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Chaesung Chun  
Patrick M. Cronin  
Sang Hyun Lee  
Scott A. Snyder

# A Vision for the **ROK-U.S. Alliance**



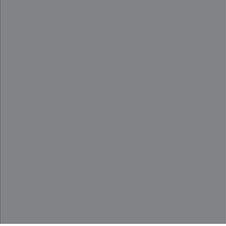


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EAST ASIA INSTITUTE

Address : 158, Eulji-ro, Jung-gu, Seoul, Korea (#909 Sampoong B/D)

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# Executive Summary

The ROK-U.S. alliance should aspire not just to deliver peace and security on the Korean Peninsula but also to help usher in tomorrow's liberal world order. South Korea has experienced remarkable growth under the U.S.-led international order, and the ROK-U.S. alliance has contributed both to South Korea's security, economic prosperity, and democratization as well as to the U.S. mission to preserve the liberal world order. Now, the ROK-U.S. alliance faces many challenges amid the rapidly changing international environment and rising Sino-U.S. geopolitical rivalry.

Since the establishment of the ROK-U.S. alliance, South Korea has grown into a middle-power country that ranks among the top ten wealthiest democracies in the world, and can now contribute to the stabilization of regional order and resolution of problems at the global level. The ROK-U.S. alliance must now evolve into a complex network alliance coping with geopolitical challenges on the Peninsula and in Asia, as well as future-oriented frontier issues.

The two techno-democracies should double their efforts to forge a knowledge alliance,—one committed to tackling complex challenges such as climate change and issues related to energy, resource scarcity, and the environment, as well as pandemics, including the possible threat of bioterrorism. Furthermore, the two nations should elevate democracy, human rights, and good governance as shared alliance concerns for improving regional and world order. By contributing to new constellations of like-minded states, such as a D-10 summit of democracies, as well as building on existing institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the South Korea-U.S. relationship should increasingly focus on how to preserve and adapt democratic governance and market economies in the face of the digital age and major-power

competition over technology and innovation.

As the initial rationale for establishing the alliance based on shared sacrifices during the Korean War is fading, the United States and South Korea should establish a new and binding rationale for cooperation to sustain the alliance. A future-oriented rationale for the alliance might be rooted in shared values, but a forward-looking ROK-U.S. alliance would embrace technological cooperation as the glue for alliance-based partnership. A wide range of areas, from fighting pandemics to space exploration to development and application of new 5G standards in technology, constitute new opportunities for collaboration that could sustain the alliance going forward.

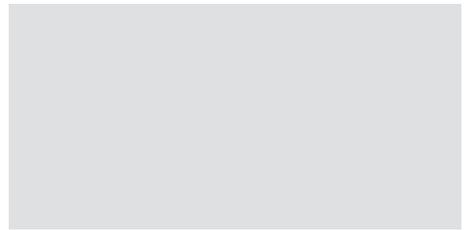
A vision for the ROK-U.S. alliance should be comprehensive, address an array of short-to-medium-term issues, and seek to align the two countries for the long-term. A resilient, forward-looking alliance will be based on close consultation, effective cooperation on meaningful issues for both countries, and diplomatic agility to adjust to shifts within the two democracies.

1. The Biden and Moon administrations should swiftly announce their commitment to strengthening and broadening the ROK-U.S. alliance. Seoul and Washington should consider a declaratory policy of moving from cost-sharing to value-sharing and responsibility-sharing alliances. The United States and South Korea should conclude an interim Special Measures Agreement, bolster support for a capabilities-driven wartime operational control (OPCON) transition, augment existing discussions on extended deterrence, establish a regular training and exercise schedule, expand naval and maritime cooperation, and initiate a strategic dialogue on the environment and challenges facing the alliance after the North Korea threat recedes.
2. South Korea should pursue a strategic agreement with the United States in negotiations regarding North Korean denuclearization, while maintaining the consistency of South Korea's policy toward North Korea, to attain peace on the Korean Peninsula. It is necessary to harmonize South Korea's diplomatic efforts with surrounding countries'

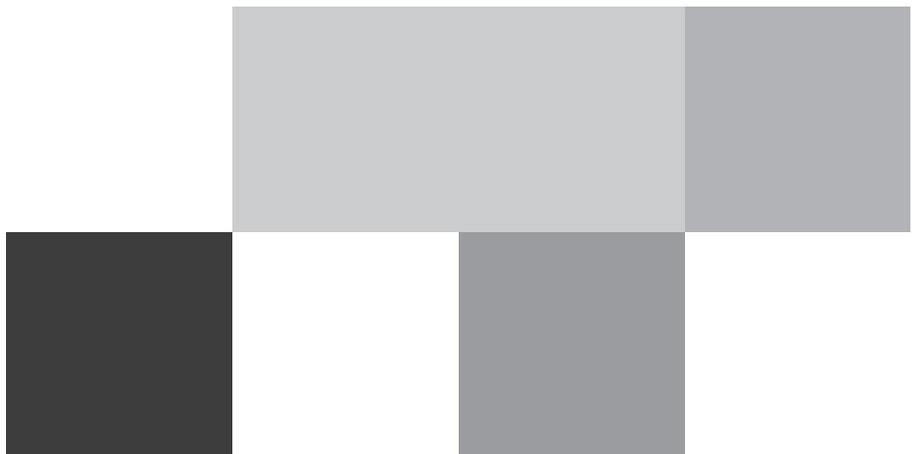
North Korea policy so that the Sino-U.S. strategic competition does not become an obstacle to solving the North Korean problem. The United States should continue to support South Korean efforts to build on existing tension-reduction and confidence-building efforts with North Korea. The United States should discuss the future of missile defense and extended deterrence with South Korea and Japan in light of North Korea's continued missile development.

3. The United States and South Korea should establish a normative framework for maintaining peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia and the broader international system. Adopting a rules-based approach to managing major power competition would buffer the allies and the region from malign, unilateral action, without posing a direct challenge to any country. The United States and South Korea should design and institute a collective response system to cope with Chinese retaliation, especially its use of coercive economic statecraft. While the United States currently enjoys some military advantage over China, a framework for cooperation between the United States and South Korea with the aim of maintaining the current balance of power will help prevent China from undermining norms and promote mid- to long-term Sino-U.S. cooperation in possible areas such as non-proliferation and climate change.
4. The Hub-and-Spoke system has worked fairly well, and upon further consultation the allies may choose to supplement it with additional collective or mini-lateral networks. It is important for the U.S. to cooperate with Asian allies to formulate the roles of each allies and partners, and to consult closely with allies and partners when pursuing China-related strategies. The Biden administration's regional strategy is expected to focus on linking allies and friends in a network-based partnership. ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation is very important, and the normalization of Korea-Japan relations is a prerequisite for it.
5. The two countries should upgrade their economic cooperation from the traditional fields of trade and investment to new arenas for cooperation, including the digital economy,

energy, the environment, and development cooperation. The United States and South Korea should also work together closely to drive regional cooperation forward, and build linkages between the Indo-Pacific strategy and New Southern Policy in order to do so. The United States and South Korea should exercise greater influence on extant and nascent international institutions to harness knowledge for solving complex problems like climate change, establishing norms and a code of conduct for the use of advance technologies in the digital age, and creating the best-educated scientists and scholars to meet tomorrow's needs. Both countries should strengthen and expand the scope of their global health security partnership. Eco-friendly energy cooperation needs to be strengthened, including restrictions on the use of fossil fuels, carbon-reducing economies, expanding renewable energy and utilizing advanced nuclear power.



Introduction:  
**The Future Role  
of the Alliance**



# I

Introduction:

## The Future Role of the Alliance

“The trouble with the future,” writes historian John Lewis Gaddis, “is that it’s so much less knowable than the past.”<sup>1)</sup> How can we predict the Asian security landscape over the next ten years when we have largely failed to anticipate strategic shifts in international relations over the past seventy years? Few if any military planners foresaw the outbreak of the Korean War or the end of the Cold War; most economists overlooked the onset of the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and the global economic crisis of 2008; and national security advisors were almost universally surprised by the devastating terrorist attacks of 9/11 and caught flat-footed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We can create a vision of the future that relates to current decisions, but to make smart estimates of the future requires sketching out plausible future scenarios and calculating probabilities.<sup>2)</sup>

We are currently undergoing multiple transformations in global politics, and predicting the future is very difficult. After the end of the Cold War, we expected the establishment of a peaceful and free international order, but the thirty years of post-Cold War were marked by many crises and difficulties. As revealed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the problems of the Third World region were complex and historically deep-rooted, defying any easy solution. Neoliberal globalization based on the logic of the free market was expected to closely connect the world and bring economic development, but inequality across the globe

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1) John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56.

2) This is the expert advice of J. Peter Scoblic and Philip E. Tetlock, “A Better Crystal Ball: The Right Way to Think About the Future,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/article/s/united-states/2020-10-13/better-crystal-ball>.

and domestic dissatisfaction increased. As a result, phenomena such as exclusive nationalism, economic protectionism, populism, and political polarization have gained traction. With the existing multilateral international order seriously weakened, COVID-19 rapidly spread across the globalized world, but countries responded unilaterally with nationalism, criticism of globalization, and border closures.

The ROK-U.S. alliance should aspire not just to deliver peace and security on the Korean Peninsula—as important as those goals remain—but also to help usher in tomorrow’s liberal world order. By contributing to new constellations of like-minded states, such as a D-10 summit of democracies, as well as building on existing institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the South Korea-U.S. relationship should increasingly focus on how to preserve and adapt democratic governance and market economies in the face of the digital age and major-power competition over technology and innovation.<sup>3)</sup> At the same time, the two techno-democracies should double their efforts to forge a knowledge alliance—one committed to tackling complex challenges such as climate change and issues related to energy, resource scarcity, and the environment, as well as pandemics, including the possible threat of bioterrorism. Furthermore, the two nations should elevate democracy, human rights, and good governance as shared alliance concerns for improving regional and world order.

An essential step toward building realistic scenarios involves identifying critical developments and major uncertainties: which trends will likely drive future decisions and events in meaningful ways? Health, the environment, and technology in particular may play salient roles in shaping the regional landscape over the decade ahead.

COVID-19 should serve as a reminder that public health is national security. When health risks are widespread, economies are disrupted and issues that seemed pressing lose their urgency. At a minimum, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may endure well into this

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3) British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has proposed a D-10 group of 10 leading democracies, which would comprise the current G-7 members, plus South Korea, India, and Australia. See Erik Brattberg and Ben Judah, “Forget the G-7, Build the D-10,” *Foreign Policy*, June 10, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/10/g7-d10-democracy-trump-europe/>.

decade. Even if we are spared another pandemic—or a subsequent biological threat in the ten years ahead—how countries emerge from coronavirus crisis will likely have an enduring impact on nations’ perceived power and the objective foundations of their security. In general, South Korea (also known as the Republic of Korea, or ROK) and other Asian countries have set the global standard for effective containment of the virus. China appears to be the first major economy to emerge from the COVID-19 recession, and its experience will make evident the enduring impact of the global health crisis.

Climate change is a long-term threat facing all of humanity, as the pronouncements of leading voices in the world’s biggest economies have pledged to develop clean energy and reach zero-emissions by around the mid-century.<sup>4)</sup> More generally, environmental issues are apt to loom large in the decade ahead because of the growing frequency and severity of extreme weather and natural disasters, water and other resource shortages, and the mounting pressures from everything from urbanization to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

Technology offers both promise and peril: an opportunity for connectivity and advancement that might mitigate health, environmental, and other challenges, but also the danger of heightened geopolitical competition for technological dominance, the disruption of trusted supply chains, and a new domain for persistent engagement and confrontation. Technology is indubitably a double-edged sword. As lives grow more digitalized, competition will intensify over the hardware, software, standards, institutions, and people involved in innovating the high-technologies that will drive tomorrow’s economies and militaries. The question is whether technologies will create the conditions for competition to escalate into conflict,

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4) President-elect Joe Biden ran on a clean energy policy pledge for the United States to achieve net-zero emissions no later than 2050; <https://joebiden.com/climate-plan/>. South Korea’s President Moon Jae-in has pledged to make South Korea carbon neutral by 2050; <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Environment/South-Korea-joins-Japan-in-making-2050-carbon-neutral-pledge>. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced in late October that Japan would seek to become carbon-neutral by 2050; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/japan-climate-emissions/2020/10/26/b6ea2b5a-1752-11eb-8bda-814ca56e138b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/japan-climate-emissions/2020/10/26/b6ea2b5a-1752-11eb-8bda-814ca56e138b_story.html). Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping announced in September that China would reach peak-emissions by 2030 and zero emissions by 2060; <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/IEA-head-Beijing-carbon-goal-welcome-but-policies-needed>.

internal, transnational, or interstate strife.

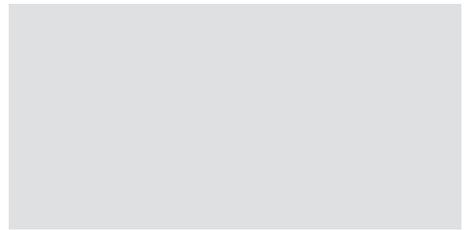
These developments will have grave long-term consequences for the ROK-U.S. alliance. After World War Two, the liberal international order was established in East Asia based on the so-called Hub-and-Spoke alliance structure, liberal economic order, respect for human rights and democracy, U.S. security strategy, and shared threat perception. U.S. power served as the foundation of this liberal international order, but ironically, U.S. unipolarity has revealed the limits of U.S. power. If power is defined as the ability to exert control, recent events have demonstrated that the United States is limited in its ability to take charge of global crises and maintain world order. Under these circumstances, coalition building with allies and like-minded strategic partners will grow increasingly indispensable to the maintenance and development of the liberal world order.

South Korea has experienced remarkable growth under the U.S.-led international order, and the ROK-U.S. alliance has contributed both to South Korea's security, economic prosperity, and democratization as well as to the U.S. mission to preserve the liberal world order. Now, the ROK-U.S. alliance faces many challenges amid the rapidly changing international environment and rising Sino-U.S. geopolitical rivalry. Since the establishment of the ROK-U.S. alliance, South Korea has grown into a middle-power country that ranks among the top ten wealthiest democracies in the world, and can now contribute to the stabilization of regional order and resolution of problems at the global level.<sup>5)</sup> The ROK-U.S. alliance must now evolve into a future-oriented partnership primed to address emerging, frontier issues while continuing to serve its traditional security role.

