



CHAPTER 13

**The ROK-U.S. Alliance and  
Self-Reliant Defense in the ROK<sup>203</sup>**

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**Background**

An alliance is a form of cooperative relationship between countries and it is a formal agreement or association between said countries to cooperate in providing security against common adversaries. The ROK-U.S. alliance is an exemplary model, which incorporates a cooperative relationship between the two countries. For over fifty years, the security cooperation system between the ROK and the U.S. has been primarily based on the 1953 ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty, the Security Consultative Meetings, and the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command defense system.

For half a century, the ROK-U.S. alliance has effectively deterred the recurrence of war on the Korean peninsula and has contributed to the astonishing development of Korea's economic growth. The 37,000 USFK troops, along with its highly sophisticated early warning systems and formidable air power,

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<sup>203</sup> The views expressed in this chapter are solely those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Ministry of National Defense.

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have complimented the ROK force in providing a powerful deterrent against the North Korean threat. Simultaneously, it substantially alleviated the ROK's burden of maintaining a national defense budget without jeopardizing security on the peninsula.<sup>204</sup> Even today, the ROK-U.S. combined defense posture, which is centered on USFK assets, continues to act as the lynchpin of Korea's security, ensuring peace and stability of the Korean peninsula.

Despite these crucial functions, the alliance has been depicted as lop-sided, with the ROK being overly dependant on the U.S. for security matters, unwittingly displeasing the Korean people's pride. Similarly, USFK-related scandals and the inappropriate handling of criminal cases have caused sentimental controversy by raising sovereignty and national pride as political issues.

The so-called anti-U.S. sentiment in Korea began spreading as a corollary to accidents and crimes that were induced by the USFK since the 1990s, and has now become a serious concern between the two countries. In 1991, the rise of the anti-American sentiment leveled after the Status of Forces Agreement revisions and efforts to curb the recurrence of crimes committed by the USFK personnel. However, when the U.S. military court exonerated the two servicemen charged in the death of two schoolgirls during a training accident in June 2002, the anti-U.S. sentiment inflamed quickly. Insufficient understanding of the two legal systems and prejudices towards the USFK have led the

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<sup>204</sup> According to the KODEM-II analysis conducted by KIDA, the ROK's total defense expenditure is expected to double as a result of the total USFK withdrawal. Had the USFK completely withdrawn from Korea in 1975, the ROK's defense expenditure would have jumped to 11% ~ 14.9% of GDP, compared to 5.1% ~ 6.2% now, or 2.2 ~ 2.8 times over the previous level. Similarly, if the USFK withdrawal had taken place in 2000, the expenditure would have jumped by 1.7 ~ 1.8% to 5 ~ 5.5% of GDP, from the original 3.1%. See Chai-Ki Seong, *Defense Expenditures and Economic-Social Development*, KIDA, 1989.

Korean people to demand nullification of the “not guilty” verdict and transfer criminal jurisdiction to the Korean court. At one point, the SOFA was viewed as a mechanism that infringed upon the nation’s sovereignty, as people demanded a major revision to the SOFA. In order to remedy this debacle, both the U.S. and Korean governments took measures, including an expression of regret from the U.S. government<sup>205</sup> and a ROK-U.S. joint effort to improve the SOFA management. Since then, the anti-U.S. mood has been somewhat subdued. The Roh administration, inaugurated in February 2003, also took active measures to ameliorate the bilateral relations and has managed to neutralize the domestic tension towards the U.S. to a certain degree.

Mirroring the spread of anti-U.S. sentiment in Korea, a negative perception towards South Korea began growing within the United States, culminating in certain media suggestions that both the U.S. troops presence in Korea and the ROK-U.S. alliance itself must be re-examined.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> During U.S. State Secretary Powell’s visit to Korea on December 9, 2002, he delivered President Bush’s message of “deepest apologies” for the death of two schoolgirls during the training accident. On the 13th of the same month, President Bush called President Kim Dae-jung and expressed “deep sadness and regret” for the death of two schoolgirls. See *Yonhap News*, December 14, 2002 (online edition).

<sup>206</sup> *The New York Times* columnist William Safire’s argument is that had the USFK not been deployed in the KPA’s “kill zone,” the U.S. would have had much more discretion in eliminating North Korea’s nuclear facilities. Instead, at present, the USFK serves as a hampering factor in any Western actions designed to raid North Korean nuclear sites (*The New York Times*, December 6, 2002). Mr. Safire also said that President Bush, who is ridiculed by the South Koreans, should withdraw the U.S. forces from Korea and should have both Koreas talk with one another directly (*The New York Times*, January 2, 2003). Robert Novak said that Americans are disgusted at the South Korean attitudes towards Washington, and Americans should not tolerate Korean complaints any longer. Accordingly, the U.S. should make Korea responsible for its own actions (*The Washington Post*, January 6, 2003). William Drennan of the U.S. Institute of Peace said it is not true that USFK will remain on the peninsula in consideration of the U.S. national interest despite significant dissent from Korean citizens. He also said that U.S. forces would withdraw

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Before this cloud of tension cleared, President Roh Moo-hyun, in a National Independence Day commemorative speech on August 15, 2003, expressed his will to pave a way for a self-reliant military within the next 10 years. During an Armed Forces Day speech on October 1, 2003, he reiterated the need for Korea to procure a self-reliant defense capability within the next 10 years to secure a strong security foundation.

