

Summary

ROK-U.S. Alliance: Planning for the Future

February 9, 2011

Session I

Moderator
Sook-Jong Lee

Presenters
Victor Cha
Kang Choi
Evans Revere

Session II

Moderator
Abraham Denmark

Presenters
Patrick Cronin
Beomchul Shin

Session III

Moderator
Young-Sun Ha

Presenters
Abraham Denmark
Du Hyeogn Cha
Markus Garlauskas

The EAI has been hosting the ROK-U.S. alliance conference since 2008 to build a dialogue on the major issues facing the alliance in the 21st century.

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The last twenty years have witnessed fundamental changes in the international landscape with the end of the Cold War, the events of 9/11, and more recently the Global Financial Crisis. The threats and challenges that the ROK-U.S. alliance faces in the twenty-first century are all derived from these changes. Following the Global Financial Crisis, the influence of the United States as the global superpower is relatively declining while the hegemonic voice of China is becoming louder. At the same time, the future of North Korea is uncertain with the ongoing delicate succession process of handing power from the frail Kim Jong-il to his young and inexperienced son Kim Jong-eun. These international shifts raise significant questions yet also provide an opportunity to prepare for a new era.

The East Asia Institute and the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) jointly held the 4th “ROK-U.S. Alliance Conference” with support from Pyeongtaek City. The topic for this conference was “ROK-U.S. Alliance: Planning for the Future” and brought together a number of scholars, experts, politicians, and media from both South Korea and the United States. Reflecting the future challenges, the conference held three sessions looking at the changing strategic environment, non-military planning for Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) collapse, and the future of the ROK-U.S. alliance. The following is a summary of the main points and policy recommendations from the discussions in each of the sessions.

Session I: The Changing Strategic Environment and its Implications for the Alliance

Coping with the Rise of China

- **The ROK-U.S. alliance must understand the impact of China’s leadership transition process.** In the run-up to China’s leadership transition in 2012, Beijing has been evidently more vocal in its foreign policy toward Washington. Efforts must be made by the alliance to understand the impact of the political competition at work during this delicate transition period. By understanding the domestic context, it will be possible to interpret China’s limits and expectations on the world stage.

- **China’s support for North Korea will run counter to its own interests.**

In 2010, North Korea twice launched belligerent action against South Korea, the sinking of the *Cheonan* and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island. In both cases, China backed North Korea without question as it reaffirmed its close partnership. This support makes it difficult for the ROK-U.S. alliance to contain the DPRK’s threats. China’s continued support for the North Korean regime in spite of provocative actions will work counter to its stated goal of peace and stability in the region.

- **The U.S.-China Summit is an opportunity to pressure China on North Korea.**

The U.S.-China Summit in January 2011 is a good opportunity to persuade China to increase its pressure on North Korea. Currently, Beijing holds most of the cards in dealing with Pyongyang and can exert a great deal of influence through its aid and diplomatic support.

Countering the North Korean Threat

- **South Korea must deal with North Korea's limited warfare threat.**

Both the sinking of the *Cheonan* and the attack on Yeonpyeong Island revealed North Korea's ability to wage limited warfare without incurring a destructive full-scale war. The attacks also revealed shortcomings in South Korea's ability to efficiently respond and manage such crises. In order to cope with this asymmetrical threat, Seoul needs to enhance its policy planning regarding which direction Pyongyang's strategy is heading. Such forward thinking will be critical for managing tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

- **Seoul must close the gap between its words and deeds toward North Korea.**

The Lee Myung-bak administration in South Korea has come under a brunt of domestic criticism for the way it has handled North Korea's provocations. Particularly following the Yeonpyeong Island attack, Seoul was accused of failing to respond adequately to a direct threat. In response, the Lee administration has been stepping up its rhetoric against North Korea. However, this echoes much of what was voiced before following the sinking of the *Cheonan*. This shows that there is a gap between words and deeds in Seoul's response to Pyongyang's aggression. It is critical that in the future, rhetoric and strong words match actions and responses on the ground. Yet this must only be utilized having taken into account all possible consequences. Any gap in this regard will likely be taken advantage of by the North Korean regime to deadly affect.

