

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
CENTER FOR NORTHEAST ASIAN POLICY STUDIES

CHANGES IN PERCEPTIONS OF THE
ROK-US ALLIANCE
AND THE WAY AHEAD TO ACHIEVE COMMON INTERESTS

by

GENERAL (RET.) LEE SANGHEE
Nonresident Senior Fellow
Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies
The Brookings Institution
Former Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Republic of Korea

The Brookings Institution
Washington, D.C.
Wednesday, July 11, 2007

1. Introduction
2. Changes of Perceptions on the Alliance between ROK-US
3. Differences in Perceptions on Key Issues
4. Developing ROK-US Common Interests
5. Efforts for a Sustaining and Comprehensive Alliance
6. Way Ahead for Evolutionary Development for ROK-US Military Alliance
7. Conclusion

1. Introduction

Nowadays there are many voices worrying about current status of the ROK-US alliance that it is at its lowest point with heavy strain in its history. Two view points are colliding in addressing the ROK-US alliance. Some say that such a successful and strongest alliance that has fought together and has achieved free democracy and economic growth from the ruins of war should remain unchanged. However there are others who say that despite the achievements of the ROK-US alliance, it is losing its momentum and is coming to an end in accordance with the changing security environment. Whatever thought we pursue it is certain that there are fundamental changes happening in the ROK-US alliance. It is obvious that these are the responses to the changes in the relationship between the two countries. In approaching to the ROK-US alliance it is important to understand the changes of the other and under what perceptions the policies of the other are going through. It is beyond a matter of governments in present or in future. It is a matter of perceptions of politicians, journalists, scholars and people as a whole in both countries. Therefore it is of vital importance to accept reality of changing security environment as it is and to pursue the coordinated policies under the mutual understanding.

Based upon my long experience of negotiation of the alliance on spot, I would like to review the basic reasons behind the changes of perceptions in the ROK-US alliance, go over the perceptual differences on several key issues between the ROK and US in recent years, and to propose the way ahead for the ROK-US alliance evolution to achieve the common interests.

2. Changes in Perceptions of the Alliance in the ROK and the US

A. Changes in the Republic of Korea

It is almost impossible to see the images of the 1950s, when the ROK-US alliance was begun, in Korea today. After thirty six years of colonization, a newly born country, Korea, was one of the poorest countries in the world with per capita GDP of \$67. Having food on the table was the main and urgent problem of the country. To make matters worse, the communist north Korea invaded, the capital city Seoul was lost in three days and the alliance with the United States was begun. In the 1950s many countries in Europe and Asia were relied upon the aid from the US, and Korea was in a situation essentially dependent on the United States for its survival. Even when I was an army captain in the early 1970s, the American aided powdered milk was being distributed everyday to the students of Korean elementary schools.

After the Korean War the developments and achievements of Korea are unbelievable. A small country, with the population of 45 million, a size of one quarter of the state of California and without any major natural resources, is currently the 11th largest economy in the world with an export of \$320 billion a year. Not only had the size of the economy, but the technology and products developed as well. IT, semiconductors, LCD, PDP, automobiles, ships, chemicals and construction fields have risen to one of the finest in the world. Super high speed internet and personal computer rooms on the street are available everywhere, almost every family has a car and 83% of the population own mobile phones.

Another noticeable point is the trade structure. In 1990, the portion with the US and Japan of the total trade was over 50%. But in 2006, it reduced to 20% and China emerged to be 20%. The export to China is larger than the amount to Japan and the US in total. With Hong Kong and Taiwan added, the amount of Chinese realm is approximately 1.5 times larger than that with Japan and the US. Another interesting change is that the total trade with Japan, the US, and China is still less than 50% of total amount of international trade. This means that the economic dependency of Korea on the United States has reduced dramatically.

The achievements in sports and culture are even more astounding. Korea has been second to China since the 1986 Asian Games and in the 1988 Olympics, Korea was ranked 4th place outplaying China and Japan. In the 2002 Soccer World Cup, despite the record of never going into the second round of the tournament, Korea made it to the final four. It seems that the passionate cheering of entire nation with the famous 'Red Devils' cheer leaders for the Korean national soccer team was the outcome of an explosion of the national pride.

Koreans are experiencing the phenomena of traditional Korean culture becoming an uppermost part of the global culture. This is visible especially through the "Hanryu"

(Korean wave) sensation dealing with movies, music, and food, etc. It is noteworthy that the Korean melodrama "Geoul Yeonga" (Winter sonata) was the most popular television series in Japan, China and Southeast Asia while the drama "Dae Jang Gum" which dealt with traditional royal Korean food of the Chosun dynasty had the highest ratings in China and many of the Asian countries. For some time, the famed tourist sites for the Japanese visitors have been the filming sites of these films, and the interest for Korean food and clothing have been increased significantly in Southeast Asia. Hollywood films has been pervasive in the first class movie theaters for the long time, but after the Soccer World Cup in 2002, Korean movies, made in Korea by Koreans, have not only succeeded in their screening but have had the highest ratings. The tendency simply looking up to the advanced foreign culture shifted into looking inside domestic culture and creating it to a prominent part of the global society. This is connected to the pride that the culture of Korean own can be the best in the world.

