A View from the United States on ROK-U.S. Relations

Mark Tokola

For the proverbial visitor from Mars, the political situation in Northeast Asia is inexplicable. Sitting amidst a group of relatively stable, wealthy, and powerful countries, is a small, poor, belligerent nation that all agree is a threat to regional stability. Furthermore, the rogue state has been sanctioned and its behavior condemned by the United Nations for its weapons programs and its human rights abuses. Why can the Republic of Korea (ROK), Japan, the United States, Russia, and China not combine their considerable leverage to do something about North Korea?

The question can be divided into two parts: 1) could external pressure change North Korea's behavior? and 2) is there something getting in the way of coordination among the five regional powers? Although the first question is ripe for serious consideration this chapter primarily focuses on the second.

The most obvious culprit is the dynamic between China and the United States and its allies in the region. Comparing China's goals in its relationship with North Korea with those shared by the United States and South Korea, I argue that divergence between them, stemming from the broader context of great power rivalry, is hindering policy coordination, and thus obstructing resolution of the North Korean issue. I do so by first outlining recent examples of military interventions and economic sanctions by large states into and on small states to demonstrate the significance of China's support for North Korea. I then recount China's relations with North Korea since the conclusion of the Korean War before detailing U.S.-South Korea relations over the same period. The chapter concludes by examining how the Beijing-Washington rivalry on the global stage is preventing a shared solution on North Korea that can no longer be delayed.

MILITARY INTERVENTIONS BY LARGE STATES INTO SMALL STATES

To briefly answer the question of whether large state actions can change small state behavior, it is sufficient to note that there are examples from recent decades showing that when individual smaller states pose a threat to regional security, and lack great power patrons to protect them, forcefully imposed change can happen, usually but not always resulting in regime change. Four examples are cited: Serbia, Iraq, Georgia, and Libya.

Serbia

Serbian leader Miroslav Milosevic was forced by a military air campaign to accept an international plan to end the Kosovo War in June 1999, paving the way for the separation of Kosovo from Serbia. Although Russia protested NATO's bombing campaign against Serbia in March 1999, Milosevic yielded to international demands once it became clear to him that Russia would not intervene to protect him. Sixteen months later he was driven from office following public demonstrations in Serbia. He died in prison in 2006 while on trial for crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague.

Iraq

In 1990, Iraq invaded its neighbor Kuwait partly on territorial grounds, claiming that Kuwaiti territory had formed part of historic Iraq, and partly because Kuwait was exceeding OPEC production quotas, harming Iraq's oil revenues. After Kuwait offered only $9 billion of the

$10 billion that Iraq demanded as compensation, Iraqi aircraft first bombed Kuwait City on August 2, followed by a ground invasion. Kuwaiti resistance ended after 12 hours. After a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions calling for Iraqi withdrawal, UNSCR 678 was adopted on November 29, 1990 by a 12 to 2 vote, with Russia voting in favor, Cuba and Yemen against, and China abstaining. The resolution called for Iraqi forces to quit Kuwait by January 15, 1991, and authorized "all necessary force" to compel Iraq to comply if it failed to meet the deadline. An allied air campaign against Iraqi forces began on January 16, ground operations in Kuwait began on February 24, and on February 27, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein ordered Iraqi forces to withdraw from Kuwait, marking an end to the Gulf War. Although the United States hoped the defeat would lead to Saddam's fall, he suppressed domestic opposition and remained in power.

The international legal basis of the later U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003 is contestable. The United States argued that the unanimously-adopted UNSCR 1441 of November 2002 was sufficient grounds for military action given that Iraq had not cooperated with an international inspection program intended to identify and destroy purported weapons of mass destruction. Russia, China, France, Germany, and others argued that a further UNSCR would be required before force could be authorized. During the debate on UNSCR 1441, U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte had even said, "This resolution contains no 'hidden triggers,' or 'automaticity' with respect to use of force," and that a further resolution would be necessary if Iraq failed to comply with it.[1] Negroponte went on to say in his speech, however, that all member states reserved the right of self-defense and the ability to act unilaterally to protect peace and security.

