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국제학석사학위논문

**The Delay of the Transfer of Wartime Operational Control:
Nature of the Alliance and United States Acceptance**

한미 전시작전통제권 전환의 연기: 동맹의 본질과 미국의 수용

2016년 8월

서울대학교 국제대학원

국제학과 국제지역학전공

Luke Chandler

Master's Thesis

**The Delay of the Transfer of Wartime Operational Control:
Nature of the Alliance and United States Acceptance**

Thesis by

Luke Chandler

Graduate Program in Area Studies
For the Degree of Master of International Studies

August 2016

**Graduate School of International Studies
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이 논문을 국제학석사 학위논문으로 제출함

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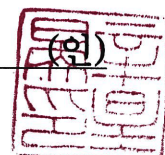
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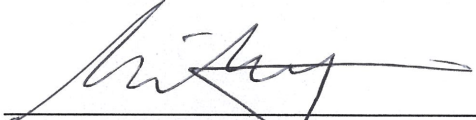
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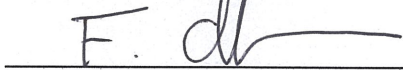
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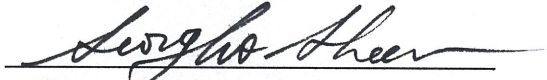
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Abstract

The Delay of the Transfer of Wartime Operational Control: Nature of the Alliance and United States Acceptance

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This thesis aims to answer the question of why the United States continues accepting a delay of the transfer of wartime OPCON. In order to answer the question, the significance of the U.S.-ROK alliance is examined, followed by the nature of the alliance applying the “Powerplay” model of Victor Cha. Finally, the thesis will conclude with a comparative analysis of the security, and political situation of the U.S. at the times that the transfer was delayed.

The result of the research is that because of the importance of the alliance to the United States, they are willing to maintain the status quo and retain wartime OPCON. However, whether or not transfer does happen is up to South Korea, as the U.S. will give back wartime OPCON whenever it is requested. That being said, as long as the U.S. has an incentive to keep wartime OPCON and barring any great shift in domestic politics or their security backdrop, they will not require South Korea to assume wartime OPCON. The United States should be mindful of the alliance’s history and its effect on South Korea’s concerns. In addition, because of possible complications that could arise after a transfer if hostilities were to break out, the alliance should opt for a new hybrid combined command that minimalizes potential obstacles by maximizing unity of command.

Keywords: U.S.-ROK Alliance, Powerplay, Fear of Abandonment, Wartime Operational Control, Unity of Command

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Abstract (English)

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I. Introduction

1. Operational Control:

Operational Control (OPCON) is one of the four types of command relationships. The types of command in order of hierarchy are combatant command (COCOM)¹, OPCON, tactical command (TACON), and support. For the purposes of this study, OPCON is the relevant command relationship. According to the United States Department of Defense, “Operational control is the authority to perform those functions of command over subordinate forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction necessary to accomplish the mission. Operational control includes authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations and joint training necessary to accomplish missions assigned to the command.

Operational control should be exercised through the commanders of subordinate organizations.” Moreover, “Operational control normally provides full authority to

¹ Also known as command authority and is a non-transferable type of command Joint Publication 1. 2013. Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States. http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1.pdf

organize commands and forces and to employ those forces as the commander in operational control considers necessary to accomplish assigned missions; it does not, in and of itself, include authoritative direction for logistics or matters of administration, discipline, internal organization, or unit training.”² In different terms it gives a commander authority to direct the forces (assign or delegate tasks) that he/she is assigned in order to complete a mission or task that is often time or location sensitive. Also it allows them to deploy subordinate units and to keep or reassign the tactical control of those units. A commander exercises OPCON only over those units, which are assigned to his or her command.

2. Background:

In July of 1950, following the outbreak of the Korean War, South Korean President Rhee Syngman transferred complete operational control of the military to the United Nations Command, which at the time was headed by American General Douglas MacArthur. The United Nations Command was comprised of all 16 nations that came to offer military assistance. Following the signing of the

² Joint Publication 1-02. 2010. Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms. http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf

Armistice Agreement, the United States and Republic of Korea both ratified the Mutual Defense Treaty. Under this treaty it was decided that ROK forces would remain under the OPCON of the United Nations Command, further expressing commitment to defending South Korea against all external threats.³ Because the U.S. military remained on the peninsula, both countries agreed to the establishment of the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK), which would be an independent command consisting of only U.S. troops.⁴

South Korean forces remained under the control of the United Nations Command until in 1978 in order to more fully integrate the ROK military into the command structure Seoul and Washington agreed to establish the Combined Forces Command (CFC). The United Nations Command took the main responsibility of armistice enforcement and operational control of all ROK forces was conceded to the CFC. In this new command, officers from both countries had combined control of the sections of which it was made up. In command of the CFC would be a U.S. general with a South Korean general being his deputy or in other words, second in

³ Park, Won G. 2009. "The United Nations Command in Korea: Past, present, and future." *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 21(4)

⁴ Bell, Burwell B. and Sonya L. Finley. 2007. "South Korea Leads the Warfight." *Joint Force Quarterly* 4(47) <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a518765.pdf>

command. The commander would be subordinate and therefore be accountable to the National Command Authorities in both countries.⁵

In 1993, there were serious discussions in the form of military consultative meetings (MCM) as well as security consultative meetings (SCM) about transitioning peacetime OPCON back to the government of South Korea. An agreement was reached and on December 1, 1994 the transfer was completed. This meant that in the event of war the South Korean President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff would authorize the OPCON of ROK forces to transfer to the CFC. All structure and combined nature of the CFC would remain unchanged.⁶ Figure 1 shows how upon initiation of war, command and control of all forces would be structured. It shows that only the President of the United States, along with his Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have National Command Authority over the CFC. All other entities either provide strategical/operational guidance or function as a force provider.

⁵ Roehrig, Terence. 2007. "Restructuring the U.S. Military Presence in Korea: Implications for Korean Security and the U.S.-ROK Alliance." *Korea Economic Institute* 2(1) <http://www.keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/Roehrig.pdf>

⁶ Kwang, Sub K. "*The US-ROK Alliance, 1953-2004: Alliance Institutionalization.*" PhD diss., Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2006.

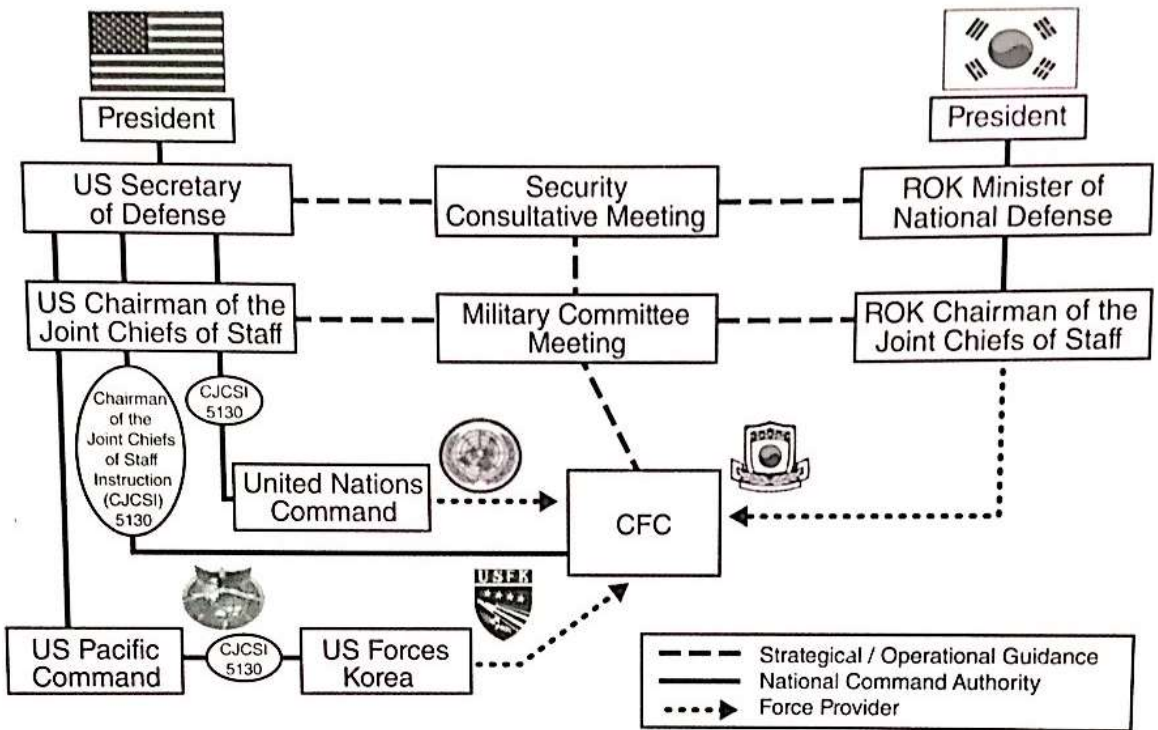


Figure 1: U.S. and ROK Command Relationship During Wartime Operations

Source: Wood, Stephen G. and Christopher A. Johnson. 2008. "The Transformation of Air Forces on the Korean Peninsula." *Air and Space Power Journal* 22(3)

In 2003, at the request of President Roh Moo-Hyun and the South Korean government, the CFC studied and examined to what extent it would be feasible for ROK to assume OPCON of its forces during wartime. This would mean that during a war, ROK and U.S. forces would be fighting under two different chains of command. On top of this the CFC would be dissolved. Following the results of the

CFC's study, the Presidents of both the United States and South Korea approved the transfer. It was then decided at the 2007 Security Consultative Meeting that the dissolution of the CFC and transfer of wartime OPCON would take place April 17, 2012. The decision was again confirmed in 2009.⁷ In 2010, South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak suggested to the President of the United States Barack Obama that they delay the transfer from 2012 to 2015 allowing more time for them to adjust their forces.⁸ President Obama was receptive to the idea and they signed a formal agreement affirming the delay. Following the postponement the shift from the CFC led wartime command to a ROK led wartime command continued.⁹ With the date for transfer looming in the near future discussions again began concerning OPCON transfer. Finally at the 46th Security Consultative Meeting on October 23, 2014 it was agreed that there would be an indefinite delay in the OPCON transfer with an ambiguous future deadline being set for some date in the mid 2020s. This time

⁷ Minnich, James M. 2011. "The year 2012: South Korea's Resumption of Wartime Operational Control." *Military Review*, May-June. http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_0110630_art004.pdf

⁸ Cha, Victor. and Ellen Kim. 2010. "US-Korea Relations: the Sinking of the Cheonan." *Comparative Connections*, July. http://csis.org/files/publication/1002qus_korea.pdf

⁹ Thurman, James D. 2012. Statement for the record before the House Armed Services Committee, March 28, http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/files/serve?File_id=174ac278-d0b6-4122-b7bd

instead of setting a specific date, a conditions based OPCON transition plan was adopted.¹⁰

Date	Major Contents
July 14, 1950	President Syngman Rhee transferred operational command authority (OPCOM) over the ROK military to the UNC Commander.
November 17, 1954	OPCON over the ROK military delegated to the UNC Commander.
November 7, 1978	CFC established; OPCON transferred to the CFC Commander.
December 1, 1994	Armistice OPCON over the ROK military transferred to the Chairman of the ROK JCS.
September 16, 2006	Wartime OPCON transition agreed at the ROK-U.S. summit.
February 23, 2007	ROK Minister of National Defense and U.S. Secretary of Defense agreed on the timing (April 17, 2012) of the wartime OPCON transition.
June 28, 2007	ROK and U.S. agreed on the Strategic Transition Plan.
June 26, 2010	At the ROK-U.S. summit, the two nations agreed to adjust the timing of transition to the end of 2015.
October 8, 2010	ROK Minister of National Defense and the U.S. Secretary of Defense agreed on the SA 2015.
October 23, 2014	ROK Minister of National Defense and the U.S. Secretary of Defense agreed on "conditions-based wartime operational control transition."

