tasks that would help them navigate the transition and post-unification eras. Given the unpredictability of North Korea and the amount of time and effort required for unification, the ROK and the U.S. should begin the endeavor to envision the future of the alliance as soon as possible.

Figure 1. An Evolutionary Framework for the ROK-U.S. Alliance



The First Phase

The first phase of the evolutionary framework for the ROK-U.S. alliance is the period between the present and the beginning of the unification process. The vision for this first phase is that of Comprehensive Strategic Alliance, a continuation of current policy positions and missions. There seems to be no particular reason to alter this vision, given its emphasis on the security and stability of the Korean Peninsula.

For this stage, the alliance has two key roles: (1) preventer of provocations and (2) mobilizer. First, the most important role for the alliance is to prevent North Korean provocations, which might seriously harm the security of South Korea. At the same time, it is important that the alliance lays down firm ground for managing North Korean

contingencies in a stable manner and for the evolution of the alliance, geared toward the future.

The second important role is to mobilize support from the domestic audience and neighboring countries. Designing the future vision for the alliance is essential here. Given the impending threats from the North, it might be difficult to actively promote it to the domestic audience, requiring a careful approach for this purpose. The effort to enhance public awareness for the future vision of the alliance will be taken more seriously as the North Korean contingency begins to materialize. In addition, a clear vision for the alliance will be a key element in trying to garner support from the neighboring countries.

The Second Phase

The second phase of the evolutionary framework for the ROK-U.S. alliance is the period during which the unification process is underway. Rapid changes in political, social, economic, and military environments will characterize this phase. It will be also marked by a huge need for resources, both personnel and material. Therefore, it is imperative for the alliance to create stable conditions for the transition and to coordinate efforts made by the alliance partners, neighboring countries, and international entities. This means the key roles for the alliance at this stage will be (1) interior manager and (2) coordinator, with Comprehensive Strategic Alliance in place as the guiding vision for the alliance.

This phase has a particular importance in the evolution of the alliance. Given the fluidity of the situations, successful management of this phase will be critical for the shift to the next phase. Elimination of North Korean threats may bring about an unwanted consequence, pulling along with it a period of strategic uncertainty in which a clear and coherent vision for national security does not exist. Under this circumstance, it is likely that discussions over national security strategy will be shaped by nationalistic sentiments. In the process, some radical ideas for future security strategy will be circulated and gain public support. In order to keep this from happening and to smooth the transition process for the alliance, a particularly important task for the alliance will be to actively publicize the vision for the alliance in the post-unification era. This will also have the positive effect of easing neighboring countries' concerns over the future of a unified Korea, and be essential to gaining the support of neighboring countries.

The Third Phase

The last phase of the evolutionary process of the alliance will be the period after unification. The vision of “New Comprehensive Strategic Alliance” will guide not only the relationship between a unified Korea and the U.S. but also the alliance’s relationship with regional and global actors. The main thrust of this concept is a change in the *raison d’être* for the alliance. Although the security of a unified Korea will still be the most vital mission, the alliance in the post-unification era will substantially broaden the scope of its activities to deal with regional and global issues. Threats from North Korea, which have provided the reasons for existence and the focal points of efforts for the alliance for several decades, no longer will exist. Given the possibility of mounting public demands for the peace dividend and the necessity of gaining support for a unified Korea from neighboring countries, it will be almost inevitable that the alliance make substantial changes in the way it deals with strategy, missions, posture, and force level.

Two key roles for the alliance in this period are conceivable. First, the alliance is supposed to be a regional stabilizer. This means that the alliance will function to maintain a balance of power and prevent an arms race in Northeast Asia. Secondly, the alliance will need to pursue the role of a pillar of the regional security community. The unification of the Korean Peninsula, which would resolve the last remnant of the Cold War, would provide a unified Korea with the high moral privilege to initiate and lead the formation of regional security consultative bodies. The alliance could take the initiative of facilitating the creation and consolidation of regional security mechanisms by paying more attention to a set of non-traditional missions such as counter-piracy, peace keeping operations (PKOs), disaster relief, transnational disease control, and cyber security.

