

[연구논문]

South Korea's Middle Power Strategy as a Foreign Strategy*

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1. Searching for South Korea's long-term security strategy

The expectation that the end of the Cold War and the tide of mega-trend transformation of globalization will bring about post-Westphalian transition gradually fades away. Some observers hold that there will be global governance in security architecture will be established with the relative weakening of state power. Others predicted that the United States will create the genuine empire possessing unprecedented power as a single unit in the human history, creating truly liberal institutions and providing global goods. However, triple crises that haunted the United States after 9.11, that is security, economic, and ideological problems impaired American dream of producing global imperial power. Now the phenomenon of

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“return of geopolitics” is witnessed in many regions, and traditional realist great power rivalry seems to dominate international order.¹⁾

Northeast Asia, reflecting these global changes, still preserves its own characteristics. With the so-called American rebalancing strategy, retrenchment of American power is less felt, while rivalry between the United States and China increasingly define the nature of East Asian security order. Unlike other regions, especially Europe, geopolitics had never left the regional scene in security matters, and globalization or economic interdependence has not transformed the situation in which military competition has worsened even in the post-Cold War period. The combination of balancing strategy and the phenomenon of power transition defies the expectation that great power politics will make way for multilateral cooperation, but multilateral institutions are being reshaped to reflect great power politics. The rise of nationalism, composed of many different elements, haunts the region, further complicating security situation. Going through a series of hardships, nations in East Asia preserves a high level of suspicions and fears among themselves, which aggravates security dilemma.

On the other hand, global security environments are in great flux. One of the main reasons is the change in American grand strategy, which may be termed as retrenchment, causing from the relative decline of American power. It is true that there is a lively debate on the decline of American hegemony, but power vacuum takes places in many regions motivating many powers to take risks to accomplish

1) Walter Russell Mead, “The Return of Geopolitics: The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers,” *Foreign Affairs* 93.3 (2014).

regional ambitions. Rising tensions in Ukraine, the Middle East, and even in East Asia, shows that the hesitance of the United States to intervene with massive military power, specially ground forces, radically changes security landscape in these regions.

These changes provide South Korea with opportunities and difficulties. At the global level, South Korea with its increased national power and status, acts as one of the prominent middle powers. However, at the regional level, almost everytime geopolitics reinforces itself, the Korean Peninsula becomes the focus of serious great powers' rivalry and even military clashes. When uncertainty for the future with the changes in power distribution becomes more evident, developing South Korea's foreign strategy becomes highly urgent. South Korea's main purpose is to contribute to enhancing systemic stability and flexibility to absorb the impacts of great powers' rivalry and to pave the way for resilient adaptation to new security surroundings.²⁾ Theoretically beyond options of foreign policy of balancing, bandwagoning, hiding, hedging, bonding, and transcending, South Korea should develop a future-oriented, and advanced regional policy which can solve the dilemma of conflicting bilateral great power policies.³⁾

2) In the history of modern international relations, the final outcome of power transition among great powers was general, hegemonic wars. However, if the international system is highly flexible and stable to guide the conflict based on dispute settlement mechanism, power transition happens in a peaceful and stable manner. Then, systemic flexibility increases when rising powers negotiate with established powers and try to lessen the level of dissatisfaction. Also the responses of established powers are important to solve the conflict of interests reflecting the demands of rising powers.

3) See Robert S. Ross, "Balance of Power Politics and the Rise of China: Accommodation and Balancing in East Asia," *Security Studies* 15.3 (2006): 355-95.

South Korea has devised and elaborated the concept of middle power diplomacy for the past several years. In the area of security strategy, The following five elements have been discussed in the existing literature recently⁴⁾: 1) to help great powers to lessen mutual strategic mistrust; 2) to find out and suggest issue-specific dispute settlement mechanism; 3) to develop multilateral institutions or to actively participate in and further existing institutions; 4) to preemptively import globally established norms to the region to set up the principle on which East Asians can solve the problems; 5) to make a cooperative network among like-minded middle powers to strengthen their positions vis-à-vis great powers. However in the 21st century when the power shift between the United States and China becomes accelerated both at global and East Asian dimension, South Korea's middle power strategy needs to pursue the sixth element, which is 6) to be a co-architect in making and reforming regional security architecture. By striving for more cooperative regional security architecture in which middle powers such as South Korea

