The ROK-US Alliance During the Bush and Roh Administrations: Differing Perspectives and Their Implications for a Changing Strategic Environment

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The ROK-US Alliance has been in a state of flux almost since the beginning of the Roh Moo-hyun administration in early 2003. As of the writing of this article, many issues remain up in the air, including the future role of USFK on the Korean Peninsula, the cost of maintaining troops and equipment on the Peninsula (and who will pay for them), the transformation of USFK as a military force, and the move south of both US Army units close to the DMZ and Headquarters USFK in Seoul.

These issues and the steps taken to resolve them remain unresolved as much because of differing perceptions and perspectives regarding the security and stability of the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia because of the ideological differences between the current administrations in Washington and Seoul. As these issues come to the forefront of the foreign policy agendas in the US and the Republic of Korea, this article will attempt to analyze the differing perspectives and why the resolving of these differing views is so important during this key period of the ROK-US Alliance.

Defending the Republic: The Most Important Task of any National Leader

The most important task of any national leader is the defense of the nation-state. In doing so, a nation's leader must take into account several important factors, including economy, geography, resources, populace, and enemies. Regarding Korea, it is extremely important to note that in *all eight* Korean nation-states in the Peninsula's history, geography has always been one of the most important, if not the most important, factors in securing the security and stability of the nation.[2] The reason is

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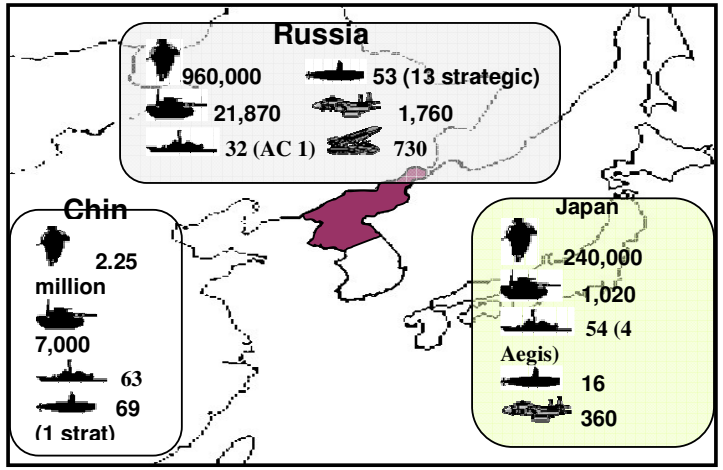
very simple: Korea has almost always been a state that is located between great powers. Today this has not changed. While in the past, Korea has been located between such great powers as China and Japan, Russia and Japan, or (during the Cold War) strategically located in an area of concern for both the USSR and the US, today the situation is no different. With the threat of a DPRK that continues to use brinkmanship and military might as tools of foreign policy, China the ever present larger neighbor to the north of the DPRK, and Japan to the east, highlight the continued significance of geography for the government in Seoul and the security and stability of the Peninsula (see map below).



Source: ROK Ministry of National Defense: 2004

Throughout Korea's history, the importance of geography has always required an alliance structure with a major power in order to protect Korean sovereignty. For more years than not throughout its long history, Korea looked to China, but since 1953 the alliance structure that has protected the sovereignty of the people of the Republic of Korea has been the ROK-US Mutual Defense treaty.[3] It is important to note that the mission of the alliance is *mutual defense*, not just deterrence for the South from attack by North Korea. The role of deterring an attack from North Korea is played by Combined Forces

Command (CFC), which includes both a peacetime and a wartime structure of ROK and US forces.[4]

How have the United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK) mutually supported each other in defense of the national interests of each nation-state? The United States has fulfilled its role in the alliance since 1953 by stationing troops, combat systems, equipment, and logistical support in the ROK. Prior to 1953 (from 1950-1953), US troops conducted defense of the ROK through combat forces under the command of the United Nations.[5] The ROK has supported the mutual defense of the United States by supporting US security actions around the world on numerous occasions. These missions have ranged from peacekeeping operations in places such as Cyprus and East Timor to combat operations in Vietnam (where 313,000 troops rotated through, with 43,000 men in theater at any given time), where Korea suffered nearly 10,000 deaths and the same number of casualties, to current operations in Operation Iraqi Freedom (as well as numerous other combat and peacekeeping operations not named specifically here).[6] No other ally has sent more troops to fight or conduct security operations with US troops since WWII except the United Kingdom and Australia. In every way, this alliance has been one that, since its inception, has truly been mutually supportive – both in reality, and in the perceptions of the citizens of Korea and the United States.

