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Interviewee

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**The Future of U.S.-ROK Alliance:  
Implications for the Korean Peninsula**

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Following the celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the U.S.-ROK alliance, the 2013 Joint Declaration was adopted to commemorate the bilateral partnership and address the opportunities and challenges facing the future of the alliance. On May 22, the East Asia Institute invited Professor Terence Roehrig of the U.S. Naval War College to discuss the alliance and future challenges between the U.S. and South Korea.

**Q1: How is the 2013 Joint Declaration different from the 2009 Joint Vision? Is there any significant sign of improvement in the U.S.-ROK alliance between 2009 and 2013?**

**A1: "The most recent joint declaration is very consistent with the Joint Vision of 2009. The two documents show a great deal of improvement: far greater security cooperation, increased policy coordination, and the U.S.-ROK Free Trade Agreement (FTA)."**

- The goals in the 2009 Joint Vision have been carried over to the 2013 Joint Declaration, which show that the two statements are consistent and maintain the same theme of a comprehensive strategic alliance between South Korea and the U.S. The U.S.-ROK alliance has improved and evolved from a patron-client relationship to a partnership in which there is a greater focus on shared interests. Currently, both nations are seeking to expand their common interests in global issues, such as the environment, anti-piracy operations, and terrorism.
- The U.S.-ROK alliance has reinforced its security cooperation after the sinking of the *Cheonan*, the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, and the North's ongoing nuclear testing. North Korean provocations have prompted South Korea and the U.S. to focus on bilateral cooperation, particularly through the Extended Deterrence Policy Commission (EDPC). The EDPC has contributed to strengthening the U.S.-ROK alliance by facilitating dialogues in response to the North Korean provocations. In addition, the counter-provocation policy coordination response toward North Korea has shown signs of improvement. In the past, discussions between the two countries regarding how to respond to North Korea were carried out in an ad hoc manner. However, there have recently been greater efforts toward cooperation and communication. South Korea and the U.S. have increasingly tried to keep each other informed about North Korea's actions and collaborated on collective responses. Although it is unknown what North Korea's next step will be, the improved foundation of cooperation and communication will help the U.S.-ROK alliance to move forward.

- Another sign of improvement in the U.S.-ROK alliance is the U.S.-ROK FTA. Although certain amounts of anxiety remain on both sides regarding the FTA, it has been deemed successful for at least the short-term. The U.S.-ROK FTA has shown that the alliance is not limited to just military and security issues but has expanded to economic issues as well.

**Q2: What are the implications of North Korea's continued nuclear program for the Korean peninsula and the U.S.-ROK alliance?**

**A2: "There is no simple solution in future North Korean policy. At some point, the U.S., South Korea, and the international community must work together to bring about North Korea's denuclearization."**

- There are four parameters to take into consideration when devising a feasible North Korea policy. The first parameter is acceptance of the fact that North Korea will not likely give up its nuclear program. North Korea is committed to developing its nuclear program and will continue to test nuclear and ballistic weapons. The North's insistence on testing its nuclear program is not necessarily intended to send any particular message to the international community, but rather simply to check the operational capacity of its nuclear program. The second is difficulty in legitimately acknowledging North Korea as a nuclear state. North Korea hopes that the international community will proceed along the same path it did with regards to Pakistan and India's missile testing. In both cases, sanctions were imposed after the missile tests, but ultimately the international community overlooked the sanctions and accepted Pakistan and India as nuclear states. It is unlikely, however, that North Korea will be accepted as a nuclear state due to a variety of factors, including the non-proliferation treaty and the impact of North Korea's nuclear status on Iran. The U.S. is particularly adamant on the non-proliferation principle and does not, in any way, want to encourage North Korea or Iran to breach that principle. The third parameter is the lack of will to conduct military operations against the North's nuclear program. No state is willing to take military action in order to eliminate North Korea's nuclear capability. The last parameter is the limitations on how much pressure China is willing to put on North Korea to denuclearize its program despite China's frustration with the North's recent acts.
- The U.S., South Korea, and the international community must collaborate toward denuclearizing the North. At the same time, they need to recognize that it will be difficult to identify a specific North Korea policy and accept that the North may never give up its nuclear weapons. An engagement strategy must be conducted in which efforts are made by both South Korea and the U.S. to bring North Korea in on close dialogues and delink the nuclear issue by first focusing on non-nuclear issues such as humanitarian assistance.

**Q3: What are the future challenges facing the U.S.-ROK alliance, and what are the implications for the Korean peninsula?**

**A3: "To predict the future outcome of the challenges facing the U.S.-ROK alliance is difficult, and there is no apparent solution. These challenges could potentially be complicated in negotiation positions."**

- One of the biggest challenges facing the U.S.-ROK alliance is how to conduct North Korea policy. The North's actions, particularly its continued nuclear testing, have evolved gradually over a number of years and created difficulty in communication between the U.S. and South Korea in an area where they previously had good policy coordination. Challenges remain because the unpredictability of North Korea's behavior will continue to pose uncertainty on the Korean peninsula and North Korea policy challenges will adapt accordingly.

- Although North Korea's refusal to denuclearize is the main concern of the U.S.-ROK alliance, other challenges have emerged. The first challenge is the opposing perspectives between the U.S. and South Korea on the U.S.-ROK Nuclear Cooperation Agreement. While South Korea requests to be allowed to reprocess its spent nuclear fuel, the U.S. adamantly opposes this demand based on its adherence to nuclear non-proliferation. The second challenge involves the ongoing burden-sharing of the U.S. Forces in Korea's military budget between the U.S. and South Korea. These issues are especially problematic since each country wants the other to shoulder the bulk of the cost due to stricter constraints on the military budget. The last challenge facing the U.S.-ROK alliance is the difference in perceptions between the U.S. and South Korea regarding China. South Korea focuses on China's role as a significant economic partner, while the U.S. remains cautious, debating if China is a security concern for U.S. national interests. If, however, China becomes a serious concern for the U.S., South Korea may be pulled in a different direction.
- It is difficult to predict the future outcome of these challenges due to the opposing viewpoints of the U.S. and South Korea. It will be challenging, for example, to reach a mutually satisfactory outcome for the U.S.-ROK Nuclear Cooperation Agreement and may become a potential cause of friction. The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the U.S.-ROK alliance shows, however, that the alliance is strong and continues to aid in building a solid framework for addressing the challenges.

**Q4: What are some possible policy recommendations to further strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance?**

**A4: "Continued close dialogue and communication in the alliance is very important. The alliance should have a continued focus on the common interests, which have broadened and will facilitate the cooperation between U.S. and South Korea."**

- In the past, South Korea has shown its willingness to maintain a strong relationship with the U.S. through close dialogue and focus on shared common interests between the two countries. As a result, the continuation of close dialogue and communication and the expansion of common interests are necessary and should contribute to driving the relationship further.
- South Korea has become a middle power and has shown itself to be an important partner to the U.S. and the international community. Unlike the other members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), South Korea is the only country to have transitioned from recipient of foreign assistance to donor. Therefore, the South should increase its development assistance to foreign countries in order to enhance its contribution to the international community. Moreover, South Korea needs to increase its involvement in UN peacekeeping efforts and host more international events and forums such as the Seoul Nuclear Summit and G20 summit in order to prove that it is a world leader and supports the interests of the U.S.

**About the Interviewee**

**Terence Roehrig**

Dr. Terence Roehrig is a professor in National Security Affairs and the director of the Asia-Pacific Studies Group at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. He is also a research fellow at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in the International Security Program and the Project on Managing the Atom.