President Roh's use of the term caused a political debate among wide audiences on appropriateness and applicability of the term "self-reliant defense." Some from the media industry criticized it as a dangerous policy decision that could lead to the deterioration of the alliance and presupposed the withdrawal of the USFK, warning the public that this criticism might ultimately undermine the fidelity of the ROK-U.S. alliance.<sup>207</sup> In light of the above-mentioned official pronouncements of President Roh Moo-hyun, commander in chief of the ROK Armed Forces, the ROK military analysts began to ask the following questions: will the pursuit of a self-reliant defense necessarily result in deterioration of the alliance, and what is in common between the pursuit of a self-reliant defense policy and the alliance?

This study focuses on the nature of alliances, the concept of self-reliant defense, and a review of the self-reliant defense policy that the ROK government has been pursuing. This chapter concludes that the ROK government's drive to establish a self-reliant defense is neither based on an intention to dismantle, nor entails the dismantlement of the ROK-U.S. alliance. Rather, the

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from Korea should the host nation disapprove of their presence (*The Kyunghyang Daily*, December 6, 2002).

<sup>207</sup> For detailed information, see the following materials: Kim Seung-hwan, "Self-reliant defense in absence of ROK-U.S. alliance?" *The Joongang Daily*, Seoul, August 21, 2003; *The Dong-A Ilbo* editorial, Seoul, August 27, 2003; *The Chosun Ilbo* editorial, Seoul, September 3, 2003.

ROK's pursuit of self-reliant defense is related to the complex nature of alliance-making, the so-called secondary alliance dilemma. Additionally, a self-reliant policy pursued by the ROK is not an absolute self-reliant defense but it is a practical self-reliant defense.

## Theories and Practice

### *Functions of Alliance*

Generally, the concept of alliance has been academically professed in many ways.<sup>208</sup> In a rather narrow perspective, Holsti, Hopmann, and Sullivan define alliance as a formal agreement between two or more nations to collaborate on national security issues.<sup>209</sup> On the contrary, Osgood suggests a much broader definition of alliance: a latent war community, based on general co-operation that goes beyond formal provisions and that the signatories must continually cultivate in order to preserve mutual confidence in each other's fidelity to specified obligations.<sup>210</sup> The alliance between the ROK and the United States is an example of a narrow definition of alliance; both countries established a formal agreement in the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1953.

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<sup>208</sup> For more explanation of the definition, formation, values, and management of an alliance, see George Liska, *Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962.; Stephan M Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Cornell University Press, 1987; Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics", *World Politics* 36 (1984): 461-495, and "Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut," in *The Evolution of Theory in International Relations*, edited by Robert L. Rothstein, University of South Carolina Press, 1991; Arthur A. Stein, *Why Nations Cooperate: Circumstance and Choice in International Relations*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990.

<sup>209</sup> Ole R. Holsti, Hopman P. T. and Sullivan J.D., *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances: Comparative Studies*, New York: A Wiley-Interscience Publication, 1973, especially p.4.

<sup>210</sup> Robert E. Osgood, *Alliance and American Foreign Policy*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968, especially p.19.

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To understand the creation and continuation of the alliance between the ROK and the United States, we need to look at the general function of alliances. Fedder argues that alliances are instituted to perform one or more of the following functions:

- (1) Augmentative: A allies with B in order to add B's power to its own in relation to a given outside enemy; therefore,  $A+B>C$ .
- (2) Preemptive: A allies with B in order to prevent B's power from being added to that of A's enemy; therefore,  $A>C-B$ .
- (3) Strategic: A enters into an alliance with B "simply" for the purpose of obtaining the use of B's territory for A's strategic purposes (military bases, refueling depots, etc.).<sup>211</sup>

This explanation is quite applicable to the ROK-U.S. alliance. For the ROK, the augmentative function is the key factor in the creation and continuation of the alliance. The ROK allied with the United States in order to deter a possible North Korean attack with the support of the power capabilities of the United States. On the other hand, for the United States, the preemptive and strategic functions are the key factors in the creation and continuation of the alliance between the two countries. The United States allied with the ROK in order to prevent the ROK from becoming a communist country like the former Soviet Union, which had been the United States' enemy during the Cold War era. In addition, the United States allied for the purpose of obtaining the use of the ROK's territory for its strategic purposes. Although the ROK is less important now than during the Cold War era, it is still considered as an important U.S.

