

Overview

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South Korea has gradually expanded its contributions to international security in recent years through increased participation in peacekeeping, antipiracy, postconflict stabilization, counterproliferation, and other activities designed to safeguard global stability. These contributions build on those from the late 1990s and early 2000s, including the dispatch of peacekeepers as part of United Nations (UN) stabilization operations in East Timor and Cyprus in the late 1990s and of a special unit to contribute to the stabilization of Iraq beginning in 2003. Prior to these operations, the last major Korean military operations off the Korean peninsula involved South Korean contributions of military forces to the conflict in Vietnam in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Within the past five years, the scale and level of South Korean contributions to international security operations have expanded noticeably in line with the emphasis on South Korean president Lee Myung-bak's references to a "global Korea." Under this initiative, South Korea has sought to raise its global profile and contributions to the international community not only by hosting meetings such as the Group of Twenty (G20), but also by more actively participating in both development and security around the world. South Korea's increased profile as a contributor to international security is striking because it has traditionally, since the Korean War in the 1950s, been considered a consumer rather than a producer of security resources. Despite the ongoing threat posed by North Korea, however, South Korea is becoming a producer of security resources off the Korean peninsula in response to international needs, contributing to the provision of public goods as a responsible participant in and beneficiary of the world trading system. South Korea's economic growth and modernization has enabled it to build the capacity, interest, and resources necessary to make contributions to global security.

By manpower, South Korea is the sixth-largest military in the world. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute,

South Korea had the twelfth-largest military expenditures in 2010, just ahead of established middle powers such as Australia and Canada, representing an expansion of capacity that has enabled its contributions to international security beyond the peninsula.¹ As long as the situation on the peninsula remains stable, the South Korean government has the appropriate capacities to meet the specific international need, and the government is able to maintain public support for contributions to stabilization and peacekeeping operations, South Korea is well positioned to make important niche contributions to international stability.

Indeed, South Korea's increased contributions to global security are one of three national defense priorities, alongside ongoing efforts to ensure security on the Korean peninsula. South Korea's 2010 defense white paper identifies "contributing to regional stability and world peace" as one of three national defense objectives, along with "defending the nation from external military threats and invasion" and "upholding the principle of peaceful unification." To support these activities, the Republic of Korea (ROK) has established a three-thousand-person standing unit dedicated to overseas deployments; passed legislation authorizing the deployment of up to one thousand ROK personnel to UN peacekeeping operations (PKO) before requiring an authorization request from the ROK National Assembly; and established a PKO center dedicated to the training of military personnel to be dispatched for overseas assignments.² This is a significant new development that, with South Korean public support and in the absence of major instability or tension on the Korean peninsula, shows South Korea's willingness to contribute to international security for the long haul.

As a top-twenty global economy that depends on trade for its economic growth, South Korea has an interest in contributing to global stability to protect a primary source of the country's hard-won prosperity. Envisioning a more active South Korean role on the international stage based on its own economic modernization and political development, South Korean president Lee Myung-bak pledged in his inaugural address to "carry out global diplomacy under which we actively cooperate with the international community. Respecting the universal principles of democracy and market economics, we will take part in the global movement for peace and development."³ Since his inauguration in 2008, Lee has fulfilled his pledge by contributing South Korea's military and technological capabilities to stabilization and peacekeeping missions in Haiti, Lebanon, the Gulf of Aden, and Afghanistan. South

Korea's multifaceted efforts to establish itself as a provider rather than merely a consumer of security go hand in hand with its transformation from recipient to provider of international development assistance, making available additional resources to preserve stability at a time when traditional aid and security providers in the United States and Europe are facing increased fiscal constraints.

