

**Pyongyang Between  
Seoul and Washington**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The future of the U.S.-Republic of Korea alliance hinges on the ability of these allies to adjust promptly and realistically to changing circumstances in Northeast Asia. The partnership must strike a new balance between Washington's preoccupation with global security concerns and Seoul's pursuit of reconciliation with North Korea. Otherwise, the half century old alliance could retreat into history.

Today, the alliance is under strain. But this is not a new phenomenon. If anything, strain has been a prominent and continuing characteristic not just in the US-ROK alliance, but all similar alliances forged during the Cold War. Even older North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) survived France's preference for its own nuclear capability, Western European opposition to the US placement of ballistic missiles in Western Europe, plus numerous other testy issues. NATO survived not just these tests, but the even the Soviet Union's collapse and the Cold War's end, at least in Europe.

Alas, the Cold War persists on the Korean Peninsula. The US-ROK alliance is a consequence of that war. When forged, its primary purpose was to deter another North Korean invasion of South Korea. Since the alliance's conception, each government's role and contribution to the alliance has and remains a source of tension. Nevertheless, the partners shared virtually the identical goals of deterrence, preservation of the Korean War Armistice and sustaining South Korea as the sole legitimate government on the Korean Peninsula.

Change in Northeast Asia, however, has outpaced both Washington and Seoul's political willingness to recast their alliance. Both still share the common goal of discouraging North Korea aggression on the Korean Peninsula. Until 1992, Seoul set the pace and direction for policy toward North Korea while remaining heavily dependent on Washington regarding military strategy. At the same time, Washington played the supporting role regarding diplomacy toward North Korea while sustaining the lead in military strategy.

But since 1992, the two capitals' priorities have diverged. From the start of the Clinton Administration in 1993, Washington seized leadership of policy toward North Korea. It did so citing concerns about North Korea's role in the global proliferation of ballistic missiles and development of a nuclear weapons' capability. Then President Kim Young-sam's vacillated between pushing the US to negotiate with North Korea and refusing to sanction the outcome of these negotiations. The alliances sought to rationalize the consequent tension between them by accusing North Korea of trying to "drive a wedge" between Seoul and Washington. If anything, Pyongyang undoubtedly sought to manipulate this "wedge" to its advantage. On the other hand, the wedge was a consequence of diverging priorities between Washington and Seoul, not a product of some mysterious North Korean capability to pit the United States against South Korea.

Obviously, since 2001 after George Bush became president, the strain in the US-Korea relationship appears to have intensified. The Bush Administration's foreign policy

priorities are to preserve the *status quo ante bellum* on the Korean Peninsula. In other words, President Bush's is determined to rid North Korea of all nuclear programs, maintain the Korean War Armistice and impede North Korea's economic modernization. The South Korean administrations of Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun aim to achieve the opposite. Their priority is national reconciliation and the inducement of North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons capability in exchange for the means to revitalize and modernize its economy.

My paper will explore the causes and consequences of this divergence of goals in the US-ROK relationship and their potential consequences on the Korean Peninsula and North East Asia.

aim at coercing it to give up all nuclear ambitions and ensuring its military and economic weakness ening North Korea militarily, prompting its sustaining its but Global geopolitical changes combined with has been the continuing dueling over each government's role in the alliance North Korea's formidable conventional military force, now augmented by nuclear weapons, remains the primary concern of the US-ROK alliance, and deterrence its foremost goal. . of this, alliance. Since the trauma of the Korean War forged the alliance in 1953, the governments in Washington and Seoul have been at odds over a continuing stream of clashing priorities.

Beneath the. Originally, the allies clash over whether to sign the Korean War Armistice. President Eisenhower resolved this debate by directing his military commanders to sign the armistice, regardless of South Korean President Rhee Syng Man's adamant opposition. From 1958 to 1987, first rampant corruption in the South Korean government, then the South Korean government's authoritarianism and disrespect for political and human rights increasingly troubled the alliance. By 1977, the alliance seemed near rupture. South Korean President Park Chung-hee not only continued to ignore Washington's admonishments, he sought to "buy" the alliance of prominent American politicians (the so-called "Koreagate Scandal"), but much more worrisome was Park's attempt to secretly build his own nuclear arsenal.

In the 1980s, the US-Korea alliance persisted despite lingering past problems and substantial new ones. The US government's response to the political turmoil of 1979-80 and rise of General Chun Doo-hwan to the presidency fostered intense anti-American sentiment. Originally, anti-American sentiment was concentrated among college students. But intensifying US government effort to pry open Korea's domestic market to American imports spread this sentiment across generation and socio-economic groups. By 1987, many South Koreans were seriously questioning the need for the US-South Korea alliance.

Korea's democratization and prosperity, however, quickly assuaged these tensions. By 1990, the US-Korea alliance had achieved unprecedented levels of cooperation in numerous areas. Trade problems became history and bilateral trade flourished. The flow of Korean students and immigrants to the United States quickened. In short, the two nations achieved a true partnership in business and education.

Problems persisted, nevertheless. Korea's prosperity enticed the United States to press Seoul to assume more responsibility for its defense. Washington pushed Seoul to increase its "host nation support," the amount of money and material support the South Korean government contributed toward the maintenance of US Forces in Korea. Although this issue continues to trouble the alliance, both sides are gradually but successfully forging a new balance in their shared security responsibilities.

But a much more fundamental and enduring source of stress in the alliance became evident in the early 1990s – North Korea.

## **II. SHARED GOALS**

- Peace
- Prosperity
- Stability
- Deterrence
- Disarmament
- Reconciliation

## **III. DIVERGING STRATEGIES**

### **A. Washington's Preferences**

- Neo-Containment
- Unilateralism
- Global priority
- Coercion
- Six Party Talks – Multilateral Pressure
- PSI

### **B. Seoul's Economic Engagement**

- Mixed Unilateralism and coordination
- Regional priority
- Inducement
- Six Party Talks
- Economic interdependence

## **IV. PYONGYANG'S PRIORITIES**

- Peace
- Prosperity
- Deterrence
- International Respect



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