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Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific Hearing:**

U.S. Economic and Military Alliances in Asia: The Republic of Korea

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**Prepared Statement by
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Chairman Salmon and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the kind invitation to testify before you today. I am honored for the opportunity to share with you my views on the status of our alliance with the Republic of Korea (ROK) and to offer strategies that will serve the national interests of both our countries and maximize mutual benefits.

In 2006, almost a decade ago, I testified before the House Committee on International Relations on this very topic, but under quite different circumstances: the question at the time was whether the U.S.-ROK alliance was at risk, as the issues confronting us seemed dire and challenging to the partnership. Then, we were confronted with perceptions of anti-American sentiment in South Korea and perhaps more significantly, a perilous chasm in how the two countries viewed the purpose and function of the alliance. The reemergence of the North Korean nuclear crisis in the early 2000s coincided with a profound transformation of South Koreans' threat perception of North Korea, which had metamorphosed from the Cold War fear of the regime's strengths into one concerned rather with its *weaknesses*: the instability of the North Korean regime might lead to a collapse (either through implosion or explosion) thereby devastating the South's hard-won economic, political, and social systems.

Unfortunately, the fundamental difference in the U.S. threat perceptions of North Korea, which continued to focus on the threats emanating from the regime's strength – namely its build-up of nuclear capabilities – meant that Washington and Seoul's approaches towards Pyongyang would fundamentally clash and be at the heart of rising tensions between the two allies. Indeed, at the time there was a growing sense that some in Washington viewed the U.S.-ROK alliance as inhibiting a strong and muscular approach towards North Korea. Similar views were prevalent in South Korea, but for the inherently opposite reason; Seoul increasingly believed that the alliance was preventing South Korean-led overtures toward reconciliation and engagement with the North. As such, we reached perhaps one of the lowest points in the history of the long bilateral relationship in which the alliance was seen as a burden by both sides and a source of resentful "demands" that did not seem to meet the interests of either.

Fortunately, today, I am happy to be here before you amidst a much more satisfactory environment, in which the dark days of the alliance are relegated to recent history. Today, the alliance is overall in strong and robust shape due to much diligence,

hard-work, and dedicated efforts by both governments over the last several years. Domestic political changes, such as the change of administrations in both countries, have been important contributing variables and must not be discounted. However, perhaps the single most important factor in closing the gap between the U.S. and ROK's threat perceptions of North Korea is due to the provocative and menacing behavior exhibited by the North itself. These include aggressive continuation of its nuclear weapons programs, repeated testing of short and long-range missiles, and the sinking of a ROK naval ship *Cheonan* and shelling of South Korea's *Yeonpyeong* Island in 2010.

While both allies remain frustrated over the lack of progress in denuclearizing North Korea, there is a renewed and strong shared commitment to the alliance itself and its crucial function in deterring widespread North Korean aggression. Moreover, while the role and functions of the alliance have largely remained constant in the United States in the last decade, South Koreans and their attitudes about their own country, their position in the region and the world, and their global responsibilities have steadily evolved, imbuing them with broader understanding and consideration for the alliance. For example, a Pew survey conducted in 2014 indicated that 84 percent of South Koreans viewed the United States favorably, more than almost every other country in the world. This figure is nearly double of the lowest favorable rate of 46 percent reported in 2003.

This should not be misinterpreted, however, as a sign that all South Koreans support and embrace the U.S.-ROK alliance, nor that positive attitudes will last or even remain steady. Indeed, South Korea is a vibrant and mercurial democracy in which strong civil opponents of the alliance are active and may again gain political traction in future elections. In addition, certain bilateral issues remain as potential flashpoints for dramatic and rapid shifts in public opinion about the alliance, such as the potential deployment of THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense), and perennial issues arising from maintenance of U.S. forces on the Peninsula.

Nevertheless, I believe the strongest contributing factor in shaping South Korean attitudes toward the bilateral alliance is the changing strategic environment confronting the Korean Peninsula. It is therefore imperative for the United States to understand if not necessarily sympathize with South Korea's position.

ROK Views on the Alliance

South Korea has witnessed astonishing change and transformation since its inception as the Republic of Korea (ROK) in 1948, achieving remarkable economic, political, and social developments. The well-known "miracle on the Han" propelled the transformation of a war-torn, impoverished, and undeveloped country into a global economic powerhouse and modern democracy: today the ROK is the 13th largest economy in the world, and the 6th largest U.S. trading partner, with bilateral trade totaling almost \$114 billion in 2014.