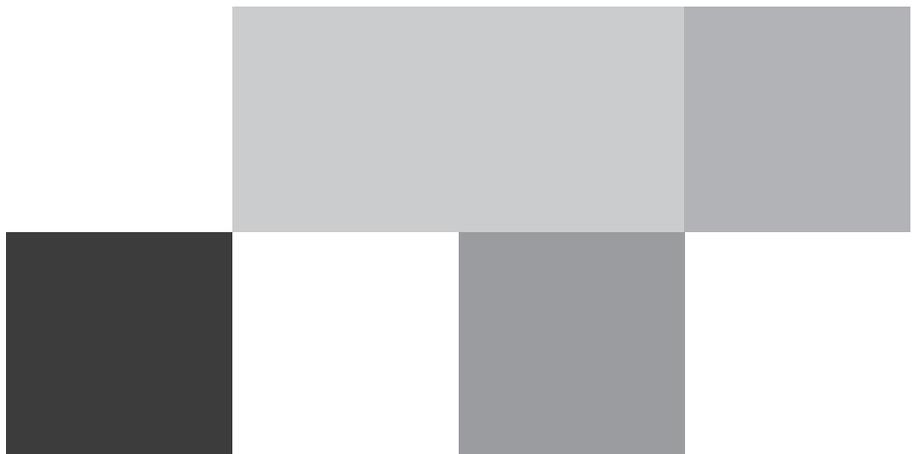
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5) Wealth measured in terms of overall Gross Domestic Product, <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/>.





## Asia and the World Through 2030



# II

## Asia and the World Through 2030

In addition to the aforementioned three overarching drivers of health, the environment, and technology, three other interrelated issues inform the existing regional order: Sino-U.S. relations, the broader tussle over the rules governing order and institutions, and the management of regional flashpoints. Each could lead to heightened confrontation, disruption, and fragmentation. Conversely, prudent statecraft could maintain or even enhance stability and cooperation.

The Sino-U.S. relationship is hugely consequential for Northeast Asia, the Indo-Pacific, and international relations. The relationship has long been seen as predicated on a mixture of cooperation and competition, but Sino-U.S. relations have tilted toward rivalry and confrontation in recent years. While most of the competition remains focused on economic primacy and technological dominance, these areas are inseparable from perceived shifts in the balance of power, and a possible power transition from the United States' postwar system to a Sino-centric or more disaggregated system of many actors. If Beijing and Washington can address their conflicting interests without lapsing into open conflict, regional order should permit further development and prosperity. However, open confrontation could lead to additional fissures in the regional architecture and a potential military clash.

The ongoing competition for ruling-making and standard-setting serves as one barometer for Sino-U.S. rivalry. In question is the operating system, the rules of the road both regionally and globally. Economic coercion, political warfare, and information operations are among the non-military tactics likely to persist in the gray-zone between peace and conflict. Establishing norms in cyberspace and the electromagnetic spectrum, for instance, will be a long-term and

challenging enterprise, if enduring challenges to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea are any indicator. Meanwhile, competition over leadership in international organizations, the imposition of sanctions and tariffs, and other measures will require thoughtful diplomacy and hard work to avoid a breakdown in the regional and global order.

Regional flashpoints, from North Korea's nuclear and missile threat, to the status of democratic Taiwan, to tensions over maritime claims in the East China Sea and South China Sea, to rising border tensions between China and India, are among the extant points of tension that could escalate suddenly or continue without overt conflict. In response to potential threats, regional actors, including significant middle powers, will continue to invest in self-defense capabilities and networked security with other regional partners. But if one or more of these disputes results in open conflict, all bets are off about the decade ahead, because the impact is unlikely be confined to the immediate actors involved. Conversely, the peaceful management of these disputes could bode well for greater stability.

The Sino-U.S. relationship, the ruleset, and regional flashpoints might be reduced to a binary choice between the existing order and a new order. One could undoubtedly construct plausible scenarios based on possible outcomes. But all of these factors will interact to produce a future environment that is hard to predict. For instance, advances in high technology are fueling a technological arms race and raising a longer-term question surrounding a deteriorating Sino-U.S. relationship. But will techno-nationalism fragment global supply chains and telecommunications to create a new Cold War or worse? Much will depend on whether the United States, China, and others who are in support them can work out a new *modus vivendi* in their relations.

Put differently, if *Pax Americana* is no longer able to maintain the post-World War Two liberal rules-based order, how will a shared view of order be achieved?<sup>6)</sup> This issue may well reach a tipping point in this decade, possibly catalyzed by a longstanding dispute over Taiwan

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6) For instance, this question is central to the first chapter of Abraham M. Denmark, *U.S. Strategy in the Asian Century: Empowering Allies and Partners* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 9-23.

or maritime boundaries. In sum, these six variables—three broad drivers of health, the environment, and technology, and three interconnected uncertainties over power and order—will likely have a profound impact on whether the future of the global and regional environment is more peaceful or more conflictual.<sup>7)</sup>

Maintenance and development of international order requires both an enduring commitment to international rules and the absence of unilateral military action that creates conflict or decisively shifts the balance of power. The first requirement necessitates consistent observation of multilateralist handling of major debates and conflicts based on existing rules and norms. The second requirement demands the military status quo which does not permit the change of international order by resorting to violent means. It is critical for the United States to stick to the principle of multilateralism while persisting in efforts to acquire the assent of allies and strategic partners. Development of a common military strategy with allies to maintain the status quo and military ascendance over China will be significant.

Over the next decade, severe competition between the United States and China will shape the security architecture in Asia. A U.S. War College study on the nature of the rivalry characterized it as a hypercompetitive situation.<sup>8)</sup> The Trump administration has perceived China as a strategic competitor and this trend will continue regardless of who assumes power in the next decade. The U.S. military evaluates that by the end of the 2020's, China will present obvious threats of strategically consequential political, economic, and military injury.<sup>9)</sup> China is likely to actively contest the U.S. position in the Indo-Pacific by trying to establish its own sphere of influence. The People's Liberation Army(PLA) will expand on emerging strengths such as information warfare and power projection, as well innovate to offset its

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7) For one insightful look at regional trends, see *Asia Power Trends 2020*, The Asia Group, October 2020, <https://theasiagroup.com/asia-power-trends-2020/>.

8) Nathan Freier, John Schaus, and William Braun. 2020. *An Army Transformed: USINDOPACOM Hypercompetition and U.S. Army Theater Design*. The Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. War College Press.

9) *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020: Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2020), <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

vulnerabilities such as weak joint command structure over reliance on ground forces, and limited long-range power projection and lift capacity.<sup>10)</sup>

The U.S. military will continue to invest in operationalizing its Joint Multi-domain Operations (MDO)—increasingly referred to as Joint All-domain Operations—over the next decade. The U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps are developing corresponding concepts. The U.S. Air Force, for example, is pursuing innovation in multi-domain command and control and agile combat employment. The Navy and Marine Corps are developing distributed maritime operations and expeditionary advanced base operations.<sup>11)</sup>

The U.S. Army has been working over the past few years to reorient its focus toward great power competition with China and Russia, as well as North Korea and Iran. In a plan that may well carry forward under the Biden administration, U.S. Secretary of the Army Ryan D. McCarthy said in January 2020, that the U.S. Army had begun the initial testing of the Multi-Domain Task Force: intelligence information, cyber, electronic warfare, and space units known as I2Qs. He stated that the Army had conducted exercises regarding the East China Sea and Pacific Pathways with Japan, the Philippines, and Palau. According to McCarthy, the Army will position a Multi-Domain Task Force in the Indo-Pacific theater in the coming years, and it will encourage allies and partners to invest further in building similar capabilities; Japan, Thailand, and Singapore are already developing MDO-like concepts with the United States. The United States is also strengthening efforts to stretch the limits of logistics and learning how to employ new capabilities in different operational environments, exercise in new locations to experiment with distributed logistic concepts, and develop methodologies for employing long-range precision fires or hypersonic weapons in the

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10) For instance, see Joel Wuthnow, “Projecting Strength in a Time of Uncertainty: China’s Military in 2020,” Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on “U.S.-China in 2020: Enduring Problems and Emerging Challenges,” September 9, 2020, [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/Wuthnow\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/Wuthnow_Testimony.pdf).

11) U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, *Multi-Domain Battle: Evolution of Combined Arms for the 21st Century*. 2017: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*. 2018.

region.<sup>12)</sup>

These changes will bring about a transformation in the military strategies and security postures of U.S. allies, especially as security cooperation among U.S. allies becomes increasingly important. What does this assessment of the regional and global environment portend for North Korea, the Korean Peninsula as a whole, and the ROK-U.S. alliance?

Forces far more powerful than North Korea will shape the future of Northeast Asia. A problematic environment could foster an action-reaction cycle of decisions and misperceptions that leads to inadvertent or ill-conceived military actions. Furthermore, although military force will likely remain a threat, it will not be the all-consuming concern that it once was. North Korea will have difficulty leveraging its nuclear and missile programs, whatever their range and capability. North Korea's best option moving forward may be to pursue a gradual thaw in tensions with South Korea in exchange for a pathway to normalization, a solution that might be acceptable to all powers, including the North.

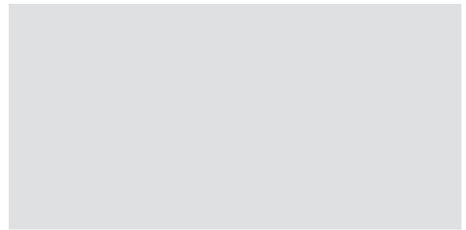
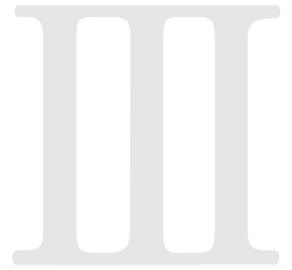
President-elect Joe Biden's administration will place a premium on forging a common allied and partner strategy for a liberal regional order. The ROK-U.S. alliance should serve as a pillar undergirding this strategy and its execution. Combating illiberal alternatives to the existing order will remain important, but it will be even more vital to devise a common vision for the future that is inclusive but resolute concerning open and fair competition. The central aim regarding China will be to wage a serious competition centered on technology and innovation, given their strategic implications for economic and military dominance. Importantly, however, that competition will be bounded, conducted within a framework that maximizes cooperation on shared issues such as climate change, nuclear proliferation (including the risks posed by North Korea), and pandemics, which focus on areas of competition that devise new rules for our digital era and emerging technologies. Moreover, strategic dialogue that minimizes the risk of inadvertent escalation or conflict will remain a key component of

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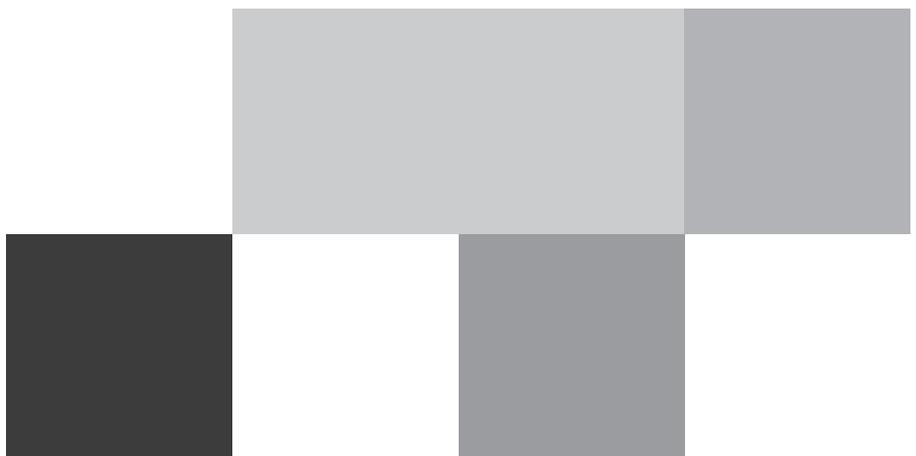
12) Ryan McCarthy. "The Army's Strategy In The Indo-Pacific." January 10, 2020. The Brookings Institution.

engagement with China. Bilateral, mini-lateral, and multilateral mechanisms will continue to provide overlapping systems of influence and deterrence to enhance regional and global peace and security. The United States and its Asian allies will also need to devise a long-term plan that allows China to easily adapt and conform to the liberal world order, stabilizes relationships between China and other powers, and allows for China's future development.





## Status of the ROK-U.S. Alliance



# III

## Status of the ROK-U.S. Alliance

The alliance can both look forward and still remember the past. The ROK-U.S. alliance is “ironclad—forged in blood,” shaped over many decades by “combined military operations and training, and hardened by the crucible of war.”<sup>13)</sup> The alliance was formally codified in a Mutual Defense Treaty signed in October 1953, which obligates both parties to “act to meet the common danger” in the event of an “armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the Parties.”<sup>14)</sup> Although evolving command arrangements raise questions about the future of extended deterrence, the United States has pledged to defend South Korea with “the full range of military capabilities, including U.S. nuclear, conventional, and missile defense capabilities.”<sup>15)</sup>

The alliance has long been institutionalized in a combined command architecture with a growing list of exchanges, combined exercises, and interoperable defense systems. This high degree of military integration has served to stabilize the relationship in times of political uncertainty. At the outbreak of the Korean War and the creation of the UN Command, South Korean President Syngman Rhee formally granted U.S. General Douglas MacArthur ‘operational command authority’ to lead the allied forces in combat.<sup>16)</sup>

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13) “The Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region,” June 1, 2019.

14) “Between the U.S. and the Republic of Korea Regarding the Mutual Defense Treaty. Signed at Washington October 1, 1953. Entered into force November 17, 1954,” U.S. Department of State, [https://photos.state.gov/libraries/korea/49271/p\\_int\\_docs/p\\_rok\\_60th\\_int\\_14.pdf](https://photos.state.gov/libraries/korea/49271/p_int_docs/p_rok_60th_int_14.pdf).

15) “Joint Communique of the 52nd U.S.-Republic of Korea Security Consultative Meeting,” U.S. Department of Defense, October 14, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2381879/joint-communique-of-the-52nd-us-republic-of-korea-security-consultative-meeting/>.

16) Won-gon Park, “The United Nations Command in Korea: The Past, Present, and Future,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 21, no. 4 (December 2009), 487.

After the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement, the United States and South Korea codified the wartime operational command arrangement in the Mutual Defense Treaty. The treaty stipulated that ‘operational control authority’ applied only to forces fighting against North Korean aggression. The creation of a Combined Forces Command (CFC) ensured greater South Korean control over the use of troops in wartime and provided a structure that could eventually transfer authority over to the Koreans.<sup>17)</sup>

One country’s willingness to take risks in defense of another is the ultimate test for an alliance. The ROK-U.S. alliance was forged in crucible of war as soldiers from both nations sacrificed their lives in pursuit of freedom and democracy, distinguishing the relationship from most others. The U.S. role in winning World War Two helped liberate the Korean Peninsula from thirty-five years of Japanese colonial rule in 1945. The abrupt end of war left behind numerous problems, to include both the seeds of internecine conflict among Koreans and an incipient contest between the Soviet Union and the United States. Two years after the Republic of Korea was established in 1948, the United States led a UN Command coalition and fought alongside South Korea to thwart an invasion by North Korea. 2023 will mark the 70th anniversary of the formal ROK-U.S. alliance, which remains “the linchpin of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia.”<sup>18)</sup>

Alliance management is practiced daily and led through a series of routine high-level meetings as part of a Security Consultative process. In October 2020, for example, the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from both countries held the 45th ROK-U.S. Military Committee Meeting (MCM), and the U.S. Secretary of Defense and South Korean Minister for National Defense held the 52nd ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting (SCM). Prior to the Trump and Moon administrations, the two countries have also held “two plus two”

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17) Victor D. Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 118.