Declaring that Iraqi WMD posed an imminent threat to international peace and security, the United States, with coalition allies, attacked. The formal phase of the Iraq War lasted from March 20, 2003, when U.S., British, Australian, and Polish troops entered Iraqi territory, until April 9, 2003, when Baghdad fell and Saddam Hussein's Iraqi government ceased to exist. Saddam Hussein was executed by the successor Iraqi government on December 30, 2006.

Georgia

On August 8, 2008, Russian forces entered Georgia in a "peace enforcement operation" to prevent Georgian forces from opposing a South Ossetia separatist campaign. On August 12, Russia and Georgia agreed to a French-brokered ceasefire. In violation of the ceasefire agreement, Russian troops continue to occupy Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Prior to 2008, Georgia had sought NATO membership, which it believed would create a shield against Russian pressure, but France and Germany both believed that NATO membership, or a NATO defense agreement with Georgia, would have been overly provocative towards Russia, and the Georgian application was rebuffed.[2] The consequence of Russian pressure since 2008 has been to forestall Georgia from aligning itself with the West.

Libya

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was fighting a civil war against an Arab Spring uprising in 2011 when UNSCR 1973 was passed on March 17, 2011 to authorize the protection of civilians in Libya "by all means necessary" by a vote of 10 to 0 (with Russia, China, India, Brazil, and Germany abstaining). NATO air strikes suppressed Gaddafi's forces, leading to a rebel victory on October 20. Gaddafi was captured and killed on that final day of heavy

fighting. Earlier, in 2003, Gaddafi had agreed under the pressure of international sanctions to dismantle his program of WMD. It was suggested at the time that the agreement could serve as an example for Iran and North Korea to do the same; and it was argued after Gaddafi's demise that the outcome of the Libyan War would serve to convince Iran and North Korea that it would be folly for them to abandon weapons programs that might have deterred NATO attacks on Libya. The discovery of hidden chemical weapons[3] and nuclear precursors (yellowcake)[4] in Libya after the conflict ended equally might be taken as a lesson that actually retaining WMD did not in the end save Gaddafi.

LARGE STATE ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AGAINST SMALL STATES

In cases in which military intervention is unworkable or undesirable, the most frequent alternative is economic sanctions. There is a rich and argumentative literature about the effectiveness of international economic sanctions. They have been exercised countless times, dating back at least to 432 B.C. when sanctions were imposed on the Megarians by Athens. Most scholars would agree that the record of their effectiveness is mixed at best. It is possible to cheat, leakages around the edges of sanctions are difficult to avoid, some economies are more self-sufficient than others, sanctions can provide a rallying point for the regimes of the targeted countries, and they rarely work quickly enough to satisfy those who impose them. Nevertheless, there are examples of them having worked.

One example of the effectiveness of international sanctions is apartheid South Africa – not the 1986 to 1991 international sanctions against South Africa, which seem to have played a minor role in ending apartheid compared to domestic political developments – but rather South Africa's own sanctions against Lesotho which lasted from 1982 to 1986. Members of the rebel African National Congress (ANC) had sought refuge in Lesotho. Lesotho was landlocked, surrounded by South Africa and economically dependent upon South Africa. South Africa's economic sanctions cost Lesotho an estimated 5.1 percent of its GDP. The economic pressure led to a 1986 coup after which the new Lesotho government deported 60 ANC members, satisfying South Africa's demands.[5] Lesotho's heavy dependence on one relatively large state left it vulnerable to effective economic leverage.

CHINA'S PROTECTION OF NORTH KOREA

North Korea has no special immunity that would make it less susceptible to international intervention or pressure than was the case for Serbia, Iraq, Georgia, Libya, or Lesotho—except for China's protection. North Korea has a large armed force, but so did Iraq. Iraq, as feared, did lash out against Saudi Arabia and Israel when attacked in 1991 and 2003, but with limited effect. North Korea could undoubtedly inflict serious harm on South Korea in the event of an armed conflict, but previous armed interventions have had to deal with similar calculations when tensions reached a breaking point; it was considered that the dangers created by not intervening had become greater that the risks attending intervention. North Korea appears to be assuming that possessing WMD will protect it from possible intervention; but possessing them may have the opposite effect of making it seem more necessary to threatened states that they take swift, decisive action to forestall their use.

