

ROK-U.S. Military Alliance and the Future of Korea's Defense Policy

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The Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States of America, which came into existence shortly after the Korean War in the context of Cold War confrontations, has been the centerpiece of the strategic relationship between both countries for more than a half-century. Nowadays, even though the economic and political ties between the two nations have grown in importance vis-à-vis the security relationship, it was initially the security cooperation between them that contributed to the economic and political progress in South Korea. It helped them to promote their strategic goals on the peninsula and the adjoining region.

In the post-Cold War period, and especially in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks in the USA, the alliance has been increasingly challenged by events that are taking place in domestic, regional, and international arenas. In the military quarters of both countries, an intense debate is cropping up about the future orientation of the alliance. Both nations have already proposed restructuring and adapting their mutual defense alliance to the new regional and international environments. Nevertheless, in the present ROK-US strategic alignment, it is South Korea's sovereignty that is at stake. Like Japan, South Korea will remain an "abnormal state" as long as its military forces remain under U.S. military protection. In line with the demands for restructuring the military alliance with the United States, South Korean authorities have been advocating a policy of "self-defense." At the same time, there is some apprehension about how South Korea's neighbors will perceive such a policy. The main issue of this presentation is how Seoul is going to handle its self-defense policy without upsetting the present balance of power in the Northeast Asian region.

Keywords: Restructuring of ROK-US military alliance, self-defense policy, nuclear option, balance of power in East Asia

Introduction

Although the main objective of the ROK-US Military Alliance was to deter North Korea, with the passage of time however, the alliance has proven to be a contributing factor in the economic and political transformation of South Korea. Moreover, the US military presence has provided the South Korean people a much-needed sense of security.¹ The subsequent stability has enabled them to accomplish their desire for modernizing the country and to lead them on a path of rapid economic growth. The outcome is that today South Korea has Asia's third largest economy and the twelfth largest in the world.

The alliance has not only been a rampart against the possibility of Soviet and Chinese hegemony over the entire peninsula, it has also preserved the country from being contaminated by communist ideology. As a result, South Korea has moved gradually from authoritarian regimes to democratic ones. In fact, the ultimate goal of the ROK-US alliance was to make South Korea a showcase of a successful market economy and liberal democracy in East Asia.

Yet, on the strategic front, while the alliance has curbed to a certain extent North Korea's aggressive attitude toward the South, it has failed to completely neutralize the North Korean military threat. It could not prevent Pyongyang from developing a nuclear and missile program. In this situation, South Korea is still under a military threat from North Korea. The recent nuclear buildup and North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT have added to South Korean apprehensions.

Diplomatically, the rapprochement between the USA and the People's Republic of China in 1972 and the US conciliatory policy towards the Soviet regime had thrown a shadow over the ROK-US alliance (Bandow & Carpenter 1992: 5). Meanwhile South Korea abided by the policy of containment set out by the United States in order to counter the two communist powers of that period. Accordingly, Seoul refrained from interacting with these powers. But Washington's diplomatic moves toward Moscow and Beijing rendered the poli-

1. The Alliance is a combined deterrence achieved by an integrated military force comprising of an estimated 681,000 soldiers and 3,040,000 reserve personnel from ROK and about 37,000 US troops. There are three main pillars of this alliance: the ROK-US Mutual Defense Treaty signed in 1953, the Annual Security Consultative Meetings begun in 1968, and the ROK-US Combined Forces Command established in 1978 (See Laporte, Testimony to the Armed Services Committee, US House of Representatives, March 31, 2004 as well as Han in *Korea and World Affairs*, Spring 2004: 32).

cy of containment meaningless. It somewhat marginalized the South Korean position in US schemes in Northeast Asia.

The reason behind this US policy shift may be attributed to the fact that in spite of its security alliances with South Korea and Japan, the USA was not able to tilt the balance of power in the East Asian region in its favor. Instead it was the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and the United States that enabled Washington to create a split in the communist block. It ensued that the rift between the PRC and the former USSR in the late 1960s paved the way for the USA to strengthen its leadership in the Asia Pacific region.

