



CHAPTER 11

**Visions of the Future U.S.-Korean  
Security Relationship<sup>189</sup>**

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The traditional friendship and alliance between the Republic of Korea and the United States must mature and advance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*President Roh Moo-hyun<sup>190</sup>*

**Introduction**

The December 2002 victory of progressive Millennium Democratic Party candidate Roh Moo-hyun reflected a shift in generations, a slippage in the power of the political right, a rise in the power of heretofore untapped populism, and the feeling that the US was ignoring South Korean concerns in dealing with the North Korea nuclear crisis.<sup>191</sup> While the first three factors can be

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<sup>189</sup> The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

<sup>190</sup> Bill Tarrant, "S. Korean leader seeks change in U.S. alliance," *Reuters Asia*, 20 December 2002, online <http://asia.reuters.com>, 09:48 GMT+08:00

<sup>191</sup> Martin Woollacott, "At least Korea is united over one thing – anger at the US," *The Guardian*, 20 December 2002, online [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

seen as indicators of the ongoing maturation of Korean democracy, the last is open to interpretation and was seen at the time as indicative of growing friction between South Korea and its most important ally.

Korean grievances against the United States were a factor in the election. The weeks preceding the election were marked by South Korean protests over the handling of the deaths of two middle school girls who had been crushed by an American armored vehicle during summer maneuvers, and the subsequent acquittal by a U.S. military court of the two U.S. soldiers charged with negligent manslaughter. During the election campaign, President Roh was highly critical of the Status of Forces Agreement which, under most official circumstances, shields U.S. military personnel from the South Korean justice system. More than rival conservative Lee Hoi-chang, Mr. Roh's campaign managed to ride the wave of these strong feelings.<sup>192</sup> The anti-American protests over the SOFA resonated with a more fundamental question of the ROK-U.S. security relationship.

Young South Koreans, over a decade removed from the end of the Cold War and with only school knowledge of the Korean War, increasingly question the relevance of U.S. troops in Korea and the goals of U.S. policy toward North Korea. This shift in attitude was demonstrated by Mr. Roh's ability to withstand a last-minute controversy over his assertion that he would prevent the United States from going to war with North Korea over its nuclear weapons program and act as a mediator. A few years ago, such a break with the United States would have doomed Mr. Roh's candidacy.<sup>193</sup> But times have changed.

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<sup>192</sup> "South Korea's president-elect looks more to North, less to West," *The Seattle Times*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *Knight Ridder Newspapers*, 20 December 2002, 12:14 am, Pacific, online <http://seattletimes.nwsources.com>

<sup>193</sup> Tim Shorrocks, "Roh win underscores US-Korea rift," *Asia Times Online*, 21 December 2002, online [www.atimes.com](http://www.atimes.com)

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In the 2002 presidential election campaign, Mr. Roh took up the banner of Koreans who want changes in the relationship with the United States and argued that South Korea should adopt a more independent course in foreign policy. In a comment that was widely publicized in the U.S. press, he declared that “I don’t have any anti-American sentiment, but I won’t kowtow to the Americans either.” He also parlayed the fact that he had never been to the United States into evidence of his independence<sup>194</sup>

Mr. Roh promised to be more assertive with Washington. In the past, he had lobbied for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. During the campaign he said he supported a strong security alliance, perhaps extending beyond Korean unification, but on a more equal footing. Informed observers, such as Scott Snyder, the Asia Foundation representative in Seoul, were not as sanguine,

I think that what it does mean is that the issue of the future of U.S. troops, depending on the broader security context, is up for discussion and that it is impossible to rule out a scenario at this point that would involve the departure of U.S. troops. Is all of this going to occur tomorrow? No. It is very much dependent on the broader security environment.<sup>195</sup>

The response from the United States to this dramatic sequence of events was surprising to many conservative Korean observers. The U.S. Department of Defense, rather than recoiling from challenges about the fundamental structure and purpose of the

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<sup>194</sup> Tim Shorrock, “Roh win underscores US-Korea rift,” *Asia Times Online*, 21 December 2002, online [www.atimes.com](http://www.atimes.com).