Specific Tasks of the ROK-U.S. alliance for Each Phase

In each phase, the ROK-U.S. alliance needs to perform a set of distinctive tasks to make the evolutionary process as smooth as possible for the lasting viability of the alliance. The list of tasks presented here and their descriptions as well are illustrative, not exhaustive. It is assumed that these tasks have direct relevance to the evolutionary process of the alliance. The order of the tasks does not necessarily indicate the relative importance of each task.

Table 2. Major Tasks for Each Phase

	Present – Beginning of the Unification Process	During the Unification Process	After Unification
Vision	Comprehensive Strategic Alliance		New Comprehensive Strategic Alliance
Key Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventer of Provocations • Mobilizer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interior Manager • Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Stabilizer • Mastermind of Regional Security Systems
Major Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining Strong Deterrence Posture • Developing Contingency Plan • Transfer of Wartime Operational Control • Designing a Long-term Vision for the Alliance • Trilateral Dialogue (ROK-U.S.-China) • Strategic Communication to Domestic Audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention of Third Party Intervention • Elimination of WMDs • Humanitarian Relief • Stability Operations • Military Integration • Strategic Communication to Domestic Audience • Strategic Communication to International Audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBMs • Changing Posture of USFK • Changing Posture of ROK Forces • Developing Regional Security Systems

The First Phase

Acting in the two key roles of “preventer of provocations” and “mobilizer,” the alliance needs to perform at least six key tasks in the

first phase. The first task is to maintain a strong deterrence posture. Successful deterrence against North Korea's provocations is essential as the most important condition for peaceful unification. In particular, the ability to detect the North's provocations in advance and to impose unbearable costs in case of attacks on South Korea is required. Given the North's rapidly growing nuclear and ballistic missile threats, the credibility of extended deterrence and tailored deterrence measures is also critical.

Secondly, developing contingency plans concerning North Korea and making concrete preparations to effectively implement them are also necessary. As previously mentioned, the increasingly unstable political conditions in North Korea require the ROK-U.S. alliance to make concrete progress in such potential missions as stability operations, controlling the border between North Korea, China, and Russia, elimination of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), pacification, and removal of conventional weapons in North Korea.²³

An emphasis on preparing for contingencies in North Korea has a special implication: the ROK-U.S. alliance needs to maintain a delicate balance between the first and second task. This is especially so when the alliance is preoccupied by the imminent threats of conventional forces and WMDs from North Korea. As observed in Iraq and Afghanistan, a regime collapse without careful plans and coordination could cause serious instability—domestic and international—and impose unbearable burdens upon the ROK and the U.S. that may lead to a fissure in the alliance. A combined politico-military commission consisting of representatives from both countries may be needed to examine the level of readiness for contingency situations in North Korea.

Third, the alliance must quickly make arrangements for the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON). Delaying the transfer of OPCON is in a sense understandable, but could be detrimental to the evolution of the alliance, considering the possibility of contingencies in North Korea. If the alliance faces such a contingency as regime collapse while the shift of OPCON is still not complete, some serious problems could occur. In this situation, while conducting an enormous amount of missions and tasks related to nation building in North Korea, the ROK-U.S. alliance would have to finalize the transfer of OPCON. The concern here is that nationalistic public sentiments may arise and demand an immediate conclusion of the transfer. Also some neighboring countries

may interpret the delay of OPCON transfer as a sign that a strong, unified Korea would still be under the same alliance umbrella.

Fourth, designing a long-term vision for a unified Korea and the alliance is essential. The concept of “New Comprehensive Strategic Alliance” presented here can be an alternative for this purpose. It might be difficult for the ROK and the U.S. to openly discuss what the security policy of a unified Korea would look like and what vision, roles and tasks the alliance would focus in the post-unification era. Both countries, however, can still aim to discuss these issues at various levels. A shared vision is the most important element in the evolution of the alliance.