Security Policies of the Roh Administration: New Perspectives and Objectives

Roh Moo-hyun is certainly not the first President of South Korea to take a "left of center" view of domestic and foreign policy. His predecessor, Kim Dae-jung, also had policies that could legitimately be considered "progressive" in nature. But Roh's policies, almost since the very beginning of his presidency, have been much more openly critical of the United States than were those of Kim.

Roh's new policies were epitomized by the National Security Strategy released by the Blue House in March of 2004. The document emphasized two key issues,

1) Reconciliation with the North; and, 2) Self-reliant national defense. The document also declared the North Korean nuclear program to be the greatest threat to the security and stability of the ROK, stating in part, "The North's nuclear development is not only the greatest security threat to our nation but also a hindrance to peace and stability in Northeast Asia."[7] Of note, there was almost no mention of the North Korean asymmetric threat, commonly agreed among most analysts to consist of short-range rockets and missiles capable of carrying chemical warheads (Free Rocket Over Ground, or "FROG" rockets, and SCUD missiles), the highly trained and well equipped Special Operations Forces, and perhaps most importantly, the long-range artillery systems. Many of the latter have been deployed to areas just north of the DMZ since the mid-1990s, within range of Seoul and key areas in Kyongi province, and can target and destroy important military and civilian targets, potentially causing casualties in the hundreds of thousands with little or no warning.[8] These long-range artillery systems are easily the most ominous military threat to Seoul, and ultimately the security of the entire ROK.

It is clear that Roh is restructuring the national security strategy of the ROK. Based on many public statements, both during his campaign for the presidency and since assuming leadership in the Blue House, one of his key foreign policy aims is to marginalize the ROK-US alliance, and, as quickly as possible, to change many of the paradigms that have been so mutually beneficial to both the United States and Korea for over 50 years.[9] Indeed, actions taken since 2003 have also pointed to this apparent fact. Perhaps as importantly as any other reason, this should be of concern to the public in South Korea because, as discussed earlier in this article, throughout its history Korea has needed an alliance in order to maintain security, stability and prosperity. Thus, if Roh's intention is to move away from the ROK-US Alliance, what alternatives are there?

The Republic of Korea as a Balancer: The New "Roh Doctrine?"

In March, 2005, President Roh unveiled what some have called a "new doctrine." At a graduation ceremony for the Korea Third Military Academy, Roh called for a new role in the geo-political future of South Korea, the role of a "balancer" in Northeast Asia. In his speech to the graduates of the military academy, Roh commented, "Korea will calculate and cooperate if need be, and move forward with its proper authority and responsibility." As is often the case when Roh has made controversial statements in the past, high-ranking government officials commented on his speech, providing more details of the new Blue House vision. One such official was quoted as saying the order in which Korea plays one leg of the three-way alliance with the US and Japan was a product of the Cold War, and that Korea wants to extract itself from a stand-off centered on the Peninsula between a "Southern Alliance" of South Korea, the US and Japan, and a "Northern Alliance" of North Korea, China, and Russia. Another official was quoted as saying that as tensions arise between the US and Japan, on one hand, and China and North Korea, on the other, Seoul will not be cornered into an exclusive alliance with Washington.[10] Predictably, Chinese Ambassador Li Bin later stated that China would give "unreserved" support to Korea if it chose to play the role of a "stabilizer" for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia, remarking in part, "…We can't greet an era of mutual prosperity in this region with such old Cold War thoughts, can we?"[11]

An analysis of the "balancer" role, shows that Seoul would be locked neither into the "US-Japan" camp or the "northern alliance" of North Korea, Russia, and China. Most importantly, it means that South Korea would distance itself from a security alliance that has been the basis of its survival for over five decades. In pondering this, one must keep in mind that South Korea sits in one of the most geo-politically dangerous geographical positions in the world.

Going back to the earlier discussion regarding geography, it is important once again to emphasize the importance of Korea's strategic location, and the implications that holds for Seoul's

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national security. Currently supported by the world's last remaining super power, the United States, South Korea sits just south of the world's number two military power (China) and immediately south of a government in North Korea that remains intent on maintaining a 1.2 million man military (with weapons of mass destruction), and west of the world's second most powerful economic nation, Japan.[12] While Russia sits slightly farther away, it is also a major player in the relationship with North Korea and in the Six-Party Talks as well. Thus, South Korea literally sits in a position, in which several of the world's most powerful countries (either economically or militarily) continue to maintain large-scale military forces and/or important economic interests very close to the Korean Peninsula. This means that because of powerful, well-armed neighbors, national security concerns remain paramount in the minds of many who have concerns regarding this new vision, many of whom have made statements pointing to the weaknesses in this policy, if initiated at this time in Korean history.

