

Vol.32, No.2, 2023

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ISSN 1229-6902

# International Journal of Korean Unification Studies

Korea Institute  
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Unification

# *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*

Published Biannually by the Korea Institute for National Unification

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***International Journal of Korean Unification Studies***

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TEL: (82-2) 2023 8211

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Submission: <https://kinu.jams.or.kr/co/main/jmMain.kci>

E-Mail: [kinujournal@kinu.or.kr](mailto:kinujournal@kinu.or.kr) Webpage: <https://kinu.or.kr/main/kinu>

Annual Subscription Rates (two issues)

Domestic (individual & institution) 20,000 Won (10,000 Won per issue)

Overseas (individual & institution) USD 30 (by airmail, USD 15 per issue)

\* The rates are subject to change without notice.

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ISSN 1229-6902

Publication Date: December 31, 2023

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Printed by RIDRIK TEL: (82-2) 2269-1919

# International Journal of Korean Unification Studies

2023

Vol. 32, No. 2

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## **A Roadmap for ROK-US-Japan Trilateral Security Cooperation (TSC)**

**Alex Soohoon Lee\***

In the face of increasing security threats in the Indo-Pacific, and especially those by the DPRK, trilateral security cooperation (TSC) among the Republic of Korea, the United States, and Japan is imperative to sustain peace and stability in the region. The Camp David Summit, in this regard, has established a formal cooperative mechanism and produced meaningful trilateral agendas. Over the last several decades, the three nations have made several attempts to form cooperation but failed at every attempt. This research analyzes the brief history of trilateral cooperation between the Republic of Korea, the United States, and Japan and proposes a way to make this cooperation more sustainable. The key to increasing the mechanism's sustainability would be the institutionalization of agendas. In light of this, the research employs a norm life-cycle, presented by Finnemore and Sikkink, to assess the agendas discussed at Camp David at the August 2023 summit. Ultimately, the manuscript draws a roadmap for the TSC that the three countries' governments can refer to.

**Keywords:** ROK-US-Japan Trilateral Security Cooperation, TSC, Camp David Summit, ROK-US Alliance, ROK-Japan Relations, Norm Life-cycle

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## **I . Introduction**

Trilateral security cooperation (hereafter ‘TSC’) between the Republic of Korea (hereafter ‘ROK’), the United States (hereafter ‘US’), and Japan was officially formed at the Camp David Summit in August 2023. After several failed attempts to create cooperation, it was a historic moment for the three nations. TSC has been established in the face of increasing military provocation by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (hereafter ‘DPRK’), the intensification of strategic rivalry between the US and China, the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the breakout of the Israel-Hamas war. Each of the above events directly or indirectly reshaped the Indo-Pacific region’s security landscape.

In this context, it is critical to assess TSC between the three nations and discuss the way forward. This article addresses several key questions. First, how should we interpret the significance of the Camp David Summit? Second, what are the goals of each nation in establishing TSC? Third, how can the three nations resolve any potential differences? To answer this question, this article includes the following sections. First, it reviews the history of TSC. While there has been a series of dialogues among the three after multiple DPRK provocations, initial attempts to establish TSC occurred during the 1960s. This article unearths and presents the efforts made by the US to initiate cooperation during the Cold War, then explains the developments that occurred in the post-Cold War era. The article will then expound on the trilateral efforts made after the inauguration of ROK President Yoon Suk Yeol. Reviewing the process and effort that enabled the three nations to meet at Camp David is essential for understanding TSC.

Finally, the paper proposes the road that TSC should take. Here, the author first explains how the current iteration of TSC differs from those of the past. Then, the author will discuss the critical agendas of the Camp David Summit. Past experiences tell us that sustainability is essential for TSC. To make TSC sustainable, selecting an agenda that will suit the national interests of all three countries is critical.

This article consists of the following order. First, the following section will be a literature review and theoretical analysis. Here, the author will introduce different scholarship concerning ROK-US-Japan trilateral cooperation. Some researchers regard ROK-Japan relations as the most important criterion for successful cooperation, while others assert that cooperation is the key to driving the US Indo-Pacific regional strategy. Then, the author will introduce the life-cycle of norms and the constructivist perspective as the basis for this paper's theoretical analysis, and explain TSC's sustainability within this context.

The third section will deal with the history of ROK-US-Japan trilateral cooperation, and the fourth section will present a roadmap for future TSC. According to the Biden administration's National Security Strategy, "the post-Cold War era is definitively over and a competition is underway between the major powers to shape what comes next"; furthermore, the "world is at an inflection point" confronting a new age of transnational threats and the beginning of renewed great power rivalry.<sup>1</sup> In the Indo-Pacific, which is the most populous, militarily equipped, and economically competitive region in the world, the US-ROK-Japan TSC has become undeniably important. In this respect, a roadmap for TSC needs to be drawn.

## **II. Literature Review and Theoretical Analysis**

In international relations and foreign policy analysis, most of the previous research concerning trilateral cooperation has focused on cooperation between the US, Australia, and Japan, known as the Trilateral Security Dialogue (hereafter "TSD"). Previous scholarship concerning trilateral security cooperation among the ROK, US, and Japan has left much to be discussed. Not much research has been conducted on ROK-US-Japan trilateral security cooperation because the past efforts have not been

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1 The White House, *National Security Strategy*, October 2022: 1-6.

successful. There are many reasons why past attempts at trilateral cooperation have failed. Unstable ROK-Japan relations may be one. The academic literature covering ROK-US-Japan trilateral cooperation can generally be divided into three sets.

The first set of previous scholarships concerns ROK-Japan relations in the context of trilateral security cooperation. Smith argues that “the most often cited challenge to effective trilateral policy coordination has been the difficult relationship between Seoul and Tokyo.”<sup>2</sup> For instance, anti-Japanese sentiment remains widespread in South Korean society. ROK-Japan relations are often beholden to domestic politics in one or both of the two countries. The bilateral relationship is primarily affected whenever there is a strong sentiment or opposition on one side. This dynamic exerts certain limits on the scope and scale of both bilateral and trilateral

Hinata-Yamaguchi introduces a capability-based cooperation framework for trilateral cooperation.<sup>3</sup> This article analyzes the strategic and operational dimensions of trilateral cooperation that effectively deal with security risks. In the article, Hinata-Yamaguchi outlines the developments, constraints, and restraints of ROK-Japan security relations. The research argues that “the ROK-Japan partnership is essential in completing the alliance triangle with the United States to serve as the lynchpin of security in the Asia-Pacific.” The US-led alliance system in Asia is often described as a ‘hub-and-spoke’ system. In this system, the US serves as the hub and the ROK and Japan serve as spokes. The hub-and-spoke system differs from the US alliance system in Europe, namely ‘collective security.’ Therefore, a stable bilateral relationship between the ROK and Japan would be the prerequisite for trilateral

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2 Sheila A. Smith, *The U.S.-Japan-ROK Trilateral: Better at Deterrence than Diplomacy?* (Washington, D.C.: Korea Economic Institute of America, 2020) keia.org.

3 Ryo Hinata-Yamaguchi, “Completing the US-Japan-Korea Alliance Triangle: Prospects and Issues in Japan-Korea Security Cooperation,” *Korean Journal of Defense Analyses* 28 (2016).

cooperation in the region.

The work of Ralph Cossa discusses a virtual alliance, referring to ROK-US-Japan trilateral cooperation.<sup>4</sup> According to Cossa, the critical “common denominator of the US-ROK and US-Japan bilateral alliance” is the US, and the “Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) institutionalized three-way cooperation, at least dealing with North Korea.” The TCOG was initiated after DPRK had launched a long-range missile, *Taepodong*, in 1998. After the launch, the ROK, the US, and Japan started intelligence sharing on the DPRK to better prepare for future contingencies. Cossa argued that the virtual alliance among the three countries may not be permanent, but could serve as a long-term factor in stabilizing regional security. In this regard, it is essential to trace why and how the relations eventually affected the trilateral relations. However, this literature set does not explain the structure or contents of trilateral cooperation.

The second set of literature deals with US-led mini-multilateralism (mini-lateralism), the conceptual framework of trilateral cooperation. Wuthnow argues that the US promotes “policy coordination and interoperability among its allies and partners, through dialogues, exercises, intelligence-sharing agreements, and other means.”<sup>5</sup> However, “‘minilateral’ activities could exacerbate Chinese fears of ‘encirclement’ and lead to strategic or economic counter-moves.” According to Wuthnow, trilateral cooperation between the ROK, the US, and Japan would be a threat to China. However, this would not necessarily mean a security dilemma in Asia since states would still be economically dependent on China even as they pursue strengthened security relations with the US. This should also open possibilities for greater multilateral cooperation under most conditions.

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4 Ralph A. Cossa, “US-ROK-Japan: Why a ‘Virtual Alliance’ Makes Sense.” *Korean Journal of Defense Analyses*, vol. 12 (2000).

5 Joel Wuthnow, “U.S. ‘Minilateralism’ in Asia and China’s Responses: A New Security Dilemma?” *Journal of Contemporary China* 28 (2018).

ROK-US-Japan trilateral cooperation is technically a mini-multilateral network. Since it is a US-led multilateral network, it would undoubtedly serve US interests. In this respect, the trilateral cooperation would seem to work against China. However, the topic of China's potential response to increased ROK-US-Japan trilateral cooperation remains outside the scope of this article. Trilateral cooperation diversifies its objectives, and at Camp David, the main topic of discussion was deterring the DPRK. In this article, the author regards the DPRK as the main reason for the formation of TSC.

Lee argues that the "Biden administration's mini-multilateral strategy in the Indo-Pacific region gave a push for the ROK-US-Japan trilateral security cooperation."<sup>6</sup> In other words, Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy is a foundation for such a trilateral security cooperation. Lee argues that the Biden administration is expanding the mini-multilateral network in the Indo-Pacific region. Highlighting the Biden administration's changes in Indo-Pacific strategy and linking them to the structure of trilateral cooperation may be the best way of explaining the most recent trend. Although the cooperation can only be successful when all three governments agree to it, it is also important to note that the direction of the cooperation could differ. In this regard, the author aims to discuss the agendas of the TSC.

The third set of literature concerns the role of trilateral cooperation. Nam and Song argue that amid "US-China strategic competition intensification, Seoul can expand its diplomatic capacity through trilateral cooperation [punching above its weight]."<sup>7</sup> In the past, the ROK-US-Japan cooperation claimed China as a stakeholder contributing to regional peace. Nam and Song also mention the objective of trilateral cooperation

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6 Alex Soohoon Lee. "Achievements and Tasks of 2023 ROK-US Summit: Alliance in action toward the future." *Northeast Asia Security Analysis*, Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, May 9, 2023. [In Korean]

7 Chang Hee Nam and Sang-ho Song, "Bolstering the Alliance for a Trilateralism-Based Security Strategy for South Korea in Times of US-China Rivalry," *Pacific Focus* 37, no. 1 (2022): 68-94.

between the ROK, the US, and Japan, namely to deter DPRK provocations and expand international cooperation to denuclearize DPRK.

Yeo claims that the main objective of trilateral cooperation is to eliminate DPRK's nuclear and missile threats. However, trilateral security cooperation "is not only important for addressing North Korea threats but in providing a major platform for cultivating deeper roots to cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region... The Taiwan issue will pose a particularly thorny problem"<sup>8</sup> The Taiwan Strait issue will remain one of the concerns of the Trilateral security cooperation. Of the three sets of scholarship mentioned here, this last set is the most recently published and contains the most up-to-date information on TSC. The research in this article was established based on this set of literature.

Each of the three sets of literature mentioned here has a unique way of analyzing trilateral cooperation. Over the past several decades, research has followed on different occasions and events, and previous and current scholarship each has distinctive value. The author conducted the research for this article after the Camp David Summit, on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023, where multiple agendas were introduced. In this article, the author aims to analyze what these agendas are and suggest ways to promote them for better US-ROK-Japan cooperation.

Several conceptual and theoretical approaches could be employed to assess trilateral security cooperation. Victor Cha introduces the "quasi-alliance" model, where "two states that remain unallied but have a third party as a common ally."<sup>9</sup> While there are historical and territorial disputes between the ROK and Japan, under certain conditions (namely the weakening of US security commitment in the region) ROK-Japan bilateral relations can change when the two adopt a more pragmatic

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8 Andrew Yeo, "Strengthening ROK-U.S.-Japan Cooperation in Response to North Korean Nuclear Threats and Indo-Pacific Security Challenges," *Korean National Strategy* 8, no. 1 (2023): 85-109.

9 Victor Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

approach. This reasoning, which stems from a fear of abandonment, illustrates the US Indo-Pacific strategy can influence bilateral relations. In other words, it is essential for the US to play a meaningful role in constructing trilateral security cooperation.

The international relations theories of realism and liberalism would adequately explain the stance and policy direction of the ROK, the US, and Japan. However, constructivism most explicitly illustrates the importance of each nation's agenda and shows a possible way to increase the sustainability of their cooperation. The importance of ideas and norms is well-versed by constructivists. Liberals and realists failed to predict the end of the Cold War, while constructivists saw it. Various explanations exist about the end of the Cold War or the collapse of the Soviet Union. The decline of the Soviet Union's global position and influence, the increase of the US global sphere of influence, and even the expansion of the democratic bloc are rationales based on the concept of power dynamics, which realists may cite in their arguments. However, constructivists argue that "the end of the Cold War was attributed to ideas – in this case, Gorbachev's 'new thinking'."<sup>10</sup> In other words, it was the idea of an individual - Mikhail Gorbachev - that ended the Cold War. This explanation for the end of the Cold War strengthened the credibility of constructivist explanations.

Having stated this, the roadmap of TSC outlined in this article is based on the concept of the norm life cycle, which is a constructivist approach. Here, a norm is "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity."<sup>11</sup> For example, sovereignty is a norm. The peace of Westphalia in 1648 gave birth to the concept of sovereignty, which later became a norm recognized by the world. In this article, the author applies some of the agendas discussed at the August 2023 Camp David Summit to the concept

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10 Andreea Mosila, "Mikhail Gorbachev: A Transformational Leader," *Global Security and Intelligence Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1 (2022): 11. 7-24.

11 Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization*, vol. 52, no. 4 (1998): 887-917.

of the norm life cycle. Finnemore and Sikkink introduced the concept of the “norm life cycle.” The life cycle consists of norm emergence, norm cascade, and norm internalization.

In the first stage, norm entrepreneurs convince a critical mass of states, “norm leaders,” to adopt a norm. In the second stage, called “norm cascade,” norm leaders try to socialize other states, sometimes through peer pressure, into embracing the norm. In the final stage of “norm internalization,” the norm acquires a taken-for-granted quality and ceases to be a matter of broad public debate. Even though TSC agendas at the Camp David Summit are limited to discussions between just three nations, not all 200 countries in the world, the author of this article employs Finnemore and Sikkink’s concepts to assessments of TSC agendas, asserting that when a TSC agenda satisfies all stages, it is considered a “norm” among the three nations and it will increase the overall sustainability of the TSC.

In this regard, this article lays out the roadmap of TSC after the Camp David Summit. Trilateral security cooperation proved unsustainable for various reasons. Drawing a roadmap for future cooperation would increase its sustainability. A step-by-step institutionalization of individual agendas is crucial to achieve this goal. Before discussing the roadmap, the following section reviews the history of ROK-US-Japan trilateral security cooperation to find its shortcomings.

### **III. TSC: Past and Present<sup>12</sup>**

#### **1. Historical Analysis**

Trilateral cooperation between the ROK, US, and Japan officially

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12 Some of the contents in this section are based on the analysis conducted in the author’s contributed chapter, Alex Soohoon Lee, “The Republic of Korea, Japan, United States Trilateral Cooperation: A Korean Perspective” in *The Next 70 Years, Future Paths for the ROK-U.S. Alliance and Defense Cooperation*, Korea Institute for Defense Analyses (KIDA), September 2023.

began in 1999, when the three formally initiated the TCOG. However, the US made numerous attempts to facilitate this cooperation in the past. One such effort took place in 1965, when US President Lyndon Johnson congratulated ROK President Park Chung-hee for signing a basic treaty with Japan.<sup>13</sup> The treaty, which established diplomatic relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, was signed a year after the People's Republic of China (hereafter the 'PRC') conducted its first atomic bomb test. On October 16, 1964, the PRC tested its first Uranium-235, a payload of 25 kilotons.<sup>14</sup> The Chinese government officially stated the reason for the test was due to the "ever-increasing nuclear threat posed by the United States," therefore, it was "forced to conduct nuclear tests and develop nuclear weapons."<sup>15</sup>

President Johnson announced that they were aware of the test and condemned the Chinese government that such a test would jeopardize both international security and Chinese people's lives. He also added that the US will prepare to protect its allies from Chinese provocations.<sup>16</sup> This may have been why President Johnson met President Park to congratulate him on the 1965 signing of the basic relations treaty between the ROK and Japan. President Johnson wanted the critical spokes, the ROK and Japan, to expand bilateral cooperation and eventually work toward setting up trilateral security cooperation in the region in the face of China's provocation. Although bilateral cooperation between the ROK and Japan has gone through ebbs and flows in the decades following 1965, President Johnson's actions present the US' well-intended position regarding trilateral cooperation.