An appreciation of China's current role as North Korean's dominant ally and defender against international pressure requires some history. It has not always been the case. The Soviet Union, not China, was responsible for North Korea's creation, and relations between China and North Korea have suffered through low points during the past decades. An assumption that China is naturally and inevitably going to support the North Korean regime obscures rather than illuminates China's attitudes toward the peninsula.

Postwar Chinese North-Korean Relations

Although North Korea had resisted Chinese efforts to exert control at the height of the Korean War, and despite Chinese resistance to the negotiated ceasefire that Kim Il-sung desired beginning in early 1952, North Korea moved away from Moscow and closer to Beijing after the war. Part of the anti-Soviet mood was created by the transition in Moscow following Stalin's death. Whereas Kim Il-sung was personally in tune with Joseph Stalin's cult of personality, and indeed took it further than even Stalin would have dreamed, Khrushchev moved to denounce and replace Stalin's personal style of governance.[6] Kim Il-sung was more comfortable with Mao Zedong's continuing fidelity to Stalin's personal governing model than with Khrushchev's reforms, making China a more sympathetic partner.

By early 1962, Pyongyang was praising China's aggressive stance towards Taiwan and echoing it by announcing similar intent to liberate South Korea. Its propaganda contrasted this aggressive stance to the Soviet Union's "weak" approach of peaceful coexistence with the West. In the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962, North Korea ridiculed the Soviet stand-down as cowardly: "one should not beg the imperialists for peace, but fight them over it."[7] Worse was to come for Soviet-North Korean relations when North Korea wholly sided with China during the Sino-Indian border clashes that also took place in October 1962.

By mid-1965, Kim Il-sung was concerned that North Korea had become too dependent upon China and told a new Soviet ambassador to Pyongyang that he wanted to improve relations with Moscow. The following year Mao's "Cultural Revolution" disrupted relations between China and North Korea. Kim Il-sung denounced the movement as "left opportunism" pushing the public towards "arch-revolutionary slogans to act in the extreme." China, for its part, denounced Kim Il-sung as a "bourgeois revisionist."[8] Relations remained strained between China and North Korea until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. Beginning in 1977, Kim Il-sung, having learned from experience that over-dependence upon either Moscow or Beijing left North Korea vulnerable, adopted a policy of equidistance from both, a policy he maintained until his death in 1994, even after the Soviet Union was formally dissolved in 1991.

Chinese Support in Recent Years

During the Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un years from 1994 to the present, North Korea has become increasingly economically dependent upon China as international sanctions have reduced trade with virtually every other partner. As recently as 2001, North Korea had a higher value of imports from Japan than from China, and India and South Korea were significant trading partners.[9] Trade with China made up less than half of North Korea's total trade in 2004. After Japan cut trade with North Korea in 2002 following no resolution to the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea, and after South Korea essentially ended

trade relations as part of the "May 24" measures in 2010 following the sinking of the naval vessel *Cheonan* and North Korea's shelling on Yeonpyeong island, economic dependence upon China rapidly increased. Today, over 90 percent of North Korea's trade is with China.[10]

The first sign that China's support for North Korea was not unconditional came after North Korea's first nuclear test in October 2006. Following the test, China supported UN Security Council Resolution 1718, which imposed economic sanctions. After North Korea's third nuclear test in February 2013, China agreed to further trade sanctions and reduced energy supplies to North Korea. However, China has made clear that the intent of sanctions is to punish North Korea for its provocative behavior, not to apply pressure to a point that might endanger the regime. Experts differ on the extent of China's compliance with the latest round of UN sanctions imposed in November 2016 by UNSCR 2321. It may simply be too soon to tell. However, it is safe to gauge that China's continuing intent is for economic sanctions to indicate displeasure with North Korea's behavior rather than to apply strong pressure on the regime.

