

Readjusting the National Interest: Four Power Relations and Korea's Strategic Choices after the Summit

Park Hahn-kyu

INTRODUCTION

Since East Asia first entered the modern international system in the mid-19th century, the power balance among the four major players, i.e., the United States, China, Russia and Japan, have greatly influenced Northeast Asian regional order. At the time, Huang Zunxian, a Chinese poet and diplomat, wrote *Chosun Chaekryak* (Chosun's Stratagem), a well-known book offering diplomatic advice to Chosun rulers who were trapped in the middle of a power struggle between four powers. In that book, Huang suggested that Korea cooperate with the United States, maintain a close relationship with China, and ally with Japan in order to defend against an invasion by Russia. Regardless of the validity of his judgment, it was a totally new idea: Korea should, for the first time, consider its own strategy to cope with the dynamics of the four power relations surrounding the peninsula.

As it enters the 21st century, Korea again must choose strategic options very carefully, so as to cope with the ever-changing power struggles surrounding the Korean peninsula. Especially, after the

historic Inter-Korean Summit Meeting between President Kim Dae-jung and Chairman Kim Jong-il, held in Pyongyang in June 2000, the four neighboring powers are now trying to expand their influence on the peninsula by readjusting their strategic interests in Northeast Asia. As a result, the rapidly changing situation in South-North Korean relations will likely lead to a regional power struggle between the U.S., China, Japan and Russia, competing to expand their influence in the peninsula. One indication that competition is heating up is the holding of a series of summit talks between the four powers and South and North Korea during the year 2001.

Under such circumstances, the South Korean diplomatic agenda must include not only ways to promote inter-Korean relations, but also how to meet such strategic challenges posed by the power struggle. This article seeks to examine rapidly changing strategic relationships among the four powers and to illuminate South Korea's strategic choices after the inter-Korean summit.

FOUR SCENARIOS OF NORTHEAST ASIAN REGIONAL ORDER AND KOREA'S STRATEGIC OPTIONS

Before examining current relations among the four major powers in Northeast Asia, the paper will present four types of regional order that Northeast Asia may face in the future. Northeast Asian strategic architecture in the future will be mainly determined by the power game among the four nations. Many scholars have so far offered various kinds of strategic options such as bilateral alliance, multilateral security cooperation, equidistance diplomacy, and neutrality for future Korea, depending on how they see the future security order in Northeast Asia. I would argue that there is no sole prescription for Korea's future strategy and that South Korea should be flexible in choosing strategic options depending on the characteristics of regional order it will face in the future.

The types of future Northeast Asian regional order are likely to

be determined by the two variables: (a) the degree of American engagement in East Asia, and (b) the possibility of China's pursuit of regional hegemony. Many scholars tend to agree that future Northeast Asian security order will be largely determined by U.S.-China relations.¹⁾ Therefore, the four different scenarios of Northeast Asian regional order can be suggested depending on the relationship between the two variables, as shown in Table 1.

*Scenario I: Conflictual and Unstable Order by Competition
Between the U.S. (Japan) and China (Russia)*

This type of regional security order represents a confrontational relationship between U.S.-led alliance system and China (or China-Russia alliance). In this scenario, the United States will engage firmly in East Asia mainly based on the U.S.-Japan alliance and the U.S.-South Korea alliance. On the other hand, China will strongly resist being integrated into a U.S.-dominant Northeast Asian regional order. It is highly likely that China will consider the U.S.-led alliance system a threat to its security. Consequently, the China's external behavior could be basically competitive and confrontational vis-à-vis the United States. China, Russia, and North Korea are likely to form a counter-alliance among them to counterbalance the U.S.

1) For the analyses of the U.S.-China relations and their impact on world order and East Asian regional order in the 21st Century, see Robert Ross, "The Geography of the Peace," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Spring 1999), pp. 81-118; Gerald Segal, "East Asia and the Containment of China," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring 1996), pp. 107-135; Thomas J. Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Spring 1999), pp. 49-80; Joseph Nye, "China's Re-emergence and the Future of the Asia-Pacific," *Survival*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Winter 1997/98), pp. 65-79; William T. Tow, and Richard Gray, "Asia-Pacific Security Regimes," *Australian Journal of Political Science* (December 1995); Byung-jun Ahn, "A Prospect for Northeast Asian Security Order in the 21st Century," in Yong-Soon Kim, *et al.*, eds., *Security Environment in the 21st Century and Korea's Strategic Options* (Seoul: KAIS, 1997).