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<sup>211</sup> Edwin H. Fedder, "The Concept of Alliance," *International Studies Quarterly* 12 (1968): 65-86, especially p.67.

outpost in the East Asian region that engages the interests of many great powers - the United States, Russia, China, and Japan.

*Benefits and Drawbacks of Alliance*

Functionally, the biggest advantage of an alliance, wherein a comparatively weak nation could benefit from a more powerful partner, is affording security and deterring war. In the case of Korea, it is estimated that the ROK armed forces' capability matches only about 64-78% of North Korea's, not enough for a self-reliant deterrence measure against the North Korean threat. To compensate for the gap, Korea is operating a ROK-U.S. combined defense system, which fully takes advantage of the USFK's enormous military assets, thereby maintaining war deterrence and a military superiority over North Korea.<sup>212</sup> The value of the USFK assets is roughly estimated to be at approximately 20 billion U.S. dollars, which balloons to over 100 billion U.S. dollars if deployment forces are included.

Meanwhile, despite the intrinsic advantage of sustaining stability at lower cost through the operation of the alliance, the weaker ally must bear the burden of constant fear, including the fears of abandonment and entrapment. Due to an innately anarchic notion of international order, there exists a certain limitation in guaranteeing a perpetual alliance. Attesting to this notion, Goldstein elucidates the small nation's fear of abandonment, arguing that "[in] an international system where there is not reliable authority to enforce contracts, commitments are inherently uncertain, and states who would depend on others must worry about the risks of abandonment."<sup>213</sup> For example,

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<sup>212</sup> According to the KRIS report, *2002 East Asia Strategic Balance* (January 27, 2002), which quotes research results by Dr. Bruce W. Bennett from the U.S. Rand Corporation, the ROK-U.S. combined forces' capability (which includes USFK's assets) is estimated to exceed North Korea's military capability by 20~30%.

<sup>213</sup> Avery Goldstein, "Discounting the Free Ride: Alliances and Security in the

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changes in the U.S. foreign policy toward Taiwan and Mainland China, as well as the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, were seen as the “abandonment of an ally.”<sup>214</sup>

Looking back at the past 50 years of the ROK-U.S. alliance, Korea has been more concerned about abandonment than entrapment.<sup>215</sup> In the bilateral relationship, there have been numerous occasions when the fear of abandonment was widespread. In 1969, the United States proclaimed the so-called Nixon Doctrine, which led to the unilateral removal of nearly 20,000 U.S. soldiers from Korea -- mostly from the 7th Infantry Division -- and the concurrent transfer of the U.S. 7th ID’s frontline defense missions to the ROK Army in 1971. This development contributed to the growing suspicion and apprehension of the ROK government and its citizens regarding the firmness of the U.S. security commitment on the Korean peninsula.

In another case, in 1977, President Carter declared his intention to withdraw all U.S. ground forces from Korea in four years.<sup>216</sup>

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Postwar World,” *International Organization* 49 (1995): 39-71, especially p.39.

<sup>214</sup> Ronald D. McLaurin, “Security Relations: Burden-Sharing in a Changing Strategic Environment,” in *Alliance Under Tension: The Evolution of South Korean-U.S. Relations*, edited by Manwoo Lee, Ronald D. McLaurin and Chung-in Moon, Westview Press and Kyoungnam University Press, 1988, especially p.170.

<sup>215</sup> Fears of “entrapment” were hardly observable among the Korean public prior to the 2000s. The burden of entrapment within the ROK-U.S. relationship began to surface since 2000. In contrast to the previous period, the Korean public began to perceive the possibility of entrapment in the early 2000s. According to a Gallup poll (Seoul, Korea), conducted on May 22, 2000, by phone, out of 1,033 randomly selected men and women of over 20 years in age, 13% of respondents believe that there is a high possibility of Korean involvement in a unwanted war due to the presence of the U.S. forces on Korean soil.

<sup>216</sup> Mr. Carter first indicated his support for withdrawing the U.S. troops from the Korean peninsula at the meeting with the Editorial Board of *the*



Due to strong resistance from the U.S. military leadership and lawmakers, however, the Carter plan was scrapped. But, the USFK presence was still reduced by 3,400, albeit any further USFK reduction was frozen in 1981.<sup>217</sup> Nevertheless, the original U.S. uncompromising stance in favor of troop withdrawal and subsequent unilateral nullification of the reduction plan without proper consultations with Seoul undermined the credibility of the U.S. security commitment to Korea.