- **The alliance should continue to pressure North Korea through international organizations.**

Bringing about international attention and pressure on North Korea can be very effective for not only resolving the situation but also gaining credibility for South Korea.

Soft Power and the Alliance

- **The benefits of soft power must be utilized by the alliance.**

Soft power is becoming more evident in international relations as governments increasingly invest in their public diplomacy resources. The ROK-U.S. alliance could enhance its role overseas by using its soft power.

- **South Korea's soft power can be used to engage North Korea.**

South Korea should do more to use its soft power toward North Korea. In fact, the Republic of Korea's democracy and prosperity is a soft power asset that is already having a major impact upon the North Korean regime and wider population. Radio broadcasts and the use of cell phones among ordinary North Koreans will help to spread further the soft power of South Korea.

Session II: Non-Military Planning for DPRK Collapse

Stability of the North Korean Regime

- **There is a need to distinguish instability from collapse.** Predictions of North Korea's imminent collapse were prominent at the end of the Cold War. They have resurged again with Kim Jong-il's deteriorating health and growing internal difficulties related to the succession process. However, there needs to be a deeper understanding of the current situation in North Korea which means categorizing the difference between instability and collapse. The North Korean regime may be suffering instability but this cannot be considered state collapse as it still exercises an iron fist upon the country.

- **A failing central economy does not translate into overall economic collapse.**

The collapse of the central economy in the 1990s and the ongoing economic problems in North Korea should not be interpreted as signs of a wider collapse. Since the famine of the 1990s and the collapse of the state Public Distribution System, North Koreans have engaged in market activities to survive. This unofficial economy has prolonged the survival of the system and allowed the population to muddle along despite efforts by the regime to control these activities.

Preparations for Collapse

- **Military planning must not ignore civilian contingency planning.**

While the military is expected to take the lead in a post-DPRK collapse scenario, civilian planning must also figure in military planning. Following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, one of the greatest failings was the lack of civilian planning. State collapse in North Korea means collapse of all institutions including public services. It will be of critical importance to gain the support of the population through effective contingency planning to cope with such a power vacuum.

- **The alliance needs to examine what contacts exist in North Korea.**

At present, South Korea and international organizations have some contacts on the ground in North Korea. These range from the South Korean-operated Kaesong Industrial Park to international aid programs, all of which involve cooperation with local DPRK officials. Such contacts could be used in future contingencies to facilitate operations and dialogue with the wider population.

- **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) must be involved in planning.**

NGOs can play an important role in state collapse scenarios, with extensive experience and expertise in areas that governments often find hard to operate in. Many NGOs have had long experience of operating in North Korea and

will have important contacts that could support aid operations. While cooperation with these NGOs will be vital, the government must still lead the way as they will be providing basic security.

- **Which DPRK institutions should be maintained in North Korea following any collapse must be considered.**

An important question following the collapse of the DPRK is to what extent should existing institutions be maintained. Following the invasion of Iraq, the U.S. military disbanded many state institutions including the military which resulted in a power vacuum that fermented instability and violence. Which institutions should be preserved and which should be removed is a fundamental question that needs to be answered at an early stage.

Coping with China's Role in Future Contingencies

- **China's interests in North Korea need to be taken into account.**

China has significant investments in North Korea, including ports and islands it has leased for extended periods. It would be easy to forget about China's interests due to the euphoria from the prospect of unification. It is possible to imagine that following such a collapse China will make a move to secure those investments. An example would be Russia's actions at the end of the Kosovo War in 1999 where it moved its troops to occupy the main airport before NATO forces arrived. In this regard, it is important that the ROK-U.S. alliance does not provoke a proactive response from China. The interests of Beijing must be noted and considered following any DPRK collapse scenario. Considering the sensitive nature of such discussions, Track 1 or 1.5 dialogues would help to bridge misunderstandings.