Table 1. Four Scenarios of Future Northeast Asian Regional Order

		Degree of U.S. Engagement in East Asia	
		High	Low
Possibility of China's pursuit of regional hegemony	High (conflictual)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · U.S. (Japan)-China (Russia) Competition · Conflictual and Unstable Order (Scenario I)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · China-Japan Competition · Conflictual and Unstable Order (Scenario II)
	Low (cooperative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · U.S.-China Cooperation or U.S.-China Condominium · Cooperative and Stable Order (Scenario III)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Multilateral Cooperation between the Four Powers · Cooperative and Stable Order (Scenario IV)

predominance in East Asia. In sum, this type of Northeast Asian regional order will be composed mainly of the competitive alliance systems of the United States and China respectively on the principle of power struggle among the nations depicted by the theory of political realism.

The conflict between the United States and China will originate for the most part from changes in the power relations between them. According to the power transition theory,²⁾ the international system is likely to become unstable when a state, dissatisfied with the existing international order, rapidly gains power through successful industrialization and then challenges the existing hegemonic state. In this respect, China, which is very dissatisfied with the U.S.-led East Asian regional order, can emerge as a challenger to American hegemony. As a result, the Northeast Asian regional order is highly likely to become conflictual and unstable.

2) A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958); Woosang Kim, "Power Transitions and Great Power War from Westphalia to Waterloo," *World Politics*, Vol. 45 (1992), pp. 153-172.

What kinds of strategic options does South Korea have in this case? The strategic option that it can choose is the strengthening of the current South Korea-U.S. alliance system.³⁾ The bilateral alliance system has been a cornerstone of South Korea's security during the postwar period. And as long as there is North Korean security threat, the utility of the South Korea-U.S. alliance is likely to continue. However, South Korea should not provoke China's ire by excessively depending on the South Korea-U.S. alliance system. In addition to that, South Korea should also make diplomatic efforts to maintain friendly relations with both Japan and Russia for the establishment of an international security environment favorable to the peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.

*Scenario II: The Conflictual and Unstable Order Caused by Competition
Between China and Japan*

The second type of Northeast Asian regional order is possible only if the U.S. military withdraws from East Asia due to reduction in U.S. interests in the region. In the early 1990s, as a matter of fact, during the father Bush Administration, the U.S. Department of Defense announced the *East Asia Strategic Initiative* (EASI), a plan for the phased withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Asia-Pacific region. The EASI called for the withdrawal of about 30,000 U.S. troops from the region in 1990-92; including 7,000 from South Korea, 5,000 from Japan, and all troops from the Philippines.⁴⁾

However, the Clinton Administration reversed plans in order to

3) For the argument that emphasizes the U.S.-Korean alliance for future Korea's strategy, see Hyun In-Taek, "New Regional Order in Northeast Asia and Korea's Future-Oriented Strategy," (in Korean) a paper presented at an international conference organized by the Korea Research Institute for Strategy in Seoul, Korea (October 29, 1997).

4) The U.S. Department of Defense, *A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Looking Toward the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: 1990); and *A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: 1992).

cope with unstable situations in the region, namely the North Korean nuclear issue and the cross-straits crisis between China and Taiwan. In February 1995, the U.S. Department of Defense, announced a revised policy toward East Asia in a report entitled *United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region*, which reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to maintain a stable forward presence in the region, at the existing level of about 100,000 troops for the foreseeable future.⁵⁾ It remains to be seen how long the United States will maintain its current force level.

U.S. disengagement from East Asia could lead to major changes in the East Asian security environment. The U.S. forward presence in the region has played a pivotal role not only in maintaining stability on the Korean peninsula but also in keeping the balance of power in the East Asian region as a whole. If the U.S. military withdraws from East Asia in the future, however, there will be severe competition between the regional powers, especially between China and Japan, to fill the power vacuum. If China and Japan become embroiled in competition for hegemony, there will be a major arms race between Beijing and Tokyo. Under such circumstances, China and Japan are also likely to compete with each other to increase influence on the Korean peninsula as they did in the late 19th century. Of course, the major difference between then and now is the ascendancy of China in international politics. Given that, South Korea's foreign relations will be much more complicated than they were a century ago.