In non-economic policy areas, China's chairmanship of the Six-Party Talks that ran from 2003 reinforced China's position as a defender of North Korea. The talks collapsed after North Korea's 2009 nuclear test. In the following years, China refused to condemn North Korea's sinking of the *Cheonan* in 2010, calling instead for "restraint by both sides."[11] China criticized a February 2014 UN report that condemned North Korea's human rights record and moved to block UN Security Council sessions in December 2014 and 2015 that were to take up North Korean human rights issues. Although there has been no summit between Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un, diplomatic relations continue at a relatively high level. Liu Yunshan, first-ranked secretary of the Central Secretariat of the Chinese Community Party and member of the Politburo Standing Committee, attended the seventieth anniversary of the Korean Workers Party in Pyongyang in October 2015.

Of at least formal significance, the Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty of 1961 continues in force.[12] Along with calling for economic and social cooperation, it is a defense pact, requiring each country to take all necessary measures to oppose any country or coalition of countries that attacks the other. It requires renewal every 20 years and was renewed in 1981 and in 2001. It, therefore, will continue until 2021. A similar North Korean treaty with the Soviet Union[13] was replaced in 1999 with an agreement that requires only bilateral consultation in the event of an attack.[14] Although China has close military relations with Pakistan, it is not party to any defense pact except that with North Korea. What this means as a practical matter is difficult to judge but, reportedly, the Chinese military continues to take the mutual defense alliance seriously, more than do other elements of the Chinese establishment.

A final, and more recent example of China's support for North Korea can be seen in China's strong condemnation of South Korea's decision to deploy the U.S.-provided Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system. Chinese public and private objections to THAAD have been almost exclusively based on the threat that China claims THAAD poses to China's national security, but they add, as a secondary point, that THAAD deployment is a sign of South Korea's unwillingness to engage North Korea in diplomatic talks to ease tension on the peninsula. THAAD will only serve to make North Korea feel more insecure.[15] In all discussions of how to reduce tension on the Korean Peninsula, China

resorts to the argument that North Korea feels threatened by the United States and South Korea. Progress will only be made when the United States and South Korea recognize North Korea's legitimate security concerns, end North Korea's international isolation through easing sanctions, and engage North Korea in negotiations, particularly for a peace treaty to replace the armistice, and finally bring the Korean War to a close.

In sum, Chinese-North Korean relations have been challenged by North Korea's persistence in pursuing a nuclear weapons and missile program, but not to a point at which China would welcome regime change. China remains less concerned about a nuclear-armed North Korea than about a collapsed North Korea.

THE U.S. ALLIANCE WITH SOUTH KOREA

Postwar U.S.-South Korean Relations

Although the United States provided a strong military shield over South Korea during the entire postwar period and significant economic assistance that contributed to its rapid economic development, political relations were uneasy during the decades of authoritarian rule in Seoul. The United States was committed to a process of democratization in South Korea and put pressure, successively, on presidents Syngman Rhee, Park Chung-hee, and Chun Doo-hwan to respect electoral processes, to allow political opposition, and to end human rights abuses.

Washington eased Rhee out of power, allowing him to retire to Hawaii for the remainder of his life;[16] tried to rally the Korean government to resist Park's takeover by military coup;[17] and put pressure on Chun to not declare martial law. President Reagan wrote to Chun that U.S.-South Korea relations "would be under severe strain" if Chun did not allow the presidential election of 1987 to go forward.[18] The record of the United States during the 1950s through the 1980's was to work with the successive South Korean governments to ensure stability and economic growth while supporting constitutionalism and resisting the excesses of authoritarianism.

Whereas North Korea has persistently tried to negotiate directly with Washington, the United States has been consistent in its policy that the proper channel for diplomacy was directly to engage South Korea. Washington has given South Korea the lead in policy towards North Korea, first joining in providing humanitarian assistance during the years of South Korea's "Sunshine Policy" of positive engagement with North Korea from 1998 to 2008, and then coordinating tough economic sanctions following North Korea's attacks on South Korea during 2010. The absence of regional security arrangements meant that the United States and South Korea have had a strong bilateral relationship rather than working together within a multilateral setting.