From another point of view, the ROK-US alliance has been repeatedly shaken by the USA's unilateral decisions to reduce its troops in South Korea from time to time. Following the announcement of the "Guam Doctrine"² by US President Richard Nixon in 1969, Washington made it clear that Asian countries must take care of their own security and defense without depending on the USA. In line with this doctrine, the Nixon Administration cut the number of US troops based in South Korea from 60,000 to 40,000 military personnel (Harrison 2002: 174-5; Ko 2006: 260). The United States also withdrew its 7th Infantry Division from South Korea in 1971. In 1977, the Carter Administration decided to pull out an additional 3,000 US ground forces from South Korea, bringing the USFK manpower down to the current 37,000 level (Harrison 2002: 179). In the same vein, in 1990, President Bush removed the US tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea as well as from Pacific aircraft carriers (Harrison 200: 124).

It was against this backdrop that successive South Korean governments have attempted to reduce defense or diplomatic reliance on the US. For example, following the "Guam Doctrine," President Park Chung-hee launched a nuclear weapons program with a view to strengthening South Korean defense capabilities. Despite Washington's pressure on Seoul, President Park maintained a secret nuclear program until his assassination in 1979. Likewise, President Roh Tae Woo's Northern Policy in the 1990s could be interpreted as South Korea's willingness to distance itself from the diplomatic predicaments of the ROK-US alliance and to pursue its own foreign policy. The Sunshine Policy of President

2. The Guam Doctrine also known as the Nixon Doctrine was put forth at a press conference in Guam (Guam is officially a US territory and an island in the western Pacific Ocean) on July 25, 1969, by Richard Nixon. He stated that the United States henceforth expected that its allies would take care of their own military defense. The doctrine also argued for the pursuit of peace through a partnership with American allies.

Kim Dae-jung may also be seen in the same light (Ko 2006: 260).

Post-Cold War International Changes and the US Military Presence in Asia

Even during the height of the Cold War, the world situation did not remain static for a long time. Gradually, both superpowers began to realize that there was no sense in remaining in a constant confrontation with each other, particularly in view of their almost complete parity of military power. Their domestic mutations also compelled them to rethink their strategies toward each other. This led to a *détente* in international relations through a series of arms reduction talks between the two superpowers (Taylor, Cha, Blodgett 1990: 111).

At a regional level, the new strategic thinking of Gorbachev and his Asian policy as revealed in his July 1986 Vladivostok speech and that of his Krasnoyarsk speech in September 1988 established some guidelines to improve relations with Asian countries.³ This policy allowed the Soviet Union to not only strike a blow to the US-led alliance system but also to set the stage for its own military disengagement from the Asian mainland (Taylor, Cha, Blodgett 1990: 110). It was during this period that the Soviet Union sent back to Russia its strategic bombers and reduced its military personnel at its air-navy base at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam (Blagov 2006).⁴ It normalized its relations with Seoul and Tokyo. At the same time, it tried to induce capital investments and technology transfers from South Korea and Japan for its Siberian development projects

3. In a speech made in Vladivostok on July 28, 1986, the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev signaled a new assertive foreign policy toward Asia and the Pacific. He outlined several bold initiatives designed to reverse a quarter century decline in Soviet regional influence. He said the Soviet Union would 'aspire to improve its relations with all countries situated in Asia and the Pacific region, without exception.' He also stressed that 'the Soviet Union aspires to a radical reduction of armed forces and conventional weapons in Asia up to the point of reasonable-sufficiency' [Gerald Segal. 1988. 'The USSR and Asia in 1988: Achievements and Risks.' *Asian Survey* 29(1)].

-In a speech delivered on September 16, 1988, at the southeastern Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, Gorbachev presented a seven-point program designed to enhance security in the Asia-Pacific region and to promote his view of a multipolar approach to solving issues in foreign relations (Donald S. Zagoria. 1988/89. "Soviet Policy in East Asia: A New Beginning?" *Foreign Affairs, America and the World*).

4. See "Russia Shutdown of Vietnam base speaks of changes" at <http://www.atimes.com>.

(Taylor, Cha, Blodgett 1990: 110).

The US policy in Asia also went along with the change of the Soviet attitude toward this region. Washington viewed Gorbachev's reform policies in a positive light. It came to the conclusion that the probability of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union was very low. Thereby, it placed a greater emphasis on enhancing its economy and trade as opposed to increasing military spending (Taylor, Cha, Blodgett 1990: 111).