4) For the discussion of middle power foreign strategy of South Korea, see Sook Jong Lee, "South Korea as New Middle Power: Seeking Complex Diplomacy," *EAI Asian Security Initiative Working Paper 25* (2012); Sangbae Kim, ed., *Weaving Webs and Building Hives: Transformation of World Politics in the Perspective of Network Theories* (Paju: Hanul Academy, 2011) (in Korean); Sangbae Kim, "Korea's Strategies for Network Diplomacy: A Perspective of Actor-Network Theory," *National Strategy* 17.3 (2011): 5-40. (in Korean); Woor-sang Kim, *Korea's National Strategy: Its Middle Power Diplomacy* (Seoul: Sechang Publisher, 2012) (in Korean); Min Gyo Koo, *Island Disputes and Maritime Regime Building in East Asia: Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (New York: Springer, 2009); Yul Sohn, ed., *East Asia from the Perspective of Attractive Power: Creating Regionness and Seoul Consensus* (Seoul: Chisikmadang, 2007) (in Korean); Yul Sohn and Mingyo Koo, "Securitizing Trade: The Case of KORUS FTA," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 11.3 (2011): 433-60.

retains an appropriate say, South Korea may be able to overcome the tragedy of great power politics. In what follows, this paper will elaborate this point with other existing roles of middle power in mind.

2. The Rise of South Korea as a middle power in the era of post-American hegemony

As the second term of Obama administration meets the mid-term election, we can expect a debate for American grand strategy for the next administration. Especially as the world is in the middle of hot clashes in many regions at the same time, American foreign strategy after eight years' democrats' leadership will draw a lot of attention. Debates occur on the following points: whether American power is on the decline; between retrenchment/off-shore balancing and deep global engagement, which way the United States should follow; which region(s) should receive most intensive attention; what level of military preparedness the United States should maintain to defend itself and its allies; what kind of defense strategy the United States should adopt to effectively lead the world; how the United States should deal with potential competitors such as China and Russia, and so on.

Some argues that the United States should adopt the strategy of retrenchment, where retrenchment is defined as "a policy of retracting grand strategic commitments in response to a decline in relative power." This strategy means "decreasing the overall costs of foreign

policy by redistributing resources away from peripheral commitments and toward core commitments.” More concretely, “declining great powers select from a wide menu of policy options, but these options may be categorized as economizing expenditures, reducing risks, and shifting burdens.” Then, all the resources should be reallocated to only core interests renouncing peripheral commitments at the same time.⁵⁾ Republicans, at the times of stringency, have adopted this position, which may happen in the next Presidential election.⁶⁾

Others argue that the costs of deep engagement cannot outweigh the merits and benefits of continued American leadership. Advocates of retrenchment overstate budgetary cost, the systemic costs of hegemonic leadership, and the distortion of U.S. interests, while underestimating benefits of deep engagement. Then, “the fundamental choice to retain a grand strategy of deep engagement after the Cold War is just what the preponderance of international relations scholarship would expect a rational, self-interested, leading power in the United States’ position to do.”⁷⁾

American response at this time under Obama administration is an

5) Paul K. MacDonald, and Joseph M. Parent, “Graceful Decline?: The Surprising Success of Great Power Retrenchment,” *International Security* 35.4 (2011): 7-44; Steven E. Lobell, “The Grand Strategy of Hegemonic Decline: Dilemmas of Strategy and Finance,” *Security Studies* 10.1 (2000): 86-111.

6) See also Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise,” *International Security* 17.4 (1993): 5-51; Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States’ Unipolar Moment,” *International Security* 31.2 (2006): 7-41; Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Exit: Beyond the Pax Americana,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 24.2 (2011).

7) Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Don’t Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment,” *International Security* 37.3 (2012): 51.

emphasis on international collective action: “The starting point for that collective action will be our engagement with other countries. The cornerstone of this engagement is the relationship between the United States and our close friends and allies in Europe, Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East—ties which are rooted in shared interests and shared values, and which serve our mutual security and the broader security and prosperity of the world.”⁸⁾ As the global problems get more complex than in the 20th century, collective action is inevitable, and the United States holds that “The United Nations, NATO and our Asian alliances were all built on the foundation of American strength and American values. American leadership established the Bretton Woods system and supported open markets.”⁹⁾

In this vein, the United States defines most significant security purposes as follows: Counterterrorism and Irregular Warfare; Deter and Defeat Aggression; Project Power Despite Anti-Access/Area Denial Challenges; Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction; Operate Effectively in Cyberspace; Operate Effectively in Space; Maintain a Safe, Secure, and Effective Nuclear Deterrent; Defend the Homeland and Provide Support to Civil Authorities; Provide a Stabilizing Presence; Conduct Stability and Counterinsurgency Operations; Conduct Humanitarian, Disaster Relief, and Other.¹⁰⁾

South Korea, as the most robust ally of the United States, has

8) United States, The White House, *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2012).

9) Susan E. Rice, “The Strength of American Leadership, the Power of Collective Action,” Center for a New American Security Annual Conference, Washington, DC, June 11, 2014, Address.