18) “Joint Communiqué of the 52nd U.S.-Republic of Korea Security Consultative Meeting,” U.S. Department of Defense, October 14, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2381879/joint-ommunique-of-the-52nd-us-republic-of-korea-security-consultative-meeting/>.

meetings, at which the South Korean foreign minister and defense minister, and the U.S. secretary of state and secretary of defense conduct a policy dialogue.

The United States and South Korea routinely conduct joint military exercises. These exercises have evolved as tensions with North Korea have stabilized or escalated. In the aftermath of North Korea's renewed attempts to destabilize South Korea en dash a period known as the "Second Korean War" (1966-1975) the allies expanded their exercises and defense capabilities to deter an attack. The Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991 undermined North Korea's support from major powers, and the threat of internal regime collapse shifted alliance planning to dealing with scenarios emanating from a weak rather than emboldened North Korea. More recently, North Korea's growing arsenal of missiles and nuclear weaponry, combined with a deadly attack on a South Korean corvette and shelling along the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in 2010, drove the ROK-U.S. alliance to focus on deterring provocations and limited uses of force.<sup>19)</sup>

The past few years have illustrated how swiftly relations can change and at the same time underscored the durability of the alliance and the intractability of relations with Pyongyang. However, while the ROK-U.S. alliance remains structurally poised to defend against the possibility of North Korean aggression, the pursuit of peace and denuclearization with North Korea has exposed significant differences between the allies. These differences have encompassed preferred strategies for dealing with North Korea, alliance burden-sharing, trade, future U.S. troop presence on the peninsula, and future military command arrangements.

Current attempts to negotiate an end to the Armistice on the Korean Peninsula and hopes for a denuclearized peninsula raise profound questions about the future contours of security in Northeast Asia. It is frequently suggested that North Korea's regime requires an external threat to legitimize its rule. But it is also true that the "clear and present nuclear threat" of North Korea has helped to unite allies' interests and resolve conflicts of interest in favor of

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19) For instance, see Robert Collins, "A Brief History of the U.S.-ROK Combined Military Exercises," *Foreign Affairs*, February 26, 2014; reprinted on the *38North* website: <https://www.38north.org/2014/02/rcollins022714/>.

ensuring the ability to neutralize North Korea.<sup>20)</sup>

Since its conception in 1953, the ROK-U.S. alliance has grown into a mature, institutionalized partnership. In policy-making circles in both nations, the alliance remains respected by members of all major political parties. However, in recent years the alliance has confronted significant challenges. U.S. president Donald J. Trump's perceived dismissal of the value of U.S. allies, push for balances of trade more favorable to the United States, and calls for vastly increased South Korean financial contributions to maintain U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula have complicated management of the ROK-U.S. alliance. In some ways, the president became the biggest source of uncertainty in the alliance.

Trump's transactional approach to burden-sharing and trade agreements was incredibly unpopular in South Korea. So too were other perceived slights, such as U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo's cancellation of a trip to South Korea, which he had not visited for two years, and decision to still travel to Tokyo to meet with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue countries of Japan, Australia, and India.<sup>21)</sup> South Korean officials were particularly irked because many see the Quad as jeopardizing relations with China, South Korea's largest trading partner and "strategic cooperative partner."<sup>22)</sup>

Though some South Koreans have welcomed Trump's unconventional approach to North Korea because it secured room for top level negotiations and even personal trust, frustrations have simmered over Trump's shallow understanding of the North Korean nuclear problem, and of how sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula might be achieved. Despite superficial developments in the U.S.-North Korea relationship, frustration and skepticism over prospects

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20) Patrick M. Cronin, *The Cornerstone and Linchpin: Securing America's Northeast Asian Alliances* (Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute, October 2019), [https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/Cronin\\_The%20Cornerstone%20and%20the%20Linchpin%20-%20Securing%20America%27s%20Northeast%20Asian%20Alliances.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/Cronin_The%20Cornerstone%20and%20the%20Linchpin%20-%20Securing%20America%27s%20Northeast%20Asian%20Alliances.pdf).

21) Shannon Tiezzi, "The Cost of Pompeo's Cancelled Trips to South Korea and Mongolia," *The Diplomat*, October 6, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/the-cost-of-pompeos-cancelled-trips-to-south-korea-and-mongolia/>.

22) Byun Duk-kun, "Seoul's Participation in 'Quad' May Jeopardize Regional Security: S. Korean Adviser," *Yonhap News Agency*, October 28, 2020, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20201028000251325>.

for a durable peace persist among South Korean government officials, who continue to support the resumption of denuclearization negotiations.

Higher-profile, large-scale, and named exercises have been scaled back, briefly suspended, and conducted with less fanfare en dash including generically named exercises such as the 20-2 Combined Post Training held in 2020. Smaller-unit drills continue and are meant to retain sufficient readiness without appearing as threatening as more massive exercises. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the further scaling down of recent ROK-U.S. exercises. The paring back and reduction of exercises has sown doubts about the readiness of the U.S. and South Korean armed forces to deter or defeat an attack, especially as the U.S. armed forces on relatively short tours of duty have missed essential training cycles.<sup>23)</sup>

Another challenge facing the ROK-U.S. alliance in the coming decade revolves around the question of whether both governments can expand the aperture of the alliance to address regional threats while retaining the same depth of institutional coordination that has developed in response to the evolution of North Korea's nuclear and missile development. The rationale for expanding the scope of the alliance will involve a firm public commitment by the United States and South Korea, along with other countries committed to preserving a rules-based regional order, to defend such an order against Sino-centric exceptionalism in which coercive efforts attempt to define the regional order around the principle of might-makes-right.

Furthermore, it remains to be seen how the bilateral alliance fits into a multi-lateralized approach to security in Asia, a context that has never existed for U.S. alliance partners in Asia. South Korea aspires to promote an inclusive and cooperative-security based regional order. However, ascending Sino-U.S. strategic competition is driving the United States to demand that the alliance operate within the context of collective-security based forms of

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23) U.S. personnel in South Korea generally serve 12-month tours if unaccompanied and 24 to 36-month tours if accompanied, which means a significant portion of U.S. personnel have only served in Korea during this period of disrupted military exercises. See "Tour Lengths and Tours of Duty Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS)," U.S. Department of Defense, August 20 2020, <https://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/Docs/AP-TL-01.pdf>.

multilateral cooperation aimed at resisting a regional power transition to a Sinocentric order.

A related internal challenge involves the ability of the United States and South Korea to prioritize alliance coordination over a narrower, nationalist-infused emphasis on autonomy over alliance cooperation. For the United States, this challenge revolves around “America First” expressions of alliance fatigue and views of overseas military deployments as one-sided and transactional rather than as serving national interests. These views will continue to be a risk factor within the United States, as demonstrated by the 2020 presidential election result that revealed the depth of American political polarization over every aspect of policy. For South Korea, such risks involve a desire for expanded autonomy for South Korean security and foreign policy at the expense of alliance coordination. The explosive interaction between these two forms of nationalist thinking constitutes an internal threat the alliance has not prepared for, and thus poses the greatest threat to the durability of the ROK-U.S. alliance.

Joe Biden’s election as America’s forty-sixth president signals a return to a conventional and more predictable U.S. approach to foreign policy, following Trump’s unconventional, transactional, and personalized approach to foreign relations. President-elect Biden was quick to jettison the “America First” foreign policy brand.<sup>24)</sup>

The inheritance of Trump’s legacy in Asia is both an asset and a liability to the Biden administration as it seeks to work with South Korea and others to safeguard peace and promote sustainable development. The main asset is that the shift in U.S. diplomacy toward greater use of soft power and multilateral diplomacy will be welcomed by all countries. Not even America’s staunchest allies were comfortable with an “America First” brand that actively sought to weaken international institutions and preferred confrontation to strategic competition and cooperation. The chief liability Biden inherits may be that, assuming China and other competitors remain on their current trajectories, the challenge of deflecting malign behavior and unilateral rule-changing is a long slog. Chinese leader Xi Jinping’s goal of achieving a

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24) David E. Sanger, “The End of ‘America First’: How Biden Says He Will Re-Engage With the World,” *New York Times*, November 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/09/us/politics/biden-foreign-policy.html>.

great rejuvenation will endure, leaving various disputes around China's periphery, including Taiwan, as flashpoints that could seriously challenge regional security and U.S. posture, including the ROK-U.S. alliance.

The transition from Trump to Biden will have a mixed impact on the Korean Peninsula. On the one hand, Biden's emphasis on the importance of alliances will reflect the high opinion Americans hold of South Korea's capabilities and resiliency and will alleviate tensions over burden sharing with South Korea that resulted from Trump's personal view of many U.S. allies as free riders. On the other hand, U.S. policy toward the challenges posed by North Korea's nuclear development will revert to a more institutionalized, bottom-up, and pragmatic approach, in contrast with the unpredictable and highly personalized approach through which Trump developed an unprecedented relationship with North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un. Despite plenty of good will on the part of South Korea's President Moon Jae-in and Biden, there are clear gaps in viewpoint between the Moon administration, with its emphasis on a denuclearization-embedded peace process with North Korea, and the incoming Biden administration, which will be consumed with a heavy domestic agenda, a return to a democratic-values based multilateral approach, and the restoration of deterrence as a critical element of U.S. national security. Biden's return to a conventional alliance management approach may also shed light on existing cracks in the alliance previously obfuscated by Trump's unconventional approach to Korean affairs. As a result, the onus will shift to the Moon administration to meet the expectations for elevated alliance cooperation that a Biden administration will bring.

Biden's emphasis on domestic self-strengthening, democracy, deterrence, and multilateralism carries with it both opportunities and pitfalls that will require careful management at both the bureaucratic and leadership levels. The Moon administration will welcome a U.S. return to a conventional, institutionalist approach to managing its alliances, but this will also mean that the United States will act in a more predictable fashion toward North Korea. In response to developments with North Korea under the Trump administration, Biden's policies toward North Korea will be shaped more by current and emerging challenges—and by input from experts

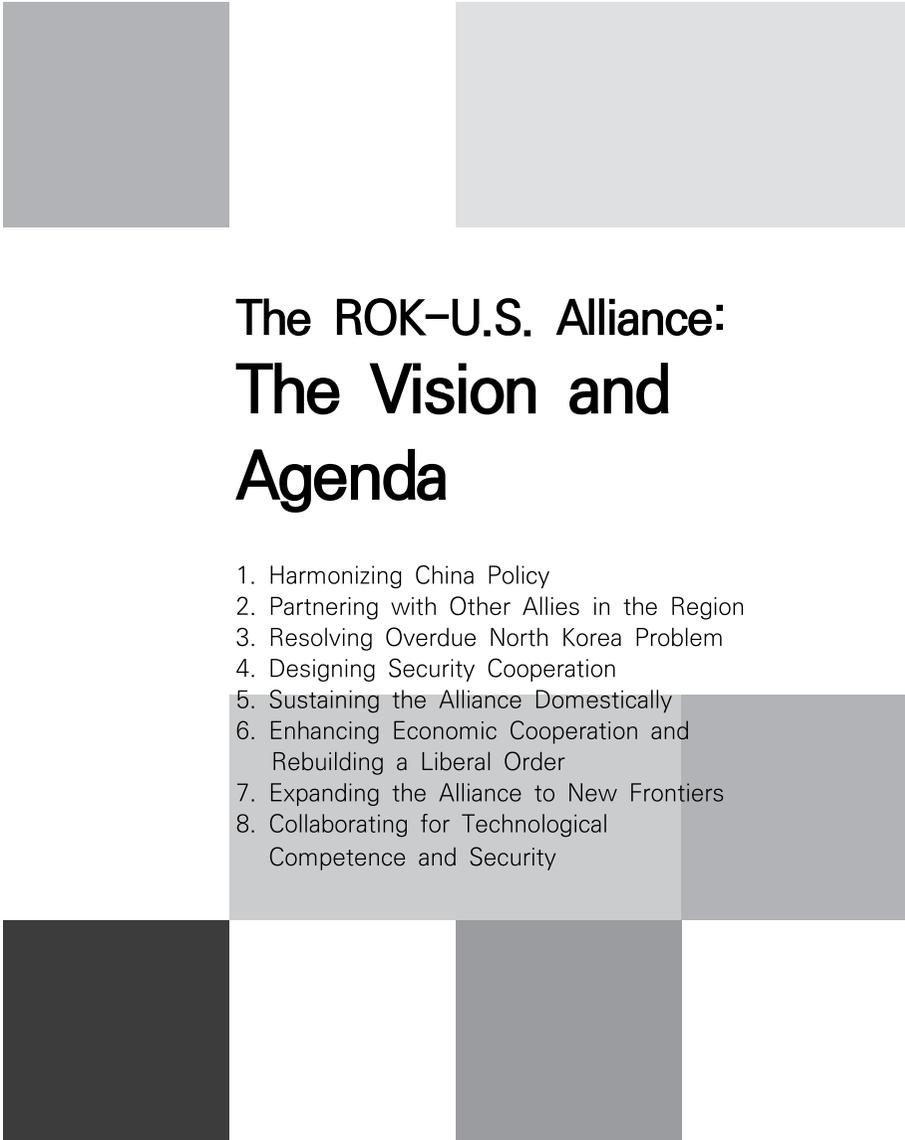
based on institutional strategies—rather than on personalized policies and political staging. Even expert calls for greater pragmatism, to include settling for a nuclear freeze and arms control while elevating the search for a new political relationship with North Korea, is sure to face stiff political headwinds within the United States.<sup>25)</sup>

Biden’s advisors are keen to reinforce deterrence in the Asia-Pacific and restore the credibility of U.S. pledges to defend against North Korea’s ongoing nuclear development. But Moon’s policies center on peace rather than deterrence. Some progressive Moon supporters even argue that the focus on deterrence rather than peace is not an essential condition for preserving peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, but instead has obstructed peaceful development of inter-Korean relations. The Biden and Moon administrations may find it difficult to harmonize Moon’s emphasis on peace and an end-of-war declaration with the Biden administration’s desire to shore up the credibility of extended deterrence.

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25) Victor Cha, “Engaging North Korea Anew,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2020-11-17/engaging-north-korea-anew>.





## The ROK-U.S. Alliance: The Vision and Agenda

1. Harmonizing China Policy
2. Partnering with Other Allies in the Region
3. Resolving Overdue North Korea Problem
4. Designing Security Cooperation
5. Sustaining the Alliance Domestically
6. Enhancing Economic Cooperation and Rebuilding a Liberal Order
7. Expanding the Alliance to New Frontiers
8. Collaborating for Technological Competence and Security

# IV

The ROK–U.S. Alliance:

## The Vision and Agenda

### 1. Harmonizing China Policy

In the context of rising major power rivalry, the United States has a vested interest in maintaining the current liberal international order and in balancing against China’s rise and efforts to undermine that order. China’s rise threatens to reshape the existing U.S.-led liberal rules-based order into a Sinocentric order in which Chinese interests are primary and unchallengeable. Given its development under and past contributions to the U.S.-led international order, South Korea too has a strategic interest in sustaining and strengthening the liberal world order. The allies share common interests and concerns regarding China’s rising regional influence and propensity to settle disputes through force rather than through rules-based dispute-settlement mechanisms.