In terms of military tactics, the development of long-range bombers, airborne and sea transportation capabilities coupled with intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine launched ballistic missiles made the Cold War doctrine of forward defense deployment irrelevant. It greatly reduced the value of countries such as South Korea and other US protectorates as allies or frontline states in a crusade against communism and Soviet expansionism (Bandow & Carpenter 1992: 5). In practice, the United States in the late 1980s could strike the USSR and its satellite countries with these weaponries without resorting to overseas military bases or military deployment within their perimeters.

The easing of Cold War tensions also brought to the fore the problem of huge US budget deficits that were partly attributed to its military commitments abroad. Till today, the United States spends nearly US\$42 billion per year for its military presence in Asia Pacific (Harrison 2006: 2). With this in mind, the US government has begun to question the cost of its military cooperation with its allies. In order to alleviate this financial burden, the USA made its Asian allies agree on sharing the cost of mainlining US troops on their soil. In the case of South Korea, its share of the cost of US forces stationed on the peninsula was estimated at about US\$150 million in 1991. In 2005, it had risen to US\$680 million or about 38 percent of the total cost of keeping US troops in South Korea (Korea Herald, October 4, 2006: 2).

However, despite these expenses, the US military presence in the Asia Pacific Rim is welcomed by most of the countries in this region. They fear that the departure of US troops from their continent may revive the age-old rivalries among certain Asian countries and inevitably lead to conflagration that would disrupt the current peaceful situation. Therefore, they regard the continued US military presence across Asia as a stabilizing factor that helps in maintaining peace as well as economic prosperity in the region. Hence, Asian countries are somehow ready to pay the high price for it.

September 11th and the Transformation of the ROK-US Military Alliance

While the USA was in the thick of readjusting its military presence in Asia, the unprecedented September 11th attacks brought yet another set of dramatic changes to the US military's thinking and planning.⁵ Since then, homeland security has become a more important concern in the process of defense and strategic decision-making (Kang & Yu 2005: 12). It has also changed the US perception of threats to its security and other national interests. Consequently, the post-September 11th strategy seems to focus on four major targets: fight against terrorism, prevention of the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), roadmap for the "Great Middle East," and protection of supplies of vital resources especially oil and natural gas (Korea Herald, August 23, 2006: 18; Klare 2001: 50).

This approach resulted in the Global Defense Posture Review (GDPR) in 2003 (Korea Research Institute for Strategy 2004: 63). The plan's objective was to downsize US military forces and to ensure long-distance power projections. Its ultimate motive was to design a tactical maneuver of deployment or redeployment of US troops from one region to another in consonance with the security threats at hand.⁶

In the USA's GDPR, Korea had been classified as a "Main Operation Base (MOB)." This categorization gives Seoul a lower importance in US military planning in comparison to Japan's "Power Projection Hub" designation (Korea Herald, May 21, 2004: 6). These restructuring plans raised questions about the future of the ROK-US Military Alliance.⁷ Moreover, some discrepancies had

5. Prior to September 11th, Washington had contemplated reducing its troops in South Korea through its policies known as the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) and the East Asian Strategic Initiative (EASI). But due to the North Korean nuclear crisis, these reduction plans formulated by the Pentagon in 1991 and 1993, respectively, were suspended [Kim, Han-Sung. 2004. *New Vision for Korea Alliance: Restructuring of USFK.* *Korea Focus* 12(5): 12].

6. As part of its global war on terrorism, the United States along with its Asian allies has worked out some regional initiatives for combating terrorism. An example is the Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI), which is an intrinsic part of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) project set up in 2003. The RMSI was designed for interdiction activities such as dealing with WMD-related transfers across the seas, components of weapons of mass destruction from one state or non-state entity or terrorist network to another [Suryanarayana. 2004. *Frontline Magazine* 21(11)].

7. The final agreement stipulates that the United States will withdraw 12,500 or one-third of its

been noticed between the US-led war on terrorism and South Korea's security concerns over the North Korean nuclear threat. Indeed, the United States views the nuclear issue as part of its war on terror and its efforts to prevent the proliferation of WMD, while South Korea regards the North Korean arsenal as a major security issue. Consequently, the South Korean self-defense option is perceived as a last-ditch attempt to save the situation. Also, if this kind of divergence in their security perceptions persists, it could open a Pandora's box of the ROK-US Military Alliance.