Koreans have experienced and are still experiencing major changes in politics as well. Kim Youngsam and Kim Daejung, the symbolic representatives of the democratic movement in the mid 1980s, served as presidents from 1993 to 1998 and from 1998 to 2002 respectively. And the current president used to be an attorney of human rights. These three presidents moved on from the industrial era, which lasted from the 1960s to the 1980s, to a new democratic era. President Kim Youngsam focused on the disestablishment of the past military-led political structure with the new value of "civilian government." The alliance with the United States did have some conflicts concerning the north Korean nuclear issue in 1994, but being the main perception not far different from the US, there occurred no critical problems. The anti-American movement in Korea since the democratic movement in the late 1980s reduced due to the north Korean nuclear crisis and the transfer of armistice operational control from the ROK-US Combined Forces Command to the Korean military.

After three unsuccessful attempts, Kim Daejung was elected as president hugely supported by the southwest region of Korea. On foreign policy, especially on north Korea he showed the "Sunshine Policy" emphasizing South-North national coordination and began to support the North without any conditions. This considered being a catalyst to hint the recognition of the north Korean government by the South, to compart the conservative and the progressive in the South and to present the need of re-evaluation of the ROK-US alliance. Especially his speech returning after the South and North Korean Summit Talk in June 15, 2000, "there will be no more war in the Korean Peninsula" was considered as a questioning of the absolute efficiency for the ROK-US military alliance.

The current government, entered the stage by the organizational movement of so-called "movement generation" of the 1980s, also known as the "386 generation" in Korea, which emphasizes "independency and national coordination between the South and the North," has showed radical ideas and reestablished the existing social system far beyond even what president Kim Daejung had done. These people were far different from their predecessors, the two Kims, who strived for a democratic Korea from military dictatorship but

remembered the values of the US aid given to the industrial growth during the cold war era. Showing the policy of “distribution first rather than growth” and negative attitudes towards “the successful,” they attempted to disestablish the existing order and establish the new one. The staffs of the Blue House and other government offices were filled with those people who used to be on the sidelines and in the civilian movements.

Externally they made harsh public remarks concerning their policy to the US under their concept of “independency and national coordination” and no compromise concerning the issues with Japan. After 9.11 when the American government was referring to north Korea as one of the "axis of evil" and striving for regime changes and transformation, President Roh Moohyun and his staffs were not cooperative with any US policy that might have brought an end to the North regime. On the contrary, the Korean government was quick to make adjustments and plans for supporting the North. On this account, the Korean government was quite favorable to China regarded as having influence on the North, and brought rather uncomfortable relationship with its ally, the US.

Going through the “impeachment incident,” the ruling party (Uri Party or Wooridang) which only had small number of members in the national assembly gained a majority. Taking control of both the legislative and administrative branch they boldly perused their own policies. This strong party in power gave little space for the conservative to voice their opinions. Also the Korean military, which is supposed to be the key player for security issues, was hugely limited in voicing their opinions because of the political propaganda of the "civilian government" since Kim Youngsam government. Even today it is common for the ruling power to treat the military behavior as the non-democratic or the "remnant of the past military dictatorship."

Though the Korean society owe its growth to the United States, now it is not dependent only on the US, and its sphere of activities has enlarged to the rest of the world. The alliance, which has been military based, is encountering the need of new cooperative relationship in various fields. In short, the alliance relationship of militarily focused, one-sidedly dependent and recipient pattern for Korea cannot be a basis for a sound and sustainable alliance in the changing environment.

B. Changes in the United States

It is ironic that a progressive government came to power in Korea, vis-à-vis a conservative government in the United States. The Republican government became a platform for a new conservative value that went beyond the Democratic Party's "world police" and became more active in expanding American values such as market oriented economy and free democracy. After 9.11, the war on terror turned this tendency into a strong ideal of the Bush administration. The countries, traditional allies of the United States such as the UK, Germany, Japan and Australia were pressed to take part in the US policies. Friendly relations were newly made with the past hostile countries and communist nations

such as Poland, the Middle East nations, Pakistan, Vietnam and so on. It is suggestive that the three party strategic dialogue among foreign ministers of the US, Japan and Australia were held in March, 2006, and made a joint statement for active cooperation for the security of the Asia-Pacific region.

These thoughts of the US were shown through the military transformation and the Global Posture Review (GPR) to respond to the newly emerging threats after the cold war, while bringing the qualitative change and enhancing operational flexibility of the US military. In Korea over 100 dispersed US military bases are being relocated to two key areas away from densely populated cities. The command headquarters of the US forces in Japan will share the same locations with Self Defense Forces Commands and most of the US marines in Okinawa are moving to Guam.

There are two opinions on the Korea issues in the US. The traditional notion is that Korea has grown through the support of the United States and it is currently under the protection of the US. These people believe that it is time for Korea to take part actively in sharing the burden with the US and to cooperate with US policies. Regarding the hesitance of Korea in sending troops to Iraq and not being in an active role in Iraq, they feel that Korea is breaking the faith with the US. The second notion is that Korea has grown enough not to be a free-rider of its security and that there is no need for the patron role of the US. These people do not understand why the US should support Korea which pays smaller percentage of GDP than the US for the defense budget. They demand for the withdrawal or reduction of the US forces in Korea, increase of burden sharing for Korea and the expansion of strategic flexibility of the USFK. In a word, both of these ideas equally acknowledge Korea as a traditional ally to the US, address the need for Korea to take its responsibility in defense of Korea, and require expanding its contributions in regional and global issues in accord with its international status.

