

# The Trust-building Process and Korean Unification

*KINU* Unification Forum 2013

Edited by *Choi Jinwook*

# **The Trust-building Process and Korean Unification**

Printed January 2014  
Published January 2014

**Published by** Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU)  
**Publisher** President, Korea Institute for National Unification  
**Editor** Center for North Korean Studies, KINU

**Registration number** No.2-2361 (April 23, 1997)  
**Address** 123, 4.19-ro(Suyudong), Gangbuk-gu, Seoul 142-728, Korea  
**Telephone** (82-2) 900-4300; (82-2) 901-2606  
**Fax** (82-2) 901-2546  
**Homepage** <http://www.kinu.or.kr>  
**Design·Print** dooildesign (82-2) 2285-0936

ISBN 978-89-8479-767-3 93340  
Price 8,000 won

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All KINU publications are available for purchase at all major bookstore in Korea.  
Also available at Government Printing Office Sales Center  
Store (82-2) 734-6818; Office (82-2) 394-0337

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The analyses, comments, and other opinions contained in this monograph are those of the authors' and do not necessarily represent the views of the Korea Institute for National Unification.

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# The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula and Outlook for Inter-Korean Relations\*

*Choi Jinwook*

The Trust-building Process has greatly shaped the direction of the Park Geun-hye administration's policy towards North Korea. Trust is a new concept in South Korea's North Korea policy, and the Trust-building Process emerged as a new paradigm for policies on North Korea. The current government has diverged from the pathways of the previous governments. Since the end of the Cold War, South Korea's economic superiority has been utilized as a major policy leverage against the North by means such as deciding the volume of humanitarian aid towards North Korea or economically pressuring the North. However, the Trust-building Process does not confine

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\*This paper has compiled and revised a portion of author's works, "The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula: A Paradigm Shift in Seoul's North Korea Policy," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2013): pp. 23-52; and "The Current Implementation and Future Strategies of the Trust-building Process," In *KINU's International Conference on Strategies to Implement the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula*, Seoul, 2013, pp. 15-60, Seoul: KINU.

policy means to either a hard-line or soft-line stance on South Korea's North Korea policy. As a social capital, trust is an intangible infrastructure between North and South Korea.

Since the inauguration of the Park Geun-hye administration, the Trust-building Process has enjoyed relatively strong support at home and abroad. However, North Korea's responses have not been positive and inter-Korean relations have not made much progress. In fact, the Trust-building Process faces challenges arising from North Korea's increasing uncertainties, nuclear weapons, security threat, etc. In addition, a growing number of voices have been demanding a more realistic and applicable approach to achieve a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations.

The Trust-building Process needs to evolve to bring inter-Korean relations closer and to invoke changes in North Korea. Therefore, something must be done with regard to sensitive issues such as the May 24 Measures, Six-Party Talks, humanitarian aid, and inter-Korean exchange. This paper explains the Park Geun-hye government's Trust-building Process and evaluates how it has been implemented in the first year. Then it suggests how its terms should be improved to become a more realistic policy.

# **I. What is the Trust-building Process?**

## **1. Definition of Trust**

The importance of trust was mentioned in past inter-Korean relations. However, it is the Park Geun-hye government that has first brought the word “trust” to the forefront of the government’s North Korea policy. The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula can be seen as a shift in the North Korea policy paradigm. Regarding the previous governments’ North Korea policies, discussions were mainly focused on policy measures, including military force, containment, negotiations and strategic patience. However, in the Trust-building Process, trust — an intangible infrastructure — is being newly highlighted. The Process emphasizes that it is upon trust that policy measures can have more stable and lasting effects, and inter-Korean relations can develop sustainably.

There are many things to manage and deal with in inter-Korean relations; for example, North Korea’s denuclearization, South-North economic cooperation, humanitarian aid to the North, prisoners of war, and separated families. Trust alone will not solve all these problems, nor will the absence of trust hinder all progress. Even in hostile relations, business cooperation is possible as long as mutual benefits exist. However, the more trust there is, the quicker it will be

to resolve inter-Korean problems. For example, in regards to the issue of humanitarian aid, as trust builds up, there will be less pressure to establish a distribution monitoring system. This is similar to commercial transactions in that the more trust exists between the transacting parties; the less is the need for lawyers, formal contracts, and collaterals.

For the past 20 years, the South Korean government has employed diverse measures and postures like bilateral talks, Six-Party Talks, sanctions, negotiations, and strategic patience to resolve North Korea's nuclear development, but ended without much fruition. Meanwhile, North Korea took a step further to stipulate itself as a nuclear power in its constitution. However, as trust builds up, in the case of the denuclearization process, the need for thorough inspections will reduce. Hence, the denuclearization process can be accelerated, which in turn, enhances mutual trust — creating a virtuous circle. Thus, efforts to build trust must continue, while demanding denuclearization as a precondition to any dealings with North Korea. Therefore acts such as severing communications and neglecting the North Korea problem are undesirable.

Trust has the following characteristics. First, trust means to gradually move on from phase to phase through a series of verifiable conducts, similar to stacking a pile of bricks. Trust cannot be built by a few occasional dramatic events. Trust-building requires time and the less the trust, the more important it is to avoid hasty actions. In the end, inter-Korean relations steadily built on trust would have a lower chance of deterioration.