In this type of regional international order, South Korea's national strategy should be based on the bilateral alliance strategy. However, it should be very careful to choose its counterpart in the alliance and to decide on the degree of cohesiveness of the alliance depending on the situation. In other words, South Korea can choose a "bandwagoning" strategy, thereby choosing an alliance

5) The U.S. Department of Defense, *United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region* (Washington, DC: February 1995), p. i.

relationship that can best serve South Korea's interests.⁶⁾ In this unstable regional order caused by the Sino-Japanese competition, some may think of multilateral security cooperative framework as one of plausible options.⁷⁾ However, the multilateral approach can only be realized on the basis of cooperation and mutual confidence building among the nations. Therefore, it is not an effective strategy in a competitive and conflictual international order in which individual states compete with each other for power. Both equidistance diplomacy and neutrality strategy can be considered as alternative strategic choices in an unstable regional order. Unless South Korean power increases significantly compared to China and Japan, however, these strategies will not be realistic options, since there is no guarantee that the neighboring powers would recognize the neutrality of a weak Korea.

Scenario III: Stability Through Cooperation Between the U.S. and China

One can also think of a Northeast Asian regional order led by a U.S.-China condominium. Such an arrangement could emerge in this region when the following circumstances occur in combination: First of all, the U.S. attempt to seek co-leadership in the region when it begins to believe that the U.S. alone cannot manage to maintain stability and peace in the region. Although the U.S.-Sino relationship has had a bumpy course since the inauguration of the new Bush Administration in early 2001, the U.S. government during the

6) For the bandwagoning theory, see Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). For its application to South Korea, see Sung-Hack Kang, "The Korean Style of Foreign Policy: From Bandwagoning to Quo Vadis?" in Yong-Soon Yim, and Ki-Jung Kim, eds., *Korea in the Age of Globalization and Information* (Seoul: KAIS, 1997), pp. 3-33.

7) For the argument of multilateralism for future Korea's strategy, see Kim Tae-hyun, "New World Order and East Asia," in Kim Tae-Hyun, ed., *New security Order in East Asia* (in Korean), (Seoul: The Sejong Institute, 1997); The Sejong Institute, *Korea's National Strategy into the 21st Century* (in Korean), (Seoul: The Sejong Institute, 1996), p. 3.

Clinton Administration had tried to engage China since 1997 and in June 1998 President Clinton and President Jiang Zemin met in Beijing and declared “constructive strategic partnership” between the two countries.⁸⁾ At that time, Washington believed that an engagement policy could ease China’s entry into the international community and encourage a more open and democratized political system.

Secondly, the Washington-Beijing condominium could be realized if China finally achieves a full-fledged market economy and a working democracy. A market-oriented and democratized China will seek cooperation with the United States to maintain a favorable international environment for her further economic development. In this case, the United States has no reason to reject China as a partner in the region. At the same time, the United States could recognize China’s constructive role in maintaining the stability and peace in the region. By establishing the “constructive strategic partnership” with China, the United States and China together could effectively deal with regional issues, such as the North Korean missile and nuclear issues, regional economic problems, and nuclear competition between India and Pakistan, that cannot be resolved easily by the United States alone.

Under such circumstances, South Korea can choose a mixed approach of alliance and multilateral security cooperation as its strategic options. As long as the United States actively engages in East Asia, Seoul’s security policy should still be based on the bilateral security alliance between Seoul and Washington.

8) *Chosun Ilbo*, June 28, 1998. When the bilateral strategic partnership was declared, there emerged a serious concern among the Japanese people that the U.S. might switch its Asian partnership from Japan to China. Japan showed a very sensitive response by using the term “Nichibei Domei Hyoryu” (the U.S.-Japan Alliance Adrift) to describe a sense of isolation on the part of Japan caused by the renewed U.S.-Chinese rapprochement. For the argument in a similar vein, see Funabashi Yoichi, *Domei Hyoryu* (Alliance Adrift), (Asahi Shimbun-sha, 1997); Kuriyama Shoichi, *Nichibei Domei: Hyoryukarano Dakkyaku* (The U.S.-Japan Alliance: From Adrift to Breakaway), (Nihon Keizai Shimbun-sha, 1997).