Table 1: Wartime OPCON Transition Chronology of Major Events

Source: Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, 2014 Defense White Paper

¹⁰ Harper, Jon. 2014. "OPCON transfer, US troop redeployment in Korea postponed indefinitely." Stars and Stripes, October 23. <http://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/korea/opcon-transfer-us-troop-redeployment-in-korea-postponed-indefinitely-1.309960>

3. OPCON Transfer Process:

Understanding the true significance of transferring wartime OPCON from the U.S. forces to the ROK forces requires a look at what the process of such a transfer would entail. Because the transfer was never realized or never truly came close to fruition before there was a postponement, statements from commanders and proposed plans for the previous transfers comprise the bulk of what is known. Upon transfer of wartime OPCON, the CFC would be dissolved. Thus during wartime, ROK forces would not give OPCON to the American commander of the CFC as was the case pre-transfer. Rather there would be two parallel but independent chains of command that would exist.¹¹ One would be the Korea Command (KORCOM) for the U.S. while the other would be what was originally in 2008, when it was initially conceptualized, called the Joint Forces Command for South Korea for the South Korean forces.¹² Regardless of the name, the new command would be subordinate to the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff. Figure 2 shows the proposed command structure following OPCON transfer. Figure 3 emphasizes

¹¹ Bechtol, Bruce E. 2014. "Aftermath: 1953-2013", In *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Korean War*, edited by James I. Matray and Donald W. Broose, 421-434. Hampshire England: Ashgate.

¹² Wood, Stephen G. and Christopher A. Johnson. 2008. "The Transformation of Air Forces on the Korean Peninsula." *Air and Space Power Journal* 22(3)
<http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj08/wood.html>

the U.S. would be taking over a supporting role in the event of hostilities. As seen in the figure, coordination between the two countries would be done via a system of boards, bureaus, coordination centers, and cells. Upon further analysis by both countries, because of the lack of capabilities in some operations and the time sensitive nature of others, it was determined that they would remain under a combined command. Meaning during wartime, the U.S. would still have OPCON. These were by the consensus of both parties to be the recovery of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)¹³, amphibious operations¹⁴, airpower, and certain aspects of the intelligence operations¹⁵. However apart from the four types of operations that would still be under U.S. wartime OPCON, all other combat troops would be under the separate commands of their respective countries.

¹³ Bennett, Bruce, Choi Kang, Chaesung Chun, and Bon-Hak Koo. "The political economy of US-ROK OPCON transfer." AIPS Roundtable, Asan Institute for Policy Studies, Seoul, April 15, 2010.

¹⁴ Rowland, Ashley and Hae-rym Hwang. 2010. "Will South Korea be ready to assume wartime command?" Stars and Stripes, April 19, <http://www.stripes.com/news/will-south-korea-be-ready-to-assume-wartime-command-1.101057>

¹⁵ Bechtol, Bruce E. 2014. "Aftermath: 1953-2013", In *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Korean War*, edited by James I. Matray and Donald W. Broose, 421-434. Hampshire England: Ashgate.

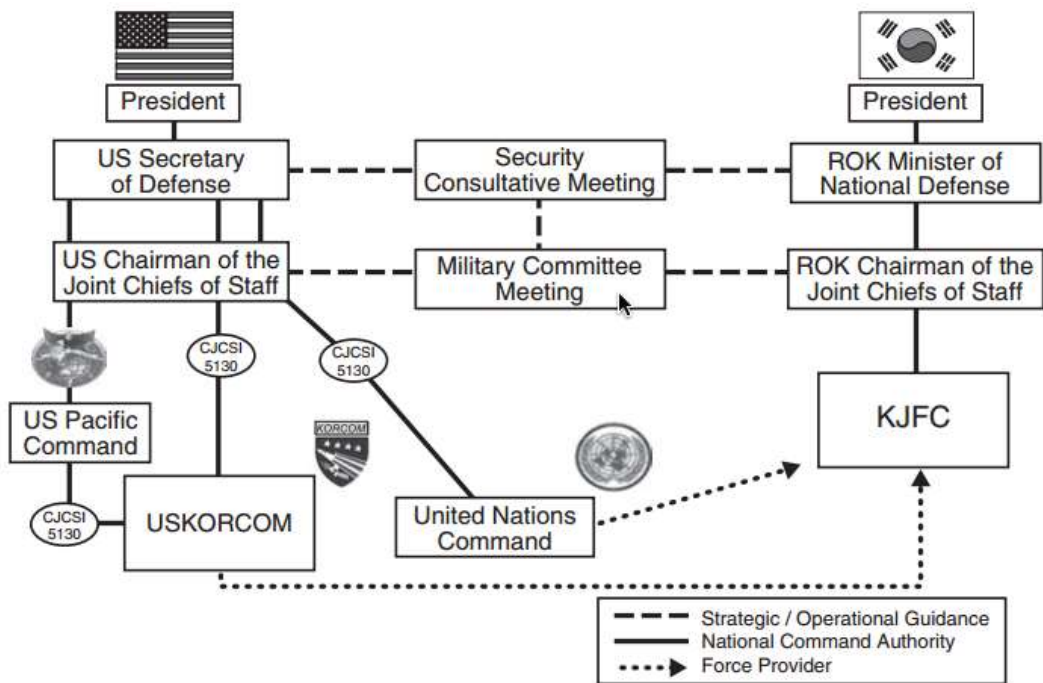


Figure 2: Proposed Wartime Structure of U.S and ROK Forces after OPCON Transition

Source: Wood, Stephen G. and Christopher A. Johnson. 2008. "The Transformation of Air Forces on the Korean Peninsula." *Air and Space Power Journal* 22(3)

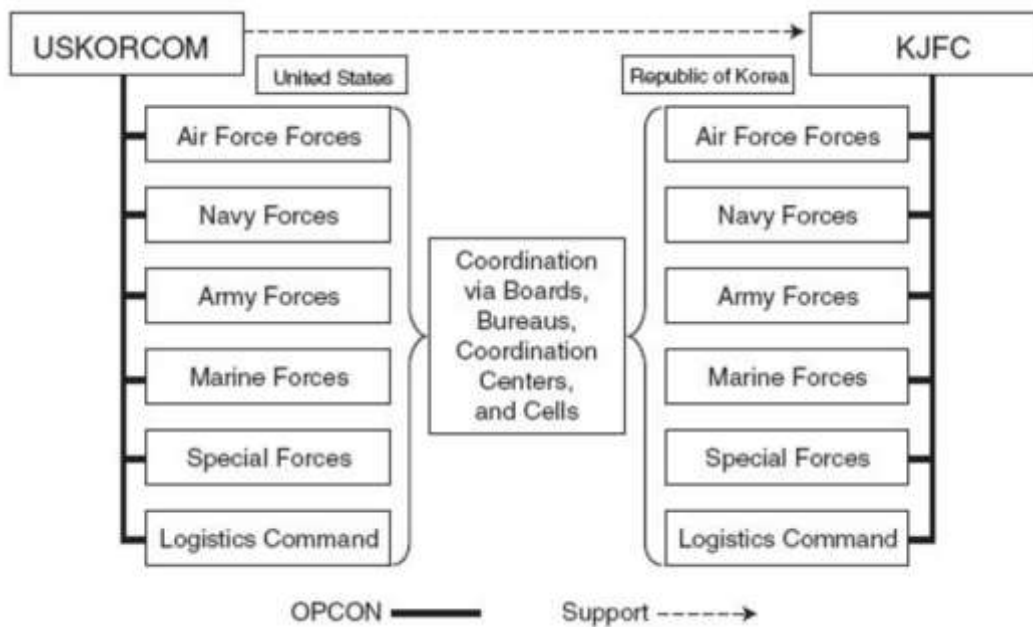


Figure 3: Proposed Wartime Structure of U.S and ROK Forces after OPCON Transition showing the U.S. in a supporting role

Source: Wood, Stephen G. and Christopher A. Johnson. 2008. "The Transformation of Air Forces on the Korean Peninsula." *Air and Space Power Journal* 22(3)

II. Research Question:

The transfer of wartime OPCON has been delayed twice throughout the history of the U.S.-ROK alliance. The reasons for the delay are principally motivated by both the security conditions on the Korean Peninsula as well as the

domestic politics of both countries. Most notably is South Korea's debate over sovereignty by the conservative and progressive political parties in relation to the involvement of the United States.

There has been a relatively small amount of research conducted on the United State's role in delaying wartime OPCON transfer. Why does the U.S. continually agree to delay the transfer of wartime OPCON? This thesis will answer the question by first looking into the significance and nature of the U.S.-ROK alliance with relation to wartime OPCON. This will be followed by and analysis of the domestic factors within the U.S. that influenced the decision to transfer wartime OPCON in 2007 and accept the delay both in 2010 and 2014.

III. Analytical Framework:

This research will analyze the U.S. role in the transfer of wartime OPCON by using a three-pronged approach. The first part will deal with the significance of the U.S.-ROK alliance. The second part will look at the nature of the alliance using the "Powerplay" rationale model developed by Victor Cha. Finally, a comparative

analysis of the situation domestically of the U.S. during the time periods that the wartime OPCON was delayed will be conducted.

IV. Literature Review

1. Literature on the debate of the OPCON transfer

Scholars have discussed the debate over the pros and cons of a wartime OPCON transfer ever since plans were formalized in 2007. The major recurring themes of said debate are U.S. security commitment and support, the threat from North Korea, military capabilities of the ROK military, and South Korean national sovereignty.

One of the supporters for the delay, Hui-Rak Park, puts emphasis on the command system of the U.S. under current operations. Using the concepts of involvement and entrapment he argues that under the CFC, strong U.S. military support is guaranteed. Park also believes that the CFC having wartime OPCON is not detrimental to national sovereignty but with respect to operations and planning, the commander of the CFC needs to consult with the Joint Chiefs of Staff from

both countries as well as the Ministry of National Defense and the Department of Defense.¹⁶ However, Ko argues against the delay by focusing on the legal implications of the U.S. command system. His findings include that the CFC commander does not have any legal duties or obligations to report to the ROK president and that the capability ROK's military has grown to the point where they can face North Korea's military threats.¹⁷

Bruce Bechtol also reaffirms the importance of the CFC by arguing that the loss of the unity of command will hurt the degree of coordination between the ROK and U.S. forces. He states that fighting under two separate military commands is a major source of controversy amongst the military officials and retired general officers. Bechtol argues that the military transformation process undertaken by South Korea is dangerous to national security as well as a strain on the government's budget. He also stresses that the threat from North Korea is significant, specifically their nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and other asymmetric warfare capabilities and that the ROK is insufficiently ready to deal

¹⁶ Park, Hui-rak. 2013. "Understanding of the Delay of Wartime OPCON Transfer and the Disbanding of the CFC." *Han Sun Policy Brief*.

¹⁷ Ko, Young-dae. 2010. "The Problem of the Delay of the Wartime OPCON transfer." *Peace Nuri Unification Nuri*.

with them.¹⁸ Other scholars such as Sung-Wook Nam echo the sentiment that South Korea cannot deal with the threats from the north after a wartime OPCON transfer and dissolution of the CFC and thinks it should be postponed until after North Korea's nuclear problem is solved.¹⁹

2. Literature on the determinants for ROK to delay the OPCON transfer

There has been significant study on the reasons why the ROK requested a delay of the transfer of wartime OPCON in 2010 and 2014. Kim first explains the five main reasons for the South Korean government to delay the OPCON transfer. The five determinants are political and military autonomy, restraint capability against North Korea, North Korea's nuclear development, continuation of the U.S.-ROK alliance, and efficiency of the U.S. Korea joint operations.²⁰ Jang, using

¹⁸ Bechtol, Bruce E. 2009. "The U.S. and South Korea: Prospects for Transformation, Combined Forces Operations, and Wartime Operational Control: Problems and Remedies." *International Journal of Korean Studies* 13(2): 71-96

¹⁹ Nam, Sung-wook. 2010. "Delay the Transfer of Wartime OPCON until the North Korean Nuclear Problem is Solved." *Korea Institute for Future Strategies*.
<http://www.kifs.org/contents/sub3/life.php?method=info&searchKey=&searchWord=&offset=&Id=2405>

²⁰ Kim, Jae-chul. 2013. "Analysis of Changing Factors of Wartime Operational Control Authority Transfer Policy and Its Alternative: Focusing on National Interest of Korea and the US." *The Korean Association of Northeast Asia Studies* 69:183-204.