Second, trust is an intangible infrastructure that promotes the

effectiveness of North Korea policies by, for example, reducing the cost of policy implementation while broadening the possible scope of policies.

Third, the degree of trust is an indicator of progress in inter-Korean relations. As the degree of trust increases, the scale of inter-Korean economic cooperation will also grow, and vice versa.

Fourth, trust does not mean unilateral or unconditional concessions without appropriate verification, nor is it about forgetting North Korea's past provocations and providing compensation. Any further provocation by North Korea will further deteriorate the level of trust, which is already at its lowest. Such security-threatening incidents must be responded firmly.

Fifth, trust not only refers to inter-governmental trust between the South and North, but also to the trust manifested by the international community and Korean people. It is difficult to expect considerable progress in inter-Korean relations if inter-governmental trust, when it exists, is not accompanied by trust from the international community and especially, from the people.

## **2. Three Goals**

### ***a) Normalization of Inter-Korean Relations***

In the current state of inter-Korean relations, most communication channels have been disconnected. The demand for a swift resolution of humanitarian issues, as well as the resumption of mutually

cooperative projects is increasing. The normalization of inter-Korean relations by building trust through exchanges and cooperation on all levels of politics, military, and socio-economic areas is the top priority of the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula.

### ***b) Sustainable Peace***

The second goal of the Trust-building Process is to build a reliable and sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula by thoroughly preparing for any uncertainties. To this end, North Korea must stop its provocations, become a responsible member of the international community, and raise its people's welfare not by developing nuclear weapons but by focusing on economic development. Meanwhile, South Korea must also develop its North Korea policy. Seoul must pursue an 'aligned' North Korea policy that goes beyond the false dichotomy of seeing 'dove' or 'hawk' as an either-or choice. Through transparent policy making and execution, South Korea must garner public support for its North Korea policy.

### ***c) Cornerstone for Unification***

The third goal of the Trust-building Process is to lay the cornerstone for eventual unification. The process after building trust is to form economic cooperation that has political unification as its ultimate goal. However, it would be difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between the process of building trust and the process of forming an economic entity with political union as its ultimate goal.



Unification should not be pushed off to a far future. We must not wait for unification, but must take steps toward unification.... We will eventually achieve unification through forming an economic community based on sustainable peace.<sup>1</sup>

Unification means to go beyond the formation of a community involving mutual recognition, exchanges, and trade. It must be not only *de facto* unification, but also *de jure* unification (legal unification) based on liberal democracy. Management of the division can be achieved with consistency under the clear goal of unification. The vision for unification is like a lighthouse that shines the direction of South Korea's policies on North Korea and unification. When the leader's will is focused on unification, he or she can also garner the support of the people and international cooperation for the vision.

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<sup>1</sup> Park Geun-hye, "Trustpolitik and a New Kind of Korea" (Speech on the Policy Direction for Diplomacy, Security, and Unification, Seoul, November 5, 2012).

## II. Why South Korea Needs the Trust-Building Process

Inter-Korean relations have been in a state of confrontation and animosity for more than six decades. Progress, which have been made at times, were unsustainable and quickly set back. This is mainly due to the lack of trust, which explains why historical events such as the Joint Declaration on July 4, 1972, Basic Agreement in 1992, two North-South summit meetings in 2000 and 2007, all failed to make irreversible progress in inter-Korean relations.

Seoul's unprecedented engagement policy from 1998 to 2007, known as the Sunshine Policy, has failed to change North Korea, partially because North Korea was not confident in its regime stability and was concerned of a possible 'absorption' by the South. North Korea chose to implement its military-first policy instead of reform and opening, and develop nuclear weapons for the regime's survival. Therefore, even a dramatic increase in inter-Korean economic cooperation under the Sunshine Policy was not able to ensure sustainable peace or irreversible progress in inter-Korean relations. In other words, unilaterally seeking an active engagement policy by means such as large-scale inter-Korean economic cooperation, without sufficient inter-Korean trust, will lead to a high level of anxiety and fragility.

On the other hand, the Lee Myung-bak administration promoted a policy of 'strategic patience' as its North Korea policy and faced

criticisms of being negligent without any sincere attempts to deal with the North Korean issue, especially in the face of growing insecurity and need to alleviate tensions.

Expectation is high for the Park Geun-hye government to reach a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations. There have also been calls to send a special envoy to Pyongyang and provide large-scale economic aid to North Korea. However, the current inter-Korean environment does not favor a one-silver-bullet approach to the North Korean issue. South Korea's negative perception towards the North has only been exacerbated by North Korea's third nuclear test. North Korea is also seeking to participate in bilateral talks with Washington first, rather than improving inter-Korean relations.

Economic cooperation with North Korea and providing economic support to the regime may temporarily ease tensions on the Peninsula. However, this would not necessarily guarantee a sustainable peace or improvement in inter-Korean relations. Without trust, any progress in inter-Korean relations would be short-lived. Therefore, rebuilding trust should be the top priority in setting any North Korea policy.

### **III. Implementing the Trust-Building Process**

The South Korean government took a cautious approach and refrained from harboring excessive expectations from North Korea. It also made constant efforts to communicate with the North in order to build trust. Under circumstances in which the level of inter-Korean trust was at rock bottom, the government attempted to solve one issue after the other, building trust in the process rather than attempting to deal with all the issues at the same time.