<sup>195</sup> Amy Bickers “Profile of South Korean President-elect Roh,” *Voice of America, Asia Pacific*, 20 December 2002, 0911 UTC, online [www.voanews.com](http://www.voanews.com).

alliance, appeared to embrace them. Following the inauguration of President Roh, senior U.S. defense officials proposed that the already-agreed-upon bilateral alliance reassessment should expedite the review of a wide range of issues to include a major adjustment of the U.S. force presence or footprint on the Korean peninsula, one that would shift the center of U.S. forces from Seoul -- north of the Han river to Osan and the southeast of Korea. Such a move would eliminate many of sources of friction with the Korean populace. It would also physically acknowledge the shift the U.S. role in the alliance from being a key component deterring and defeating the North Korean conventional attack in the forward areas to a strategic deterrent more capable of deploying off the peninsula for regional contingencies.

In many ways, the recent U.S. proposals evoked a return to the East Asia Strategic Initiative process of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which envisioned South Korea taking the lead in the defense of the peninsula and the US taking the lead in an invigorated regional role for the alliance. Seoul officials have been alarmed by the proposals to realign troops at a time when the North Korean nuclear crisis continues unresolved, and have pressed the U.S. to reconsider the pace and scope of changes<sup>196</sup>. Additionally, the U.S. proposals have also raised worries among supporters the alliance in both Korea and the United States that significant troop withdrawals were on a secret agenda or could be unintended consequences of an attempt to rapidly reshape the alliance.

As the Roh Moo-hyun administration begins the second year of its five-year term in a year that marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ratification of the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty, concerned observers are asserting that the allies are farther apart on issues of security and U.S. force presence than any other time since

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<sup>196</sup> Oh Young-jin, "Troops May Be Moved Without Seoul's Nod," *The Korea Times*, 19 March 2003, online,

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U.S. troops first entered the country in 1945.<sup>197</sup> To best understand the present situation with the security alliance and visions for its future, one needs to look at the present circumstances, but also its past.

### **Origins and Background of the Alliance**

In the 1980s, Professor Ed Olsen of the Naval Postgraduate School argued that, throughout most of the life span of South Korea, the military and political threat from North Korea so threatened the survival of the state that responding to the threat dominated the political arena. Additionally, the South Korean-U.S. security relationship was seen as the most important counter to the North Korean threat. In essence, the North Korean threat loomed so large, and the U.S. security relationship was so important to keeping the threat at bay, that they became the prism through which all other foreign relations and security issues were viewed. It might also be argued that the two also exerted tremendous influence on South Korean domestic politics as well.

The organizing concept of the security alliance for its first four decades was that the U.S. and ROK held convergent conceptions of peninsular security, focusing the alliance in narrow terms of deterring a hostile North Korea. Both clearly defined North Korea as the salient threat, and saw the pursuit of security in terms of hard-line deterrence embodying containment, forward-deployed deterrence, an acceptable military balance, and dialogue with Pyongyang only on the most favorable terms. The United States was expected to provide overarching strategy and operational planning within the combined defense framework, and to exercise a degree of operational control over South Korean forces -- an arrangement that ensured American commitment, but which stunted development of the Korean

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<sup>197</sup> Tim Shorrocks, "Roh win underscores US-Korea rift," *Asia Times Online*, 21 December 2002, online [www.atimes.com](http://www.atimes.com)

military's strategic vision and its command and control skills, and constrained its autonomy.

Almost from the beginning, Washington chafed at having forces tied down on the peninsula unable to deploy to trouble spots in the region. Seoul went to exceptional lengths to counter U.S. withdrawal initiatives. As South Korea developed economically, some Americans questioned if it was contributing enough to its own defense or if subsidizing the defense of the regime in Seoul was really in the American national interest. Seoul, for its part, has questioned whether a policy of simply following the security strategies worked out in Washington and keeping command relationships that put the U.S. on some level in charge of the South Korean military and influential in its personnel matters was consistent with South Korea's national interests. The history of the security relationship has always had these undercurrents. Washington has sought to lower its "fixed costs" on the peninsula while increasing its freedom of action within the region. Seoul has tried to adjust its distorted security paradigm to bring it closer to "normalcy" without losing the advantages of the U.S. commitment and the capabilities its military brought to the peninsula.