C. Summary

Every time when the strategic situation and environment changed, Korea and the United States have coped with wisely and have brought evolutionary development for the robust alliance. I believe that the current discord between Korea and the US would be the process for another evolution in our great alliance. But there is lack of efforts to understand each other in more rational perspective. Both countries have been experienced many changes since its beginning of the alliance and it is also occurring today. While some are too close-minded to change, others are going far beyond what is needed.

The conservative in Korea are weak-voiced in expressing their thoughts and for them any change of the alliance, especially of the USFK, is easily considered as the US abandoning Korea. On the other hand, the progressives, despite the North Korean nuclear and missile tests, claim that “there will be no more war on the Korean Peninsula” and strive for radical and independent changes.

The US is in similar situation. Some people think it as natural to continue pursuing one-sided, notifying relationship to Korea and feel betrayed when Korea voices its own opinions. The progressive thinkers wish to have a black and white, “yes or no” relationship based on the current American interests and national gains.

Now, both nations should try to understand the changes of security and strategic environments, and also to understand the changes of perceptions on the ROK-US alliance of each people, and then to overcome the differences. But, there is lack of the reasonable supporters in both countries who think about desirable future of the alliance to pursue the common interests, and overcome the differences between the conservative and progressive views, and reflect it to the policy pragmatically.

3. Differences in Perceptions on Key Issues

Taking a review at the internal changes of perceptions from a historical perspective, now I would like to discuss the differences in viewpoints and perceptions on key issues between the ROK and the US in recent years. They are different perspectives on north Korea, different approaches on the alliance security and military issues and differences of perceptions in regional and global issues.

A. Different Perspectives on north Korea

The first is the difference in perceptions of the north Korean military threat. This is the most important aspect of the ROK-US alliance and imperatively affects the other issues as well. It seems that the Korean “participatory government” has the wishful assessment that the north Korean military threat is relatively low. It assesses that the North’s national strength is only 1/33 of the South’s and military forces are not stronger, and rules out the possibility of provoking a war by the North against the combined ROK-US forces. It is also showing the perception that the north Korean long-range missile launches and the nuclear tests are not aimed towards South Korea.

The US expressed the similar assessment on all-out war through the senior commanders of PACOM and USFK that north Korea has a low possibility in provoking an all out war with the South, but the North’s conventional forces including long range artillery and mechanized forces are still sufficient enough to enforce severe damage to the combined ROK-US forces. Asymmetric capabilities such as biological and chemical weapons, missiles and nuclear weapons are especially considered to be a severe threat to the security of the Peninsula and Northeast Asia. Also if the North’s WMD, including its missiles and nuclear capabilities, are flowed into terrorists, it would be considered to be a direct and intense threat to the security of the United States.

The second is the difference in how to manage north Korea. The Korean government seems to believe that a sudden collapse of the North regime would bring extreme pressure and burden to the South and the neighboring countries. Then it might bring the intervention of external powers in the process of unification and might put the two Koreas on the side rather than in the middle of the process. The Korean government seems to have wishful and ideal policy concepts that through the help of neighboring countries, north Korea could be stabilized, its regime could be changed slowly and consequently this long-term and gradual change will lead to a peaceful unification. Therefore Korean government is hesitant in participating in any form of sanctions that might shake the stability of the North. Rice and fertilizers are continuously being transported to the North in the name of humanitarianism, even under the strategically unfavorable circumstances of the pressure of the global society to relate its supports to the North with the progress of the Six Party Talks and the demand of internal public opinion to derive corresponding response from the North. Militarily, the Korean government has agreed upon with the North to stop the information operations and eliminated loud speakers on the front line and stopped dropping leaflets that could affect the North's regime and its army.

The US government seems to have a notion that the ROK-US alliance should lead the changes of north Korea under the practical basis that all the possibilities must be managed and deterrence must be maintained in the process. And it thinks that both allies should take counter-proliferation measures of WMD including long-range missile and nuclear program of north Korea.

The third is the difference in preparation for the instability of the north Korean regime. It seems that the Korean government understood the OPLAN being developed on the instability situation of north Korea as the US-led preparation process for offensive operations on the North, despite it was the combined plan of Korea Joint Chiefs of Staff, Combined Forces Command and United Nations Command. They made the military to stop developing OPLAN with the excuses that this plan would go against the long term co-existence of two Koreas, politico diplomatic issues should not be dealt with in military plan and especially there were some elements in violating the Korean government's sovereignty. It might be considered that immoderate actions could lead north Korea to a sudden collapse or taking provocative measures in its desperate situations. President Bush's remarks on "the axis of evil" and "the rouge state" might help the Korean government come to this conclusion.

Meanwhile, the US questioned that to counter appropriately to the possible instable situations of the north Korean regime and to lead its changes in the right direction, the DIME (diplomatic, informational, military and economic) elements can not be neglected in military plan as the lessons from Kosovo and Iraq showed. Also the US, from the traditional perspective, showed seriously great doubt in the efficiency of the military alliance that could not even develop a combined OPLAN while expressing a loss of trust on the remarks of Korean sovereignty.