Rosenau's level of analysis, divides the determinants into two factors, external and internal. Internal factors of ROK include the capability of the military, the reform of the defense system, defense budget, and the leader's perception. The external factors are North Korea's threat, incidents occurring in Northeast Asia.²¹ Lee, on the other hand, focuses on the domestic politics, especially the leaderships of the ROK presidents. The domestic politics of identity and security culture, public opinion, perceptions of threat, and the leadership of the president determined the delay of the OPCON transfer. He argues that the presidents had a greater role in determining the government's decision.²²

Finally, Han and Jung examine the reasons for the delay by analyzing political, economic, and military perspectives. They first go over the debate of the transfer and identifies which conditions are suitable. They further provide countermeasures to prepare for early transfer of the OPCON in the near future.²³

Kim further elaborates the future plans for South Korea in preparation of the transfer. He provides five problems of improvement. First, he argues for

²¹ Jang, Soon-hui. "Transfer of Wartime Operational Control over ROK Armed Forces: Postponement and Re-Postponement." PhD diss. Kyungnam University. 2014

²² Lee, Soo-hun. "A study on the Transfer of Wartime OPCON and the Readjustment of ROK-U.S. Alliance." PhD diss. Kyungnam University. 2014

²³ Han, Young-sup, and Sang-hyuck Jung. 2015. "Political, Economical, Military Analysis of the Wartime Operational Control Authority Transfer Issue: Theory, Evaluation, Countermeasures." *Journal of International Politics* 20(1): 5-36.

flexible responses against North Korea's nuclear threat. Second, ROK should develop a cooperation system for a more efficient and integrated operations. Third, both U.S. and South Korea should cooperate and bring alternative measures for "strategic flexibility" of U.S. armed forces in Korea. Fourth, South Korea should develop independent operating abilities. Fifth, the country should also improve risk management and war commanding abilities at the national level.²⁴

3. Limitations

As can be seen above, most current studies are concerning the continuing pro and con debates of the OPCON transfer. Moreover, when discussing the determinants of the final decision of the delay, the literatures mainly focus on South Korea's domestic politics, military system, and defense budgets. However, one must take into account the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance and its role in this decision. Moreover, the previous researches are heavily lacking in regards to the U.S. security environment, internal politics, and economics at the times of the delays.

²⁴ Kim, Jae-chul. 2010. "ROK-US Analysis for the Transition of Wartime Operational Control Authority and Korea's Preparation." *Asia Studies* 13(1):119-146.

V. U.S.-ROK Alliance:

1. Evolution of U.S.-ROK Alliance

The alliance between the United States and South Korea arose during the Cold War as the U.S. assisted the liberation of the peninsula from the Japanese colonization. For the United States, it was crucial to be involved in the aftermath, as they had to prevent the communist expansion in Asia. The American Military Government was established to bring political and economic stability. South Korea was then attacked by its brother country, the North who was supported by Communist China and the Soviet Union. During the Korean War, U.S. supported the South with significant military assistance. More than 54,000 American troops died throughout the duration of the conflict. At this time protecting South Korea was seen as a way to quell the spread of communism as losing the peninsula could lead to a domino effect with surrounding regional countries also succumbing to communist influence. After the war, to many the relationship between the U.S. and South Korea took on a much more symbolic tone and became permanent. This can be seen through statements such as by Christopher Hill, the former assistant

secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, even described the alliance as “the blood that bound our countries was the blood spilled on the battlefield.”²⁵

The U.S. had its focus in relief and reconstruction. They helped reconstruct the country as it received 12.7 billion U.S. dollars of military and economic aid between the years 1945 and 1975.²⁶ Not only did ROK receive the economic aid but they were also provided with military security because of U.S. troops physically present in the country. A presence that has continued for over 65 years.

For the U.S., South Korea was a country so far away, yet still they proceeded to intervene in the war and even provide assistance. Their decision intentional and calculated, as the peninsula had geopolitical and security value for the American national interest. The biggest fear for the U.S. during the cold war would be losing both Korea and Japan to the communists since they had already lost China. Post-war aid policies were mainly focused on reconstruction and to bring a Korea “with a self-supporting economy and under a free, independent, and

²⁵ Hill, Christopher. 2006. “The U.S.-Republic of Korea Alliance.” Statement to the House International Relations Committee. Washington DC, September 27, 2006.

²⁶ Fox, James. 2000. “Applying the Comprehensive Development Framework to USAID Experiences.” *OECD Working Paper Series. No. 15*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

representative government, friendly toward the United States.”²⁷ Korea would become a key role of the U.S. Cold War containment strategy.

However, the relationship between the ROK and the U.S. had several obstacles during its reconstruction period. Daniel Sneider even elaborates that there was no period of “golden age” between the two countries. The nationalism of the Koreans and the U.S. proposed policies have continuously been in conflict with each other.²⁸ In addition Lee argues that the presidents such as Syngman Rhee and Park Chung-hee who were more on the pro-American side still pursued hardline policies against the United States.²⁹ The Kwangju uprising intensified the sentiment of anti-Americanism. During the Chun Doo-hwan period, the principals such as democracy and human rights, which were pursued by the U.S., were in question. Yet, even though the relationship suffered through hardships, the U.S. maintained its commitment to South Korea.

The Cold War has ended, yet there are still 28,500 American troops stationed in the ROK. The commander of who still retains the full wartime OPCON

²⁷ Cited from the NSC 170/1 document

²⁸ Sneider, Daniel. 2006 “The U.S.-Korea Tie: Myth and Reality.” Washington Post. September 12. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/11/AR2006091100877.html>

²⁹ Lee, Chun-geun. 2012. “The Presidents Who Were Hard Against the United States: Looking over foreign policies of Lee and Park.” *Geulmadang*. Seoul. Print.

of South Korea's military forces. Defending against communism is no longer the purpose for the U.S. to remain on the peninsula. Moreover, South Korea developed into a stable democratic and economically developed country no longer needing the economic and security assistance. However, U.S. continues to spread its military influence over the southern part of the peninsula for its strategic necessities.

2. Strategic Value of South Korea to the U.S.

1-1. North Korea nuclear threat

North Korea continues to steadily improve its missile and nuclear programs with the country violating the UNSC Resolution in regards to continuous missile launches and nuclear tests. Moreover, the threat is intensifying as the North continues to double the size of their uranium-enrichment facilities and continues to develop and test a series of long-range rocket engines. The absence of denuclearization talks has intensified the likelihood of the proliferation of missile and nuclear technology to other rogue states or even non-state actors. North Korea continues to threaten not only the South but also the United States with its nuclear development.

The international community, with the United States leading, has been trying to denuclearize the country going back and forth between carrots and sticks. U.S. tried engagement strategies such as the 1994 Agreed Framework. The framework stated that the U.S. and its allies would construct two proliferation-resistant light water reactors and provide electricity for the country. In return, North would commit to dismantle its nuclear program. However, including the Agreed Framework, food aid, and energy assistance have all resulted in failure. In addition, the sticks also have proven not to be effective. North Korea seems to endure all tough sanctions. The most prominent was the sanction against North Korea's funds handled by Banco Delta Asia. This sanction, which proved to be one of the symbolic achievements of the Bush Administration, had an impact on North Korea's business and forced the country to destroy one of its reactors.³⁰

In order to have an effective impact on North Korea's nuclear disarmament, the consensus is that the U.S. must work efficiently with its close allies among whom the ROK has been the critical partner when dealing the issues of North Korea's nuclear program. As can be seen from previous cases, the U.S. unilateral hard line policies, such as that involving the Banco Delta Asia, would have been

³⁰ Revere, Evans J.R. 2013. "Facing the facts: towards a new U.S. North Korea Policy." The Brookings Institution. October.

more effective if it was in line with South Korea's policies. Beginning from 1998 during Kim, Dae Jung's presidency and until President Lee, Myung-bak was elected in 2007; South Korea was implementing the Sunshine policy to encourage more engagement and interaction. For the U.S., South Korea's strong commitment and coordination is crucial to effectively achieve the objective of North Korea's full denuclearization and counter-proliferation.

1-2. Balance against China

The strong relationship with ROK is also critical as another challenge arises from a rising power, China. The Sino-U.S. rivalry has amplified the tensions, creating what many see as an unstable order in East Asia. Beginning from the time of the Second World War, the U.S. stood strong not only economically but also militarily in the Asia-Pacific region. With America's strategic primacy and its role as a regional police, the region was able to enjoy an era of relative peace and stability. However, "the rise of China is having significant effect on the global balance of power. In particular, the power gap between China and the United States is shrinking and in all likelihood 'US strategic primacy' in this region will be no

more.”³¹ Shifrinson moreover argues that even though U.S. might still have absolute advantage in its capabilities, it is declining in relative terms. Therefore, the continuous constraint by the rise of China is urging U.S. for more retrenchment policies.³²

The transition of the balance of power from hegemonic power system to bipolar system enhances the instability and contests the current order. China is increasing its involvement in the region. It is not only opening economically but also expanding its diplomacy building an image as a global leader. By participating in more multilateral negotiations, China is enhancing its global recognition. Moreover, it is using its economic and financial power to gain more influence in the region. As China feels more that its security is threatened by the encirclement of the U.S. alliances, it will strongly push to exert more significant influence in the region.

China has recently increased its influence by creating the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). This has brought great concern to U.S. as the new bank would bring immense change and even turmoil to current

³¹ Mearsheimer, John J. 2010. “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to US Power in Asia”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3

³² Itzkowitz Shifrinson, Joshua R. and Michael Beckley. 2012. "Correspondence: Debating China's Rise and U.S. Decline." *International Security* 37(3):172-181

international economic order. Washington has counseled its allies not to join the AIIB in order to suppress the exercise of China's leadership. However, in the end, major American allies, including South Korea joined the Chinese initiative. On the contrary, U.S. is still putting great efforts to maintain its influence in Asia in order to rebalance against the rise of China's growing threat. The U.S is trying to strengthen its alliance with South Korea by deploying the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD). The purpose of this system is to intercept North Korea's longer-range missiles. However, China has been against the deployment arguing that the system was aimed to deter China and its security was at risk.

No matter how much China's power grows in the region, the U.S. will continue to play a crucial role in the East Asian region. U.S. will continue to defend its allies and act as a police in the region. Seoul's outreach towards Beijing is a strategic opportunity for Washington. Seoul, as a U.S. ally would be able to influence China to cooperate with controversies such as North Korea's nuclear armament and global issues such as global warming. For concerns such as the AIIB, South Korea would play a critical role in promoting global norms of transparency

and governance.³³ South Korea would become an important leverage against China's growing influence.

1-3. Geopolitical strategic position

“No Westerner imagined a modern Korea in 1900, none predicted it in 1945, and experts still did not envision it just a generation ago.”³⁴ South Korea was a country where no one expected to show great influence over the region. However, the country developed to become an imperative partner for the U.S. to maintain and enhance its leadership in the Asia-Pacific region. For the United States, its strong relationship with ROK is significant for its geographic location and its growing influence in East Asia.

Throughout history, the Korean peninsula has been through numerous confrontations due to its geopolitical strategic position. Its geographical positioning has attracted many great powers for its own geopolitical interests. Rivalry among greater powers led to unexpected wars and division of the peninsula. The current significance of ROK is that it is the only U.S. partner in modern times that is in

³³ Kim, Ellen. and Victor Cha. 2016. “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: South Korea’s Strategic Dilemmas with China and the United States.” *Asia Policy* 21. January.

³⁴ Cummings, Bruce. 2005. *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History*. Rev. ed. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

East Asia and which is connected to the Asian continent. Moreover, North Korea lies as a buffer state between the South and the biggest rival China. The threats of North Korea and its provocations require the U.S. to have strong military presence in the South. At the same time, ROK is also establishing a more solid relationship with China, which allows the country to promote more influence and leverage against China's growing power.