### **Visions of the Alliance: Seoul**

Through the 1970s, from the South Korean perspective, the major challenge within the security relationship was maintaining the US presence and/or reacting to possible withdrawals. The South Korean desire to adjust roles and missions and decision-making within the alliance can be traced to accession of Korea Military Academy-educated Army elite with General Chun Doo-hwan's rise to power in 1979-80. The shift was to asserting strategic autonomy within the relationship and the planning and command and control skills required to do so.

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By the 1988 Olympics, South Korea's military had acquired the necessary skills to assert control of its forces and at the same time began to think in terms of its regional role. The U.S. East Asia Strategic Initiative process and the strong lead the U.S. took in dealing with the first North Korea nuclear crisis in the 1990s, however, caused many South Korean planners to advocate speeding up the acquisition of independent capabilities and called into question the reliability of the U.S. as an ally. It was not apparent, however, how the bilateral relationship would be integrated into a broader regional security policy or what Seoul's relationship would be with Beijing or Moscow. This thought process would evolve over successive administrations into President Kim Dae-jung's formulation -- "strengthen the Korea-U.S. joint security system and promote cooperation with neighboring powers."

Two lessons Seoul clearly learned in the 1990s, however reluctantly, were that U.S. interests and policy options are broader than South Korea's; and that Seoul can sustain policies that directly contradict those of the United States only with great risk and difficulty. As Seoul began to see engaging and deterring Pyongyang as potentially related approaches, some South Koreans argued that U.S. policy toward the North might be counter to Korean interests. First, in private and later publicly, senior South Korean officials voiced the idea that South Korea should not be reluctant to disagree with U.S. positions if national or regional interests dictated.

Although the United States has continued to play a central role in South Korea's foreign and security policy, changes in international and national conditions have enabled the South to break out of its pre-occupation with the United States. In the view of many South Koreans, favorable trends in inter-Korean relations have created an opportunity for Seoul to fold its security relationship with the U.S. into a larger regional security arrangement. Under such a paradigm the security relationship

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with the U.S. will still be the most important bilateral tie, but security links with other states will increase in relative importance as part of an overall comprehensive security approach that will embrace economic and diplomatic considerations as well.

### *The Combined Defense*

The Korean prism for viewing any changes within the combined defense structure has always been focused on recovering the full command autonomy that has been abridged since the formative days of the Republic. Seoul is well on its way redressing these shortcomings through the acquisition of sophisticated C3I technology and robust unilateral exercise and training programs. But while there is a desire for a stand-alone defense capability, there is also the recognition that replacing the capabilities that the U.S. brings to the alliance remains unaffordable and unreachable in the near term. Korean reliance on U.S. intelligence, for example, remains significant despite the introduction of new systems. The same is true in a number of areas including missile defense, the counter-battery battle, and precision-guided munitions. Faced with this reality, there is an ongoing debate on how much emphasis and money should go to securing self-sufficiency versus continued reliance on the U.S. to supply key capabilities.

The touchstones for criticism of perceived excessive deference to the U.S. within the combined defense has always been twofold: the distribution of Koreans and Americans within the combined defense and the delegation of command/operational control between the combined defense and the South Korean command structure. Many of the proposals forwarded by the Defense Reform Promotion Committee and Revolution in Military Affairs Committee directly address the organizational shortfalls which have to be corrected for Seoul to exercise operational control of

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its forces inside or outside of the South Korean-U.S. combined system either in a contingency situation or during wartime.

### *Beyond the North Korean Threat*

In the late 1980s, South Korean defense planners realized that at some point the North Korean threat might cease to be the number one problem confronting the military. In response, they began to reorient long term planning and force improvement efforts to prepare for regional security challenges and to give renewed impetus to developing cooperative security dialogue and arrangements with all the regional powers

The Korean defense establishment has conducted its review of security requirements should North Korea no longer pose a major threat. This review included studies done by the National Defense College and the Korea Institute for Defense Analysis. The Kim Dae-jung administration gave added emphasis to the effort through the creation of a Defense Reform Promotion Committee and the Revolution in Military Affairs committee, and captured the theme in its commitment to dismantle the “Cold War security mechanisms” while “strengthening the Korea-U.S. joint security system and promoting cooperation with neighboring powers.” No single authoritative public study has emerged that captures the results of this approach, but enough discussion has occurred in the public realm to allow an outline to emerge.