EVOLUTION OF SOUTH KOREA'S DEBATE OVER ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

South Korean debates over the country's international security role have historically been framed primarily in the context of the U.S.-ROK security alliance, either as a down payment on the extension of a U.S. security presence on the Korean peninsula or as an "involuntary" contribution resulting from South Korea's dependency on the United States to meet South Korean security needs. South Koreans have historically worried that resources expended off the peninsula might come at the expense of South Korea's ability to meet the ostensibly overwhelming threat posed by North Korea. For U.S. security planners, an occasional source of conflict with South Korea has been the latter's seemingly narrow vision of security, which has traditionally been confined to the peninsula at the expense of a broader regional and global view. Past South Korean thinking about contributions was inevitably tied to the question of how to strengthen either American assurances or tangible commitments to the security of the Korean peninsula. South Korea's new view of its role reflects a dramatic change in this self-assessment, which for the first time delinks South Korea's role in and contributions to international security from the U.S.-ROK alliance.

The classic example of the old thinking about the relationship between South Korean overseas deployments and the U.S.-ROK alliance was former South Korean president Park Chung-hee's decision to provide South Korean troops in support of American war aims in Vietnam. At that time, the United States was deeply entangled in conflict in Indochina that threatened to distract from its security obligations in South Korea. Moreover, a belligerent and opportunistic North Korean leadership sought to take advantage of the U.S. preoccupation with the war in Indochina, for instance through the 1968 capture of the

USS *Pueblo* in waters near North Korea. Worried that U.S. commitment to South Korea might waver in the face of heavy burdens in Vietnam, Park sent South Korean infantry troops to fight in Vietnam, where they built a reputation as a fearsome fighting force. Park's reasoning for sending the troops was tied to South Korea's security dependency on the United States and Park's worry that American distraction might lead to renewed North Korean adventurism at the expense of South Korea. Thus, South Korea weighed its decision on whether to contribute troops to Vietnam purely within the context of concerns about U.S. abandonment of South Korea's security needs vis-à-vis North Korea.

A more recent manifestation of tensions between South Korea's prioritization of its security needs against U.S. demands for out-of-area contributions came in 2003 and 2004 at a time of relative tension in the U.S.-ROK alliance. At that time, the United States requested that friends and allies, including South Korea, contribute military forces to help stabilize the security situation in Iraq following the Persian Gulf War. This request for assistance came to the Roh Moo-hyun administration in 2003, along with informal notice that the operational demands of the Iraq War would also require the United States to relocate a brigade of the Second Infantry Division based in Seoul to Iraq. This onward assignment of 3,600 American troops was disturbing to Seoul, coming as it did in the midst of political differences between Washington and Seoul over how to coordinate policy toward North Korea.

The Roh Moo-hyun administration responded to Washington's request by attempting to negotiate a more flexible U.S. policy toward North Korea as a quid pro quo for South Korean troops in Iraq, a request that American officials brusquely deflected as unseemly and contrary to the spirit of the long-standing alliance relationship. On the other hand, progressive South Korean officials clearly felt entrapped by the alliance: they could not easily avoid a U.S. request for assistance at the same time that South Korea disagreed with and felt endangered by the Bush administration's hard-line policies toward North Korea.

The issue of a South Korean troop contribution to Iraq was defined by the Roh administration wholly as a U.S.-ROK alliance matter, for which South Korea sought due recognition from the United States on the basis of its ultimately contributing the third-largest contingent of military forces to Iraq. But Seoul's decision to define the U.S. request for military assistance primarily as an alliance contribution served to politicize the U.S.-ROK alliance unnecessarily. It also revealed South

Korean public concerns about the risk of involvement in international entanglements, as exemplified by weak initial public support for South Korea's troop dispatch to Iraq. The dispatch was finally approved at the National Assembly on a rare bipartisan vote in which an independent group of ruling party members combined with the conservative opposition. Months later, the South Korean contribution in Irbil proved to be a success on the ground, but South Korean officials rankled over the Bush administration's failure to give sufficient acknowledgment to the government of South Korea for its contributions. Once again, South Korean deliberations over whether to contribute to stabilization in Iraq were conducted exclusively in the context of how to manage the alliance with the United States and how to manage policy differences over North Korea, rather than with regard to South Korea's stake in promoting international stability.