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13 US Office of the Historian, "48. Memorandum of Conversation," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXIX, Part 1, Korea*, May 17, 1965.

14 Atomic Archive. "Chinese Becomes a Nuclear Nation," [atomicarchive.com](http://atomicarchive.com).

15 Hsinhua, "Statement by Peking on Nuclear Test," *The New York Times*, October 17, 1964.

16 The American Presidency Project, "Statement by the President on the First Chinese Nuclear Device," October 16, 1964, [presidency.ucsb.edu](http://presidency.ucsb.edu).

As mentioned above, the first official attempt at cooperation took place in 1999. This was right after DPRK had tested a long-range missile, *Taepodong*. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1998, DPRK launched *Taepodong-1*, which flew over Japanese territory and landed in the west Pacific. Whether the test was successful or not was irrelevant. *Taepodong-1*'s trajectory over 1,500km greatly surprised the international community.<sup>17</sup> The ROK, US, and Japan formed the TCOG in response to this event. On May 24, 1999, the three countries held their first meeting in Tokyo to discuss possible cooperation in dealing with DPRK issues. In this deputy-ministerial meeting, they agreed to stay together and remain one voice regardless of who negotiates with DPRK. They not only discussed deterring DPRK missile provocation but also talked about providing humanitarian aid to North Korean people.

The Bush administration's first TCOG meeting was held before the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. There, the three agreed to work together toward opening US-DPRK talks and managing the peace and prosperity of the Korean Peninsula. The Bush administration, which did not yet have its own DPRK strategy, had discussed a great deal with the ROK. TCOG was a meaningful trilateral attempt to resolve DPRK issues. However, the DPRK's continued provocations and nuclear development program halted trilateral cooperation. The Six-Party Talks became a new venue for DPRK denuclearization and TCOG gradually faded out.

The DPRK conducted its third nuclear test in 2013, nearly a decade and a half after the first TCOG meeting. In response, the three nations signed the Trilateral Information Sharing Agreement (hereafter "TISA"). Despite the efforts made by the surrounding nations at the Six-Party Talks, the DPRK continued its nuclear development, conducting its first three tests in 2006, 2009, and 2013, respectively. The payload of the third nuclear test was between 6 to 9 kilotons, making it much more potent than the first nuclear test (0.5 to 2 kilotons) and the second one (2 to 4 kilotons).<sup>18</sup> In the

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17 Sang-ho, Yoon. "From Taepodong to Mach 10... 60 provocations during 10 years of Kim Jong-un regime." *Dong-A Ilbo*, January 15, 2022.

face of DPRK's nuclear provocations, the ROK, US and Japan signed TISA in 2014. TISA was legally based on two legal frameworks: the 1997 ROK-US General Security of Military Information Agreement (hereafter 'GSOMIA') and the 2007 US-Japan GSOMIA. Vice ministers of the three nations signed the agreement on December 29, 2014.

Through TISA<sup>19</sup> the three nations exchanged military intelligence on DPRK provocations and missile developments. The ROK military sent to the United States Forces in Korea (hereafter 'USFK') and the Indo-Pacific command, and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces did the same. Information flowed in the direction of Self-Defense Forces to the United States Forces in Japan (hereafter 'USFJ') and the Indo-Pacific Command. Once this information is gathered in the Indo-Pacific Command, the US releases it upon request. If the ROK military calls for intelligence from the Japanese side, the Indo-Pacific Command consults with the Self-Defense Forces first and then releases information to the ROK military, and vice versa.

The main problem of the TISA was that there was no direct link between the ROK military and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. Each of the three nations used monitoring assets such as satellites, the AEGIS Weapon System, and early warning radar when the DPRK launched a missile test. Due to the curvature of the earth, information from all three nations is needed to accurately calculate a missile's trajectory. If this were to happen in real-time, the three could promptly coordinate a response. However, the lack of a direct link caused delays in information sharing, especially between the ROK and Japan.

Several factors contributed to the fact that TCOG and TISA no longer

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18 It was measured both by the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) and the ROK Ministry of National Defense. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) presented the combined data. CSIS, "Missiles of North Korea," Nov. 22, 2022, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/>.

19 US Department of Defense, "Signing of Trilateral Information Sharing Arrangement Concerning the Nuclear and Missile Threats Posed by North Korea," December 18, 2014.

exist. Domestic politics or international security environment could be one reason. However, the fundamental explanation is that both TCOG and TISA failed to institutionalize the cooperation. This is why analyzing the cooperation as part of the “norm life-cycle” is critical.

## 2. Recent Efforts

The Biden administration’s change in its Indo-Pacific Strategy has opened a new venue for trilateral security cooperation, and the pace of ROK-US-Japan trilateral security cooperation has picked up after the inauguration of ROK President Yoon. Recent efforts by the three nations, written in their Indo-Pacific strategies, enabled the initiation of the trilateral security cooperation. In this regard, reviewing each nation’s Indo-Pacific Strategy is essential. The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States emphasizes the importance of trilateral security cooperation among the US, the ROK, and Japan.<sup>20</sup>

The Biden administration has called for an end to the post-Cold War era,<sup>21</sup> claiming that the US needs a new regional strategy to pursue its strategic objectives in the decisive decade ahead. In this light, the Biden administration’s efforts to promote trilateral security cooperation have been consistent. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the ROK and Japan are “key allies” of the US that play a critical role in maintaining the liberal international order.<sup>22</sup> Secretary Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited Seoul and Tokyo in March 2021 to hold 2+2 meetings with their Korean and Japanese counterparts. After the US-Japan 2+2 meeting in Tokyo, Secretary Blinken emphasized the importance of strengthening trilateral cooperation to resolve the DPRK nuclear problem in the statement but he added, “in my judgment”<sup>23</sup> understanding the

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20 The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, 2022.

21 The White House, *National Security Strategy*, 2022.

22 Antony. J. Blinken and Lloyd. J. Austin III, “America’s Partnerships are ‘Force Multipliers’ in the World,” *The Washington Post*, 2021.

23 U.S. Department of State, “Joint Statement of the 2021 Republic of Korea-United

tension between the ROK and Japan. In March 2021, ROK-Japan relations were tense. Therefore, Secretary Blinken's tone in the statement regarding ROK-Japan bilateral relations was also cautious.

The Biden administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy, published nine months before the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy, states that "we will seek to coordinate our regional strategies in a trilateral context."<sup>24</sup> Such a definitive tone illustrates that trilateral cooperation with ROK and Japan will be the core of the US Indo-Pacific strategy. In this regard, the US will work towards strengthening the relations between the ROK and Japan.<sup>25</sup> The Indo-Pacific Action Plan states that the United States will pursue ten core lines of effort. Among them, the seventh line is to "Expand US-Japan-ROK Cooperation."<sup>26</sup> According to this line, the US will "continue to cooperate closely through trilateral channels on the DPRK."

The Biden administration has set clear imperatives for trilateral security cooperation. The Biden administration has clear incentives to push this cooperation forward, deterring China and the DPRK. As stated, trilateral security cooperation is important for the US to manage the competition with China in the Indo-Pacific region and deter DPRK provocations. In other words, trilateral security cooperation with the ROK and Japan is vital for the preservation of peace and prosperity and maintenance of the region's rules-based order.

In December 2022, Japan underwent a significant change in its security strategy. Japan's 2022 Defense Strategy states that "a key to deterring invasion against Japan is counterstrike capabilities that leverage

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States Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting ('2+2')," Department of State, 2021, [state.gov](https://state.gov).

24 U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, U.S. Department of Defense, 2019, <https://media.defense.gov>.

25 Ibid.

26 The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, 2022.

stand-off defense capability and other capabilities.”<sup>27</sup> It was by far the most significant change in Japanese defense strategy. According to Tsuneo, such a revision can be “considered a turning point in Japan’s defense policy since the aftermath of World War II, when the principle of pacifism took precedence.”<sup>28</sup> However, it is not only the turning point for Japan’s security strategy but also a significant shift in the US regional strategy. With such a change, some would say that the US-Japan alliance has truly become a traditional military alliance that the US will utilize to maintain region’s peace and prosperity. The US Indo-Pacific Strategy may be revised with the newly adopted Japanese defense strategy.

Unlike the ROK and the US, Japan did not publish an official or formal version of the Indo-Pacific strategy. Instead, Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs released different versions of its Indo-Pacific strategy, or plan. First, Prime Minister Kishida’s speech in New Delhi during his visit in March 2023 illustrates the general direction of Japan’s Indo-Pacific strategy. In this speech, Minister Kishida explains the reason for developing FOIP (Free and Open Indo-Pacific) and proposes that Japan will “expand cooperation for FOIP.” He claims that Japan “will enhance the connectivity of the Indo-Pacific region, foster the region into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, free from force or coercion, and make it prosperous.”<sup>29</sup> This shows Japan’s strong commitment to the region.

Another difference between Japan’s Indo-Pacific strategy and the ones of the ROK and the US is that it does not necessarily emphasize the importance of trilateral security cooperation. While both the ROK and US Indo-Pacific strategies state the necessity of trilateral cooperation, Japan’s does not. Out of three documents published by Japan MOFA, only the PDF

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27 Japan Ministry of Defense, *National Defense Strategy*, Translated by Ministry of Defense, December 16, 2022.

28 Tsuneo Watanabe, “What’s New in Japan’s Three Strategic Document,” CSIS, February 13, 2023.

29 Fumio Kishida, “The Future of the Indo-Pacific: Japan’s New Plan for a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific – Together with India, as an Indispensable Partner’,” Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 20, 2023.

version published in March mentions it. Its reference slide, strengthening domestic and international partnership, states that Japan would utilize “frameworks such as the G7, Japan-U.S.-Australia-India, and Japan-U.S.-Korea, promote cooperation for rulemaking and enhancement of autonomy of each country.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, the goal of trilateral cooperation between the US and the ROK is to enhance the autonomy of each country. This tone is relatively softer than the one appears in the ROK and the US Indo-Pacific strategies.

The ROK government published its Indo-Pacific Strategy in December 2022.<sup>31</sup> As its official title “Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region” claims, the ROK Indo-Pacific Strategy upholds the values of such in its regional strategy. The ROK Indo-Pacific Strategy is composed of vision (a free, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific), principles of cooperation (inclusiveness, trust, and reciprocity), regional scope (different regions in the world), and core lines of effort. Like US Indo-Pacific Strategy, ROK Indo-Pacific Strategy also demonstrates core lines of effort that the ROK will focus on.

In this strategy, the Yoon government points out that ROK is “aspiring to become a Global Pivotal State that actively seeks out agenda for cooperation and shapes discussions in the region and the wider world.”<sup>32</sup> Global Pivotal State, Yoon’s vision of the ROK, has been mentioned numerous times in various official government documents, including the Indo-Pacific Strategy. As described in the strategy, ROK playing meaningful regional and global roles is the key to becoming a Global Pivotal State. The ROK is willing to increase its role in “addressing various issues in the region and building a positive regional order.”<sup>33</sup> The ROK has the

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30 Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “New Plan for a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP),’” March 2023.

31 The Government of the Republic of Korea, *Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region* (English Version), 2022.

32 Ibid.

33 The Government of the Republic of Korea, *Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region* (Korean Version), 2022.

intention and capability to play a proactive role in maintaining the regional order.

One of the differences between the US and the ROK Indo-Pacific strategies is how the two assess China. While both mentioned “inclusiveness” in their strategies, the US Indo-Pacific Strategy describes China as presenting a “mounting challenge” where its “coercion and aggression spans the globe, but it is most acute in the Indo-Pacific.”<sup>34</sup> ROK Indo-Pacific Strategy, on the contrary, describes China as “a key partner for achieving prosperity and peace in the Indo-Pacific region.” Thus, ROK will “nurture a sounder and more mature relationship as we pursue shared interests based on mutual respect and reciprocity, guided by international norms and rules.”<sup>35</sup> The ROK sought to enhance its relations with China regarding geopolitical proximity and economic partnership.

ROK’s first Indo-Pacific Strategy states the significance of the trilateral security cooperation with the US and Japan. It says, “We [three nations] share the values of liberal democracy and human rights.” Also, trilateral security cooperation addresses “not only North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats, but also supply chain disruptions, cyber-security, climate change, health crisis, and other emerging regional and global issues.”<sup>36</sup> The late trilateral cooperation, TCOG and TISA, focused on resolving DPRK nuclear and missile problems. However, the Yoon government set a higher standard for trilateral cooperation, dealing with regional and global issues. With such motivation, the ROK government proposes the vision of trilateral security cooperation.

To accomplishing the vision of Global Pivotal State, ROK-US-Japan trilateral security cooperation would be essential. Over the two years, leaders of the three nations met several times. After the NATO Summit meeting in July 2022, major meetings took place at the ASEAN Summit

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34 The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, 2022.

35 The Government of the Republic of Korea, *Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region*, (English Version), 2022.

36 Ibid.

meeting in November 2022 and at Camp David in August 2023. During the ASEAN Summit meeting at Phnom Penh, the trilateral summit occurred among the ROK, the US, and Japan. In this meeting, the leaders condemned “DPRK’s unprecedented number of ballistic missile launches” and reaffirmed “their commitment to the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”<sup>37</sup> It was the first trilateral statement released by the Yoon, Biden, and Kishida governments.

The primary outcome of this meeting was setting up a system to share “DPRK missile warning data in real-time” to enhance the trilateral ability to detect and assess DPRK missile threats. In the meeting, the leaders condemned Russia’s brutal war of aggression against Ukraine. They emphasized maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, the first time the three leaders publicly mentioned it. During the G7 meeting, the three leaders did not publish the statement but they reemphasized the cooperation discussed over the Phnom Penh meeting. President Biden invited President Yoon and Prime Minister Kishida to the US for the next trilateral summit meeting.

The historic meeting at Camp David was the first meeting that had been prepared exclusively for the three nations. Over the last few years, the trilateral summit took place in different multilateral meetings; however, at Camp David, only the three leaders met. Three documents have been generated from the Camp David summit meeting. They are The Spirit of Camp David, Camp David Principles, and Commitment to Consult. The Spirit of Camp David is the joint statement of the three leaders, and it claims that three nations will ensure that the “Indo-Pacific is thriving, connected, resilient, stable, and secure. Ours is a partnership built not just for our people but for the entire Indo-Pacific.”<sup>38</sup> The leaders expressed how the trilateral security cooperation would work for the region.

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37 The ROK President’s Office, *Phnom Penh Statement on Trilateral Partnership for the Indo-Pacific*, 2022.

38 The White House, “The Spirit of Camp David: Joint Statement of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States,” [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov), 2023.

Three leaders reemphasized the DPRK and Taiwan Strait in the statement. Three will be fully committed to the complete denuclearization of DPRK and, simultaneously, will “remain committed to dialogue with the DPRK with no preconditions.”<sup>39</sup> While complete denuclearization is non-negotiable, the three would remain intact in the diplomatic approach to the DPRK. Three also reaffirmed “the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element of security and prosperity in the international community.”<sup>40</sup> Although it has been repeated multiple times in bilateral and trilateral meetings, this time, the weight of the message that came out of Camp David has certainly been different. Furthermore, three announced the operationalization of real-time missile warning data sharing on the DPRK by the end of 2023 and “enhanced ballistic missile defense cooperation to counter DPRK nuclear and missile threats.”<sup>41</sup>

There are three notable accomplishments from the Camp David Summit.<sup>42</sup> First, they regularized some of the agendas for cooperation. Annual summit and ministerial (foreign, defense, and national security council) meetings will occur from 2024. Also, the three agreed to “hold annual, named, multi-domain trilateral exercises regularly to enhance our coordinated capabilities and cooperation.”<sup>43</sup> This is a big step for regularizing trilateral cooperation, increasing the sustainability of the cooperation. Second, the three created the most robust security cooperation in the region. The combined GDP of the three is 32% of the global total.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, ROK and Japan are in the top 10 strongest

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39 The White House, “Camp David Principles,” August 18, 2023, [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov).

40 Ibid.

41 The White House, “The Spirit of Camp David: Joint Statement of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States,” 2023.

42 Alex Soohoon Lee. “Camp David ROK-US-Japan Summit Meeting: Achievements and Tasks.” *Northeast Asia Security Analysis*, Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, August 25, 2023. [In Korean]

43 The White House, “The Spirit of Camp David: Joint Statement of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States,” 2023.

44 Kyung-sik Lee. “Korea, U.S., Japan account for 32% of the entire GDP of

militaries in the world, while the US remains number one. Third, three declared Commitment to Consult to “share information, align our messaging, and coordinate response actions.”<sup>45</sup> It’s not a collective security exercised by NATO, but three agreed to consult if any of them is under threat.

From the 1960s to Camp David, trilateral cooperation has gone through ebbs and flows. Three have cooperated to counter common threats, especially DPRK. To deter DPRK missile and nuclear provocations, three direct stakeholders, the ROK, the US, and Japan, must work together. In this regard, the Camp David Summit was a great success in producing significant measures of collaboration. Having such productive outcomes from Camp David, the trilateral security cooperation is now at a critical juncture where it needs to produce actual results. For producing meaningful results, it is essential to draw a roadmap which the following section will deal with.