These differences in concept not only left scars in the ROK-US alliance but resulted in taking 18 months to agree upon a “strategic guidance statement for operation planning for north Korea instability.” If the two countries kept the situations of political changes in mind from the early stage of developing OPLAN and established a working group to review the possible problems before making their strategy, the uneasiness between the two allies could have been prevented.

The fourth is the difference in the north Korea’s nuclear issue. The “Initial Actions for the Implementation for the Joint Statement” for resolving the north Korean nuclear issue was taken through the 6 Party Talk last February 13. But there is a common prospect that the process will not be a smooth and easy one. The Korean government has been continuously trying to clarify the need of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula under the condition that there can not be any sort of military measures to north Korea which might bring the instability of the North’s regime and showed passive attitudes towards the PSI (Proliferation Strategic Initiative) led by the US. In addition, the Korean President showed extremely different approaches about the north Korean nuclear issues from the US. They were seen in remarks such as “there is some reason in the North trying to have nukes” and “the north Korean nuclear weapons are not aimed towards South Korea” after the North tested its nuclear weapons. These thoughts were set in place under the idea that there would be not a fool to start a nuclear war on the Peninsula which would result in the self destruction of the North and if another war occurs in Korea, it would remain as an underdeveloped country forever losing all the possibilities to advance into a developed nation. It seems that the priority was placed simply on the prevention of the North’s sudden instability than its denuclearization.

The US considers solving the north Korean nuclear issue to be a serious one, in order to deny the proliferation of north Korean nukes to terrorist groups and to prevent the nuclear domino in Northeast Asia and the rest of the world. Under these circumstances the US not only requested the south Korean involvement in the PSI in consideration to the north Korean nuclear and missile issues, but also constantly demanded reconsideration on the south Korean government’s support policies for the North. Furthermore, after the nuclear tests by north Korea, there were voices in the US that it could not understand the Korean government’s position still asking the US extending nuclear umbrella with saying “the north Korean nuclear weapons are not a threat to the South.

If the US understood that Korea was thoroughly reviewing various factors to solve the north Korean nuclear issue while staying carefully not to cross the bottom line to bring a sudden collapse and military provocation of the North, and Korea understood that US was currently conducting a war on terror and taking the north Korean nuclear issue as a serious problem, the north Korean nuclear issue could be rather a momentum to strengthening the alliance. The two countries might not argue on the participation of PSI or the support to north Korea, if they thought comprehensively and listed detailed tasks from the first stage

under mutual understanding and tuned up what was feasible for the ROK side.

The fifth is the difference in their positions concerning the support for north Korea. The Korean government's position was that the "Sunshine Policy" should be continued to lead a long term shift of north Korea and humanitarian support specially on rice and fertilizer could not be stopped. On the other hand, the US stood on the idea that the support programs must be leveraged for solving the north Korean nuclear issue and opening north Korean regime to the world society. The United States agreed on the basic principles of humanitarian assistance of rice and fertilizer but showed concern that these items kept by the military and those in power exclusively would be used only to strengthen Kim Jung Il's regime. Especially the US has continuously showed discomfort in the cash flow of the tour costs of Kungang Mountain and the salaries of Gaesung Industrial Complex workers that might be directly flowed into the north Korean power group. On an extreme note, it was even said that the support from China and Korea is actually extending the lifeline of the north Korean regime.

North Korea has used repeatedly the tactics making excuses of their military's objection in negotiating with the South, when there were troubles in implementing agreed issues. If the ROK and the US had made good use of the North's tactics, there could have been better results. They could get more desirable results through a simple tactics, if the ROK and the US had adjusted the level of supports for north Korea and the ROK tactically had played the leverage in accordance with the demands of the US.

The sixth is the difference in the human rights in north Korea. The US insists that the human rights problem should be brought forward to settle the inhumane situation of the north Korean people and the north Korean regime should improve it with top priority. But the Korean government has the position that the opening and reforming of the North regime is the first priority and the improvement of the living standard and human rights of the north Korean people would be produced as a result. This is the stance of the ROK government not to stimulate the North at this point. But the US criticized the Korean government's inactive attitude towards the human rights problem and this led to the questioning on the fidelity of the once human rights attorney, Korean President.

It seems that most of the disputes between the ROK and the US were based on the lack of shared perspectives on north Korea but a large part of it seems to be the result of questioning of trust due to the lack of communication. If the changed perceptions and positions of the other were understood in the initial phase and appropriate discussions were held and adequate coordination were made, it could have resulted in strengthening the ROK-US alliance to more robust and sustainable one

B. Different Approaches on Alliance Security and Military Issues

The first is the difference of perspective in transfer of wartime operational control of the Korean military. It has been a long term issue which Korea has been considering since the late 1980s and the US since the mid 1970s. While the US forces in Asia were being pulled out in 1970s by the Nixon Doctrine, in Korea OPCON issue was settled in 1978 to transfer from the UNC to the newly established Combined Forces Command which the two allies shared OPCON on the designated forces from each ally. It has brought the effects of securing continued military support for Korea from the US and the US was able to deter north Korea and maintain stability in the Korean Peninsula and the region with minimum cost.