### *Problem Identification*

South Korean planners agree that the security environment of a post-threat or unified Korea will be forged by many factors, including the future of North Korea, the North-South relationship, the roles of the U.S. and neighboring countries in contingencies and in the peace process, and regional security dynamics. At least for the next several years, Korean planners

assume North Korea's stress on its survival through brinkmanship will require continuity in the deterrence policy toward the North. The basic assumption of Korean defense planning has been that North Korea's military threat will gradually decline but remain meaningful for an extended period. At the same time, the range of contingency confronting Seoul demands that defense planning be flexible and adaptive enough to counter potential hostile scenarios accommodating the South Korean government's policy of inducing openness and reform in the North.

However, once the situation in North Korea is fundamentally altered – through collapse, policy change, or preludes to unification -- Korean defense planners understand there will be change. The disappearance of the North Korean military threat, or at least the perception of its disappearance, and the timing and modality of any North-South accommodation will heavily influence Korean defense funding and planning. Planners assume that South Korea will pursue confidence building/arms control measures with the North. Additionally, while maintaining its alliance with the U.S., it will actively pursue multilateral security dialogues and cooperation with neighboring states as a means of complementing the bilateral security relationship.

### *Regional Dynamics*

Most South Korean planners acknowledge that through the near and mid term, Korea, united or not, will be a middle power, clearly inferior to all of its neighbors in national and military power. The U.S. is likely to maintain an Asian military presence at a somewhat reduced level, yet continue to exert powerful influence throughout the region. China, as a “potential theater-peer competitor” might challenge the U.S.'s definition of a favorable strategic environment or see Japan as a strategic competitor. Such a confluence raises the specter that history will

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repeat itself and, as in the late nineteenth century, the Korean peninsula will be the locus where the interests of the four surrounding powers will intersect to the detriment of Korean national interest.

### *Role of the United States*

In the short term, the U.S. can be instrumental in deterring another war by maintaining a strong, combined defense posture with the ROK while engaging North Korea in order to reduce tensions. Planners believe that the U.S. can play a much-needed role in dealing with North Korean contingencies to include engaging Japan and, to a lesser extent, China to control the manner in which they might become involved. In the long term, planners see the U.S. playing a role in a new peace regime and unification by first bringing North Korea into international forums, and possibly taking a leading role in activating the dormant potential for multilateral security dialogue and cooperation in Northeast Asia,

### *Role of China*

Planners believe China will play a low-profile but important role in maintaining the status quo on the Korean peninsula. It will seek to prevent a collapse of the North, but its role in a major crisis or a possible North Korean collapse is problematic. Such a crisis could prompt Beijing to consider whether it should intervene. In the longer term, however, Korean defense planners are confident that China, as long as its territorial integrity is not threatened, will not oppose Korean unification. The Chinese however, might raise the issue of the presence and level of U.S. troops in Korea at the time of unification. Beijing will try to induce a unified Korea to lean toward it. Planners acknowledge the pull of Sino-Korean cultural links and historical affinities, but do not see the two countries allied at the expense of strong ties to the United States.

*Role of Japan*

South Korean planners do not grant Japan a major role maintaining peace on the Korean peninsula, but do acknowledge that, despite lingering animosity, the trend in trilateral cooperation and contingency planning among the U.S., Japan, and South Korea will foster growing trilateral and bilateral cooperation. As the two Koreas enter a phase of accommodation and integration, planners believe that the three countries will work together to shape an environment favorable to Korean unification. Japan's security role, as always, is viewed with ambivalence. Japan's guidelines for defense cooperation with the U.S. on the one hand acknowledged as directly or indirectly contributing to security of the Korean peninsula and providing the U.S. with leverage in contingency situations, yet there is lingering concern. The acceptable roles Japan can play are open to debate but include refugee, humanitarian assistance, noncombatant evacuation, mine sweeping, peace keeping operations, and UNHCR-type operations whether within and outside the region. Ultimately, however, there is a question whether the shared political and economic values will bind the two states together or whether Korea will see Japan as a "reference power" if not a potential threat.