10) United States, The White House, *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2012).

contributed to the provision of global goods such as hosting global conferences(G20, Nuclear Summit Meeting, etc.), dispatching troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, sending PKO troops to many places in dispute, and contributing to non-proliferation efforts in many cases. The challenge ahead, however, is that as American unipolarity faces many difficulties, South Korea needs to develop new agendas for “going global” under the framework of the ROK-US alliance,¹¹⁾ and to act as an independent middle power trying to realize universal norms in security affairs. Sometimes American initiative in dealing with security matters such as Iranian nuclear problems, and Russian annexation of Crimea, is not exactly in line with South Korean national interests. South Korea has maintained close economic relationship with Iran, and Russia is an indispensable economic and security partner in Northeast Asia.

The solution is to confirm South Korean’s values in dealing with global matters and take concerted action with like-minded partners. The United States may be a natural partner sharing common values such as democracy, market economy, and human rights, but partnership is not confined in alliance partnership. South Korea’s active participation in major international institutions, and middle power initiative will place South Korea in the right place. It is true that South Korea has effective security resources such as well-trained military, long-preserved experiences in real combats and PKO operations, and good reputation as a rapidly democratized and

11) See, for example, Kurt M. Campbell *et al.*, *Going Global: The Future of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2009).

economically developed middle power.

For this global role, there should be a consensus in South Korea that active participation in global affairs will enhance South Korea's national interests in the long term. At first, middle power diplomacy may not seem so beneficial, but growing reputations and evaluation will ultimately benefit South Korean interests. Also South Korea's reputation as a global normative power will give South Korea a good status in dealing with great power politics in East Asia. As long as South Korea is known as a country to take care of collective interests, great powers will be constrained in disregarding South Korea's role.

3. Transitions in Northeast Asian International Relations and South Korea's middle power role

(1) Transition in Power Transition in Northeast Asia in the 21st century

One of the most significant elements that define the current and the future security architecture of Northeast Asia is power transition. Looking back on the history of power transition in the modern international system from the 16th century, every transition has been defined by bloody great power rivalries with middle powers impotent in influencing on this transitional process. Currently, the rapid rise of China makes more plausible the prediction that the power gap between the United States and China will be narrower, and that

ultimately China may surpass American power at least in this region. How power transition in international politics will happen, however, will be shaped by the nature of change of international politics itself.¹²⁾ This will give light on the analysis of how middle powers may retain some capacity to affect the process of great powers' rivalry and the process of post-shift order building.

The current power transition between the United States and China, contrary to typical power transition theories, is different from the past ones, such as two World Wars in the 20th century. In a narrower sense, China is rising under very different environments from the 20th century. In a broader sense, we witness the transformation of global and regional international politics from the ground. There are several particular points in current power transition in Northeast Asia, which may be indicative of possible peaceful process of transition.

First, reflecting the late modern features, it is the phenomenon of power transition under unipolarity. Rising powers should adapt themselves for a certain period of time to the structural frameworks made by the current hegemon. For example, China to further its rise, needs to conform to security, political, and socio-economic framework made by the US for the time being. The need to rise under unipolarity might have the effect of orienting the rising power in line with the existing structural framework, lessening the degree of dissatisfaction of rising powers. This possibility is optimistic in that it increases the chance of regional, peaceful power transition. However

12) Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline," *International Security* 36.1 (2011): 41-72.

there are still lingering doubts for the possible cooperation between Washington and Beijing as experienced in many issues in 2010 such as the arms sales to Taiwan, military drills in the Yellow Sea, and the debated regarding the South China Sea. If unprepared for the any possible controversial issues, these soon degenerate into the problems aggravating the security dilemma between the existing hegemon and the rising power.

Second, the current power transition occurs not in the area of hard power, but also in that of soft power. International politics in the era of informatization and democratization works differently before these megatrends appeared. The hegemon candidate needs to develop the soft power resources to lead the region, inventing better soft power vision for the region than that of existing hegemon. Then, soft power transition occurs during the times of rise of competing states, by which the regional identity, normative politics became more complicated. China tries to strengthen its soft power strategy, both to advance a better regional framework than that of the US, and to search for the space of soft balancing against the US with possible soft power alliances. Northeast Asian countries like South Korea, in the middle of soft power competition, sometimes have hard time to take a stance.