This is the reason why South Korea separates subjects such as the resumption of the Gaeseong Industrial Complex, reunion of separated families, and the tour business in Mt. Geumgang, in negotiations with the North. Accordingly, the South Korean media decided not to broadcast the 2013 Asian Cup and Interclub Weightlifting Championship held in Pyongyang in order to prevent any immediate upsurge in the public's expectation for rapid improvements in inter-Korean relations when it only took its first step. In the same context, when measures with temporarily strong impact such as summit talks or large-scale aid do not translate into sustainable progress in inter-Korean relations, it could paradoxically interfere with the process of trust-building.

The Park administration claims that it will resolve the crisis on the Korean Peninsula through the close cooperation and coordination

with the international community, and pursue a virtuous cycle of the resolution of the problems on the Korean Peninsula and the peaceful cooperation in Northeast Asia.<sup>2</sup>

In implementing North Korea policies, the importance of international cooperation cannot be overstated. In particular, the assistance of the U.S. and China is crucial for its success. President Park explained the details of the Trust-building Process and drew support from the two respective states in the ROK-U.S. Summit on May 7, 2013 and the ROK-China Summit on June 27, 2013. The two powers especially agreed not to tolerate North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and advocated South Korea's endeavors to communicate with the North.

South Korea's alignment with the international community resulted in the shift of North Korea's attitude from pursuing provocative threats in the early days the Park Geun-hye administration to creating a communicative atmosphere. The U.S. determination for nuclear deterrence and China's strong stance on denuclearization played a significant role. At the Joint Address to the U.S. Congress, President Park Geun-hye proposed the "Northeast Asia Peace Cooperation Plan" (Seoul Process) to ameliorate inter-Korean relations and multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia. This process intends to first focus on non-political areas such as disaster relief, environmental issues, nuclear safety, and humanitarian issues. As trust gradually solidifies, it will then tackle political and military problems such as denuclearization.

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<sup>2</sup> "Trust-Building Process on the Korean Peninsula," p. 12. Ministry of Unification.

South Korea's policy toward North Korea is based on the ROK-U.S. alliance, and improving relations with China whose support is quintessential to improving inter-Korean relations. Beijing's firm stance against Pyongyang after its third nuclear test highlighted the strength of the ROK-U.S.-China alignment. Still, when China raised a different view from the U.S. which demanded the North to take preemptive measures for denuclearization as a precondition to the Six-Party Talks, South Korea chose to side with the U.S.

North Korea conducted its third nuclear test on February 12, 2013, shortly before the inauguration of the Park Geun-hye administration, and then heightened the crisis with threats of provocation thereafter. President Park responded to such threats with warnings that the ROK-U.S. combined forces would immediately retaliate against the North. She affirmed that North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons is unacceptable and the development of inter-Korean relations would be implausible without the North's denuclearization, emphasizing the impossibility of the so-called *Byungjin* Line which pursues nuclear and economic development simultaneously.

## **IV. Challenges to Overcome**

### **1. North Korea's Nuclear Weapons**

North Korea's nuclear weapons, together with North Korea's military provocations, are the most significant obstacles to the Trust-building Process. As long as Pyongyang holds on to its nuclear weapons, progress in inter-Korean relations remains impossible. First, the so-called May 24 Measures which were imposed on North Korea as a result of the sinking of ROKS Cheonan, prevents South Korea from resuming Mt. Geumgang Tourism and making further investments in North Korea. In addition, as stated in the UN Security Council Resolutions, due to North Korea's nuclear and missile tests and repeated violations of previous resolutions, sanctions also ban South Korea and the international community from engaging in economic cooperation with North Korea which would allow bulk cash to flow into the North.

In South Korean society, North Korea's repeated provocations, including the shelling of Yeonpyong Island, resulted in the general public's agreement that the government should not provide large-scale humanitarian aid to the North without proper apology.

## **2. North Korea's Increasing Uncertainties and Execution of Jang Sung-taek**

Despite the rather quick hereditary succession of power from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un, uncertainties regarding the stability of new regime still remain. First, the sudden disappearance of a figure with absolute power causes a power vacuum in any political system, which threatens the stability of the regime. Change in leadership is even more risky in countries like North Korea, where much of stability and leadership depends on the absolute leader. Second, stability also depends on how well the new young leader, Kim Jong-un, copes with the challenges such as chronic economic hardship, social disorder, and external pressures.

The policy direction of the Kim Jong-un regime reflects the dilemmas it faces. First, the 'strong and prosperous nation' policy inherited from Kim Jong-il has self-contradicting aspects. While the regime stresses that the utmost priority is building a robust economy, this directly collides with the priority of building a strong military. Domestically, prioritizing resources on the military such as developing nuclear weapons and missiles hinders the economic growth for the enhancement of public welfare, while externally, it constrains rapprochement in foreign relations and in particular, blocks opportunities for economic cooperation.

Second, there is a paradox in the prospects of reform and opening-up. Unless the regime takes measures for reform and opening-up, its legitimacy becomes more precarious. However, even if it does do so, the continuity of regime is not guaranteed as witnessed by the political transition in Eastern European countries after the collapse of



the Soviet Union. In this regard, although the Kim Jong-un regime talks of change, such change only refers to technical and superficial aspects, while diversity and plurality of the society is even more suppressed by the existing system of authority.