In 1990, the East Asia Security Initiative based on the Nunn-Warner amendment of July 1989, presented another three-phase USFK withdrawal plan. After withdrawing 7,000 USFK troops from Korea in 1992, in accordance with the EASI Phase I guidelines, Washington halted the withdrawal process due to the eruption of the North Korean nuclear issue. Yet again, the U.S. unilateral announcement, without prior consultations with the ROK counterpart, regarding its plans to reduce the size of USFK and to redefine its missions as supplementary to the ROK forces led to a disturbance of the balance of power on the peninsula, created a sense of uneasiness, and provoked the fear of abandonment in Seoul.

As attested in the cases just mentioned, Washington is used to making and proclaiming decisions on USFK withdrawal without due consultations with Seoul, which amplifies the Korean

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*Washington Post*, on January 16, 1975, and used this as an important issue during the 1976 presidential campaign.

<sup>217</sup> After the President's formal announcement of the withdrawal plan, General John K. Singlaub, Chief of Staff of the United States Forces in Korea, expressed his strong opposition to the withdrawal plan, stating publicly "If we withdraw our ground forces on the schedule suggested, it will lead to war." (*The Washington Post*, May 19, 1977). General George S. Brown, Chairman of the JCS, and General John Vessy, the U.S. Commander in Korea, also opposed to the Carter plan. Many U.S. congressional leaders such as Senator Hubert Humphrey and Senator John Glenn also had serious misgivings about the President's withdrawal plan.

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perception of the possibility of abandonment by the United States.

Another burden that a weaker ally may have to carry is of a political-psychological nature, namely, foreign infringement on sovereignty and national pride. This is a rather perceptual discomfort, as opposed to actual or physical discomfort, which is caused by a stronger ally when a weaker partner feels its sovereignty is violated and national pride is hurt.

The Mutual Defense Treaty, which was willfully entered into by the Korean government, serves as the foundation of the ROK-U.S. alliance and contains no article that violates either nation's code of sovereignty. In regards to the wartime operational control (OPCON), as a result of the July 1950 Taejon agreement, the ROK government relegated the OPCON to Commander of Combined Forces Command, who falls under the control of both the U.S. and ROK presidents, National Command and Military Authorities, and the Military Committee -- the top working-level military command. Since strategic directives and guidance are passed down to the CFC Commander via the ROK-U.S. Military Committee, the OPCON issue is irrelevant to the accusation that the United States infringes upon Korea's sovereignty.<sup>218</sup>

Korea procures 70-80% of its weapons from the United States in order to ensure the interoperability within the alliance. But, as long as Korea retains fiscal, technological, and operational controls over these new procurements, procurement of the U.S.-made weapons systems does not entail the U.S. coercion of

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<sup>218</sup> The NCMA, as nation's authority as a sovereign state, entails authority over national military establishment, encompassing control over personnel management, operations, logistics, intelligence, and all other related fields. On the contrary, OPCON is limited to the military in content, such as tactical control over the units serving designated purposes and executing specific assignments. These two terms, therefore, have a clear distinction.

Korea with respect to its sovereign decisions.<sup>219</sup> Nevertheless, many Koreans falsely perceive that Korea's sovereignty and pride are being exploited within the framework of the ROK-U.S. alliance. According to a recent poll, 44.9% of Koreans objected to the U.S. presence in Korea, reasoning that it interfered with Korean's independence and sovereignty. Also, 42.4% of those polled named restoration of national pride as a direct positive effect emanating from anti-U.S. demonstrations.<sup>220</sup>

Since 2002 the issues of national sovereignty and pride have drawn a lot of attention among the Korean public. In June 2002, two schoolgirls were killed during a USFK training accident. When the U.S. military court found the accused not guilty, the Korean general public regarded the court's finding as a distortion of sovereignty and an offense to national pride, and strongly demanded a sweeping revision of the SOFA and a retrial of the case in a Korean court. The Korean ordinary people failed to recognize the difference in the U.S. and ROK legal systems and instead interpreted the verdict as a direct challenge against Korea's national sovereignty.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Jong-Ho Yoon and Jong-Chul Choi, *Self-reliant Defense and ROK-U.S. Combined Defense System*, KNDU Security Affairs Institute, 1988.

<sup>220</sup> This information is from the same Gallup poll (Seoul, Korea) results, introduced previously.