According to the U.S. National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy, U.S. policy has evolved to identify major power rivalry as a serious challenge.<sup>26)</sup> At a minimum, greater attention and vigilance is required to protect data, intellectual property, supply chains, and critical infrastructure.<sup>27)</sup> However, despite some decoupling and rising economic competition, Sino-U.S. economic interdependence appears to impose costs and limits to Sino-U.S. strategic

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26) *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, December 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>; and *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2018), <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

27) Akinori Kahata, “Manging U.S.-China Technology Competition and Decoupling,” *CSIS Technology Policy Blog*, November 24, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/technology-policy-blog/managing-us-china-technology-competition-and-decoupling>.

competition. This dichotomy introduces ambiguity and complexity for countries such as South Korea that maintain significant economic exposure to China yet have much to gain from upholding the norms and values that underpin the U.S.-led liberal international order.

While the United States and South Korea share similar long-term interests, their preferred methods for dealing with China differ based on differences in geography, preferred instruments, thresholds and tactics for mounting a response, and susceptibility to Chinese retaliation. Thus, the United States and South Korea should hold in-depth policy planning talks to confirm the scope of converging interests related to China and to develop understanding of each other's strategic preferences, perceptions of available response options, and limits of response. For instance, the United States and South Korea may want to affirm common interests in upholding a rules-based maritime order and may share a desire to promote common legal approaches to upholding norms in the South China Sea, but may hold differing views on the threshold and desirability of responding publically versus pursuing quiet counter-moves less likely to invite Chinese economic retaliation. Through in-depth talks, it should be possible for the allies to reduce misunderstandings where preferred responses differ, while building confidence and strengthening capacities to maintain a coordinated response.

U.S. and South Korean interests are not identical in the short term. As a leading power, the United States seeks to impose checks and balances on Chinese policy across a wide range of areas, from unfair trading practice to maritime disputes. South Korea is more focused on its economic relations with China and desire for China to play a constructive role in both pressuring and helping North Korea to transform itself as a normal country that conforms to international rules.

In pursuing a more confrontational policy toward a rising China, the United States sought during the Trump administration to address the significant trade imbalance, prevent unfair Chinese economic and technology policies, and check China's attempts to increase its military presence in Asia. However, South Korea's economic relations with China are critical to its economy. About 15% of South Korea's GDP comes from its exports to China, and China is

a popular target for South Korean direct investment. Economic overdependence on China and rising Sino-U.S. economic competition have driven South Korea to pursue a policy of external diversification.

Despite growing economic tensions, China has made some significant contributions to efforts to denuclearize North Korea. In 2003, the George W. Bush administration initiated talks regarding North Korea's denuclearization among the United States, China, and North Korea. China's position became even more critical when these three-party talks evolved into the so-called Six-Party Talks, which took place in Beijing with China as host and moderator. With China as North Korea's main economic partner and with economic sanctions an essential component of applying pressure to North Korea, China's sustained participation in the international sanctions regime will determine the success of sanctions policy. However, in the context of rising Sino-U.S. strategic rivalry, South Korean policymakers are losing confidence in China's will to remain a strong supporter and enforcer of economic sanctions against North Korea. Still, as long as U.S. military dominance prevails, South Korea will seek peace on the peninsula and North Korea's denuclearization and normalization, which will all require Chinese commitment and assistance.

The problem of managing short-term divergences in interests regarding China despite a long term consensus regarding the future international order is not confined to the ROK-U.S. alliance. Many Asian countries have maintained close relations with China both economically and strategically under U.S. unipolarity, and the changing international environment puts these countries in a difficult position. As the United States increasingly calls on its allies to support the U.S.-led liberal world order, the United States should keep in mind the position many Asian nations are in, and work with its partners to divide roles accordingly. Above all, it will be important for the United States and its allies to avoid slipping into a new Cold War mentality and to instead respond in principle to Chinese sanctions and retaliation, using diplomatic power and making a concerted effort to diffuse the burden of retaliation across like-minded nations.

With the rising criticism of Trump administration's new Cold War approach, the issue of addressing China's rise will loom large over other concerns on the Biden administration's foreign policy agenda. A more predictable, professional tone will buy some goodwill in Asia, but durable influence will require tough decisions on trade and technology policies, the political will and wherewithal to maintain the U.S. military presence in the Asia-Pacific, and the ability to translate diplomacy—including multilateral efforts—into effective action. Addressing challenges to global trade amid rising authoritarian power and the digitalization of economies will be arduous, but will also provide an opportunity for the United States and South Korea to craft a vision for the future and a plan of action to make that vision a reality.

Putting a floor beneath the U.S.-China relationship is a priority for the Biden administration. Biden's advisors recognize that the relationship is "too big to fail" and that there is no realistic alternative to coexistence. Competition with China will therefore center on technology and innovation. While the Biden administration will not significantly deviate from the tougher approach adopted under Trump, it will make some important adjustments, including: maintaining restrictions on high-tech imports from Huawei but also easing restrictions to allow some commoditized parts in cellphones to be traded; loosening restrictions on highly skilled worker visas; increasing funding for basic research; creating a united front with allies to set standards and promote a trusted set of vendors and a stable supply chain network; creating a new layer of WTO digital-era trading rules; and sending allies and partners more supportive than combative messages.<sup>28)</sup>

This is all to say that the ROK-U.S. alliance should work together to wage what political scientist Joseph Nye calls "cooperative rivalry."<sup>29)</sup> Further, the Biden administration should attempt to identify disputes worth pursuing them to ensure "competition without catastrophe."<sup>30)</sup>

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28) Jeanne Whalen, "Biden Likely to Remain Tough on Chinese Tech Like Huawei, But with More Help from Allies," *The Washington Post*, November 16, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/11/16/biden-huawei-trump-china/>.

29) Joseph S. Nye, "Globalization and Managing a Cooperative Rivalry," *China-U.S. Focus*, July 6, 2020, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/globalization-and-managing-a-cooperative-rivalry>.

30) See and Kurt M. Campbell and Jake Sullivan, "Competition Without Catastrophe: How America Can Both

Specifically, it should work with allies like South Korea to invest in fundamental research and development, establish fair trading rules for the digital age, advance multilateral standards and security cooperation through vehicles as some variant of a D-10, and support nascent efforts such as the Blue Dot Network to ensure transparency around major regional development and infrastructure efforts. Because China is unlikely to alter its strategy or ambitious goals, it will be crucial for the United States and South Korea to work together and mobilize others to ensure successful adaptation of and adherence to rules and norms. This will include vigorous diplomatic engagement to craft multilateral rules of the road that address China's challenge to global trade in the age of digital economy—especially regarding state subsidies and technology transfers. Cooperation with China can be advanced through strategic dialogue to avoid accidental escalation, including over potential provocations from North Korea or emerging technologies such as drones, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and hypervelocity weapons.

The United States and South Korea share a common interest in upholding normative and rule-based mechanisms for addressing regional security, but differ on the preferred instruments, approaches, and tactics for responding to Chinese challenges. South Korea prefers to take a cautious approach that avoids premature escalation and accompanying Chinese retaliation, which would disproportionately fall on South Korea due to its geographical proximity to China. South Korea also prefers coordinated action with the United States and avoidance of rhetorical public escalation, while the United States sees the establishment of a common declaratory position that anticipates Chinese aggression as an important way to support deterrence and avoid miscalculation by establishing clear lines.

The United States runs the risk of pressuring South Korea by viewing positions on China as a litmus test for fidelity to the alliance in situations where considering and addressing legitimate South Korean concerns about the risks of Chinese retaliation might be a more effective approach. Careful coordination, dialogue, and gradual deepening and broadening of

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Challenge and Coexist with China," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/competition-with-china-without-catastrophe>.

the scope of alliance priorities will be critical if the alliance is to successfully adapt and incorporate a broader approach to deterrence in response to simultaneous peninsular and regional security threats.

With Biden, there will be less ad hominem demonization of China, but he will likely mount a more direct competition over defining values suitable for exercising global leadership and a more direct challenge to China by calling out human rights violations. While Trump weakened American exceptionalism, Biden will embrace it in ways that deepen ideas competition between the United States and China. The Biden administration will likely globalize areas of competition between the United States and China by building a coalition among like-minded states in response to areas where China has been perceived to have overreached. The dimensions of the competition are as follows:

- *Technology*: Sino-U.S. technology competition will intensify and broaden on a global scale. The United States will strengthen legal frameworks for technology denial and pressure allies to join these efforts in order to limit Chinese influence in the hi-tech sector, especially in defense-related areas. The hardening of technological lines will be a significant driver for decoupling in the technology sector, but it will take time to determine the final impact of such a zero-sum competition in the technology sphere.
- *Economy*: It will be hard to compete with China's broader economic influence. Competition will rely on self-restraint by parties dependent on trade and supply chains with China rather than U.S. policies. There will be pressure to shift supply chains away from China, possibly backed by U.S. legislative efforts to reduce dependency on China-based supply chains and to curtail Chinese in-roads into advanced sectors in the United States. However, U.S. economic pressure on its partners will not succeed in driving decoupling given the nature and benefits of economic exchange with China. Partners will choose the level of exposure with which they are comfortable based on their own experiences and knowledge that China aims to exploit economic dependencies

for political purposes.

- *International Institutions*: The Biden administration will return the United States to international engagement in institutions and will promote international cooperation and use of institutions to backstop norms. Such an effort should help restore a U.S.-led coalition of like-minded countries, but it will not fully counter China's continued efforts to strengthen resource-based influence on international leadership. The U.S. rhetorical and practical emphasis will be on restoration of rules-based mechanisms that form the foundation of the liberal international order. China will slough off criticism of economic coercion and seek to focus on offering material opportunities and strengthening economic incentives for cooperation through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and other global infrastructure projects.
- *Human Rights*: Biden will generate a bigger divide with China through criticisms of human rights, but Xi may continue to assert control, brushing off such criticisms with a blend of persuasion and "wolf-warrior diplomacy."<sup>31</sup> The human rights issue will mark a clear rhetorical line between Biden and Xi and could be reinforced by economic restrictions on bilateral interaction, supporting trends toward decoupling. Human rights will be a visible part of Sino-U.S. competition, but is unlikely to be embraced as a public rationale for third parties to change the trajectory of their relationships with China.
- *Security*: The fault lines of regional security competition in East Asia are well known, and there is no major partisan difference in U.S. security objectives. Rising Sino-U.S. competition will constrain progress on the North Korea nuclear issue as China elevates geopolitics above priorities like sanctions enforcement or denuclearization. China's growing naval capabilities will result in greater pushback against and could reduce the frequency of U.S. Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS), and will increase the

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31) Jessica Brandt and Bret Schafer, "How Wolf-Warrior Diplomats Use and Abuse Twitter," *Brookings Tech Stream*, October 28, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/how-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomats-use-and-abuse-twitter/>.

likelihood of accidental and asymmetrical conflict. The shift in the balance of cross-strait military power toward the mainland raises the risks of military coercion and could test U.S. commitments to support Taiwan's ability to defend itself. The United States will emphasize strengthened security cooperation with allies and partners to respond to China's growing military capabilities and to promote military cooperation and integration across the Indo-Pacific.

- *Global Coalition-based (Networked) Leadership*: Sino-U.S. competition will likely move to a new phase in which coalition cooperation with allies is no longer just preferable but essential in managing the regional security environment and Sino-U.S. relations. But the extent to which countries are willing to act in concert or formalize cooperation is unclear, leaving opportunities for China to exploit and divide coalition-building efforts.
- *Managing Competition and Potential Crises*: Biden will likely move in concert with U.S. bureaucracy to rebuild a strategic dialogue with China. But it remains to be seen how U.S. and Chinese leaders will manage the relationship in a crisis or what sorts of domestic political pressures might accompany a crisis in ways that remove the margin for personalized crisis management. Both sides should put institutional communication mechanisms into place to manage risks of unintended conflict escalation.
- *Preserving Cooperation*: The Biden administration will prefer to cooperate with China where it must: i.e., on issues where the broader interests of the two sides transcend immediate competitive impulses, such as climate change, arms control, North Korea's denuclearization (at least rhetorically), or other mechanisms designed to manage risks of unbridled competition. Such cooperation can be a safety valve for managing tension escalation, but it will not replace competition.

In the waning days of the Trump administration, senior Moon administration officials have been wringing their hands over how to deal with challenging issues such as the Economic

Partnership Network and the Quad Plus that appear to have thrust Sino-U.S. competition into hyperdrive. While the Biden administration will seek to cooperate with China where it can, it will compete with China where it must and will prefer to approach the rivalry with China by building coalitions with like-minded partners rather than by pursuing unilateral strategies. But a coalition-based strategy that raises expectations for alliance partners to move in tandem with the United States on policy toward China, even if it preserves space for cooperation with China on universal issues such as climate change or nonproliferation, will increase pressure on the Moon administration to align itself with the Biden administration as a fellow democracy with shared values.

## 2. Partnering with Other Allies in the Region

Given both North Korea's history of surprises and growing military, cyber, and other capabilities, intelligence cooperation has become an increasingly significant element of the ROK-U.S. alliance. Intelligence sharing with other allies and partners has also become indispensable. Yet tensions between South Korea and Japan delayed a bilateral information-sharing arrangement between the two nations until 2016. Friction between Japan and South Korea that mounted in late 2018 and spilled over into 2019 nearly resulted in the suspension of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)—a legal framework for sharing intelligence.<sup>32)</sup> Intelligence sharing with like-minded countries interested in holding North Korea accountable has enabled stronger cooperation in monitoring and enforcing sanctions.<sup>33)</sup> However, while South Korea is sometimes mentioned as a possible member of a “Five Eyes Plus” expansion of America's closest intelligence partners, differences over how to manage a rising China have tended to mean that bilateral intelligence

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32) Andrew Yeo, “South Korea Pulled out of a Military Intelligence-Sharing Agreement with Japan. That’s a Big Deal,” *The Washington Post*, August 27, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/08/27/south-korea-pulled-out-military-intel-sharing-agreement-with-japan-thats-big-deal/>.

33) “‘Five Eyes’ intel alliance ties up with Japan over N. Korea,” *Kyodo News*, January 26, 2020, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2020/01/adbec6317258-upadte1-five-eyes-intel-alliance-ties-up-with-japan-over-n-korea.html>.

sharing remains exclusively focused on North Korea.<sup>34)</sup>

At the Asian regional level, Asian countries, including South Korea, are wary of falling into proxy competition in the Sino-U.S. hegemonic struggle. South Korea is in a particularly difficult position because it relies heavily on both the United States and China for its security and economy. To mitigate the risks associated with great power competition, South Korea should diversify its diplomatic and economic portfolios.