Power transition in the period of democratization, globalization, and information technology, then, will be affected not merely by military and economic power. In the 21st century, rising power cannot accumulate economic power if that violates international economic norms. In times of democratization, public support and national preference in neighboring countries will decide how rising state will

be supported by them. Institutions that rising states present as alternatives to established powers' institutions will be under scrutiny in surrounding countries. Then, power transition in this century, will be a transition of normative power, institutional power as well as hard power. Countries that are believed to conform to most developed norms and principles will acquire consent from the public and the government of neighboring countries.¹³⁾

(2) New modes of rivalry between the United States and China and growing leverage for middle powers

The rise of China, first witnessed in economic realm, now translated into military one, complicates surrounding countries' China policy. Unlike other regions where Washington directs toward retrenchment or off-shore balancing, Obama administration takes Asia as the resourceful place in which it can find the platform for regaining hegemonic power. Asian markets including China, and rapidly growing economy, can give the United States profitable trade partners, and based on economic reinvigoration, the United States will strive for hegemony in the 2020s.¹⁴⁾

The Northeast Asian international relations can be still defined as the unipolar system at least in the military affairs, with the US

13) See Steve Chan, *China, The US and power-transition theory: a critique* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Zhiqun Zhu, *US-China Relations in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

14) See Aaron Friedberg, *Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011); Jonathan Kirshner, "The tragedy of offensive realism: Classical realism and the rise of China," *European Journal of International Relations* 18.1 (2012): 53-75.

military expenditure, military technology, and alliance network still surpassing China. The United States is well aware of the narrowing gap between China and itself and, pursues several strategic goals: 1) trying to engage with China with a view to socializing China into the existing international norms, now coined in the term, “new type of major power relationship,”; 2) balancing against China with its major Northeast Asian allies, to cope with Chinese strategy of the so-called anti-access and area denial; 3) forming multilateral institutions strengthening liberal norms and human rights in several areas such as trade, finance, and human security. National security advisor Susan Rice remarked that “With emerging powers, we must be able to collaborate where our interests converge but define our differences and defend our interests where they diverge.”¹⁵⁾

For these goals, the United States, to back up Asian rebalancing strategy, purports to strengthen its military preparedness, by doing the followings: “We will also increase and more widely distribute our port visits, including in the important Indian Ocean region. And by 2020 the Navy will reposture its forces from today’s roughly 50/50 percent split between the Pacific and the Atlantic to about a 60/40 split between those oceans. That will include six aircraft carriers in this region, a majority of our cruisers, destroyers, Littoral Combat Ships, and submarines.”¹⁶⁾

The United States has the perception that China “continues to pursue a long-term, comprehensive military modernization program

15) Susan E. Rice, *op. cit.*

16) Leon E. Panetta, “Shangri-La Security Dialogue,” Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore, June 2, 2012.

designed to improve the capacity of its armed forces to fight and win short-duration, high-intensity regional contingencies.” According to the report of the Pentagon, “China’s leaders describe modernization of the PLA as essential to preserving and sustaining what they view as a “period of strategic opportunity” to advance China’s national development during the first two decades of the 21st century.” It is to be noted that the United States try to read Chinese strategic goal at this particular state of power transition. Washington thinks that “China’s leaders see this period as providing an opportunity to focus on fostering a stable external environment to provide the PRC the strategic space to prioritize economic growth and development and to achieve “national rejuvenation” by 2049.” This perception leads to the analysis of Chinese policies, such as to “maintain peace and stability along their country’s periphery; expand their diplomatic influence to facilitate access to markets, capital, and resources; and avoid direct confrontation with the United States and other countries.” For the regional strategy, the United States evaluates that “this strategy has led to a growing Chinese presence in regions all over the world, and particularly on its periphery, creating new and expanding economic and diplomatic interests. China’s expanding interests have led to friction between some of its regional neighbors, including allies and partners of the United States.”¹⁷⁾

Also Washington puts great emphasis on strengthening alliance ties. It is coherent with American global security strategy of collective action and burden-sharing. Also the United States needs to repeatedly

17) United States, Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2013* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2014).

show its commitment to alliance partners when there is a growing doubt in American power and credibility to intervene, and China actively tries to draw neighbor powers on the basis of mutual relationship. For example, Japan wants to be sure of American commitment in dealing with the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, when the United States cannot actively restrain Russia from annexing Crimea, and had hard times in criticizing China for its announcement of aggressive Air Defense Identification Zone.

Also as the alliance network built by the United States transforms itself from the “hub-and-spoke” to “inter-spoke” network to ease the tension between China and its neighbors, America’s role to encourage cooperation among its alliance partners becomes more important. For example, faced with rising tensions between South Korea and Japan due to territorial disputes and historical issues, President Obama’s role to mediate will draw much attention.

China, on the other hand, tries to strengthen itself for the future all-out competition with the United States. Just after 2008 economic crisis, China with remarkable resilient economy, has tried to challenge the US hegemony at both global and regional level, but after a couple of years’ stand-out with the United States, decided to maintain stable relations with the United States. Since Hu Jintao-Obama summit meeting in January, 2012, China has paid more attention to normative, institutional politics with charm offensive to neighboring countries. In the area of core interests, China was not willing make concessions to any country and tried to realize its will even with military power. But in other areas, China actively publicized its

principles and norms with elaborate efforts to advance alternative institutional frameworks to American liberal inventions.