The U.S.-ROK Alliance

In 1953, at the close of the Korean War, the United States and South Korea signed a Mutual Defense Treaty that continues to provide the basis for the presence of U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK), and a Combined Forces Command (CFC) that integrates U.S. and ROK forces within a common command structure. Either country is free to withdraw from the Mutual Defense Treaty on one year's notice. The four-star U.S. general who commands USFK and

CFC also commands the United Nations Command (UNC), which continues to exist under UNSC Resolution 84 of July 7, 1950 that put allied forces under U.S. command at the outset of the Korean War. Because it would require a unanimous vote of the Security Council to change the status quo, the UNC has continued as the armistice has continued.

U.S.-South Korean economic ties are strong, with South Korea standing as the sixth-largest U.S. trading partner and with mutual FDI of over $60 billion. Under the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA), 95 percent of all goods are duty free and trade in services is growing.[19] Broadening the relationship beyond defense and trade, the two sides signed a Civil Nuclear "123" Agreement in 2015, hold cabinet-level Joint Committee Meetings on science and technology, and cooperate on everything from public health, to cyber security, to anti-piracy efforts, to fisheries. Underpinning the broadly-based official contacts, people-to-people links are strong, with South Korea sending more students on a per capita basis to study in the United States than any country. The United States is host to more South Korean immigrants than any other country, over one million as of 2015, most of whom advocate strong U.S. ties with South Korea. Fewer than 200 North Korean refugees have immigrated to the United States.

The most recent U.S.-ROK "Joint Vision Statement" of June 16, 2009 is worth quoting at length because it is an authoritative encapsulation of the U.S. and ROK policy objectives for the Korean Peninsula: "Through our Alliance we aim to build a better future for all people on the Korean Peninsula, establishing a durable peace on the Peninsula and leading to peaceful reunification on the principles of free democracy and a market economy. We will work together to achieve the complete and verifiable elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, as well as ballistic missile programs, and to promote respect for the fundamental human rights of the North Korean people."[20]

The U.S.-ROK alliance is based on a strong foundation of security cooperation, economic relations, and people-to-people ties, but it is not invulnerable to shocks, some of which might take the form of: a revival of mistrust if each side thought the other might be engaged in secret diplomacy with North Korea or China; an acrimonious fight over cost sharing, trade policy, or a split on policy towards North Korea; or a dispute following a serious safety or health incident involving U.S. government or corporate facilities in South Korea. Any of the above could reawaken anti-American sentiment that has been mostly dormant for thirty years in South Korea. The relationship requires attention, monitoring, and tending.

GREAT POWER RIVALRY OVER THE KOREAN PENINSULA

The history of Chinese involvement with North Korea and U.S. involvement with South Korea, as recounted above shows that there is inertia behind the continuing situation of two states on the peninsula each having strong ties to a great power. But, that is not enough to explain the current stalemated situation. The two Koreas are in no way equivalent. South Korea has generally amicable relations with all countries including China, abides by its international commitments, is a responsible member of international organizations and the international community, and is regarded by no one—with the exception of North Korea—as a menace. North Korea is the opposite in almost every regard—difficult to perceive as anything other than a threat to regional peace and security—which raises the question of why China continues to shield the

North Korean regime. Objectively, it is difficult to think through why China would not prefer a unified Korean Peninsula, which would at a minimum reduce regional tension and most likely would economically benefit China and Northeast Asia. A belligerent North Korea introducing nuclear weapons into the region would seem undesirable from a Chinese point of view because it gives the United States reason to maintain military forces in the region. It could even lead South Korea and Japan to come under pressure to develop their own nuclear arsenals, a nightmare situation for China.

Short of South Korean-led unification—which might have the drawback from China's point of view of enlarging and strengthening a traditional U.S. ally—an alternative, attractive outcome for China might be increased international pressure on North Korea, leading to regime change in Pyongyang that would result in a more responsible, successor North Korean government. Even this outcome, however, seems beyond China's current thinking. A plausible explanation for China's aversion to applying sufficient pressure on North Korea to change its dangerous behavior might be China's concern that a collapsed North Korea would lead to a chaotic situation, with refugees heading for the Chinese border, an urgent need to secure North Korean nuclear and chemical weapons sites, and, perhaps, civil strife breaking out among competing factions within North Korea. China's calculation may be that the Kim Jong-un regime is so brittle, that any pressure on it might shatter it, leading to unpredictable consequences.