China is South Korea's main trading partner, but South Korea's finance relies on the United States. With its security and economy intertwined, '안미경중 (security with the United States and economy with China)' is no longer in a sustainable diplomatic posture. Given this situation, South Korea should assume a "positive hedging" posture as much as possible. South Korea should also cultivate a reputation for making choices based on 'enlightened self-interest' on a case-by-case basis, searching common interests with the U.S. than unilaterally taking sides with the United States.

So far, with the exception of the deployment of a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, South Korea has maintained strategic ambiguity, avoiding choices between the United States and China whenever possible. Certainly, this has been the case on the South China Sea and over Huawei 5G telecommunications, for instance. However, as Sino-U.S. strategic competition heats up, South Korea will increasingly have to choose between strategic ambiguity and strategic transparency. Ideally, South Korea would maintain good relations with all countries, including the United States and China. But if the choice is unavoidable, participation in a U.S.-led network is in South Korea's best interest given the liberal, democratic values it shares with the United States.

Considering South Korea's interest in preserving these values, it is desirable for South Korea to strengthen its trilateral cooperation with the United States and Japan. The Korea-Japan

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34) For instance, see Alan Weedon, "Why Japan Wants to Join the Five Eyes Intelligence Network," Australia Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), September 18, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-19/five-eyes-intelligence-japan-bid-yoshihide-suga-shinzo-abe/12665248>.

relationship, however, has experienced serious setbacks over the last year, and unless the two countries settle their issues, trilateral security cooperation cannot move forward.

The restoration of trilateral coordination among the United States, South Korea, and Japan as a foundation for dealing with North Korea and other threats to the liberal international order may be another area of importance for Biden and Moon. But both Japanese and South Korean domestic politics, visceral emotions, and long-standing differences over history have strained ROK-Japan relations, limiting space in both countries for future-oriented cooperation based on common democratic values. The Biden administration will seek to work productively with Japan and South Korea while also curtailing the downturn in the Japan-South Korea relationship. Senior Biden policy advisor Anthony Blinken played a major role in establishing a regular trilateral coordination dialogue during the Obama administration and, as Biden's nominee to be Secretary of State, he will undoubtedly seek to restore these meetings.

It is important for South Korea to establish a cooperative relationship with the Quad countries (United States, Japan, Australia, and India) through active cooperation, by taking a wait-and-see approach until the structure and agenda of the Quad becomes more concrete, or through separate multilateral cooperative mechanisms that represent the interests of small- and middle-sized countries. Furthermore, South Korea should actively participate in the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific strategy to prepare not only for diplomatic and security risks but also for trade disputes between great powers, while actively expanding its geo-political and geo-economic boundaries to the New Northern and New Southern Policy regions.

The Biden administration should seek to enhance connectivity across a combination of bilateral, mini-lateral, and multilateral arrangements, spearheaded by a D-10+ grouping of like-minded allies and partners. While such an arrangement might incorporate existing groups such as the Quad and the Five Eyes countries, it should be named to reassure all countries of the positive intent of these nations—to shape agreed rules and norms, not to conduct multilateral military interventions. Moreover, other diplomatic, economic, and military arrangements will be required to enhance dialogue with China and other countries, and to

support existing multilateral institutions in the region and around the globe.

### 3. Resolving Overdue North Korea Problem

The military threat from North Korea remains the centerpiece around which ROK-U.S. security cooperation has been organized for decades. But the contours of that threat have evolved beyond conventional deterrence to prevent the recurrence of military conflict on the peninsula to an unconventional nuclear threat from a North Korea with the capacity to execute a nuclear strike on any country in the world. North Korea's expanded threat capacity tests both the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and the ability of the United States and South Korea to coordinate politically and diplomatically in response. Since the most recent round of working-level contact between the United States and North Korea in Stockholm in 2019, nuclear negotiations with North Korea have remained deadlocked. Diplomacy is likely to receive a fresh start after President-elect Biden is inaugurated on January 20, 2021. However, even a honeymoon period or North Korean charm offensive could be punctuated by actions perceived as provocative by one party or the other.

Fortunately, North Korea has not made any extreme provocations since the Stockholm meeting. However, though North Korea has yet to violate the September 19 Inter-Korean Military Agreement itself, it has undermined the spirit of the agreement through other actions—like the test launch of short-range missiles and Mobile Rocket Launcher Systems (MRLS). This may be partially due to North Korea's preoccupation with managing the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic impact of continued sanctions, natural disasters (including three powerful typhoons in 2020 alone), and the uncertainty about U.S. policy prior to the outcome of the U.S. presidential election.

Unfortunately, ROK-U.S. military exercises have yet to resume at their pre-negotiations level and North Korea continues to build up its nuclear and conventional weapons stockpile. In an October 2020 military parade celebrating the 75th anniversary of North Korean Workers

Party, the regime showed off new weaponry including huge-sized Inter-continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and Submarine-launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs), along with multiple tactical weapons that could devastate South Korea's capital, Seoul. The parade and Kim Jong Un's speech both signaled the regime's continued unwillingness to relinquish its nuclear weapons. Overall, it seems that Trump and Moon's policy of effusive engagement with North Korea has been struggling with various setbacks. North Korea has also not welcomed Moon's peace initiative and proposal to officially declare the end of the Korean War.

Moon requested global support for a declaration to an end to the Korean War in a keynote speech at the 75th UN General Assembly in 2020. The Korean people have mixed feelings regarding Moon's promotion of a declaration to end the Korean War. Though it could be seen as a sign of progress or a precursor to peace, they also worry that an end-of-war declaration without progress on denuclearization is meaningless and could even be dangerous. Following an end-of-war declaration, North Korea will likely seek to undermine the ROK-U.S. alliance by questioning the presence of foreign troops on the Korean Peninsula and calling for the withdrawal of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK). Furthermore, South Korea's unilateral push for an end-of-war declaration could mistakenly send the wrong signal that it is surrendering to the North Korean threat. A declaration of an end to the war is a political and symbolic declaration without legal binding force, but North Korea wants a legally binding security guarantee, so it is unlikely that such a declaration will be made any time soon. Before such a declaration is agreed to, it will be critical to ascertain how it can be used to resume and propel a meaningful process of denuclearization negotiations.

Despite North Korea's apparent commitment to retaining nuclear weapons, the country is also facing severe domestic difficulties arising from self-imposed quarantine, sanctions, and a series of natural disasters. The extent to which North Koreans have suffered from COVID-19 is not publicly known, though the regime has announced a series of strict measures aimed at containing the spread of the virus. Furthermore, Kim Jong Un has launched a proactive response and at times even responded emotionally to the damage caused by natural disasters under his leadership. However, it is impossible to say whether these efforts have alleviated

the concerns of the North Korean public. The juxtaposition of North Korea's show of force during the October military parade with Kim Jong Un's tearful admissions of economic distress suggest that North Korea is facing severe domestic difficulties, but it remains to be seen whether Kim can hide his weaknesses and reinforce a position of strength as a precondition for reengaging diplomatically with the United States.

In the face of North Korean refusal to negotiate, the Biden and Moon administrations will have to decide whether to pursue denuclearization as the primary objective or to pursue an arms-control based approach focused on risk reduction that tacitly accepts North Korea as an entrenched nuclear state. The latter approach induces North Korea to return to negotiations if North Korea feels that it can retain its nuclear capabilities for the foreseeable future. The two administrations will continue to coordinate on the relationship between a peace process and denuclearization and will have to consider whether the combination of U.S.-North Korea and inter-Korean negotiations is sufficient to address the challenges posed by a nuclear North Korea or whether it is necessary to return to a multilateral negotiation framework that includes China. The United States and South Korea should continue to uphold deterrence while pursuing diplomacy. The allies should also continue to prepare for the likelihood that North Korea's unique ruling system will continue to be a source of instability, either because North Korea's dictatorship requires an external enemy to sustain itself and provide legitimacy in the absence of a healthy economy, or because North Korea retains a strategy and theory of victory that envisions Korean unification on North Korean terms.

The Biden administration will support efforts to use diplomacy to control North Korea's nuclear and missile programs and promote inter-Korean peace. The incoming administration is unlikely to win Congressional support for arms control or sanctions relief. Barring significant concessions from Pyongyang, the White House will likely pursue a more even-keeled posture, remaining positive about working-level or Cabinet-level official efforts and putting off future summit meetings unless they would truly help codify agreements reached at lower levels.

## 4. Designing Security Cooperation

The same economic and political success that makes South Korea a strong military ally can also make it a competitor when it comes to procuring military hardware and selling conventional weapons globally. Buying top-of-the-line weapons from the United States can balance some of the natural asymmetries between the two allies, and certainly advances the cause of achieving unity of operations. Most countries with military capabilities rely to some degree on both indigenously produced arms and foreign arms markets. In July 2018, the Moon administration adopted the “Defense Reform 2.0” modernization plan, which included the objective of building an elite-level defense industry through acquisition reform and world-class research and development.<sup>35)</sup> Key projects such as the KF-X stealth fighter could give the ROK Air Force a 4.5 generation fighter aircraft while filling a niche market in selling advanced aircraft to countries unable or unwilling to purchase U.S. F-35s or similar advanced systems.<sup>36)</sup>

South Korea is a major buyer of U.S. weapons, and purchased roughly 2.8 billion USD in arms between 2015 and 2019.<sup>37)</sup> Among the major procurement items that the United States has sold to South Korea in recent years are: the first of four uncrewed *Global Hawk* surveillance aircraft that arrived in December 2019; sixteen F-35A multirole stealth fighter aircraft delivered from 2018-2019 (twenty-four more ordered); thirty-six *Apache* attack helicopters; AMRAAM medium-range air-to-air missiles; *Sidewinder* short-range air-to-air missiles; *Stinger* short-range air-to-air missiles for the *Apache* helicopters; *Maverick* air-to-ground or anti-ship missiles; *Hellfire* air-to-ground anti-tank missiles for the *Apache*

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35) 국방개혁 2.0 [Defense Reform 2.0], ROK Ministry of Defense, July 27, 2018, [https://reform.mnd.go.kr/mbshome/mbs/reform/images/contents/reform\\_EBOOK.pdf#page=1](https://reform.mnd.go.kr/mbshome/mbs/reform/images/contents/reform_EBOOK.pdf#page=1).

36) David Axe, “Behold South Korea’s Very Expensive Stealth Fighter,” *Forbes*, September 3, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2020/09/03/behold-south-koreas-very-expensive-stealth-fighter/#5469e90053f2>.

37) Elizabeth Shim, “South Korea a Top Buyer of U.S. Weapons, Annual Report Says,” United Press International (UPI), December 16, 2019, [https://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/World-News/2019/12/16/South-Korea-a-top-buyer-of-US-weapons-annual-report-says/4681576512463/#:~:text=South%20Korea%20imported%20%246.28%20billion,percent%20of%20U.S.%20weapons%20exports](https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2019/12/16/South-Korea-a-top-buyer-of-US-weapons-annual-report-says/4681576512463/#:~:text=South%20Korea%20imported%20%246.28%20billion,percent%20of%20U.S.%20weapons%20exports).

helicopters; GBU-39 SDB, JDAM, and CBU-105 guided bombs; SM-2 MR ship-launched surface-to-air missiles; *Harpoon* ship-launched anti-ship missiles; PAC-3 mobile air and missile defense systems; and PAC-2 mobile air and missile defense systems with the GEM-T missile upgrade.<sup>38)</sup> In 2019, South Korea also made several additional multi-year orders for U.S. arms, including: six P-8A *Poseidon* anti-submarine warfare aircraft; sixty-four PAC-3 mobile air and missile defense systems; eighty-nine *Maverick* air-to-ground missiles; and twelve LM-2500 gas turbines for the three KDX-III guided-missile destroyers South Korea is currently building.<sup>39)</sup>

These arms transfers seriously upgrade the ROK armed forces for a full range of contingencies, enhance interoperability with U.S. forces, and augment South Korea's contribution to burden-sharing.

However, despite the robust nature of the ROK-U.S. security alliance, difficulties have arisen in recent years. The abrupt cancellation of a joint press conference on October 14, 2020 following the 52nd annual ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) has raised concerns regarding the possibility of discord between the allies over a number of issues, including burden-sharing, USFK troop numbers, and wartime operational control transfer.

The Special Measures Agreement (SMA) that establishes specific host-nation support for stationing U.S. forces in Korea has grown especially contentious in the past few years, and while the issue will not disappear soon, there is every prospect that it will be dealt with both equitably and professionally. The renegotiation of multi-year SMA documents reached an impasse this year when the Trump administration called for a cost-plus-50% formula—amounting to a 500% increase in annual host-nation support from South Korea. The last five-year SMA expired in December 2018, and it was followed with a short-term deal through the end of 2019 that increased South Korea's annual contribution to 1.0389 trillion KRW (approximately

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38) "Importer/Exporter TIV Tables", Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), updated through 2019, <http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/values.php>, and "Sources and Methods," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/sources-and-methods/>.

39) Ibid.

891.23 million USD using the yearly average exchange rate for 2019).<sup>40)</sup> During the SMA negotiations for 2020 and beyond, South Korea offered to increase its contribution by 13%, but the United States rejected the offer. The Trump administration has consistently pressed South Korea to contribute far more to collective security, saying the cost of joint defense should not be unfairly imposed on U.S. taxpayers. Cost-sharing issues will likely be easier to resolve under the Biden administration.

The number of USFK troops stationed on the Korean Peninsula may also become a flashpoint in the alliance. The joint statement issued after the 2020 SCM did not affirm that the presence of USFK on the Korean Peninsula would be maintained at the current level. During the Obama administration, South Korea and the United States agreed to keep 28,500 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea. This year's joint statement is the first since 2008 that has omitted "the clause on maintaining U.S. forces in South Korea." Although the South Korean government said that discussions did not address a reduction in the U.S. force presence on the peninsula, the United States responded that it routinely reviewed the relocation of U.S. troops around the world. Some Korea watchers have raised the possibility that the Trump administration intentionally excluded the phrase from the joint statement to pressure Seoul to contribute more to defense cost sharing.

The stationing of U.S. troops in South Korea deters open conflict and reassures both democracies that the peninsula will carry on, focusing on commerce and cooperation. The cost of a bloody, protracted military campaign would be horrendous. Furthermore, a U.S. force withdrawal would increase the potential for North Korean attacks and coercion, weaken U.S. influence in the region, and further isolate U.S. allies, especially South Korea and Japan. Left to fend for themselves, Japan and South Korea could experience accelerated domestic pressure to acquire nuclear weapons that could be married with hypervelocity missiles and other systems capable of engulfing Northeast Asia in a nuclear war. Meanwhile, South Korean and

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40) "Yearly Average Currency Exchange Rates," U.S. Internal Revenue Service, <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/yearly-average-currency-exchange-rates>.

