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Toward 2020: Ten Agendas for South Korea's Foreign Policy

December 2012

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Executive Summary:

Strategic Goals and Principles for South Korea's Foreign Policy toward 2020

Strategic Goals

1. Construct “symbiotic complex networks” appropriate for a new order in East Asia.
2. Establish a new inter-Korean relationship through the “co-evolution strategy.”
3. Actively participate in designing a new regional and global governance architecture through “middle power diplomacy.”

Principles

1. Maintain “systemic flexibility” to peacefully manage the power shift in East Asia. First, develop the ROK-U.S. alliance into a complex strategic alliance in accordance with the changes in the global environment of the 21st century. With ensuring maximum utility of the alliance, secure Korea's status in the global, regional and peninsular levels.
2. Simultaneously expand cooperative networks with China through various channels. Amidst the U.S. and China's efforts to construct “a new type of great power relationship,” substantiate the Korea-China strategic cooperative partnership and strengthen the ROK-U.S. complex alliance.
3. Pursue a three-step approach to resolve fundamental disputes with Japan. In the short term, depoliticize pending historical issues; in the medium term, use complex power to take the initiative in developing a bilateral relationship; in the long term, promote cooperative institutions and identity-sharing. Also, deepen the ROK-Russia strategic partnership that focuses on Russia's role in East Asia, especially in the process of constructing a peaceful Korean Peninsula.
4. Take the initiative in establishing middle power networks with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) states, Australia, and India and propose a new regional architecture.
5. Help resolve regional maritime disputes. Resolve pending territorial conflicts, and build multilateral consensus on nontraditional security issues such as collaborative resource development, marine environment and sea lane security.
6. Pursue the “co-evolution strategy” as a new paradigm for the North Korean strategy. First, help North Korea evolve from a nuclear military-first system into a denuclearized security system. Assist North Korea



in transforming into an economy-first model and cooperate with the U.S, China and the UN on establishing a complex peace system for the Korean Peninsula.

7. The second stage of the co-evolution strategy pursues a systematic assistance program that includes humanitarian aid and measures that support system transition in North Korea. Seoul should seek for the normalization of North Korea and a new inter-Korean relationship.
8. Implement a knowledge-based network diplomacy in the area of trade, finance and development cooperation and help sustain a stable and balanced growth of both the global and Korean economy.
9. Actively engage in designing an effective global governance system for emerging issues pertaining to environment/energy/population, culture, and information/knowledge.
10. Exercise public diplomacy by developing a two-way communication channel with diversified actors in the 21st century. To serve global public goods and expand Korea's diplomatic leverage, utilize Korea's soft power resources including economic development experience, the Korean wave, and knowledge base. Establish a diplomatic culture commensurate with the statuses of middle powers and reach a national consensus that

transcends deep-seated social and ideological cleavages.

South Korea should establish a long term and comprehensive diplomatic strategy at the local (Korean Peninsula), regional (East Asia) and global level. Korea's strategic vision in East Asia is to establish a "symbiotic complex network" and secure a peaceful power transition in the region by minimizing the strategic distrust between Washington and Beijing. Korea should also maintain systematic flexibility to buffer the impact of transition in the coming decade. During this process, South Korea should transform the current U.S.-ROK alliance into a strategic complex alliance and make efforts to elevate Korea's status in the global, regional and local (Korean Peninsula) level. Simultaneously, within the strategic cooperative partnership framework with China, South Korea should substantiate cooperation on specific issues and build a multi-dimensional network beyond government-to-government (Track I) relations. It is essential to prevent the U.S. and China relations from deteriorating especially due to the deepened strategic distrust triggered by conflicts involving each others' "core interests."

The ROK-Japan relationship is of importance considering the ongoing structural shift in the balance of power in East Asia; the presence of threat from North Korea; the indirect ROK-Japan partnership based on alliance with the U.S.; and the need for cooperation in regional/global human security issues. In the



short-term, South Korea should prevent the bilateral cooperation with Japan from being impeded by broaching historical and territorial issues at the political table. In the mid-term, Seoul needs to lead the Korea-Japan partnership by strengthening its hard power (military, economy), soft power (knowledge, culture, institution) and network power. In the long-term, Korea should resolve clashes pertaining to nationalism by institutionalizing regional cooperation and establishing a shared regional identity.

Russia can not only play the role as a facilitator or a stabilizer in constructing the cooperative network in East Asia but also exercise its influence over the Peninsula based on its natural resources and relationship with North Korea. Australia, India and ASEAN countries are also important partners for strengthening cooperation among middle powers in the region. South Korea needs to take the leading role in strengthening the cooperation among middle powers in the region in order to realize its collective interest amidst the ongoing strategic competition between Washington and Beijing. Meanwhile South Korea should develop regional multilateralism that transcends the hitherto multilateral arrangements. Multilateral arrangements so far have shown the dynamics of “institutional balancing” only to maximize the interests of each state. In order to serve the collective interest in East Asia, networks among the regional institutions will be necessary.