Both those in the academic and policy community in the United States have expressed concern over this recently-articulated vision of the Blue House. During April of 2005, a State Department official who asked that his name be withheld urged Korean lawmakers on a visit to the US to think about the errors of the Chosun dynasty at the end of the 19th century (when discussing the "Balancer" vision) when Korea's weakened role because of a lack of major-power alliances made Seoul an easy target for Japanese aggression.[13] A member of the South Korea National Security Council responded to criticism of Roh's ambition to play a balancing role in Northeast Asia, commenting that South Korea could play a balancing role despite lacking economic, political and military strength (certainly an ambitious vision), and adding that a stabilizing role was the most realistic security strategy for Korea to "survive on the world stage."[14]

Criticism of the Blue House's "balancer" vision for South Korea, made public during the spring of 2005, has also come from many within both the academic and policy communities in Seoul. On April 8, 2005, in an address delivered on behalf of the GNP to the National Assembly, Party Chair Park Geun-hye

stated, "Being a balancer in Northeast Asia reminds me of Daehanjeguk (the imperial continuation of the Chosun dynasty from 1897 to 1910). The empire declared its futile neutrality just before the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, 100 years ago." Ms. Park also pointed out an extremely important fact regarding this vision openly articulated by members of the Blue House, stating, "At present, China, Japan, and Russia, as well as North Korea, do not recognize South Korea as a balancer in the region. Under the circumstances, any more isolation outside the framework of the Korea-US alliance would not serve Korea's interests."[15] During the same time frame, a group of conservative academics, lawyers, and educators held a press conference to express their opposition to the President's view of Korea as a potential "balancer," declaring his new doctrine as detrimental to the Korea-US alliance, which, they stressed, has been the main pillar of Korea's economic development and national security.[16]

Perhaps the most surprising critic of the proposed "balancer" doctrine is Roh's predecessor and supporter during his presidential election campaign, Kim Dae-jung. During early April of 2005 in an address to the newly-elected Uri party leadership, Kim told Moon Hee-sang and other new ruling-party members that, "Fundamentally, it's best that our diplomatic relations operate within the three frameworks of a strong Korea-US relationship, the tripartite alliance and cooperation between the region's four Great Powers," further commenting, "this is not a choice, but a position we have to accept fatalistically, our destiny."[17] Kim was apparently articulating to the leadership of Roh's supporting party the fact that geo-political decisions should not be based on emotional reactions to recent events, but rather on pragmatic, practical realities that will safeguard the national security of the state. So, if the role of "balancer" is not a good one for South Korea, are there other alternatives to the current ROK-US alliance?

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Are Other Alliances Possible as Alternatives to the Current ROK-U.S. Alliance?

Because it is important for the ROK to have an alliance with a powerful nation-state in order to maintain stability, security and prosperity, some alternatives should be discussed. For much of its history, Korea's main ally has been China. China was frequently the benefactor of Seoul in both peace and war up until the 19th century, when a weakened Beijing was itself plagued by foreign aggression. In fact, during April of 2005, the Defense Ministry announced that military exchanges between Korea and China would eventually intensify to a level similar to those between Korea and Japan (which is relatively minor). ROK Minister of Defense Yoon Kwang-ung, who gave the announcement, stated in part, ". . . there is a need to raise the level of military cooperation between Korea and China to at least that shared between Korea and Japan, and it's worth thinking about plans to help stability on the Korean Peninsula with China's assistance."[18]

Later, during April of 2005, it was confirmed that the Ministry of National Defense is planning to create a policy desk (unnamed as of the writing of this article) provisionally dubbed the "Department of Northeast Asian Policy." The desk will oversee increased military cooperation with China and Russia. This is the first time in South Korea's existence that a department to head up military exchanges with Russia and China has been created (if plans are approved at the end of 2005). This recent move, no doubt directed by the Blue House is reportedly extremely unnerving to many high ranking officials and military officers within the Ministry of Defense.[19]

But the 20th century does not bode well for choosing China as an ally. The PRC fought on the side of the DPRK in the Korean conflict, and continues to provide economic and military assistance to Pyongyang today. In addition, it is well known that Beijing wishes to promote the "status-quo" of two Koreas as long as possible.[20] Indeed, journalist Richard Halloran addressed the issue of Seoul's reaching out to Beijing as an ally recently, outlining the real motives the government in Beijing has and the possible implications for Seoul. He stated, "The fundamental

issue is which alliance will prevail in East Asia: the autocratic coalition led by China that seeks to drive the United States from the region or the democratic grouping led by the United States that seeks a stable balance of political and military power in which trade and economic development flourishes."[21] And Seoul must ask the question (even post-unification), does it truly want to have a military alliance with an authoritarian communist regime that in the past supported the unification of the Peninsula under a communist government?