South Korean "Self-defense" Policy

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun avowed for the first time the "self-defense policy" of Korea during a ceremony marking the 58th anniversary of national independence on August 15, 2003. In his address, he stressed the need for the country to build up a "self-reliant military system." The policy objective was to improve the military capabilities of its own armed forces along with a gradual reduction of the USFK (Korea Focus 2004 12(1): 4; Korea Focus 2004 12(5): 86). Accordingly, the government of Korea endorsed a reform plan in 2005 based upon the "self-defense system." Under this plan, Korea decided to spend US\$150 billion over the next five years to boost the country's combat and defense capabilities (Korea Herald, October 2, 2006: 2). It also attempted to secure advanced capabilities to counter any military threats and introduce sophisticated weapons systems, including PAC-III Patriot missiles, mid-air fueling aircrafts, Aegis-equipped warships, F-15 class fighter jets, multi-purpose satellites, Airborne Early Warning Aircrafts, and satellite-guided bombs also known as JDAMs (Korea Herald, August 18, 2006: 1).

On the other hand, the South Korean government is also pursuing its defense reliance through control of wartime military command by 2012. Indeed, wartime operation command is considered to be the core of the ROK-US

37,000 troops from South Korea in three stages. This three-phased process will be completed by the end of 2008. Thirteen military bases were returned to South Korea in 2005-2006 according to the relocation plan (Korea Research Institute for Strategy 2004: 348). According to General Leon Laporte, Commander of the United Nations Command, the restructuring plan of the USFK is to ensure that the USA and ROK "have the right capabilities on the peninsula to deter and, if necessary, defeat North Korean aggression; assign roles and missions to the appropriate units and replace the post-Cold War basing plan with less intrusive, enduring hubs."

Military Alliance. In 1950 South Korea transferred control of its troops to the United States, but peacetime control was handed back to Seoul in 1994. Retransferring wartime command to Korea is expected to give South Korea autonomy in conducting warfare operations without depending on the US command (Korea Herald, August 7, 2006: 2). The transfer will eventually lead to the breakup of ROK-US Combined Forces Command, retained so far by the United States. However, critics say wartime command cannot be in the hands of an inferior partner in any military alliance because it may weaken the alliance in a time of war.

As such, thinking of “self-defense” in this interdependent world is not an easy task. Realizing the complexity of defense reliance through control of wartime military command, Korean authorities had to work out yet another option. It was in this light that the idea of the cooperative self-defense system came up.⁸

This system envisages a complementary US role in Korea’s future defense policy (Korea Focus 2004 12(1): 88). Through the “cooperative self-defense system,” South Korea has sought to adjust the timing for the reduction of US forces stationed in Korea and the transfer of designated military tasks to Korean military personnel (Korea Research Institute for Strategy 2004: 79).

Even this option has raised questions. Domestically, there is a deep division among Koreans over the entire utility of the alliance. There are also some doubts regarding the overall policy toward North Korea. Many a Korean no longer views North Korea as a threat to South Korea. At the same time, there is a resurgence of anti-American sentiment in Korean society. Its military build-up in South Korea is considered the main stumbling block for reconciliation between the two Koreas. It is believed that the ROK-US Military Alliance is one of the causes of the North Korean nuclear posture toward South Korea.⁹

8. In a statement on May 20, 2004, President Roh Moo-hyun urged his government to come out with measures for the establishment of a “cooperative self-defense system” with the US military command based in Seoul. This approach adopted by the Roh Government marked a clear departure from the “self-defense” policy advocated by the same administration in early 2003. It tried to convey an approach under which the Korean government considers the ROK-US Alliance in terms of US’s complementary role in the country’s future defense policy [Kim, 2004. “New Vision for Korea-US Alliance: Restructuring of USFK.” *Korea Focus* 12(5): 88].

9. While conservatives in Korea want the continuation of the Washington-Seoul alliance with a tough policy toward Pyongyang, liberals and leftists are opposed to the alliance. This leftist view on the ROK-US strategic relationship has gained currency in South Korean politics

South Korean Nuclear Option

Another way of dealing with the issue is to consider the nuclear option. Up to now, it has generally been believed that the combined forces of Korea and the United States enjoyed a relative conventional military superiority over North Korea. But in the face of the recent development of North Korea's nuclear capabilities, this superiority has become meaningless simply because South Korea has no nuclear deterrence. In this situation, should South Korea contemplate a nuclear option in order to fill the nuclear gap?