#### **IV. A Roadmap for TSC**

The security environment of the Indo-Pacific has also dramatically changed due to the threat posed by the DPRK. War broke out against most people’s expectations in Europe and the Middle East. The Indo-Pacific would hardly be an exception. The Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Strait could be the places with possible contingencies in this region. To preserve the peace and stability of the region, Indo-Pacific nations need to work together. In this regard, TSC between the Republic of Korea, the United States, and Japan is crucial.

This section focuses on proposing a roadmap for TSC. As previously mentioned, the trilateral cooperation has been through ebbs and flows due to various factors ranging from domestic issues to the international

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the world,” *The Korea Post*, August 19, 2023, <https://www.koreapost.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=33079>.

45 The White House, “Commitment to Consult,” August 18, 2023, [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov/).

security environment. Nonetheless, the grave threat posed by the DPRK is something that should be handled promptly in a time when its missile technology is advancing tremendously. With the recently launched *Malligyoung-1* spy satellite, the DRPK claimed it obtained “detailed images of the White House, the Pentagon, and US nuclear aircraft carriers.”<sup>46</sup> This claim is unverified, but if it turns out to be true the US, the ROK, and Japan will be exposed to a whole new level of threat.

Against this backdrop, it is time for the ROK, the US, and Japan to have TSC set in stone. The security landscape of the Indo-Pacific region has changed tremendously, and the three nations have come to realize the importance of working together to secure their citizens and further preserve the peace and prosperity of the region. Therefore, TSC should be free from changes in domestic politics and the dynamics of the international security environment. In this regard, the key to successful TSC would be sustainability, which would require institutionalization of the cooperation. As previously explained, Finnemore and Sikkink’s concept of the “norm life cycle” could provide theoretical backing to TSC institutionalization and sustainability.

Again, according to Finnemore and Sikkink, a norm is “a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity.” National sovereignty is a modern norm, whereas slavery is an outdated norm that was widely practiced and openly accepted in the past. Finnemore and Sikkink argue that most international norms begin as domestic norms. At the norm emergence stage, some norm entrepreneurs use international norms to strengthen their status in domestic politics.<sup>47</sup> Such a constructivist approach interprets the behavior of states in domestic and international affairs through the lens of the norm life-cycle.

The way the author utilizes the concept of the norm life-cycle in this

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46 Justin McCurry, “North Korea claims spy satellite has photographed White House and Pentagon,” *Reuters*, November 28, 2023.

47 Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization*, vol. 52, no. 4 (1998): 887-917.

article differs from what Finnemore and Sikkink suggest. Here, the agenda for TSC is considered a norm for two reasons. First, a TSC agenda may not be a “standard of appropriate behavior for actors” as defined by Finnemore and Sikkink. Second, although the concept of the norm life-cycle does not require a certain number of actors, only three actors are needed for ROK-US-Japan TSC. Finnemore and Sikkink suggest a tipping point, which requires a “critical mass of state actors” between the stage of norm emergence and norm cascade. This means that if two out of three actors in TSC embrace specific agendas, it would be at the stage of norm cascade.

This could be interpreted in only two ways: either all three nations adopt the agenda, or only two do, with one standing against the agenda. In this case, there would be an internal conflict among the three nations. This certainly is a process that ROK-US-Japan TSC must undergo. Throughout the process, the three nations will build a learning curve and become better at dealing with new agendas. The outcomes shared in the 2023 Camp David meeting laid out agendas for the three leaders to work with. This section deals with three components that construct a TSC roadmap. First, the agendas from Camp David will be reviewed; second, possible new agendas will be presented; lastly, an idea of setting up the secretariat will be proposed. The suggestions made in this section are for increasing the sustainability of TSC; in this respect, final recommendation would be to set up a secretariat that would operate TSC.

### **1. Camp David Agenda**

Technically, all agendas discussed at Camp David are either at the norm cascade or internalization stage. To make it this far, the agenda would be well past the stage of norm emergence since the three had already openly discussed it in the trilateral meeting. However, considering the TSC roadmap, defining where each agenda stands is essential. For this article, the author has selected five agendas from the Camp David Summit for analysis. The first agenda is the real-time sharing of the three nations’ DPRK missile warning data. In the past, the three had exchanged

information on DPRK missiles in a limited sense. The TISA was a combination of two bilateral GSOMIAs (ROK-US and US-Japan) but lacked a direct link between ROK and Japan. However, at Camp David, the three leaders confirmed opening of a three-way data-sharing mechanism, which will be realized by the end of the year. Therefore, real-time missile warning data sharing mechanism has entered the norm internalization stage.

The second agenda is the regularization of trilateral meetings at varying levels and trilateral multi-domain military exercises. Both are on the verge of internationalization. They have undoubtedly passed the cascade stage but are in the process of setting up plans for 2024. Once each meeting among three nations takes place in 2024, it could be considered to have entered the stage of norm internalization. The same goes for the trilateral multi-domain military exercises. The three countries' militaries will set up a schedule for annual exercises. For now, both trilateral meetings and military exercises are considered at the stage of norm cascade.

The third agenda is trilateral cooperation in space security. Over the summit, three leaders agreed to cooperate on the "space domain, national strategies, and the responsible use of space." In the joint statement in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the alliance, President Yoon and President Biden called for strengthening space cooperation. President Biden welcomed the ROK's establishment of the Korea Aero Space Administration (KASA). Space cooperation can be done trilaterally. At this point, space cooperation among the three remain in the norm cascade stage.

The fourth agenda concerns cooperation between the three nations with ASEAN and the Pacific Islands. In the Camp David joint statement, the three leaders agreed to work with ASEAN based on ASEAN centrality and with the Pacific Islands based on the Pacific Way. TSC must work with ASEAN and the Pacific Islands in climate change, maritime security, and cyber security. Unlike space cooperation, the three nations go through

norm cascade and emergence stages. It is going through the emergence stage since the two counterparts, ASEAN and Pacific Islands, haven't promoted the cooperation. It will be at the norm cascade stage when cooperation is realized with both regions.

The final agenda of this research would concern the three nations' cooperation in the Taiwan Strait. Under the Taiwan Contingency, there is a possibility of trilateral cooperation. This agenda is also in the stage of norm emergence. In fact, it is impossible to assess this agenda at this point since there has been no contingencies since the Camp David Summit. Three leaders affirmed the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait but have not planned any specific cooperative measures yet.

Among the five agendas discussed above, one is at the norm internalization stage, two are in the cascade, and two are at the norm emergence stage. This analysis shows where each TSC agenda is located in the norm life-cycle. Once they are all internalized, the level of institutionalization of the TSC would increase and eventually would positively affect sustainability of the TSC. <Table 1>

<Table 1> TSC Agendas on Norm Life-Cycle

TSC Agenda	Norm Life Cycle		
	Emergence	Cascade	Internalization
Real-time sharing of DPRK missile warning data			
Regularization of high-level meetings and military exercises			
Cooperation in space security			
Cooperation with ASEAN and the Pacific Islands			
Cooperation in the Taiwan Strait			

Source: Created by the author

2. Possible Agendas

Besides the agenda discussed at the Camp David Summit, the following agendas could also be considered for future TSC. Of the notable

mini-multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (hereafter ‘Quad’) between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States mainly focuses on non-traditional security agendas such as climate change and emerging technologies. At the same time, AUKUS primarily deals with the traditional security agenda of building nuclear-powered submarines for Australia. In this regard, TSC, presents more diverse agendas in both scope and scale than what Quad or AUKUS hold. More diverse agendas could be poured into the basket of TSC in a long run.

Search and rescue exercises (hereafter “SAREX”) have been a TSC agenda. SAREX focuses on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (hereafter “HA/DR”) and has been held annually until 2016. After COVID-19, SAREX has been held from 2023 again. This is an agenda that TSC can certainly commit. The Quad originated from four nations: the US, Japan, Australia, and India, which worked together in disaster relief missions during the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. The Quad has become a more institutionalized due to this cooperation. Trilateral SAREX can be conducted beyond the Indo-Pacific region and could eventually be an essential asset for TSC.

Cooperation between the US-Japan Extended Deterrence Dialogue (hereafter “EDD”) and the ROK-US Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group (hereafter “EDSCG”) is also an agenda to consider for future TSC. The ROK-US Nuclear Consultative Group differs from the Nuclear Planning Group in that it is designed in a bilateral framework, which differs from the Nuclear Planning Group. NCG is in the development process for nuclear-conventional integration (hereafter, ‘CNI’). Such a unique cooperation between the ROK and the US would necessitate some time to mature. Meanwhile, the three nations can exchange views on EDD and EDSCG in dealing with DPRK nuclear threats. This is certainly worth discussing among the three parties.

Creating a public-private working group for trilateral cooperation could also be an agenda. This would be a 1.5-track meeting that should

occur frequently, preferably quarterly. This public-private working group aims to explore new agendas and monitor the existing agendas. This would work to check and balance the governmental-based dialogue and to work towards evaluating agendas. Another role that this group can play is mitigating trilateral relations. As previously argued, trilateral relations depend primarily on domestic politics. Properly assessing domestic politics and explaining TSC to domestic audiences would be crucial. In this regard, the private sector should lead this public-private working group.

While multiple agendas can be proposed, the three abovementioned agendas are the ones that three can work within the initial stage. Again, the key to successful TSC is sustainability. There could be different agendas and directions along the way, but as long as the cooperation is sustained, three may find a breakthrough. Until then, efforts by the three to increase sustainability through institutionalization would be the most productive way to enhance mini-multilateral cooperation and preserve the peace and prosperity of the region.

### 3. Establishing a Secretariat

The 2023 Camp David Summit produced a document titled “Commitment to Consult.”<sup>48</sup> This is a unique document published along with the joint statement and principles of cooperation. The document underscores the importance of the “three nations consulting trilaterally with each other, in an expeditious manner, to coordinate our responses to regional challenges, provocations, and threats affecting our collective interests and security.”<sup>49</sup> In the face of external threats, three nations will “share information,” “align” messaging, and “coordinate response actions.”<sup>50</sup> While this commitment neither supersedes the two ROK-US

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48 The White House, “Commitment to Consult,” 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/08/18/commitment-to-consult/>.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

and US-Japan bilateral treaties nor plays the role of a collective security mechanism, it confirms the necessity of close and timely consultation among the three nations when there is a threat. The central command that connects the three regularly is necessary to satisfy such a demand.

In this context, establishing a secretariat would be something the three nations could consider. To implement the outcomes of the Camp David Summit, it is imperative to establish an efficient secretariat capable of planning annual meetings, coordinating trilateral multi-domain exercises, and adjusting existing and new agendas. A secretariat will work closely with three foreign ministries to resolve any issues and prevent problems between and among the three nations. The Quad and AUKUS do not have a secretariat and may even work efficiently without one. However, the leaders have agreed on multiple agendas over the Camp David Summit that the three parties must work together down the road. To increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the TSC, it is critical to set up a secretariat promptly.

The TSC secretariat will work as a central command where planning, consulting, and implementing the TSC agendas will occur. In this regard, the TSC secretariat should comprise officials from the three foreign and defense ministries. Although most of the agendas discussed in the Camp David Summit would be prepared by foreign ministries, trilateral multi-domain exercises would be handled by defense ministries. Since there are only three members for TSC, each can take turns serving as the head of the TSC secretariat. Moreover, several venues can be considered for the TSC secretariat. Since the two out of three nations in the region are located in the West Pacific, it will make more sense to set up a secretariat in ROK or Japan. In this regard, Incheon or Yokohama could be possible options to consider. While not as crowded as Seoul and Tokyo, they are both harbors and easily accessible to capitals.

## V. Conclusion

The need for TSC exponentially increases in tandem with regional threats, especially those made by DRPK nuclear and missile programs. In this regional security environment, ROK-US-Japan TSC seems inevitable. After the Camp David Summit, the three nations are working together to advance the level of cooperation and institutionalizing the agendas. In this light, this research analyzed the efforts made by the three nations for cooperation in the past, reviewed the agendas discussed in the Camp David Summit, and proposed a roadmap that the three governments could refer to in the short and long term. One of the suggestions this research made is three nations establishing a secretariat. The sooner, the better.

One caveat is that three nations may have different views on each agenda and may not come to an agreement in dealing with them. For example, while ROK's primary TSC agenda may be to deter DPRK nuclear and missile threats, the US and Japan may have different priority in TSC. The three must talk more frequently and manage differences. If not, the routine, from TCOG and TISA may be repeated. Returning to the discussion of realism in international relations, there will be a significant loss in national interest if TSC is dissolved. Therefore, the three need to work out the differences. In this regard, TSC requires a venue for discussion, in other words, establishing as secretariat.

TSC can be complementary to the ROK-US alliance. Deterring provocations and containing threats posed by the DPRK is a primary objective of the alliance. The ROK-US alliance, which began as a blood alliance, now holds a vision of Global Comprehensive Strategic Alliance. The allies will work beyond the Peninsula and deal with various agendas. When this is realized, the ROK will truly become a Global Pivotal State. To accomplish all of these visions and goals, TSC is essential. A balanced division of labor between the alliance and TSC will be the key to achieving the vision of Global Pivotal State. With this in mind, the ROK government should cautiously but proactively promote TSC.

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## **Tackling Cross-Strait Paradox: Economic Dependence, Foreign Policy, and Domestic Split**

**Seungjoon Paik\***

This study addresses “Asia’s paradox,” where deepening economic interdependence has not led to sustained political harmony in East Asia. It argues that domestic splits, non-violent conflicts between antagonized social groups with significant political and economic power, can disrupt the pacifying effect of economic dependence. Using an in-depth case study of Taiwan’s relations with the People’s Republic of China from the late 1980s to the late 2000s, this paper underscores the limitations of economic constraints on political relations across the Taiwan Strait, suggesting that despite economic interdependence, individuals’ political preferences may be swayed when identity agendas emerge at the center of politics. This research predicts that Beijing’s recent utilization of economic coercion for political purposes is likely to prove counterproductive, as it can provoke nationalist sentiments among the target country’s population and neutralize China’s economic leverages. For the same reason, the U.S.-ROK alliance won’t be hindered by South Korea’s economic ties with China.

**Keywords:** Asia’s Paradox, Cross-Strait relations, economic coercion, the capitalist peace, ethnic cleavages

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## Introduction

At the end of the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant argued that the power of money impels states to try to avert war.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the proposition that economic dependence results in a conciliatory foreign policy, also known as the capitalist peace, has remained a prominent theory in the field of international relations (IR). In academia, this proposition was developed into a more sophisticated model by several theoretical endeavors, especially by liberal IR scholars, and supported by a large number of empirical studies.<sup>2</sup> In the political realm, this theory has been accepted by numerous policymakers and became a theoretical foundation for many significant policy initiatives, such as Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik, Richard Nixon's détente, and the rapprochement with the People's Republic of China (PRC).<sup>3</sup>

However, not all IR scholars agree with this proposition. Realist skeptics argue that economic interdependence can provoke tensions between states by increasing strategic vulnerability.<sup>4</sup> Empirically, the proposition has been challenged by many counterexamples, most notably World War I, where heavy economic interdependence among European powers could not prevent an all-out war in Europe. Moreover, East Asia has recently witnessed a phenomenon called Asia's paradox that is quite

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1 Immanuel Kant, *The Philosophy of Kant*. (New York: Modern Library, 1994), 454-455.

2 Erik Gartzke, "The capitalist peace." *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (2007): 166-191; Edward D. Mansfield and Brian M. Pollins, "The Study of Interdependence and Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45 no. 6 (2001): 834 -859; Bruce Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001).

3 Mansfield and Pollins, "The Study of Interdependence and Conflict," 834.

4 Dale Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). Avery Goldstein and Edward D. Mansfield, *The nexus of economics, security, and international relations in East Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); T. J. Pempel, *The Economy-Security Nexus in Northeast Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

puzzling from the capitalist peace's perspective. Despite the deepening economic interdependence among East Asian countries in the 21st century, the relationship between them has been marred by recurring political tensions. How can we explain this puzzling behavior? What is the condition under which economic dependence does and does not contribute to a peaceful relationship between states?

This article posits that a domestic split has the potential to disrupt the relationship between economic and political ties among states. A domestic split is defined as a non-violent political conflict between antagonized groups with comparable and robust domestic support. Given that domestic splits commonly arise from enduring social divisions such as ethnic, religious, or class issues, they can profoundly influence individuals' political preferences, steering them toward supporting policies aligned with their social causes rather than economic interests. Consequently, a domestic split has the capacity to nullify the pacifying influence of economic dependence, at least temporarily. To assess this argument, the research delves into an in-depth case study examining Taiwan's relationship with the People's Republic of China from the late 1980s to late 2000s, a period often considered an anomaly within the capitalist peace framework.

This research aims to contribute to the theory of the capitalist peace by introducing a new variable, domestic split, that may undermine the connection between economic and political relations between countries.<sup>5</sup> By testing this variable against anomaly of extant theories, the Cross-Strait relations, this paper also intends to extend empirical coverage of the capitalist peace research program. Furthermore, conducting an in-depth case study is not only useful to examine the causal relations that connect economic interdependence to political relations, but also contributes to the methodological diversity in the current research on the capitalist peace, which is heavily driven by quantitative research.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Gartzke, "The capitalist peace."