Reasons for not engaging in a long-term or even a short term alliance with Japan are so numerous that this author simply cannot go into all of them at present. Suffice to say, the reasons are cultural, historical, ideological and economic. The strong emotional resentment that continues to exist in the Korean populace against the government of Japan and much of what it stands for was exhibited during the recent "Tok Do Controversy" and shows that close military ties with Japan in either the long run or the short run are simply out of the question.[22] Such an alliance would be highly unlikely to support the long or short term goals of the government in Seoul and would be extremely unpopular with the people of Korea. Many of the same reasons would be applicable to an alliance with Russia, and Russia is also far too weak (both militarily and economically) to be a truly beneficial long or short term ally.[23] The unliklihood of allying with Russia is exacerbated by the fact that there are long term territorial disputes with both China and Japan.[24] Thus, alternatives to the current alliance with the US appear to be unlikely, and to the disadvantage of Seoul – which means that even for an administration like the one in power now (which wishes to change many of the paradigms of the ROK-US Alliance), the best alternative is the restructuring of the alliance as we now know it.

Restructuring the ROK-US Alliance: Key Concerns

Because of the concerns stated above, the ROK-US Alliance is now in a state of flux. It can be legitimately said that the alliance is in the midst of a major restructuring. This author believes it is important to state once again , that maintaining an alliance has been the foundation and basis of Korean national

security strategy and the goal of every Korean leader for literally thousands of years. It is also important to note, that when these alliance systems did not work, it was not just one generation that suffered but several subsequent generations. Key recent examples are, of course, the occupation of Korea by Japan in the early 20th century and the Korean conflict, beginning in 1950.[25]

Today, the Roh administration, through i.e. its new national security strategy, is in the midst of taking major steps to adjust the ROK-US Alliance. The major means which Seoul is using to re-adjust the alliance is the Security Policy Initiative, previously referred to as the Future of the Alliance talks. Roh has referred to his goal in public statements as being the "rebalancing of the ROK-US relationship."[26] This publicly stated policy has caused some to ask whether this is an emotional backlash to being the traditionally weaker partner in an alliance that has lasted since 1953. Others have postulated that this is because of the fact that Roh's political base (many of whom helped run his campaign and who are now highly placed within his government) comes from the "386 Generation," a group of intellectuals and politicians who are inexperienced politically, but share a common bond – much of which is comprised of an agreement that the relationship with the United States should radically change. This has been widely publicized in the press as the chief target of the conservatives; the individual who epitomizes the values of the "386 Generation," NSC Vice-Chief Lee Jong-sok, is widely believed to hold extraordinarily powerful influence over national security and military issues as well as having the ear of the President.[27] Despite the pressure that Roh receives from those in the "386 Generation" and old-line progressives from his base of support, the fact remains that Seoul continues to need a strong alliance, just as it always has in its history.

Current Symptoms of Change to the ROK-US Alliance: OPLAN/CONPLAN 5029

Perhaps the latest and most important operational change to the ROK-US alliance is the recent controversy over Operational Plan (OPLAN) 5029, a plan which deals with proposed military action by ROK and US forces in the event of such contingencies as the collapse of the North Korean regime, a mass exodus of

refugees, natural disasters, "civil" war in North Korea, a palace coup, and other events short of a force-on-force conflict.[28] The South Korean National Security Council announced the termination of OPLAN during April of 2005, stating, "We have terminated the U.S.-South Korea Combined Forces Command's efforts to map out a plan, code named 5029, because the plan could be a serious obstacle to exercising Korea's sovereignty."[29]

