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# The Changing Security Environment on the Korean Peninsula and Korea-Japan Security Relations

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## Introduction

With the end of the Cold War, a new global security system has emerged. In Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been expanded to now include Eastern European countries. In East Asia, China's security role is on the rise after the demise of the former Soviet Union, and Japan's role is also expected to be significantly expanded under American auspices. The increase in Japan's security role, in particular, has attracted the attention of neighboring countries, including that of Korea. Japan's greater security role is expected to influence indirectly the Korean security environment.

It is clear that the strengthening of the Korea-Japan security relationship is an important new theme for the defense policy-making of both countries. This paper aims at analyzing the necessity and the limits of the bilateral cooperation and proposes a direction for the establishment of a desirable cooperation between Korea and Japan.

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## Changes in the East Asian Security Environment

### *Changes in U.S. Strategy towards the Asia-Pacific Region*

The U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era has been to preserve its status as the world leader and to secure its economic interests. Given these goals, the U.S. plans active intervention in Asia-Pacific affairs. These intentions were clearly expressed in the "East Asia Strategic Review" in February 1995. The Clinton Administration abandoned Bush's EASI (East Asia Strategic Initiative) plan and declared its commitment to continued engagement in East Asia with the forward deployment of one hundred thousand troops in the region.

Currently, the U.S. is mainly concerned with the maximization of its economic interests in East Asia. Anticipating the great economic potential of this region, the U.S. has been trying to reinforce its economic relations with the countries in this region.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is expected that the U.S. will strengthen existing economic cooperation on the basis of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and will also carefully watch for any further attempts by regional countries to exclude the U.S. The U.S. forces stationed in the region have been an effective tool for America's diplomatic initiatives. The U.S. appears to be pursuing its objectives by increasing its security duties within regional countries, especially in Japan and Korea. As a consequence of increased U.S. involvement, changes in the existing relations between Korea and Japan have emerged.

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### *Japan's Increased Security Role*

In spite of the reduction of armed forces in many countries after the Cold War, the Japanese government has tried to improve its military power. Japan's military build-up has been supported by the U.S., which has encouraged Japan to assume a greater role. The Japanese government has responded positively to these

<sup>1</sup> The White House, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, 1996, p. 41.

suggestions. Japan now openly pronounces not only its intentions, but its ability to assume a proper role in the name of "international contributions." Japan's changed attitude and increased confidence stems from its successful participations in UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs) and the recent revisions of its National Defense Program Outline (NDPO).

The shift in Japan's position within the field of international security is closely connected with U.S. policy through changes in the existing U.S.-Japan security system. As far as national security is concerned, Japan, as an ally of the U.S., cannot go independently. Since Japan's power is still far weaker than that of America, Japan will probably pursue a supporting role by joining American leadership.

Therefore, under the auspices of the U.S., the supportive and supplementary security role of Japan seems to have increased. Japan will now extensively offer the U.S. forces logistical support in the region under the newly agreed ACSA (Acquisition & Close Service Agreement) with the U.S. On the other hand, Japan is expected to make every effort to increase its influence by initiating regional security dialogues, wishing to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and initiating control of conventional weapons.

#### *Korea's Active Diplomacy toward the Surrounding Powers*

By expanding its "Northern Diplomacy" on the basis of its economic power, Korea succeeded in normalizing diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation and China earlier this decade. Korea has dispatched military attaches to both countries and, as a result, military interchanges are currently taking place. The U.S. and Japan are keeping a close eye on the military cooperation between Russia and Korea, which has progressed rapidly. The Korean Navy visited the port of Vladivostok for the first time in September 1993, and two Russian aircraft carriers to be dismantled were sent to Korea. Korea has also shown a strong interest in buying Russian weaponry and has even received highly advanced arms from Russia as a form of repayment on a loan granted to the former Soviet Union. Recently, however, Korea-

Russia security system has been weakened by the increasing conservatism in the Russian domestic politics.

Compared to the Korea-Russia relationship, the military exchanges between Korea and China have not expanded so rapidly. This is mainly due to the Chinese government's intention to act as a patron of North Korea. Although a Korean naval visit took place with Russia, such an exchange has not been realized with China.

The success in the normalization of relations with China and Russia gave the Korean government confidence in its efforts to control North Korea. Thus, the Korean government began to examine its security strategies not only *vis-a-vis* North Korea but in regard to other strong, neighboring powers. Hence, Korea has realized the importance of coordinating Korea-Japan security relations. During the Cold War era, the Korea-Japan security relationship was geared towards deterring a North Korean invasion of South Korea.