If the sole reason for China's support for North Korea were fear of the consequences of regime failure, that concern could be addressed by quiet, coordinated planning among the ROK, United States, China, Japan, and Russia, on how to deal with such an eventuality. The United States and South Korea have made clear that their objective is a change in North Korean behavior, not the fall of Kim Jong-un. Their 2009 Joint Vision statement calls for peaceful reunification, not for overthrow of the North Korean government—a policy premised on North Korea being able to change course under international pressure: to denuclearize and to put an end to human rights abuses of its own people. The logic of international sanctions must be that North Korea will not change its behavior absent international pressure, but might, given sufficient pressure. One could even conclude that the United States and South Korea have more faith in the ability of North Korea to reform than does China.

Neither Russia nor China were prepared to thwart the United States and her allies from dealing with what they deemed to be unacceptable threats to peace and security as posed by Serbia, Iraq, and Libya, within their regions and against their own people. Neither the United States nor her allies were prepared to actively resist Russian intervention in Georgia and against Ukraine. There is no shortage of examples of large states intervening in small states. Why is China singularly allowing North Korea to pursue its destructive course rather than leading, participating in, or at least discussing a plan to deal seriously with the threat posed by North Korea?

One answer is that China sees the current situation on the Korean Peninsula not as an isolated problem to be solved cooperatively, but as part of a national interest-oriented, regional strategy, whose outcome would be served by the installation of a pro-Beijing government in South Korea as well as North Korea. Given the unlikelihood of North Korea succeeding in its stated ambition of uniting the peninsula on its terms, the status quo, regardless of how unsatisfactory, is for China preferable to a peninsula suddenly unified on South Korea's terms, or even to the peaceful unification that might gradually follow the advent of a

reformist regime in Pyongyang. China perceives Korea as an element in its great power rivalry with the United States, making a joint U.S.-China-ROK approach to dealing with North Korea unacceptable in almost any form.

Korea as an Element of China's Regional Policy

Chinese foreign policy writers have been explicit about what China regards as its vital interest in the fourteen countries that border China. "(The periphery) is the main theater where China preserves national security, defends its sovereign unity and territorial integrity, and unfolds the struggle against separatism; it is...the buffer zone and strategic screen in keeping the enemy outside the gate. Second, it is the vital area for China's rise that world powers cannot cross... and the main stage for China to display its strength to the outside world."[21] Another Chinese writer said that China must create "a common security circle in neighboring regions" based on mutual trust, equality, and coordination.[22] "In the future, China will decisively favor those who side with it with economic benefits and even security protections. On the contrary, those who are hostile to China will face much more sustained policies of sanctions and isolation."[23] China's conception of a "common security circle," and a "community of common destiny" reaches as far as Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and the Central Asian States. It certainly includes the Korean Peninsula.

China's attitude towards Korea may go beyond considering it a bordering country fitting within a natural Chinese sphere of influence along its periphery. In 2002, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) as part of its "Northeast Project" reassessed the Koguryo Kingdom (first century B.C. to seventh century A.D.) as falling within "Chinese local history," i.e. essentially belonging to China. At its height, the kingdom encompassed all of what is today North Korea, and parts of South Korea. This is not a mainstream view within academia, most scholars consider Koguryo as proto-Korea rather than as part of the historic Chinese Middle Kingdom.[24]

There is a pattern of China appropriating Korea as part and parcel of Chinese history. In 2004, the Chinese Foreign Ministry deleted references to ancient Korean history from its website. In 2011, the government listed the quintessential Korean song "Arirang" as a Chinese cultural asset.[25] Even recognizing a distinctive Korean culture and history would not mean that China would necessarily regard Korea as a fully sovereign entity. The concept of Zhonghua minzu or "Chinese nationalities" recognizes Tibetans and Uighurs as having their own culture, yet also belonging within China's historic borders.[26]

None of this is to suggest that China has a current ambition to absorb Korea. China's policy is all about friendly relations within the region. It argues instead that China in light of its current self-perceived need to dominate its peripheral region and belief that Korea is part of China's historic ambit, is unlikely to cooperate with the United States and the Republic of Korea in any project that would lead to a Western-oriented regime in either a unified peninsula or in North Korea. China would view with suspicion even a non-aligned Korea which did not conform to Chinese national interests and whose decisions it could not veto.