American taxpayers would not save money, given the former's need to compensate with new defense spending and the latter's need to maintain its withdrawn forces at a new location. The allies would also lose the bargaining chip of troop removal that could have been used in the event that Pyongyang was willing to take steps to dismantle its growing arsenal of missiles.<sup>41)</sup> The overall effect of reducing the U.S. troop presence in South Korea would be to undermine U.S. combat readiness and deterrence capability in Northeast Asia.

Despite potential friction over troop levels, both governments and militaries remain committed to the eventual transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON). At the 46th SCM in 2014, Seoul and Washington agreed to consider three conditions for the transfer of wartime operational control: the combined operational capability of South Korean troops, the initial response capability toward North Korea's nuclear weapons program, and the security environment around the Korean Peninsula.

While both governments are committed to achieving a smooth transition, the timeline for that transition shifts depending on the administrations in power, varying perspectives on the status of the North Korean threat, and readiness of the South Korean armed forces. Moon has committed to completing the transition by the end of his term in 2022, but the U.S. side has expressed doubt that South Korea will fully meet the conditions required for the transfer by that deadline. The issue has grown fraught, with the United States reluctant to alter the status quo in the face of North Korea's growing nuclear program, and South Korea often casting the issue as a matter of equal partnership or even "military sovereignty."<sup>42)</sup>

The allies revised the transition plan in 2018, under which South Korea would achieve Initial Operational Capability (IOC), followed by Full Operational Capability (FOC), and, finally, Full Mission Capability (FMC).<sup>43)</sup> ROK forces conducted a series of certification assessments

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41) Simon Denyer and Min Joo Kim, "North Korea Parades Huge New ICBM, But Kim Jong Un Stresses Deterrent Nature," *The Washington Post*, October 10, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/northkorea-military-parade-missile-icbm/2020/10/10/f6f13a74-0869-11eb-8719-0df159d14794\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/northkorea-military-parade-missile-icbm/2020/10/10/f6f13a74-0869-11eb-8719-0df159d14794_story.html).

42) Soo W. Kim, "South Korea-U.S. OPCON Transition: The Element of Timing," RAND, April 2, 2020, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/04/us-south-korea-opcon-transition-the-element-of-timing.html>.

to meet the first hurdle during combined command post training exercises and the 2020 Crisis Management Staff Training exercise.<sup>44)</sup> They have also developed a single set of bilaterally formulated strategic documents, a requirement for meeting both the first and second milestones.<sup>45)</sup>

The OPCON issue involves an extensive technical agreement between the two sides regarding conditions and capabilities that would justify transition and a joint assessment of the status and nature of the North Korean nuclear threat. Some South Koreans are concerned that a U.S. desire to reassert control could somehow thwart their goal of achieving OPCON transition, while the United States is mainly concerned with maintaining the structures for armistice implementation that have successfully bolstered defense and deterrence for decades.

Fortunately, with the new Biden administration, the allies will have a fresh opportunity to reassert their fundamental vision of common interests, reach a fair division of both burden- and power-sharing, and take a balanced approach to defense, diplomacy, and economic development in dealing with North Korea and other regional challenges. While Trump has viewed negotiations with North Korea as an essentially bilateral enterprise, Biden sees the advantages of working with allies and seeking peace through a deliberate process and “principled diplomacy.”<sup>46)</sup>

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43) “Joint Communique of the 52nd U.S.-Republic of Korea Security Consultative Meeting,” U.S. Department of Defense, October 14, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2381879/joint-communique-of-the-52nd-us-republic-of-korea-security-consultative-meeting/>.

44) “Joint Communiqué of the 51st ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting,” U.S. Department of Defense, November 16, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2018651/joint-communique-of-the-51st-rok-us-security-consultative-meeting/>; and “Joint Communique of the 52nd U.S.-Republic of Korea Security Consultative Meeting,” U.S. Department of Defense, October 14, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2381879/joint-communique-of-the-52nd-us-republic-of-korea-security-consultative-meeting/>.

45) “Joint Communique of the 52nd U.S.-Republic of Korea Security Consultative Meeting,” U.S. Department of Defense, October 14, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2381879/joint-communique-of-the-52nd-us-republic-of-korea-security-consultative-meeting/>.

46) On Trump’s worldview, see Tom McTague and Peter Nicholas, “How ‘America First’ Became America Alone,” *The Atlantic*, October 28, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/10/donald-trump-foreign-policy-america-first/616872/>. On Biden’s basic approach to the Korean Peninsula, see Byun Duk-kun, “Biden Vows Not to Extort S. Korea with Troop Withdrawal Threats,” Yonhap News Agency,

Some differences of opinion will persist under the Biden administration. South Korea supports the maintenance of military deterrence against North Korea and security cooperation with the United States, but ultimately seeks to achieve denuclearization and reunification through a policy of engagement with North Korea. Moving forward, disagreements may arise between the allies over the prioritization of nuclear nonproliferation versus the development of inter-Korean relations. The alliance could also come under greater pressure if failure to realize shared, if potentially unrealistic, objectives generates blame or infighting over roles and responsibilities.

The United States and South Korea also view the role of a declaration of the end of the Korean War differently. The United States sees such a declaration as a symbolic confidence-building measure that could be used as leverage in the denuclearization negotiation process. The South Korean government sees the declaration as a first step to achieving denuclearization. The allies should pursue any end-of-war declaration in close coordination and ensure that its signing will propel denuclearization negotiations forward.

Many other security-related issues could provoke differences of opinion between Seoul and Washington. Generally speaking, the allies view regional security from different perspectives. South Korean officials first consider the peninsula, starting with North Korea, and then look beyond to the rest of the region. In contrast, U.S. officials tend to look at China first and then beyond. Consequently, it is unsurprising that Seoul's dominant priorities in the alliance relate to the peninsula, and Washington's priorities often focus on the broader Indo-Pacific region. This difference in perspective and priorities has already impacted the alliance, with the United States calling on an unenthusiastic South Korea to aid in combating China's rise by joining in multilateral frameworks like the Economic Prosperity Network (EPN) and Quad Plus.

Strategic communication between South Korea and the United States has become more important than ever in the face of growing strategic uncertainty surrounding the Korean

Peninsula and the world. The alliance, which has lasted seventy years, will not suddenly collapse under the weight of the problems enumerated above. However, a tiny crack can cause the strongest levee to collapse. In this way, the potential for a rupture in the ROK-U.S. alliance will grow if small differences are not addressed and resolved.

## 5. Sustaining the Alliance Domestically

The alliance has prepared for decades to address external threats from North Korea and, to a lesser degree, from regional actors such as China that could threaten South Korean security. But the alliance has not prepared to address an internal threat that may pose an even greater risk to its future sustainability. The rise of nationalist sentiment in both the United States and South Korea detracts from the fundamental spirit of alliance cooperation by defining national security priorities in exclusive terms rather than in terms of security cooperation. The “America First” mentality propagated by Trump pits U.S. interests against South Korean interests by casting South Koreans as freeloaders who have not paid their due in return for the U.S. commitment to defend South Korea. Under the Biden administration, the impulse toward “America First” will be dampened, but given the polarization evident in the 2020 election results, domestic pressures may still weigh heavily on U.S. international commitments. At present, a substantial majority of Americans believes that Asian alliances are valuable tools for preserving U.S. national interests, but public perceptions could change in the face of sustained nationalist rhetoric. On the other hand, a “North Korea First” mentality among some progressives inside the Moon administration casts strong ROK-U.S. alliance coordination as a hindrance to the development of inter-Korean relations even as North Korea continues to take provocative actions aimed at the South.

These two approaches constitute different forms of alliance fatigue that privilege unilateralism over alliance cooperation based on convergent and overlapping national security interests. Though the ROK-U.S. alliance continues to face wedge-driving strategies from North Korea

and China, these threats are well-known and neither North Korea nor China have experienced much success. Shifts in domestic perceptions to a narrower conception of national interest, however, have already begun to cause internal tensions between the United States and South Korea and threaten to diminish space for alliance cooperation.

Securing strategic coherence across the U.S. and South Korean administrations is important to consolidate the foundation of the alliance. Strong public support for the alliance will play a crucial role in enabling the continuity of the alliance.

Despite the threat posed by growing nationalist sentiment, the ROK-U.S. alliance enjoys broad support within both countries. A poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA) conducted in December 2019 showed that 92% of South Koreans support the alliance with the United States.<sup>47)</sup> The survey also found that 74% supported the long-term stationing of U.S. forces in South Korea, and 87% agreed that U.S. forces in South Korea contribute to South Korea's national security. Significantly, 62% believed that South Korea should strengthen relations with the United States even if this could complicate relations with China.<sup>48)</sup> But there are limits to public support for the relationship, with half of the South Koreans surveyed expressing concern about the allies working at cross purposes. More than two-thirds opposed U.S. demands for up to a 500% increase in host-nation support.<sup>49)</sup>

Although Trump has touted an "America First" foreign policy, the same 2019 CCGA poll found that 70% of Americans viewed the ROK-U.S. alliance as beneficial to national security.<sup>50)</sup> American views are less fixed when it comes to preserving current troop levels in South Korea (or any other foreign base). While more than half (57%) of Americans favored maintaining or increasing U.S. forces in South Korea, about one-third supported

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47) "While Positive Toward U.S. Alliance South Koreans Want to Counter Trump's Demands on Host-Nation Support," Chicago Council, December 16, 2019, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/lcc/while-positive-toward-us-alliance-south-koreans-want-counter-trumps-demands-host-nation>.

48) Ibid.

49) Ibid.

50) "Rejecting Retreat," The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, September 6, 2019, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/lcc/rejecting-retreat>.

reducing or withdrawing U.S. forces from South Korea.<sup>51)</sup> So, while Trump's rhetoric has some basis in the U.S. body politic and broader trends, the majority of Americans do not hold the same views.

South Korea is one of the world's most prosperous states, and the United States commands a relatively smaller percentage of global wealth than it did in previous decades. Likewise, rapid technological change is altering the character of war, making tactical defense more dominant and raising the costs of protecting large, forward military platforms.<sup>52)</sup> This trend may partly account for the dip in American public support for U.S. use of force to defend South Korea in the event of a North Korean attack: 58% in 2019, down from 64% in 2018.<sup>53)</sup> This has implications for alliance reassurance and the deterrence of potential aggression. However, a clear majority (61%) of Americans still view the North Korean nuclear program as a "critical threat" to vital U.S. interests.<sup>54)</sup>

A poll conducted by the East Asia Institute (EAI) in September 2020 also explored South Korean views of the ROK-U.S. alliance. Over 60% of South Koreans expressed a relative national preference for the United States, while only 6% expressed a preference for China. Over 50% of South Koreans said they believed U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) should remain on the peninsula after reunification, with 13% answering that it was necessary and 38% answering that it was largely necessary.

According to the EAI survey, the most important USFK tasks are stabilizing the situation on the Korean Peninsula, followed by contributing to South Korea's national defense, maintaining peace in East Asia, responding to a rising China, and maintaining global peace, including in the Middle East and Europe. When asked whether USFK presence in South Korea should be maintained if the goal of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula is achieved, 48% answered that it should be reduced, 36% answered that it should remain as is, and 11%

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51) Ibid.

52) See T. X. Hammes, *Deglobalization and International Security*, (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2019).

53) Ibid.

54) Ibid.

answered that it should be withdrawn. When asked about the nations that pose a military threat to South Korea, 84% of South Koreans said North Korea posed a military threat and 44% said China posed a military threat. In response to the question of what future strategy South Korea would pursue in East Asia, 46% of South Koreans answered that they did not know; 21% answered that South Korea would act independently without being affected by neighboring powers; 17% said South Korea would stand with the United States and Japan; and only 7% said South Korea would take China's side. Interestingly, over 53% South Koreans replied that trilateral U.S.-Japan-South Korea cooperation is necessary, with 40% mentioning the need to balance against China's rise. When asked about the countries that are most important to South Korea's economic development, the South Korean public was equally divided between China and the United States.

As demonstrated by these polls, South Koreans hold generally positive views of the role of the ROK-U.S. alliance and USFK, and believe that the ROK-U.S. alliance should be maintained after denuclearization and reunification of the peninsula. South Koreans view the military threat posed by North Korea and maintenance of stability on the Korean Peninsula as the primary objectives of the ROK-U.S. alliance, but also see China as posing a military threat and recognize the need for a check on China's military strength. South Koreans have serious concerns about future Sino-U.S. competition, and are unsure of South Korea's future strategic alternatives. They are concerned about economic relations with and retaliation from China. They generally favor trilateral U.S.-Japan-South Korea security cooperation to contain China's military threat.

## **6. Enhancing Economic Cooperation and Rebuilding a Liberal Order**

Future South Korea-U.S. economic cooperation will include maximization of the effectiveness of the KORUS FTA, linkage of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy and South Korean New Southern Policy, collaboration in 5G and in the biomedical field, cooperation on energy

production and trade, strategic involvement in the building of market systems and free economies in the developing world, and the reorganization of the economic world order.

The implementation of the KORUS FTA in 2012 has contributed to the balanced development and expansion of South Korea-U.S. economic cooperation. The KORUS FTA's adoption has not only drastically increased the scale of trade between the two countries, which have seen an increase of 34% between 2011 (100.8 billion USD) and 2019 (135.2 billion USD), but also assisted in balancing the trade surplus between the United States and South Korea. During the same period, the share of South Korea's trade surplus with the United States decreased by 18.8%.

The reduction of the trade imbalance amid the increase of overall South Korea-U.S. trade illustrates a virtuous circle between quantitative expansion and the qualitative development of economic relations between the two countries. The allies should build on these achievements by further strengthening and upgrading the quality of South Korea-U.S. economic cooperation through faithful execution of the KORUS FTA.

The two countries should upgrade their economic cooperation from the traditional fields of trade and investment to new arenas for cooperation, including the digital economy, energy, the environment, and development cooperation. The United States and South Korea should also jointly prepare to counter the expansion of economic sanctioning and trade disputes in a worsening global trade environment. Qualitative improvements in South Korea-U.S. economic relations will not only contribute to the ongoing promotion of economic cooperation, but also suggest a model for 21st century economic cooperation overall.

In March 2020, when uncertainty in global financial markets and the global economy spiked due to the spread of COVID-19, the Bank of Korea and U.S. Federal Reserve signed a currency swap agreement in the amount of 60 billion USD. In July 2020, the agreement was extended for another six months in a demonstration of smart cooperation between trusting partners. The United States and South Korea should disseminate this exemplary model of cooperation to manage global economic uncertainty in the face of the growing lure of a “my

country first” approach.