In general, China is very cautious in coping with American rebalancing strategy, because Beijing is deeply suspicious of American intention of balancing against China. For example, Chinese media holds that “Dealing with the US containment attempts should be one of China’s diplomatic strategic goals. China should unite with all possible forces and keep certain strategic initiatives against the U S... Fast economic development has become the biggest advantage that China has when dealing with the US. The US can hardly provoke China in the economic field, unlike its developing military strength which gives excuses for the West to suppress China. The more the two focus on economic competition, the more the situation will tilt China’s way. The growth and decline in economic strength is the starting point for national competition as well as its destination. It reflects national tendencies. But military and politics are often powerful tools to disturb or twist the trend. China should try to avoid a new cold war with the US, but by no means should it give up its peripheral security in exchange for US’ ease in Asia.”¹⁸⁾

As China learns rapidly the nature of new power transition game taking place in both hard and soft power front, Chinese leadership endeavors to suggest alternative institutional framework. President Xi Jinping in an address, “Keeping up with the Trend of the Times and Promoting World Peace and Development” at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, On March 23, 2013, expounded

18) “Pentagon plan changes game in Asia,” *People’s Daily* and *Global Times*, Jan. 6, 2012.

on China's view on the current international situation and its position on international relations. Xi advanced the idea of building a "new type of international relations" which posits that win-win cooperation, peaceful development is crucial and that people of all nations should combine their efforts to safeguard world peace and promote common development.¹⁹⁾

China also plans to assuage neighbor power's concern for the rise of China, by coining new principles in dealing with them, and hopefully to set up Chinese version of "Monroe doctrine." In a conference on the diplomatic work on neighboring countries in Beijing, Oct. 25, 2013, Xi was reported to have stressed the necessity of good diplomatic work in neighboring countries to realize the "centenary goals" set by the 18th CPC National Congress in November 2012: a moderately prosperous society by 2021 and a prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and modern socialist country by 2049. Xi reportedly said that "CPC leadership in previous generations attached high importance to diplomacy with neighboring countries, raising important issues and guiding policy, opening up a generally sound environment, laying the foundation for diplomatic work." It is notable that Chinese leadership increasingly emphasizes, "a three-dimensional, multi-element perspective, beyond time and space." As the goal of treating neighbors, Xi said that "we must strive to make our neighbors more friendly in politics,

19) "Xi Jinping Calls for the Building of New Type of International Relations with Win-Win Cooperation at the Core in a Speech at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations," *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, May 23, 2013, Retrieved on Oct.10, 2014.
(http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpcfl_665694/t1024781.shtml).

economically more closely tied to us, and we must have deeper security cooperation and closer people-to-people ties.”²⁰⁾

It becomes more interesting that China now tries to propose alternative security mechanism to deal with Asian security architecture. At the fourth summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), President Xi Jinping delivered a key-note speech, saying that “his country...advocates a new security concept featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination, and supports the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and the League of Arab States in playing a positive role in regional affairs.” Here new security concept may mean that China now plans to suggest a better security norms and principles, based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. Xi, in this address, basically mentioned almost all important regional security issues covering from North Korean nuclear issue to Afghanistan, and promised “unremitting efforts in solving international and regional hotspot issues through dialogue and negotiation.”²¹⁾

As the all-front competition between the United States and China goes on, for the time being, the US-China relations are expected to go along the line with “new type of major power relations.” Both countries try to find out the dimension of common interests, to

20) “Xi Jinping: China to further friendly relations with neighboring countries,” *Xinhua*, Oct. 26, 2013, Retrieved on Oct.10, 2014. (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-10/26/c_125601680.htm).

21) “President Xi addresses CICA summit,” *Chinadaily*, May 21, 2014, Retrieved on Oct.10, 2014. (http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2014-05/21/content_17529363.htm).

expand the scope of consent, and to operationalize the cooperation. Susan Rice once holds that “When it comes to China, we seek to operationalize a new model of major power relations. That means managing inevitable competition while forging deeper cooperation on issues where our interests converge—in Asia and beyond.” Both countries list most impending and easily agreeable issues for the platform such as the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, a peaceful resolution to the Iranian nuclear issue, a stable and secure Afghanistan, and an end to conflict in Sudan. Also two countries can take concerted action to “bolster peace and development in places like sub-Saharan Africa, where sustainable growth would deliver lasting benefit to the peoples of Africa as well as to both our countries.” With China, Washington tries to enhance military-to-military relationship and strategic security dialogues and to cooperate on issues like counter-piracy and maritime security.²²⁾