6 Mansfield and Pollins, "The Study of Interdependence and Conflict," 837.

In terms of policy-relevant contribution, this research underscores the limitations of economic constraints on political relations across the Taiwan Strait. The case study indicates that, despite the growing economic dependence on China, Taiwanese people at times did not necessarily support Taipei's mainland policy pleasing Beijing. Specifically, this research predicts that while individuals in Taiwan may lean toward supporting an amicable relationship with Beijing, they may not be unswervingly influenced by the pacifying impact attributed to economic connections with China, particularly when their identity is under threat. This explains why Beijing's recent assertive stance towards Taiwan could be counterproductive.<sup>7</sup> A confrontational policy is likely to mobilize Taiwanese individuals who would have otherwise favored the status quo in the Taiwan Strait for economic reasons to rally behind more provocative mainland policies. That is to say, the mitigating influence of commerce may not suffice to offset openly aggressive behavior.

This research also holds relevance for the future U.S.-Republic of Korea (ROK) relations. South Korea, maintaining robust ties with both the U.S. and China in terms of security and the economy, has adopted a hedging strategy between the two powers.<sup>8</sup> This approach has occasionally raised questions about Seoul's allegiance to the United States.<sup>9</sup> However, considering China's deployment of its commercial relationship as a coercive tool during diplomatic tensions over THAAD, it appears improbable that South Korea would be significantly restrained by its economic links with Beijing. In essence, the U.S.-ROK alliance is unlikely to be impeded by South Korea's economic engagement with China.

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7 Kathy Huang, "China Is Locked Into Xi Jinping's Aggressive Diplomacy," *Foreign Policy*, December 2, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/12/02/china-xi-jinping-aggressive-diplomacy/>.

8 Ellen Kim and Victor Cha, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: South Korea's Strategic Dilemmas with China and the United States," *Asia Policy*, no. 21 (2016): 101–22.

9 Tong Kim, "Scholars call for stronger ROK-US alliance," *Korea Times*, November 1, 2015, [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2023/09/113\\_189901.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2023/09/113_189901.html).

## Literature Review

Large numbers of existing studies deal with the influence of economic dependence on foreign policy. Many scholars who follow the liberal tradition argue that economic dependence promotes a conciliatory foreign policy.<sup>10</sup> Some focus on the influence of domestic interest groups in the policymaking process. Specifically, they argue that as a state's commercial relations with other states grow, the number of people who prefer a peaceful relationship with those countries also grows, forming a powerful interest group. Faced with large numbers of citizens who favor a good relationship with their trade partners, policymakers in the government are more likely to adopt a moderate foreign policy toward those countries.<sup>11</sup>

Other liberal scholars emphasize the impact of the increased interaction between countries due to economic relations. They maintain that as commercial relations with other countries intensify, a complex interdependence between non-governmental actors can emerge.<sup>12</sup> Due to frequent contact with people from other countries, individuals are more exposed to the values and culture of others. The population of one country would understand other countries better and might develop a shared identity. Therefore, they are more likely to support a more benign foreign policy toward each other.<sup>13</sup> In a nutshell, the proponents of the capitalist peace argue that when a conflict breaks out between economically

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10 Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to Their Economic and Social Advantage* (Garland Pub, 1972); William K. Domke, *War and the Changing Global System* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1988); Edward D. Mansfield, *Power, Trade, and War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Solomon William Polachek, "Conflict and Trade," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24, no. 1 (1980): 55 -78.

11 Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace*, 130.

12 Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr. "Power and interdependence," *Survival* 15, no. 4 (1973): 158-165.

13 Karl Wolfgang Deutsch, Sidney A. Burrell, and Robert A. Kann, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1969).

interdependent countries, the population within these countries will pressure their respective governments for a speedy resolution for fear of losing the economic gains as well as the friendship associated with the trading relationship.

On the other hand, some scholars, including realists and mercantilists, counter the liberal view.<sup>14</sup> They maintain that a state becomes more vulnerable when economically dependent on others because the state will be more likely to become entangled in other states' affairs.<sup>15</sup> In addition, some scholars contend that asymmetric economic dependence can be utilized as a coercive power of strong states.<sup>16</sup> Although the neo-realists and mercantilists are opposed to liberals, they implicitly agree that economic dependence constrains a state's behavior.

One glaring problem of these studies is that they are based on restrictive assumptions. The second group of scholars treats a state as a unitary actor. As many critics have pointed out, by "black boxing" a state, they fail to consider a nuanced domestic process that influences its foreign policy.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, while liberal scholars embrace domestic political processes in their theories, they suffer from a restrictive assumption on people's preferences. They assume that domestic politics are primarily driven by people's economic interests. However, as a plethora of studies has demonstrated, people often follow motives other than economic interests, including moral values, political ideologies, and emotions, which may trump their rational calculation related to economic gains.<sup>18</sup> This problem is related to an important methodological issue.

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14 Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

15 Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages, 1979), 138-139.

16 Albert O. Hirschman, *National Power and the Structure of Foreign Trade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

17 Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 72-107.

Because most widely cited studies on the relationship between economic dependence and foreign policy employed quantitative analyses, which have a disadvantage in examining the causal process.<sup>19</sup>

## Argument

Here, it is hypothesized that domestic splits prevent a state from adopting a conciliatory policy towards other states it economically depends upon. It is in partial agreement with the capitalist peace proposition that when a state's economy becomes more dependent on other states, people will generally be more inclined toward cooperation for economic gains. This private economic interest influences a state's foreign policy through domestic political processes, such as political parties, pressure groups, and lobbying. When there is a domestic split, however, this process can be reversed; instead of being influenced by their supporters, politicians adopt policies that polarize the population to maximize their factional interests.

As stated above, existing literature virtually assumes a theoretical conveyor belt, which automatically delivers a state's economic interest into its foreign policy. However, there are complex dynamics of domestic politics that these literatures neglect. While private actors are the main players in the economic arena, a state's foreign policy is determined by politicians. And under certain conditions, this conveyor belt malfunctions, and a state's foreign policy fails to reflect its overall economic interests. This research argues that domestic splits may prevent economic dependence from resulting in a conciliatory foreign policy.

In a normal political process, economic dependence affects a state's foreign policy. Suppose that there are two states: A and B. When state A's economy becomes more dependent on state B, people in A will hope for

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18 Stanley Feldman, "Economic self-interest and political behavior," *American Journal of Political Science* (1982): 446-466.

19 Mansfield and Pollins, "The Study of Interdependence and Conflict," 837.

their government to build good relations with B because many of them have stronger economic ties with the state than they did before. To secure their gains from economic activities with B, they will prefer more harmonious relations with the country, supporting a cooperative policy. If conflicts break out between states A and B, many of the population of A will be concerned that such conflicts may negatively affect economic relations with B. If state B damages its economic relations with A by imposing an economic sanction or trade barrier, many citizens of state A will have to suffer economic losses. Thus, they will expect their government to resolve the conflict and avoid taking an action that will further jeopardize its relationship with B.

This private economic interest will influence a state's foreign policy through domestic politics. Taxpayers in state A will support the party that pursued a more conciliatory policy towards state B. To maximize the opportunity to win, parties will develop policies that reflect the economic interest of the majority or avoid policies that contradict with people's interests at least. Politicians who hold power will also maintain a more cooperative policy towards state B to increase the chance of getting reelected.

When a state suffers from a domestic split, conversely, its foreign policy may not reflect private economic interests. There are three attributes to the notion of domestic split. The first attribute is an *antagonism*; domestic split occurs when there is an antagonism between groups within a country. The causes of these antagonisms, such as religious, ethnic, or class conflict issues, often are long-standing issues within society and emerge into the center of politics when there are changes in external conditions, such as an outbreak of war, military threats, or global economic recession, or internal conditions, including changes in political system and economic hardship. When emerged, this antagonism can be strong so that there is a small room for compromise among groups.

The second attribute is the *balance of power* among groups. If there is an overwhelmingly strong group, an antagonism among groups may not

affect domestic politics, as the dominant group will easily take control of the country. However, it is when antagonized groups have comparable power, in terms of the political and economic power as well as the number of populations, that a domestic split occurs. As each group has a chance to win the competition by outnumbering the opponents, all of them have strong incentives to mobilize their respective constituencies.

The third attribute is *peace*, or lack of armed violence. This attribute distinguishes domestic splits from militarized internal conflict such as civil wars or insurgencies. The antagonism among domestic groups has the potential to develop into violent conflict, but they compete with each other by using peaceful means at this stage. If an armed conflict breaks out, it will be outside the scope of this research. Conversely, a state may suffer from a domestic split when it has finished a long-lasting violent conflict or civil war and is about to implement a normal political process.

When there is a domestic split, each group will be firmly united against one another and domestic politics will be factionalized. People will identify their interest with their faction's causes or interests and oppose other faction's interests. There will be limited vote mobility because voters who belong to one faction will not support the parties of other factions. Domestic splits hinder each political party implementing a policy that deliberates economic interest of the majority. Each party will follow a policy that clearly reflects the identity of the population it belongs to and distinguishes its factional interest from others. Sometimes, parties use aggressive strategies towards other factions simply to mobilize loyalty within their own factions. By doing so, parties can promote solidarity among the factions they belong to and eventually attract stronger support from their own factions. These policies may reflect the economic interest of the majority or not, but mobilized voters will not be much concerned about it for a while.

## Case Selection, Measurement, and Methods

To assess the argument, this research examines the case of Taiwan's mainland policy spanning from 1986 to 2010, which is often recognized as an anomaly within existing theories addressing the nexus between a state's economic dependence and foreign policy.<sup>20</sup> Despite the continuous growth in Taiwan's economic ties with the PRC during this timeframe, its policy toward Mainland China fluctuated from conciliatory to provocative. If the hypothesis of this research effectively explains this case, it will extend the empirical scope of the capitalist peace research program.

Furthermore, this analysis specifically concentrates on this timeframe to mitigate the influence of other factors that could potentially have impacted Cross-Strait relations, such as Sino-American relations, U.S.-Taiwan relations, and Chinese domestic politics. During this timeframe, the United States adhered to what some describe as an engagement policy toward China, fostering deepened economic, social, and cultural ties while managing potential diplomatic and military tensions.<sup>21</sup> This contrasts sharply with the post-2011 Sino-American relations, marked by Washington's shift toward great power competition with China, now the world's second-largest economy with advanced military capabilities.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, in tandem with its evolving approach to China after 2010, the United States also adjusted its position on Taiwan, transitioning from its traditional "strategic ambiguity" to a more robust commitment.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, this timeframe predates Xi Jinping's

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20 Scott Kastner, *Political Conflict and Economic Interdependence Across the Taiwan Strait and Beyond* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

21 Aaron L. Friedberg, *Getting China Wrong* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2022), 24-25.

22 "China uneasy over US troop deal in Australia," *The Guardian*, November 16, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/16/china-us-troops-australia>; Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy* 189 (2011): 56-63; Donald J. Trump, *National security strategy of the United States of America* (Washington: White House, 2017), 27.

23 David Brunnstrom and Trevor Hunnicutt, "Biden says U.S. forces would defend

ascension to the leadership of China in 2012, whose assertive foreign policy differed starkly from that of his predecessors.<sup>24</sup>

Using qualitative methods, this research aims to capture within-case variation to avoid the risk of an indeterminate research design.<sup>25</sup> Based on the values of the hypothesis's independent variable, domestic split, the Taiwanese case is disaggregated into three periods: a period of democratization (1986-1993), ethnic factionalism (1994-2004), and normal politics (2005-2009).<sup>26</sup> As ethnic cleavages among Taiwanese spiked between 1994 and 2004, the argument of this research predicts a less conciliatory policy towards the PRC during the second period compared to the first and third periods. With these three observations, the analysis first examines the correlation between the independent and dependent variables and observes whether the Taiwanese government changes its mainland policy as the hypothesis predicts for each period. After that, the analysis proceeds to trace the link between the independent and dependent variable to observe whether the causal process suggested by the hypothesis is evident in the Taiwan case.<sup>27</sup>

## Alternative Explanation

While conducting a case study, the main hypothesis's explanatory

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Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion," *Reuters*, September 19, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/biden-says-us-forces-would-defend-taiwan-event-chinese-invasion-2022-09-18/>.

24 Kathy Huang, "China Is Locked Into Xi Jinping's Aggressive Diplomacy."

25 Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 118.

26 To measure a domestic split, I examine the three attributes of the variable. I determine that Taiwan politics experienced a domestic split when there was significant antagonism between ethnic groups, when the economic and political capabilities of those groups were comparable, and when the groups were opposed to each other in a peaceful manner.

27 Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), Chapter 10.

power is tested against one alternative explanation: the balance of power across the Taiwan Strait. From the balance of power perspective, Taiwan is more likely to become more conciliatory to the mainland as the PRC's relative power grows. In general, IR realists consider an accommodation strategy irrational since it is likely to make a rival more dangerous,<sup>28</sup> yet in the case of the Cross-Strait relations, Taiwan had quite a limited policy option. When its rival's power grows, a state will balance against its rival externally and internally.<sup>29</sup> However, the military and diplomatic support from the United States were obscure at best, and despite its constant growth in national power, Taiwan was no match for China's rapid rise as a great power. If it could not secure external support and its relative power declined, Taiwan is expected to adopt a more conciliatory policy toward the mainland or, at least, avoid provocative action to guarantee its survival.<sup>30</sup> Examining the Taiwan case is a crucial case study for the balance of power theory.<sup>31</sup> As the military gap across the Taiwan Strait significantly grew throughout these periods, it was a clear case for the balance of power theories to predict a continued conciliatory policy toward mainland China.

## Case Study

### I. Democratization (1986–1993)

#### Economic Dependence

After the 1980s, the Taiwanese economy faced various difficulties. Due to past economic development, Taiwanese firms suffered from high

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28 John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 164.

29 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 168.

30 Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 28-33.

31 Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," In *Handbook of Political Science, Vol. 7: strategies of Inquiry*, ed. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby. (Boston: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc, 1975), 118-119.

wage levels. Taiwan's small and medium-sized enterprises sought to lower labor costs.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, the advent of newly industrialized neighboring countries, such as members of ASEAN, caused greater international competition. Taiwanese enterprises were also concerned about growing shipping expenses. Under such unfavorable circumstances, mainland China emerged as an excellent solution, providing cheap and plentiful labor, raw materials, and a huge export market.

The incentive to develop economic relations with the mainland increased further by the PRC's creation of a legal framework for investment from Taiwan. China offered preferential treatment toward investments from Taiwan and endured a sizeable trade deficit with the Taiwanese for this political objective.<sup>33</sup> PRC leaders, including Yang Sang-Kun, openly revealed their intention to use economic ties for political purposes.<sup>34</sup> The PRC State Council enacted the "Regulations for Encouraging Investment by Taiwan Compatriots" in 1988, followed by the designation of two special investment zones for Taiwanese enterprises in Fujian Province.<sup>35</sup> Thus, many Taiwanese companies started to trade with the mainland and invest considerable amounts of money.

From 1986 to 1993, Taiwanese economic dependence on the mainland grew considerably. Trade across the strait significantly increased. According to estimates from the Mainland Affairs Council, trade with the mainland formed 1.49 percent of total trade in 1986, which increased to 9.19 percent in 1993.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the total Taiwanese investment in mainland China by 1993 was at least 5,032 million dollars.<sup>37</sup>

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32 T. J. Cheng, "China-Taiwan Economic Linkage: Between Insulation and Superconductivity," In *Dangerous Strait: The U.S.-Taiwan-China Crisis*, ed. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, 93-130 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 97.

33 Suisheng Zhao, *Across the Taiwan Strait: Mainland China, Taiwan and the 1995-1996 Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 27.

34 Cheng, "China-Taiwan Economic Linkage," 104.

35 Karen M. Sutter, "Business Dynamism across the Taiwan Strait: The Implications for Cross-Strait Relations," *Asian Survey* 42, no. 3 (2002), 524.

36 Mainland Affairs Council, *Cross-Strait Economic Statistics Monthly*, no. 197 (Taipei: Mainland Affairs Council, 2009), 26.

### Domestic Politics

During the first period, Taiwan underwent rapid democratization. Recognizing public demands for direct elections and an end to the Kuomintang (KMT) one-party authoritarian rule, President Chiang Ching-kuo, the son of the first ROC President Chian Kai-shek, allowed the formation of opposition parties and the rejuvenation of the Legislative Yuan in 1986. In that year, the first opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), was founded, and the inaugural multi-party Legislative Yuan election was held. The president also terminated a half-century of martial law in 1987. Lee Teng-hui, who became the next president after the unexpected death of Chiang Ching-kuo, accelerated democratization. He abolished the “Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion” imposed in 1948, which suspended the democratic constitution and granted extraordinary power to the president that normally belonged to other branches of government.<sup>38</sup>

Quite a few Taiwan experts argue that democratization increased the political influence of entrepreneurs.<sup>39</sup> During the authoritarian era, businesses had marginal representation within the KMT regime, so economic bureaucrats had limited influence compared to their counterparts from other agencies.<sup>40</sup> After the mid-1980s, however, private business owners could gain expanded political influence through several changes. Influence-buying was permitted in some elections, including the Legislative Yuan election.<sup>41</sup> Also, thanks to democratization, entrepreneurs themselves were able to participate in politics.

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37 Mainland Affairs Council, *Cross-Strait Economic Statistics Monthly*, no. 197, 28.