<sup>221</sup> The U.S. Uniform Code of Military Justice prescribes the defendant to select a jury comprised of military judges or military personnel. In this case, the two defendants both chose military personnel as jurors. Here, the number of jurors must be at a minimum 5 U.S. military members currently in service. Therefore, a civilian or a KATUSA cannot be selected as a juror. Furthermore, should the defendant be proven not guilty, to safeguard the defendant's rights, the military prosecutors are not given an option to appeal. Therefore, one can say that the trial was conducted in a legally appropriate fashion, as it adhered to the U.S. UCMJ. Those Koreans, who argued that the trial was not fair because all jurors were American in nationality, should be reminded that the law was applied correctly under the provisions of the existing legal system.

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In sum, in a cooperative partnership and alliance, a weaker country tends to derive benefits in terms of augmenting its war deterrence capabilities and lowering the costs of security maintenance, while suffering from constant fear of abandonment and a public overreaction to wrongful behavior by a stronger counterpart.

### **The Nature of Alliance and Desire for Self-Reliant Defense**

Allies have a tendency to pursue a self-reliant defense due to the fear of abandonment in the anarchical international system. Fearing abandonment (by the larger ally) under the anarchical context of the international system and desiring a greater self-reliant defense, allies voluntarily allocate more domestic resources to national defense spending.<sup>222</sup> Yet, what they seek is a self-reliant defense relative to economic and other variables, not absolute self-defense independent of all others. In other words, it is a dilemma of devising the optimal level at which a country maintains its self-reliant defense deemed appropriate in order to manage surrounding risk factors. Here, the weaker ally's tolerance for the perceived violations of its sovereignty and pride is also factored in. Snyder characterizes the dilemma faced by such allies as a "secondary alliance dilemma."<sup>223</sup> He argues that the most important determinant of the alliance security dilemma is the relative dependence of the allies on the alliance. The more dependent an ally is, the more likely that it will fear abandonment.

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<sup>222</sup> See Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36(1984): 461-495; Oran R. Young, *International Cooperation: Building Regimes for National Resources and the Environment*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989; Avery. Goldstein, "Discounting the Free Ride: Alliances and Security in the Postwar World," *International Organization* 49(1995): 39-71.

<sup>223</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36(1984): 461-495; Lee Jong-sup and Uk Heo, "The U.S.-South Korea Alliance," *Asian Survey* 41(2001): 822-845.

Desire for a self-reliant defense is often regarded as a real-life example of the “public goods” theory. Since deterrence itself is a non-exclusive good, a weaker ally tends to get a free ride by leveraging the neighboring allies’ powerful military at no extra cost.<sup>224</sup> But in essence, national defense or security is not a public good.<sup>225</sup> While the collective goods theory of alliance-making emphasizes the tendency of small allies to get a free ride, the neorealist perspective suggests that states make efforts to avoid dependence on allies. Hence, the tendency to secure a self-reliant defense voluntarily outweighs the inclination for a free ride. On an individual standpoint, nearly every nation is faced with a dilemma, deciding where it will draw the line between cost and effect, as pertaining to alliances.

In the end, all allies must choose between the desire to deter a military attack and maintain stability at a substantially lower cost and the desire to institute self-reliance in order to eliminate (or at least minimize) the abandonment fear factor, albeit incurring certain costs. Hence, in deciding the relative level of self-reliance, allies fall into the so-called “secondary alliance dilemma” before the actual dilemma itself.

### *Korean Concept of Self-Reliant Defense*

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<sup>224</sup> Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser, "An Economic Theory of Alliances," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 48(1966): 266-279.

<sup>225</sup> See for more information, Todd Sandler, "Impurity of Defense: An Application to the Economic of Alliances," *Kyklos* 30(1977): 443-483, and "The Economic theory of Alliances: A Survey," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37(1993): 446-483; Todd Sandler and John F. Forbes, "Burden Sharing, Strategy, and the Design of NATO," *Economic Inquiry* 18(1980): 425-444; M.C. McGuire, "U.S. Assistance, Israeli Allocation, and the Arms Race in the Middle East," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 26(1982): 199-235; Lee Jong-sup and Uk Heo, "The U.S.-South Korea Alliance," *Asian Survey* 41(2001): 822-845.

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The term “self-reliant defense,” which means one’s own independent defense, needs to be given more attention. According to a Korean dictionary the term “self” includes the meaning of independence, autonomy, and sovereignty. Moreover, based on *Webster’s Dictionary*, the meaning of independence is to be self-reliant or in a state of being freed from another’s opinions or actions. “Autonomy” is listed as the state of being self-ruled, a self-ruling authority, or having the freedom of action. Sovereignty is an authority that exercises supreme power over a limited area. As such, we can define the conventional use of the “self-reliant defense” concept as the act of deciding/adjusting/controlling behavior related to national defense and voluntarily applying the military force to protect a nation.