Several aspects of this recent action are important. First of all, an OPLAN is different than a "conceptual" plan – which is what 5029 had been until 2003. The biggest difference is that command and control and the flow of troops and equipment is much more "set in stone" in an OPLAN than in a CONPLAN. Thus, because the OPLAN version of 5029 had Combined Forces Command under the command of a US general, the National Security Council of Roh's administration apparently felt that this was "infringing on the sovereignty of South Korea."[30] Secondly, this is a highly unusual move because the decision-making process appears to have been conducted entirely by the ROK National Security Council – not the Defense Ministry. In South Korea, much like in the United States, Operational Plans have previously been considered the exclusive domain of the military, with almost no outside involvement from the National Security Council or similar bodies.[31] Finally, the disagreement over how to change the plan (because of the involvement of the ROK NSC) has reportedly caused tensions between Seoul and Washington.[32]

Soon after the controversy erupted, South Korea proposed to continue updating the plan – reverting back to the process of working together on it as a "conceptual" plan (a CONPLAN, as it had been prior to 2003). The proposal was made during a visit to the United States by ROK NSC Vice-Chief, Lee Jong-seok.[33] As of the writing of this article, the issue is now in the process of being resolved. During June of 2005, two months after Seoul announced it wanted the plan shelved, Yoon Kwang-ung and Donald Rumsfeld met in Singapore and agreed to develop and upgrade 5029 – as a contingency plan.

According to ROK Defense Ministry spokesman Shin Hyeon-don, discussions regarding the plan will be conceptual in

nature, with the two Defense Chiefs agreeing not to develop an Operational Plan "at the moment." Reportedly, South Korea and the US have agreed not to include organization of operational units and the use of military force plans in the CONPLAN that is now being developed, based on agreements reached by the Military Committee that are currently being discussed among high level officials from the two countries.[34] The symptoms of change in the alliance on the South Korean side are evident if one considers the change in the decision-making process (NSC vice MND), the confusion about how the plan will evolve (as evidenced by the "resurrection" of the old CONPLAN as proposed by Lee Jong-seok after 5029 was at first completely scrapped), and the tensions that this confusing decision-making process caused with the United States. It is likely that this is only a symptom of other upcoming problems the alliance will face on a variety of other issues.

Current Strengths and Weaknesses of the ROK-US Alliance

Before discussing challenges facing the alliance, it is important to analyze the strengths and weaknesses inherent in it. Both nations share common strategic interests: regional stability, preservation of a robust alliance, prevention of war, economic prosperity, non-proliferation, and the fight against the global war on terrorism[35] (North Korea represents a nexus of nuclear weapons and possible proliferation to terrorist organizations and the rogue states who support them). Currently, the ROK has over 4,000 personnel in 12 countries and 15 different locations in support of peacekeeping operations or US efforts.[36] The US currently stations 32,000 troops in the ROK to defend against external aggression.[37]

The two nations also share a unique combined war-fighting capability. Combined Forces Command (CFC) receives bi-lateral guidance into a "unity of command" structure. In its current structure, CFC gives common purpose to mission, commanders' intent, plans, training, exercises, and integration of capabilities. The structures of the two militaries are complimentary. The ROK armed forces bring mass, and the US armed forces contribute technology. The ROK forces are ground

centric, and the US brings significant air and naval power.[38] There is also interoperability of systems and personnel, and combined training and exercises, as well as common doctrine – ROK officers train in US schools and employ strategy and tactics from US manuals and operational art, and US officers attend ROK Primary Military Education programs.[39] Often less publicized but certainly at least as important, the ROK and US share a common support for freedom's principles and institutions. The ROK is the seventh largest trading partner of the US, and the US is the second greatest destination for ROK products.[40]

Weaknesses also exist in the alliance. These include lack of a common long-term vision for Northeast Asia, and differing views on the region (polling data suggests the current majority party in the ROK is hedging its bets that one day China will again gain ascendancy in the region versus US dominance, and the US sees Japan as an ally, while the ROK sees Japan as a trade partner but a potential enemy).[41] The ROK and US currently also have differing views on North Korea, as the Blue House seeks coexistence with Pyongyang through a "gradualism" approach, and the ROK public has diminished views of the North Korean threat since the June 2000 summit, whereas the US sees the DPRK as a member of the "axis of evil" and a proliferator of WMD.[42] There are starkly different views of North Korea's nuclear program, which the ROK government tends to see as a threat to the US, not the ROK, and that is viewed by the US through the counter-proliferation prism. This paradigm truly began to exist during the Kim Dae-jung administration, but has come to the forefront since 2003.