38 Denny Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 83–84.

39 Kastner, *Political Conflict and Economic Interdependence*, 49.

40 Yun-han Chu, The Realignment of Business-Government Relations and Regime Transition in Taiwan, In *Business and Government in Industrialising Asia*, ed. Andrew MacIntyre (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 116–17.

41 Kastner, *Political Conflict and Economic Interdependence*, 50.

Taiwanese domestic politics maintained unity. The DPP created a stir in Taiwan. In the process of a hegemonic struggle between internal factions of the DPP, independence emerged as a plank. The DPP's independence plank, however, was unable to make a strong impact on Taiwanese politics. Although the DPP won a small number of seats in the Legislative Yuan, it possessed only marginal political power. According to one estimate, the DPP had approximately 7,000 members in 1988; some estimates say they had only 2,500 members.<sup>42</sup> During this period, the DPP did not yet have enough power to mobilize large numbers of people. Moreover, Taiwan was still under strong KMT rule; although martial law had been lifted, there was a new national security law that retained the substance of the martial law.<sup>43</sup> The DPP opposed the enactment of this law, the was supported by the public.

### Mainland Policy

From 1985 to 1994, Taiwan's mainland policy became more conciliatory. After 1979, when the mainland isolated Taiwan from the world by establishing official relations with the United States, the PRC government pursued a peaceful unification strategy. Faced with the PRC's reunification policy, the Taiwanese government maintained the Three No's" policy: no contact, no negotiation, and no compromise with the mainland. The Taiwanese government, however, eventually adjusted its policy toward the PRC. Taipei began to recognize Beijing as its counterpart, not as *gongfei* (Communist bandits).<sup>44</sup> In 1986, the Taiwanese government eased restrictions on contact with the mainland. In 1987, Taipei allowed trade, investment, and visits to the mainland to some degree. Taiwan permitted indirect importation of goods from the PRC and indirect

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42 John F. Copper, "Taiwan: A Nation in Transition," In *The Republic of China on Taiwan today: View from Abroad* (Taipei: Kwang Hwa Pub. Co, 1990), 42.

43 Selig S. Harrison, "Taiwan After Chiang Ching-kuo," In *The Republic of China on Taiwan today: View from Abroad* (Taipei: Kwang Hwa Pub. Co, 1990), 24.

44 Zhao, *Across the Taiwan Strait*, 22.

investment and technological cooperation in 1989 and 1990, respectively. In 1991, the Taiwanese government revealed its intention of peaceful coexistence with the mainland by announcing the Guidelines for National Unification. In addition, Taiwan and the PRC established some quasi-official organizations: the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) on the Taiwan side, and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) on the mainland.<sup>45</sup> At the preliminary meeting of the talk between the agencies, the SEF agreed to accept one Chinese principle, although it also added that there might be a different interpretation of what that meant.<sup>46</sup> This “1992 consensus” reveals Taiwan government’s eagerness to develop its relations with the PRC. In sum, Taiwan’s mainland policy became more conciliatory as economic ties across the Strait strengthened.

## II. Domestic split (1994–2004)

### Economic Dependence

During the second period, the Taiwanese economy was rapidly integrated into the mainland economy. After Taiwan and mainland China entered the WTO, markets on both sides became more open, and mutual trade tariffs were reduced. In addition, the PRC government’s efforts to promote strong economic ties with Taiwan were even more successful than in the earlier period.<sup>47</sup> The National People’s Congress enacted the Investment Protection Law, which was designed to protect Taiwanese investments in China.<sup>48</sup> In 1999, the State Council proposed the Implemented Regulations for this law.<sup>49</sup> The Asian financial crises, which devastated alternative investment markets (especially those in Southeast

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45 Bates Gill and Chin-hao Huang, “More Strait Talk: Ten Years After the Taiwan Missile Crisis,” *China Brief* 5, no. 22 (2005), 2.

46 John Q. Tian, *Government, Business, and the Politics of Interdependence and Conflict across the Taiwan Strait* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 21.

47 Cheng, “China-Taiwan Economic Linkage,” 102.

48 Sutter, “Business Dynamism across the Taiwan Strait,” 52.

49 Cheng, “China-Taiwan Economic Linkage,” 102.

Asian countries), and economic hardship in Taiwan also affected Taiwanese entrepreneurs' decision to increase investment to China.<sup>50</sup>

Trade levels across the strait tripled. From 1994 to 2004, the amount of trade with the mainland jumped from 17,881 million dollars to 65,722 million dollars.<sup>51</sup> During the same time, the mainland's share of total foreign trade went up from 9.93 percent to 18.72 percent.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the amount of Taiwanese-approved investment in mainland China increased from 962 million dollars to 6,940 million dollars.<sup>53</sup>

### Domestic Politics

From 1994 to 2004, Taiwan's domestic politics suffered from a serious domestic split. Taiwan established procedural democracy; the first direct Presidential election was held in 1996. Repressed grievances of the native Taiwanese finally erupted in this period. Many native Taiwanese, who once were alienated from politics under KMT's authoritarian rule, gained political influence thanks to democratization.<sup>54</sup> Some of them adopted an aggressive posture toward the mainlanders, who were believed to be the dominant power during the past period; they even eagerly strived to dilute the remaining Chinese legacy through the revision of education programs.<sup>55</sup> Some of them were also strong champions of Taiwan's external sovereignty and independence, which was regarded as a highly unrealistic policy from others' perspective.<sup>56</sup>

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50 Sutter, "Business Dynamism across the Taiwan Strait," 56–57.

51 Mainland Affairs Council, *Cross-Strait Economic Statistics Monthly*, no. 197, 23.

52 Mainland Affairs Council, *Cross-Strait Economic Statistics Monthly*, no. 197, 26.

53 Mainland Affairs Council, *Cross-Strait Economic Statistics Monthly*, no. 197, 28.

54 Tian, *Government, Business, and the Politics of Interdependence and Conflict*, 32.

55 Tian, *Government, Business, and the Politics of Interdependence and Conflict*, 36.

56 Shelley Rigger, *From Opposition to Power: Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 135.

Ethnic problems between native Taiwanese and mainlanders emerged as a central issue of domestic politics.<sup>57</sup> Native Taiwanese, who gained the rights for full participation in the politics for the first time, took an initiative. By setting a political agenda, they were able to modify the political landscape in their favor. President Lee openly advocated a state-to-state relationship between the PRC and Taiwan in an interview with a German radio broadcast in 1999. Lee's interview was so strong that it made DPP candidate Chen Sui-bien's posture, which also was quite radical, seemed relatively moderate.<sup>58</sup> In addition, ethnic rivalry seemed to have trumped regular party politics. Lee, who was a leader of the KMT, expressed his support for Chen Sui-bien before he left the party. After his withdrawal from the KMT, Lee's followers established the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), which would form the Pan-Green Coalition with the DPP after the 2000 presidential election.

In contrast, the KMT adopted a passive posture. First, the KMT did not have a strong political agenda that could inspire loyalty among its members, as independence did in the native faction. The KMT politicians criticized the native Taiwanese faction's pro-independence policy as unrealistic or reckless but did not have their own strong counter-initiative. In addition, the party suffered from a lack of cohesiveness. As the KMT had served as a vehicle for one-party rule, it included members with various political spectrums.<sup>59</sup> In other words, the KMT had much to lose but nothing to gain during the process of democratization. For example, Lee Teng-hui was a charismatic figure of the conservative KMT, but he was, in fact, a pro-democratic and pro-independence individual. When Lee was removed from the party due to his dubious loyalty, it was a huge blow to the KMT. Therefore, the party failed to find a charismatic candidate for

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57 Some commentators even refer to this political trend as a "cultural populism." Olwen Bedford and Hwang Kwang-Kuo, *Taiwanese Identity and Democracy: The Social Psychology of Taiwan's 2004 Elections* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 10.

58 Bedford and Hwang, *Taiwanese Identity and Democracy*, 20.

59 Rigger, *From Opposition to Power*, 123.

president despite its strong factional power. The KMT eventually divided into two political parties, with a group of former KMT members, including James Soong, establishing the People's First Party. Such division contributed to the DPP's victory in the 2000 presidential election, in spite of the relatively small power of the progressives.

The success of the native Taiwanese was not limited to the administration. The DPP's relative vote share in the Legislative Yuan also substantially grew. In 1995, the KMT polled 46.1 percent of the total votes but won 28.6 percent in 2001, while the DPP maintained its share of around 33 percent of the votes during the same time period.<sup>60</sup> In the 2004 Legislative Yuan election, the Pan-Blue Coalition won against the Pan-Green Coalition, but it was a narrow victory, with 49.81 percent of total votes to 46.26 percent. Also at this time, the DPP became the largest party.<sup>61</sup>

### Mainland Policy

During the second period, the Taiwanese government did not pursue a conciliatory policy towards the mainland. Instead, Taipei often maintained a provocative posture. The Republic of China (ROC) White Paper, published in 1994, exposes a huge departure of Taiwan's mainland policy from earlier periods.<sup>62</sup> The paper claimed equal status of the ROC with PRC over its own territory and in the international sphere. In 1995, President Lee Teng-hui responded to Beijing's Eight Points, quite a conciliatory gesture for China, with a demand for acceptance.<sup>63</sup> In addition, Lee Teng-hui enforced a visit to his alma mater, Cornell University, despite Beijing's open displeasure. Such action frustrated the PRC leaders and galvanized aggressive reaction; the People's Liberation Army did a series of missile exercises toward the Taiwan Strait in 1995 and

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60 John Fuh-sheng Hsieh, "Ethnicity, National Identity, and Domestic Politics in Taiwan," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 40, no. 1-2 (2005), 23.

61 Kastner, *Political Conflict and Economic Interdependence*, 72.

62 Tian, *Government, Business, and the Politics of Interdependence and Conflict*, 30.

63 Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History*, 196.

1996. Again, in a 1999 interview with a German radio station, Lee mentioned the Cross-Strait relations as a state-to-state relationship and provoked a sharp reaction from the PRC.<sup>64</sup> Negotiation between the SEF and ARATS stopped immediately after the interview and did not continue until 2008.

Chen Sui-bian, Lee's successor, also frequently took provocative actions toward the mainland. He had continuously pursued an independence policy during his candidacy for president. Although he proclaimed that his administration would not pursue independence, he occasionally revealed his pro-independence ideas, which strained the Cross-Strait relations. In 2002, Chen antagonized the PRC by describing the Cross-Strait relations as "one country on each side of the Strait".<sup>65</sup> Further, his regime decided to put the *de jure* independence issue to the referendum vote alongside the 2004 presidential election. Chen also refused to recognize the very existence of the 1992 consensus over the "one China" principle.<sup>66</sup>

In terms of economic policy, the Taiwanese government also introduced policies that sought to diversify its economic relations outside China, yet they were mostly unsuccessful. The first attempt was a Go-South policy, which was designed to promote Taiwanese entrepreneurs' investments in South Asia.<sup>67</sup> The policy, however, was unsuccessful due to the Asian Financial Crises. President Lee also adopted the "Go Slow, Be Patient Policy". Taipei banned larger firms whose investments on the mainland exceeded 50 million US dollars.<sup>68</sup> He also threatened to punish business people for illegal investment. But, Chen Sui-bien was more reluctant to impose economic restrictions across the Strait because the

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64 Rigger, *From Opposition to Power*, 180.

65 Shelley Rigger, "The Unfinished Business of Taiwan's Democratization," In *Dangerous Strait: The US-Taiwan-China Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 18.

66 Tian, *Government, Business, and the Politics of Interdependence and Conflict*, 21.

67 Kastner, *Political Conflict and Economic Interdependence*, 56–57.

68 Kastner, *Political Conflict and Economic Interdependence*, 58.

DPP was experiencing a difficult financial situation, so he had to consider the business interests of the supporters of the party.

In sum, although Taiwan's economic dependence upon China continued to deepen during this period of time, the tie failed to result in favorable mainland policy. Domestic split can account for this anomaly of capitalist peace. As the ethnic problem emerged into Taiwan politics as a central issue, domestic politics were largely shaped by native Taiwanese-mainlander rivalry. The DPP successfully concentrated native Taiwanese support and came into power by adopting radical policy.

### III. Post-domestic split (2005–2009)

#### Economic Dependence

Between 2005 and 2009, Taiwan became even more dependent upon the mainland. Trade across the strait dramatically went up. From 2005 to 2008, the amount of trade with the mainland increased from 76,365 million dollars to 105,369 million dollars.<sup>69</sup> During this period, however, trade with the mainland's share of total foreign trade remained constant at around twenty percent.<sup>70</sup> In addition, the amount of Taiwanese approved investment in mainland China increased from 6,006 million dollars to 10,691 million dollars.<sup>71</sup>

#### Domestic Politics

In this period, the Taiwanese overcame the domestic split. Many Taiwanese, including those who had supported the native Taiwanese faction, now realized the problems of ethnic duelist politics. They witnessed an unfavorable result of radical policy.<sup>72</sup> A *de jure* independence

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69 Mainland Affairs Council, *Cross-Strait Economic Statistics Monthly*, no. 197, 23.

70 Mainland Affairs Council, *Cross-Strait Economic Statistics Monthly*, no. 197, 26.

71 Mainland Affairs Council, *Cross-Strait Economic Statistics Monthly*, no. 197, 28.

72 Tian, *Government, Business, and the Politics of Interdependence and Conflict*, 35.

policy led the island into a risky situation.<sup>73</sup> Trouble with the PRC posed economic risk as well as a security threat. After the PLA's missile practice toward the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan's stock market suffered a dramatic loss of its stock price and approximately 10 billion dollars of foreign capital fled the island.<sup>74</sup> Independence was a virtually infeasible policy for Taiwan as it lacked sufficient power to achieve its own independence. Such radical policy merely resulted in diplomatic trouble, especially with its most important economic partner, the PRC. When political relations across the strait worsened, Taiwanese citizens realized that their economic interests were being threatened. Many taxpayers were disenchanted with factionalism and began to pursue their own interests.

In addition, ethnic grievances seemed to have been resolved during the democratization period. The DPP's "Resolution on Ethnic Diversity and National Unity," which was introduced six months after Chen Sui-bien's inauguration, emphasized harmony among ethnic groups and the national unity of Taiwan.<sup>75</sup> The resolution also states, "national oppression is not to be considered as an original sin of the mainlanders".<sup>76</sup> One remarkable point is its emphasis on the DPP's leading role in political change "as the ruling party." It implies that there was a departure from the party's long history of resistance. The DPP, which used to suffer from authoritarian oppression, now produced a re-elected president and emerged as the largest party in the Legislative Yuan. Therefore, there was little room for longstanding ethnic grievances. Rather, the party highlighted ethnic harmony.

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73 Some experts point to Formosa Island as the most likely place for a potential war involving the United States to occur. See, Kurt M. Campbell and Derek J. Mitchell, "Crisis in the Taiwan Strait?" *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 4 (2001): 14-25.

74 Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History*, 197.

75 Democratic Progressive Party. "Resolution on Ethnic Diversity and National Unity," 2004. <https://ah.nccu.edu.tw/bitstream/140.119/37472/12/92401512.pdf>.

76 Democratic Progressive Party. "Resolution on Ethnic Diversity and National Unity."

As ethnic rivalry receded from the center of the politics, its symbolic issue, *de jure* independence, also became less attractive. There was a remarkable change in the DPP's pledge for the 2008 presidential election. Although he could not resist President Chen Sui-bien's decision to take a vote that touched upon Taiwan's status in the United Nations,<sup>77</sup> the presidential candidate Hsieh Chang-ting clearly drew a line between Chen and himself by adopting a more pragmatic pledge in regard to the Cross-Strait issue.<sup>78</sup>

The shift of generations in the KMT also clearly demonstrates this new trend. In 2005, Ma Ying-jeou was selected as the KMT chairperson. This represented a hegemonic transition between old and new members. Ma's rival Wang Jin-pyng was an old generation member who supported pro-unification policy.<sup>79</sup> In contrast, Ma pursued a status quo policy in terms of Cross-Strait relations. Although he often criticized pro-independence politicians, he was not a pro-China individual. Ma made harsh comment on the Tiananmen Incident in 2005.<sup>80</sup>

In the 2008 presidential election, candidate Ma Ying-jeou won the majority of votes. He defeated the DPP candidate Hsieh, 58.45 to 41.55 percent of the total votes. Despite his more pragmatic and moderate posture, some argued that Hsieh still clung to the issue of independence.<sup>81</sup>

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77 Yun-han Chu, "Taiwan in 2007: The Waiting Game," *Asian Survey* 48, no. 1 (2008), 129–131.

78 Thomas B. Gold, "Taiwan in 2008: My Kingdom for a Horse," *Asian Survey* 49, no. 1 (2009), 91.

79 Shu-ling Ko, "Wang courts the support of old KMT," *Taipei Times*, July 15, 2005, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2005/07/15/2003263570>.

80 Jewel Huang, "Ma Ying-jeou Hopes Truth Will Out," *Taipei Times*, Jun 5, 2005, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2004/06/05/2003173813>.

81 Eugene Liu, "Letters: Open letter to the DPP," *Taipei Times*, March 30, 2008, <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2008/03/30/2003407733>.