After the democratic movement in Korea in the mid 1980s, OPCON of the CFC Commander became a political issue and began to be discussed seriously in the 1990s. In the meantime, because of the first north Korean nuclear crisis it was concluded that OPCON be distinguished between armistice and wartime, and in December 1994, OPCON in armistice was transferred to Korea, while CFC Commander continued to have OPCON in wartime under the sharing responsibilities between ROK and US through the directives of SCM(Security Consultative Meeting) and MCM(Military Consultative Meeting).

The Korean 'participatory government', based on the aforementioned perception on the North, had begun to review and initiate 'wartime OPCON transfer' at the Presidential Inauguration Committee (early 2003) on the political cause of so-called 'regaining sovereignty and prompting the relationship with the North.' There was a report to the President from the Ministry of Defense in 2004 that the transfer would be possible in 2010. The US showed hesitancy until mid 2005. The US would have assessed it inappropriate to disestablish CFC and reorganize the defense system under the actual north Korean threat including the nuclear issue and with no clear settlement of the relocation of the Yongsan Garrison and USFK.

The Korean military was well aware that the wartime OPCON transfer meant the disestablishment of the Combined Forces Command. Therefore it conveyed its estimation to the National Commands that wartime OPCON transfer had to be dealt with prudently and should be discussed based on the considerations, such as decrease of the north Korean military threat, the improvement of the South-North relations, the change of security environment in Northeast Asia, the enhancement of the ROK military capabilities and the sustainment of the robust ROK-US alliance. The President wanted the Korean military to say that the transfer could be done in the near future even before 2009. But the military could not agree with the politicians' view that national sovereignty could only be established when the wartime OPCON is transferred in earlier time.

At the 2005 SCM in October the Minister and Secretary of Defense agreed to accelerate consultation concerning wartime OPCON transfer, in September 2006 the Presidents of the

two nations made it a principle to transfer the wartime OPCON and at the 2006 SCM in October it was agreed to transfer before March, 2012. The reason why the US changed its hesitant attitude on the transfer to positive one from late 2005 seems to take into account the strong willingness of the Korean government and the anticipated negative effects on the alliance in case of stalling talks on the transfer issue. Once both Presidents came upon a political agreement, the task of top priority for the ROK-US military was to find the best military options to maintain deterrence and guarantee victory in contingency.

It is obvious that the wartime OPCON transfer itself would be a long-term evolutionary development in the ROK-US alliance. But the phenomena showed in the consultation process were seriously disgraced the principles and philosophy of the ROK-US alliance. It was not appropriate for the Korean government not to listen to the public worries on security and to have made political statements without any close and honest consultations with its ally. The reaction of the US was also not proper in understanding the spirit of the alliance with perseverance. The Minister and Secretary's agreement on the date of April 2012 for wartime OPCON transfer showed the US consideration for the Korean position, and could prevent the potential discord at present for the management of the alliance.

There is a need to find the optimal solution to stop the spread of misunderstandings on the wartime OPCON. The agreed transfer date must be considered as an objective date on condition of achieving the end state of situations and conditions provided. It is necessary for us to have flexibility in deciding the actual transfer date based on the changing security environment including the solution of north Korean nuclear issue, the preparation of the ROK military, the supporting posture of the US after transfer and enough exercises for ROK-supported and US-supporting process. It is the best way to share the spirit of the alliance with a basis on mutual trust.

The second is difference of perception related to the United Nations Command. In the early stages of the command relationship studies concerning the transfer of the wartime OPCON, the US stated that it was inevitable to have the USFK Commander a three star general and relocate the UNC Headquarters to Japan or Hawaii after wartime OPCON was transferred to Korea and CFC was disestablished. But it was a reasonable decision that UNC would remain and the USFK commander would be dual hatted with the UNC commander as a four star General, realizing the possible negative impact of changing the status of the UNC.

The US wants the ROK military to resume armistice responsibility after the OPCON transfer because of a discord in authority and responsibility on the armistice maintenance for the UNC commander. The ROK side is giving a great deal of weight on the importance of UNC in the security of the Peninsula and wants the UNC Commander to keep the responsibility for the armistice maintenance until a peace regime would be established on the Peninsula. The US is approaching the UNC issue from a military perspective, while the Korean side is taking it on from a more comprehensive view in political and diplomatic

The Korean government failed in preventing the issues surrounding Mae-Hyang Ri range to be a political tool for some civic organizations. The construction for Jikdo range was delayed due to a lack of previous coordination with the local government of Gunsan city, which had experienced serious internal conflict about building of radioactive waste facilities in the city area. Meanwhile instead of trying to understand the Korean government's situation, the US publicly stated that if the training facilities were not available without delay, it would have to relocate part of its forces to another country. This brought uneasiness to the Korean government and its people. Similar to the previous issues, this problem was grown more serious because of differences in perception and lack of efforts to overcome them and brought a negative impact on the alliance.

The fifth is the difference in USFK related accidents. The deaths of the two middle school girls by a USFK armored vehicle just before the previous presidential election was assessed to be exploited by some political groups in Korea as a tool for anti-American demonstrations. However, the US did not have an idea on the environmental changes in Korea and referred only to the SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) provisions that was established almost forty years ago and brought critical damage to the ROK-US relationship. The lack of understanding by the US that the Korean people are very emotional, have been revealed so often even today.