Yet curiously, the ROK's security strategy has remained conspicuously consistent for the last sixty plus years, focused primarily on maintaining a robust deterrence and defense posture in order to sustain the status quo and prevent recurrence of conflict on the Korean Peninsula. South Korea's national security has

relied on maintaining three mutually reinforcing pillars: defensive deterrence; forward active defense; and an alliance with the United States.

Such a consistent national security strategy is not surprising given the persistent and constant threat posed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea). The lack of a formal peace treaty to end the Korean War caused the overwhelming security priority of both Koreas to inevitably focus on the existential threat posed by the other. As such, for the last six decades South Korea has prioritized its security concerns almost exclusively around immediate threats based on the Peninsula. The result, however, is that regional and global security issues have tended to rank much lower if at all in the South Korean consciousness, in direct contrast with U.S. security concerns which have been globally focused since World War II.

Since the late 1990s, however, South Korea's security challenges have grown more complex and multi-faceted, and are no longer narrowly defined by the conventional military threat from North Korea. Four key trends have compelled a redefinition of South Korea's security calculations over the last decade: diversification of the North Korean threat; China's military modernization and increased assertiveness in the region; the U.S. defense transformation and reorientation post-9/11; and South Korea's rise to middle power status and commensurate desire for greater autonomy in the regional and global arenas.

Of these factors, the primary driver of South Korea's defense transformation and modernization is an internally-based shift in its self-perception of national power, which is reinforced and shaped by changes in the external environment. While the U.S. Pivot or "rebalance" towards Asia has spurred debates and dialogue about security in the region, the policy itself has not had a direct causal impact on South Korea's security outlook. Indeed, the ROK's recent efforts to transform its armed forces, particularly of its navy, is more clearly a manifestation of the country's changing perception of its own status in the region and globally, rather than any changes wrought by U.S. Pivot itself, despite China's – and to some degree North Korea's -- attempts to further such a narrative.

Since the end of the Cold War, South Korea has actively pursued diplomatic and economic power projection off the Peninsula. Building upon the spectacular success of its export-led economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s, the Kim Young Sam administration launched a national "globalization" policy ("segyehwa") in 1993, to project South Korea's influence in the diplomatic, cultural, and educational arenas around the globe. It was a goal assiduously pursued by successive South Korean governments, including President Kim Dae Jung who dramatically increased the number of countries with diplomatic relations with the ROK. Expanding South Korea's presence if not influence around the world was more recently manifested by President Lee Myung-bak and his "Global Korea" strategy, highlighted by the ROK hosting the G20 Leaders Summit in 2010, and the Nuclear Security Summit in 2012. Today, with internationally recognized consumer brands, home to the world's second largest shipbuilding industry, significant commercial interests and investments all around the world and especially in the Middle East, as well as being highly dependent on foreign oil imports for its domestic energy supply, South Korean participation in international efforts to promote stability and security around the globe are reasonable if not necessary expectations.

It was not until 2006, however, that the ROK announced a major military modernization plan, the National Defense Reform bill -- often referred to as "Defense Reform 2020" (DR2020). Its purpose was to reconfigure the direction of South Korea's future military development by adjusting its military posture and missions to bring them closer in line to the new U.S. strategy.¹ While still addressing military threats from the North as the underlying threat to the ROK, DR2020 placed new emphasis on issues beyond the Peninsula with a corresponding reduction of the predominant ground-based forces. The new approach concentrates on new technologies and doctrines with a particular focus on working towards "jointness" among the armed services.

In 2011, following North Korean attacks on the *Cheonan* and *Yeonpyeong* Island in 2010, the ROK Ministry of Defense (MND) revised the DR2020, with the "Defense Reformation Plan 307" (DRP307). The new doctrine articulated in DRP307 signaled a significant change from the previous policy of patience and "defense by denial," to one of "proactive deterrence," directing the armed forces to retaliate against North Korean aggression.

It is important to note that these defense reform plans were not developed independently of the U.S.-ROK alliance, but rather in the context of changes within the alliance. DP2020 and DRP307 were in large part responses to force realignment plans made by the U.S. government in 2004, when it announced the redeployment of U.S. forces in Korea (USFK) that included the transfer of one brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division -- approximately 3,600 combat troops -- from the Peninsula in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The other stated objective was to reduce USFK troop levels in South Korea from 37,000 to 25,000 by 2008; in 2008, however, a new floor for troop levels was established at 28,500, where it remains today.