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Primary Challenges Facing the Security Policy Initiative

There are several challenges facing the Security Policy Initiative (SPI). The first challenge is the issue of strategic flexibility. Because of the changing strategic environment throughout the world, the United States has engaged in a global posture review over the past two years. The result of this review regarding US forces in Korea has been a discussion of turning the forces on the Peninsula into a rapid deployment force able to respond to a crisis in Asia or elsewhere on short notice.[43]

Despite the planned realignment of forces in Korea, numerous US Defense Department officials have stated that the primary mission of US forces in Korea is to defend and deter against an attack from the North.[44] To date, Roh's position regarding this issue has been that he wants to reshape the alliance, but does not want to give USFK strategic flexibility at a time when the US needs all of its forces to accomplish security objectives in a post-9/11 world.[45] The issue of strategic flexibility continues to be a major discussion item at the SPI talks, and during early March, 2005, Roh was quoted in a speech at the 53rd graduating class of the Air Force Academy as saying, ". . . our citizens will not become embroiled in Northeast Asian conflicts without our consent." A high ranking Blue House official said that Roh's comments were a matter of principle and ways of setting them down formally were being studied in consultation with the US Reportedly, the Blue House wants to make it mandatory for Washington to obtain prior consent from Korea when moving USFK forces elsewhere.[46]

Another challenge facing the SPI talks is the issue of burden sharing. Seoul wants to minimize burden sharing that consists of non-personnel stationing costs. These are typically costs associated with such items as bases, infrastructure, and, non-US base workers. On March 16, 2005, the two sides announced that an agreement had been reached in principle that would reduce the costs paid by Seoul over the next two years to help maintain a US military presence in Korea. Foreign Minister Ban Ki-Moon has repeatedly stated that the ongoing reduction in US troops on the Peninsula must be taken into account when costs are

considered.[47] The effects of the agreement were almost immediate and costly. On April 1, 2005, USFK announced a decision to lay off up to 1,000 Korean civilian staff due to the reductions in South Korea's cost sharing for the year.[48] When discussing the announcement on behalf of USFK, Lt. General Charles Campbell said that the US military must reduce spending because the amount that Seoul has agreed to pay is not enough to support workers at US bases. The amount Seoul will pay is a nine percent reduction over 2004.[49] ROK Defense Minister Yoon Kwang-ung later stated that the proportion of the USFK's budget allocation to South Korea for 2005 had been reduced by 8.9 percent.[50] On May 20, 2005, the first Korean workers were laid off, when 112 civilians who worked on Air Force bases in South Korea were let go.[51]

There also has been a great deal of discussion regarding Washington's request for Seoul to share the costs for modernizing integrated command and control (C4I) systems. There has been much debate over how much Seoul is going to pay for integrated command and control systems, but, at least for now, it appears Seoul is unwilling to pay these costs.[52] This issue was also addressed by Lt. General Campbell speaking on behalf of USFK, when he commented, ". . . we will be required to make tough but necessary decisions in C4I systems, which are currently provided to South Korea's military forces."[53]

If one were to compare the costs of military burden sharing in Korea to what the government in Japan pays, Seoul's share of the burden is significantly smaller.[54] In related concerns are the discussions over the cost of the Yongsan (USFK Headquarters) relocation to areas farther south near the Camp Humphries US Army base. There are also ongoing discussions on land allocation. In this case Seoul has been seeking to limit relocation payments to less than the US Department of Defense is asking. It is important here to consider the fact that currently South Korea has the fourth largest holding of foreign currency reserves ($202 billion) in the world. These reserves were originally acquired in order to prevent a re-occurrence of the ROK financial crisis of 1997 – which entailed strict rules imposed on South Korea by the IMF.[55] To date, Seoul has refused to discuss

using any of this money to pay for the relocation of Yongsan Army garrison.

Yet another challenge facing the SPI talks is the issue of future command relationships. Roh also addressed this issue in his speech at the Air Force Academy graduation, stating that it would be necessary to readjust command relationships over the next ten years.[56] This will no doubt be a discussion item in the long-term. Rumors have circulated in the ROK that the US will downgrade the rank of the Commander of US forces from a four-star to a three-star – despite statements to the contrary from the US Department of Defense and high-ranking military officials.[57] In addition, Roh has called for adjustments to (or complete abolishment of) United Nations Command, and Combined Forces Command. Both of these commands have undergone changes in past years, and it is likely that they will continue to do so as the alliance evolves. Finally, Roh has called for changes to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). As of the writing of this article, it is unclear what changes, if any, will occur in the SOFA.[58]