The third dilemma is the paradox of self-determination. Although North Korea asserts that nuclear weapons and satellites have assured its self-determination in the midst of great powers, it has, in fact, led to further isolation from the international community and greater dependence on China for its subsistence. While it is watchful of China's rise and seeks to improve relations with the U.S., South Korea, and Japan, its nuclear and long-range missiles impede any fundamental breakthrough in the respective relationships. Thus, the means for self-determination are paradoxically hampering North Korea's self-determination.

Whether North Korea breaks away from its dilemmas remains a question. However, in the long run, by looking at the North Korea's current policies, the dilemmas could exacerbate both in terms of socio-economic and political instability.

The execution of Jang Sung-taek has undoubtedly increased uncertainties regarding North Korea, although it is still early to tell whether or not the Kim Jong-un regime is stable or on the verge of collapse.

The execution seems to be caused by a combination of power struggle and struggle for economic interests. Jang began expanding his influence after Kim Jong-il's failing health in 2008. He played a crucial role as a political messenger between Kim Jong-il and the power elites. He was known to be the kingmaker in Kim Jong-un's

succession. He assumed powerful positions such as candidate member of Standing Committee, vice chairman of National Defense Commission, and director of Korea Workers' Party's (KWP) Department of Administration.

Jang's rise inevitably encroached the interests of other organizations. The Ministry of People's Security under the supervision of Jang's Department of Administration extended its roles to political affairs beyond routine police work to maintain social order and conflicted with State Security Department. The Department of Administration became independent of the Organization and Guidance Department, only to be its chief rival by organizing its branch offices at the municipal level as well as the provincial level. As KWP normalized its functions and roles, it replaced the National Defense Commission in policy-making process and appointment of personnel.

The effects of the purge of Jang Sung-taek on the Kim Jong-un regime is uncertain. Given the lack of resources to distribute even to powerful organizations and the collapse of centrally-planned economy, the struggle for economic interests may recur. However, the power struggle like Jang's case is unlikely to happen again, particularly if it is intended by Kim Jong-un rather than Jang's rival groups like Organization and Guidance Department.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Insider Perspective: The Removal of Jang Song-taek," *New Focus International*, December 9, 2013.

## V. Upgrading the Trust-building Process

One major shortcoming of the Trust-building Process is considered to be a lack of strategy and specific policy agenda to implement such a conceptual policy; nevertheless, its vision and direction as well as perception and policy means are generally accepted. However, much, if not all, skepticisms disappeared, when President Park Geun-hye proposed “*a foundation for an era of unification,*” a more advanced concept than “*a foundation for peaceful unification*” during the New Year press conference on January 6, 2014. She proclaimed three tasks to lay the foundation for an era of unification. The first task is to make peace. North Korea’s nuclear weapons are the biggest obstacles in improving inter-Korean ties, and South Korea needs to strive to resolve the problem and deter North Korea’s military provocations. The second task is to carry out humanitarian aid, which, together with social exchange, could narrow psychological and cultural differences between North and South Korea. For example, agricultural cooperation, DMZ World Peace Park, the Eurasia Initiative, and Peace and Cooperation Initiative in Northeast Asia are all part of this task. The third task is to promote international cooperation for Korean unification.

It is necessary to maintain the momentum to upgrade the Trust-building Process by materializing more tasks and developing strategic minds to operate the Trust-building Process.

As the Trust-building Process has clarified, in order to build trust, it is essential to begin with small but feasible tasks which includes abiding by existing promises, acquiring diverse communication channels, implementing humanitarian aid, etc., rather than neglecting the situation on the excuse of political controversies over issues such as North Korea's nuclear program.

As President Park said that the “two Koreas must talk even in wartime,” consistent efforts to communicate with North Korea are an integral part of the Process, because trust is impossible to accumulate without communication. Naturally, the absence of mutual trust limits opportunities to resolve numerous pending tasks between the two Koreas. In fact, through the persistent efforts to communicate instead of reproaching or pressuring the North, South Korea was able to reach an agreement with the North in reopening the Gaeseong Industrial Complex.<sup>4</sup>

North Korea's provocations as well as the international community's negative perceptions toward North Korea after the execution of Jang made the Korean Peninsula ever more uncertain. Thus, South Korea should make more efforts to prepare for North Korea's contingency and military provocations. However, such efforts should not discourage

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<sup>4</sup> South Korea proposed a dialogue to settle the Gaeseong Industrial Complex crisis on April 25, 2013. When North Korea refused, the South government ordered South Korean personnel to return from the Complex. On June 6, the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland (CPRF) offered talks, to which South Korea responded with a counter proposal for a minister-level talks. Both sides had a working-level talks, which broke down due to a controversy over the 'level' of chief representatives. On August 4, 2013, the South proposed a working-level talks again, and finally the seventh minister-level talk agreed to the resumption of the Gaeseong Industrial Complex.

South Korea's long term plan to make peace and gradually mend fences with Pyongyang. Potential instances of North Korea's contingency, military provocations, as well as long-term inter-Korean development should be equally prepared for. Each of the three agendas should always be on the table.