### Mainland Policy

During the third period, Taiwan gradually adopted a conciliatory mainland policy. Although he did not entirely abandon the pro-independence policy, Chen Sui-bien took a more conciliatory posture than expected. Immediately after his inauguration, Chen declared “no independence, no unification, and no use of force,” which relieved Beijing’s concerns about Taiwan’s independence. In return, the PRC allowed Taiwan observer status in the World Health Organization. After 2008, Taiwan showed an even more conciliatory posture. Taiwan and the PRC reopened the quasi-governmental Cross-Strait talk between the ARATS and SEF that had been halted in 1999. The two agencies agreed to establish a regular direct flight across the Strait and to open Taiwan to mainland tourists. Further, Taiwan’s Ministry of Economic Affairs agreed to accept investments from the mainland.<sup>82</sup> In 2009, the two governments across the Strait agreed to make a free trade agreement.<sup>83</sup>

In essence, as the Taiwanese people underwent the side effects of ethnic-centered politics and as the native Taiwanese began to overcome long-lasting ethnic discrimination, the domestic split was resolved over time. Being disillusioned with the ethnic populist politics, people started to support politicians who addressed a policy that was more likely to promote their economic interests. Therefore, strong economic ties resulted in a policy that is more conciliatory.

### **Comparing Explanatory Power**

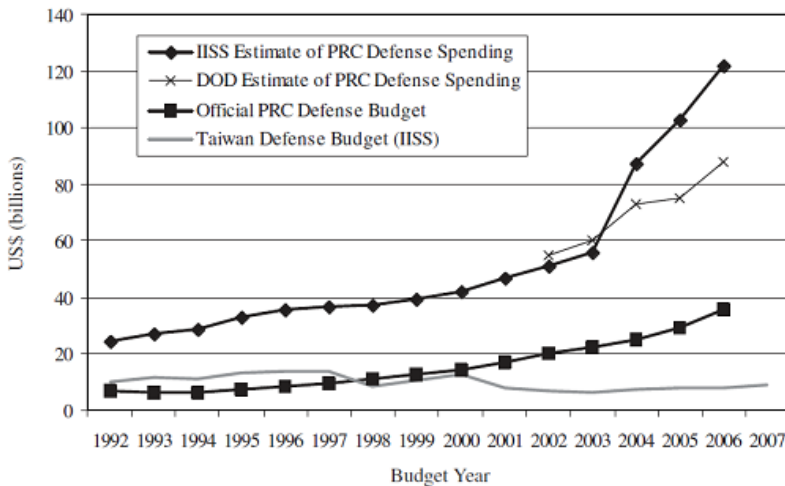
In this section, the main hypothesis’s explanatory power is compared

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82 “Talking to Taiwan’s New President,” *Time*, August 11, 2008, <https://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1831748,00.html>.

83 Thomas B. Gold, “Taiwan in 2009: Eroding Landslide,” *Asian Survey* 50, no. 1 (2010), 68. This agreement was signed on June 28, 2010. See, “Chinese Mainland, Taiwan Sign Landmark Economic Pact,” *Xinhua*, June 29, 2010, [https://www.china-daily.com.cn/imqq/china/2010-06/29/content\\_10036381.htm](https://www.china-daily.com.cn/imqq/china/2010-06/29/content_10036381.htm).

with that of the balance of power theory. As mentioned above, a widening balance of power across the strait is likely to result in Taiwan's conciliatory policy according to a realist perspective. Figure 1 below illustrates estimates of the military expenditures of the PRC and Taiwan.<sup>84</sup> Both the US Department of Defense and the International Institute for Strategic Studies calculate sharp increases in the mainland's defense expenses. Meanwhile, Taiwan defense budgets remained fixed. Balance of power theorists would argue that Taiwan's mainland policy would have moved toward a more conciliatory position. It cannot account for the varied posture of Taiwan toward the PRC. Therefore, the author's hypothesis, whose prediction is consistent with the variation of Taiwan's mainland policy, is demonstrated to have stronger explanatory power than the balance of power theory.



Sources: Official defense budget of the People's Republic of China, the International Institute for Strategic Studies' *The Military Balance*, and the Defense Department's *Military Power of the People's Republic of China* reports.

<sup>84</sup> Justin Logan and Ted Galen Carpenter, "Taiwan's Defense Budget: How Taipei's Free Riding Risks War," *Cato Policy Analysis* 600 (2007).

## Conclusion

The empirical evidence from the case study supports the main hypothesis. As Taiwan's economic dependence on the PRC increased, the Taiwanese people adopted a more favorable stance toward the mainland, influencing their government's policies in the first and third periods of the case study. However, during a split between native Taiwanese and mainlanders, ethnic interests took precedence, leading to a provocative mainland policy in the second period. This variation in Taiwan's mainland policy is not adequately explained by either the capitalist peace or the balance of power theories.

This study holds crucial theoretical implications. From a Lakatosian perspective, it contributes to both theoretical and empirical progress related to the capitalist peace research program.<sup>85</sup> Introducing the variable of domestic split, the research maintains that it can hinder economic dependence from influencing foreign policy, providing insights into the anomalous case of Taiwan. Moreover, it adds methodological diversity to the research program, departing from the predominant quantitative analyses in existing studies. Adopting a case study approach allows for a more tangible description of the explanatory power of the hypothesis.

This research provides a clear prediction for the future Cross-Strait relations, suggesting that Taipei is unlikely to exacerbate tensions by seeking formal independence. The resolution of Taiwanese ethnic issues, facilitated by the consolidation of democracy and generational changes, along with an awareness that assertive policies can endanger economic interests and national security, has prompted a more cautious approach. The current DPP administration, in line with this prediction, abstains from

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85 Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Knowledge," In *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge: Volume 4: Proceedings of the International Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science, London, 1965*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 118.

discussions on de jure independence, maintaining that the ROC is already an independent country.<sup>86</sup>

Nevertheless, Taiwan may still adopt a confrontational policy in response to Beijing's aggressive actions. With a recent survey indicating twice as many individuals identifying solely as Taiwanese (62.8%) compared to those with both Taiwanese and Chinese identities (30.5%),<sup>87</sup> Beijing's assertive stance may trigger nationalistic sentiments.<sup>88</sup> While the majority of Taiwanese prefer maintaining the status quo,<sup>89</sup> provocative actions by Beijing could push them toward supporting a more confrontational policy.

Regarding future U.S.-ROK relations, this research anticipates that China's potential economic coercion will not impede the alliance between the two countries. The mitigating effect of trade is likely to be nullified by aggressive behavior. In response to China's increasing use of economic coercion,<sup>90</sup> South Korea aims to diversify its economic relations. Similarly, if China attempts economic leverage for coercion, it could fuel nationalistic sentiments among South Koreans, boosting support for the U.S.-ROK alliance, as witnessed during the THAAD dispute.<sup>91</sup>

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86 Lev Nachman and Brian Hioe, "No, Taiwan's President Isn't 'Pro-Independence': Calling Tsai Ing-wen 'Pro-independence' Isn't Just Lazy; It's Wrong," *The Diplomat*, April 23, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/no-taiwans-president-isnt-pro-independence/>.

87 Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, "Changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwanese," July 12, 2023. <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7804&id=6960>.

88 Bates Gill, *Daring to Struggle: China's Global Ambitions Under Xi Jinping* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 196-197.

89 Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, "Changes in the Unification - Independence Stances of Taiwanese as Tracked in Surveys," July 12, 2023. <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7805&id=6962>.

90 "G7 Struggles With Response to China 'Economic Coercion' Threat," *Al Jazeera*, May 17, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/17/g7-struggles-with-response-to-china-economic-coercion-threat>.

91 Richard Q. Turcsanyi and Esther E. Song, "South Koreans Have the World's Most Negative Views of China. Why?" *The Diplomat*, December 24, 2022,

For future research, certain considerations should be addressed. The case study relies on limited empirical evidence from secondary sources in English, potentially neglecting information. Utilizing more primary sources could enhance process tracing. Additionally, future studies might explore the applicability of the theory, focusing on the role of domestic split between economic dependence and foreign policy, in non-democratic states, albeit in a modified form.

■ Article Received: 12/05 ■ Reviewed: 12/14 ■ Revised: 12/18 ■ Accepted: 12/19

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## **A Stable Peninsula in an Unstable World: How Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Increases Korean Security**

**Tobias Dahlqvist and Sunwoo Paek\***

This article examines how Russia's invasion of Ukraine impacts peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. Drawing on some neorealist theories of international relations, the article argues that Russia's war in Ukraine has *reduced* the likelihood of military conflict between North and South Korea. This is because Russian aggression has rapidly accelerated a division between two security blocs in East Asia, one comprising South Korea, the United States, and Japan, and one comprising North Korea, Russia, and China, and this division contributes to regional stability in two ways. First, an unambiguous division of East Asia creates a bipolar region, and a balance of power between the two blocs can be maintained. Second, as North Korea is provided with an opportunity to strengthen its ties with Russia and China, it is more likely to adopt a catalytic nuclear posture, pursuing only a limited nuclear arsenal.

**Keywords:** Russia, North Korea, Ukraine war, Bipolarity, East Asia

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## I . Introduction

On March 2, 2022, just six days following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the United Nations General Assembly conducted its first vote on the matter. By a massive margin, the assembly condemned Russian aggression and called for Russia to comply with international laws by withdrawing its troops from Ukrainian territory. Among the member states present at the assembly, 141 voted in favor of the resolution, while 35 abstained. Only five states voted against the resolution: Russia, Belarus, Syria, Eritrea, and *North Korea*.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, among all the represented states, North Korea was one of only three besides Russia and Belarus that explicitly refused to denounce Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. Since the beginning of the invasion on February 24, 2022, it is clear that North Korea has adopted a strategy of alignment with Russia.

Many scholars and policymakers see Pyongyang's support of Moscow as a worrisome issue; North Korea has been acting more aggressively since it decided to side with Russia. In 2022, North Korea conducted more missile tests than it has in decades, even setting a new record for the number of missiles launched in a single day.<sup>2</sup> In one such provocation, a North Korean missile landed within the territorial waters of South Korea - something that has not happened since the end of the Korean War.<sup>3</sup> While it is difficult to prove causation between Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the noticeable surge in North Korean missile tests, there may at least be a correlation.

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1 United Nations, "General Assembly Resolution Demands End to Russian Offensive in Ukraine," *UN News*, March 2, 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113152>.

2 Carlotta Dotto, Brad Lendon, and Jessie Yeung, "North Korea's Record Year of Missile Testing is Putting the World on Edge," *CNN*, December 26, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/26/asia/north-korea-missile-testing-year-end-intl-hnk/index.html>.

3 Seung-woo Kang, "North Korea Fires Missile Toward South Korean Territory," *The Korea Times*, November 2, 2022, [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2023/10/103\\_339068.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2023/10/103_339068.html).

In this light, this article tries to answer the question of how Russia's invasion of Ukraine impacts peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. Utilizing the theoretical framework of realism, and particularly the ideas presented by prominent neorealist scholars, this article argues that the likelihood of war on the Korean Peninsula has diminished following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This is because Russia's war of aggression has accelerated the division between two security blocs in East Asia: one involving South Korea, the United States, and Japan, and the other involving North Korea, Russia, and China. This growing divide contributes to regional stability in two ways. Firstly, the emergence of two identifiable security blocs in East Asia will render the region bipolar, allowing for a regional balance of power to emerge. Secondly, given an opportunity to strengthen its ties with Russia and China, North Korea has a stronger incentive to adopt a less aggressive *catalytic nuclear posture*<sup>4</sup> and only pursue a limited nuclear arsenal. Consequently, the likelihood of a full-scale conflict on the Korean Peninsula has decreased as a direct consequence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

This article is outlined as follows: Section two provides assumptions and necessary background information. Section three briefly surveys existing studies on how Russia's invasion of Ukraine impacts security on the Korean Peninsula and reviews some neorealist publications that can provide us with new perspectives. Section four explains how Russia's invasion of Ukraine has contributed to stability on the Korean Peninsula. Section five provides a summary of the arguments and some concluding remarks.

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<sup>4</sup> A nuclear posture which aims to secure military and/or diplomatic assistance from a third party when the nuclear power's interests are threatened. This posture requires the availability of a more powerful third-party patron. However, since the main goal is to catalyze the involvement of a third-party state, a limited nuclear arsenal will be sufficient.

## **II. Background and Basic Assumptions**

While neither the Ukraine War nor the tensions between North and South Korea require a lengthy introduction, some contextualization is necessary to understand the logic used in this article. First, the term “Russia’s invasion of Ukraine” here refers to the full-scale attack that started in February 2022 and not the Russo-Ukrainian War that began with Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea. The former is, of course, part of the latter. However, although Russia’s annexation of Crimea caused a limited outcry in the international community, one can only talk of a real paradigm shift in February 2022. Secondly, the term “peace and security on the Korean Peninsula” here refers to the absence of a full-scale war between North and South Korea, not inter-Korean tensions or even potential skirmishes. While skirmishes can have severe consequences, they do not threaten the survival of entire states. The only time this happens is when skirmishes develop into actual warfare.

Some necessary background information also includes a brief explanation of the assumptions made for the authors’ central argument. First, this article assumes that the regime in Pyongyang will remain in power for the foreseeable future. Should Kim Jong Un’s regime fall, will the Korean Peninsula would become unpredictable and dangerous, but there is no reason to anticipate such a development anytime soon. While there is limited insight into the internal politics of North Korea, history has shown that the regime in Pyongyang has demonstrated resilience even during times of crisis. The regime has survived two successful power successions and domestic disasters like the famine during the Arduous March in the mid-1990s. Additionally, Kim Jong Un is only in his early 40s, and he appears to have successfully consolidated his grip on power in North Korea. Although authoritarian regimes can unexpectedly fall, there is currently no reason to place significant emphasis on North Korean regime survival when calculating the risk of a potential war on the Korean Peninsula.

Secondly, even if Russia loses the war in Ukraine, Russia will not cease to exist or undergo substantial disintegration. When the Soviet Union collapsed, it fragmented into 15 sovereign states, one of which was the Russian Federation. Rather than a typical nation-state, the Russian Federation is the successor of the multiethnic empire originally inherited by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from Tsarist Russia.<sup>5</sup> Some experts have argued that the Russian Federation is likely to disintegrate further if Vladimir Putin's regime falls.<sup>6</sup> However, this argument ignores the facts that today, at least according to official statistics, over 70 percent of Russian citizens self-identify as ethnic Russians, and that these self-identifying ethnic Russians comprise the majority population in nearly all constituent entities of the Russian Federation.<sup>7</sup> Even if minor republics with strong national identities such as Chechnya or Dagestan in the North Caucasus were to declare independence, it would not mean a substantial change in territory for the Russian Federation as a whole. While Russia could potentially lose some minor republics during times of political chaos, Russia proper is here to stay.

Third, the deep rift between Russia and the West will likely take decades to repair, even if Russia suddenly withdrew its troops from Ukraine or if Vladimir Putin were removed from power. This includes the unlikely scenario of Russia again moving towards democratization. Some policymakers and scholars in the West seem to have high hopes that now-imprisoned Russian politician and opposition leader Alexei Navalny can move Russia in a democratic direction.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, many

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5 Odd A. Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41.

6 For example, see Alexander J Motyl, "It's High Time to Prepare for Russia's Collapse," *Foreign Policy*, January 7, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/07/russia-ukraine-putin-collapse-disintegration-civil-war-empire/>.

7 Joshua R. Kroeker, "Rising Ethnic Tensions Won't Tear Russia Apart," *The Moscow Times*, September 29, 2023, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/09/29/rising-ethnic-tensions-wont-tear-russia-apart-a82609>.

8 Mark Trevelyan and Andrew Osborn, "Russia's Oscar-Winning Opposition Is Mired in Conflict," *Reuters*, March 15, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/>

Ukrainians remain skeptical, as they perceive Navalny as harboring similar ideas of Russian chauvinism as the Putin regime.<sup>9</sup> If Vladimir Putin were ousted from power, he would probably be replaced with a leader from the existing top leadership in the Kremlin. However, even seemingly progressive forces like Navalny are not likely to simply embrace the West, nor would the West readily accept a democratized Russia. Furthermore, the fundamental conflict of interests between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will likely persist. Thus, the analysis of the security situation on the Korean Peninsula as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine should be considered a long-term consequence.

### III. Literature Review

This section provides a brief survey of existing studies on the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the security of the Korean peninsula. It also introduces some neorealist publications that lay the theoretical foundation for the central arguments of this article. Previous studies analyzing the relationship between the war in Ukraine and security on the Korean Peninsula mainly argue that Russian aggression has negatively impacted stability in the region. In contrast, this article draws on neorealist theory to provide a more optimistic perspective.

#### 1. The Ukraine War and the Korean Peninsula

A 2022 article by Ha and Shin primarily focuses on the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Russia-North Korea relations. In the article, the authors argue that two power groups will be established in East Asia as a result of the new international order that has emerged

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europe/russias-oscar-winning-opposition-mired-conflict-2023-03-15/.

9 Aleksander Palikot, "Oscars and Opposition: For Many in Ukraine, Award for Navalny Documentary Is Part of the Russia Problem," *RadioFreeEurope / RadioLiberty*, March 18, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/oscar-outrage-ukraine-navalny-documentary/32324139.html>.

post-February 2022, with North Korea, China, and Russia constituting the “illiberal group”.<sup>10</sup> The authors assert that this will lead to a more confident and aggressive North Korea, which will further develop its nuclear program. As a result of this new regional order, the authors conclude that “overall, the Ukraine war will have brought insecurity, uncertainty, and instability at the international and regional levels, causing volatility in and around the Korean Peninsula.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, like this article, Ha and Shin predict that bipolarity will emerge in East Asia. However, Ha and Shin’s argument that a well-defined bipolarity in East Asia will bring instability to the Korean Peninsula runs counter to the authors’ conclusion.