Furthermore, ROK has now developed to become a middle power in the Northeast Asia region. Northeast Asia is unique for its "Asia Paradox" which refers to the disparity between economic cooperation and political-security tensions among Northeast Asian nations. The region is evermore intertwined economically but is undergoing numerous historical disputes and territorial conflicts. With the long history of imperialism within the region, historical disputes among the three Northeast Asian countries have always been the main problem in foreign relations. The legacy has never been settled but rather has been escalated creating a tense atmosphere in the region. The politics and security among the three nations are in one way or in the other influenced by the historical disputes. We can see a similar pattern of mistrust in territorial disputes. Regarding Dokdo/Takeshima Island dispute between South Korea and Japan and Senkaku/Diayudao Island dispute

between Japan and China, neither sides have backed down to resolve the issue. On the surface, both disputes rise from the need of resources as there are large energy reserves and fishing grounds around both islands. Yet, the territorial disputes go beyond economic and military reasons. The fundamental obstacle of the disputes is not resources but, “unresolved historical grievances and the politics of national identity.”³⁵ Washington has been trying to be assist in resolving such issues in Northeast Asia by engaging in the South China Sea dispute and the Senkaku/Diayudao Islands conflict. However, such engagement strategy only seemed to provoke China and dismantle the region.

On the contrary, South Korea has grown economically and diplomatically to become the middle power in the region. The country has enhanced its international profile and has “drawn a record number of leaders to Seoul for discussions on some of the toughest problems facing the world and has earned a seat at the table based on its thought leadership than its size.”³⁶ The role for South Korea has been accompanied with a parallel development of developing its relationship with other countries. Therefore, stronger U.S.-ROK alliance would

³⁵ Valencia, Mark J. 2007. “The East China Sea dispute: Context, claims, issues, and possible solutions.” *Asian Perspective* 31(1):127-167

³⁶ Snyder, Scott. *Middle Power Korea: Contributions to the Global Agenda*. Council on Foreign Relations. June 2015.

become critical for U.S. to continue to peacefully engage and to enhance its influence in the region.

3. Nature of Alliance:

Since its inception following the end of World War II, the alliance between the United States and South Korea has been a bilateral one. This is opposed to a multilateral security alliance such as those that were developed in Europe or Southeast Asia. The forming of bilateral alliances by the U.S. is the prominent security structure in East Asia (South Korea, Republic of China, Japan) because of what Victor Cha refers to as the “powerplay” rationale in the region.³⁷ He defines this as “the construction of an asymmetric alliance designed to exert maximum control over the smaller ally’s actions” and says the original purpose of these bilateral alliances was to both contain the Soviet threat as well as prevent antagonistic behavior that could draw the United States into an undesired war.³⁸

³⁷ Cha, Victor. 2010. “Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia”. *International Security*, Vol.34(3):158-196

³⁸ *Ibid*

Even though the alliances in Europe also were formed with the common goal of establishing control, it was confined to the economic recovery and political development under the security protection of NATO.³⁹ In East Asia however, the U.S. had to worry about leaders who were diametrically opposed to communism such as Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan and Rhee Syngman in South Korea. The U.S. was concerned that these leaders would start conflicts because of their own domestic authority. Washington didn't want to be involved in any such hostilities because it was concentrated on the upcoming struggle with the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ Because of this, the U.S. saw bilateral alliances, rather than multilateral regional alliances, as the most effective system to control the anti communist leaders. The bilateral alliance system that is seen today in East Asia is a consequence of the choice made by the U.S. in the past.⁴¹

In the context of the “powerplay” rationale, OPCON is simply another way in which the U.S. could exert more control over South Korea. As Victor Cha stated, “The rationale for this extraordinary usurpation of state sovereignty was not only to facilitate combined warfighting capabilities, but also to restrain South Korea from

³⁹ *Ibid*

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

⁴¹ *Ibid*

undertaking aggressive unilateral actions against the North.”⁴² The dual purpose of OPCON has allowed the U.S. to both maintain unity of command as well as effectively deter the ROK from any unnecessary escalation of hostilities on the peninsula.

The choice of the U.S. to prefer a bilateral alliance with South Korea also has other less apparent consequences in regards to OPCON. The bilateralism helped in the ROK recovery but caused a degree of isolation from the rest of East Asia and a deficiency of regional reconciliation. “The legacy of bilateralism remains deeply ingrained in the thinking of successive postwar generations in both countries, which naturally weakens the enthusiasm for new multilateral structures.”⁴³ This in turn made South Korea to be deeply reliant on the United States especially in regards to security. Therefore, because of their reliance, ROK has always been afraid of a decline in the U.S. military commitment, primarily in the form of withdrawal of some or all of the troops. The fear of abandonment has only been deepened by the historical actions of the U.S. and has taken hold in the minds of many in South Korea forming a connection with the transfer of wartime OPCON. The result of which is a misconception that if wartime OPCON was

⁴² *Ibid*

⁴³ *Ibid*

transferred back to ROK, the American military obligation to the peninsula and strength on the peninsula would decrease.

1-1. Escalation Deterrent:

Throughout the history of the alliance, the U.S. has used the fact that they possess OPCON as a way to prevent South Korea from taking unilateral action that would escalate tensions and cause conflict with North Korea. In 1953, the United Nations Command did not want to be drawn back into hostilities with the North. Therefore they needed to ensure that no unilateral action would be initiated by President Rhee against North Korean or Chinese forces. Having control over the operations of the ROK military was a way to accomplish this. On top of this in a now declassified document from the National Security Council, they stated that if unilateral action was taken, it would not be supported by the UN. More specifically unilateral ROK action would cause the UN to (1) Cease all military support by air, ground, and sea; (2) Cease all logistics support; (3) Immediately stop all economic aid to South Korea; and (4) Only take actions that would spare UN forces from

harm, avoid getting involved in renewed conflict, and provide stable security.⁴⁴

Any unilateral action by President Rhee never happened, as he knew without the help of UN forces he could not win.

Under the Park Chung-Hee government, the United States had to again use their power in order to stop escalation of hostilities with North Korea. In 1968 there was a raid on the Blue House when thirty-three commandos from the north infiltrated the south by crossing the DMZ on a mission to assassinate President Park.⁴⁵ Two days after that, the USS Pueblo was seized by North Korea and its eighty-three member crew taken hostage. President Park wanted to take military action in response even calling for retaliatory U.S. air strikes on North Korean military targets. He also suggested that within two days his forces could be in Pyongyang. Again the U.S. was able to avoid a military response preferring rather to hold a series of negotiations concerning the USS Pueblo and thus avoid any unnecessary escalation with the north.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ National Security Council 170/1. 1953. "U.S. Objectives and Courses of Action in Korea," November 20, Top Secret, in *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. 15

⁴⁵ Park, Tae G. 2012. *An Ally and Empire: Two Myths of South Korea-United States Relations, 1945-1980*. Translated by David Cho. Seongnam: Academy of Korean Studies Press

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

Again in 2010, an escalation was prevented under the Lee Myung-Bak administration. The shelling of Yeonpyeong Island was an attack on South Korean territory that surprised the nation and took the life of four people. In response, the South Korean administration wanted a quick and heavy response. According to former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates the U.S. talked the Lee Myung-Bak out of airstrikes. Alluding that there was evidence that China was helping to calm the situation he stated, “South Korea’s original plans for retaliation were, we thought disproportionately aggressive, involving both aircraft and artillery. We were worried the exchanger could escalate dangerously.”⁴⁷ These are just a couple of instances in which the U.S. was able to prevent South Korea from taking unilateral action against North Korea and avoid further hostilities, armed conflict, and possible an outbreak of all-out war.

1-2. Unity of Command:

For thousands of years wars have been fought for countless reasons. Whether in the name of conquest, liberation or religion, by the order of a monarch

⁴⁷Gates, R. M. 2014. *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*. New York: Penguin Random House

or the consensus of the people, for the accumulation of wealth or the propagation of ideals, war has remained a constant. From wooden sticks to iron swords, bow and arrows to sniper rifles, catapults to nuclear warheads, weapons and their ability to kill and destroy have evolved. Regardless of the reason for fighting or the technology used, there have always existed common “nonphysical factors that affect the conduct of operations at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.”⁴⁸ The U.S. military recognizes nine of these “principles of war” that are characteristics of a successful military operation. They include objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, and simplicity.⁴⁹ These can be used as an analyzing tool for offering insight in determining the reason for the outcome of a past war, to educate current and upcoming military leaders, and to guide operations for any future conflicts.

Unity of command has been an integral part to how the U.S. conducts warfare operations. Unity of command means “all forces operate under a single commander with the requisite authority to direct all forces employed in pursuit of a common purpose”. This is done “to ensure unity of effort under one responsible

⁴⁸ Headquarters Department of the Army. 2008. *Operations*. Field Manual 3-0. [us.army.mil/fm3-0/FM3-0.pdf](http://www.army.mil/fm3-0/FM3-0.pdf)

⁴⁹ US Joint Chiefs of Staff. 2011. *Joint Operations*. Joint Publication 3-0. http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_0.pdf

commander for every objective.⁵⁰ This means that if the commander in charge makes a judgment or issues an order, every other subordinate commander accepts it. This serves to increase the cohesion and decrease the confusion in military operations, which in turn leads to more efficient use of forces, ultimately resulting in victory. Although it is known by different names, the majority of militaries worldwide also incorporate the concept into their own principles of war. Even though unity of command is not the only factor for victory in military operations, its importance in both execution and planning is recognized by most countries.

Because the military operations have increasingly become combined or coalition efforts, it has become harder to maintain unity of command. Many times a nation may be unwilling to give authority of their forces to the commander from a different nation for fear of losing sovereignty. This is why the US military created the concept of “unity of effort”. “During multinational operations and interagency coordination, unity of command may not be possible, but the requirement for unity of effort becomes paramount. Unity of effort—the coordination and cooperation toward common objectives, even if the participants are not necessarily part of the

⁵⁰ *Ibid*

same command or organization—is the product of successful unified action.”⁵¹ In the case in which unity of command is not possible, unity of effort is the next best option. Essential to unity of effort however is the cooperation and coordination voluntarily of all nations to the decisions made by the head nation. There is also no way to guarantee that parties involved will do what is required and no way to enforce responsibility for mistakes or negligence. Therefore unity of command is preferred because of the obligation to unconditionally obey orders that are given by a head commander.

Lack of unity of command has led many great military defeats. One of the earliest recorded examples was the Battle of Cannae in 216 B.C. This was a battle in which the greatly outnumbered Carthaginians who were led by Hannibal defeated the Romans. One of the biggest reasons for their defeat was the command system in place. The system consisted of two tribunes who shared leadership. This led to disagreements as to how to fight Hannibal and an inability to adjust to the enemies maneuvers because of the lack of consistent commands.⁵²

For the United States the genesis of this principle can be seen when General Ulysses S. Grant was appointed as the General-in Chief of the Army in a move

⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁵² Greene, Robert. 2006. *The 33 Strategies of War*. London: Profile Books

meant to unite the military efforts of the north under a single authority.⁵³ In World War I General Ferdinand Foch was given command of all American, British, and French forces in the western front in response to German offensive operations. This granted a degree of unity of purpose of allied strategic planning that was unprecedented. “The principle of unity of command is undoubtedly the correct one for the Allies to follow. I do not believe that it is possible to have unity of action without a supreme commander. We have already experienced enough in trying to coordinate the operations of the Allied Armies without success. There has never been real unity of action. Such coordination between two or three armies is impossible no matter who the commanders-in-chief may be. Each commander-in-chief is interested in his own army, and cannot get the other commander’s point of view or grasp the problem as a whole. I am in favor of a supreme commander and believe that the success of the Allied cause depends upon it. I think the necessary action should be taken by this council at once. I am in favor of conferring the supreme command upon General Foch.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Donaldson, John W. E. and Archibald F. Becke. 1907. *Military History Applied to Modern Warfare*. 2d Ed. (2012), London: Hugh Press

⁵⁴ Pershing John J. 1989. *My Experiences in the First World War, Volume I*. 1st Ed., New York: Da Capo Press

After the war was over it was acknowledged by the leadership of the allies that unity of command of forces from different nations was the best way to attain consistency and unity of effort at an operational level. American General John Pershing recognized, “I do not believe it is possible to have unity of action without a supreme commander.”⁵⁵ Because of their validity and his former relationship with General Pershing, these sentiments were carried forward by General George Marshall who worked to make the leaders in Washington adopt the principle of unity of command. After the entrance of the United States into World War II following the attacks on Pearl Harbor, General Marshall resolved that, “unified command in theatre would solve nine-tenths of the problems of British-American military collaboration”.⁵⁶ The End of World War II would eventually be brought about by the surrender of Germany to a combined force of allied powers under the command of General Dwight Eisenhower.⁵⁷

At the outbreak of the Korean War 16 nations sent troops to the peninsula in order to repel the attack from the north and to restore security. At this time the

⁵⁵ *Ibid*

⁵⁶ Rice, Anthony J. 1997. “Command and Control: The Essence of Coalition Warfare.” *Parameters* Spring:152-167

<http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/97spring/rice.htm>

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

United Nations Security Council made the recommendation “that all Members providing military forces and other assistance.... make such forces and other assistance available to a unified command under the United States of America.”⁵⁸

From the appointment of General MacArthur to the signing of the Armistice Agreement, the entire Korean War was fought under the unified command of one commander.

