

# Introduction and Recommendations

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For the past five years, U.S.-Korea relations under the Roh Moo-hyun administration in Seoul and the Bush administration in Washington have witnessed both progress and peril. On a working level there have been some notable achievements: successful negotiation of a free trade agreement; real progress on difficult alliance issues such as base relocation, a new status of forces agreement, and the transfer of wartime operational control; broader international cooperation in areas such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and even Lebanon; and more recently, close cooperation in the Six Party Talks related to North Korea's nuclear program.

This same period, however, has seen a political-level crisis in U.S.-ROK relations with some lawmakers and opinion leaders on both sides of the Pacific, calling into question the very nature of the alliance. Very real divergence over respective policy approaches to North Korea, differing views of major power relations in Northeast Asia, and the lack of established personal and political relationships have all contributed to considerable lack of trust and mutual misunderstanding.

In historical retrospect, the accomplishments of this era will likely be recognized. However, in a political arena in which words matter, the widely perceived weakness in adequately articulating the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance and in accurately advocating for steps to improve perceptions of the relationship have by almost any measure weakened the political relationship. This dynamic can in part be best understood by the political climate in Seoul.

Five years ago, President Roh Moo-hyun was elected on a wave of public sentiment that, if not “anti-American,” was certainly skeptical. Genuine worry in Seoul at the time of the U.S. invasion of Iraq that the U.S. might take some precipitous action against North Korea, coupled with the public reaction to the tragic case of two South Korean schoolgirls killed in a U.S. military training exercise, served to galvanize public opinion in South Korea and constituted a political base for President Roh—a base to which some of his most controversial public pronouncements would be directed.

In sharp contrast, the incoming administration of President Lee Myung-bak takes over the reins in Seoul in a climate in which there appears to have been a reevaluation of the U.S.-ROK relationship by the South Korea body politic. Perhaps due to the North Korea nuclear test, the controversy surrounding China’s historical claims on the ancient kingdom of Kokuryo, and the stark relief in which the alliance was placed by the negotiations on the transfer of wartime operational control, a sizable majority of South Korean voters clearly indicated their preference for an improvement in U.S.-Korean relations in Korea’s December 2007 elections. As this is the political base to which President Lee Myung-bak will be beholden, the current transition in Seoul likely represents a new political reality in Seoul.

In order to better understand this reality, the Mansfield Foundation, with the support of the Korea Foundation, launched an effort to explore the likely political changes in Seoul and make recommendations for how Korea and the United States might work toward a more common approach in five key areas: North Korea policy, denuclearization, a Northeast Asian peace and security mechanism, trade and investment, and alliance maintenance. As part of this project we solicited papers from five leading American scholars. We asked each paper writer to address his particular topic in the context of the new political realities in Seoul, but more importantly, to explore how greater coordination and cooperation between Washington and Seoul in these key areas might be achieved.

Dartmouth College Professor David C. Kang contributes an insightful chapter on “Forging a Common Approach on Policy toward North Korea:

Economic and Humanitarian Issues” (Chapter 1). Jon B. Wolfsthal of the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Toby Dalton, currently on sabbatical from the Department of Energy and a Ph.D. candidate at The George Washington University, not only address the United States’ primary obsession in North Korea, namely the North Korean nuclear program, but also expand the discussion to include broader cooperation on non-proliferation in their chapter, “Harmonic Convergence? The Maturing U.S.-ROK Nuclear Relationship” (Chapter 2). The Stanley Foundation’s Michael Schiffer tackles the challenge of the as of yet to be defined security framework in the region in his chapter “Envisioning a Northeast Asian Peace and Security Mechanism” (Chapter 3). In his chapter on “Implementing the KORUS FTA: Key Challenges and Policy Proposals” (Chapter 4) Jeffrey J. Schott of the Peterson Institute for International Economics focuses on the one issue that is most likely to define U.S.-ROK trade and economic issues over the coming year. In Chapter 5, “Forging a Common Approach on Strength: Challenges and Opportunities for the Lee Myung-bak Presidency and the ROK-U.S. Alliance,” Bruce Bechtol from the Marine Corps University highlights the continued importance of the military aspects of the U.S.-Korea relationship.

In order to avail our authors of the combined expertise of the issue and area studies specialists in Washington, D.C., we convened five separate workshops during the month of January 2008 at which the paper authors presented their research and solicited feedback to be incorporated as appropriate into the chapters included in this volume. Participants in these workshops were selected from across the political spectrum and from a range of institutions and areas of expertise. As such, this book represents what we hope will be a snapshot of current thinking in Washington, D.C., and a timely contribution to decision makers in Seoul and Washington during this period of transition.

Toward that end, we have culled our notes from the various workshops to highlight a number of the most salient recommendations on each issue area. These recommendations are listed below by topic in the same order they appear in the chapters of this volume. They are not listed in any order of prioritization, and, while some are contained in the chapters that follow,

these particular recommendations represent a general consensus among participants in the five workshops rather than the individual views of our chapter authors:

## **Recommendations**

### ***Forging a Common Approach on Policy to North Korea:***

#### ***Economic and Humanitarian Issues***

1. The United States and South Korea should initiate a dialogue intended to broaden the engagement agenda with North Korea in order to create and utilize leverage in a coordinated manner. Any coordinated approach would have to be structured in such a way that it supports rather than undermines the ongoing dialogue on security issues.
2. South Korea should focus on international standards and norms when addressing the issue of human rights in North Korea. At a minimum, South Korea should join the United States and other democratic nations in international efforts, such as resolutions before the United Nations, to identify and condemn human rights abuses in North Korea.
3. South Korea and the United States should initiate a coordinated and high-level dialogue on contingency planning with regard to North Korea that extends beyond military contingencies.
4. The United States, South Korea, and other past and potential aid donors, including Japan, should hold a joint dialogue with the World Food Program regarding humanitarian aid to North Korea. This dialogue should focus on establishing a coordinated approach to aid based on international standards of distribution and monitoring.