Because a nation-to-nation alliance is almost as much about perception as it is actual combat and political capability, the last issue regarding challenges to SPI is extremely important: the transformation of USFK (particularly ground forces). USFK is certainly not the only force to undergo transformation in the US military. In fact, a transformation has been ongoing in all of the US military services since late 2001. The problem here is that any change in the status quo is interpreted by the ROK general public (and often the Blue House) as producing changes to the military alliance without consulting America's ROK allies.[59] A key example of this is the current transformation of forces and command and control being conducted by the 2nd Infantry Division, close to the DMZ.[60] The 2nd Infantry Division transformation to a rapidly deployable, "UEx," or "Unit of Employment," was scheduled to be completed by June 15, 2005.[61] While this is more or less being done because of current issues capabilities and troop deployments around the world, it has been interpreted by many in South Korea as initiating Strategic Flexibility right now, before it has been addressed

properly in the SPI talks. The transformation of the US military as it relates to USFK will no doubt continue to be a challenge in both the short term and the long term as the SPI talks continue.

In each of the points discussed above, the Roh administration has been pushing very hard. This has caused problems, because as the US seeks to transform its forces in order to best support the national security needs of the ROK, Seoul appears to be downplaying the political threat involved. Statements by Roh to this effect have caused concern in the US.[62] Statements made recently by Defense Minister Yoon regarding the North Korean threat have also caused concern.[63] Finally, the most recent (2005) Ministry of Defense White Article, which eliminated the term "Main Enemy," has caused concern, not only in the United States but in the ROK military as well. In Korea a poll conducted by the *Chosun Ilbo* as the Defense Ministry was considering the change in terminology, revealed 84.8 percent of the 1,447 army officers and soldiers surveyed believed that the government should in fact retain the terminology.[64] As the change to the White Article became a reality, a ROK field commander was quoted as saying, **". . .** it has become difficult to give our soldiers psychological training, and it will get tougher in the future."[65] Clearly, the change to the designation of North Korea as the "Main Enemy" has caused repercussions in the ROK military.

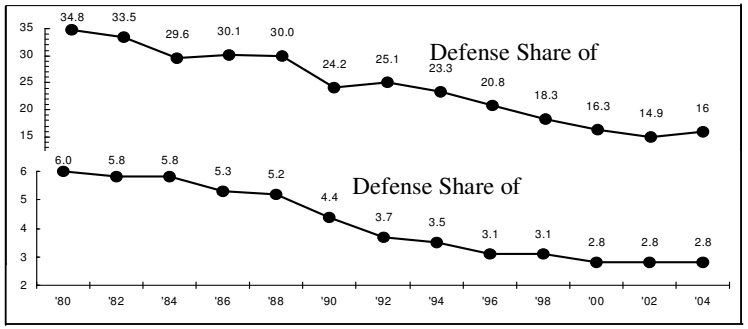
The actions of the current administration in Seoul have already had a profound effect on some members of the US Congress. Congressman Henry Hyde, Chairman of the House International Relations Committee commented on the recent MND White Article in a prepared statement on March10, 2005, ". . . it deleted the designation of Pyongyang as the Main Enemy, although the White Article stated that, in the event of armed conflict in Korea, the US would dispatch 690,000 troops, over four times the 150,000 serving in Iraq. . ." Hyde went on to observe: "If you need our help, please tell us clearly who your enemy is."[66]

Congressman Hyde's remarks were of course, picked up and widely publicized by the ROK press. ROK Unification Minister Chung Dong-young responded to the remarks soon thereafter,

and was quoted by Unification Ministry spokesman Kim Hong-jae as saying Northeast Asia was trying to move from hostile confrontation to coexistence, reconciliation and cooperation, further stating that Hyde's confrontational thinking was not helpful in resolving problems on the Korean Peninsula.[67] While Hyde may be the first member of Congress to come out so bluntly in speaking of a perception that now exists among many on both sides of the aisle in Congress, he has highlighted a concern regarding perceptions of the threat in the Blue House that will likely have an important impact on the ROK-US Alliance.

This brings us back once again to the dilemma created by the current ROK national security strategy and the contradictions seen in the actions regarding this policy since its introduction in 2004. The current security policy appears to be downplaying much of the threat that the North poses, while at the same time taking actions (as discussed above) that have served, at least thus far, to marginalize the ROK-US Alliance. Also of key importance is the fact that "Self-Reliant Defense" is being stressed in this policy, yet to date, the ROK government has been unwilling to spend the money necessary to create a military force capable of self-reliant national defense, one of the key examples of the contradictions that seem to be occurring between stated policy and actual implemented programs. If an examination is made of ROK defense spending in recent years (see graph below), the results show that budget allocations do not appear to match the goals stated by Roh in 2003 and articulated in the National Security Strategy in 2004.