The United States however has first hand historical knowledge of what can happen in the case that they fail to establish unity of command. The Vietnam War was a case where previously learned lessons were paid no heed and a parallel command structure was chosen instead. In summation of some of the chaos that ensued, “no master plan ever integrated US and South Vietnamese effort.

Commander in Chief, Pacific, headquartered in Hawaii, was responsible for the air war. COMUSMACV (Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) conducted ground operations. The US Ambassador in Saigon handled diplomatic matters. Nearly forty South Vietnamese organizations engaged in rural reforms in

⁵⁸ *United Nations Security Council Resolution 84* “Complaint of Aggression Upon the Republic of Korea.” (7 July 1950)

1966. The resultant patchwork made it impossible for US Armed Forces and their allies to prosecute the Vietnam War most effectively”⁵⁹

South Vietnam had been divided into four regions. Each was home to one corps headquarters of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Because of this, the regions were called Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ). On the U.S. side there was the Military Assistance Command (MACV) as well as the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC). MACV possessed OPCON of all operations carried out by U.S. forces in South Vietnam and CINCPAC commanded all other U.S. operations that happened in Laos and North Vietnam. On top of this, each Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) region had a separate corps level U.S. command, whose commander not only directed U.S. military forces in his area but served as the chief advisor to the ARVN regional commander.⁶⁰ The commander for U.S. Forces in Vietnam was General William C. Westmoreland. He thought that the advisor role would give the American commander “controlling influence” but no command authority in respect to their Vietnamese counterparts. In order to show the Vietnamese that they were in charge of their own country Westmoreland took

⁵⁹ Collins, John M. 2002. *Military Strategy: Principles, Practices, and Historical Perspectives*. Washington DC: Potomac Books

⁶⁰ Palmer, Bruce. 2002. *The 25 Year War America's Military Role in Vietnam*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky

up a supporting role by continually deferring to the Vietnamese leadership.⁶¹ By creating a parallel command relationship and not possessing OPCON of South Vietnamese forces, in each CTZ the two countries forces were carrying out independent ground operations of each other. To complicate things even more South Korea had at the height 50,000 troops in Vietnam. This was a number second to only the U.S. An OPCON relationship was never established between the two countries but instead operations were of a joint nature with South Korea having their own area of operations.⁶²

General Westmoreland offered many justifications as to why he opted for a parallel command structure. The Vietnamese aversion and sensitivity to having an U.S. commander, wanting to avoid complications of integrating foreign staff into his own, and wanting the Vietnamese to lead their own defense were just a few among them. In the end he thought that his own personal advising and persuasion to the Vietnamese leaders would be enough and didn't need to establish any formal unity of command in the form of a combined integrated operations command with

⁶¹ Westmoreland, William C. 1989. *A Soldier Reports*, New York: Da Capo Press

⁶² Summers, Harry G. 2007. *American Strategy in Vietnam: A Critical Analysis*. New York: Dover Publications Inc.

a U.S. commander at the top.⁶³ This was a decision that would be seen as a mistake by commanders when looking back. General Bruce Palmer who was a commander in Vietnam wrote, “In retrospect the advantages of having U.S. commanders exercise operational control over other national forces, especially the South Vietnamese, would have far outweighed the drawbacks, for the fact is we did not generate our best combined efforts.”⁶⁴ Ultimately, there were many contributing factors for the defeat of the United States in Vietnam but having no unity of command was a significant one that proved detrimental to military efficiency and restricted operational options.

The war in Afghanistan is a second example in which the U.S. and coalition forces were unable to establish a coherent unity of command structure and therefore the efforts suffered. “Unified command structures and unity of command have been forsaken during the ad hoc evolution of the ISAF and OEF missions.

⁶³ Westmoreland, William C. 1989. *A Soldier Reports*, New York: Da Capo Press

⁶⁴ Palmer, Bruce. 2002. *The 25 Year War America's Military Role in Vietnam*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky

Unity of command – optimally with all aspects of the counter-insurgency coming under a single omnipotent leader – is essential.”⁶⁵

In 2001, when the U.S. began large-scale operations in Afghanistan, the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) coalition was formed. At this time the command rested with the commander of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). The commander also spearheaded the coalition efforts.⁶⁶ There was no combined forces command set up in which to ensure true unity of command. This oversight was not objected to by other coalition partners out of sympathy for the U.S after the 9/11 attacks and because most thought that the fighting in Afghanistan would not last long.⁶⁷ At the same time there were four nations that were permitted to work on separate tasks outside of the CENTCOM command structure.

A separate and distinct coalition began in 2002 under the title of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Originally a British led mission, it became under the leadership of the North Atlantic Trade Organization (NATO) in

⁶⁵ Hope, Ian. 2012. “Coalition Counter-Insurgency Warfare in Afghanistan”, In *No Easy Task: Fighting in Afghanistan*, edited by Bernd Horn and Emily Spencer, 83-100. Ontario: Dundurn

⁶⁶ Hope, Ian. 2008. “Unity of Command in Afghanistan: A Forsaken Principle of War.” *Carlisle Papers in Security Strategy*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College

⁶⁷ *Ibid*

2003.⁶⁸ Continuity of command was very weak as the ISAF commander was rotated every six months. In 2006, the Combined Forces Command transferred the command of the fight on the ground in the entire country to ISAF. All of the other processes were divided between the U.S. Special Operations Command, NATO, and CENTCOM.⁶⁹ Although the results of the war were not nearly as catastrophic as they were during the Vietnam War, unity of command issues surely impacted war fighting capabilities throughout the 13-year campaign until 2014 when the coalition switched from a combat role to one of training, advising, and assisting.

The United States has seen first hand what can be accomplished during wartime with a strong adherence to the principle of unity of command. On the other hand they have seen what can happen when this principle is either not upheld such as in Afghanistan or intentionally passed over in favor of a parallel command structure like in Vietnam. Although the eventual outcome of the two wars was very different, it is certain that military leaders and advisors today remember both as cautionary tales for maintaining unity of command. It is unknown to what degree a transfer of OPCON would impact the unity of command in South Korea.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*

⁶⁹ *Ibid*

Organizations inherently want to avoid uncertainty.⁷⁰ This uncertainty of what would happen in the event of wartime hostilities with North Korea makes South Korea repeatedly ask for a delay of OPCON transfer. At the same time, the uncertainty causes the U.S., and its military (which is a huge organization), to be more willing to continue accepting the request for OPCON transfer postponement.

1-3. Fear of Abandonment (Alliance Security Dilemma):

In an asymmetric alliance, dependence by the weaker party on the stronger party leads two different kinds of fears. These two fears are abandonment and entrapment. Many times if one of the fears increases, then the other one may decrease. The probability of abandonment is mostly determined by an ally's commitment and dependence but also takes into consideration the ally's historical behavior.⁷¹ In the case of the U.S.-ROK alliance, the fear of the U.S. withdrawing troops from the peninsula and decreasing their commitment to South Korean defense is deeply ingrained. It is a fear that is rooted in history. When discussing

⁷⁰ Allison, Graham T. and Phillip Zelikow. 1999. *Essence of Decision*. 2d Ed., New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers

⁷¹ Snyder, Glenn H. 1997. *Alliance Politics*. New York: Cornell University Press

OPCON transfer it is a fear that is perpetuated by the media and ultimately based on a misconception of what the transfer would mean.

Historically the numbers of U.S. troops in South Korea have fluctuated from a high of 326,863 during the Korean War⁷² to around 28,500 today⁷³ In 1949, after the National Security Council agreed on the decision and President Truman approved, all American combat troops were withdrawn from the Korean Peninsula. This presented a significant threat to the national security of South Korea. Removal of troops was the most important decision that the United States made in the time period preceding the Korean War.⁷⁴ Because the troops were no longer there to act as a deterrent against aggressions, it was one of the most significant events that led to the outbreak of war.⁷⁵

Remembering what happened the first time when U.S. troops were withdrawn, the fear of abandonment was exacerbated by President Nixon, the Vietnam War, and the normalizing relations with China. Only July 25th, 1969

⁷² Kane, Tim. 2004. Global U.S. Troop Deployment, 1950-2003. *The Heritage Foundation*, October 27, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2004/10/global-us-troop-deployment-1950-2003>

⁷³ Kay, Sean. 2015. *Global Security in the Twenty-First Century*. 3d Ed., Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield

⁷⁴ Stueck, William W. 1981. *Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press

⁷⁵ Chay, Jong-suk. 2002. *Unequal Partners in Peace and War: The Republic of Korea and the United States, 1948-1953*. Westport, CT: Praeger

President Nixon put forth his plan, called the Nixon Doctrine, for shifting the international policies of the United States in Asia. By this time, the United States had been fighting in Vietnam for years requiring a huge manpower commitment. Under this doctrine the U.S. would provide military and economic aid when it was requested but it would be the responsibility of the threatened nation to provide the principle manpower necessary for its defense. This meant that the U.S. wanted to reduce the number of troops in Asia.⁷⁶ One March 26th, 1970, President Park Chung-Hee was informed that in accordance with the Nixon Doctrine, Washington planned to withdraw the whole 7th Infantry Division, which totaled approximately 20,000 soldiers. The division was withdrawn in 1971.⁷⁷ President Park could hardly believe that an entire division was withdrawn and saw this as meaning that if North Korea invaded the south again the U.S. would not come to the rescue.⁷⁸ At the height of the Vietnam War, South Korea had around 50,000 troops deployed there. In response to American reductions on the Korean peninsula, it was announced that ROK would reduce their forces in Vietnam. Washington implored them not to do

⁷⁶ Bechtol, Bruce E. 2014. "Aftermath: 1953-2013", In *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Korean War*, edited by James I. Matray and Donald W. Broose, 421-434. Hampshire England: Ashgate.