Hearing from the sources within the US embassy, even today when gathering public opinion in Korea, they would call and invite someone they hardly know to a meal and start asking questions with a paper and pencil in hand, write down the responses and report it to their authorities. These kinds of behavior do not correspond to the Korean way of thinking. It is a great relief that learning from the middle school girls' accident, the USFK commander and his staffs have been trying to deal with the problem in the early stages of incidents to prevent them from becoming political issues. The USFK commander has made public to discipline not only the drunken drivers, but the excessive drinkers as well, and this measure is provided a good response to the USFK from the Korean public.

C. Differences in Perceptions of Regional and Global Issues

The first is the difference in 'strategic flexibility.' Historically the ROK has painful experiences that the Peninsula had been the battle field among surrounding nations from unwanted conflicts as for the Korean people. Many historians would interpret the most recent Korean War as a collision between communism and capitalism. It seems that this is one of the reasons why Korea is extremely cautious when it comes to strategic flexibility and the possibility of involvement in the conflicts among neighboring countries. The US strategy is that the US forces are not to be confined to a certain region to be flexible for global operations, and the USFK also should have the flexibility to counter not only north Korea but other areas of Northeast Asia and the rest of the world.

Concerning strategic flexibility Korea should understand the situation and strategy of the US. The possibility for flow-out of the US forces also means the possibility for flow-in. For the flow-in of the US forces for Korea to become a reality, it relies on mutual trust and strong will rather than paper documents. The ROK government must realize that to guarantee flow-in of the forces of our strongest ally, it must acknowledge the possibility of flow-out as well on the basis of consultation in advance between the allies. The obsessional and conventional notion of the ROK for the USFK to be stationed only in Korea might bring conflicts with the US strategy to have more strategic flexibility. Paradoxically speaking, this attitude might result in further reduction of the US troops in Korea. The fifty years of our alliance shows this to be true.

But it was beneficial that the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Secretary of State agreed on the following two principles in January 2006. “The ROK, as an ally, fully understands the rationale for the transformation of the US global military strategy, and respects the necessity for the strategic flexibility of the US forces in the ROK. In the implementation of strategic flexibility, the US respects the ROK position that it shall not be involved in a regional conflict in Northeast Asia against the will of the Korean people.”

The second is the differences in countermeasures against the war on terror, PSI and sending forces to Iraq. These issues might have taken the alliance down to an unrecoverable level, but through the efforts of both nations the alliance is being held together. It might be impracticable for Korea to understand the strategy and resolution behind the war on terror as strongly as the US. This not only applies to Korea but probably to other participating nations as well. But it is questionable if the US gave enough explanation to the relevant people in the Korean government about its objectives and the proposed role of Korea on the war on terror and the war in Iraq. It is also questionable if the Korean government gave enough explanation on why Korea was limited in supporting the expectations of the US. The ROK government was not successful in getting the understanding of the American public, government and congressmen on the reasons why Korea could not take part in the PSI in full scope concerning north Korea.

The Korean government’s decision in December 2006 to reduce the number of troops in Iraq to 1,200 and retreat from Afghanistan until the end of this year might be a compromise measure to get the approval on the extension of force deployment to Iraq from the progressive oriented National Assembly. But this must be discussed not only on the basis for the ROK-US alliance, but also for the contributions of Korea to the world peace and for the achievements of its national interests.

The third is the difference in ROK-US-Japan relationship. It is already known in Korea that the remarks was raised by the United States that if Korea showed one tenth of its interests in the Dokdo and Shrine issues with Japan to north Korea, the north Korean problem would be solved easily and that it is strategically unwise for Korea to rebuke continuously Japan, one of the United States’ closest allies. There was a hearsay that the

meeting was uncomfortable when Rice, Secretary of State and Ph.D. in history, visited Korea on March, 2005, to consult on the north Korean issues as President Roh gave a long-widened explanation on the historical background of the ROK and Japan relation.

The Korean government has a strong tendency to deal with the Dokdo issue in coherence with the Yasukuni Shrine, distortion of historic events, Comfort Women and other post colonization issues in a nationalist perspective which resulted from its colonial experience. But the US is in a position where the Korea-Japan disputes must be held back as much as possible to deal with the pending north Korean issues and the regional problems.

When the tensions around the Dokdo waters between Korea and Japan were raised, the US made a wise response in requesting both countries to be profound in their actions. The US would have to continue to play an important role in the Korea-Japan relationship. This role would include demanding Japan to take positive and responsible attitude like the case in Germany concerning various historical facts including the comfort women and demanding Korea to take a more realistic and future oriented stance and policy.

In a word, it seems that the most of the issues concerning the ROK and US relations were branched off from the ignorance to the other's changing perspectives and position and not giving enough efforts in trying to understand the other and overcome the differences. And also, most of these issues have sparked into political issues because of lack of discussions, cooperation and expertise, and have brought negative impacts on the alliance. The main causes of stirring up the alliance structure were the misunderstandings in Korea on the changing strategies of the US as a sign to lay aside Korea and the misinterpretations in the US on Korea's voicing its opinions as a sign to break free from the alliance.