With the sharp decrease in global trade and economic growth that has followed the spread of COVID-19, protectionist trends will likely grow stronger. Rather than simply aiming to restore the liberal international order, the United States and South Korea should proactively counter increasing protectionism by taking an innovative approach to redesigning the global economic order in ways that stabilize and strengthen the institutional connections underlying the bilateral, regional, and multilateral orders. For example, the United States and South Korea should keep pace with the reorganization of the regional order by jointly reviewing the possibility of joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

The United States should strengthen engagement amid the increasingly complex global trade environment, which is undergoing a reorganization of the global value chain, the processes of reshoring and near-shoring, the promotion and establishment of mega FTAs, and the introduction and spread of new trade rules and norms. U.S. efforts should be made to build international consensus on the reform of international multilateral institutions, including the WTO. The existing multilateral trade system centered on the WTO is limited in its ability to address “21st century trade, 21st century trade rules.” For example, there is a steadily growing need for rules and regulations on digital trade governance. Though the Trump administration criticized the WTO, the Biden administration is likely to redouble efforts for reform rather than for the abolishment of multilateral trade institutions themselves. As such, the United States and South Korea should work together to initiate public discussion on WTO reform in support of “free and fair trade.”

The United States and South Korea should also work together closely to drive regional cooperation forward, and build linkages between the Indo-Pacific strategy and New Southern Policy in order to do so. At the November 2019 Fourth High-level Economic Consultative Meeting between the United States and South Korea, the South Korean government agreed in principle to strengthen economic cooperation with the United States to promote linkages

between the two initiatives. For linkage of the Indo-Pacific strategy and New Southern Policy to work in practice, parallel efforts must be made to establish infrastructure cooperation for smart cities, industry clusters, and financial cooperation centers as well as to expand the scope of cooperation in investment, development cooperation, and trade.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy seeks to establish a regional economic order differentiated from China's One Belt One Road Initiative, which relies heavily on infrastructure building. South Korea should identify areas where it can contribute and pursue projects through the New Southern Policy that are complementary with the Indo-Pacific strategy. South Korea and the United States should move forward cooperatively in pursuing infrastructure projects, smart cities construction, energy production, and trade with third party nations. Such projects will help South Korea in its efforts diversify its own economic relationships. While the U.S.-led Blue Dot Network, a multi-stakeholder initiative formed with Japan and Australia that assesses and certifies infrastructure development projects, will inevitably clash with China's One Belt One Road Initiative, excessive competition will impede the establishment of a peaceful, prosperous regional order. Accordingly, South Korea should strive to form complementary relationships with both initiatives on the basis of cooperation with the United States.

With Sino-U.S. strategic competition in full swing, South Korea will likely remain in the difficult position of having to choose between its two main economic partners. As such, South Korea and the United States should seek out new areas for economic cooperation, reaffirming their strong economic relationship, human ties, and shared values. However, it is important to send the signal that the establishment of a new direction for South Korea-U.S. economic cooperation does not come at the expense of a good economic relationship with China.

South Korea and the United States must effectively manage the process of finding a new balance in the evolving global trade environment. To ensure that the restructuring of the supply chain is not excessively securitized, South Korea should cooperate with countries facing similar challenges in managing the supply chain reorganization process.

## 7. Expanding the Alliance to New Frontiers

Cooperation within the ROK-U.S. alliance is expanding beyond military and security to include the economy, culture, education, and other such arenas. ROK-U.S. cooperation on health security should be prioritized within this context. Thus far, South Korea and the United States have worked well together to address the COVID-19 pandemic, and South Korea's domestic success in responding to the health crisis has served as timely reminder of the importance of the South Korea-U.S. alliance. In May 2020, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo referenced the importance of ROK-U.S. cooperation to eradicating COVID-19, reaffirming the alliance as the linchpin of peace and prosperity in both Asia and the world.

Unlike military security, which places certain groups and organizations in the position of "enemy," the enemy in health security is not other countries but rather diseases, bioterrorism, and bio-accidents that can threaten the stable order and development of society. As a result, bilateral cooperation in the health security arena is less affected by the sensitive issues surrounding great power cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. In fact, health security cooperation can be a useful tool through which to circumvent sensitive geopolitical issues and persuade others to engage in mutual cooperation. South Korea and the U.S. have a history of ongoing cooperation to promote improved public health. In 2003, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to engage in health and medical cooperation, the scope of which has expanded over time. The scope of this cooperation includes preventable diseases, epidemiological surveys, novel influenza, tuberculosis, quarantine, health development cooperation, and so on. South Korea worked closely to cooperate with the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing test kits and medical equipment. COVID-19 should be taken as an opportunity to further strengthen health security cooperation between the ROK and U.S. Going forward, cooperation can be sought in the following areas.

First, South Korea and the U.S. should strengthen their global health security partnership. Despite U.S. leadership and active South Korean participation, the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) has failed to effectively respond to the coronavirus pandemic. In order to

mitigate the risk of future novel infectious diseases spreading worldwide, the U.S. and the ROK should engage in mutual cooperation to revive the role of the GHSA as a platform for global health security. In the same context, Korea should support and participate in the U.S.-led Anti-Microbial Resistance Challenge, while the U.S. should do the same for the Korea-led Group of Friends of Solidarity for Global Health Security.

There is a need to jointly develop items for global cooperation on the development, manufacturing, and administration of vaccines and medicine. Korea's vaccine business is a success. Since the country has a high capacity to manufacture and administer vaccines, it can participate in and contribute to the rapid mass manufacturing and administration of COVID-19 vaccines if it can cooperate with U.S. developers.

Second, the two countries should expand the scope of their global health security cooperation. Korea is expanding its contributions to the international community as a model of economic growth based on aid, and its public health capacity is recognized as world-class. Korea's success in containing COVID-19 while adhering to free democratic principles is the subject of particular attention.

The U.S. is pushing ahead with the Blue Dot Network Project, which is a sustainable infrastructure development project in the Indo-Pacific region, and hopes that Korea will participate. Korea should expand its participation in and contribution to health cooperation talks between major countries, including the G-7, especially in consideration of the role it is expected to play in the field of health security cooperation.

Third, the U.S. and South Korea should expand their technical cooperation to develop mechanisms for monitoring the emergence and spread of infectious diseases and sharing information using advanced technologies such as ICT and AI. The two countries have grasped the importance of using such advanced technology in the response to COVID-19. South Korea and the U.S. are both leaders in the realm of digital technology, including 5G communication. The ROK and U.S. should exercise these advantages to seek cooperation in the joint development of high-level technologies for health security.

In addition, with regard to the controversy over privacy violations relating to data and information sharing on infectious diseases for the purpose of epidemic response and prevention, South Korea and the U.S. can cooperate in international discussions to create international norms regarding epidemic responses and privacy protection through the use of digital technology.

Fourth, the U.S. and Korea should cooperate on the problems of how to reform and develop the WHO, which is the central actor in global health security governance. The Biden administration will reopen discussions on the U.S. rejoining the WHO, and this should also be an opportunity to discuss the need to reform global health governance. Both Korea and the United States should cooperate with various global actors to create an international environment for WHO reform.

## **8. Collaborating for Technological Competence and Security**

South Korea and the U.S. have a long history of established cooperation in science and technology, and have recently put in place systems to further develop these efforts. Science and technology cooperation itself is beneficial to both countries and will further solidify the ROK-U.S. alliance. In fact, cooperation on new frontier technologies may serve as the best vehicle by which to brand and shape the future of the alliance, especially as memories of the Korean War fade. A conscious decision by the United States and South Korea to integrate strategies for science and technology cooperation would facilitate the leveraging of new forms of cooperation while integrating a shared-technology mindset with efforts to find solutions to new problems.

The U.S. is highly likely to lead the introduction of a new economic paradigm based on its overwhelming technological dominance, but it needs to overcome domestic issues such as monopoly disputes among big companies like Google, Facebook, and Amazon, as well as its weak manufacturing base. In addition, the United States will face difficulties in its efforts to

check China's technological rise in various areas such as AI, big data, biotechnology, and space. It is inevitable that leaks of technology will continue to occur. As the challenge from China grows, the U.S. must request cooperation from its allies to overcome its weaknesses.

Korea is facing the shared challenge of continuing to enhance its technological innovation in the face of China's rise. Cooperation with the U.S. is urgently needed in high-tech information, communications technology, and biotechnology, which are driving the new economic paradigm under the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Korea and the U.S. should upgrade their cooperation in science and technology by exploring potential agenda items based on their strengths that can lead to win-win cooperation. This will lead to a stronger alliance.

The South Korean and U.S. governments signed the South Korea-U.S. Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement in 1976, and upgraded it to a partnership in 1993 to exchange information on science and technology and conduct joint research. The Joint Science and Technology Committee has held regular meetings since 1993, which were upgraded to ministerial-level meetings in 2004. The South Korea-U.S. Joint Committee on Science and Technology discusses major issues, and exchanges information on the latest science and technology. However, the committee has not met during the Trump administration following the 9th meeting in 2016. The South Korea-U.S. Science and Technology Joint Committee should be re-established under the Biden administration to develop a new agenda for science and technology cooperation between the two countries and create a focal point for deepening bilateral scientific and technological cooperation.

Various studies are currently underway on the most recent information and communication technologies related to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Such technologies, including artificial intelligence and drones, have been introduced to the defense sector. The two countries should conduct joint research within the framework of the ROK-U.S. alliance on the utilization of technologies related to the Fourth Industrial Revolution in the defense sector. Strengthened cooperation in the defense technology sector will further consolidate the foundation of the

ROK-U.S. alliance.

In the 5G technology race, South Korean private sector semiconductor production is at the cutting edge of enabling and expanding product advancement, making South Korea a critical ally in producing and hardening the technologies necessary to maintain national security and remove vulnerabilities that have arisen due to reliance on Chinese-produced hardware. South Korean adherence to U.S. laws prohibiting spread of U.S.-origin semiconductor technologies to China is as important as the integration of South Korean-produced chips into the technology infrastructure of systems hardened to Chinese penetration. The advancement of manufacture of high-quality chips and integration into new devices will also be critical to the pace of development of the AI technologies that will be at the forefront of new technology development. The U.S. and South Korean governments can support an integrated approach to these issues by cooperating to define standards for building the new technology infrastructure and for keeping the door open to the free flow of information, while ensuring that new hardware is resistant to theft or intrusion.

Shared concerns about cybersecurity vulnerabilities also provide a strong basis for ROK-U.S. shared interest in strengthening technological cooperation. The United States and South Korea need to cooperate both in response to North Korea's efforts to exploit global infrastructure weaknesses to raise hard currency, and as part of making international technological infrastructure more robust, resilient, and protected from offensive threats and hacker exploitation of systemic weaknesses. The United States and South Korea should work together to address North Korea's increasing reliance on hacking operations and cyber theft and to build global standards for protecting critical infrastructure vulnerabilities that have enabled North Korean hacking operations.

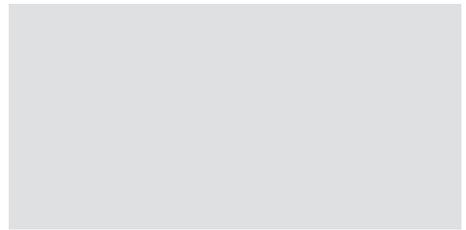
As cybersecurity becomes increasingly important, South Korea should seek to serve as a facilitator of international cooperation in the field of cybersecurity. Singapore, which opened the ASEAN-Singapore Cyber Security Specialist Center in 2018 and plans to invest about 22 million USD into the center by 2023, has already begun to do so and is strengthening its

cyber (security) capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region. South Korea also should consider promoting the establishment of a cyber security center in Northeast Asia with the United States and Japan. The importance of cybersecurity and cooperation between regional countries is emphasized in the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA), which the United States passed in 2018.<sup>55)</sup>

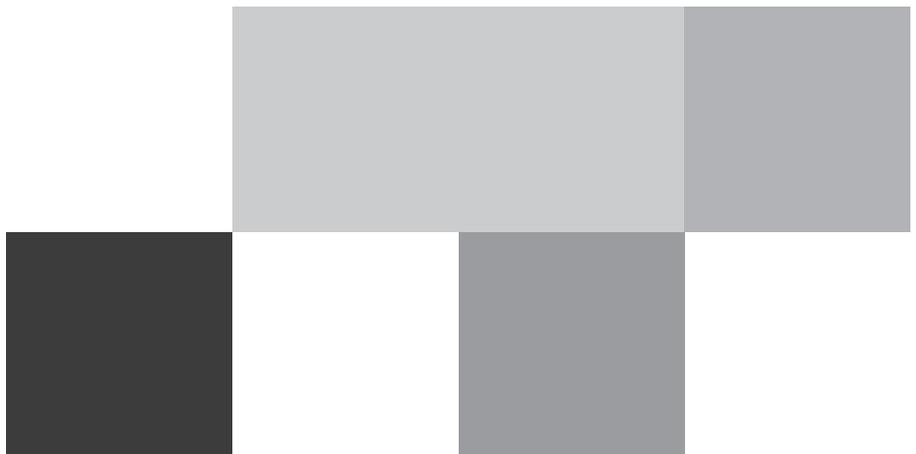
The ROK-U.S. alliance should also continue to build cooperation in space both to support and align with South Korean interests in expanding scientific and technological capabilities to jointly pursue space exploration and to maintain effective space-based reconnaissance and intelligence gathering regarding North Korean nuclear and missile development.

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55) <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/2736/text>



## Recommendations for a Complex Network Alliance



# V

## Recommendations for a Complex Network Alliance

The ROK-U.S. alliance has successfully adapted to a new environment despite momentous transformations in both the international geopolitical context and U.S. and South Korean domestic politics over the past seventy years. As the initial rationale for establishing the alliance based on shared sacrifices during the Korean War is fading, the United States and South Korea should establish a new and binding rationale for cooperation to sustain the alliance. A future-oriented rationale for the alliance might be rooted in shared values, but a forward-looking ROK-U.S. alliance would embrace technological cooperation as the glue for alliance-based partnership. A wide range of areas, from fighting pandemics to space exploration to development and application of new 5G standards in technology, constitute new opportunities for collaboration that could sustain the alliance going forward.

Biden and Moon should offer a vision of the future centered on advancing knowledge. Advances in technologies ranging from AI to quantum computing and robotics to biogenetics open up new vistas for human progress, but also introduce new threats such as digital disinformation. While nations pursue their own plans for countering such threats, a vanguard of democracies will need to protect liberty from pernicious threats while installing mechanisms for cooperation and guardrails for permissible behavior. Necessarily, this initiative must make room not just for governments, but also for private sector actors and regional and international organizations.

A vision for the ROK-U.S. alliance should be comprehensive, address an array of short-to-medium-term issues, and seek to align the two countries for the long-term. A resilient, forward-looking alliance will be based on close consultation, effective cooperation on meaningful issues for both countries, and diplomatic agility to adjust to shifts within the two democracies.