⁷⁸ Oberdorfer, Don. and Robert Carlin. 2013. *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*. New York: Basic Books

this as it could create a security vacuum. Praying on their fear of abandonment, Washington threatened to remove even more U.S. forces from the Korean peninsula if Seoul executed their Vietnam withdrawal plans.⁷⁹

President Nixon's détente with China caused South Korea even more reason for concern. One of the big reasons that the U.S. had entered the Korean War was because they saw it as not only a North Korean invasion but also as a larger act of aggression by communist powers. It was a huge shift in policy for the U.S. to send delegations seeking cooperation and considering normalizing relations with the Chinese whom they had been fighting some 20 years earlier. It caused doubt in South Korea about the commitment of whether or not the U.S. would do anything to counter any communist forces or threats on the peninsula. Seoul was worried about what this rapprochement might mean for the U.S.-ROK alliance and what requests China might ask, like the withdrawal of all U.S. forces by the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Park, Tae G. 2012. *An Ally and Empire: Two Myths of South Korea-United States Relations, 1945-1980*. Translated by David Cho. Seongnam: Academy of Korean Studies Press

⁸⁰ Ostermann, Christian F. and James F. Person. 2011. *The Rise and Fall of Détente on the Korean Peninsula, 1970-1974*. Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/RiseAndFall_Part1.pdf

When President Carter was elected in 1977, he called for a total withdrawal of all U.S. ground forces in South Korea. This had been part of his campaign strategy and upon becoming president the plan was constructed without conferring with ROK leadership. Part of the reason for President Carter's wish to pull out troops was the way in which President Park often ignored the human rights of his people. After U.S. ground forces left, President Carter affirmed that they would still abide by their treaty obligations, help to improve the ROK military capabilities, and offer air power in the form of keeping the air force on the peninsula. After commissioning a military officer to assess the military capabilities of North Korea, he evaluated that they were far superior than any previous analysis had concluded. The result in turn was that the Carter administration issued a statement saying, "It is the judgment of the United States that further reductions of our combat elements in Korea should await credible indications that a satisfactory military balance has been restored and a reduction in tension is underway."⁸¹

The tumultuous past of the U.S. relocating, withdrawing, and threatening to withdraw forces from South Korea has left a lasting impression on the minds of

⁸¹ Carter, Jimmy. "United States Troop Withdrawals From the Republic of Korea Statement by the President." Speech, Washington, DC, July 20, 1979. *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32622>

ROK policy makers. They have seen what happened in 1949 when there was no American deterrent and the fickle way in which U.S. politicians treated the number of troops issue despite the impact that it would have on ROK security. Thus based on historical memories, the ROK is reticent to do anything that might adversely affect U.S. commitment to the peninsula.

OPCON transfer and the fear of abandonment have formed a relationship in the minds of many South Koreans. This association between the two has created a misconception that if the U.S. were to transfer wartime OPCON to the ROK then there would be a decrease in military support and commitment. This idea can be seen coming from both the U.S. and ROK sides propagated through the media. For example, on the side of the United States, a retired General said that the transfer of command was the first step to U.S. troops being withdrawn and that it was a “slippery slope”.⁸² On the side of South Korea, this view is expressed principally through specific political factions. According to the conservatives, the OPCON

⁸² Lee, Chi-dong and Hyo-dong Roh. 2013. “OPCON transfer may usher in withdrawal of U.S. troops from Korea: ex-general.” Yonhap News Agency. November 18. <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2013/11/18/13/0301000000AEN20131118000100315F.html>

transfer would lead to either a decrease or withdrawal of U.S. forces.⁸³ These views represent a misconception of what wartime OPCON transfer means and simply serves to play upon the fear of abandonment that has been continually reinforced throughout the history of the alliance. On top of the historical influence that causes increasing fears about U.S. troops leaving, future issues facing South Korea serve to amplify these fears. One prime example would be of the imminent demographic crisis facing the ROK military. Because of a decreasing population there are less young men who are available for military service. By the year 2020 it is estimated that the number of active duty military is expected to decrease from the peak of 690,000 which is what it was in 2004 to 500,000. That would be a decline of 28%.⁸⁴ This makes U.S. troops on the peninsula to be even more necessary in the minds of South Koreans.

The logic behind the idea that a transfer of wartime OPCON would cause a withdrawal or reduction of U.S. troops is flawed and based on conjecture. The ones who have pointed to a lessening of U.S. troops and commitment were not involved

⁸³ Kwon, Hyuk-chul. 2010. "'OPCON Redemption' Misunderstandings and Truths." Hankyoreh, June 25. <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/defense/427343.html>

⁸⁴ Bennett, Bruce. 2011. "The Korean Defense Reform 307 Plan." *The Asan Institute for Policy Studies*. April 18. <http://en.asaninst.org/contents/issue-brief-no-8-the-korean-defense-reform-307-plan-by-bruce-w-bennett-the-rand-corporation1/>

in the decision making process and do not directly influence policy. Those with intimate knowledge of defense policy, to include the U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel have said even before the second delay of OPCON transfer that the U.S. would not reduce their military presence in Korea.⁸⁵ Hagel reaffirmed this sentiment at the time of the decision for the delay.⁸⁶ Figure 4 shows that in 2011, before the second delay of wartime OPCON transfer, the U.S. planned no reduction in troop levels but to the contrary projected an increase in DOD personnel. As of 2016, troop levels have remained at approximately 28,500, showing that the number has not been affected by defense sequestration. Also in 2016, the largest joint exercises ever were held in March to further demonstrate their commitment.⁸⁷ In addition, the Mutual Defense Treaty, in which the U.S. promises to fully assist in defending the ROK in the case of an attack, remains in effect even after there is

⁸⁵ Whitlock, Craig. 2013. "Hagel visit to South Korea focuses attention on large U.S. military presence, construction." The Washington Post, October 2. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/hagel-visit-to-south-korea-focuses-attention-on-large-us-military-presence-construction/2013/10/02/fca40e0c-2b52-11e3-83fa-b82b8431dc92_story.html

⁸⁶ Chang, Jae-soon. 2014. "Hagel: U.S. has no plan to cut American troop levels in S. Korea." Yonhap News Agency, October 24. <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2014/10/24/39/0200000000AEN20141024000300315F.html>

⁸⁷ Watson, Ivan. and K. J. Kwon. 2016. "South Korea, U.S. deter North Korea with 'largest ever' military drill." CNN. March 12. <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/12/asia/south-korea-us-military-drill/>

a transfer of wartime OPCON. Finally, because Seoul shares the costs of keeping U.S. troops in Korea, it is cheaper for Washington to keep them there rather than to have them stationed in the U.S.⁸⁸ Any changes to the number of troops deployed to the peninsula would have to come from the highest levels of the U.S. government. On top of this, there would have to be consensus among all of the parties involved which would make any unilateral decisions and actions more difficult.

⁸⁸ Browne, Ryan. 2016. "Top General: Cheaper to keep troops in South Korea than U.S." CNN. April 21st. <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/04/21/politics/trump-troops-korea-japan-cheaper-abroad/>

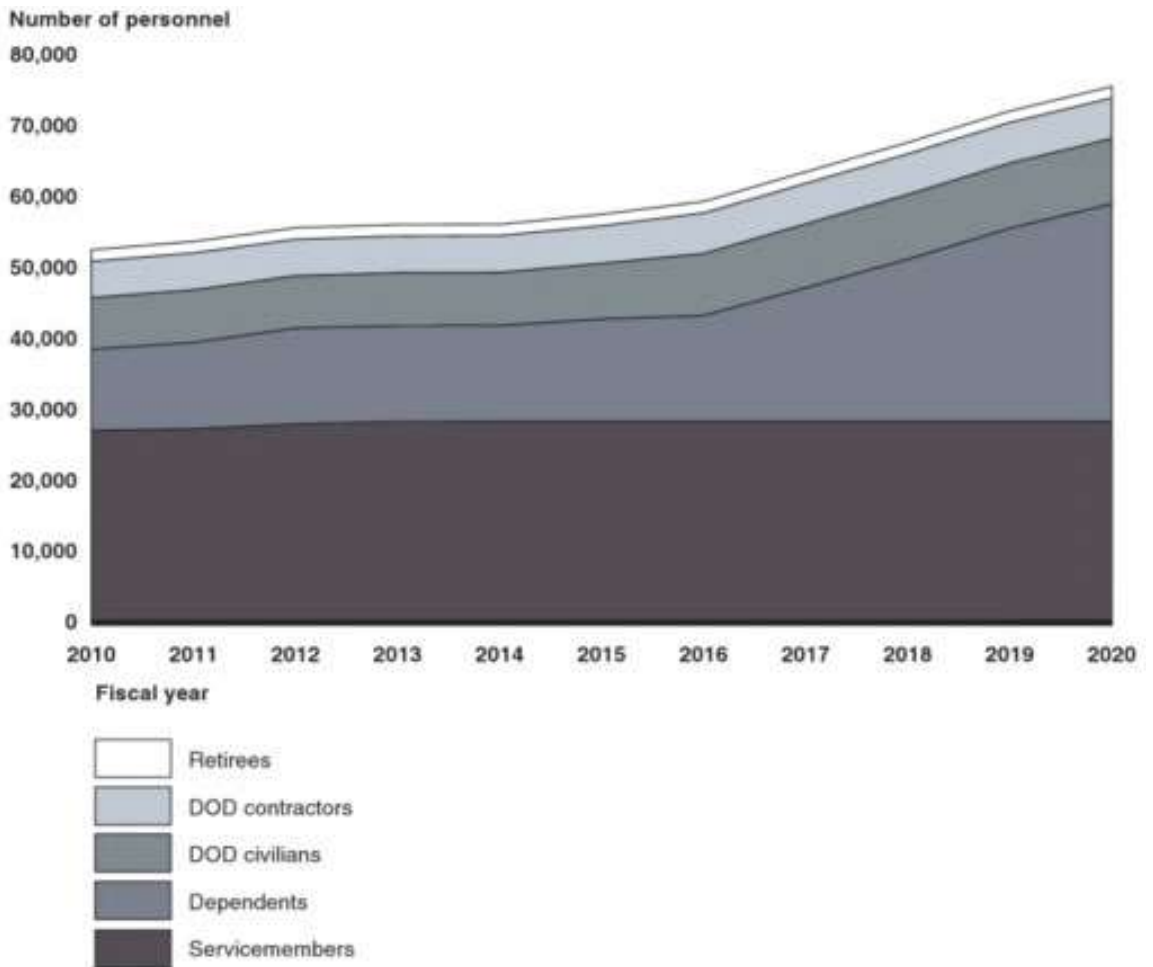


Figure 4: Projected Changes to the DOD population in South Korea through 2020

Source: United States Government Accountability Office. 2011. *Defense Management: Comprehensive Cost Information and Analysis of Alternatives Needed to Assess Military Posture in Asia*. Washington D.C.

VI. 2007 Wartime OPCON Transfer Decision

1. Security Backdrop: Post-9/11

When the cold war ended, the American military presence overseas was greatly reduced. 60 percent of bases were either closed down or handed over to the host governments. Along with this, approximately 300,000 military personnel were returned to the United States.⁸⁹ In the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks, there was a shift in both the international security environment as well as the strategy the United States would employ in dealing with the new threats. The attacks showed that “the geographic position of the United States no longer guarantees the immunity from direct attack on its population, territory, and infrastructure.”⁹⁰ In this new security context, the concept of who the enemy was also had to be redefined. According to the National Security Strategy in 2002, “the enemy is not a single political regime or person or religion or ideology; the enemy

⁸⁹ United States Department of Defense. 2004. *Strengthening U.S. Global Defense Posture*

⁹⁰ United States Department of Defense. 2001. *Quadrennial Defense Review*

is terrorism- premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents.”⁹¹

The unpredictability of the global security situation and nature of the threats that they had to face caused the Bush administration to reevaluate the ability of U.S. forces to respond quickly and efficiently to terrorism. This was the inception of the principle of “strategic flexibility” in respect to the U.S. forces stationed in Korea. It suggested that if necessary the U.S. might deploy troops from the peninsula to other theatres.⁹² This impacted the USFK posture and caused officials to look to the future of the alliance and be willing to increase the autonomy of the ROK military. The result was the agreement in the form of the Land Partnership Plan in 2002 in which the USFK was to be repositioned with the Second Infantry Division moving from north of the Han River (Uijeongbu and Dongducheon) to south of the Han River (Pyeongtaek).⁹³ Later in 2004 as a result of the ROK-US Alliance Policy Initiatives, it was agreed that the CFC would also be relocated from Yongsan to

⁹¹ White House. 2002. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, D.C.