(3) The problem of over-balancing among South Korea, Japan, and China

In dealing with security matters in Northeast Asia, one significant factor is that Korea, China, and Japan have not completed modern transition, in the sense that three countries could not accomplish their long-cherished goals of realizing normal, modern states with their traditional concept of people, nation, territory and sovereign rights. Both China and Korea are divided, failing to establish a unified

22) Susan E. Rice, “America’s Future in Asia,” Georgetown University, Washington, DC, Nov. 20, 2013.

modern state based on the traditional concept of one nation. Japan also failed to normalize itself having a constitutional restraint in wielding sovereign rights.²³⁾ As three countries have no experience of mutually recognizing each other as normal, modern state, each still preserves serious doubt that other actors may strive for revisionist policies. Korea and Japan fears of the revival of traditional Chinese hegemonic expansion, whereas Korea and China fear the return of Japanese imperialism in some forms. These fears historically produced, make these states over-balance against each other, and become highly sensitive to each other's interpretation of history. They assume that historical consciousness may reflect each other's future strategic intention, thereby feeling needs to perform soft balancing against each other. These fears have been frequently aggravated by the element of domestic politics, in which some politicians make full use of these matters for the benefit of political calculation.

One example is Japanese conceptions of the rise of China.

23) As three countries still have the accomplishment of complete modern states as national goals such as reunification or normalization preserving traditionally cherished concept of territory and nation, sources of conflict are fundamentally deep. It is true that as of now these countries are recognized as complete modern states by international society, yet these countries still want to complete the modern transition by integrating traditionally conceived nation, territory, and sovereign rights. As these countries behave as normal modern states, this poses theoretical challenge how to deal with this composite situation in terms of organizing principle in international relations and the conception of units. For the concept of incomplete sovereignty, see Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), David Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), Siba N. Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-Determination in International Law* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Frequently Japan remembers the traditional regional order under Sino-centric world view. With the worsening of the relationship between South Korea and Japan, Japanese also uses the history as one of the grounds to argue that South Korea's traditional affinity with China will be revived in projecting the future regional order in the 21st century. This means that the traditional regional order still looms large in the perception of East Asians.

Augmented by this kind of fear, and also furnished by national aim to normalize itself, Japan has been taking steps to creating a stronger military. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, with the tenet of proactive pacifism, approved a new five-year defense plan, and the acquisition of drones and amphibious assault vehicles, and decided to reinterpret constitutional clause for collective self-defense. It comes from a prolonged rivalry with China over islands in the East China Sea, but reflects Japanese perception on the rise of China in general.

(4) South Korea's middle power role in regional security architecture

South Korea, surrounded by four great powers, will have terrible times if power transition translates into military clashes. More than anything else, to enhance systemic flexibility is crucial. To do this, South Korea needs (1) to prevent war among great powers or military clashes for regional hegemony; (2) to peacefully manage difficult regional affairs which has implications for great powers' rivalry; (3) to establish universal, international norm in spite of power shift; and (4) to enhance the role of middle powers to lessen the

strategic distrust among great powers, especially between the United States and China.

This goal is, in other words, to balance against “great power politics” itself rather than any specific great power for specific their national interests. It aims to balance against great power politics not to replace the role of great powers, but to transform the logic of power politics with better logic of multilateral cooperation. Then, East Asians may advance a new picture of regional governance with more universal value orientation benefiting regional citizens regardless of power distribution.

Second, to cope with complex nature of power transition and the problem of overbalancing, it is crucial to have a common, well-developed view on Northeast Asian international politics; to trace the origin of the problems, different combinations of organizing principles in East Asia international relations; to develop customized means for solving different problems. Also South Korea with the help of other middle powers in the region, or hopefully of great powers, need to develop knowledge diplomacy among middle powers. Here theoretical assumptions are important. If we can develop common view on our regional history, then, the problem of over-balancing will be easy to solve. In this case to depoliticize the issue is critical, and we may hope to develop regional identity among people in the region.

Third, the role of middle powers such as South Korea will be crucial in mini- and multi-lateral mechanisms. Northeast Asia-specific multilateral security institutions are rare. Only Six Party Talks is equal to the qualification as a Track I network confined to Northeast Asian countries. However the issue area of the Six Party Talks is

limited to dealing with North Korean nuclear issues, even though there is one working group related to regional multilateral cooperation. Also the Six Party Talks has been held at the level of assistant secretaries which is relatively insufficient to deal with major regional issues.

Under this situation, main venues for regional cooperation are bilateral, and mini-lateral ones. U.S.-centered alliance network, the so-called hub-and-spoke network comprises cooperation among the United States, South Korea, and Japan. China has not pursued alliance as a central venue for cooperation from the Cold-War times, with the exception of the case with North Korea. Russia's tie with North Korea in the form of alliance does not exist any longer. However, bilateral network among China, Russia, and North Korea is still central. Trilateral cooperation reflects both institutional balancing and institutional cooperation.