### *Early Signaling of Intent*

- The Biden and Moon administrations should swiftly announce their commitment to strengthening and broadening the ROK-U.S. alliance—one that deepens the search for peace with North Korea while preserving deterrence, dispatches with unfinished business such as a host-nation support agreement, tightens and elevates channels of consultation including a senior-level whole-of-government dialogue, and outlines a long-term vision for shaping regional security and forging a liberal rules-based order in an era of scientific and technological transformation.
- Seoul and Washington should consider a declaratory policy of moving from cost-sharing to value-sharing and responsibility-sharing alliances. South Korea should make efforts to expand the focus of its alliance policy currently focused on North Korea to shared values-based coordination applied at the regional and global policy levels. The Moon Jae-in government's Korean Peninsula peace process policy contributed to eliminate the risk of war and promote peace on the Korean peninsula to a certain extent. However, due to excessive emphasis on inter-Korean relations, policy interest with the Moon administration in other important agendas in Korean diplomacy is extremely low. South Korea needs to restore the balance in its perspective in diplomacy and security and look at its foreign policy in a broader framework.

### *Proactive Alliance Management*

- The United States and South Korea should conclude an interim Special Measures Agreement, bolster support for a capabilities-driven OPCON transition, augment existing discussions on extended deterrence, establish a regular training and exercise schedule, expand naval and maritime cooperation, and initiate a strategic dialogue on the environment and challenges facing the alliance after the North Korea threat recedes.
- The United States should actively support South Korea in meeting conditions for

Operational Control transition, including those to certify IOC, FOC, and FMC in an expeditious manner, based on prior agreements for a capabilities-driven OPCON transition. The United States and South Korea should continue to work closely to develop a clear understanding of U.S. extended deterrence commitments and policies through the ROK-U.S. Committee on Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction, Deterrence Strategy Committee, and the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultative Group. The United States and South Korea should through these consultative mechanisms discuss ongoing implementation of the Tailored Deterrence Strategy, and any need for adaptation given changes in the security environment and the Alliance's force posture. The allies should expand cooperation in cyber and space to ensure a robust and all domain approach to deterrence.

- The United States and South Korea should resolve existing obstacles to maintenance of operational readiness by preserving access to proper training facilities and maintaining a regular exercise schedule in a spirit reflecting their shared objectives and interests in peninsular and regional stability.
- As South Korea's threat environment transitions away from a primarily North Korea-driven threat environment and as South Korea's naval capabilities and contributions expand, the United States and South Korea should strengthen naval, coast guard, and marine cooperation as part of a comprehensive approach to preserve South Korea's security.
- The United States and South Korea should consult on future threats to South Korea's security and assess how alliance capabilities should be adjusted and oriented in a post-North Korea threat environment. To this end, the United States should consider bringing South Korea and other bilateral alliance partners willing to commit tangible resources to the pursuit of shared interests in preservation of global stability into selected discussions and planning related to U.S. global threat assessments and adjustments in military posture.

*Seamless Coordination on North Korea*

- South Korea should pursue a strategic agreement with the United States in negotiations regarding North Korean denuclearization, while maintaining the consistency of South Korea's policy toward North Korea, to attain peace on the Korean Peninsula. For instance, Victor Cha's call for incremental steps, beginning with a freeze of all nuclear operations at Yongbyon in return for some sanctions relief could provide the basis for an alliance understanding of how to achieve progress with both peace and nuclear reductions on the peninsula. This "mini deal" could pave the way for a "fundamental transformation of the political relations" between the United States and North Korea before pursuing a long-term framework for eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons and programs.<sup>56)</sup>
- Peace on the Korean Peninsula requires that the geopolitical interests of neighboring powers align. Therefore, it is necessary to harmonize South Korea's diplomatic efforts with surrounding countries' North Korea policy so that the Sino-U.S. strategic competition does not become an obstacle to solving the North Korean problem.
- The United States and South Korea should continue to take measures to maintain readiness and strengthen joint command and control mechanisms necessary to support alliance deterrence capabilities in the event of military conflict with North Korea.
- The United States should continue to support South Korean efforts to build on existing tension-reduction and confidence-building efforts with North Korea, recognizing that additional progress will require North Korea's active reciprocation, implementation of existing agreements, and engagement in negotiations that build on the Comprehensive Military Agreement (CMA). The United States and South Korea should also expand planning for further steps toward tension-reduction and develop specific plans and strategies for ending the armistice and replacing it with a permanent peace treaty. Such

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56) Victor Cha, "Engaging North Korea Anew," *Foreign Affairs*, November 17, 2020.

planning should address both the ways in which the UN Command can continue to be helpful in implementing the transition from the Korean Armistice Agreement to a permanent peace treaty and in addressing incidents of accidental conflict that could threaten efforts to achieve permanent peace. Upon the establishment of conditions of peaceful coexistence and the adoption of a permanent peace treaty, the UN Command and its functions would wind down as a result of having completed its mission. The United States and South Korea should indicate their intent to adopt a revamped bilateral alliance structure and mission to preserve South Korea's security from external threats following the establishment of a permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula.

- The United States should discuss the future of missile defense and extended deterrence with South Korea and Japan in light of North Korea's continued missile development to determine whether these alliance partners should consider a closer alignment of respective missile defense infrastructures based on a joint assessment of alliance objectives.

*Forward Partnership for Regional Peace and Prosperity*

- The United States and South Korea should establish a normative framework for maintaining peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia and the broader international system. Adopting a rules-based approach to managing major power competition would buffer the allies and the region from malign, unilateral action, without posing a direct challenge to any country. For instance, the allies should try to enumerate a code of conduct on coercive economic statecraft, cyberattacks, and other gray-zone areas, along with appropriate responses. A rules-based approach would also allow for both constructive dialogue about and with China, as well as provide a natural means for strengthening ROK-U.S.-Japan cooperation.
- Coordination on short-term issues in the ROK-U.S. alliance is essential to build trust and reach an agreement on purpose in the medium- and long- term. The ROK-U.S. alliance will likely face many difficulties amid Sino-U.S. strategic competition. As

Sino-U.S. competition intensifies, it will be necessary to establish South Korea's China policy in more detailed and principled terms. The United States and South Korea may seek alignment, if not agreement, on a particular strategy toward China.

- The Hub-and-Spoke system has worked fairly well, and upon further consultation the allies may choose to supplement it with additional collective or mini-lateral networks. It is important for the U.S. to cooperate with Asian allies to determine the roles of each allies and partners, and to consult closely with allies and partners when pursuing China-related strategies.
- While the United States currently enjoys some military advantage over China, a framework for cooperation between the United States and South Korea with the aim of maintaining the current balance of power will help prevent China from undermining norms and promote mid- to long-term Sino-U.S. cooperation in possible areas such as non-proliferation and climate change.
- South Korea should identify common ground with the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy while promoting its New Southern Policy and other multi-dimensional mini-lateral and bilateral cooperation efforts with Asian countries.
- The ROK-U.S. alliance should seek to find norm-based solutions without aggravating geopolitical competition between great powers. To this end, institutional cooperation should take into account the positions of all members of the international community, including the middle powers and weaker countries.
- The United States and South Korea should design and institute a collective response system to cope with Chinese retaliation—especially its use of coercive economic statecraft.
- The United States and South Korea should actively engage their respective publics on the strategic value of the relationship, highlighting the breadth and depth of cooperation in various areas—including but not limited to defense. The two governments should

work together to proactively counter false narratives and misinformation about alliance-related activities.

- To safeguard its sustainable economic development, South Korea should continue pursuing a gradual diversification of external economic relations amid the current Sino-U.S. competitive landscape and work to strengthen economic and technological cooperation with the United States. Both the United States and South Korea should aim to set a common set of standards and principles when engaging with third-party countries.
- The United States should reassert its commitment to the U.S.-led alliance architecture that has structurally bound the security of Japan and South Korea together since the establishment of the respective alliances in the 1950s. This architecture has enabled progress toward improvement of Japan-South Korea relations on many occasions and has provided a floor for both countries to recover from periodic downturns and persistent differences over history-related issues. The United States should actively defend the alliance architecture against economic or security actions that would threaten the principle that Japanese and South Korean security needs are indivisible from each other. The U.S.-Japan-South Korea Defense Trilateral Talks (DTT) have served as the backbone of such efforts on the security side and should be continued. On the political side, the United States should reestablish the quarterly U.S.-Japan-South Korea trilateral talks that were held through 2016 with Deputy Foreign Minister-level representatives on each side.
- South Korea should quickly start consultations with the Suga government for the development of future-oriented Korea-Japan relations. The Biden administration's regional strategy is expected to focus on linking allies and friends in a network-based partnership. ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral security cooperation is very important agenda in Biden administration's Asia policy, and the normalization of Korea-Japan relations is a prerequisite for it.
- The United States should initiate a senior-level whole-of-government dialogue with

South Korean counterparts devoted to discussion of the contours of shared interests and scope of possible coordinated action in addressing shared challenges in policy toward China. The dialogue should initially focus on delineating areas where cooperation is possible, areas where the countries share objectives but prefer different approaches, and obstacles/limits to a coordinated strategy toward China. The dialogue should be low profile to avoid politicization and should initially be exploratory rather than designed to deliver joint actions toward China, but eventually may result in a coordinated policy response toward China. A resumption of periodic two-plus-two meetings could help oversee the process of turning ideas into action.

- The United States should actively work with South Korea to align respective policies in the Indo-Pacific. The two governments have taken a good first step by agreeing to a joint fact sheet in November 2019 underscoring the areas of alignment between the U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific Policy and South Korea's New Southern Policy, which included infrastructure development, maritime security cooperation, development cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges. The United States should prioritize development of joint cooperation activities in private sector infrastructure development and international development cooperation. South Korea should work to identify the areas to which it can contribute and pursue projects complementary to the Indo-Pacific strategy. Efforts should be made to establish infrastructure cooperation for smart cities, industry clusters, and financial cooperation centers, as well as to expand the scope of South Korea-U.S. cooperation in investment, development cooperation, and trade. The two governments should explore complementary strategies to re-shore critical and strategic industries to guard against supply chain disruptions and risks to national security—both military and economic. The two should also discuss if there are areas for co-investment, testing, or development of strategic technologies.
- There is a need to reach an effective consensus on the necessity of reorganizing the supply chain, an issue made more urgent by the global spread of COVID-19. The United States has formed the Economic Prosperity Network (EPN) to accelerate the

redesign of the supply chain, and is encouraging its allies to join in this effort. The United States and South Korea should formulate a new direction for cooperation on the basis of a shared understanding of the EPN. South Korea should approach the issue of whether to participate in the EPN from the perspective of “China +  $\alpha$ .”

### *Expanding Cooperation in Global Challenges*

- The time is ripe for the United States and South Korea to exercise greater influence on extant and nascent international institutions to harness knowledge for solving complex problems like climate change, establishing norms and a code of conduct for the use of advance technologies in the digital age, and creating the best-educated scientists and scholars to meet tomorrow’s needs.
- The United States should continue to promote opportunities for South Korea to participate in global governance forums, such as the expanded G-7 discussion that Trump proposed in the summer of 2020. Such invitations elevate the alliance, demonstrate the closeness of ROK-U.S. coordination, and demonstrate its suitability to addressing global issues.
- The United States and South Korea should partner in research and development on identification and application of select fourth industrial revolution technologies, such as AI, autonomous robotics, quantum computing, nanotechnology, and bioengineering. Bilateral cooperation should help drive multilateral processes. For instance, cooperation on how to respond to the next pandemic might be usefully joined by select regional actors at the center of the current crisis or the forefront of effective responses. For instance, this might include the United States, South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Taiwan. The COVID-19 pandemic response has shed light on the way forward in promoting technological cooperation to serve practical purposes as well as on the value-added that South Korea can bring to such cooperative efforts.

- South Korea and the United States have cooperated closely on a host of global challenges, and they must continue to do so within the framework of bilateral and global development cooperation on COVID-19. As the spontaneity of private actors has proven the effectiveness of public-private partnerships in responding to COVID-19, it is necessary to promote global development cooperation that can incorporate private actors to harmonize economic growth and public health.
- The United States should look to South Korea as a preferred partner in technology cooperation and industrial application and promote close government consultations to reduce barriers to entry for jointly beneficial technological development. The two governments should also work together to promote global standards in emerging technologies at regional and global forums such as APEC, the G-20, the International Telecommunications Union, and the WTO to develop a common regulatory structure for managing the application of new technologies.
- South Korea should use cooperation with the United States as a foundation on which to establish a systematic response to the increasing weaponization of economic measures. When Korea-U.S. cooperation in regional strategies for security and economy results in China's retaliation, it is necessary to strengthen the reassurance for joint responses between Seoul and Washington. China's recent retaliation against Australia suggests that China's retaliation against countries that agree with the United States in the Asia-Pacific region may be repeated more frequently.
- The allies should upgrade economic cooperation by identifying new areas for cooperation such as digital economy, energy, environment, and development cooperation. South Korea should also prepare for the possibility that the U.S. Democratic Party's traditionally valued environment and strengthened labor standards will emerge as new trade issues. Eco-friendly energy cooperation needs to be strengthened, including restrictions on the use of fossil fuels, carbon-reducing economies, expanding renewable energy and utilizing advanced nuclear power.

## Author Bios

- **Chaesung Chun** is a director of National Security Center of East Asia Institute, and a Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Seoul National University, teaching international relations theory and security studies. Dr. Chun received his PhD in international relations at Northwestern University in the United States, and he is a member of the advisory committee for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Unification. Major books include *Sovereignty and International Relations: Northeast Asian International Relations Theory: Politics among Incomplete Sovereign States* (2020), *Sovereignty and International Relations: Modern Sovereign States System and the Evolution of the Empire* (2019), *Is Politics Moral: Reinhold Niebuhr's Transcendental Realism* (2012), *East Asian International Relations* (2011).
- **Patrick M. Cronin** is the Asia-Pacific Security Chair at Hudson Institute. He received his DPhil from the University of Oxford. Dr. Cronin served as the director of studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and senior vice president and director of research at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). His research program analyzes the challenges and opportunities confronting the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, including China's total competition campaign, the future of the Korean Peninsula, and strengthening U.S. alliances and partnerships. His recent publications include "All the Japanese Prime Minister's Course Corrections" (2020).
- **Sang Hyun Lee** is a Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Security Strategy Studies of the Sejong Institute. Dr. Lee received his PhD in Political Science at the

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He served as a Director-General for Policy Planning at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, researcher at the Korea Institute of International Relations and researcher at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses. The main areas of research are international security, South Korea-U.S. relations, war and conflict theory, regional conflicts and military security. His major publications include *The U.S.-China Hegemonic Rivalry and the Korean Peninsula* (2020), *The Trump Administration's Nuclear Policy: International Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime and its Implications on the North Korean Nuclear Issue* (2019), and *Understanding Modern Korea-U.S. Relations* (2019).

■ **Scott Snyder** is a senior fellow for Korea Studies and director of the program on U.S. policy at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Mr. Snyder received his MA from the regional studies East Asia program at Harvard University and was a Thomas G. Watson fellow at Yonsei University. He previously served as a senior associate in the international relations program of the Asia Foundation, where he founded and directed the Center for U.S.-Korea Policy and served as the Asia Foundation's representative in Korea. His major publications include *South Korea at the Crossroads: Autonomy and Alliance in an Era of Rival Powers* (2018), and *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States* (2015).

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