⁹² Nicksch, Larry. 2014. “The US Security Role in South Korea: Issues that Test South Korean Confidence in the US Commitment” In *Changing Security Dynamics in East Asia*, edited by Elena Atanassova-Cornelis and Frans-Paul van der Putten, 89-108. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁹³ Sawyer, Nina. 2006. “USFK Realignment and Reduction”. *SAIS U.S.-Korea Yearbook*. <http://uskoreainstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/2006-SAIS-USKI-YB-Chapt2.pdf>

Pyeongtaek. That same year in June, the United States deployed 12,500 troops from the peninsula to Iraq, reducing the USFK troop numbers by almost one-third.⁹⁴

The changing international arrangement and the pervasive terrorism threat led to the creation of global posture review concept, ushering in the repositioning and downsizing of the USFK and affecting the U.S.-ROK alliance. Therefore the security backdrop of the U.S. could have been a correlational component of the decision in favor of wartime OPCON transfer. It was later articulated that, “This change in our forces’ operating patterns- from static defenses to frequent expeditionary operations- combined with advances in military capabilities, an increasingly uncertain global strategic environment, and stresses on the force, led President George W. Bush to conclude that a comprehensive review of U.S. global defense posture was needed.”⁹⁵

The international security situation at the time meant that there was the perception of a decreased importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance. Because of this in a global context, there was a reduced focus regarding the alliance. All of which

⁹⁴ *Ibid*

⁹⁵ United States Department of Defense. 2004. *Strengthening U.S. Global Defense Posture*

supported the U.S. pursuing policies and changes that would lead to a restructuring of the current alliance composition to include wartime OPCON.

2. Internal Politics: Bush's Neoconservative Administration

George W. Bush was elected as the president in the year 2000 and then reelected in 2004. Upon his election, he chose to fill his cabinet and other positions close to him with people who worked with his father, George H. W. Bush, while he was the president. These were mostly staunch anti-communists from the sixties and seventies who rose to political positions of power and influence during the time of Ronald Reagan. They had a significant effect on the policy directions that was taken during the Bush administration.

Foreign policy under the George W. Bush administration was characterized by power diplomacy and was known as the "Bush Doctrine". In the eyes of the neoconservatives, although hegemony was maintained in the post-Cold War period, the United States' security was threatened by terrorism. This belief was only exacerbated following the attacks on September 11th. Because of this, increased military capabilities were necessary for both a preemptive attack as well as a

preventative war. At the core of the threat to the United States was the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in conjunction with terrorism.⁹⁶ On January 29, 2002 in his State of the Union Address, President Bush said that Iraq, North Korea, and Iran were all sponsors of terror and labeled them as the “Axis of Evil.”⁹⁷

This was a substantial departure from what had been employed under the previous Clinton administration. Whereas Clinton had used a strategy of conflict avoidance, Bush operated a “Fight-to-Win Strategy.”⁹⁸ The Bush Doctrine for many in the international community was seen as very negative and American unilateralism resulted in the spread of Anti-American sentiment. This extended to South Korea where the relationship between the Roh and Bush governments had soured causing shifts in the alliance to include the wartime OPCON transfer.

During this time the war efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan took the focus of the U.S. national interest. The principle of strategic flexibility was a key part of the Global War on Terror and thus the Bush administration was willing to use it as a

⁹⁶ Brook, Yaron and Alex Epstein. 2007. “Neoconservative Foreign Policy: An Autopsy”. *The Objective Standard* 2(2)

⁹⁷ Wagner, Alex. 2002. “Bush Labels North Korea, Iran, Iraq an ‘Axis of Evil’”. Arms Control Association. March 1. https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002_03/axismarch02

⁹⁸ Feste, Karen A. 2011. *America Responds to Terrorism: Conflict Resolution Strategies of Clinton, Bush, and Obama*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

the reason for changing its relations with allies. One such instance was when the U.S. notified South Korea that they would be withdrawing 12,500 troops from the peninsula because of the need for more numbers in Iraq. ROK had been hesitant to deploy troops to Iraq but in order to avoid further downsizing of USFK, South Korean forces were deployed and the reduction was delayed.

From the year 2003, regarding the ROK-U.S. alliance, the Bush government had concentrated on realignment to include relocation of the USFK in the name of the principle of strategic flexibility. The Bush administration even alerted the Roh administration that there would be a reduction in the USFK if ROK troops were not deployed to help the war effort in Iraq. On top of this, with the agreement of the Land Partnership Plan and the Yongsan Relocation Plan, high ranking American officials saw it as a resolution of long standing issues within the alliance.

As a result of U.S. decisions within the alliance and progressive ROK politics, it was agreed by both parties at the 2006 Washington summit that the wartime OPCON would be transferred. They concurred that it shouldn't become a political issue and that there should be a great deal of cooperation amongst the military experts. The date was set for April 17, 2012. Despite this, some

neoconservatives such as Donald Rumsfeld who was the Secretary of Defense wanted to move up the transfer to 2009.

Ultimately, the Bush government's neoconservative shift of priority to the Middle East, the policy of strategic flexibility, and reduction of the USFK accelerated the decision to accept the transfer of wartime OPCON. The U.S. also needed the alliance relationship to adhere to their new strategy in a global context as well as they needed to garner ROK support for their efforts in the Global War on Terror.

VII. 2010 Delay of Wartime OPCON Transfer

1. Security Backdrop: Rise of China and the Global Financial Crisis

The time between the agreement to transfer wartime OPCON and the first time that it was delayed represented a shift in American priorities. Although there was still a prevalent North Korean threat (second nuclear test in 2009 and the sinking of the Cheonan killing 46 sailors in 2010), the shift was caused mainly by a rising China. In 2005, China was behind the U.S., Japan, and Germany to be fourth

place in economic power. They then reached the number three spot in 2008 and became number two in 2010.⁹⁹ This brought about other changes as well. In 2009, China surpassed the United States as the number one trading partner with South Korea. The U.S. saw this as not only economic competition but also potentially an issue politically and within the U.S.-ROK alliance.

During this time the U.S. had been dealing with an increasingly worrying economic condition as well. Government deficits and debt had been continually on the rise since the global financial crisis of 2008. Because of this there was a strong correlation between increases in defense budget expenditure and the rise of federal debt. Therefore, cuts in the defense budget became a necessary action. Troops that were stationed overseas required adjustment mainly in the form of cuts to the number of forces deployed to the Middle East. Wartime OPCON transfer also had to be examined. As a result of shortfalls in the defense budget, prerequisites to a wartime OPCON transfer, such as the relocation of USFK to Pyeongtaek were affected.

⁹⁹ Barboza, David. 2010. "China Passes Japan as Second-Largest Economy". The New York Times. August 15.
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/16/business/global/16yuan.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

In summation, the international security situation leading up to the first delay of wartime OPCON transfer made the U.S. refocus on their alliances in Asia. In particular they wanted to improve their relations with the ROK and increase the strength of the U.S.-ROK alliance. Also because of the poor economic situation they did not want to undertake any large non-essential expenditures such as the Land Partnership Plan or the Yongsan Relocation Plan that were associated with a wartime OPCON transfer. All of these factors contributed to the U.S. agreeing to a delay of the wartime OPCON transfer.

2. Internal Politics: Obama and Pragmatism

When President Obama was elected in 2008, there was a significant change in foreign policy. Whereas the previous Bush Doctrine was characterized by unilateral action, the Obama Doctrine was characterized by multilateralism. Although still important, the Middle East was waning in the priorities of the American people. Instead, after many years of war, the focus seemed to be turning back to the homeland. Issues like the economic downturn and the social inequality

became more important. “What takes place within our borders will determine our strength and influence beyond them.”¹⁰⁰

The next significant change in the priorities of the Obama administration took place under the concept of the “Pivot to Asia”. Although the famous speech detailing the pivot was not made until 2011, the prioritization of the Asia-Pacific region began from the beginning of the administration. In the speech, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton laid out the six key lines of action concerning the “Asia Pivot”. These included, “strengthening out bilateral security alliances; deepening our working relationships with emerging powers; engaging with regional multilateral intitutions; expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military presence; and advancing democracy and human rights.”¹⁰¹ The emphasis on strengthening alliances meant that the relationship with South Korea took on a higher priority and increased importance.

The Obama administration was also able to use the first delay of wartime OPCON as a form of leverage with the Lee Myung-Bak administration. Over 1,900

¹⁰⁰ White House. 2010. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, D.C.

¹⁰¹ Clinton, Hillary R. “America’s Pacific Century.” Speech, Honolulu, Hi, November 10, 2011. *U.S. Department of State*.
<http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/11/176999.htm>

ROK troops were sent to Afghanistan from 2010-2014. The U.S. also requested that the ROK join the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). The PSI was to control and moreover block the transaction of weapons of mass destruction. South Korean then officially joined the PSI on May 26, 2009.¹⁰² The leverage was also a way to further dialogue about other issues affecting the alliance on the U.S. agenda such as missile defense.

In the end, with the shift of priorities to Asia, the Obama administration needed their relationship with South Korea to fit into their strategy on a global scale. On top of strengthening the alliance, the U.S. needed to get ROK support for the PSI and missile defense. There was also pressure politically to reduce the amount of defense spending following the global financial crisis. These factors all led to an acceptance of delaying the transfer of wartime OPCON.

¹⁰² Yoo, Jee-ho. 2009. "Nuke Test Leads Seoul to Join PSI Proliferation Pact." Korea Joongang Daily. May 27.
<http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2905368>

VIII. 2014 Delay of Wartime OPCON Transfer

1. Security Backdrop: Sequestration and Growing North Korean Threat

The security situation between the first and second delay of wartime OPCON transfer was in many ways very similar to the situation leading up to the first delay. There were still important concerns about a rising China and their military modernization. Chief among these was worries about the increasing tensions in the South China Sea and Beijing's aggressive actions including land reclamation and building air strips that military aircraft would be capable of landing upon. Ukraine also became an international issue in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Regarding the North Korean threat, the U.S. stated something in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review that was not mentioned in the 2010 edition. It was regarding the perception of North Korean weapons of mass destruction. "North Korea's long-range missile and weapons of mass destruction programs-particularly its pursuit of nuclear weapons in contravention of its international obligations-constitutes a significant threat to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in

Northeast Asia and is a growing, direct threat to the United States.”¹⁰³ By including this, it can be seen that the perception of the North Korean threat had become elevated. Between the first and second decisions to delay the wartime OPCON transfer Pyongyang had increased the amount of significant provocations and belligerent actions. Table 2 shows these provocations and belligerent actions in relation to wartime OPCON transfer decisions.

¹⁰³ United States Department of Defense. 2014. *Quadrennial Defense Review*

Date	Major Event
November 7, 2007	Formally announced that wartime OPCON would be transferred to ROK forces by April 17th, 2012
May 25, 2009	North Korea carries out second underground nuclear test
March 26, 2010	North Korean torpedo sinks South Korean corvette Cheonan (46 sailors killed)
June 26, 2010	U.S. and ROK agree to delay the wartime OPCON transfer to December 1st, 2015
November 23, 2010	North Korea shells the South Korean Yeonpyeong Island (2 marines and 2 construction workers killed)
April 13, 2012	North Korea fails to launch a satellite using a Unha-3 Rocket
December 12, 2012	North Korea successfully launches a satellite using a Unha-3 Rocket
February 12, 2013	North Korea conducts a third nuclear test
April 2, 2013	North Korea says it will restart its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon
October 23, 2014	U.S. and ROK agree to delay the OPCON transfer indefinitely (Possibly mid 2020s)

Table 2: Major North Korean Actions in Relation to Significant OPCON Decisions

Source: Compiled by author

Also during the time leading up to the second delay of wartime OPCON transfer much attention was paid to the growing federal budget deficit in the U.S. This brought about the fiscal policy in 2013 known as sequestration, which consists

of automatic spending cuts to government programs both defense and non-defense related.¹⁰⁴ As a result, around 55 billion dollars would be cut from the defense budget every year. This was a cause of concern for some people who worried about how the defense spending cuts would affect the country's defense and military capabilities.¹⁰⁵ This emphasized the importance of already existing military alliances and relationships and how they could help one another.

Ultimately, as was the case in the previous time period of the first delay, the international security situation made it prudent to strengthen alliances in Asia and especially the U.S.-ROK alliance. On top of this there was an increase in provocations by North Korea resulting in an intensified perception of threat. Sequestration also made it necessary to increase the ROK defense budget burden sharing. All which led to an acceptance of the delay of wartime OPCON transfer when it was requested.