# The Future of U.S. Alliances and Partnerships in Asia

## Implications for the U.S.-ROK Alliance

*Abraham M. Denmark*

*“Our overall policy at the present time may be described as one designed to foster a world environment in which the American system can survive and flourish.”*

– NSC 68: U.S. Objectives and Programs for National Security  
April 14, 1950

As the 21st century advances, the United States is focused on renewing its leadership in the world by building its strength at home while shaping an international order that can meet emerging challenges.<sup>1</sup> This strategy will be put to the test in the Asia-Pacific, which is rapidly emerging as the center of gravity for global geopolitics. While the United States will likely remain more powerful than any other state in the Asia-Pacific for several decades to come, fundamental shifts in the regional balance of power, as well as persistent economic

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<sup>1</sup> “National Security Strategy,” The White House, May 2010, p. 1, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf).

problems and budgetary constraints at home, will diminish the relative preponderance of American power and challenge Washington's ability to sustain a liberal international order.

Since the end of World War II, the liberal international order was supported by, and in turn facilitated, American global leadership. In the Asia-Pacific, American power set the conditions for the region to enjoy a historically unprecedented period of stability and economic integration; a period that has also tremendously benefited the United States.

Yet significant regional security challenges — including a rising China, an increasingly multipolar Asia-Pacific, an aggressive North Korea armed with nuclear weapons, and intensifying vulnerability to natural disasters — will weaken the health of the liberal international order, threaten regional stability, and increase demand for American power. Distressingly, supply of this power is not infinite, and will likely be hampered by persistent economic problems and budgetary pressures within the United States. While Washington has announced its intentions to expand the level of diplomatic engagement and military investment it devotes to the Asia-Pacific — most recently in the form of “Strategic Rebalancing” — it is unclear how the necessary high levels of engagement and defense investment can be sustained in the face of persistent economic and budgetary challenges.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Remarks By President Obama to the Australian Parliament,” The White House, November 17, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australianparliament>; Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” *Foreign Policy*, November 2011, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas\\_pacific\\_century?page=full](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century?page=full); Leon Panetta, “The US Rebalance Towards the Asia-Pacific,” *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, June 2, 2012, <http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2012/speeches/first-plenary-session/leon-panetta?locale=en>.



These dynamics have begun to drive the United States to call upon its allies and partners to play a more active role in addressing regional security issues. This is a very natural policy impetus, as its allies and partners — including Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam — could help sustain the liberal international order. Vietnam could also be included in as a potential partner; even though its domestic politics are far from liberal, the interests it shares with the United States (e.g., stable global commons, concerns over the rise of China) make it a potential partner in certain areas. Even China, though a strategic competitor of the United States, is also a cooperative partner with the potential ability to contribute to international public goods.

*In pursuing this strategic objective, the United States faces a significant dilemma in the Asia-Pacific.* If the United States continues to shoulder the vast majority of costs for the defense of its allies and the preservation of the liberal international order, this will simply reinforce allied tendencies toward free riding and will not help address American budgetary challenges. On the other hand, an unconsidered reduction in U.S. capabilities or commitments in the region (or threats to do so) may backfire, and diminish U.S. influence while undermining the perceived reliability of American security commitments. The possible results — a regional security dilemma that could threaten the overall stability of the Asia-Pacific or allied and partner accommodations of China — would be a significant challenge for the United States.

Navigating this dilemma will pose a profound policy challenge. The United States must understand how budgetary constraints and the

Asia-Pacific's rapidly changing strategic dynamics will affect its alliances and partnerships in the region, and how to adjust these relationships in this new strategic environment. Specifically, the United States must develop a new framework that encourages expanded allied and partner investment in military capabilities without inflaming fears of abandonment, sparking a regional arms race, or jeopardizing American influence in the region.

Ultimately, this problem speaks to a broader challenge: how can the United States adjust its alliance relationships for a more multipolar Asia at a time when its own resources may become increasingly limited?

## I. The Future Strategic Context

“Free riding” by smaller allies, and the unequal assumption of costs by the dominant power, is not a new phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it is a natural dynamic of unequal alliance relations — even if the smaller powers benefit greatly from the arrangement — because the dominant power stands to benefit the most by leading collective action, setting agendas, and building legitimacy for its preeminence.<sup>4</sup>

This dynamic existed to varying degrees of intensity between the United States and its allies throughout the Cold War.<sup>5</sup> At times, the

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<sup>3</sup> See John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), pp. 156-157.

<sup>4</sup> See Steven Walt, *Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 30-31; Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Paradox of American Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 142-144; Barry Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 63-64; Glenn H. Snyder, “Security Dilemma in Alliance Policies,” *World Politics*, July 1984, pp. 466-68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2010183>; Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser, “An Economic Theory of Alliances,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, August 1996, pp. 266-279, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1927082>.

<sup>5</sup> See Ellen Hallams and Benjamin Schreer, “Towards a ‘Post-American’ Alliance? NATO Burden-Sharing after Libya,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (2012), pp. 313-327; Robert F. Reed, *The US-Japan Alliance: Sharing the Burden of Defense* (Washington, D.C.: NDU Press, 1983); LTC T. W. Roberts, US Navy, *Retaining the Japanese/American Security Alliance*, 1992, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1992/RTW.htm>; Richard Armitage, “Pivot to Asia: Back to the Future,” *Daily Yomiuri*, July 23, 2012; Robert S. McNamara, Speech before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Montreal, Canada, May 18, 1966, <http://www.oldcolo.com/McNamara/mcnamara.txt>; “Larger Defense Contributions

United States would try to encourage greater military investments by its allies by threatening to reduce its overseas military presence, even though the U.S. never fully carried out its threats.<sup>6</sup> The most direct example of this dynamic is the Nixon Doctrine, in which the United States sought to adapt to a changing strategic environment by reducing American unconditional defensive guarantees to lesser (i.e., non-treaty) allies and opened the floodgates of U.S. military aid to partners around the world. As a result, the U.S. greatly expanded foreign military assistance in the hope of outsourcing containment of Soviet power. However, subsequent administrations did not continue this doctrine, and it ultimately proved short-lived.