*Role of Russia*

Korean planners assess that despite periodic initiatives, Russia will play a lesser, peripheral role relative to the other three big powers unless its national interests are severely threatened. The areas where planners believe Russia might be an active player are in multilateral maritime cooperation and the broader cooperative multilateralism. But Russia's potential to play a role in Northeast Asia will require that Seoul engage it in a positive manner.

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### *Korea's Security Options*

Seoul's defense planners cast a post-threat or unified Korea as a classic "middle power" among larger powers. Four potential strategies are identified: 1) keeping its conventional alliance ties with the U.S. or, in the case of an American policy change, with other major powers in the region; 2) developing a stand-alone military capability while attempting to maintain an equidistant balance with the four major powers; 3) developing a stand alone military capability but detaching itself from the regional power game so as to remain neutral; 4) developing a stand alone capability and seeking multilateral ties with other Asian states and middle powers and dismantling its close bond with the United States. Aside from the first option, the rest assume that the conventional alliance ties with the U.S. would be drastically weakened or even replaced by an alternative security apparatus.

Under this perspective, Korea's options will be complicated should rivalry between Washington and Beijing over drawing Korea into their respective spheres of influence develop. This will presumably pressure South Korea -- or a united Korea -- to review its alliance relationships and decide on a future course. In the process there may be some compromise between the two powers, and this again will affect Korea's security environment and security strategy at the time.

Considering the requirements of the four policy options, the strategies of "neutrality" and "equidistant balancer" are unlikely because they would require Korea to develop a sufficient stand-alone capability to achieve extended deterrence. The goal for South Korea, therefore, is that a future Korea will be stable and peaceful with some form of the U.S.-ROK bilateral alliance still in existence. Korean planners would like to see this alliance complemented with multilateralism. However, Korean planners worry that the U.S. might pursue a strategy of "exclusionary bilateralism" under which the U.S. might try to limit Korean

involvement in multilateral security arrangements if they threaten long-standing bilateral security arrangements.

### *Force Structure*

South Korean defense planners believe that emphasis should be placed on developing South Korea's self-sufficient defense and preparing for new missions, while maintaining the ROK-U.S. alliance and engaging in multilateral security arrangements. Even as the North Korean threat declines, uncertainty may increase. Therefore, Seoul will need to design a defense strategy that moves away from threat-based planning to mission-based planning. As the nature of threats and conflicts changes, the Korean armed forces will also need to consider a wider range of potential missions.

There have been several proposed force structure plans developed, but specific program details and reorganization milestones in any long-term plans will change. They do, however, share the same general characteristics for both a post-threat and unified Korea. Total active-duty strength is posited for no more than 500,000 personnel but probably less. The air force and navy would increase and both would stress acquisition of weapons platforms with extended reach and power projection.

As the Kim Dae-jung administration drew to a close, Korean defense planners saw the reinforcement of the U.S.-Korean bilateral alliance, together with the preparation for a stand-alone military capability and active initiation of multilateral security cooperation as absolute prerequisites to Korea's survival as well as its prosperity. Likewise, the alliance would continue to play a pivotal role in laying the infrastructure for Korea's post-threat and post-unification posture.

South Korean planners intended to build upon the burgeoning number of multilateral security forums in the Asia-Pacific region.

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However, they realized that embracing multilateralism carried with it the possibility that the status of U.S. military forces in Korea would be decided based upon overall Northeast Asia security dynamics, as well as upon a strategic assessment of U.S.-Korean relations.