A "GLOBAL KOREA" AND SOUTH KOREA'S INTERESTS IN GLOBAL SECURITY

The Lee Myung-bak administration, however, has taken a different approach to South Korean contributions to international security with the aim of establishing what it calls a "global Korea." After an initial period of caution and concern about the need to ensure public support for a larger South Korean role in global security at the beginning of his administration, President Lee was able to raise South Korea's profile, capabilities, and willingness to contribute to international security in tandem with broader efforts to raise the country's profile as a leader on the world stage. To this end, South Korea has stepped up its efforts to show leadership in multilateral global forums by hosting the G20 in Seoul in November 2010, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) High-Level Forum in Busan in November 2011, and the nuclear security summit in March 2012.

President Lee stated in his 2011 New Year's speech that "a crucial goal of this administration has been to build a Global Korea," in which he identified contributions to international development, green growth, and economic growth through free trade agreements as components of the strategy. In a subsequent speech at a conference commemorating the fourth anniversary of his inauguration, Lee stated that "the Global

Korea initiative puts emphasis on helping countries in need, while contributing proactively to the peace and prosperity of all peoples.”

President Lee has provided a compelling rationale for South Korea to make contributions to less fortunate countries, both as part of South Korea's global responsibilities and as a way of acknowledging and reciprocating international assistance that made vital contributions to South Korea's survival and rapid development. Thus, South Korea's roles in and contributions to international security are no longer being defined by its government as U.S.-ROK alliance issues, but as issues of South Korea's responsibilities and interests in promoting global stability as a leading member of the international community.

As a result, South Korea is no longer seeking credit for its contributions in the eyes of the United States or as a contribution to the U.S.-ROK alliance; instead, it is contributing to international security based on its capabilities and interests. This shift is evidence of a maturation of South Korea's conception of its role in the world that helps establish the country as a leader that does not pursue its foreign policy interests solely through the lens of the U.S.-ROK security alliance. South Korea deserves both acknowledgment and credit for its sense of international responsibility and for its efforts to establish itself as a country capable of making tangible contributions and providing leadership within the world community.

Today, South Korea has developed substantial experience in a variety of peacekeeping operations since it first contributed an engineering battalion to Somalia in 1993. South Korea currently contributes 637 personnel to nine UN peacekeeping operations, making it the thirty-third-largest contributor of personnel to UN-led peacekeeping operations. It is also the tenth-largest contributor of funds to the 2011–2012 UN peacekeeping budget, with a share representing 2.7 percent of the annual budget. A solid contributor to Combined Task Force (CTF)-151, South Korea has the capacity to keep two destroyers operational as part of the mission on an ongoing basis. In addition, it is contributing a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) of 336 personnel in Afghanistan along with \$93.416 million in assistance in 2010 via the overseas Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).⁴ Although South Korea was relatively late to join the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)—it did so only two days after North Korea's May 2009 nuclear test—it has become an active participant in the group and has heeded the call to strengthen both its export control over dangerous or prohibited items and its cooperation with others in this regard.

KOREA'S CONTRIBUTIONS

The June 2009 U.S.-ROK Joint Vision Statement formally defines the application of the U.S.-ROK bilateral alliance as extending beyond the Korean peninsula to meet regional and global challenges.⁵ The joint vision statement proposes an expanded role for the U.S.-ROK alliance in contributing to international security. It is underpinned by both an increase in South Korean capabilities and a South Korean willingness to step forward and make such capabilities available as a public good for use within the international community. The statement also anticipates that South Korea will make contributions to security commensurate with the benefits it derives from a stable global system.

The obligation to support the United States because of the U.S.-ROK alliance is no longer the dominant South Korean interest in contributing to international security. However, the alliance can continue to provide a solid platform for South Korean regional and global missions, both by assisting South Korean efforts to extend its capabilities in international stabilization and peacekeeping efforts and by making South Korea's contributions more effective in concert with the efforts of other actors.