Maritime conflict in East Asia is intricately connected with boundary delimitation, resource, sovereignty and sea lane issues that no unilateral

or bilateral effort alone can resolve. Therefore, basing upon the declaration to freeze pending sovereignty issues, South Korea should strive to enhance multilateral cooperation in dealing with nontraditional security issues such as collaborative resource development, marine environment protection, and navigation safety. It would be best to approach each issue such as territorial, fishing, maritime resource development and the environment separately. These cooperative efforts should ultimately contribute to building multilateral consensus on the overall maritime issues.

A new paradigm that can help the Kim Jong-un regime evolve from the current military-first system based on nuclear weapons program into a denuclearized economy-first system is essential for resolving ongoing peninsula conflicts. North Korea's nuclear problem can only be resolved when Pyongyang realizes that the nuclear weapon guarantees neither its survival nor prosperity. It is important to propose an alternative security assurance that can make North Korea feel secured even without nuclear weapons. Setting up a friendly political environment to Pyongyang is necessary in this respect. Therefore, relevant parties need to send an elaborate and complex signal: suggesting a complex peace system on the Korean Peninsula that involves the North and South, China, the U.S. and the United Nations; and clearly pointing out the catastrophic challenges Pyongyang will face when it continues to develop nuclear weapons.

South Korea and the relevant countries



should “co-evolve” with North Korea when Pyongyang makes the strategic decision to abandon its nuclear weapons. It is important to make diplomatic efforts in order to completely dismantle North Korea’s nuclear program; expand economic assistance; support Pyongyang’s endeavors in gradual reforms and opening; and work to develop a peace system on the Peninsula by normalizing diplomatic relations with one another. With these efforts, international community would be able to help North Korea take the path of modernization and advancement in alignment with the rest of the world and fulfill its long lost dream of becoming a “strong and prosperous nation.”

South Korea is in the center of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) competition between the U.S. and China in the Asian market. Seoul’s trade diplomacy in 2010s should focus on transforming the existent and future bilateral FTAs in the region into a formal or de facto multilateral arrangement. South Korea should construct a system wherein bilateralism and multilateralism can coexist in a complementary manner rather than an alternative one, while ultimately pursuing a strategy oriented towards a multilateral regime.

In this transitional period of global finance and currency order, South Korea needs to be equipped with the capability to provide and manage the capital that stabilizes the exchange rate by expanding the financial safety net and ensuring economic development. Simultaneously, by linking regional multilateralism with global multilateralism and assuming the role of

a “honest broker,” Seoul needs to successfully reflect its preferences for regional and global finance and currency order which is under transformation.

Regarding cooperation for future development, South Korea should assume the role as a mediator among great powers. By enhancing multilateral cooperation in East Asia, bridging donor and recipient states and reforming domestic institutions, South Korea can successfully implement the Official Development Assistance (ODA) diplomacy based on the “selection and concentration” strategy.

South Korea should contribute towards the construction of a global energy governance system in order to meet emerging challenges such as resource nationalism, low growth in producer states, and discrepancies in the old governance system that do not correspond to the rapid economic growth of rising powers. Focusing on the establishment of communication mechanisms between producer and consumer states will be crucial in this regard. Furthermore, since the global governance system work effectively with a strong domestic governance system of producer states, it is important to build an energy system based on complex power such as domestic political and economic development, finance, and even military capabilities.

South Korea’s environmental capabilities need to be amplified. A measured combination of the “environmental mainstreaming” and “strategic environmental assessment” concept must take place. Such combination will help reconstruct the norms, institutions, organiza-



tion and political agenda of South Korea so that environmental issues can be more effectively addressed. It is important to examine the long-term effects of climate change on international politics, and to observe how key issues on the dilemma continue to interconnect. The agendas regarding trade, energy, and food crisis that are especially relevant to the issue of climate change, deserves closer attention.

In pursuing the middle power diplomacy, Seoul needs to diversify the subjects of diplomacy. By using the two-way communication channel, it is desirable for South Korea to take initiative in discourses among policy makers, government officials, civil society groups, and epistemic communities in East Asia and the world in order to secure its mid- and long-term interests. Internationally, South Korea should not only strengthen its influence on the international community but also expand universal interest by utilizing its soft power resources. Moreover, South Korea should concentrate on diversifying its cultural contents as well as strengthening the production system of public diplomacy contents.

Domestically, South Korea should establish a diplomatic culture commensurate with its middle power capability, and accomplish national consolidation by transcending ideational

cleavage, so-called “South-South conflicts.” Since South Korea has enhanced its material capability and has now become a middle power, it should redefine its national interests and come up with a new diplomatic strategy that corresponds well with its elevated status. Rather than chasing after short-term interests, South Korea should strive to secure its mid- and long-term interests by actively mapping out regional and global governance architecture. In this regard, widening the perception of policy makers as well as establishing diplomatic culture and policy-making system apposite to that of a middle power is critical. Furthermore, on the domestic front of the Peninsula’s “co-evolution strategy,” a consensus of the public opinion within the South Korean society is called for. Seoul should take a selective approach to the strengths and weaknesses of previous administrations’ “sunshine policy” and “principled engagement policy” and design a future-oriented paradigm in accordance with the changing international order and South-North relationship. South Korea should forestall politicization of its North Korea policy and establish an integration mechanism in the national level to collaboratively design the future of the Peninsula.

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