4. Developing ROK-US Common Interests

The various disputes between Korea and the United States in some current pending issues were reviewed. It is important to make evolutionary development of the alliance for the mutual interests of both nations on the basis of previous achievements rather than regarding it as faded one in an obsession of past mindsets. Now I will take a look at what the mutual interests would be between the ROK and US such as deterrence of war on the Korean Peninsula, stable management of north Korean issues, maintaining peace and stability in Northeast Asia and common countermeasures for the world peace.

A. Deterrence of War on the Korean Peninsula

Firstly, the deterrence of war on the Korean Peninsula is a key factor not only for the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula, but also for the stability of Northeast Asia and the peace of the world. To deter war on the Peninsula, the first priority is on establishing a strong and sustainable basis of alliance not to be wavered by the changes of political environment. The current tasks such as the relocation of the USFK bases, wartime OPCON

transfer, establishment of the new military structure of the alliance, and training sites for the USFK should be concluded smoothly to prevent them from being exploited as tools to weaken the alliance by certain political groups. Also the alliance, currently mostly focused on the military issues must be reorganized and expanded into the area of economy, society and culture. As the old generation who were in Korean War and Vietnam War are fading away, it is most important and urgent task to systemize the scattered man power of pro-alliance in Korea and the United States to prepare for the next generation of the alliance.

B. The Stable Management of north Korean Issues

First, the two nations should cooperate more closely to find a peaceful resolution of the north Korean nuclear issue. This is the most urgent task in Korea today, unavoidable one for the global war on terror conducted by the US, and key issue for the security and peace of the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia.

Second, cooperative response should be made to the security challenges of the north Korean instability which are now happening and spreading up in size and possibility. There must be made joint and cooperative efforts in managing the increasing number of refugees, expanding humanitarian aids and preventing negative influence of the sudden internal collapse of the regime in the North. In this context, it is essential to prepare the coordinated plan including DIME elements between the ROK and the US.

Third, it is vital to bring about soft landing in the regime transformation of north Korea and long-term peace and stability to the Peninsula and its surrounding area. This would contribute to the Northeast Asia policies of the US. And if it is successful, it could be of great help in converting autocratic states in Asia, Middle East and other areas of the world into democratic countries with market economy.

Fourth, accomplishing peaceful reunification of Korea would bring long lasting security and prosperity to Northeast Asia. The multinational process of handling the north Korean nuclear issue could be applied to establish a regional security cooperation organization in the region and under this basis the reunification of Korea could be accomplished. On a larger scale this might bring a regional cooperation system which contributes to the world peace like the case in Europe.

C. Maintaining Regional Peace and Stability

First, it is to manage jointly the variables of neighboring countries for the peace and stability in the region. This coincides with the US remarks on “shaping the choices of countries at the strategic crossroads” in the '06 QDR. The experience of Korea in developing its free democracy and market economy could be a good model for the developing countries of Southeast Asia, Africa and Middle East.

Second, it is to settle the historical conflicts and to prevent the rivalry for regional

influence among neighboring countries. It is necessary for the US and Korea to engage and cooperate actively for solving historical problems among regional countries such as territorial disputes, comfort women controversy and regional struggle for hegemony as well.

D. Joint and Coordinated Response on Global Security Challenges

This includes responding to transnational threats such as terrorism, drugs, pirates, money laundering, natural disasters, cyber attacks and so on. These coordinated responses are not to be confined to north Korea or Northeast Asia, but to contribute to the world peace and to achieve national interests of both countries in global sense.

5. Efforts for a Sustaining and Comprehensive Alliance

Now the ROK-US alliance should go beyond a ‘military oriented and recipient-patron relationship’ and be developed into mutually beneficial, sustaining, more comprehensive and dynamic one.

First, it is to establish stable basis for the military alliance and expand the mutual benefits. Referring to the success of the combined working group for the ROK-US future command relationship studies and the SPI, it is necessary to have appropriate working group or consultation group in the early stage of negotiation on the pending issues to overcome the differences of perspectives and to coordinate clear directions for resolution.

Second, it is to improve upon the working culture. There is a need to improve the working method from one-sided demand of the US as a protector to bilaterally coordinated consultation. We should keep in mind that the officers of the ROK Air Force Operations Command, who are sharing working places and always working in coordinated manner with their counterparts of the 7th US Air Force, have the most negative feelings. Also even the small discords must be resolved through revising the MOAs and documents of decades old. For instance, the Korean officers studying in the US military institutions say that they are not treated as good as those from Japan or NATO. It may seem to be less important, but it is not agreeable for the young officers, who are at the forefront of the alliance, to have such an unbalanced perception.

Third, it is to establish a system to prevent military issues from being issues of mass politics. This means a system that assures active coordination among specialists for each issue and guarantees the chance for review in advance and makes efforts to gain better understanding from politicians, journalists and the people of each country. Especially, there is a need to help the conventional supporters of the alliance understand the right direction of the alliance’s evolutionary development.

Fourth, it is to diversify its fields of alliance from military-focused to various functions and areas. It is necessary to have a diversified alliance dealing with various functions in

order to prevent weakening of the alliance by the pending military issues concerning USFK as if it is the only part of the ROK-US alliance. The first step is to create the coordination and consultation systems between the departments concerned of the two governments and to have them identify the pending issues prior to becoming political issues and to be exploited by anti-American groups or media. Creating man power pool for each department or field through education, seminars, consultations and brainstorming between government officials is also important not only for better understandings, but for eliminating unnecessary misunderstandings and making right directions and decisions in understanding each other. Especially, the alliance has experienced hard times by appointing officials with little understanding on the ROK-US relationship to the key posts. There is a need to intensify the efforts for the ROK-US alliance supporters not to be excluded from major decision making process.