### ***Forging a Common Approach to Denuclearization***

1. The United States, South Korea and Japan should re-establish effective trilateral coordination initially focused upon, but not limited to, the Six

Party Talks. An early opportunity for a trilateral summit between President Bush, President Lee Myung-bak, and Prime Minister Fukuda would be an important symbolic first step. However, such trilateral coordination and cooperation should expand to include multiple levels and offices of government and should address numerous issues of mutual interest.

2. Given the apparent stalemate in the Six Party Talks, and the apparent low prospects for rapid progress in denuclearization extending beyond the Yongbyon facilities, the United States and South Korea should reach a mutual understanding as to how and to what degree to link both humanitarian and economic aid to progress, or lack thereof, in denuclearization.
3. The United States and South Korea should discuss and agree on common metrics and standards for the process of disabling and dismantling North Korea's nuclear program. These standards should incorporate international norms for safety and transparency.
4. The United States and South Korea should initiate a comprehensive nuclear dialogue with South Korea focused on South Korea's civilian nuclear power program, including sensitive issues such as spent fuel management.
5. South Korea should adopt a more pro-active position in support of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty in a context that extends beyond the Korean Peninsula. South Korea could provide technical support for the International Atomic Energy Agency as part of an expanded global role.

***Forging a Common Strategy for a Northeast Asian Peace and Security Mechanism***

1. Regardless of its form and timing, the U.S.-ROK alliance needs to be seen as supportive of the peace process on the Peninsula. Since a lasting peace on the Peninsula will likely require U.S.-ROK agreement and cooperation, the two governments in Washington and Seoul should reach an agreement on what a peace would look like. At this time, the impetus for such an agreement would be better coming from South Korea.

2. As allies, the United States and South Korea need to honestly examine what would be acceptable in a peace regime and develop a forward-looking vision that extends beyond the Peninsula.
3. Assuming there is progress on the nuclear issue, the U.S. and South Korea should explore using some type of a peace declaration as a tool in the ongoing process of negotiation with North Korea.
4. The United States needs to devote more senior-level attention to the broader issue of a Northeast Asian peace and security mechanism. Any sort of forward-looking statement from a high-level official in the United States would be helpful.

### ***Forging a Common Strategy for Trade and Economic Relations***

1. There is general consensus that there exists a narrow window of opportunity during which the KORUS FTA might be ratified and implemented in the current year. Given the political climate in Washington and Seoul, with Washington in a presidential election year and the new government in Seoul facing the imminent National Assembly election in April of 2008, passage of the FTA this year will require political will and a concerted effort in both Seoul and Washington.
2. President Lee Myung-bak's anticipated first visit to Washington, D.C., provides a unique opportunity to move the FTA debate from the contentious and currently politically sensitive economic arena and reframe it as a national security issue for which there will be broad support in Washington, D.C. Presuming that Seoul and Washington are able to reach agreement on the issue of beef, and hopefully with ratification of the FTA by the South Korean National Assembly in hand, President Lee Myung-bak should be able, with some confidence, to request and receive the opportunity to deliver a speech to a joint session of the U.S. Congress. This will allow both the Lee administration and the Bush administration to push the U.S. Congress to ratify a truly historic trade agreement with an ally that has stood with the U.S. in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon.

3. Both South Korea and the U.S. should work to better institutionalize the U.S.-ROK relationship. In comparison with countries and economies of similar size, Korea does not have the same kinds of institutional mechanisms, frameworks and institutions that characterize the U.S. relationship with other countries.
4. While the FTA is the most immediate and important issue in the near term, the U.S. and ROK policy community, as well as the business communities in both countries, should seek to expand multilateral cooperation and coordination on economic issues of mutual concern such as intellectual property rights.

#### ***Forging a Common Approach on ROK-U.S. Alliance Maintenance***

1. Given the limited tenure of the Bush administration in Washington, there is understandable hesitation in Seoul, and limited time in which to craft a formal “vision” for the U.S.-ROK alliance. At a minimum, President Lee and President Bush should issue a joint statement “reaffirming” the U.S.-ROK alliance and announcing the initiation of a process designed to craft a common vision for the future. This vision would among other things clearly articulate why the alliance is in the strategic interests of both the United States and South Korea. Presumably, this process would be completed early in the next administration in Washington and would provide a positive starting point for the new administrations in Washington and Seoul.
2. Above and beyond the Six Party Talks, the United States, South Korea and Japan should reinvigorate, or reinstitute, trilateral communication, cooperation and coordination on security issues.
3. The U.S. and South Korea should continue to closely monitor implementation of already agreed upon issues in alliance maintenance and make adjustments as warranted by changes in the security environment.

If the recommendations above seem overly focused on relatively obvious steps in alliance management, such as communication and coordination, it is significant as there appears to have been many issues in the last five years, particularly those dealing with North Korea, China, and Japan, that were deemed too politically sensitive and thus off the table for the alliance.

Throughout all of our discussions and the five chapters that are included in this volume, there is a general sense of optimism that there truly is a “new political reality” in Seoul, and one that bodes well for relations between Korea and the United States. It is our sincere hope that this volume will in a timely manner contribute to the myriad of essential discussions that will take place as the Lee Myung-bak administration takes control in Seoul and help forge not only deeper understanding between the United States and Korea, but provide a basis for a closer, more coordinated approach in addressing the five issues upon which we have focused.

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