However, in the post-Cold War era, this same security cooperation can be expanded to deal with regional and global security problems.

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## **Need for the Establishment of Korea-Japan Security Relations**

### *Similarity in the Existing Security Frames*

Korea and Japan, as military allies of the U.S., both maintain their own national security through the American security commitment. It is mainly the presence of U.S. forces stationed in Korea and Japan that preserve American security initiatives. As a consequence of sharing roles under the same leadership, an indirect security relationship is formed between the two countries. Hence the Korean and the Japanese military forces are also indirectly linked. In this respect, Korea's security relationship with Japan differs from those it shares with Russia and China. The

possibility of security cooperation increases in the event of an emergency in which the national securities of both countries are threatened. If an emergency involving Korea occurs, the U.S. is expected to automatically intervene in the conflict. If such a situation arises, the U.S., in an attempt to swiftly and efficiently contain the situation, might call on Japan for assistance. This strong possibility of Japanese involvement in Korea should be viewed seriously.

#### *Similarity in Security Threats*

Korea and Japan share similar concerns about external threats, the biggest one being North Korea. The possibility of a North Korean missile attack on a core area has kept Japan anxious, especially since the issue of the nuclear threat in North Korea still remains unsettled. The food and energy shortages in particular contribute to the instability of North Korea, which, in turn, may have a negative impact on Japanese security. Accordingly the Japanese government prefers the scenario of a "soft landing" for North Korea and often assists the country. At the same time, Japan utilizes the TMD (Theater Missile Defense) initiative to deter a potential North Korean missile assault. These series of Japanese policies towards North Korea are similar to those of South Korea.

Japan's other major security threat comes from China. Japan is wary of China's increasing military power and is keeping a close eye on the increase of China's influence.<sup>2</sup> In the post-Cold War era, Russia has reduced its military forces in East Asia. Availing itself of this situation, China has tried to secure a more favorable geopolitical position. To keep China in check, Japan has chosen to rely on U.S. power and to support U.S. policies. The U.S. and Japan strengthened their security cooperation by declaring the "U.S.-Japan Security Declaration" in April 1996. Korea's policy towards China, however, differs from that of Japan. The Korean government is less concerned with China's military threat and actually accepts China's political influences to a certain degree as can be seen by the Korean proposal for a quadripartite meeting to

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<sup>2</sup> *Defence of Japan*, 1996, pp. 55~62.

be attended by North and South Korea, the U.S. and China. Korea does, however, share Japan's interest in preventing China from becoming a regional hegemonic power.

*Need for the Establishment of a Regional Security System*

When the U.S. controlled East Asia with its overwhelming military power, it became apparent that the best way to achieve national security was for each country to establish a bilateral security relationship with the U.S. Now, however, given the relative decline in U.S. power and the diversification of regional relations, serious discussion for a new security system has begun. In an effort to create a new system similar to that of the OSCE (Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe) in Europe, Korea and Japan have utilized the most positive aspects of the existing ARF (Asean Regional Forum).<sup>3</sup> Since the U.S., which at first opposed a multilateral security system, has changed its views on the matter, the current East Asian bilateral relation-based security system is expected to gradually convert to a multilateral system.

Although the U.S. will continue to play a critical role in the formulation of this new system, support from Japan and Korea will be indispensable. Japan in particular plans to actively participate in the regional security initiative. In order to attain this goal, Japan needs Korea's assistance. In essence, Japan could easily initiate the regional security dialogue with Korea's diplomatic cooperation.

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<sup>3</sup> Some Japanese scholars point out the possibility of the security cooperation between Korea and Japan through the ARF. Yoshihide Soeya, "Japan's Multilateral Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific and its Implications for the Korean Peninsula," *Asian Perspective*, Fall-Winter 1995, pp. 238 ~ 240; Yoshinobu Yamamoto, "Korean-Japanese Relations in International Theory Perspective," Paper Prepared for the Hallym University Conference, Seoul, Korea, August 21, 1996, pp. 159 ~ 160.