Meanwhile, South Korea can also seek the multilateral approach as a complementary means to enhance its security. Bilateralism and multilateralism can coexist in such a cooperative Northeast Asian regional order, and are not necessarily contradictory or conflictual. Accordingly, South Korea can utilize these two different approaches in a mutually complementary manner in the stable international system. For example, the four neighboring powers have their own calculations of costs and benefits regarding Korean reunification. Those calculations cannot be resolved easily without the understanding of and cooperation of all four powers. South Korea should, therefore, try not only to maintain close relationships with each of the four neighboring countries, but also to encourage mutual understanding and common interest regarding Korean reunification through a multilateral security framework.

Scenario IV: A Cooperative and Stable Order Through Multilateral Cooperation among the U.S., China, Japan, and Russia

A regional order based on multilateralism has never existed in Northeast Asia. Bilateralism has always been the dominant phenomenon in the regional security structure. However, multilateralism could supplant bilateralism if the United States gradually withdrew from East Asia due to the readjustment of its interests in the region, on one hand, and other powers such as China, Japan, and Russia also established foreign relations based on cooperation and partnership, rather than competition and conflict, on the other. While this scenario may be the least probable in Northeast Asian regional order, it is the most favorable one for South Korea's security.

Since the end of the Cold War, the four major powers have frequently conducted shuttle summit diplomacy and have actively sought to establish "strategic partnership" or "new friendship" between them, reflecting a new vision of post-Cold War international order: reconciliation and cooperation. Under such circumstances, the

four powers surrounding the Korean peninsula believe that they should cooperate with each other to bring about stability and peace in Northeast Asia, which is indispensable in terms of maximizing their own economic interests. In the regional multilateral cooperative setting, relations among the nations would be based on international cooperation depicted by neo-liberalism. Non-traditional security issues such as economy, environment, and international terrorism, among others, will become as important as traditional politico-security issues in international relations.

Under such circumstances, South Korea will have to reduce the influence of the four powers on the Korean peninsula while enhancing its international position through active multilateral diplomacy. With increasing mutual cooperation among the four powers, it is highly likely that a multilateral security cooperative framework could emerge in Northeast Asia. South Korea could deal with such security issues as arms reduction in the region, the North Korean problem and Korean reunification, regional territorial disputes, regional economic issues and environmental pollution. In addition to the multilateral approach, South Korea could also consider equidistance (balanced) diplomacy between the four powers or a neutrality strategy in relations with the four powers in such a multilateral and cooperative regional order.⁹⁾

THE FOUR POWER RELATIONS SINCE THE INTER-KOREAN SUMMIT

The inter-Korean summit and the subsequent process of

9) For the argument of a neutral unified Korea, see Song Byung-rok, "New Ideology and Civil-Military Relations of a Unified Korea," The Korean Association of Political Science, ed., "Searching for New Ideology and Order for a Unified Korea" (in Korean), (Seoul: KPSA, 1993); In K. Whang, *One Korea via Permanent Neutrality: Peaceful Management of Korean Unification* (Cambridge: Schenkman Books, 1987).

rapprochement between both Koreas have brought about rapid change on the Korean peninsula. Consequently, the four powers have begun reassessing their strategic interests on the peninsula and the balance of power among them in Northeast Asia. Under such circumstances, the relationships between the four power and the two Koreas have changed very rapidly over the recent years. The southern trilateral relationship between Seoul, Washington and Tokyo has weakened significantly due to strife between Seoul and Washington over their policies toward North Korea and the worsening bilateral relations between Seoul and Tokyo caused by the unsettled historical issues between them. On the other hand, northern neighbors including Beijing, Moscow, and Pyongyang have rehabilitated the traditional triangular relationship among themselves to check American dominance in East Asia.

*The Shaky Southern Trilateral Relationship:
The U.S., Japan, and South Korea*

(1) South Korea-U.S. Relationship

Dramatic changes in the inter-Korean relations following the inter-Korean summit have had a major impact on the South Korea-U.S. alliance relationship. The problem is whether the Seoul-Pyongyang relationship can be harmonized with Seoul-Washington ties, or whether one relationship will necessarily progress in a direction detrimental to the other.¹⁰⁾

When the United States, under the Clinton Administration, adopted an engagement policy toward North Korea, there wasn't much discord between Seoul and Washington regarding their policies toward the North. The U.S. engagement policy brought about significant progress in Washington-Pyongyang relations to the extent that both countries concluded agreements on North Korea's

10) Kim Sung-han, "Peace on the Korean Peninsula and South Korea-U.S. Summit," *The Korea Herald*, March 7, 2001.

controversial nuclear and missile issues through bilateral negotiations.