Some scholars describe it as an act of determining ways and means for national defense, enhancing defense capabilities, and dictating the military force autonomously in defending a nation.<sup>226</sup>

***Figure 13.1. Self-Reliant Defense Spectrum***

A	B	C
Dependent Defense	Practical Reliant Defense	Absolute Self- Reliant Defense

As shown above, the self-reliant defense concept embeds three elements. First, in terms of will, it entails independently establishing defense-related policy and strategy. This “independent decision-making” also includes conceptualizing

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<sup>226</sup> See the following materials on the concept of self-reliant defense: Min Byung-chul, *Korea Defense Theory*, Koryeowon, 1983; Jong-Ho Yoon and Jong-Chul Choi, *op. cit.*; Jun-Ho Jung and Jong-Ho Yoon, *Establishing Concept And Study on the Correlation of Self-reliant Defense And Multilateral Security/Group Security*, KNDU Security Affairs Institute, 1998.

and concretizing various visions pertaining to the objective, policy, and strategy of a nation's defense. Second, the concept implies having the ability to protect one's nation with its own military power. This extends to procuring manpower, equipment, and funds for defense with its own power. Third, it incorporates the ability to manage and exert military capabilities based on one's own will.

Although the concept intrinsically exhibits those three elements, interpretation of the term "self-reliant" alone does not clearly delineate the true concept of a "self-reliant defense." At the 35th SCM, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated that not even the U.S., the world's largest military powerhouse, fully satisfies the theoretical notion of a "self-reliant defense."<sup>227</sup> In this case, the "self-reliant" concept entails an absolute and complete self-reliance of military, as shown in Figure 13.1. When all three requirements above are fully met, absolute self-reliant defense holds true. This absolute self-reliant defense enables a nation to build and maintain military capabilities using an internal budget; to exclusively establish defense policies and strategies; and to exercise its military influence based solely on its own will. In today's world, it is safe to assume that no single nation can easily meet all three requirements.

In reality, however, many countries adopt the term "self-reliant defense." This trend could be interpreted in two aspects. First, as shown in Figure 13.1, most of the countries use the term for political purposes with a meaning opposite to "dependent defense." For instance, when a nation sufficiently, albeit not completely, meets the above-mentioned three requirements, it utilizes the term to dissociate itself from a stigma of "dependent defense." In this context, a country is considered to be capable of maintaining a "self-reliant defense" if it can make independent decisions over defense matters and can manage its forces

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<sup>227</sup> *The Chosun Ilbo*, Seoul, November 20, 2003.

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autonomously, despite its reliance on the military's functional integration with allies in order to achieve success in its own defense.<sup>228</sup>

Furthermore, it is difficult to draw a fine line between "practical self-reliant defense" and an "absolute self-reliant defense." Among these three factors, the military capability aspect makes the distinction particularly difficult. In the 21st century, the emergence of threats that are diverse in nature, including international terrorism and proliferation of WMDs, somewhat diluted the meaning of the category of absolute self-reliant defense. In certain cases, a country must stand ready not only against an eminent foe but also against other potential enemies, complicating its decision as to what ratio of self-defense to external assistance it should rely upon in the defense of its national territory and integrity.

Hence, the concept of "self-reliant defense" encompasses a broad spectrum of descriptions, ranging from more lenient "practical self-defense" to narrower "absolute and complete self-reliant defense." The Ladder of Abstraction, suggested by Satori, explains that the conventional "self-reliant" concept tends to speak more of denotation (extension), and not as much of connotation (intention).<sup>229</sup> According to this theoretical model, "self-reliant defense" is a more abstract and general concept that has a rather minimal connotation to properties of the three factors mentioned above.

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<sup>228</sup> Jong-Ho Yoon and Jong-Chul Choi, *op. cit.*

<sup>229</sup> According to Satori's arguments, denotation appoints to the types of subject that the term is applied to and connotation is related to the properties that regulate the subject which the term is applied to. That is, denotation is the sum of the subject, which the term designates, and connotation is the sum of required properties to be included in the connotation. See, Giovanni Satori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," *The American Political Science Review* 64(1970): 1033-1053.



## **Evaluation of Self-Reliant Defense Policy in the ROK**

On April 19, 1973, after hearing about the U.S. unilateral decision to withdraw nearly 20,000 USFK members from the peninsula as per the Nixon Doctrine enunciated in 1969, the then ROK President Park Chung-hee ordered his military leadership to establish an independent military strategy and to develop a force improvement plan in order to achieve self-reliant defense at the Ulchi-Focus Lens 1973 status briefing.<sup>230</sup> As per the Presidential directive, the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff drafted a joint basic military strategy in July 1973, compiling modernization plans of all military branches, and established the Eight-Year Defense Plan (1974 to 1981). This marked the ROK's first attempt at establishing an independent force management plan. As per this plan, the Yulgok Project was launched in 1974 as part of a major force improvement program. The Yulgok Project continued until 1986 when it was re-titled the Force Maintenance Program, and then, in 1996, it was renamed the Defense Capabilities Improvement Project.