Overall, however, America's approach to Asian alliances and partnerships during the Cold War ultimately proved to be successful. Democracy has spread throughout the region, and American leadership has sustained a historically unprecedented period of strategic stability and economic integration in the Asia-Pacific, and enabled the region to become the engine of the global economy.

However, the United States cannot rest on its past successes. Persistent economic problems in the U.S. economy, constraints to American national security budgets, and the rise of new Asian powers all threaten to undermine both the ability of the United States to sustain

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by Allies Urged," *Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post* (1877-1995), Dec. 29, 1988; Richard Halloran, "Weinberger Sounds Alarm over Soviet Aggression," *The New York Times News Service, The Dispatch*, March 26, 1981, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1734&dat=19810326&rid=J4EcAAAAIBAJ&sjid=fVIEAAAAlBAJ&pg=6834,9096505>.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Tonelson, "NATO Burden-Sharing: Promises, Promises," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (2000), pp. 31-38.

its preeminence in the Asia-Pacific and possibly the long-term health of the liberal international order itself.<sup>7</sup>

## 1. Looming Fiscal Constraints

Persistent problems in the American economy will have a direct effect on American power writ large, and by extension on American strategy in the Asia-Pacific. Indeed, the 2010 National Security Strategy put America's economic challenges up front as a fundamental determinant of the continued power of the United States, several national security leaders have identified the expanding national debt as a major national security challenge.<sup>8</sup> The direct connection between federal deficit management and military power was demonstrated by the 2011 Budget Control Act, which put in place up to \$600 billion in potential defense cuts (roughly 8 percent) between 2013 and 2023 — in addition to the \$450 billion in cuts already underway.<sup>9</sup>

Constrained defense budgets will challenge the will and ability of the United States to absorb the vast majority of costs associated with

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<sup>7</sup> See Michael O'Hanlon, *The Wounded Giant* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011); Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), pp. 203-204.

<sup>8</sup> "National Security Strategy," The White House, May 2010, p. 2, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf); Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "Remarks on United States Foreign Policy," Council on Foreign Relations, Washington D.C., September 8, 2010; "Speech by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates at the Eisenhower Library," May 8, 2010; "Remarks by Admiral Mike Mullen at the Detroit Economic Club Luncheon," August 26, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Budget Control Act of 2011, Pub. L. No. 112-25, 140 Stat. 240; <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112s365enr/pdf/BILLS-112s365enr.pdf>; Weisman, Jonathan, "As Automatic Military Cuts Draw Nearer, Some Lawmakers Look for Way Out," *The New York Times*, June 4, 2012.

forward deployment across the Asia-Pacific, as it did during the Cold War. Indeed, American strategists have already begun to call for allies and partners to contribute more to their own defense and to the public goods once provided unilaterally by the United States.<sup>10</sup>

Some American actions — such as renewed economic growth or a commitment to sustain high defense budgets despite its effects on budget deficits — may delay or reduce the intensity of future budget constraints. But they will not likely reverse them. The region is changing rapidly in ways that will challenge Washington's ability to sustain regional stability and prosperity, as well as its ability to shift a greater share of the responsibility for the management of security issues to allies and partners. Economic and budgetary challenges will simply intensify and accelerate these trends.

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Armitage, "Pivot to Asia: Back to the Future," *Daily Yomiuri*, July 23, 2012; Statement of General B.B. Bell, Commander, United Nations Command; Commander, Republic of Korea-United States Combined Forces Command; and Commander, United States Forces Korea, Before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 11, 2008, p. 30, <http://www.dod.gov/dodgc/olc/docs/testBell080311.pdf>; "News Transcript: Media Availability with Secretary Gates En Route to Singapore," United States Department of Defense, June 2, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4830>.

## II. Asia's Changing Strategic Dynamics

Whether one agrees with G. John Ikenberry that Americans continue to live “in an extraordinarily benign security environment” or Robert Kagan’s view that “nationalism in all its forms is back, and so is international competition for power, influence, honor, and status,” it is clear that the international system of the Cold War, and even that of the 1990s which saw an ascendant America, is evolving toward (or returning to) a far more complex strategic environment.<sup>11</sup>

This applies particularly in the Asia-Pacific, which today is more prosperous and better armed than it has ever been in modern history. Six of the world’s top twenty economies are in the Asia-Pacific, as are five of America’s top ten trading partners.<sup>12</sup> Economic growth has driven significant economic integration in the region, with over \$1 trillion of U.S. two-way trade coming from the Asia-Pacific.<sup>13</sup> This

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<sup>11</sup> See G. John Ikenberry, “Liberal Order Building,” In Melvyn Leffler and Jeffrey Legro (eds.), *To Lead the World: American Strategy after the Bush Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Robert Kagan, “End of Dream, Return of History,” *Policy Review*, August/September 2007; Michele Flournoy and Shawn Brimley (eds.), *Finding Our Way: Debating American Grand Strategy* (Washington: Center for a New American Security, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> “Report for Selected Countries and Subjects.” International Monetary Fund.