Anchored on the US-China relations, the U.S.-centered trilateral cooperative mechanism among the United States, South Korea, and Japan may be viewed to balance against the rise of China. As the first line of American rebalancing strategy is strengthening the relationship with alliance partners, mini-lateral mechanism still looms large. China, on the other hand, endeavors to strengthen ties with neighboring countries especially in the period of Xi Jinping administration, both at the bilateral and mini-lateral levels. APT, SCO, and other multi-track mechanism is being developed to cope with the U.S. centered mini-lateralism. Yet, mini-lateral mechanism can contribute to alleviate competitiveness among great powers. China-Korea-Japan trilateral has been initiated and still continues even

though there is serious trouble between China and Japan, and between Korea and Japan.

Here mini-lateralism helps. Mini-lateral mechanism is effective in that relevant participants focus on impending issues with higher level of priority, flexible in that the scope of participants is adaptable according to the issues, and constructive in that a web of multiple mini-lateral mechanism may ultimately end up with the most solid multilateralism.

In all these processes, middle powers do not pursue hegemonic dominance. They try to lessen strategic distrust among great powers because hegemonic strife endangers their interests; anchor the regional order on non-zero-sum game and normative politics; establish stable middle power cooperation to have stronger impact on architectural issue; and evade the pitfall of degenerating mini-lateral venues for institutional balancing among major powers.

4. North Korean problem as an issue of strengthening South Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy

Although middle power diplomacy of South Korea in dealing with regional matter may seem plausible, it will be very difficult to persuade great powers to be flexible to try multilateral alternatives. In this case, South Korea needs promising issues to enhance its middle power role and to enlighten the prospect of solving the issues based on South Korea's suggestion. North Korean problem, and the question of unification, so far, has been dealt with from the

perspective of national interests. It is certainly true that these problems directly concern the interests of Korean people.

Many analysts in international society predicts that the unified Korea will assume itself as a great power with the population of more than eighty million, expanded labor forces from the North, and the synergy coming from integration overcoming the cost of division. It will be clearly a big challenge to find a common ground among Korean people whether the unified Korea will pursue great power strategy or middle power strategy. This article argues that Korea can contribute to its own national interests and regional stability by pursuing middle power diplomacy. Then, we need to try to accelerate the process of unification, at the same time, to strengthen South Korea's capability to perform middle power role and ultimately to enhance regional systemic stability and flexibility, as what follows.

The core of the North Korean problem is how to define its future strategic status with credible guarantee from outside powers, and the solution can be only given by the consent among Korean people and regional powers. North Korea is the country under constant insecurity of being absorbed by the South, betrayed by China, and allegedly threatened by the United States. North Korea will not give up nuclear weapons unless it feels assured of its survivability.

First, both South Korea and the United States have constantly declared their intention to guarantee North Korea's survival. However both lack of trust, incoherent policy coming from domestic considerations, and intransigent negation strategy prevented both parties to build trust.

Second, it is also true that recent North Korean behavior to

continue the provocation and to raise the level of tension embarrasses China. China, so far the most supportive ally of North Korea, is in a position to act as a consistent responsible stakeholder and to strengthen its soft power as a potential regional and even global leader. On the one hand, China has to conform to and strengthen universal norms such as non-proliferation which leads to wielding the influence to restrain North Korea.²⁴⁾ On the other hand, uncertain future for hegemonic rivalry with the United States, especially in the region of Northeast Asia and Western Pacific worries China precipitating the need to keep North Korea closer as a useful geostrategic buffer. In that sense, China just cannot side with South Korea and the United States in raising the level of sanctions against the North, which might lead to the final collapse of North Korea and the unification by absorption. Then, the most desirable picture is slowly reforming and pro-China North Korea which ultimately contribute to the strengthening of future China.

North Korea's recent behavior aggravated this dilemma. After China participated in international sanctions since North Korea's missile test in December, 2012, China cannot but watch deeper engagement of the United States in Northeast Asian military theater based on the alliance with South Korea, which might leave long-term effect of changing the military balance of power in the region to the favor of the United States. To make matters worse, there are common voices to urge China to take more active position to restrain

24) Reports say that a member of China's Politburo, Li Jianguo, led a small delegation to Pyongyang, North Korea's capital, in November. He carried a letter from China's new leader, Xi Jinping, which is said to have contained a simple message: Do not launch a ballistic missile.

and coerce North Korea.