Another important element of the U.S. realignment includes the relocation of U.S. bases on the Peninsula, which was driven by the need to reduce domestic issues emanating from the large presence of U.S. forces in downtown Seoul. These large-scale efforts were articulated in the Land Partnership Plan (LPP) and the Yongsan Relocation Plan (YRP). LPP includes the relocation of approximately 10,000 USFK away from the DMZ to U.S. Army Garrison (USAG) Humphreys, located some 40 miles south of Seoul near Pyeongtaek. This will result in the consolidation of 104 USFK sites into 48, dramatically reducing the "footprint" of the U.S. presence. The move was to have been completed by 2008 but has been delayed several times and is now on track for 2017 completion. The original cost estimate was \$10 billion, of which the ROK will contribute \$4 billion, although the actual cost will certainly exceed estimates. YRP includes the consolidation and relocation of approximately 9,000 U.S. military personnel away from Yongsan Base located in central Seoul, whose presence has long been an issue of local contention and unpopularity. YRP is predominantly funded by the ROK government, and has also been beset by delays.

A final and important element of the alliance transformation is the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) of South Korean troops from the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command (CFC) to the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). As part of

¹ The National Defense Reform was enacted by an "Enforcement Decree" in March 2007 upon approval by the ROK National Assembly. And in July 2007, the "Office of Defense Reform," an organization administering the defense reforms, was established directly under the Office of the National Defense Minister to oversee implementation of reforms. (ROK *Defense White Paper 2008*)

the 2007 agreement, the current U.S.-ROK CFC, which has been commanded by a U.S. General Officer, will be replaced with separate U.S. and ROK military commands, with the new U.S. command provisionally called KORCOM. OPCON transfer has been and remains a controversial issue for the alliance as many South Koreans incorrectly believe the current command structure symbolizes an infringement of Korean sovereignty. The transfer has been postponed in 2010 and 2015, and now may not be achieved until at least 2020 if at all, with the two sides agreeing to a “conditions based” necessity for the change.

Despite the various delays in implementation, these transformational elements are incorporated in a “Joint Vision for the Alliance,” (JVA) which was a product of a presidential summit between Presidents Obama and Lee Myung-bak in June 2009. The JVA remains an important achievement between the two allies that cements close cooperation and coordination, and in addition articulates goals to enhance and globalize future defense cooperation.

The significance of a shared vision for a future alliance that encompasses global functions cannot be understated and is a synchronous complement to former President Lee’s “Global Korea” strategy, actively carried on by current President Park Geun-hye. As a legitimate “middle power” in the 21st century, part of the aim of the Global Korea strategy was to raise South Korea’s profile, capabilities, and willingness to contribute to international security in tandem with broader efforts to raise the country’s image as a leader on the world stage. Increasing South Korea’s global responsibilities is considered a way of acknowledging and reciprocating international assistance that made vital contributions to South Korea’s survival and remarkable development. Thus, South Korea’s roles in and contributions to international security are no longer being defined by its government as off-shoots of U.S.-ROK alliance roles, but as issues that are part of South Korea’s responsibilities and interests in promoting global stability as a leading member of the international community.

The result has been that under the Lee and Park administrations, South Korea has greatly expanded its participation and contribution to a range of international activities, including Peace-keeping Operations (PKO), humanitarian and disaster relief, counter-proliferation, and anti-piracy, among other activities. Notably, one of the key assets South Korea necessary to increase such global activities directly involve the ROK Navy, whose eventual development into blue-water capabilities has been a focus of DR2020 and DRP307.

Ironically, although highly encouraged by the United States today and considered a crucial component of a future robust alliance, South Korean forays into the global security environment have been nascent in great part due to the alliance itself. The division of the Korean Peninsula in 1945, and the provision of a security guarantee afforded by the Mutual Security Treaty with the United States afforded the ROK the space and the confidence to seek out its own independent national interests outside the confines of the bilateral alliance relationship. In the early years of the alliance, the ROK’s pursuit to establish external relations was an overwhelming function of desire for rapid industrialization and economic development -- seeking additional sources of raw materials, critical resources, and potential markets for Korean exports – as well as a zero-sum competition with the DPRK for international legitimacy.