There is no doubt that South Korea has the capability and know-how to manufacture a nuclear bomb. In the 1970s President Park Chung-hee sought nuclear weapons capability partly as a way to gain military independence from the United States. He regarded the nuclear device as a strategic means to maintain a military precedence over North Korea and to enhance his domestic prestige (Harrison 2002: 247).

Although Seoul signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty in 1975 and additional protocol in 1991, the International Atomic Energy Agency disclosed in 2004 that South Korean scientists conducted some tests at the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute in Daejeon. The first test carried out in 1982 revealed the production of 0.7 grams of plutonium comprising 98-percent of fissile PU-239. The report also said that another group of scientists produced 0.2 grams of uranium which was enriched up to 77 percent in 2000 (JoongAng Daily, November 26, 2004: 1).

Nuclear experts say weapons-grade plutonium is about 93 percent plutonium-239, while weapons-grade uranium needs to be 90 percent. Therefore, to build a nuclear bomb at least 10 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium or 15-25 kilograms of weapons-grade uranium is required. But for this to happen there is a need to enrich and reprocess a large quantity of uranium (JoongAng Daily, November 13, 2004: 1).

Presently South Korea depends on nuclear reactors for about 40 percent of its domestic energy supply (JoongAng Daily, September 9, 2004: 1). Because of

because of the growth of the liberal and progressive environment in Korean society during the last few decades. All these developments have prompted the liberal-minded Koreans to challenge Korea's allegiance to the United States and lend support to the "Nordpolitik" and "Sunshine Policy" of former presidents Roh Tae-woo and Kim Dae-jung (See Lee's article in *Newsweek Magazine*, May 8, 2006: 26).

the ban on nuclear enrichment, South Korea spends 400 billion won (US\$ 375 million) each year on importing enriched uranium, mainly from the United States, to run its reactors (Korea Herald, September 22, 2004). The only way to save this huge and recurring expenditure is to reprocess uranium itself. But, it goes without saying that the international community, particularly the United States, would never allow South Korea to utilize this choice because the conversion of nuclear materials from civil to military use is just a short step. This situation poses a dilemma for Seoul as to whether to go for this option or not.¹⁰

Another dilemma regarding the South Korean nuclear option is caused by the Japanese rearmament policy. Indeed, South Korea allegedly defines Japan as a “virtual enemy.” Since the adoption of the Japanese New National Defense Program outlined in December 2004, its neighboring countries such as South Korea and China have been concerned about Japan’s reemergence as a military power. They suspect that North Korean missile and nuclear threats are only a pretext for the Japanese claim that it should become a nuclear state in order to ward off those threats. In case South Korea also joins the nuclear race, it would further strengthen the Japanese claim (Korea Herald, October 13, 2006: 4).

Thus the South Korean predilection for self-defense policy with or without the nuclear option is quite limited. Apart from the technical difficulties and pressures from the international community led by the United States, it is also constrained by the prevailing structure of the balance of power in Northeast Asia. Hence, South Korean military requirements and choices cannot be assessed from a peninsular viewpoint only. These have to take into account the overall diplomatic and strategic situations in the whole of Asia Pacific as well.

Balance of Power in Northeast Asia

The regional order in Northeast Asia today can be described as a combination of a “concert of power” and a “balance of power.”¹¹ The concert of power aspires to

10. South Korea can still rely on the US nuclear umbrella to counter a North Korean nuclear threat. It needs to be remembered that the United States did deploy about 750 tactical nuclear weapons on the peninsula during the Cold War but withdrew them following the denuclearization accord signed between the two Koreas in 1991. Nevertheless, the US bombers and nuclear submarines based in Japan are considered enough to serve as a deterrent for South Korea against North Korea nuclear weapons (Jin Dae-sook, *The Korea Herald*, Oct. 10, 2006: 1).

promote stability in the East Asian region. It involves a good relationship among the United States, China, and Japan. In spite of their divergences on various issues and apprehensions about Chinese military power, Washington and Tokyo have come to the realization that the Chinese "soft-power" behavior has paid off and thereby fits into their new equations in the Asia Pacific Rim. This triangle is at the center of the Six-Party Talks which deal with North Korea's nuclear crisis. It is envisaged that in the long run the six-party mechanism might be transformed into a permanent Northeast Asian security arrangement and then serve the interests of all countries in the region (Wang 2005: 45).