Under this situation, South Korea has the competence 1) to define the nature of North Korean problem including nuclear problem; 2) make the North Korean issue as one of the most important regional issues needing the concerted acts of great powers; 3) establish and deepen the mechanism of multilateral consultation; 4) to use this as the platform for a more formidable multilateral institution. Also more tactically South Korea can prove itself as highly capable of lessening security dilemma, and performing the function of networking power.

In the example of North Korean nuclear problem, North Korea will not be persuaded only by verbal guarantee or economic assistance short of political full support to give up nuclear weapons. At this stage strategic interaction should be complemented by more communicative interaction. Communicative action is about understanding the preferences of the other party, and delivering my preferences in a more credible form. It aims at “coming to understanding over the conditions of interaction rather than an orientation towards achieving immediate self-interest.”²⁵⁾ One way of reinforcing the credibility is to use publicity in communicative action. By raising the audience cost and verifiability through public realm, my signaling can be appreciated just more than a cheap talk. In this process, South Korean dynamic democratic political process will help send signal to, and form preferences of North Korea.

To convince North Korea of genuine intention of South Korea and

25) Marc Lynch, “Why Engage?: China and the Logic of Communicative Engagement, *European Journal of International Relations*, *European Journal of International Relations* 8.2 (2002): 192.

neighboring countries, more public debate and discourses about the future of North Korea needs to be augmented. If North Korea witnesses the increase of public debate upon its role and status in Northeast Asia, it may seek to conform to the expectation of international society, not because of its good intention, but because of the will to survive.²⁶⁾ In this process, even a slight representation of the intention to absorb North Korea by any government will incite North Korea's worry leading to increasing mistrust toward outside powers. If South Korea learns how to perform communicative action, and how to augment its network power as a middle power, this experience will be repeated for further problems in the region as a whole.

The question of Korean unification requires South Korea's highly keen strategic capability. Without prior strategic consultation with encompassing powers, especially the United States and China, the process of unification will be more difficult. The United States officially supported the unification of the Peninsula.²⁷⁾ China, Japan, and Russia altogether bless the future of a unified Korea in principle. However, the strategic stance of a unified Korea, assumed by these

26) James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review* 88 (1994): 577-92; James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41 (1997): 68-90.

27) "The deep longing for freedom and dignity will not go away. So, too, on this divided peninsula. The day all Koreans yearn for will not come easily or without great sacrifice. But make no mistake, it will come. And when it does, change will unfold that once seemed impossible. And checkpoints will open and watchtowers will stand empty, and families long separated will finally be reunited. And the Korean people, at long last, will be whole and free," Barack Obama, Hankuk University, Seoul, Mar. 26, 2012, Address.

states will determine how they will react in the actual process of unification. The best prospect for unified Korea's diplomacy will be middle power diplomacy which will contribute to regional common goods, with the view that unified Korea will not pursue the strategic line of expanding its power as a great power. Also as the event of unification of Korea symbolizes the beginning of the completion of modern transition, it will inspire China and Japan to accomplish the same goals, and mutually respect each other as equal sovereigns.

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Abstract

South Korea's Middle Power Strategy as a Foreign Strategy

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In Northeast Asia, the rivalry between the United States and China increasingly define the nature of regional security order. The combination of balance of power logic and the phenomenon of power transition defies the expectation that great power politics will make way for multilateral cooperation, but multilateral institutions are being reshaped to reflect great power politics. The rise of nationalism, composed of many different elements, haunts the region, further complicating security situation. Going through a series of hardships, nations in East Asia preserves a high level of suspicions and fears among themselves, which aggravates security dilemma.

On the other hand, global security environments are in great flux. With possible decline of American hegemony, power vacuum takes places in many regions motivating many powers to take risks to accomplish regional ambitions. Rising tensions in Ukraine, the Middle East, and even in East Asia, shows that the hesitance of the United States to intervene with massive military power, specially ground forces, radically changes security landscape in these regions.

These changes provide South Korea with opportunities and difficulties. South Korea's main purpose is to contribute to enhancing systemic stability and flexibility to absorb the impacts of great powers' rivalry and to pave the way for resilient adaptation to new security surroundings. South Korea has devised and elaborated the concept of middle power diplomacy for the past several years. In the area of security strategy, it is composed of six elements: 1) to help great powers to lessen mutual strategic mistrust; 2) to

find out and suggest issue-specific dispute settlement mechanism; 3) to develop multilateral institutions or to actively participate in and further existing institutions; 4) to preemptively import globally established norms to the region to set up the principle on which Northeast Asians can solve the problems; 5) to make a cooperative network among like-minded middle powers to strengthen their positions vis-à-vis great powers; 6) then, finally to be a co-architect in making and reforming regional security architecture. In what follows, this paper will delve into these points in more detail.

Key Words

South Korea, foreign policy, middle power, rebalancing, rise of china, North Korea, non-proliferation