Fifth, the most critical foundation for peaceful unification is to induce support from China. For this purpose, a trilateral dialogue among the ROK, the U.S. and China is needed. Many analysts see China preferring the *status quo* on the Korean Peninsula, mainly due to security concerns. When these concerns are well taken care of, then, room will exist for the alliance to discuss any necessary support from China given the economic benefits of unification. For this purpose, a well-defined vision for the future is an effective means for the alliance to consult with China.

Lastly, the alliance needs to conduct a carefully designed and closely connected strategic communication effort towards its domestic audience to garner support for the unification and the evolution of the alliance. The results of a recent survey show that the South Korean public exhibits mixed expectations about unification.²⁴ According to the survey, while 78 percent of the respondents agreed with the necessity of unification, only 15.6 percent of them said South Korea was sufficiently preparing for it. As for the question of whether a unified Korea would be beneficial to national development, about 40 percent of the respondents disagreed. Given the increasing importance of public opinion on national policy, the ROK-U.S. alliance needs to carefully design the contents of the message regarding the necessary and concrete steps toward unification and the evolution of the alliance. In order to maintain the alliance in a stable manner, the leaders of the ROK and the U.S. need to conduct closely connected strategic communications with domestic audiences of both countries over the necessity and future vision of the alliance.

The Second Phase

Under the vision of “Comprehensive Strategic Alliance” and with the two key roles of the interior manager and coordinator, it is expected that the alliance needs to perform at least seven key tasks while the unification process is underway. During this phase, political, social, economic, and military environments will be shaped by rapid fluctuations. How to manage this phase will be critical not only to the future of a unified Korea, but also the destiny of the alliance.

First, it is essential to come up with measures to prevent or minimize third party intervention, especially in a contingency situation in North Korea. Here’s a dilemma originating from the massive amount of effort to be made for stable management of the unification process. While the alliance seeks to minimize third party intervention, stable management necessitates support from neighboring countries at the same time. Additionally, the international nature of North Korean contingencies also makes it difficult to deny the rights of neighboring states to have stakes in what happens on the Korean Peninsula. Thus, a more realistic measure to deal with third party intervention is for the alliance to have a continued dialogue with neighboring countries in order to identify their security and economic concerns and come up with measures to ease those concerns and utilize opportunities. Institutionalized participation of those countries in economic development projects in North Korea can be one of those measures.

Secondly, elimination of WMD in North Korea will also be important. The sheer size and scale of activities needed for securing and eliminating the North’s WMD may be much bigger than we may have imagined. Some argue for a division of labor in which the U.S. undertakes the main responsibility in securing and getting rid of WMD and the ROK prioritizes the tasks of disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating North Korean troops and conventional weapons. This formula might not work if North Korea continues to diversify its WMD capabilities. Given the potential catastrophic consequences that loose WMD may engender, the alliance might have to devise and suggest a new scheme in which neighboring countries such as China and Russia play a role. This may provide an opportunity for the alliance to take the initiative in formulating an institutionalized mechanism for regional security and cooperation.

Third and fourth, humanitarian relief and stability operations are somewhat distinct but closely related to each other. If the provision of

security, food, water, and emergency health measures are delayed, it may lead to mounting discontent from North Koreans, creating an environment for organized resistance against the alliance. Stability operations are, in turn, critical for laying the foundation upon which humanitarian relief is conducted in a safe and stable manner. The case of Iraq clearly demonstrates the importance of an effective combination of humanitarian relief and stability operations.

The alliance also needs to function as a control tower and central coordinator. Given the substantial number of North Koreans who are trapped in extreme poverty and living under poor conditions, many neighboring countries, non-governmental organizations, and regional and international organizations will be willing to take part in the humanitarian aid. Here, it is essential to collect information on various parts of North Korea and share it with these actors. It is also important that these countries work in synchronization with military units and government agencies of the alliance.

Fifth, military integration will pose a challenge to the alliance, particularly regarding the management of the massive amount of arms and munitions and the selective re-entry of former Korean People's Army soldiers into unified Korea's military. A failure to organize an effective military integration may cause some factions of the North Korean military to turn into organized resistance forces, creating extremely unfavorable conditions for humanitarian relief and stability operations.