- **Sensitive discussions between the alliance and China on North Korea's future should start with humanitarian issues.**

Cooperation with China over contingency planning for North Korea's collapse is notoriously difficult as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) refuses to discuss such

issues. Discussions on humanitarian issues related to North Korea remain the best opportunity for the alliance to engage in dialogue with China on this sensitive issue.

- **The PLA's expanding networks undercut stalled inter-Korean links.**

As inter-Korean contacts remain in deadlock, China has been filling the void through business and military contacts. The PLA's extensive networks, particularly with the DPRK military may work against the ROK-U.S. alliance's operations in the event of any collapse.

- **The alliance should work with international organizations in North Korea to alleviate Chinese concerns.**

Due to the varied and complex interests of different countries in North Korea, the level of multilateral or international involvement following any collapse must be considered. Particularly, the role of the United Nations needs to be established. Such international involvement could go some way to alleviating the concerns of China and providing legitimacy to ROK and U.S. forces.

Session III: The Future of the ROK-U.S. Alliance

The North Korean Threat and the Future of the Alliance

- **All contingencies related to North Korea must be considered before transfer of wartime 'operational control' (OPCON) in 2015.**

Originally scheduled for 2012, the transfer of OPCON for South Korean troops has been pushed back to 2015. Before such a major transformation is made in the structure of the ROK-U.S. alliance, all contingencies and planning related to North Korea must be formalized.

- **South Korea's military capabilities must be fully prepared prior to OPCON transfer.**

Moving toward the future, South Korea will be facing North Korean regime increasingly utilizing unconventional

warfare and nuclear threats. This will require substantial investment and improvement of ROK military forces to meet these new challenges including the development of early warning capabilities to adequately detect future provocations from North Korea.

- **Securing 'escalation dominance' over North Korea must be achieved by the alliance.**

The ROK-U.S. alliance must secure 'escalation dominance' over North Korea in the event of further provocations. This will mean that the alliance will be able to control the pace of escalation and therefore secure any possible threat scenario. In order to establish 'escalation dominance,' a strong deterrence is required from both the United States and South Korea at the early stage of any provocation. With such deterrence, North Korea will be unable to take advantage of South Korea's fears of conflict escalation.

- **South Korea should boost its Peacekeeping Operations (PKO).**

As South Korea seeks to boost its own military capabilities in face of North Korea's unconventional threats, increased participation in PKOs will improve experience and capabilities. Many of the tasks and duties with PKOs mirror some of the challenges that could come from North Korea, particularly in a post-DPRK regime collapse scenario.

The Rise of China and the Future of the Alliance

- **How to manage the rise of China must be discussed in the alliance.**

The ROK-U.S. alliance may not wish to appear to be aimed at containing the rise of China, but it cannot avoid discussing the consequences of such a rise. Beijing's rapid military modernization and growing influence in the region will have an impact on the alliance and must be taken into account.

- **The long-term effects should be considered regarding Japan-ROK-U.S. exercises.**

The growing trilateral relationship among the United

States and its two key allies in Asia has naturally led to joint military exercises. These exercises though have caused major concern in Beijing which views such maneuvers as hostile to its own interests. While cooperation among Japan, South Korea, and the United States is positive for the region, the consequences on relations with China must be fully considered.

A 'Complex Alliance' for the Future

- **The notion of a 'complex alliance' must be emphasized.**

The ROK-U.S. alliance in the twenty-first century must be focused on different challenges and tasks that is part of a 'complex alliance'. Such an alliance is based on shared values and is not restricted to one location. Critical for the success of a 'complex alliance' is retaining public support for the alliance and its activities. Shared values between the two countries are a strong factor in gaining support from the public.