South Korea's enhanced capability and willingness to contribute to international security improve its value as a partner to the United States, which in turn adds value to the U.S.-ROK alliance. As long as the alliance has available resources and is able to muster public support in both countries, the United States should seek a close partnership with South Korea to strengthen South Korean contributions in various international coalitions. In some cases, prior relationships developed through alliance-based cooperation on the peninsula might facilitate new working relationships in an entirely different operating environment, for instance, as partners in establishing stability and promoting development in Afghanistan. In other cases, cooperation between like-minded countries, such as the United States and ROK, will be a valuable asset that can be used to build political support for international stabilization operations.

The U.S.-ROK alliance may also benefit from practical forms of cooperation and interoperability that are being honed through practical experience that cannot be replicated by scenario-based exercises alone. Both countries face the need to more prudently allocate defense budgets, and the experience of working together may also produce

opportunities to cooperate in ways that do not unduly limit loss of specific capabilities. Moreover, as the United States moves to emphasize greater interaction and lateral networking of capabilities among Asian bilateral alliances, South Korea's experience working in a multinational environment will provide a valuable base of experience from which to operate.

An enhanced South Korean role in international security will provide residual benefits for the development of South Korean experience and capabilities, particularly in light of the possibility that prolonged instability in North Korea would likely require South Korea to accomplish some tasks that are part of stabilization or peacekeeping operations in other countries. For this reason, South Korea's exposure to many types of fragile or failed-state situations and direct involvement in postconflict stabilization operations may prove to be invaluable practical experience that can be applied to the management of potential future instability in North Korea.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES TO CONTINUED CONTRIBUTIONS

Although the catchphrase *global Korea* seems appropriate to provide a framework for analyzing South Korea's stepped-up contributions to international security, it is not clear to what extent South Korea's emerging contributions are sustainable. Scenarios that could cause South Korea to reduce its international activities include a crisis in North Korea, a withdrawal of domestic public support in South Korea for stabilization operations, or economic and demographic constraints that could limit South Korea's capacity to make future contributions to international security.

The potential instability in North Korea is the most significant threat to sustaining South Korean contributions to international security. For instance, the March 2010 sinking of the *Cheonan* exposed a need for South Korea's navy to invest in antisubmarine warfare capabilities; such a significant investment arguably could have distracted from recent South Korean investments in expeditionary naval capabilities to carry out operations far from the Korean peninsula. In the end, South Korea invested in both capabilities. This example suggests that indeed South Korea is capable of providing contributions to both international

stability and security on the Korean peninsula. But there is always the possibility that a significant flare-up of inter-Korean tensions or destabilization of North Korea will cause a shift in resources back to the Korean peninsula, and a prolonged focus on the task of restoring Korean peninsular and East Asian regional stability. In fact, this circumstance could well exceed South Korean resources and turn the country once again into a consumer of international security resources, requiring significant support from the United States and the world community as well. Although the level of resources in South Korea, Japan, and even China that might be used to stabilize North Korea is considerable, political and donor coordination challenges would require substantial international attention and resources.

Second, the sustainability of South Korea's political commitment to maintain active contributions to international security will be tested by the eventual political transition to a new administration in South Korea in February 2013 that may or may not be as committed to using South Korean resources for global security. However, given the level of South Korean dependency on the world trading system, it is hard to envision a dramatic shift in South Korean priorities that would curtail South Korean participation in international stability operations. Another possibility is if there were an uptick in South Korean casualties from such operations. Certainly, such an occurrence would catalyze an active political debate in South Korea over the nature and purpose of its international involvement. But it is unlikely that South Korea will abandon the perceived prestige benefits that accrue to its reputation as an active and positive leader in the world community, including its contributions to international security.

Third, South Korea will face demographic and budget constraints in the midterm that could eventually pressure it to reduce its commitments to international security. For instance, if South Korea shifts from mandatory conscription to a volunteer army, the size of the military force would likely shrink. In addition, the country's birth rate is well below replacement rates, meaning that available manpower to serve in South Korea's military will gradually shrink from current levels. Such constraints, however, are unlikely in the next five to ten years. In addition, those constraints may be less important if inter-Korean tensions are reduced, in which case there could actually be considerable room for South Korea to become an even greater contributor in the international security field.