However, the George W. Bush Administration unveiled a hard-line policy toward North Korea, saying that it would proceed based on the principles of transparency, verification, and reciprocity. Then, in January 2002, he branded North Korea part of "an axis of evil," intent on developing weapons of mass destruction. That policy immediately froze relations between Washington and Pyongyang and also sent the fledgling inter-Korean rapprochement to the back burner. As a result, tensions arose between the U.S. and South Korea on how to deal with the North Korean problem. During U.S.-South Korean summit talks held in Washington, DC in March 2000, President Bush reaffirmed his hard-line approach toward North Korea based on his suspicions of the leader of North Korea. An angry Pyongyang cancelled plans for inter-Korean and U.S.-North Korean dialogues at the governmental level.¹¹⁾ The North Korean delegation, attending the 8th ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Hanoi on July 25, 2001, criticized that the Missile Defense (MD) program and the hard-line policy toward Pyongyang were aimed at destroying the North Korean socialist system and causing unnecessary tensions on the Korean peninsula. They further argued that North Korea had a sovereign right to maintain missile and

11) However, it is difficult to say that the U.S. tough stance on North Korea was the most decisive factor leading to the lull in current inter-Korean relations. There already existed some unresolved issues between Seoul and Pyongyang before the inauguration of the George W. Bush Administration. In February 2001, when the North called for the South Korea's provision of electricity, the South rejected the North's request on technical and political grounds. Pyongyang criticized Seoul for not observing the Berlin Declaration in which President Kim promised the South would provide the North with social infrastructure including roads, ports, and energy supplies. In addition, Hyundai had failed to pay the promised fee of \$12 million for the tourism of Mt. Kumgang located in the North and only remitted \$2 million in February 2001. North Korea threatened to halt Mt. Kumgang tourism to South Korea if the fee was not fully paid.

nuclear power programs.¹²⁾

Some people in the South Korean government believe that U.S. hard-line policy was the main cause for the current lull in inter-Korean relations. The government, anxious for a return visit by Chairman Kim Jong-il to Seoul, wanted a more flexible approach by the U.S. However, the U.S. was unwilling to adopt a carrot-only policy toward Pyongyang. The United States appeared to be rather irritated by South Korea's anxiety that chilly Washington-Pyongyang relations would have a negative affect on inter-Korean relations. It seems that the more Seoul clung to its Sunshine Policy, the worse Seoul-Washington relations would become, given the current hawkish U.S. stance toward the North.

Another source of strife arose between the U.S. and South Korea during South Korean-Russian summit talks held in Seoul in February 2001. President Kim and Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in a joint communiqué that both countries had agreed to support the maintenance and strengthening of the Anti-ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty agreed between the United States and the former Soviet Union in 1972, which implied that South Korea might support Russia's anti-MD position. The United States immediately registered its dissatisfaction toward South Korea. A month later when President Kim met President Bush in Washington, DC, he devoted much of his time to explaining that he had not meant to oppose the MD program. The Kim-Putin agreement was a blow to the bilateral relationship between Seoul and Washington.

(2) South Korea-Japan Relationship

When President Kim Dae-jung visited Tokyo for summit talks with then-Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi in October 1998, Kim and Obuchi signed the "Joint Declaration on Korea-Japan Partnership for the 21st Century," hoping to overcome the bitter past history shared by their countries and to open a new chapter of

12) *The Korea Herald*, July 26, 2001.

bilateral relations between them. The Kim-Obuchi summit talks actually improved bilateral relations and eased deep-rooted anti-Japanese sentiment among South Koreans. The Seoul government lifted a decades-old ban on Japanese popular cultural products and proposed a visit to Korea by Emperor Akihito, whose late father Hirohito had reigned during Japan's colonization of Korea. President Kim regarded the establishment of "forward-looking" relations with Japan as one of his diplomatic achievements, along with the Sunshine Policy toward North Korea.¹³⁾

Since 2000, however, several issues have divided the two countries, and have now led to an actual freeze in bilateral relations. The first involves Japanese schoolbooks. The Japanese government authorized eight controversial history textbooks, particularly one authored by right-wing scholars, for use in middle schools, despite strong protests from South Korea and China. Seoul, maintaining that the textbooks in question whitewash and distort Japan's war aggression and colonial domination of the Korean peninsula,¹⁴⁾ retaliated by postponing plans to further open its markets to Japanese cultural products and canceling visits to Japan by high-ranking officials, including the chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff.