## Limits of Korea-Japan Security Cooperation

### *Problems of the Past*

Though reparations for the numerous losses which occurred during the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910~45) have been proposed, the Japanese government has shown little effort to carry them out. Despite the efforts of some Japanese politicians to apologize for their past wrongdoings, the Japanese government has officially denied such requests. Such adamant resistance is indicative of the deep rooted nationalism in Japanese society. This resistance remains particularly strong among the Rightists. Having been repeatedly deceived by Japanese leaders, the Korean government and the Korean public strongly distrust Japan.

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### *Existence of Mutually Negative National Sentiments*

The Korean people, by and large, possess a dual attitude toward Japan. Although they respect Japan as a country to be modelled, Korea is still unable to place trust in Japan. Korea is always anxious to know what Japan's true intentions are. Given this duality, Korea is unlikely to readily accept Japan's security initiatives.

Japan's attitude toward Korea is largely indifferent and passive. During the Cold War period, Japan shared the anti-communist security goal with Korea. Now, in the post-Cold War era, the Japanese government hopes to gain a voice in Korean affairs by expanding its approach to the peninsula. By strengthening existing Korea-Japan relations, normalizing Japan-North Korea relations, and approaching the North Korean regime with a "soft-landing" policy, Japan is trying to improve its national image among the Koreans on the peninsula. These Japanese ambitions are, however, expected to be obstacles for the establishment of security cooperation between Korea and Japan.

### *Institutional Limits of Japanese Domestic Politics*

The current Japanese Constitution forbids the exercise of the

right of collective defense. As a result, Japan has limitations and is unable to participate in full-scale security cooperations with other countries. One exception, however, is the alliance with the U.S. This security tie between the U.S. and Japan has been reinforced recently through the pronouncement of the security declaration.

As Japan's active role in the security cooperation increases, the domestic institutional system is also showing signs of gradual change. These domestic changes have been accelerated with America's encouragement for Japan to take a bigger, more active role in the security cooperation. Such encouragement, however, has evoked anxiety among neighboring countries, who are watchful of the enlargement of Japan's security roles.

## Direction of the Korea-Japan Security Cooperation

The Korea-Japan security relation is an indirect one, which is derived from the U.S.'s two bilateral security relationships in East Asia with Korea and Japan. The post-Cold War changes in the security environment of East Asia have been mainly caused by the change in the U.S. policy toward East Asia and the increase in Japan's security role, which, in turn, requires the establishment of a more direct Korea-Japan security relationship.

In order for Japan to meet the demands of its increased security role, its relations with Korea, its nearest neighbor, must be improved. Given the recent expansion of the U.S.-Japan security relationship, it must also be realized that the possibility of Japanese involvement in the case of an emergency on the Korean Peninsula has significantly increased.<sup>4</sup> Under the current U.S.-Japan security cooperation, Japan will need to consult with Korea prior to such a situation in order to provide effective assistance. On a more advanced level, Japan can secure Korea's support in certain regional security matters, such as the establishment of a multilateral security system. Japan seems to realize the benefits of a strengthened security relationship with Korea, whose position in

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<sup>4</sup> The Japanese strategist Okazaki Hisahiko affirms that the Japanese Government will engage itself in emergency of Korean Peninsula without fail. (*Chosun Ilbo*, March 7, 1996)



the international community has largely improved. Japan can easily initiate a multilateral regional security system and become a permanent member of the UN Security Council with Korea's support.

Given the growth of Korea's national power, Korea can develop a security relationship with Japan with confidence. Korea has already succeeded in normalizing relations with the Russian Federation and China. The problem of external military threats, including that from North Korea, are less important to the Korea-Japan security cooperation. Now, Korea needs to emphasize regional security rather than the North Korean threat among the main common security objectives.

*Then, we can classify the Korea-Japan security cooperation on three levels: first, countering North Korea; second, reinforcing confidence in mutual relations; and third, establishing regional and global security and prosperity.*

As the main security goals of each country are similar, they have the potential to share many security interests. Moreover, since both countries are allies of the U.S., non-nuclear powers, and highly dependent on foreign economies, an improvement in the security relations between Korea and Japan is possible.

Then, we can classify the Korea-Japan security cooperation on three levels: first, countering North Korea; second, reinforcing confidence in mutual relations; and third, establishing regional and global security and prosperity.