<sup>13</sup> “Statement of Admiral Robert F. Willard, U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, Before the Senate Armed Services Committee on U.S. Pacific Command Posture,” April 12, 2011, p. 2, <http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2011/04%20April/Willard%2004-12-11.pdf>.

prosperity has also fueled rapid investment in military capabilities. Asian defense spending in 2012 will for the first time in modern history surpass defense spending in Europe, and will fund five of the world's largest militaries, four armed with nuclear weapons.<sup>14</sup> These investments are not a simple result of the region's growing prosperity, but rather reflect profound anxieties about integration leading to a loss of strategic autonomy, simmering territorial disputes, and fears of military adventurism.

American nominal objectives for the Asia-Pacific in the 21st century — defending the American homeland, preserving regional stability, and sustaining a liberal international order — will not differ significantly from those of the 20th. Yet while the objectives may not change, the ways and means of American strategy must continually adapt to the challenges and opportunities it faces. This is especially true in military affairs. The rise of new powers in the Asia-Pacific offers a new set of challenges as well as new opportunities for integration, collaboration, and facilitation between the United States and its allies and partners in ways that support the presence and flexibility of the U.S. military.

Following is a general discussion of the primary challenges and trends the United States will confront in the Asia-Pacific, and how they will affect Washington's future relations with its allies and partners.

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<sup>14</sup> Leon Panetta, "The US Rebalance Towards the Asia-Pacific," *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, June 2, 2012, <http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2012/speeches/first-plenary-session/leon-panetta/?locale=en>.



## 1. Managing a Rising China

One of the most profound strategic developments of the twenty-first century has been the emergence of China as a regional, and increasingly global, power. In just three decades, China has risen from being one of the most backward and underdeveloped countries in the world to become the world's second-largest economy in 2010. Similarly, China now has the world's second-largest military budget; the U.S. Department of Defense estimates Chinese defense spending in 2011 to be between \$120 and \$180 billion.<sup>15</sup>

America's objectives with China will not likely deviate from its decades-long strategy of engaging China in order to encourage responsible behavior as a status quo power, while at the same time maintaining a strategic hedge in case Beijing should choose hostility and confrontation. In all likelihood, U.S.-China relations will continue to involve elements of cooperation, competition, and even confrontation.

One of the most strategically challenging aspects of engaging China in the 21st century will be efforts to cooperate on areas of mutual interest. The United States will likely continue to encourage Beijing to utilize its growing power to support the international system, and will therefore seek opportunities for cooperation along those lines. Such an effort, though, will be fraught with Beijing's aversion to

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<sup>15</sup> See Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress on the Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2012, p. 6. Although China's official defense budget for 2011 was \$106 billion, outside analysts doubt the accuracy of those announcements and note that they do not include certain military expenditures, such as foreign procurement.

unnecessary obligations, Washington's concerns about improving the capabilities of a potential adversary, deeper American anxiety about the prospect of ceding responsibility for public goods to a country whose intentions it fundamentally distrusts, and regional concerns about a U.S.-China condominium that ignores other states' interests.

In addition to cooperation with Beijing, China will likely represent a challenge around which the United States will expand and deepen cooperation with its allies and partners. As Beijing's power expands, so too will its ability to threaten regional stability and redefine some of the fundamental characteristics of the existing international order. China's recent assertiveness in the East and South China Seas suggests an approach to the existing international system that is assertive at best, and potentially revisionist.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, some analysts believe that China may be attempting to assert its own version of the Monroe Doctrine, which would implicitly involve the expulsion of the United States and the establishment of a Chinese sphere of influence over the region.<sup>17</sup> More broadly, Chinese military modernization and its expanding diplomatic power pose a potential threat to some of the international order's fundamental tenets, including the openness and stability of global commons and the rule of international law.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Haddick, "Salami Slicing in the South China Sea: China's Slow, Patient Approach to Dominate Asia," *Foreign Policy*, August 3, 2012, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/08/03/salami\\_slicing\\_in\\_the\\_south\\_china\\_sea](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/08/03/salami_slicing_in_the_south_china_sea); Barry Wain, "Tossed in a Stormy Sea of Subterfuge." *The Straits Times* (Singapore), June 23, 2011, LexisNexis Academic; Alex Watts, "Vietnam Accuses China of Sabotage." *The Age* (Melbourne, Australia). June 2, 2011: 391 words. LexisNexis Academic. Web. (accessed on August 8, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> James Holmes, "China's Monroe Doctrine," *The Diplomat*, June 22, 2012, <http://thediplomat.com/2012/06/22/chinas-monroe-doctrine/>; "China Asserts its own Monroe Doctrine in SE Asia." *Canberra Times* (Australia), June 16, 2011, LexisNexis Academic.

The ability of the United States to effectively execute its China strategy would be severely limited without the significant participation of its Asian allies and partners. As China's investments in its military capabilities continue to expand more rapidly than those of the United States, allied capabilities can help the U.S. sustain a quantitative as well as a qualitative advantage. Additionally, some believe that robust trade between China and America's allies will help to enmesh Beijing more deeply in both the region and the existing international order.<sup>19</sup> Further, America's allies and partners can use their political clout to advance international laws and norms that China may be violating.