A second article by Lim and Kim, also published in 2022, addresses the consequences of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine for regional order in East Asia. Without specifically focusing on inter-Korean relations, the authors argue that “the overall atmosphere of international society is shifting from cooperation to competition and the East Asia region is becoming the most unstable region in the world.”<sup>12</sup> Like Ha and Shin, Lim and Kim base their argument on the assumption that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is contributing to East Asia’s transition from multipolarity to bipolarity.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, regarding North Korea’s nuclear program, the authors believe that Russian nuclear threats have undermined trust in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), while the case of Ukraine should serve as a warning example of a state that abandoned its nuclear arsenal.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Lim and Kim assume that bipolarity is more detrimental to security in East Asia than multipolarity. This is a view that this article does not share.

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10 Yong-Chool Ha and Beom-Shik Shin, “The Impact of the Ukraine War on Russian-North Korean Relations,” *Asian Survey* 62, no. 5–6 (2022): 893–919, accessed April 10, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2022.1800092>.

11 *Ibid.*, 911.

12 Kyunghan Lim and Jaeho Kim, “Impacts of Russia-Ukraine War on East Asian Regional Order,” *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies* 31, no. 2 (2022): 31–59, accessed April 10, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.33728/ijkus.2022.31.2.002>.

13 *Ibid.*, 48.

14 *Ibid.*, 45.

Finally, an article by Weitz from 2022 focuses on the broader consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine for East Asia in general.<sup>15</sup> Like the previous two articles, Weitz points towards the many dangers facing the region. However, in his assessment of Korean security, his conclusion is less pessimistic. He writes that "the new ROK government will need to manage an exceptionally difficult security environment. Fortunately, the United States and other democracies including Japan are eager to support Seoul."<sup>16</sup> Like the authors of the two aforementioned articles, Weitz bases his argument on the assumption that China and Russia will deepen their cooperation in Northeast Asia, and North Korea will align with them. According to Weitz, this new security bloc will not only strengthen its capabilities but also show a greater tolerance for North Korean missile provocations.<sup>17</sup> While recognizing the growing threats to North Korea, Weitz argues that South Korea's relations with the United States and Japan, especially if strengthened, can mitigate these concerns. This article shares Weitz's view that emerging security concerns on the peninsula can be mitigated. However, unlike Weitz, the authors argue that the structure of the emerging order in East Asia rather than South Korea's alignments is the crucial factor.

## 2. Neorealist Theory

### 1) The Stability of a Bipolar System

Kenneth Waltz has famously argued that *bipolarity*, rather than multipolarity or unipolarity, is the most stable composition of the international system.<sup>18</sup> According to Waltz, bipolarity, where the vast

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15 Richard Weitz, "How the Ukraine War Transforms the Northeast Asian Security Agenda," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies* 31, no. 1 (2022): 189–224, accessed April 10, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.33728/ijkus.2022.31.1.007>.

16 Ibid, 215–16.

17 Ibid, 196.

18 Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Stability of a Bipolar World," *Daedalus* 93, no. 3 (1964): 881–909, accessed April 10, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20026863>.

majority of power is distributed among two great powers, provides stability for at least four reasons. Firstly, a bipolar system lacks peripheries. Without peripheries in the international system, the division between friend and foe is lucid. The great powers can focus on the actions of their main adversary, while the lesser states will align themselves with either of the great powers. In this way, a bipolar world provides balance. Secondly, in a bipolar system, the range of factors the states compete over is both extended and intensified. This facilitates a system where the two great powers will mutually adjust to one another across this long range of factors, preventing asymmetric development, and accordingly, stability is preserved. Thirdly, the presence of constant pressure and the frequency of crises can, paradoxically, contribute to system stability. While a crisis can be dangerous, Waltz argued that the *absence* of crises in a conflictual situation may be even worse. If a crisis is avoided in the present, tensions will continuously accumulate and may later escalate into war. A crisis in a multipolar system does, however, not have the same pacifying effect, as interests and alignments among the great powers under multipolarity are often diffuse. Fourthly, the dominant power of the two great powers in the system also contributes to stability. Waltz believed that bipolar international systems best allow the great powers to fully comprehend and hopefully absorb revolutionary changes across the economic, political, and military spheres as the two great powers constantly move boundaries forward to check one another and restore stability.

Waltz is certainly not alone among neorealists in emphasizing the stability of a bipolar international system. John Mearsheimer, for example, shares Waltz's view.<sup>19</sup> He has argued that bipolarity trumps multipolarity in terms of stability for three main reasons. Firstly, a reduced number of conflict dyads means fewer arenas where conflict may emerge. Under bipolarity, there is one main conflict dyad available, while under multipolarity, the number of conflict dyads will quickly multiply.

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19 John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security* 15, no. 1 (1990): 5–56, accessed April 10, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538981>.

Secondly, as bipolarity provides a balance of power between two blocs, effective deterrence is easier to pursue. Lastly, as the number of adversaries decreases while balance is constantly maintained, the risk of miscalculating the adversaries' power capabilities and the adversaries' resolve is effectively reduced. Mearsheimer does not only apply this logic to the international system as a whole but also uses it to explain the stability that emerged in post-1945 Europe.<sup>20</sup> In sum, the neorealist argument that bipolarity facilitates stability is multifaceted, and it is not necessarily limited to the conditions among the two great powers in the international system but can also be applied to a regional system like Europe, or in this case, to East Asia.

## 2) Nuclear Postures for Regional Nuclear Power

Vipin Narang is noted for his analysis of potential strategies for regional nuclear powers such as North Korea.<sup>21</sup> More specifically, he argued that there are three different nuclear postures for emerging nuclear powers to consider. First is the *catalytic nuclear posture*, which aims to secure military and/or diplomatic assistance from a third party when the nuclear power's interests are threatened. By threatening to use its nuclear capabilities, whether known or unknown, the emerging nuclear power ensures that a third-party state with an interest in regional stability will intervene to de-escalate the crisis. This posture requires the availability of a more powerful third-party patron. However, since the main goal is to catalyze the involvement of a third-party state, a limited nuclear arsenal will be sufficient.

Second, the *assured retaliation posture* follows the principles of deterrence-by-punishment. As it deters nuclear attacks and nuclear coercion through a promise of assured retaliation, an emerging nuclear

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Vipin Narang, "Nuclear Strategies of Emerging Nuclear Powers: North Korea and Iran," *The Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2015): 73–91, accessed March 20, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660x.2015.1038175>.

power adopting this posture must have survivable second-strike capabilities. In this posture, possessing tactical nuclear weapons is not a necessity. Similarly, the support of a third-party patron is not required.

Third, the *asymmetric escalation posture* is used to deter conventional attacks by the adversaries' ground forces by promising rapid first-use of nuclear weapons against military and/or civilian targets. This posture can include aspects of both deterrence-by-punishment and deterrence-by-denial, and the state must have the ability to deploy nuclear assets quickly and may combine the use of strategic and tactical nuclear weapons. Given that this posture relies on a promise of first-use of nuclear weapons, it is the most aggressive option of the three postures. To make the threat credible, this posture requires transparency about a state's nuclear capabilities.

#### **IV. Russian Aggression and Stability on the Korean Peninsula**

Since February 2022, we have observed a significant movement towards the formation of two security blocs in East Asia. One bloc comprises status-quo states such as South Korea, the U.S., and Japan, while the other bloc comprises revisionist states North Korea, Russia, and China. This section aims to explain how this division of East Asia into two blocs reduces the likelihood of a military confrontation between North and South Korea. Firstly, a definite split between the two security blocs will create a bipolar region, which, according to neorealist theory, would increase regional stability. Secondly, North Korea, belonging to a security bloc with Russia and China, has less incentive to pursue the asymmetric escalation nuclear posture. Instead, it might opt for the less aggressive catalytic nuclear posture, pursuing only a limited nuclear arsenal.

## 1. Regional Bipolarity: South Korea, the U.S., Japan vs. North Korea, Russia, China

### 1) South Korea, the U.S., and Japan

South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, who assumed office in May 2022, has been working actively to strengthen South Korea's partnership with the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific region. In December 2022, South Korea published its first-ever official Indo-Pacific strategy. In this document, the Yoon government explicitly expresses its commitment to strengthening South Korea's alliance with the U.S., since the alliance is the "linchpin for peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and in the Indo-Pacific."<sup>22</sup> The document also emphasizes that South Korea upholds the "universal values" of freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, something that aligns well with the values emphasized by the Biden administration. Commitment to U.S.-South Korean alignment was further reaffirmed in April 2023, when President Biden hosted President Yoon for a state visit. In a joint statement, the two presidents described the U.S.-ROK alliance as a "global comprehensive strategic alliance" that "has grown far beyond the Korean Peninsula, reflecting the vital role of our two countries as global leaders in advancing democracy, economic prosperity, security, and technological innovation."<sup>23</sup>

To address South Korean concerns about the U.S. commitment to Korean security, the two parties have also issued the so-called "Washington Declaration." This document states that the U.S. "commits to make every effort to consult with the ROK on any possible nuclear

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22 The Government of the Republic of Korea, "Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region," December 2022, accessed March 20, 2023, [https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m\\_5676/view.do?seq=322133](https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=322133).

23 The White House, "Leaders' Joint Statement in Commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the Alliance between the United States of America and the Republic of Korea," April 26, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/04/26/leaders-joint-statement-in-commemoration-of-the-70th-anniversary-of-the-alliance-between-the-united-states-of-america-and-the-republic-of-korea/>.

weapons employment on the Korean Peninsula” and reaffirms that “any nuclear attack by the DPRK against the ROK will be met with a swift, overwhelming and decisive response.”<sup>24</sup> The two presidents also announced the creation of a new Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) to strengthen extended deterrence against the North Korean threat to the non-proliferation regime.

Beyond the U.S.–ROK alliance, South Korea has ambitiously approached Japan to defrost relations with its southeastern neighbor. In spring of 2022, only months after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, leadership in Seoul and Tokyo restored the previously suspended “shuttle diplomacy” of regular and mutual visits by leaders from the two countries.<sup>25</sup> On September 21, 2022, President Yoon and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio met again at the NATO Summit in Madrid, Spain. The two leaders declared that they “shared serious concerns over North Korea’s nuclear program involving the nuclear test and the new law on nuclear forces policy.”<sup>26</sup> In addition, South Korea repeatedly stresses the need for improved relations with Japan in its Indo-Pacific Strategy. In the document, South Korea declares that it “will seek a forward-looking partnership with Japan” because “improved relations with Japan is essential for fostering cooperation and solidarity among like-minded Indo-Pacific nations.”<sup>27</sup>

Improved relations between Seoul and Tokyo is welcomed by the U.S., as the Biden administration seeks to strengthen U.S. alliances with “like-minded countries to support a rules-based international order in the

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24 The White House, “Washington Declaration,” April 26, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/04/26/washington-declaration-2/>.

25 “(Lead) Japanese PM Arrives in S. Korea for Summit with Yoon,” *Yonhap News Agency*, May 7, 2023, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230506002451315>.

26 Mitch Shin, “South Korea’s Yoon Suk-yeol Finally Meets Japan’s Prime Minister,” *The Diplomat*, September 22, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/09/south-koreas-yoon-suk-yeol-finally-meets-japans-prime-minister/>.

27 “Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region,” 9.

face of growing authoritarianism.”<sup>28</sup> This cordial mood was manifested through the Camp David US-Japan-Korea Trilateral Summit held in August 2023.<sup>29</sup> According to a joint statement, the three leaders declared that they “are determined to align our collective efforts because we believe our trilateral partnership advances the security and prosperity of all our people, the region, and the world.”<sup>30</sup> The three leaders also published a Statement of Principles, reaffirming the three countries’ commitment to the complete denuclearization of North Korea and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the three leaders committed to conducting annual military exercises and exchanging real-time information on North Korean missile launches by the end of 2023.<sup>32</sup> While there are still numerous obstacles for South Korea and Japan to overcome before a formal trilateral alliance can be established, and while such an alliance might not be attainable in the near future, the recent cooperative activities between Seoul and Tokyo indicate that South Korea, Japan, and the U.S. are strengthening their military alignment vis-à-vis their revisionist rivals in the region.

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28 Scott A. Snyder, “Yoon Is Revitalizing a Seventy-Year-Old Alliance by Taking Political Chances,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 24, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/yoon-revitalizing-seventy-year-old-alliance-taking-political-chances>.

29 Aamer Madhani, “At Camp David, Biden Aims to Nudge Japan and South Korea toward Greater Unity in Complicated Pacific,” *AP News*, October 11, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/biden-japan-south-korea-camp-david-summit-2421359ebcd5973b6252fa284cfb25ff>.

30 The White House, “The Spirit of Camp David: Joint Statement of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States,” August 18, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/08/18/the-spirit-of-camp-david-joint-statement-of-japan-the-republic-of-korea-and-the-united-states/>.

31 The White House, “Camp David Principles,” August 18, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/08/18/camp-david-principles/#:~:text=We%20are%20unflinching%20in%20our,undermines%20respect%20for%20them%20everywhere>.

32 Laura Bicker, “US-Japan-S Korea Summit a Coup for Biden but Will Détente Last?” *BBC*, August 19, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66543514>.

## 2) North Korea, Russia, and China

Since February 2022, North Korea has consistently defended Russia's justification for its "special military operation" in Ukraine, and the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs has released an official comment stating that "the root cause of the Ukraine crisis totally lies in the hegemonic policy of the U.S. and the West which indulge themselves in high-handedness and arbitrariness towards other countries."<sup>33</sup> This statement reiterates Moscow's official stance on Russia's conflict with Ukraine and the West, and President Putin has partially justified the invasion of Ukraine by criticizing "the eastward expansion of NATO."<sup>34</sup> In April 2023, Vice Foreign Minister of North Korea, Im Chon-il, issued a statement, confirming "mutual support and solidarity" between the two countries.<sup>35</sup> During a meeting with President Putin on September 13, 2023, Kim Jong Un stated that North Korea provides its "full and unconditional support" for Russia's "sacred fight" to defend its security and that North Korea will always support Russia on the "anti-imperialist" front.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, North Korea was one of only three countries endorsing both the declaration of independence and later the Russian annexation of the Luhansk and Donetsk Republics, as well as Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian territories of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblast.<sup>37</sup>

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33 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, "Answer of Spokesperson for Ministry of Foreign Affairs of DPRK," *Korean Central News Agency*, February 22, 2022, accessed October 17, 2023, <https://kcnawatch.xyz/newstream/1646055083-689030505/answer-of-spokesperson-for-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-dprk/>.

34 "Transcript: Vladimir Putin's Televised Address on Ukraine," *Bloomberg*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-24/full-transcript-vladimir-putin-s-televised-address-to-russia-on-ukraine-feb-24#xj4y7vzkg>.

35 Soo-yeon Kim, "N. Korea Vows Strong Ties with Russia on Leaders' Summit Anniversary," *Yonhap News Agency*, April 25, 2023, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230425007600325>.

36 "Kim promises Putin North Korea's full support for Russia's 'sacred fight,'" *AP*, September 13, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20230913-putin-welcomes-north-korea-s-kim-with-a-tour-of-russian-space-centre>.

37 "N. Korea supports Russia's proclaimed annexation of Ukrainian territory,"

Furthermore, North Korea and Russia have strengthened ties across their respective military sectors. Although clear evidence is yet to be seen, North Korea has likely provided Russia with weapons to be used in Ukraine. North Korean arms exports are prohibited by resolutions adopted at the UN Security Council due to the country's nuclear and missile programs. Despite this, U.S. officials have claimed that North Korea has been engaged in the sale of "millions of rockets and artillery shells to Russia for potential deployment on the Ukrainian battlefield."<sup>38</sup> In a joint statement, the U.S., South Korea, and Japan have condemned these deliveries.<sup>39</sup> North Korea, however, has consistently denied all allegations regarding exports of military equipment. Additionally, Russia and North Korea have intensified their military cooperation since February 2022. When Kim Jong Un visited the *Vostochny Cosmodrome Space Center* during an official visit to Russia in September 2023, he was allegedly offered various opportunities for military cooperation with Russia.<sup>40</sup> Washington and South Korea are concerned that Russia is likely to acquire more ammunition from North Korea while North Korea could receive technological support for its satellite and missile programs, and U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller stated that "any transfer of arms from North Korea to Russia would violate multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions."<sup>41</sup> President Putin seems to officially

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*Yonhap News Agency*, October 4, 2022, <https://m-en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20221004002600325>.

38 Gawon Bae and Brad Lendon, "Putin Thanks North Korea for Supporting Ukraine War as Pyongyang Displays Its Nukes in Parade," *CNN*, July 28, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/07/28/asia/putin-north-korea-ukraine-parade-intl-hnk/index.html>.

39 Hyung-jin Kim, "South Korea, US and Japan condemn North Korea's alleged supply of munitions to Russia," *AP News*, October 26, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/korea-us-japan-russia-munitions-ukraine-9e3b0195330581779ae69cd47da1d818>.