¹⁰⁴ Koba, Mark. 2013. "Sequestration: CNBC Explains". CNBC. January 14.
<http://www.cnbc.com/id/100378424>

¹⁰⁵ Knudsen, Patrick L. 2013. "\$150 Billion in Spending Cuts to Offset Defense Sequestration". *The Heritage Foundation*.
<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/11/150-billion-in-spending-cuts-to-offset-defense-sequestration>

2. Internal Politics: Staying the Course

Along with continuing the Obama Doctrine, the administration began to reengage and participate in talks with countries that previously were the targets of sanctions. In 2012, sanctions were relieved on Myanmar. Talks began about normalizing relations with Cuba (normalized in December 2014). Iran also returned to the negotiating table in regards to its nuclear program. The one country absent from the reengagement was North Korea. This was very telling about President Obama's policy towards dealing with North Korea. It follows the pattern of relatively little engagement and rather employing "strategic patience". And with the perceived increasing threat posed by North Korea the Obama administration saw it wiser to maintain a strong military presence and posture on the Korean peninsula and to continue being a staunch supporter of the ROK rather than to engage directly with North Korea.

As stated before, the delay of wartime OPCON transfer can give the United States a degree of leverage over South Korea in regards to issues such as initiatives and missile defense. During the time of the second delay, there was an intense debate over the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system to the peninsula. By accepting a delay of the wartime

OPCON transfer, the U.S. would have a potential advantage in convincing and negotiating with South Korea to join their regional missile defense network while the ROK develops their own Korean Air and Missile Defense.¹⁰⁶

The U.S. Congress has a significant amount of influence over the decisions of an administration in regards to foreign affairs and security related policies. Every year the Congress passes the National Defense Authorization Act. By passing the act, Congress approves the defense budget as well as projects that are related. The transfer of wartime OPCON does not require Congress to approve, but if there is a strong opposition Congress could use their power in order to prevent another delay in the transfer. In 2013 when the second delay was suggested by South Korea, Congress was very against it. Senator Levin, who was the chairman of the Senate Armed Forces Committee was quoted as saying, “it is important that we see to it that the primary responsibility for defending South Korea during a time of war lies with South Korea.”¹⁰⁷ In 2014, Seoul announced an agreement to buy weapons that included F-35 purchase worth 6.9 billion dollars, Global Hawk

¹⁰⁶ Richards, Clint. 2014. “X-Band and THAAD as Good as Anti-China Trilateral Defense Agreement?” The Diplomat. October 24. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/10/x-band-and-thaad-as-good-as-anti-china-trilateral-defense-agreement/>

¹⁰⁷ Park, Hyun. 2013. “US officials annoyed with S. Korea’s request for another OPCON transfer delay.” Hankyoreh. October 2. http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/605498.html

purchase worth 832.3 million dollars, and PAC-3 purchase worth 1.32 billion dollars. Following the signing of the deal to purchase the military equipment, and anonymous senatorial aid stated, “Congress is open now to what the Obama administration decides.” Another congressional source on condition of anonymity said, “A lot of the opposition in Congress to another postponement died down when the South Korean administration decided to purchase state-of-the-art U.S. weaponry this year.”¹⁰⁸

As was the case in the period of time leading up to the first delay of wartime OPCON transfer, the Obama administration needed the U.S.-ROK alliance to adhere to their global strategy. They also needed ROK support for controversial programs such as missile defense and to cut defense spending. U.S. policy makers were not as receptive to a delay the second time but the large influx of cash as a result of the ROK weapons purchase, during a time of significant defense budget cuts and sequestration, made the policy makers much more receptive to the idea of accepting another delay of OPCON transfer.

¹⁰⁸ Park, Hyun. 2014. “Were S. Korean purchases of weaponry meant to quiet US objection to OPCON postponement?.” *Hankyoreh*. October 20. http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/660524.html

IX. Conclusion:

The alliance with the ROK is of vital importance to the United States and their international strategic vision. In the context of the alliance, wartime OPCON has been a highly contested and complicated issue. The decision of whether or not to transfer wartime OPCON cannot be explained simply by the North Korean threat. For instance, even after North Korea's first nuclear test in 2006, President Roh still went ahead with the transfer agreement in 2007. Rather, wartime OPCON assessments are influenced by national interests, military doctrine, and history. Internal politics of South Korea have played the principle role in whether or not to transfer wartime OPCON. The security backdrop and internal politics of the U.S. have determined whether or not to accept a delay of the transfer of wartime OPCON.

The U.S. will give back wartime OPCON any time that South Korea asks for the transfer. There is a misconception that the U.S. doesn't want to give up wartime OPCON to the ROK. But being a misconception, it is therefore false. Every time that the ROK has requested to resume control of their military forces during wartime the U.S. had agreed to the transfer. Following each transfer

agreement however it is always the ROK that requests a delay. Thus, it can be logically seen that it is not that the United States wants to retain wartime OPCON but it is South Korea that doesn't want to take it. At the same time, both instances in which South Korea requested a delay of wartime OPCON transfer, the U.S. also agreed. Therefore as a result it can be concluded that as long as the U.S. has an incentive to keep wartime OPCON, they will not force South Korea to take it back. As discussed in this thesis, the incentives could be anything from maintaining a strong alliance and warfighting capabilities to deterring escalation on the peninsula and garnering support for missile defense and other U.S. led initiatives.

South Korea is ready to take over wartime OPCON. When comparing the military capabilities of the ROK military and that of their principle adversary North Korea, the ROK forces are far superior and advanced. The main concerns are the unconventional weapons in the form of nuclear and chemical weapons as well as ballistic missiles. As stated before however, even after a transfer of wartime operational control, the U.S would maintain the same military strength on the peninsula and would be responsible for securing these weapons of mass destruction in the event that hostilities were to break out. Also, the U.S. would continue to bolster ROK capabilities that are seen as deficient such as the areas of intelligence,

surveillance, and reconnaissance. Therefore under the current plan and structure, South Korea is adequately equipped to takeover wartime OPCON of their military forces.

As discussed previously in this thesis, the biggest potential problem that could occur with a transfer of wartime OPCON would be the disruption to the unity of command. “OPCON transfer; though we use that term, in fact it’s OPCON division, it’s the creation of OPCON confusion. And with a lot of good people trying to minimize that, we’re still going from unity of command to duality of command. That’s what OPCON transfer is.”¹⁰⁹ In order to minimize this or to avoid it altogether there should be a new combined structure even after a transfer takes place. As retired General Walter Sharp recommends, there should be a new form of the CFC maintained. This time however, there is a ROK four star general in charge with a U.S. four star general as his deputy. This command would be in control in both armistice and wartime.¹¹⁰ The new 5015 operational plan (OPLAN) to deal with a North Korean contingency, which was signed in November of 2015,

¹⁰⁹ O’Hanlon, Michael E. 2010. “OPCON Transfer or OPCON Confusion: Making the Best of a Dubious Idea.” *Brookings Institution*, April 30.

<http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2010/04/30-korea-ohanlon>

¹¹⁰ Sharp, Walter. 2013. “OPCON Transition in Korea.” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, December 2

consists of preventive strikes on key North Korean military facilities and leaders if deemed necessary.¹¹¹ This plan is a departure from previous OPLANs as it is more offensive in nature and requires the simultaneous use of many different capabilities and the efficacy of such a plan could rely greatly on the command structure under which it is being carried out. Because of this, the U.S. is very cognoscente and aware of how to proceed in regards to OPCON decisions in order to ensure maximum efficiency.

1. Future Outlook and Further Study:

Earlier it was posited that by maintaining wartime OPCON, the U.S. could use it as a form of leverage influencing South Korea decision-making. On July 8, 2016 South Korea officially agreed to deploy the THAAD missile defense system to the peninsula despite objections from powerful neighbors such as China and Russia. The official reason was to counter the increasing threat posed by North

¹¹¹ Moon, Katherine. 2016. "The Role of the U.S.-ROK Alliance in the Process of Unification: a U.S. View." *Brookings Institution*, January 25. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2016/01/25-alliance-role-unification-moon>

Korea and their ballistic missiles.¹¹² Although the amount of influence that OPCON had on the decision is unclear, it was most certainly a contributing factor. Because of the concerns regarding neighbors (economic interdependence and the true intentions of the U.S. wanting to deploy the system on peninsula) the deployment of THAAD was something that many thought would never happen, and if it did, it would be many years down the road. They definitely did not expect it to happen so soon. Because of this it is thought provoking to consider what other changes to the U.S.-ROK military alliance could happen while the U.S. possesses wartime OPCON. Changes that other regional powers would object to because they see them as a threat such as an increased U.S. naval presence or the deployment of more military assets with greater capabilities.

As previously established in the conclusion, the decision of whether or not to transfer wartime OPCON is principally determined by the South Korean domestic situation of which politics constitutes the most significant factor. The situation of the United States to include politics determines whether or not to accept a delay of wartime OPCON transfer. With presidential elections looming in

¹¹² Judsen, Jen. 2016. "THAAD to Officially Deploy to South Korea." Defense News. July 8. <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2016/07/07/thaad-officially-deploy-south-korea/86837806/>

both countries (U.S. in November 2016 and South Korea in December 2017) it will be interesting to see how a newly elected administration will treat the U.S.-ROK alliance and more specifically the OPCON issue.

In the United States there has been an emergence of non-establishment candidates that are in favor of change in foreign policy with regards to the ROK and Asia. Donald Trump has advocated such extreme actions as ending military arrangements with Japan and South Korea, bringing U.S. troops home, and allowing the two countries to possess and build up their nuclear arsenals.¹¹³ Bernie Sanders would raise the threshold necessary to send American forces to intervene in case of a conflict abroad. Even if neither of these two candidates are elected, the popularity of similar non-establishment candidates with untraditional ideas is likely to only intensify leading up to the presidential election of 2020.

In South Korea the winds of change have begun to blow as well. In the most recent National Assembly elections, the conservative ruling party lost its seat majority. At the same time, South Koreans were fed up with bipartisan politics and there was the rise of a liberal third party that won more seats than anyone

¹¹³ Negishi, Mayumi, Josh Chin and Rob Taylor. 2016. "Donald Trump's Ascent Watched with Wariness in Asia," *The Wall Street Journal*. May 4.
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/donald-trumps-ascent-watched-with-wariness-in-asia-1462355806>

expected.¹¹⁴ If the trend continues, the upcoming presidential election could see the election of a new administration willing to make changes to the alliance structure with the United States.

2. Limitations:

This study of wartime OPCON transfer has numerous limitations, which would prevent complete understanding of the multi-faceted topic. Without the access to classified information about military specific capabilities, OPCON transfer plans and privileged communications between the governments, there are still many variables that are unknown. The extent to which these unknown variables would affect the understanding of the study and in turn influence the conclusions drawn is not clear.

¹¹⁴ Ramirez, Elaine. 2016. "New Third Party Stuns Mainstream in South Korea's Elections." The Diplomat. April 14. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/04/new-third-party-stuns-mainstream-in-south-koreas-elections/>

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국문 초록

한미 전시작전통제권 전환의 연기: 동맹의 본질과 미국의 수용

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본 연구는 한국의 전시작전통제권 전환을 연기하는 데에 왜 미국이 지속적으로 합의하는지 연구하고자 하였다. 우선 한미 동맹 의의를 알아보았고 동맹의 본질을 Victor Cha의 파워플레이 (Powerplay) 모델을 적용하여 분석하였다. 마지막으로 전환을 연기했을 때 미국의 안보와 정치적 상황을 비교연구하였다. 결론적으로 미국에게 한미동맹은 매우 중요하기 때문에 전시작전통제권 전환과 관련해서는 현재의 상태를 유지하고자 한다. 그러나 한국이 전환을 요구할 경우 미국은 그에 응할 것이다. 그렇기 때문에 미국의 큰 국내 정치 변화 혹은 안보의 위협이 있지 않는 한 미국은 한국에게 전환을 요구하지 않을 것이다. 미국은 한미 동맹의 역사와 동맹이 한국에 미치는 영향을 염두에 두어야 한다. 또한 전환 이후 발생할 수 있는 전시 상황에 대비하기 위하여 잠재적 장애물을 최소화 하고 지휘통일의 원칙 (Unity of Command)을 극대화 하는 새롭게 연합된 지휘체계를 구축해야 할 것이다.

주제어: 한미 동맹, 파워플레이, 유기공포, 전시작전통제권, 지휘통일의 원칙