The South Korea-Japan relationship continued to sour in 2001, with the two neighboring nations locking horns on various issues. The Japanese government banned Korean boats from fishing in disputed waters off the Kuril Islands between Japan and Russia. In defiance of strong criticisms and objections from South Korea and China, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi paid a controversial visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, a shrine which honors war criminals buried among the Japanese war dead. Given the severity of these conflicts, it seems that there will be no immediate thaw in the frozen relations between the two countries, since Japan continues its nationalistic-conservative foreign policies and ignores the suggestions of

13) *The Korea Herald*, August 15, 2001.

14) *Ibid.*

neighboring countries.

(3) The U.S.-Japan Relationship

The Bush Administration has made it clear that maintaining the U.S.-Japan alliance would be given top priority in its East Asia policy. U.S. officials in the Bush Administration believe that greater Japanese military involvement in regional peacekeeping is not only inevitable, but—if handled properly—beneficial. The bilateral alliance between Washington and Tokyo has been the lynchpin of American security strategy in East Asia, and in this context, the Bush Administration is now calling for Japan to be a more equal security partner.

In summit talks between President Bush and Prime Minister Koizumi held in June 2001, both leaders reconfirmed the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance in maintaining the peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region. The United States called for revision of the Japanese Constitution and authorization of a collective self-defense in order to strengthen the bilateral security alliance. It seemed that the U.S. wanted to play its Japan card to check China, which is emerging as a challenger to American hegemony in East Asia.

Recently, Japan has also attempted to pursue its own interests by strengthening the bilateral security alliance with the United States. In other words, it has capitalized on the U.S. demand for an expanded Japanese military role as an excuse to strengthen its military capabilities. Some argue that the United States has instigated Japan's trend toward militarism and ultra-nationalism by making that demand. It appears that Japan has lost enthusiasm for improving relations with the two Koreas, and instead, is focusing its foreign policy on the U.S.-Japan alliance.

*Rehabilitating the Northern Triangular Relationship:
China, Russia, and North Korea*

(1) The North Korea-China Relationship

Diplomatic exchanges between North Korea and China have increased significantly in recent years. In January 2001, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il visited China and met with President Jiang Zemin to strengthen their traditional ties. During his visit, Kim also made a secret visit to Shanghai, China's high-tech and financial center, for a first-hand look at the achievements of Beijing's economic development strategy that started in 1978 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. After his visit, Kim expressed admiration for the fruits of China's economic success.¹⁵⁾ In addition, Kim Jong-il also made two unprecedented visits to the Chinese embassy in Pyongyang in March 2001 and in July 2001, respectively. In return, President Jiang made a state visit to Pyongyang on September 3, 2001. There have also been frequent mutual exchanges of delegations to promote cooperation between the two countries in the various fields such as military, economy, and science and technology in 2001. In March 2001, China also promised that it would provide 15,000 tons of heavy oil to North Korea.

Both China and North Korea are now actively attempting to strengthen their traditional ties based on their own interests. China is jockeying for a larger say in the reunification process on the peninsula by seeking to forge close relations with both South and North Korea. It is also intent on stepping up its go-between role in resolving Korean affairs. North Korea is also eager to rehabilitate its traditional relations with China, its most important ally, to counter "unacceptable" U.S. pressure. It is capitalizing on recent Sino-U.S. conflicts surrounding such issues as the U.S. spy plane incident of April 2001, China's hard-line stance on Taiwan's independence,

15) *The Korea Times*, February 14, 2001.

human rights in China, and the American MD program.