### **The Roh Factor**

President Roh Moo-hyun barely took his oath before he was confronted by a strong U.S. desire to quickly come to grips with the future of the security relationship. There has been much speculation about what President Roh's security vision is and what that will mean for the alliance. Mr. Roh did not run for president on a security platform, but he did call for adjustments in the security relationship to shift more decision power from the United States to Korea. Additionally, much of his support came from groups which questioned not only the structure of the security alliance but its value to Korea – whether it was in Seoul's interest to have U.S. troops on the peninsula. However, events since Mr. Roh's inauguration have underscored the truism that caution should be exercised in interpreting campaign statements. Campaign statements can give insight into policy leanings but the results of a careful policy review often produce significant adjustments. This could especially be the case for President Roh, a populist who did not bring a particularly strong foreign affairs and security background to the campaign, but has displayed a keen appreciation of South Korea's national interests.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in staffing his national security team President Roh has stressed continuity to a greater extent than any other area. Nor should it be surprising that Mr. Roh took a courageous stance on support for U.S. operations in Iraq, going against the very netizens that made up his key constituency to pursue South Korea's national interest.

President Roh's support of the defense relationship is clear from these actions, but his administration is not committed to simple maintenance of the status quo. For the Roh administration, modernizing and balancing the alliance involves forging a more equitable partnership. At first glance, it is surprising, therefore, that Seoul has reacted so defensively to U.S. proposals to engage in modernizing the alliance. However, such apprehension is understandable when placed in historical context of past adjustments proposed by the U.S., which in Korean eyes far too often involved unilateral U.S. decisions which threatened to decrease Seoul's security.

As the two allies engage in dialogue over "modernizing the security relationship" South Korea's focus apparently will be on equality within alliance decision processes, such as how to best engage North Korea and resolve the ongoing nuclear confrontation rather than specific adjustments to the combined defense force structure or shifts in roles and missions. Such issues, along with changes in command relationships, are likely to be on the Korean agenda only after anxieties over the present confrontation have subsided. At that point it is possible that issues from the campaign such as the wartime subordination of Korean forces to U.S. commanders within the combined defense might be raised.

The Roh administration can be expected to continue to advocate strong alliance, but at the same time to strive for a more independent defense capability. Similarly, the administration probably will continue to believe that ultimately guaranteeing Seoul's security will require a multilateral security framework and that embedding the U.S. alliance within that framework is the best way to assure that Seoul's interest will not be ignored by its more powerful neighbors.

It is less clear how the Roh administration will treat a number of alliance issues that percolated during the presidential campaign.

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The large U.S. Yongsan facility in Seoul has been a continual source of friction. But relocation is an expensive process and one that some Koreans fear would be a signal to North Korea that the U.S. commitment was suspect. The same is true for relocating the U.S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division from what is an increasingly urban area. It addresses a friction point, but could be seen as a lessening of the U.S. commitment. Additionally, there is a worry that a process of adjustment and relocation might spin out of control and become a U.S. withdrawal from the peninsula.

### **Washington's Vision**

While Washington has become the advocate for expediting a re-balancing of the relationship, ironically there might be less in the public record about Washington's vision for the U.S.-Korean security relationship than there is for Seoul's vision. This is not indicative of a low priority Washington has placed on modernizing the relationship, rather it reflects a high degree of abstraction brought to the problem.

What Washington would like to do is to restructure the U.S.-Korean security alliance for a "better fit" within the overall U.S. defense posture – integrating U.S. Force Korea into the worldwide U.S. deployment strategy. Viewed from Washington, the security alliance has often been a "unique case," with command relationships and force structures that were peninsula specific. It was perhaps also uniquely "lost" in time, with force deployments that no longer made sense either from the pure military perspective of the military balance on the peninsula and operational plans, or from a larger perspective of changing social and political forces at work in South Korea.

A Pentagon spokesman<sup>198</sup> has stated that U.S. proposals include “re-balancing some of our roles and responsibilities, relocating Yongsan and having some preliminary ideas for repositioning some U.S. forces south of the Han River.” Press accounts have speculated that the possible removal of American troops from Seoul could be part of the U.S. proposal, but Secretary Rumsfeld has said:

... we still have a lot of forces in Korea today arranged very far forward where it is intrusive in their lives and where they are not very flexible and usable for other things. ... And here is South Korea with a GDP that is probably 25 times 35 times that of North Korea’s and has all capabilities in the world of providing the kind of up front deterrent that is needed. ...