- **Free riding is an outdated concept in a 'complex alliance.'**

A 'complex alliance' dispels the notion of free riding by South Korea. The United States strongly values the alliance and does not view South Korea as a free rider. Of course, the relationship is asymmetrical but that should not be misunderstood as a negative concept.

- **A 'complex alliance' will have a stronger foundation.**

The ROK-U.S. alliance was based on deterring a single threat, but now is working to represent broader interests and values. By becoming a 'complex alliance' based on strong foundations and not defined by a single enemy, it will outlast even the collapse of the DPRK. ■

Program of the Conference

Date: December 15, 2010

Venue: Yeong Bin Gwan, Hotel Shilla, Seoul

08:40-09:00	Registration	Venue: Emerald, Young Bin Gwan
09:00-10:00	Opening Session	
	Opening Remarks	Sook-Jong Lee, President of EAI
	Welcome Remarks	Sun-Gi Kim, Mayor of Pyeongtaek City
	Congratulatory Address	Hong-Koo Lee, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, EAI Yoo Chul Won, Chairman of the National Defense Committee
	Keynote Speech	RADM Phil Wisecup, USN, President of Naval War College
10:00-12:00	Session 1	The Changing Strategic Environment and Its Implications for The Alliance
	Moderator	Sook-Jong Lee, President of the EAI
	Presenters	“The Rise of China” Victor Cha, Professor of Georgetown University “The Threat from the North” Kang Choi, Professor of the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security “Going Global: The U.S-ROK Alliance Beyond East Asia” Evans Revere, Senior Director of the Albright Stonebridge Group
	Discussants	Woosuk Choi, Journalist of Chosun Ilbo Patrick Cronin, Senior Advisor of the CNAS Abraham Denmark, Fellow of the CNAS Sukhee Han, Professor of Yonsei University Hyeong Jin Kim, Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Sang-Hyun Lee, Senior Research Fellow of Sejong Institute
12:10-13:50	Luncheon	Venue: Topaz, Young Bin Gwan
	Speaker	Seong-Min Yoo, Congressmen of Grand National Party
14:00-15:30	Session 2	Non-Military Planning for DPRK Collapse
	Moderator	Abraham Denmark, Fellow of the CNAS
	Presenters	“Scenarios, Priorities, and Joint Planning” Patrick Cronin, Senior Advisor of the CNAS “ROK Non-Military Planning for DPRK Collapse” Beomchul Shin, Research Fellow of the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses
	Discussants	Victor Cha, Professor of Georgetown University Namhoon Cho, Senior Research Fellow of the Korea Institute For Defense Analyses Dongho Jo, Professor of Ewha Womans University Young Se Kwon, Congressman of Grand National Party Evans Revere, Senior Director of the Albright Stonebridge Group Seongji Woo, Professor of Kyung Hee University

15:30–15:40	Coffee Break	
15:40–17:40	Session 3	The Future of ROK–U.S. Military Alliance
	Moderator	Young-Sun Ha, Professor of Seoul National University
	Presenters	“Adapting the Alliance for Future Challenges” Abraham Denmark, Fellow of the CNAS “The Future of the ROK Military: What Does the ROK Need?” Du Hyeogn Cha, Research Fellow of the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses “Alliance Management and the Evolving Alliance” Markus Garlauskas, Chief of the Strategy Division, United States Forces Korea
	Discussants	Victor Cha, Professor of Georgetown University Nam Hoon Cho, Senior Research Fellow of the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses Patrick Cronin, Senior Advisor of the CNAS Chaibong Hahm, Director of Asan Institute for Policy Studies Jin Ha Hwang, Congressman of Grand National Party Evans Revere, Senior Director of the Albright Stonebridge Group Seongho Sheen, Professor of Seoul National University Yong-Weon Yoo, Military Professional Journalist of Chosun Ilbo
18:30-20:00	Dinner	Venue: Lilac, 3F
	Speaker	Gen. Walter Sharp, USA, Commander of United States Forces Korea