South Korea as a Member of the U.S. Alliance System

The American public historically is reluctant to engage in overseas conflict except as part of an alliance system. Woodrow Wilson won his second presidential term in 1916 on the slogan, "He kept us out of war." Only after German submarines sank U.S. vessels, and after the revelation of the Zimmermann telegram in which Germany offered to support Mexico in attacking the

United States to regain Texas, was the American public persuaded to enter the war in Europe. Even then, it entered on the side of an alliance comprising the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Russia. The United States would not have fought the war on its own.

The United States was similarly reluctant to enter WWII. The American public was opposed to military involvement until Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. As in WWI, U.S. forces fought alongside allies against an opposing coalition of countries. In the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War of 1991, great emphasis was put on the fact that although United States forces dominated the campaigns, they also fought alongside allies. The September 11, 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and on the Pentagon had a profound effect on the American public, shaking its traditional support for allied action. The Bush administration—simultaneously following and shaping public opinion—took the ahistorical approach that the United States needed to confront its terrorist opponents unilaterally. Traditional allies were portrayed as a burden or even a potential stumbling block to decisive military action.

After twenty years of combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is likely that the war-weary public is reverting to its traditional attitude that allies are necessary. Some of this return to normal can be seen in the Trump administration's emphasis on a more equitable sharing of the cost of defense. Saying that allies must pay more is tacit acknowledgement that alliances need to continue.

Whereas China and North Korea are each other's only security partner, a rough count of the U.S. collective defense arrangements shows a current commitment to militarily defend approximately sixty countries.[27] These commitments have all been undertaken since 1947. Opponents argue that this places an undue, perhaps unsustainable, burden on the United States. Proponents argue that collective security agreements are a major contributor to global and regional security. None of the countries covered by the current U.S. defense arrangements has ever been attacked. The U.S.-ROK agreement was concluded after, not before, the Korean War. The countries that have been involved in U.S. military operations, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Grenada, Somalia and others, were not party to American collective security agreements. Apart from its record of maintaining peace, another advantage to the U.S. alliance system is that it projects the defensive line of the United States far from its own borders.

A requirement of the U.S. alliance system is that countries must be free to choose to enter into them. There is mutual benefit: the U.S. can protect its global interests and provide for its own defense through its partnerships with treaty allies, and treaty allies are able to rely on the United States to protect them from potential enemies, including large states against which they would not be able to defend themselves. There is growing tension between Chinese and Russian efforts to build up regional spheres of influence, and the American alliance system. Vice President Biden said during a May 27, 2015 speech at the Brookings Institution: "We will not recognize any nation having a sphere of influence. It will remain our view that sovereign states have the right to make their own decisions and choose their own alliances."

CONCLUSION: PROSPECTS FOR DISENTANGLING KOREA FROM GREAT POWER RIVALRY

If China requires a compliant Korean Peninsula within its sphere of influence, the United States would oppose any outcome on the peninsula that did not allow a democratic Korean state, or states, to participate in security agreements with the United States, if that was their policy choice. In dealing with North Korea today, this is the root of tension and the obstacle to cooperation.

North Korea is a growing threat to peace and stability. If it continues on its course of developing nuclear weapons that can reach South Korea, Japan, the United States—and not excluding China from the list of possible targets—and if it continues with its rhetorical stance of threatening to use nuclear weapons even merely in cases of its dignity being impugned, a crisis is likely. It could take the form of a limited attack that escalates into a major conflict, or it could be the result of an accident or miscalculation. It is imaginable that domestic instability within North Korea could result in a faction launching attacks on neighbors. The world will be fortunate if we can escape a crisis on the Korean Peninsula.

With the stakes so high, the best course may be for the United States, China, and the ROK to acknowledge their incompatible desires for the peninsula, and to agree that an eventual resolution will have to be postponed in the interest of avoiding imminent catastrophe. A protracted future negotiation involving concessions and gradualism is an unattractive prospect for any of the parties, but better than the cataclysmic alternative. The necessity for a joint approach, whether tacit or explicit, to shift North Korea off its current trajectory is self-evident.

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