40 Cynthia Kim and Hyonhee Shin, "South Korea urges Russia to halt military cooperation with North Korea," *Reuters*, September 19, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/south-korea-urges-russia-halt-military-cooperation-with-north-korea-2023-09-19/>.

41 Nike Ching, "Russia-North Korea Military Cooperation Concerns US," *Voice*

acknowledge this point, declaring that “there are certain limitations” to Russia’s military cooperation with North Korea.<sup>42</sup> However, given that North Korea shares a land border with Russia, the possibility of unofficial and illegal exchanges of military equipment and technology between the two countries remains high.

China and Russia, which went from friends to foes during the Cold War, have also displayed tightening relations. Unlike North Korea, China has not directly supported Russia’s war in Ukraine. China has, however, consistently avoided condemning Russian aggression, and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has given a statement that “given five consecutive rounds of NATO’s eastward expansion, Russia’s legitimate security demands should be taken seriously and properly addressed.”<sup>43</sup> The Sino-Russian friendship was officially expressed when President Xi Jinping visited President Putin in Moscow in March 2023. During the visit, the two leaders called each other a “dear friend” and hailed relations between the two countries as a “no limits friendship.”<sup>44</sup> A joint statement by the two leaders also included accusations that the U.S. is undermining global stability.<sup>45</sup> The “no limits friendship” between China and Russia was again confirmed when President Putin made a state visit to China in

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of America, September 13, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/north-korean-leader-vows-unconditional-support-for-all-decisions-by-putin-/7266310.html>.

42 Tessa Wong, “Vladimir Putin Says Military Cooperation with Kim Jong Un a Possibility,” *BBC*, September 14, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66783384>.

43 Michael Martina, “China Says It Respects Ukraine’s Sovereignty and Russia’s Security Concerns,” *Reuters*, February 26, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/china-says-it-respects-ukraines-sovereignty-russias-security-concerns-2022-02-25/>.

44 James Robinson, “Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping Praise ‘No Limits Friendship’ during Chinese President’s Trip to Russia,” *Sky News*, March 21, 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/vladimir-putin-and-xi-jinping-praise-no-limits-friendship-during-chinese-presidents-trip-to-russia-12839120>.

45 “Putin, Xi Pledge Friendship but Talks Yield no Ukraine Breakthrough,” *Reuters*, March 25, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-meets-dear-friend-xi-kremlin-ukraine-war-grinds-2023-03-20/>.

October 2023.<sup>46</sup>

While China and Russia have declared a stronger friendship, the two have also expressed a unified approach towards the North Korean nuclear issue. It is important to remember that, due to their historic opposition to the North Korean nuclear program, both Russia and China supported nine packages of sanctions against Pyongyang between 2006 and 2017.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, in their desire to keep the nuclear club as exclusive as possible, Beijing and Moscow were able to bridge their disagreements with the Western powers at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). However, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the non-proliferation unity among the permanent five at the UNSC seems to have ended. Already in May 2022, the UNSC failed to further tighten sanctions on North Korea due to a veto from both China and Russia.<sup>48</sup> In turn, this sudden change in behavior led the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, to accuse China and Russia of obstructing further UN action against Pyongyang.<sup>49</sup> The story repeated itself in June 2023 when North Korea attempted to launch a satellite, but both Russia and China ignored the U.S. call for UNSC action.<sup>50</sup> These examples represent a profound shift for North Korea. In the new world order that has emerged after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, can North Korea act aggressively without suffering further sanctions and condemnation by the UNSC?

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46 Ryan Woo, "Putin visits 'dear friend' Xi in show of no-limits partnership," *Reuters*, October 18, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-visits-dear-friend-xi-show-no-limits-partnership-2023-10-17/>.

47 "Fact Sheet: North Korea Sanctions," *Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation*, May 11, 2022, <https://armscontrolcenter.org/fact-sheet-north-korea-sanctions/>.

48 "Security Council Fails to Adopt Resolution Tightening Sanctions Regime in Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as Two Members Wield Veto," *United Nations*, May 26, 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14911.doc.htm>.

49 Edith M. Lederer, "US Says China and Russia Blocking UN Action on North Korea," *AP News*, March 20, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/north-korea-mis-siles-us-china-6ce477f7e6267aba412cd4020f0bd263>.

50 Duk-kun Byun, "U.S. calls for UNSC action against N. Korean satellite launch, says China, Russia's opposition is 'troubling'," *Yonhap News Agency*, August 26, 2023, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230826000300325>.

## 2. North Korea Moving Toward a Catalytic Nuclear Strategy?

Until recently, several scholars and policymakers concluded that North Korea is adopting an asymmetric escalation posture because Pyongyang lacked a reliable security patron.<sup>51</sup> It is important to remember that North Korea has been an outcast in the international community for decades. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union saw North Korea as an independent communist party-ruled state, meaning that North Korea was not under the same direct influence from Moscow as the communist states in Eastern Europe.<sup>52</sup> Following the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, this independence also meant that North Korea had to carefully manage its relations with both Moscow and Beijing.

The end of the Cold War, however, meant abandonment and isolation for North Korea, while many of its former communist allies in the Eastern Bloc abandoned authoritarianism and planned economies for democracy and free market principles. Shortly after the Cold War, both Russia and China established diplomatic relations with South Korea, and unlike North Korea, they opened up their economies to the outside world. North Korea felt betrayed and partially ignored by its former communist patrons. It should be no surprise that the 1990s was the decade when North Korea put greater efforts into its nuclear program. The post-Cold War era has been an uncertain and vulnerable time for North Korea, and it was a time when the need for self-help became more evident than ever.

China is often viewed as North Korea's closest ally, but in reality, relations between Beijing and Pyongyang are often frosty. As already mentioned, China has a history of opposing North Korea's nuclear

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51 Narang, "Nuclear Strategies of Emerging Nuclear Powers"; John K. Warden, *North Korea's Nuclear Posture: An Evolving Challenge for US Deterrence* (Paris: IFRI, 2017). [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/warden\\_north\\_korea\\_nuclear\\_posture\\_2017.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/warden_north_korea_nuclear_posture_2017.pdf).

52 Fred Halliday, "Third World Socialism: 1989 and After." In *The Global 1989: Continuity and Change in World Politics*, ed. George Lawson, Chris Armbruster, and Michael Cox (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112–34, 119.

proliferation, even though Chinese attempts to halt the nuclear program have failed.<sup>53</sup> This failed attempt includes Chinese support for the series of UN resolutions sanctioning North Korea, the latest one adopted in December 2017.<sup>54</sup> North Korea has suffered significant economic hardship from these sanctions, but neither China nor Russia aided North Korea with their veto power in the UNSC. North Korea may be compelled to pursue an asymmetric escalation strategy due to its conventional military disadvantage to American and South Korean forces while lacking a reliable security patron.<sup>55</sup> Pyongyang's recent claims regarding the development of tactical nuclear weapons, a notable feature of the asymmetric escalation strategy, are strengthening the argument that North Korea is indeed adopting this nuclear posture. On March 28, 2023, North Korea unveiled pictures of a tactical nuclear warhead named *Hwasan-31*, sharing them with the international community for the first time through images published in the North Korean newspaper *Rodong Sinmun*. This, however, contradicts the official intelligence evaluations by both South Korean and U.S. military authorities, which maintain that North Korea has not yet obtained tactical nuclear capabilities.<sup>56</sup>

According to Narang's theory, Pyongyang's strengthened ties with both Moscow and Beijing could induce the North Korean regime to pursue a catalytic nuclear posture. Developing further nuclear capabilities is an expensive business, and the key obstacle for North Korea to pursue a catalytic nuclear posture has been the absence of a reliable third-party

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53 Dong Sun Lee, Iordanka Alexandrova, and Yihei Zhao, "The Chinese Failure to Disarm North Korea: Geographical Proximity, U.S. Unipolarity, and Alliance Restraint," *Contemporary Security Policy* 41, no. 4 (2020): 587–609, accessed March 20, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2020.1755121>, 588–89.

54 "S/RES/2397 (2017)," *United Nations Security Council*, December 22, 2017, accessed March 20, 2023, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N17/463/60/PDF/N1746360.pdf?OpenElement>.

55 Narang, "Nuclear Strategies of Emerging Nuclear Powers."

56 Je-hun Lee, "N. Korea Reveals Tactical Nuclear Warhead for First Time," *Hankyoreh*, March 29, 2023, [https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_northkorea/1085699.html](https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/1085699.html).

patron. As the East region is moving rapidly towards bipolarity, North Korea suddenly has two potential third-party patrons among the regional powers. At this point, it is too early to say whether Moscow and Beijing will be seen as reliable security guarantors for Pyongyang. North Korea has not joined any military alliances, nor does it enjoy any formal security guarantees from Russia or China. However, as North Korea has an opportunity to align itself closer with a powerful coalition, Pyongyang's rationale for attempting an asymmetric escalation posture has at least significantly decreased. As with the divergence of the East Asia region, this is a direct consequence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

## **V. Conclusion**

This article argues that Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the new world order that emerged after the invasion have reduced the likelihood of a military confrontation between North and South Korea. This is primarily because Russian aggression has accelerated the ongoing division of two distinct security blocs in the East Asian region. The split increases regional stability for two main reasons. First, the emergence of two security blocs makes the region bipolar, maintaining a balance of power between adversaries. Second, due to the sudden opportunity to strengthen its relations with Russia and China, North Korea is more likely than it was pre-February 2022 to adopt a catalytic nuclear strategy. This strategy would be less aggressive and require only limited nuclear capabilities.

It could be argued that it is too early to assert the existence of a completely bipolar system in East Asia. Considering the fact that the two groups have not formed formal security alliances and North Korea is not likely to participate in joint military exercises in the near future, this counterargument could be valid. Furthermore, the neorealist argument that bipolarity provides stability was mainly based on an analysis of the Soviet-U.S. rivalry, but the world looks very different today than it did during the Cold War. However, two main points should be emphasized regarding the emergence of bipolarity in East Asia. First, the division of

the region has clearly accelerated since February 2022, and second, to our knowledge, there is no persuasive theoretical or empirical evidence supporting or predicting that this growing regional division will bring instability to the Korean Peninsula.

Does this mean that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has made war on the Korean Peninsula impossible? Certainly not; the Korean Peninsula remains one of the most militarized territories in the world, and the interests and goals of Seoul and Pyongyang remain incompatible. North Korea can still pursue an asymmetric escalation strategy despite its improved relations with regional powers. This article simply argues that conflict, or more specifically, a war between the two Koreas, has not become any *more* likely in the post-Ukraine War era. Rather, the opposite is true, as a cornered and desperate North Korea will always be more dangerous than a North Korea belonging to a powerful coalition in a bipolar system. Unlike the conventional argument, the authors claim that there is no reason the international community should feel more worried about an inter-Korean war now than pre-February 2022. This fact remains true even if North Korea further strengthens its relations with Russia and China, and even if North Korea keeps acting aggressively.

One might also posit that the emergence of bipolarity in East Asia could potentially escalate into regional military confrontations. During the Cold War, Asia experienced proxy wars like the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Soviet–Afghan War. Two plausible counterarguments challenge this perspective. Firstly, this article argues that regional bipolarity in East Asia contributes to regional stability. It does not argue that global bipolarity would increase stability on the Korean Peninsula. Secondly, the Korean Peninsula does not constitute a periphery in this regional bipolarity. While Europe was the focal point of the Cold War, East Asia in general and the Korean Peninsula in particular stand as the epicenter of the rivalry between the U.S. and China. As we observed how “cold peace” prevailed in Europe during the Cold War, it is plausible that stability will prevail in East Asia because the region serves as the focal area for the U.S.-China rivalry.

The ironical stability on the Korean Peninsula due to Russian

aggression in Ukraine will, however, be highly influenced by China's position in the future. There are at least two reasons why China could disengage itself from the current security alignment with Russia and North Korea. First of all, Beijing may not be able to achieve its security objectives through closer relations between Moscow and Pyongyang. For China, maintaining the status quo in North Korea is a critical matter for its own security and economic development. Therefore, to prevent any unrest and provocations in North Korea, China is willing to exert strong control over its neighbor. However, if Russia and North Korea's relationship becomes excessively close, the leadership in China may feel anxious that Russia could weaken Chinese control over North Korea. In this context, the close relationship between Moscow and Pyongyang has the potential to once again generate conflictual relations between Moscow and Beijing, significantly weakening the security cooperation among the three.

Secondly, China could potentially distance itself from Russia's war in Ukraine. The lingering war in Ukraine has resulted in a humanitarian crisis with numerous casualties, and international condemnation of Russia is growing with each passing day. Given China's aspirations to become a leading global power, Beijing might find it increasingly challenging to not condemn a prolonged Russian war. This hesitancy was evident during the summit between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin in May 2023. During the press conference after the summit, President Putin stated that "we believe that many of the provisions of the peace plan put forward by China are consonant with Russian approaches and can be taken as the basis for a peaceful settlement when they are ready for that in the West and in Kyiv. However, so far we see no such readiness from their side." Contrary to Putin, President Xi was hesitant to make any bold statements regarding the war in Ukraine, simply saying that China has an "impartial position" in the conflict.<sup>57</sup> A potential Chinese disengagement from the revisionist security bloc would break the balance of power in the region, and this could again increase instability on the Korean Peninsula.

■ Article Received: 11/13 ■ Reviewed: 12/01 ■ Revised: 12/07 ■ Accepted: 12/12

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## Call for Papers *ASIAN JOURNAL OF PEACEBUILDING*

*Asian Journal of Peacebuilding (AJP)* is a semiannual peer-reviewed journal published by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) at Seoul National University. It publishes original research on the topics of violence, conflict, and peacebuilding around the world. The aim of AJP is twofold: first, to promote innovative research on issues related to peacebuilding in Asia, a region where national divisions, transitions, and developments are intertwined with new forms of threat, violence, and destruction. Second, it aims to disseminate peace studies conducted both in the traditional disciplines of social sciences and humanities, as well as in interdisciplinary fields at the interface of religion, culture, ecology, and gender studies.

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E-ISSN 2288-2707  
Print ISSN 2288-2693

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#### Research Article

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*Shameera K. Walpita*, Context of Denial in the Practice of Local Knowledge during Grassroots Peacebuilding: An Analysis of Grassroots Activists’ Experiences in North and East Sri Lanka

*Muhammad Sazzad Hossain Siddiqui, Bertram A Jenkins, and Emtiaz Ahmed*, Sequential Explanatory Mixed-Methods Research: Adapting in the Conflict-affected Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh

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# The Korean Journal of Security Affairs

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The *Korean Journal of Security Affairs (KJSA)*, launched in 1996, is an academic journal which is published by the Research Institute for National Security Affairs (RINSA), Korea National Defense University (KNDU), Republic of Korea. It is published biannually in English: June and December. The *KJSA* has been indexed and abstracted in the Korean Citation Index (KCI) since 2010 and widely circulated to institutions, scholars and analysts who are interested in research on national, regional and global security and defense affairs. It is devoted to delivering quality articles that address and analyze timely and significant security issues including national security, military and defense affairs, civil-military relations, and global/regional security issues.

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Articles submitted to the *KJSA* will be reviewed on a rolling basis. However, the dates below can serve as a general point of reference for submission.

- By April 30 (June Issue)
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- Follow the Chicago Manual of Style for all citations:  
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- Authors should also include a BRIEF CV with contact information
- The submission deadline is April 30, 2024, but manuscripts will also be accepted on a rolling basis

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# Guideline for Manuscript Submission

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Registered with the National Research Foundation of Korea as of 2009, the International Journal of Korean Unification Studies (IJKUS) is a peer-reviewed journal bi-annually published (June, December) by the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU), a government-funded research institution in the Republic of Korea. It publishes original papers covering issues surrounding the Korean Peninsula, such as inter-Korean relations, unification policy, North Korea, issues of peace and stability in Northeast Asia, foreign policy, and international affairs related to the Korean Peninsula and beyond. IJKUS aims to provide a forum for in-depth analysis, theoretical exploration, and creative policy alternatives to experts and scholars at home and abroad on Korean Peninsular issues and circumstances in Northeast Asia. Since its founding in 1992, IJKUS has contributed to enhancing the understanding of the international community on issues of unification on the Korean Peninsula by providing a global venue for active academic discussions.

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Submission is open to:

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- 3) Experts in the field of North Korean and unification studies and on Korean Peninsular issues with qualifications corresponding to above requirements.

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Submitted manuscripts should use American-English as a standard format and range between 6,000 and 10,000 words. They must be double-spaced, with 12 point font and in a Microsoft Word file. The style of the text, footnotes, bibliography must conform to The Chicago Manual of Style with the Notes-Bibliography (NB) System and footnote (not the Author-Date System and endnote). (For details, see the Chicago Manual of Style at:

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## 5. Submission and Deadline

Manuscripts should be submitted through JAMS by creating an account at:

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Submission of a paper will be held to imply that it contains original unpublished work and is not being submitted for publication elsewhere; manuscripts under consideration for publication elsewhere are ineligible.

The deadline for manuscript submission is April 21 for June issue and October 21 for December issue (subject to change). For details, please refer to the IJKUS Submission Guideline at <https://kinu.or.kr/main/kinu>.

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