Secretary Rumsfeld went on to say that the support provided by the U.S. could be tailored to meet the changing times on the peninsula and could take the form of improved intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance assets, naval power, air power and different ground capabilities.<sup>199</sup> According to some Korean sources<sup>200</sup>, the U.S. plan would involve U.S. forces being consolidated into two major areas, one near the U.S. Osan air base, and the other further south close to Pusan/Chinhae area – locations that would be useful not only for the defense of the peninsula but would also facilitate deployment of U.S. forces from the peninsula as part of larger regional or global contingencies.

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<sup>198</sup> Will Duhnham, “U.S. Plans to relocate Key South Korea Bases,” *Reuters* 19 March 2003.

<sup>199</sup> “Rumsfeld Discusses Pullout, Relocation of USFK Forces at Meeting,” *Yonhap*, in English, 0135 GMT 7 March 2003.

<sup>200</sup> Author’s interview with Korea officer in April 2003.

## **Conclusion**

Victor Cha<sup>201</sup> has taken a distinctive approach to assess the future resiliency of the U.S.-Korean alliance and whether it can survive the end of the North Korean threat. He accepts the proposition that continuing the alliance would prevent a power vacuum; symbolize the U.S. forward engagement; reassure a reunified Korea of its security; perhaps even ameliorate security friction between China and Japan and that these are compelling reasons to the specialists in both the United States and Korea for maintaining the alliance – all the arguments traditionally put forward by its advocates. But he argues, and convincingly so, that the debate to date on the future of the alliance has been focused on the wrong issues -- adjustments in specific alliance components, roles and missions, force composition and force placement approach, and command relationships.

There are many reasons for Korea in the future to want a strong bilateral relationship with the United States. And there are compelling strategic concerns to motivate the United States to want to keep a presence in Northeast Asia that includes Korea. However, without a clear and present threat, without a straightforward motivation for alliance, the glue of the alliance is harder to define. Dr. Cha makes a compelling argument that the determinant of alliance resiliency will be the degree to which Korea and the United States recognize they share commonly held norms, beliefs, and conceptions of how security is best achieved. By this argument, the future of the alliance decisions will not depend upon cold calculation of shared interests, but will be

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<sup>201</sup> Victor D. Cha, “America’s Alliance in Asia: The Coming “Identity Crisis” with the Republic of Korea” Paper presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Council on U.S.-Korea Security Studies, October 18-20, 2001. For an expanded treatment that includes Japan, see Victor Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The U.S.-Korean-Japan Security Triangle*, Stanford University Press, 1999.

based on shared values, emotional attachment, and feelings of mutual loyalty irrespective of the issue at hand.

If this is the case, a crucial problem for the alliance will be the persistent imbalance in perceptions between the United States and Korea. Koreans know more about and have more intense feelings – positive and negative -- about the U.S. than the reverse. Korea's perception among non-Asia hands and the larger U.S. public has lagged seriously behind important indicators of economic, social and security integration. Moreover, far too often, Korea has only surfaced in the larger U.S. perception over the issues that stress the cultural differences or policy friction between the two states. It is an area where the present is as hard to judge as the future. The Korean support for the U.S. war on terrorism was quick and demonstrative, but it is unclear whether in five years hence the larger American public will remember the specific Korean contributions. Worse, it is possible that what will be remembered is not the actual contributions but what Seoul "should have contributed" that Seoul's contribution of combat engineers and medical personnel will be juxtaposed against the U.S. commitment of combat forces to the defense of the peninsula.

Nevertheless, there is reason for optimism that the alliance will have a future, despite the worries raised by Dr. Cha and apprehensive articles in the South Korean press, and it can be found in the allies' shared and growing stake in democracy and free markets.<sup>202</sup> If this is the case, the future of the U.S.-Korea relationship, born of the Cold War and often perversely sustained by North Korea's continual threatening behavior, will rest more on shared political and economic values, on democracy and the market place, than on geopolitical ones.



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<sup>202</sup> Victor D. Cha, *Ibid.*