Only recently, as the ROK reached the top tiers of international advancement in the 1990s – the ROK became an OECD member in 1996 -- did South Korean national interests begin to be defined publicly as “global” in nature, but still remained confined primarily to pursuing robust economic activities. Aggressive economic engagement is not surprising given that the ROK economy is highly dependent on international trade, constituting an astonishing 97 percent of its GDP in 2011. Notably, 99.7 percent of the nation’s trade is conducted via ocean transport: 100 percent of its crude oil, 90 percent of its raw steel, and 73 percent of food are carried via ship, utilizing the major sea-lanes of the world.² Moreover, because South Korea has no domestic production of oil, the country is entirely dependent on oil imports, 80 percent of which are transported from the Middle East through two of the world’s major oil transit choke points: the Strait of Hormuz, and the Straits of Singapore and Malacca. Any disruption of vessels carrying oil to South Korea through these sea lanes would have an immediate and devastating effect on the economy. Thus, open Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) has taken on steadily greater importance over the years. Although the prioritization of securing SLOCs temporarily waned in the decades after the end of the Cold War for the United States and the West, they have once again taken on greater urgency in the wake of emboldened Chinese and even Russian maritime activities, and with the rise of transnational threats, such as piracy.

The security of critical SLOCs in and around Asia has been guaranteed and underwritten by the U.S Navy for the last six decades as part of the U.S. commitment to its treaty allies in region, and it has undoubtedly contributed to South Korea’s ability to rapidly develop its economy into an industrial powerhouse today. While the United States remains maritime Asia’s strongest military and economic presence today, it is conceivable that China may become the dominant regional naval power during this century.

The uncertainty of this power shift has increased concerns throughout Asia and in particularly South Korea about the potential for reductions or even an eventual U.S. withdrawal from the region, and the consequences of China becoming the regional maritime hegemon. Even as China has cultivated close economic ties throughout the region, its actions to date have exhibited a propensity towards competition rather than the attributes of a benevolent hegemon willing to bear the costs of maintaining open SLOCs that do not disproportionately benefit itself. For a heavily trade dependent economy such as South Korea, the consequences of such a development are profound indeed.

Deep anxieties about the future distribution of power in the region which is highly dependent on the presence and power of the United States have not been alleviated by the grand announcement by the Obama Administration of a “Pivot” to Asia. This is despite the fact that ironically, one important rationale driving the Pivot was to increase U.S. emphasis on Asia in order to alleviate the perception that U.S. commitment to the region were waning due to pressures to reduce U.S. defense spending.

Indeed, it is the inability of the Pivot to meet lofty expectations that has weakened confidence among some U.S. allies about continued American commitment in the region at a time of emboldened Chinese behavior. These concerns are exacerbated by increasing pressure at home to reduce U.S. defense spending which directly contradict

² World Bank, 2012 data.

the Pentagon's ability to implement the Pivot by directing more assets to the region. As such, ongoing uncertainty about the Pivot's intentions, impact, and sustainability in the region is contributing to the rise to increased apprehension about the future shape of the Asian security order in the 21st century.

Dissatisfaction with and uncertainty about the future distribution of power in the region are at the heart of the seemingly obsessive Asian focus on competing narratives of history which have cast a dark shadow over contemporary efforts to navigate fluctuating changes in the regional order. The revisionist tendency of all four Northeast Asian countries – China, Japan, and the two Koreas – has poisoned the political landscape and inhibits their ability to forge closer cooperation, but this is rather the symptom and not the cause of regional discord.

For example, the current heightened tension between South Korea and Japan over their inability to achieve mutually acceptable accounts over 20th century events may seem to outsiders as banal, trivial, or even unnecessary, but their significance goes beyond a righteous demands for “correction” of historical interpretation and reflects instead concern about an uncertain future more than the necessity to correct the past. Japan's current efforts to “normalize” its military and adopt more robust security stances are therefore met with suspicion because without what Koreans deem as an “acceptable” accounting of past actions – a bar that Japan may never be able to achieve – they will remain deeply anxious about future Japanese actions.