ROK Defense Budget Allocation Trend (Source: ROK Ministry of National Defense)



In fact, a comparison of ROK defense spending to other countries with similar economies and/or national security concerns shows that South Korea actually spends considerably less than other nation-states where the military plays a significant role in foreign policy (see graph below). ROK Defense Minister Yoon has stated that the South Korean military aims to establish "self-reliant defense capabilities" by 2025, and that the defense budget will "rise back" to 2.7% by the end of President Roh's current term. The defense budget share of GDP for 2005 was only about 2.47%, which was down even from the figures below (2003 and 2004 budgets).[68] US Forces Korea Commander General Leon LaPorte has reportedly stated that the Korean government needs to spend between 3.2% and 3.5% of its budget on defense if it wants to develop independent defense capabilities.[69]

Comparison of Defense Budgets of Major Countries

Classification	Israel	Russia	China	US	Japan	Korea
Defense share of GDP (%)	9.7 (10th)	4.8 (26th)	4.1 (31st)	3.3 (48th)	1.0 (137th)	2.8 (59th)
Percapital defense burden ($)	1,499 (3rd)	333 (25th)	37 (91st)	1,138 (4th)	290 (28th)	266 (29th)
Defense spending on each troop ($)	58,929 (26th)	52,862 (28th)	22,667 (53rd)	244,219 (1st)	164,583 (6th)	18,986 (62nd)

Note: Figures in parenthesis show the world's ranking.

Sources: The Military Balance 2003-2004 and ROK Ministry of National Defense: **www.mnd.go.kr**

Bruce Bennet of the Rand Institute commented on the contradictions between stated policy and actual military-related implementations in the ROK at a conference held during 2004 in Seoul, remarking that South Korea needs to improve its military equipment and observing that the US does not understand why Korea is shortening its military service period and reducing its troop strength, while at the same time telling the US that American forces in Korea should not leave the country.[70] A key example of this contradiction in the ROK military today is the current C4I structure. The structure remains almost unchanged from a structure that has existed since the 1950s, where quite literally the movement of forces consists of a ROK four-star general picking up the phone and calling a ROK three-star general to tell him where to put a division on the line. Upgrading the ROK C4I structure (and the costs associated with it) has been an important item of discussion between ROK and US defense officials, and, to date, the issue remains unresolved.[71]

Conclusions

The policy of self-reliant national defense may be a legitimate goal, but in order to begin the process for in ROK policy documents and in statements made by Roh and others, several drastic and financially-important steps need to occur. A self-reliant military must first have its own war-fighting command with its own war plans. And of key concern, it is impossible to have a competent, capable war fighting command without a modern C4I system.

In the out years of 2010 to 2015, the available conscription pool for the ROK military will be reduced. Thus, the ROK military, in order to achieve self-reliant defense, must modernize forces that have *Peninsular Operational Flexibility*, not unlike the Strategic Flexibility for which the American military is striving. To achieve this flexibility, the ROK military would need to establish a war fighting command, modernize their C4I systems, establish Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities at modern levels, and begin writing their own

war plans – and exercising those war plans. These are serious (and costly) undertakings, but, as discussed before, the ROK government has the funds to take on these extremely complicated and expensive tasks in their large holdings of foreign reserves.

Any alliance is a 50-50 proposition. At the present time, it appears that policy makers on both sides of the Pacific still desire a strong ROK-US Alliance; the differences are in the approaches that each side seems to be taking toward the future of the alliance. That said, the SPI talks remain an outstanding venue for resolving differences and setting goals for future years. After all, the main goal of the alliance has not changed since 1953, the mutual defense of the Republic of Korea and the United States of America.

With the rewriting of the ROK National Security Strategy in 2004 and the ongoing negotiations in the SPI talks, the alliance now faces many challenges. It is the assessment of this author that the ROK government currently faces two options; a) put the money and manpower into an infrastructure that is capable of actually providing self-reliant national defense; or b) resolve the challenges currently faced in the SPI talks by reaching compromise solutions satisfactory to both the ROK and the US. The alliance transformation train has already left the station, but where it is going we do not know. As go agreements through the SPI talks, so goes the future destination of the ROK-US Alliance.

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Endnotes:

[1]The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, the Marine Corps University, or the United States Government. The ROK-US Alliance During the Bush and Roh Administrations: Differing Perspectives and their Implications for a Changing Strategic Environment

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