(2) The North Korea-Russia Relationship

In its Cold War heyday, the defunct Soviet Union had been a military patron of North Korea. But Russian influence on the North drastically decreased after the former Soviet Union's establishment of diplomatic ties with South Korea in 1989. Since the mid-1990s, however, Russia has realized the need to restore relations with North Korea in order to maintain influence on the peninsula. Since then, it has tried to maintain equidistance diplomacy between Seoul and Pyongyang.

Russian President Putin made an official visit to Pyongyang in July 2000, the first ever by a Soviet or Russian head of state. It was originally aimed at mending Pyongyang-Moscow ties that had soured in the 1990s following Moscow's establishment of formal diplomatic relations with Seoul. On August 4, 2001, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il made a return visit to Moscow. In the Putin-Kim summit talks, the two leaders agreed on bilateral cooperation in the military, economic, and cultural areas. They focused on the issue of linking the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Korean Railroads and connecting gas pipelines between Russia and the Korean peninsula. By linking the pipelines and railways, Russia hoped to increase its influence and involvement in the peninsula, and in return, it promised to sell its state-of-the-art T90 tanks and MIG-29s to North Korea. In a joint communiqué¹⁶⁾ announced after the summit talks, Russia expressed its support for the North Korean missile program, "which is basically a peaceful one posing no threat to the countries that respect the sovereignty of North Korea." This statement meant that Russia did not agree with America on the necessity of the MD program as a defense against missile threats from "rogue states" such as North Korea. Both countries also agreed that the ABM treaty was a cornerstone of strategic stability in the world. And, although

16) *Chosun Ilbo*, August 5, 2001.

Russia did not agree to the North Korean assertion that U.S. forces in South Korea should be withdrawn from the peninsula, it did express its understanding of the North Korean position. By touching on the issue of U.S. forces in South Korea, Russia intended to project the idea to the international community that Russia could replace the United States as the mediator on the peninsula.

(3) The China-Russia Relationship

With the end of the Cold War, Russia and China have rapidly improved bilateral relations in order to suppress U.S. dominance on the globe. Taking advantage of the MD controversy, they have strengthened their relations very rapidly over recent years. When Chinese President Jiang visited Moscow in July 2001, Russia and China signed a new friendship and cooperation treaty that had expired in 1980. In the Jiang-Putin summit talks, both leaders reconfirmed a "strategic partnership" between their countries by which they would cooperate militarily to maintain international order. The underlying reason was to cope with the aggressive American MD program and check its hegemony in world politics.

Their cooperation was highlighted in the military arena as well. China has recently made a huge purchase of advanced Russian weaponry systems including MIG-29s and kilo-class submarines in order to overcome its military inferiority, especially its nuclear capability, vis-à-vis the United States. In return, Russia will earn a substantial amount of money to boost its economy. The total amount in Russian export of military equipment to China amounted to more than 4 billion dollars in 2000, more than the half of the total trade volume between the two countries in that year.¹⁷⁾

Likewise, China and Russia now share common interests in various fields. The congruence of their strategic interests made it possible for them to establish a renewed détente in bilateral relations to the extent that they recently resolved decades-old territorial

17) *Daehan Maeil*, July 20, 2001.

disputes and also agreed to reduce significantly the size of the military force along their border.

KOREA'S STRATEGIC OPTIONS

A new power struggle in the Northeast Asian region is emerging now as America's dominant influence in the region is being challenged by Russia and China. The power game among the four powers will likely have an enormous impact on the Korean peninsula in the future. Despite strong criticism from both China and Russia, the United States is currently pushing to establish the MD program in order to maintain hegemony, and that will likely complicate the already entangled situation.

China, encouraged by its successful bid for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing and its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in November 2001, has begun an aggressive diplomatic push to establish a strategic partnership with Russia. It has reaffirmed its traditional "blood alliance" with North Korea. It is also attempting to form a counter-alliance to block American influence in Northeast Asia, using the MD program as a rallying cry.

In addition to the U.S.-Chinese conflict, Japan and Russia have reaffirmed their roles in Northeast Asia. Japan has expanded its military role in the region through the strengthened U.S.-Japan security alliance, and its domestic politics have rapidly tilted toward ultra-nationalism. In the eyes of neighboring countries, it is a grim reminder of brutal colonial rule over Asia during the first half of the 20th Century. Russia has also attempted to reinstate its influence in Northeast Asia, evidenced by President Vladimir Putin's state visits to both North and South Korea over the last two years.