For the United States, these intractable historical disputes are increasingly problematic as they inhibit cooperation between two of the most important U.S. allies in Asia, and moreover threatens to weaken both bilateral alliances as each partner attempts to press the United States to exert its influence over the other. This is a trap that the United States must avoid as any U.S. intervention is an exercise in futility. Efforts to avoid direct involvement and contain Korean-Japanese disputes to their respective bilateral context, however, does not mean that the United States should be cavalier or dismissive about the relevance of historical issues.

Recent events in our own country involving the continued significance of the Confederate flag or debates over the name of the Redskins football team reveal that historical scars still resonate profoundly in the contemporary consciousness of many societies and cannot so easily be overcome. Lecturing our ally partners to “get over it and move on” is not a course of action or attitude that will contribute to positive U.S. alliance relationships. Rather, the United States should work with our ally partners to create a shared vision about the future regional order and alleviate anxieties by garnering their active participation and stressing their respective roles in achieving it. Only by doing so can we expect South Korea and Japan to accommodate each other's objectives and strategies. While the two countries may be deeply divided over their past, they share much more in common regarding future objectives and goals, and this should be the primary focus of U.S. diplomatic and military efforts.

Shared Strategic Objectives

Despite the current distraction of South Korea-Japan historical tensions, it is with China that Korea has had a much longer and complex relationship. China has undeniably been the foreign power of the greatest importance to Korea throughout its long history, beginning with a short-lived Chinese Yen Kingdom's conquest of the

ancient Chosun (Korean) kingdom at the end of the fourth century B.C. For more than two thousand years since then, the fate of the two cultures has been inexorably intertwined. The Korean Peninsula served as the natural conduit for access both to and off the Asian mainland. Indeed, the final death knell of Imperial China, marked by its ignominious defeat by the upstart Japan in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), was essentially a battle over control and access to the Korean Peninsula, as was the subsequent Russo-Japanese War in 1904. And China's special relationship akin to "lips and teeth" with North Korea was forged from the very inception of the DRPK in 1947. This long history intertwined with the Chinese "Middle Kingdom" has meant that both South and North Korea's relationship with the neighboring giant is profoundly complex. And as the "shrimp among whales," the smallest of independent countries surrounded by powerful neighbors, Korea – both unified and divided – has been particularly sensitive to the maneuverings of great powers.

The outbreak of the Korean War and the ensuing Cold War was in many ways a period of clarity for both Korea's position vis-à-vis China. As long as the PRC and the United States stood on opposite sides of the Cold War divide, the two Koreas were secure in their proper places in the shadows of their larger partners. Since the Sino-Soviet split in the 1970s, followed by détente between the United States and China, and then normalization of relations between Seoul and Beijing, China's relations with the two Koreas have been a delicate balance of intersecting and often conflicting interests. Today, China has surpassed the United States as the ROK's largest bilateral trading partner but China is also the lifeline for North Korea's economic survival. China's continued tolerance if not outright support of North Korea, despite its continued recalcitrant behavior, has served to encourage Pyongyang to behave with impunity.

Both Koreas have long tolerated China's bifurcated strategies to maintain ties with both sides of the Peninsula even if it has meant playing one against the other. And both are long familiar with China's assertions of superiority and dominance over the Peninsula, as evidenced by the grand controversy that erupted between Beijing and Seoul in 2004 over the origins and historical legacy of the Goguryeo Kingdom (37 B.C. to 668 A.D.).³ While the bitter recriminations over an ancient and defunct kingdom may seem to be a bemusing historical anomaly to those outside Asia, for Koreans the incident was a profound manifestation of deep and unsettling Chinese strategic ambitions in the region. While Japan has long-served as an easy and emotional target of Korean recriminations against historical injustices suffered by the Korean people during brutal colonization (1910-1945), it is the uncertainty about Chinese dominance that has always presented the far greater challenge to Korean interests more than any potential resurgence of Japanese power. This dynamic, long-buried and until recently grudgingly acknowledged, is becoming more manifest in South Korea's recently articulated defense strategies.

Nevertheless, while there seems to be a growing coalescence of concern among South Korea's leadership about Chinese dominance in the region, there is by no means a consensus, nor is the famously divisive and vociferous South Korean public unified in its views towards China. Beijing's open and flagrant support of Pyongyang after its

³ For a detailed discussion of the controversy over Goguryeo, see: Peter Hays Gries, "The Goguryeo Controversy: National Identity, and Sino-Korean Relations Today," *East Asia*, (Winter 2005, Vol. 22, No. 4), pp. 3–17.

attacks against the South in 2010, including the sinking of the *Cheonan*, caused some changes in South Korean attitudes towards China. But the public remains deeply ambivalent and divided over what it views with resentment as having to “choose” between China and the United States.