Given the strong commitment of South Korea's leadership, the public's acceptance of South Korea's expanded role and its appreciation for the prestige such a role confers, and the country's strong and growing economy, it is likely that South Korea will continue to play a constructive role beyond its own borders. Each of the potential obstacles outlined has the capacity to derail future South Korean contributions to international security. However, South Korean desires to play a greater role on the world stage appear to be strong enough that despite these obstacles, the country will continue to make modest contributions to international security.

SUSTAINING SOUTH KOREA'S GROWING ROLE: RECOMMENDATIONS

An outward-oriented South Korea capable of contributing positively to the international community generates goodwill and recognition of South Korea's international contributions and provides benefits to the world and to the United States, given the convergence of U.S. and South Korean interests in strengthening a liberal, economically open global system. The U.S.-ROK alliance is a ready-made platform to support South Korean contributions to international stability, but recognizes that South Korean contributions to global peace and security should be based on South Korean national interest and not on alliance considerations. The following recommendations would strengthen and extend South Korea's contributions to international security.

Combine South Korea's instruments of hard and soft power to enhance the effectiveness of its international security contributions. South Korea's emerging military capabilities, along with its efforts to expand its budget for international aid by capitalizing on its successful experience with development, provide an opportunity to combine the two to underscore its growing stature and responsibility in the world community. South Korea should continue to use its military capabilities and development experience in combination to strengthen its profile as a constructive actor on the global stage.

Invest in stabilization missions abroad so that the lessons of international experience are available to be applied at home. South Korea's involvement

in postconflict stabilization missions abroad provides it the benefit of learning how to merge security and development provisions in the absence of an effective government in North Korea. South Korean participation in postconflict stabilization elsewhere provides valuable experience in the event that instability in North Korea results in state failure and the necessity to restore order in the northern part of the Korean peninsula.

Grasp the opportunity to show leadership on nuclear nonproliferation commensurate with South Korea's growing interest in the export of nuclear plants. South Korea's participation in activities such as PSI and its leadership in strengthening export controls are important contributions to the prevention of proliferation. South Korea should seek to augment its human and financial contributions to strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and to build greater regional awareness of the need to uphold international nonproliferation norms through the East Asian Summit (EAS), especially given its emergence as a nuclear energy exporter.

Apply South Korea's leadership role in international security to the Asian regional context. South Korea's establishment of a three-thousand-person force dedicated to contributing to international stabilization missions provides South Korea with a capability to contribute to stability anywhere in the world. Thus far, South Korean peacekeeping forces have responded primarily to crises outside Asia. But this capability might also serve as a catalyst to develop and strengthen regional capabilities and structures for cooperation within Asia, especially in response to complex humanitarian emergencies. South Korea may also be in a position to provide both capacity and leadership in building effective regional cooperation within Asia, where effective tools for responding to crisis and managing instability have been slow to develop. It could make a valuable contribution to a strengthened regional crisis response capability by contributing resources to respond to complex humanitarian emergencies and other forms of instability in the region.

In sum, South Korea stands to strengthen its local, regional, and global position and to contribute in a helpful and constructive way to international security if it applies its development experience abroad, takes lessons from stabilization missions to apply to potential instability on

the Korean peninsula, promotes the peaceful and lawful use of nuclear power, and participates in operations in Asia. These steps will consolidate South Korea's contributions to international security and provide a return on its investment by promoting the stability necessary for it to rely on the world trading system for its development.

If South Korea can sustain this broadened role, it will be a positive development both for South Korea's role in the world and for U.S.-ROK alliance cooperation, especially because it will allow the United States and South Korea to pursue shared interests across a broader spectrum of activities, with greater potential effect on prospects for maintaining regional and global stability. But it remains to be seen whether South Korea can maintain and expand these commitments, whether its economy will continue to allow it to spend the significant resources required, and whether its leadership and public will remain committed to the vision of a global Korea. For now, if South Korea can face the obstacles outlined and pursue the recommendations suggested here, its global role seems likely to grow and mature.