The South Korean government is currently faced with serious diplomatic challenges from various directions due to the rapidly changing situation. First, it has not broken through the current standoff in inter-Korean relations, constrained by the freeze between

Washington and Pyongyang. Secondly, Seoul and Washington have not yet narrowed the gap in their perceptions and policies toward North Korea, and it has negatively affected their relationship. It appears that the more President Kim promotes his Sunshine Policy, the more difficult Seoul-Washington relations will become. Finally, South Korea-Japan relations are worsening rapidly due to the issue of Japanese history textbook and Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine.

The current picture of Northeast Asian regional order is similar to Scenario I, which represents a confrontational relationship between the U.S.-led alliance system and the China-Russia alliance system. Under this type of regional security order, I have recommended that South Korea strengthen the current South Korea-U.S. alliance system. There is no other plausible option for Seoul that can supplant the Seoul-Washington alliance, as long as the U.S. is actively engaged in the region in competition with China. Particularly, unless the North Korean problem is resolved permanently, the effectiveness of the bilateral security alliance will continue to serve as the cornerstone of South Korea's security. However, as noted, Seoul should not invite unnecessary anxiety from Beijing by excessively relying on the South Korea-U.S. alliance. Seoul should make serious diplomatic efforts to impress on China that the Seoul-Washington alliance is not a threat to its security. In addition, South Korea should also try to maintain friendly relations with both Japan and Russia in order to establish an international environment favorable peace and security on the Korean peninsula.

The current foreign policy goal for the South Korean government should be normalizing its bilateral relationship with Washington in order to cope with the strengthening northern triangular relationship between Beijing, Moscow, and Pyongyang. Seoul should not cling excessively to the achievements of the Sunshine Policy to the extent that Seoul-Washington ties are damaged. And it must consider who can really contribute to the peace and stability on the peninsula, and which national strategy will serve its national interests best. In

addition, South Korea should now restore the trilateral cooperative relationship between Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul, which has weakened over the last two years, so as to effectively deal with the North Korean issue and the reunification issue. Without cooperation from Washington and Tokyo, South Korea cannot solve these issues. Although there are no prospects for improvement in the South Korea-Japan relations for the time being, Seoul should make various efforts to promote cooperation and mutual understanding between the Korean and Japanese peoples for the long term. Even though it is currently difficult to improve bilateral relations at the governmental level, the South Korean government can help by expanding exchanges and cooperation in various civilian sectors, including academia, sports, entertainment, arts and education. The expanded exchanges and cooperation are the real foundation for a future-oriented bilateral relationship between South Korea and Japan.

CONCLUSION: LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

I have so far examined the current power relations among the four neighboring powers and suggested some diplomatic options available to South Korea. I also discussed the four different scenarios of future Northeast Asian regional order and some corresponding strategic options for future Korea. The best long-term strategic choices for future Korea are as follows:

First, if the Northeast Asian regional order is unstable, regardless of whether it is bipolar or multi-polar, the bilateral alliance, especially the South Korea-U.S. security alliance, seems to be the most effective strategic choice for South Korea. However, as a supplementary means, South Korea should maintain friendly bilateral relations with other regional powers such as China and Russia in order to reduce unnecessary suspicions on the bilateral security alliance.

Second, when the Northeast Asian regional order is characterized as stable, regardless of whether it is bipolar or multipolar, the multilateral security cooperation approach could be the most preferable option for South Korea. However, South Korea should try to maintain a bilateral security alliance between Seoul and Washington for as long as possible. It would not have to give up the bilateral security alliance unless the United States actually suspends its security commitment to South Korea. Because the behavior of individual nations tends to be cooperative and mutually complementary in a stable international order, the nations in the region could join to resolve various regional security issues in the multilateral security cooperation framework, leading to the formation of an official multilateral security cooperation organization like the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

In conclusion, the South Korea-U.S. security alliance and, to a lesser extent, the multilateral security cooperation will likely continue to be the critical strategic options for 21st century Korea. However, South Korea should be both careful and flexible in choosing strategic options, given the fluidity and uncertainty of the current international order. Therefore, the South Korea-U.S. security alliance and the multilateral security cooperation strategy may not be the only choices available to South Korea in the future. A single solution is not the answer. Rather, Seoul must prepare well for various optimal alternatives depending on the situation.