For example, the reaction in South Korea to the release of the latest U.S. *National Military Strategy* (July 1, 2015) which highlighted Chinese attempts to “revise the maritime status quo” in Asia, was concern that the United States will pressure Seoul to support measures to counter China. The predominant view in South Korea is that the country is not in a position to take an open stance on escalating maritime disputes in the region for fear of straining ties with China, its largest trading partner and an important source of tourism, as well as the key actor in denuclearizing North Korea. But in fact, by *not* choosing to support shared alliance objectives, or even by remaining on the sidelines of Chinese actions that clearly challenge Korean interests, South Korea cedes tacit power to Chinese objectives establishing a dangerous precedent for the future.

Such Korean preoccupation with China’s reaction is an important litmus test for future wrinkles in the U.S.-ROK alliance and may increase tensions as U.S. objections to Chinese actions in the region are likely to increase in the near and distant future. China’s opposition to ROK consideration of adopting THAAD is another example of inappropriate Chinese insertions into issues that should relate purely to South Korea’s defense calculations. After all, unless Beijing has intentions to launch missiles into the southern half of the Korean Peninsula, South Koreans should not be concerned about Chinese arguments about their reduced deterrent capabilities. As such, a ROK adoption of THAAD is less a straightforward military concern for China, and more a political barometer indicating the closeness of the U.S.-ROK alliance.

Indeed, the increasingly assertive Chinese maritime behavior we are witnessing today may be part of a broader strategy to test Beijing’s authority over smaller neighbors in the near term by pushing U.S. forces away from its maritime borders to demonstrate rights over the entire South and East China Seas. Under such Chinese dominance, smaller powers will not necessarily have to give up their independence or even have to emulate China ideologically, but they will have to show due respect, and if necessary provide appropriate concessions. One necessary concession in China’s view will be the reduction of U.S. influence in the region, if not the end of the alliance system itself. Whether or not these are truly Chinese intentions is less important than the significance of the smaller Asian countries reactions and the message they send to Beijing.

Increased economic, social, and even political interaction in East Asia have expanded the scope of soft power but have not eliminated the continued preeminence of traditional measures of hard power. This shift is not due to any decline of U.S. power presence in the region per se, nor is it solely a function of China’s military modernization, but rather an increase in Chinese confidence borne from its explosive economic growth and expanding global presence. Recent self-assurance – reinforced by its sole recovery from the global economic crisis in 2008 – has contributed to the expansion of Chinese strategic calculations to include the need to defend China’s national interests in maritime, air, space, and cyber environments, both near its borders and beyond. While sea and air defense area denial are short-term and tangible goals, the Chinese strategic vision seems to be much more expansive in the long-term.

In the face of such changes, but more important given the *lack* of fundamental changes in the basic security dynamics in the region, there is no question that U.S. bilateral alliances with South Korea and Japan remain the fundamental pillars upon which continued stability rests. Yet, despite the fact that the stark lines of contrasting Cold War security interests remain intact especially on the Korean Peninsula, the blurring of economic interests have served to amplify the twin fears of entrapment and abandonment that have perennially plagued America's allies. South Korea's worst fear – as is the case of many other nations in East Asia – is to be caught in the middle of a U.S.-China battle for regional supremacy. But an equally frightening scenario is one in which the United States withdraws from the region, leaving Korea alone to fend for itself in an unstable and uncertain environment.

Thus, as the United States moves forward in refining and articulating our strategy in the region, we should remain mindful of the concerns of our allies and acknowledge their crucial contribution in our efforts to proactively and peacefully meet the challenges presented by an evolving China.

Future Cooperation for the Alliance

While the primary goal of the U.S.-ROK alliance was and is to deter North Korean aggression through the Mutual Security Treaty and commitment to the Armistice, its broader objective has always been to maintain regional stability. The alliance has done so by serving as a tangible bedrock for U.S. engagement in the Asia Pacific.