(1) *Deterring the North Korean Threat:* For both Korea and Japan, North Korea remains as the biggest threat. The North Korean threats are the continuing build-up of conventional weapons and missiles, the nuclear program, and also the possibility of the collapse of the North Korean regime, which would produce the problem of mass refugees. Korea and Japan need to cooperate with each other to efficiently confront these various threats. Their cooperation at KEDO has been a great success, and the cooperation for the realization of the TMD plan, which includes the U.S., has also proceeded well. Moreover, as both governments independently devise several solutions for the potential North Korean mass refugee problem, the necessity for policy cooperation is becoming more evident.<sup>5</sup>

Korea and Japan, however, still prefer the soft landing of

North Korea's regime. By cooperating with each other in providing economic assistance and food supplies to North Korea, Korea and Japan can prevent rapid change in North Korea. Thus, the opening of North Korea to outside support is an interest shared by both countries.

In relation to North Korea, Japan has two pending problems which can interfere with the cooperation with South Korea. The first one is the normalization of Japan-North Korea relations. Japan can cooperate with South Korea by linking the normalization with the quadripartite meeting, which was proposed by South Korea and the U.S. The second one is the organization of pro-North Korean residents in Japan, otherwise known as the "chochongryon" problem. This organization is known to supply outside funds to North Korea. By supervising and controlling this group, Japan can foster cooperation with Korea.<sup>4</sup>

(2) *Strengthening Mutual Trust in Korea-Japan Relations:* The development of a new security relationship would be desirable for both Korea and Japan in order to meet the above-mentioned requirements. Though Korea's understanding of the security cooperation between the two countries is necessary, cooperation must also be preceded by a Japanese apology for its past wrongdoings.

Since Korea and Japan have similarities in their security environments, threat perceptions and respective national strategies, there is much room for them to cooperate with each other.

To build up the cooperation, the transparency of the security policy must be secured first -that is, the accuracy of mutual policy forecasting should be improved. With this improvement, mutual understanding of the security conception will be preserved.

By securing policy transparency, mutual distrust between Korea and Japan should decrease and previous memories will disappear. Korea, for example, could allow the improvement of

<sup>4</sup> "Chochonryon" is known to provide North Korea with hard currency, amounting to six hundred million U.S. dollars at least every year.

<sup>5</sup> The Japanese Ministry of Justice predicts that three thousand or more North Korean refugees would rush to Japan in an emergency.

Japan's relations with North Korea, and, conversely, Japan could understand, to some degree, Korea's approach toward China and Russia. With this mutual understanding, Korea could secure Japan's cooperation in the improvement of North-South Korea relations, which would in turn alleviate Japan's concerns about isolation from Korea. Moreover, based on this mutual confidence, both countries could create a web of cooperation on the level of regional or global security.

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(3) *Constructing Regional and Global Security:* Given the reinforced position of Korea and Japan, their roles within the international community have steadily increased. Japan has already experienced an increase in its security role as a global partner of the U.S., while Korea, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, actively participates in the UN's peacekeeping activities.

The most important regional security issue is to establish a multilateral security system which would settle regional security problems through dialogues between the regional nations. In order to attain this goal, the role of China is crucial. Korea and Japan can play an integral role in persuading China to take part in the system. It is Korea and Japan who should initiate the multilateral security system, which would include the U.S. and China.

In this perspective, the ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) is expected to act as a good regional security organization. As the issue surrounding the South China Sea and the security issues in the ASEAN region are becoming important regional security problems, it would be beneficial to create a comprehensive security system to handle all East Asian security issues.

Furthermore, Korea and Japan can promote their cooperation in a global scale security operation. The best example will be found in the field of the UN's peacekeeping operations. It is in the best interest for both countries to collaborate and participate in the PKOs.

## Conclusion

As the U.S.'s power within the region gradually declines, Korea and Japan are both pursuing active security policies towards neighboring countries, mainly, the Russian Federation and China. But for Korea, Japan is a more reliable security partner than Russia and China, while by the same token, Korea is a more reliable supporter for Japan than Russia and China. It is because Korea and Japan have much common experience in cooperating with the U.S., and moreover, their national strategies are very similar.

It is desirable for both countries to establish and reinforce their security relations for the sake of the improvement of their overall foreign relations. To put it concretely, both countries should cooperate to lead North Korea to adopt a policy of openness and reform--in other words, a "soft landing." For attaining the goal, both countries should share information on North Korea and the costs for KEDO. Furthermore, the two nations should cooperate to contribute to the stability of a newly-rising regional order by supporting reforms in Russia and China and securing the U.S. engagement in the region as well. ■

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