Fifth, it is also important to build up publicity activities that the public of both countries could understand easily and accurately on the reality of the cooperation and the mutual benefits between Korea and the US. There should be included the functions of the alliance, the successful stories of the Korean-Americans in the US, the real picture of economic cooperation and other pending issues in progress.

In a word, through the efforts to understand the other's change, to share perspectives and to pursue common interests, both allies should have a room to relieve the blow of weakening the bases of the alliance itself caused by just a petty security issues. I have strong confidence that both allies could establish more inseparable, strengthened, sustaining and comprehensive alliance by diversifying cooperative windows and organizing networks of supporters to the alliance.

6. Way Ahead for Evolutionary Development for ROK-US Military Alliance

The military relationship of the ROK-US alliance would be developed evolutionarily on the basis of the aforementioned ROK-US common interests. Here I will suggest conceptually the military relationship in three phases of armistice, peace regime and post unification of the Korean Peninsula, in the process of development of the alliance in a stable and comprehensive manner.

A. Phase of Reconciliation and Cooperation between the South and North under the Armistice Regime

First, the top priority in the reconciliation and cooperation phase in the armistice regime is to maintain military readiness posture to deter the north Korean threat and defend Korea in contingency. In this phase, the alliance should show a resolved and coordinated response to the north Korean nuclear threat, solve amicably the pending issues such as wartime

OPCON transfer and base relocation of the USFK, establish a new alliance military structure which guarantees operational efficiency, maintain a four star general as commander of UNC and USFK and station adequate size of the US forces in Korea which could show visibly the strong will of the US.

Second, the ROK-US alliance should actively take part in the activities to support the improvement of the relationship between two Koreas. There is a need for the US to be flexible and active concerning the application of the armistice agreement. Also on the basis of the results from past ROK-US joint CBM(Confidence Building Measure) studies, there needs to cooperate actively for the confidence building between the military of the South and North.

Third, there should be role sharing between the ROK and the US. Gradually, Korea should lead the defense of the Peninsula and the US should support the Republic of Korea by maintaining a strong combined defense posture and contributing to the regional stability. It is desirable for Korea and the US military to enhance the capability of peace operations and activities to respond to the instable incidents of north Korea.

B. Phase of Peaceful Coexistence in Peace Regime

First, in the phase of peaceful coexistence in peace regime, a flexible security cooperation system should be established to respond to newly evolving security challenges. This should be the one that could respond to both the security of the Korean Peninsula and the regional and global security challenges through appropriately distinguished role sharing between the ROK and the US. A new alliance military structure should have the flexibility to respond to regional and global military and non-military threats beyond the north Korean threat. It would also be useful to have the common coordination committee with the participation of not only the military but other agencies concerned.

Second, in line with the changing process of the north Korean threat, the roles of Korea and the US will be adjusted into a Korea-supported and US- supporting relationship. The appropriate size of USFK should continue to be deployed in Korea and the vital elements of the alliance such as US air and naval power and intelligence support should be guaranteed.

Third, there should be active cooperation for global security issues not only to respond to trans-national, non-military threat, but the global security issues like PKO, nation building, etc.

C. Phase of Post-Unification Era

In the post-unification era of Korean Peninsula, to enhance regional stability through building a stable and unified Korea, the USFK should continue to stay in Korea and coordinate military issues such as the integration of forces of two Koreas. The ROK-US

alliance should also play a central role for the long term security by maintaining bi-lateral and establishing multi-lateral security cooperation systems among the nations in the region. Through the experience of adapting the ROK-US military alliance into evolutionarily developed comprehensive one, security cooperation networks among nations in the region could be created multi-dimensionally by various functions and areas.

7. Conclusion

The environment surrounding the ROK-US alliance is changing rapidly. The key factors having brought the changes are the development of free democracy and economy, the progress of south-north Korean relations in Korea along with the changes of security environment, military transformation and strategic flexibility after 9.11 in the US and the collapse of the cold war era in the world. In the rapid changes of alliance environment, the conventional, one-sided, military-oriented, US-reliant alliance relationship that has been kept for the past fifty years would be no longer appropriate, desirable and possible.

Therefore, Korea and the US need to break free from this conventional relationship setting. Korea should expand its role not only for the defense of Korea but for the regional and global security. The ROK-US alliance should pursue the way of achieving common interests. Instead of responding passively to the demands of the US, the ROK should strive to achieve common interests by taking the responsible role coincided with the interests of the US. Both nations must not ignore the value of the past fifty years of alliance. The adjustments to the new alliance environment should not begin from denying the past or denying the alliance itself, but from developing future-oriented alliance relationship.

It is our hope that even though the conservative and the progressive might be different in recognizing the changing alliance environment, the future goal they wish to achieve would be almost the same. The wisdom of expanding and understanding the matters of common interests in the manner of acknowledging and respecting each other must be applied to the ROK-US alliance today.