Today, we are fortunate that the alliance has successfully weathered a dark period of tension and emerged into a bilateral relationship that continues to evolve towards greater equity and maturity. The leaders of both countries should be commended for their diligent efforts over the last few years to quietly and successfully achieve agreement on a number of thorny issues, including ratification of the KORUS Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and a new agreement on Civil Nuclear Cooperation – the so-called “123 Agreement.” We should not remain complacent, however, as the alliance will undoubtedly be bombarded again in the future by a boisterous Korean civil society. Two upcoming issues will similarly serve as proxies for existential debates about the alliance itself: South Korean adoption of THAAD and greater active ROK participation in securing SLOCs in and around the East and South China Seas. While creating challenges for political leaders, these developments if prudently managed in their proper context will not necessarily unravel the alliance.

Meanwhile, there are several other areas of cooperation that can be actively pursued under the auspices of a robust alliance. On the Korean Peninsula, we must not lose sight of the imminent and perennial threat that emanates from North Korea. Recent actions undertaken by both the United States and ROK contribute to actively address North Korean asymmetric threats. The *2015 Strategic Digest* outlines four new principles to counter North Korea's missile threat: (1) acquire, field, and employ anti-missile capabilities on the Peninsula; (2) enhance combined training exercises; (3) support existing 4D lines of efforts (4D lines are: “to detect, defend, disrupt, and destroy

North Korean ballistic missile threats”); (4) commit to bilateral consultation.⁴ A recent \$8 billion increase in the ROK defense budget for the 2016-2020 fiscal years is specifically targeted towards the nation’s preemptive strike capabilities and air and missile defense systems, and will greatly enhance the U.S.-led 4D lines.

The U.S. commitment to the ROK is not just for defense and deterrence, but as an alliance partner to support South Korean efforts towards an eventual and permanent resolution of conflict with the North. While North Korea’s illicit pursuit of a nuclear weapons program has erected an additional barrier to a permanent peace, President Park Geun-hye has admirably developed a vision for eventual Korean reunification that goes beyond the nuclear issue. The strategy, which includes conditional engagement of the North in the short-term, is essentially focused on long-term efforts to pave the way for peace in Northeast Asia. The United States should contribute full efforts to assist the realization of South Korean efforts in this regard.

The U.S.-ROK alliance has also served economic interests far beyond the narrow confines of purely military cooperation, and have been undoubtedly mutually beneficial for both countries. As such, the two allies can cooperate further in the economic arena, by seriously considering ROK as a future member of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The ROK’s inclusion in the TPP is even more crucial in the context of the conclusion of an FTA between South Korea and China in November 2014. Both countries view the bilateral agreement as the basis for further regional economic integration through its expansion into a trilateral agreement to include Japan, as well as a larger multilateral FTA, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which will incorporate the three Northeast Asian economies with the ten members of ASEAN as well India, Australia, and New Zealand. ROK participation in TPP will ensure that the regional economy will not just be Asian but securely connected with the Pacific.

Another area for closer allied coordination is the ROK’s membership in the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB). Because the United States and Japan have chosen not to join, South Korea is in a position to take a leadership role within the AIIB by representing and insisting on the values, preferred rules, and standards of conduct shared among the three allies.

In the global security arena, the ROK has already shown great initiative by steadily expanding its participation in a variety of activities, such as PKO, anti-piracy, reconstruction and stabilization operations, and humanitarian relief. A crucial area for expansion, however, is the implementation of a vigorous non-proliferation program both in the region and globally; the steady expansion of North Korea’s illicit activities makes interdiction efforts more crucial than ever. Finally, the United States and ROK can greatly expand cooperation on cyber defenses.

Ultimately, any close cooperation in the future is dependent on continuing the achievements of the past few years in reaffirming a robust and committed alliance. Because one of the most important contributing factors to a strong alliance is domestic political support, the future political leaders of both countries should be mindful to not sacrifice the achievements and hard-work of the past several years by sabotaging continuation of one of the most important bilateral relationships in the region. It is clear

⁴ The *Strategic Digest* is an annual publication issued by the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK), ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Korea Command (CFC), and the United Nations Command (UNC). The 4D lines of efforts were endorsed during the October 2014 U.S.-ROK security Consultative Meeting.

that the U.S. objectives for the mid- to long-term future is to continue to play an active and positive role in maintaining stability in East Asia. The promotion of prosperity, freedom, and cooperation in the region are undoubtedly integral to the U.S. national interest. The best and perhaps only way for the United States to maintain its positive influence in the region is through its alliances with key partners.