As for the balance of power, it implies confrontation amongst the competing powers of the region. It is described as the alliance of Japan-US-South Korea against China. It assumes that China is an ambitious power that still carries the tendencies of hegemony and wants to restore a Sino-centric order in this part of the world. It is also believed that the "soft power" attitude of China may not last long. Its growing economic and military clout bespeaks of the likelihood of China seeking dominance in East Asia, which may lead to its confrontation with the United States and Japan (Wu 2000; Korea Herald, October 19, 2006: 19).

Based on these hypotheses, the United States along with its East Asian allies Japan and South Korea has designed some strategies for counterbalancing the perceived Chinese hegemony. The concept of the so-called "Balance of Northeast Asia Initiative," which includes the United States, Japan, and South Korea, is ultimately destined to deter China (East Asian Strategic Review 2006: 11).

Notwithstanding its adherence to this initiative, the National Security Council (NSC) of South Korea issued a document explaining the role that South Korea could play in persuading the United States to pursue an accommodating policy toward China (East Asian Strategic Review 2006). South Korea's position in respect to the American initiative clearly showed that Seoul did not want to be entrapped in the US policy toward China. It is reflective of what happened in the past when Seoul was left out during the Sino-US rapprochement of 1972. In this situation, Seoul might have thought that an expansion of its coalition with Washington against China may put it in an embarrassing situation with Beijing. Indeed, since the end of the Cold War, both Korea and China have come to real-

11. Refer to: The Brookings Institution, Center for Northeast Asian Policy and Studies. 2005. "The Changing Korean Peninsula and the Future of East Asia: Alternative for Northeast Asia." Seoul: CNPS 2005 Fall Forum, p.21 (<http://www.brookings.edu>).

ize the unavoidable compulsions of their geographical proximity, cultural affinity, and historical links. This realization has brought the two countries closer and has stimulated broader social, political, and trade interactions between them. Today, China is South Korea's second largest export market after the United States. Bilateral trade between China and Korea has increased from US\$3 billion in 1991 to more than US\$30 billion in 2001 (Kim 2003: 5).¹² In comparison to this, North Korea's trade volume with China was only US\$1.58 billion in 2005 (Korea Herald, October 26, 2006: 4).

Seoul has also favored Beijing's involvement in the North Korean nuclear issue. One reason behind South Korea's shift to China may lie in the fact that unlike China, the United States does not have enough diplomatic leverage with North Korea to make it give up its nuclear program.

On the other hand, China is concerned about the continued military presence by other major powers on its peripheries or backyard (Wang 2005: 4). It is in China's national interest to see the ROK-US and US-Japan military alliances disappear. China might not tolerate a build-up of nuclear arsenals at its doorstep which would threaten its sovereignty or challenge its military power. Therefore, South Korea has to reckon with these Chinese susceptibilities while reconstituting its alliance with the United States and carrying out its self-defense policy.

Conclusion

International developments such as the post-Cold War changes and the September 11th incident have lessened to some extent the relevance of the US-ROK alliance. Seoul and Washington no longer experience the similarities of their interests and views regarding security and other international affairs. Moreover, the lack of progress on the North Korean nuclear issue and the unresolved problem of the reunification of the two Koreas have sent out the wrong signals to Koreans. Nowadays they are unsure of the ability of this alliance to bring definite solutions to their concerns. Consequently, they are inclined toward working up a self-reliant defense of their country. It brings raises the question: How long is Korea going to depend upon the USA for its security? Obviously it

12. See Hoong-Nam Kim's "Changing Korean Perceptions in the Post-Cold War and the US-ROK Alliance" at <http://www.EastWestCenter.org>.

cannot do so forever (Agrawal 2006: 261-78).

Moreover, Koreans of today are driven by national interest, which is in some ways a result of Korea's rapid economic growth (Manyin 2003). Their "self-reliant policy" and anxiousness to restructure their military alliance with the United States is also an indication of the revival of staunch nationalism among them. But at the same time, they cannot afford to remain oblivious to the realities of the power politics surrounding them.

The fragility of the Northeast Asian equilibrium of power and the uncertainty of the attitudes and responses of its players forbid any of them from making an adventurous or miscalculated move because here in Northeast Asia, "the scars are deeper, the stakes higher and contestants much closer on each others' heels (Agrawal 1985: 105-12). Hence, Korea has to tread the path cautiously while redefining its security requirements and its military alliance with the United States.

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