Sixth, strategic communication with the domestic audience will also be critical in garnering support for the alliance. Effective management of the second phase of the evolutionary process will be critical in creating stable conditions for the alliance to evolve. As for maintaining a domestic foundation for the alliance, what needs to be carefully managed is the potential political influence of North Koreans. The public opinion of North Koreans is likely to be very unpredictable and capricious. If they feel discontent and dissatisfaction with their political, social, and economic status in the unification process, their hopes for a bright future could turn into an organized movement against the current government, given their long indoctrination against the U.S. and the ROK-U.S. alliance.

Seventh, strategic communication with the international audience will also be vital in gaining support and easing the concerns of, in particular, neighboring countries. They will pay close attention to the

internal politics of Korea as it unifies, in order to have a sense of what the security orientations of a unified Korea will be. In order to create favorable conditions for a unified Korea and regional peace and stability, the ROK and the U.S. will need to take a closely coordinated approach and engage in lively dialogues with its neighbors to create a positive image of the future.

The Third Phase

The third and last phase of the evolutionary process of the alliance focuses on making concrete steps to accomplish a new vision for the alliance, the New Comprehensive Strategic Alliance. Two distinctive features characterize this new vision of the alliance. First, the new vision envisages that the alliance will be more regionally and globally focused than before. In this sense, the relative weight of the alliance will shift from being mainly peninsula-focused to being regionally and globally oriented. Secondly, the relative importance of non-traditional missions will be noticeable under the new vision. Although the necessity of preparations for conventional military missions will still exist, the alliance will need to make some adjustments in terms of posture, expertise, and capabilities given the increased regional and global focus of the alliance. Such non-traditional missions such as counter-piracy, PKOs, disaster relief, transnational disease control and cyber security would become more important.

With the two key roles of regional stabilizer and mastermind of regional security architecture, the alliance is expected to perform at least four key tasks in the post-unification era. First, the alliance will need to make significant efforts to strengthen confidence-building measures (CBMs) with the neighboring countries. Dialogue with China and Russia will be critical in this regard. A unified Korea in consultation with the U.S. would need to have a serious discussion with China and Russia over how to prevent accidental military confrontations and conflicts along the border. Specific steps such as advanced notice of military exercises and maneuvers near the border and the prevention of airspace violations could be considered. In addition, the concerned parties could reach an agreement over the disposition and role of the military forces that each country deploys along the border.

Second, closely related to CBMs is a possible change in the posture of the United States Forces Korea (USFK). The role, size, location, and configuration of USFK would be a major point of observation for

neighboring countries, especially for China, because these are supposed to be critical indicators of the identity of the alliance in the new era.

In making decisions over the specifics of these elements, it is necessary for the alliance to take into account the concerns of neighboring countries, domestic demands for peace dividends, and the key vision of the alliance into consideration. Although the nature of the relationships between a unified Korea and China and between the U.S. and China will be a key factor in deciding the nature of the ROK-U.S. alliance after unification, it is unlikely to be significantly confrontational given the interdependence of international relations. Thus, it seems safe to imagine a situation in which cooperation and conflict in national interests coexist around the peninsula after unification.

Even under this circumstance, however, it is natural to expect that the domestic sentiment both in Korea and in the U.S. would demand a peace dividend by calling for a change in the alliance posture. In particular, it is likely that the U.S. would have to reduce its forces stationed in Korea once the major common threat of North Korea has significantly eased. This could work as an important source for dialogue with China and Russia considering their concerns over USFK.

The vision of the alliance should guide this ambiguous situation in the post-unification era. Given its emphases on regional and global missions and non-traditional tasks, the vision of the New Comprehensive Strategic Alliance indicates that the ROK-U.S. alliance could reduce part of the ground forces in Korea as a symbolic move. The importance of U.S. ground forces would be diminished as the nature of the potential threats to the security of a unified Korea changes. Instead, as a security guarantor of not only a unified Korea but also Northeast Asia, the relevance of U.S. air and naval capabilities would remain largely intact. By maintaining air bases in Korea at somewhat decreased levels and by utilizing rotational deployments of naval forces, the ROK-U.S. alliance would be able to ensure political sustainability and strategic relevance in the new era.