Currently, President Roh Moo-hyun's participatory government has chosen "establishment of a peace regime on the Korean peninsula" as a primary objective of the administration's vision on security matters, as a mean to actualize its "policy of peace and prosperity towards North Korea. As such, the ROK Ministry of National Defense has selected "establishment of a firm national defense posture to ensure peace" as the MND's own objective, and currently takes the necessary steps to materialize the number one national defense policy goal -- an advanced self-reliant defense.<sup>231</sup>

The ROK government is steadfastly focused on acquiring deterrence capabilities against existing threats, within an

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<sup>230</sup> More information about the force improvement plan explained here can be found in Jong-Ho Yoon and Jong-Chul Choi *op. cit.* *Defense Policy 2008 National Defense, ROK, Participatory Government*

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accelerated timeline, while it procures advanced force capabilities against potential future threats under the concept of self-sufficient defense readiness. To meet this end, the government is strengthening supports for domestic R&D and defense industries.

To examine the force improvement plan per category, first, the ROK looks to improve its strategic surveillance and early warning capability by introducing military satellites and AWACS. Simultaneously, the MND plans to procure an automated command system and tactical C4I systems to enhance C4I electronic warfare capability.<sup>232</sup> In a move to equip the ground forces with advanced maneuverability and strike ability, the ROK Army intends to acquire next-generation tanks, armored vehicles, and multi-purpose helicopters, along with upgraded ground-to-ground guided-weapon systems to improve its ability to attack key enemy targets. Also, in order to improve the ability to carry out offensive maneuvers and strike strategic targets, assets such as a large-caliber multiple-launch rocket system, K1A1 tanks, and K-9 self-propelled artillery system are in the acquisition pipeline. For maritime defense, in order to better protect the sea lines of communication and enhance the maritime control, the ROK Navy plans to add KDX-II, KDX-III (a 7,000-tonnage Aegis destroyer), and large transport vessels to strengthen the capability of the task fleet in responding against diverse threats. Furthermore, it is scheduled to procure 214-class submarines and mid-size submarines -- assets viable for strategic use. Likewise, the ROK Air Force is in the process of introducing F-15K and KF-16 multi-role fighters -- aircraft capable of long-range operations designed to carry out air superiority missions and strategic target strike missions within the air defense zone and to deploy stand-off precision-guided

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<sup>232</sup> More information about the force improvement plan, pursued by President Roh Moo-hyun's Participatory Government, can be found in the *National Defense Budget in Preparation of the Future 2003* (<http://www.mnd.go.kr>), published by the Ministry of National Defense, ROK.

munitions such as JDAM. To increase survivability, the ROK intends to ready multi-layer air-defense systems via the procurement of *Shingoong*, *Choenma*, and other mid/long-range anti-air guided weapons, as well as protective facilities and new decontamination vehicles that shield against biochemical attacks on individual and military units.

The timeline for asset deployment has been readjusted, with the new target year for each asset is as follow: F-15K fighter by 2009; AWACS, SAM-X, Tanker, K1A1 tanks by 2010; and KDX-III by 2010. The ROK government has already reflected this force improvement plan in the 2004 budget: at 2.8% of the 2004 budget forecast, or approximately KRW 19 trillion, the figure that represents 8.1% year-over-year increase to KRW 17.5 trillion in 2003. Compared to 5-6% annual increase since 2000, the 2004 increment is considered substantial. The 2004 defense budget makes up about 16% of the total government budget, and marks the first time in 10 years (since 1993) that the comparative defense budget rate has seen an increase.

Many observers wonder whether Korea's quest for self-reliant defense is necessarily tantamount to the dismantlement of the ROK-U.S. alliance. President Roh Moo-hyun reiterated in his speech on August 15, 2003 that, as Korea pursues self-reliant defense, the ROK-U.S. alliance must grow even stronger, emphasizing that self-reliant defense and the military alliance are not contradictory but rather supplementary to each other. In his speech on October 1, 2003, he reaffirmed the importance of bolstering security cooperation with neighboring countries, with the staunch ROK-U.S. alliance as the foundation.

Korea's force improvement effort is currently underway as part of the future development of the ROK-U.S. military alliance. At the 34th SCM in 2002, the two allies signed the Terms of Reference agreement, which established a two-year policy coordination and consultation process titled the Future of the

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ROK-U.S. Alliance Policy Initiative. During the FOTA consultations, Seoul and Washington agreed on the transfer of selected military missions from USFK to the ROKA, reflecting the allies' mutual desire for the ROK to assume more military missions as the ROK's economic and military capabilities have expanded over the years; they also agreed on the withdrawal of 12,500 USFK personnel from Korea by 2008 and relocation of the Yongsan Garrison and Second Infantry Division units from Seoul and the vicinity of DMZ to the concentration areas south of the Han River located in two hubs around Osan and Pyongtaek. From the ROK's perspective, the troop reduction, redeployment, and mission transfer are all in line with the aim of achieving self-reliant defense.<sup>233</sup>

At the same time, the ROK and United States also collaborate on various plans to improve each other's military capabilities with a shared goal to supplement the combined military forces. As such, USFK is in the process of implementing a plan to upgrade its war deterrence capability and reinforce stability on the Korean peninsula by investing eleven billion U.S. dollars from 2003 to 2006 in the acquisition of new weapons and technologies. Likewise, as its role broadens in its own defense, the ROK is pushing forward with its own force improvement plan.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> According to the press release by the ROK MND dated July 25, 2003, in April 2003, the U.S. conveyed its intent to transfer 10 missions, including the JSA security mission, to the ROK forces. The ROK JCS has conducted an in-depth review, while also considering the security environment and current capability. After having a series of close consultations with the USFK regarding the exact timing of transfer and detailed procedures, the ROK JCS has decided to take up 8 out of 10 proposed missions. As for the Joint Security Area (JSA) security mission, the two agreed to maintain the current system for the time being, while gradually reducing the U.S. contingents. As for the counter-fire HQ mission, the two decided to certify the ROK's capability prior to determining the exact date of transfer. As stated in the press release, the mission transfers should help reinforce war deterrence and bolster the ROK-U.S. alliance, further contributing to peace and regional stability on and around the Korean peninsula.

<sup>234</sup> Refer to the Joint Press Statement of the ROK-U.S. Defense Ministerial

Because the ROK's military security still depends heavily on the ROK-U.S. combined defense forces, the self-reliant defense of the ROK is currently under development via close consultation with the United States. In this regard, pursuit of self-reliant defense for the ROK does not entail the dismantlement of the ROK-U.S. alliance; instead, the two allies pursue it through close consultations in a cooperative and supplementary fashion with a future-oriented outlook.

Some analysts may wonder whether the ROK's quest for self-reliant defense is "aimed at achieving an absolute and complete self-reliant defense." The answer is no. The ROK government is not pursuing "self-reliant defense" in absolute and exclusive terms, understood as the ability to defend one's territory solely by one's own military capabilities deployed through one's independent decision-making processes. No country, including Korea, can easily conclude that a nation can perfectly defend itself from all hostilities, including potential future threats, solely via the existing force improvement plan. Hence, the ROK government is seeking a more general concept of a "self-reliant defense" to compliment its alliance strategy.

## **Conclusion**

The Republic of Korea has comparatively weaker force capabilities than North Korea. This notwithstanding, for the past fifty years, South Korea has maintained a war deterrence capability against the North and has sustained peace and stability on the peninsula through a combined defense system, taking full advantage of the enormous military assets of USFK forces within the context of the ROK-U.S. alliance. South Korea has maintained security with comparatively low costs, appropriating more funds to achieve economic growth.

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In the past fifty years, on numerous occasions, Korea felt the fear of possible abandonment by the U.S. ally. The proclamation of Nixon Doctrine in 1969, the withdrawal of U.S. 7th ID in 1973, the announcement about the withdrawal of the U.S. ground forces from Korea and subsequent partial reduction of USFK in 1977, and the U.S. troops reduction in the early 1990s have all raised the fears of abandonment among the Korean public and increased Korean doubts about on the U.S. security commitment on the peninsula. Moreover, the USFK-related scandals and inappropriate handling of certain criminal cases have caused sentimental controversy by raising sovereignty and national pride as political issues and have led to increasing popular demands for a more equitable alliance, in particular through the SOFA revision. These concerns over abandonment, sovereignty, and national pride issues pushed the ROK government facing the so-called secondary alliance dilemma to pursue self-reliant defense.

There are apprehensions in Korea and abroad that President Roh Moo-hyun's policy of promoting self-reliant defense may damage the ROK-U.S. alliance. But, the ROK government promotes a self-reliant defense policy, not with the intention to dismantle the ROK-U.S. alliance. The ROK government pursues self-reliant defense through closer consultation with the United States, stressing that the relationship of ROK's self-reliant defense and the ROK-U.S. alliance are complementary and cooperative. Additionally, the ROK government's notion of self-reliant defense is not absolute, but a practical self-reliant defense concept. The Roh administration is fully aware that based on the ROK's current force improvement plan, the Republic of Korea will not be capable of defending its national sovereignty and territorial integrity from all eminent foes, including potential future threats, without the assistance from its traditional ally, the United States of America. 