Third and fourth, reconfiguration of the defense posture of ROK forces and the development of regional security architectures are closely related issues that must be carefully managed. The level and posture of ROK forces would undergo a complete reevaluation after unification. Although a unified Korea would enjoy the enlargement of its territory with a lengthened border, the current posture centered on ground forces would have to undergo significant changes. The ROK military would

face public demand to reduce its number of ground forces. Thus, it is necessary to come up with an innovative strategy and posture that would enable Korean ground forces to maintain its presence and military effectiveness with reduced capabilities. The transition to mobile strategic reserve forces would be critical in this regard. The reduction of ground forces, however, would provide a unified Korea with an opportunity to proclaim itself as a generator of peace and stability in the region. Building and maintaining a sufficient level of air and naval capability would be regarded as necessary, given the nature of the strategic environment and the vision of a unified Korea.

In order to support the vision of New Comprehensive Strategic Alliance, it is indispensable that the military of a unified Korea should make a rebalance within the military in terms of key capacity and capabilities in close cooperation with the U.S. Considering that such non-traditional missions as counter-piracy, PKOs, disaster relief, transnational disease control, and cyber security would be important focal points that the alliance needs to concentrate on to facilitate the formation and consolidation of regional security architectures, the ROK military would need to redistribute personnel and material resources to reflect this new priority.

Conclusion

The Korean Peninsula will bring about meaningful and significant political and economic opportunities, these are not a given. In the process of unification, the ROK-U.S. alliance would face enormous challenges that have a direct influence on the security of a unified Korea and the viability of the alliance as well. Given the scale of the challenges and the nature of security environments in the near and long-term future, it is imperative that the ROK-U.S. alliance should play a critical role in creating favorable conditions not only for unification but also for the peace and prosperity of the Asian region.

Peaceful unification does not simply mean unification without resorting to military conflicts. It also means building a structure of lasting peace for a unified Korea and the region. In order to accomplish this goal, the ROK-U.S. alliance should carefully design, share, and manage an evolutionary approach for its enduring relevance even in the post-unification era. The evolutionary concept of the alliance that this paper presents serves as a possible guiding vision to help navigate the

enormous challenges and strategic uncertainties that await the United States and the Republic of Korea in the process of unification.

Notes:

¹ Bruce Klingner, “How Should the ROK and the US Manage the North Korean WMD Issue to Promote and Shape the Satisfactory Unification of the Korean Peninsula?”, in *Security and Diplomatic Cooperation between ROK and US for the Unification of the Korean Peninsula*, The 2nd KRIS-Brookings Joint Conference, 2014. 1. 21, pp. 45-63.

² Christian Whiton, “Kim Jong Un: Effective tyrant or panicking?” *CNN iReport*, May 14, 2015.

³ White House, *2015 National Security Strategy*, p. 3.

⁴ 2014 U.S. and other top 5, Total Petroleum and Other Liquids Production. Accessed July 5, 2015. www.eai.gov/beta/international/. According to this dataset, the U.S. produced 13,973,000 barrels per day in 2014. The second largest oil producer was Saudi Arabia with producing 11,624,000 barrels per day during the same year. The third and fourth largest producers were Russia and China, producing 10,853,000 and 4,526,000 barrels per day in 2014, respectively.

⁵ 2014 U.S. and other top 5, dry natural gas production. Accessed July 5, 2015. www.eai.gov/beta/international/

⁶ Grant Smith, “U.S. Seen as Biggest Oil Producer After Overtaking Saudi,” *Bloomberg*, July 5, 2014.

⁷ Russell Gold, *The Boom: How Fracking Ignited the American Energy Revolution and Changed the World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014); Charles R. Morris, *Comeback: America's New Economic Boom* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

⁸ Accessed July 5, 2015. www.eai.gov/tools/faqs/faq.cfm?id=709&t=6

⁹ Russell Gold, *The Boom: How Fracking Ignited the American Energy Revolution and Changed the World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), p. 33.

¹⁰ Russell Gold, *Ibid.*

¹¹ In June 2014 the price of a barrel of oil, then almost \$115, began to slide; it was close to \$70 by the end of 2014. The price of a barrel of oil plunged about 40% during the period. The Economist, “Sheikhs v Shale: the New Economics of Oil,” *The Economist*, December 6th 2014.

¹² Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

¹³ Josef Joffe, *The Myth of American Decline: Politics, Economics, and a half Century of False Prophecies* (New York & London: Liveright Publishing Corp., 2014); Bruce Jones, *Still Ours to Lead: America, Rising Powers, and the Tension between Rivalry and Restraint* (Massachusetts: The Brookings Institute, 2014); Joel Kurtzman, *Unleashing the Second American Century: Four Forces for Economic Dominance* (Philadelphia, PA: Perseus Books Group, 2014); Daniel Gross, *Better, Stronger, Faster: The Myth of American Decline and the Rise of a New Economy* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2012); Wesley K. Clark, *Don't Wait for the Next War: A Strategy for American Growth and Global Leadership* (Philadelphia, PA: Perseus Books Group, 2014).

¹⁴ Josef Joffe, *The Myth of American Decline: Politics, Economics, and a half Century of False Prophecies*, pp. 165-170.

¹⁵ Wesley K. Clark, *Don't Wait for the Next War: A Strategy for American Growth and Global Leadership*.

¹⁶ Bruce Jones, *Still Ours to Lead: America, Rising Powers, and the Tension between Rivalry and Restraint*.

¹⁷ Sung Gi-young at al., *Sindongbuka Jilseo Sidaewi Jungjanggi Tongil Jeonryak* (신동북아질서 시대의 중장기 통일전략, A mid-term and long-term Strategy for Unification in the Era of New Northeast Asian Order) (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2014), pp. 23-34; Whang Byeong-duk at al., *Junggukewi G2 Busanghwa hanbando Pyeonghwa Tongil Chujin Jeonryak* (중국의 G2 부상과 한반도 평화통일 추진전략, China's Rise to G2 and Implementation Strategy for Peaceful Unification on the Korean Peninsula), KINU Report 11-12-1 (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2011), pp. 197-204.

¹⁸ Seol In Hyo and Kim Changsu, "The Future of the ROK-U.S. Alliance: Suggestions Based on Considerations of the Reunification and Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* Vol. 25, No. 4 (December 2013), pp. 531-547.

¹⁹ There are various views on the costs of Korean unification. For example, a 2013 ROK Ministry of Finance report estimated that the total cost of unification could amount as high as 7 percent of GDP (about \$ 80 billion) for a decade. Another report from ROK Financial Services Commission calculated the cost would be \$500 billion over the next two decades after unification. See Jeniffer Lind, "The Perils of Korean Unification," *The Diplomat*, February 23, 2015. Accessed July 5, 2015, thediplomat.com/2015/02/the-perils-of-korean-unification.

²⁰ ROK Ministry of Unification, *Tongil Munjae Ihae* (통일문제 이해, Understanding Unification Issues), 2014, pp. 248-252; Goldman Sachs, "A Unified Korea? Reassessing North Korea Risks," Goldman Sachs Global Economics Paper No. 188, 2009.

²¹ Seol In Hyo and Kim Changsu make a very persuasive argument of the enduring relevance of the ROK-U.S. alliance before and after the unification on the Korean Peninsula, centering on the concept of comprehensive strategy alliance. The authors, however, do not present a detailed and concrete explanation of the concept to be developed. Seol In Hyo and Kim Changsu, "The Future of the ROK-U.S. Alliance: Suggestions Based on Considerations of the Reunification and Post-Reunification."

²² The White House, "Joint vision for the alliance of the United States of America and the Republic of Korea," June 16, 2009.

²³ Bruce W. Bennett and Jennifer Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Fall 2011), p. 110.

²⁴ Yoo, Hyun-jin, June 17th 2015.

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