Yet it would be a mistake to regard America's Asian allies and partners as fully on the U.S. side of a great competition for regional dominance with China. Though America's allies and partners are certainly concerned about growing Chinese power, economic integration has complicated their willingness to act in addressing their concerns.<sup>20</sup> Most small and medium powers seek to "not take sides" in any U.S.-China strategic competition and would prefer to reap the benefits of good relations with both Washington and Beijing.<sup>21</sup> Further, America's new partners (especially those in

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<sup>18</sup> See Abraham M. Denmark and Dr. James Mulvenon, "Contested Commons: The Future of American Power in a Multipolar World." In Abraham M. Denmark and Dr. James Mulvenon (eds.), *Contested Commons: The Future of American Power in a Multipolar World* Center for a New American Security (Washington, D.C.), January, 2010, pp. 5-47, [http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS%20Contested%20Commons\\_1.pdf](http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS%20Contested%20Commons_1.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> See Jonathan D. Pollack, "Designing a New American Security Strategy for Asia." In James Shinn (ed.), *Weaving the Net: Conditional Engagement with China* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996), pp. 108-109.

<sup>20</sup> See Ashley Tellis (ed.), *Strategic Asia 2012-13: China's Military Challenge — America and Asia Respond* (Seattle: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> See Evan Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008); Ashley

Southeast Asia) have no interest in hosting large contingents of American forces and do not want to be seen as part of an anti-China coalition.

These countervailing dynamics will have significant implications for America's military strategy vis-à-vis China.<sup>22</sup> A key challenge for the United States will be integrating its allies and partners into its military plans and operations, including the Air-Sea Battle framework.<sup>23</sup> Allies and partners will provide irreplaceable access and support to American forces and could contribute their own capabilities to coalition operations.

## 2. Navigating a Multipolar Asia

While the rise of China has been the Asia-Pacific's most dramatic strategic event of the last twenty years, the expansion of the region's

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Tellis (ed.), *Strategic Asia 2012-13: China's Military Challenge — America and Asia Respond*, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> See "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense," The Department of Defense, January, 2012, [http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense\\_Strategic\\_Guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf); Jan Van Tol, "AirSea Battle: A Point-of-Departure Operational Concept," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010; Robert Kaplan, "The Geography of Chinese Power: How far will China reach on Land and at Sea?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (2010), pp. 22-41; Robert E. Harkavy, "Thinking about Basing." In Carnes Lord (ed.), *Restoring the Force: U.S. Overseas Presence in the Twenty-first Century*. Navy War College Newport Papers (9-31). Newport: Naval War College Press, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Air-Sea Battle emphasizes the deep co-integration of Naval and Air Force assets to defeat anti-access/area-denial challenges, such as those posed by China. See Norton A. Schwartz and Jonathon W. Greenert. "Air-Sea Battle: Promoting Stability in an Era of Uncertainty." *The American Interest*. February 20, 2012, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=1212>.

middle powers will also have significant implications. In the coming decades, the United States will have to manage an increasingly multipolar Asia-Pacific that is riven by historical animosities and simmering territorial disputes.

In recent years, growth rates in the Asia-Pacific have been heavily weighted towards developing economies, while America's Asian allies (Australia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines) have remained relatively stagnant. From 1991 to 2011, the combined GDP of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) exploded from \$383 billion to \$2.15 trillion in 2011 (2011 USD).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, India's economy expanded significantly over the same period, from 3.1% of global GDP to 5.6%. America's allies, by contrast, have not changed appreciably as a portion of global GDP, and Japan's has collapsed from 10.2% to 5.6%.<sup>25</sup>

An increasingly multipolar Asia-Pacific will pose both a challenge and an opportunity for the United States. On one hand, the relatively stagnating power of America's allies suggests that the relative power of those allies will continue to decrease over the coming years. This will be especially problematic if Asia's rising powers use their newfound strength to assert territorial claims, redress historical grievances with their neighbors, or undermine fundamental tenants of the liberal international order (such as freedom of navigation or the strength of international institutions). On the other hand, many

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<sup>24</sup> International Monetary Fund. World Economic Outlook Update. Rep. Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, July 2012. World Economic Outlook Database. Web. July 24, 2012. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2012/01/weodata/index.aspx>.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

of Asia's rising powers are democracies, are generally friendly to the United States, and/or evince a building anxiety regarding Chinese assertiveness. Indonesia and India are the best examples of rising democracies who are concerned about rising Chinese power; some even believe that Burma's recent reforms are partially driven by concerns about Beijing's influence and an attempt to reach out to the U.S. While these countries are certainly not interested in becoming official American allies, and many harbor significant suspicions about the United States, deft engagement could expand areas of potential cooperation that would help the United States sustain its regional access and presence.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, an important feature of geopolitics in a multipolar Asia-Pacific is its various subregional institutions — most significantly, ASEAN. Washington already recognizes that a robust and unified ASEAN would likely be an important bulwark for regional stability and economic integration and could help check Chinese assertiveness. Yet the recent meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers in Phnom Penh — which for the first time in its 43 year history failed to produce a communiqué — demonstrates the complexity of building regional institutions in a divided region.

Overall, navigating a multipolar Asia-Pacific will pose a significant challenge to regional stability and intensify demand for American leadership. While opportunities exist for the U.S. to harness rising powers to buttress the international system, such an effort cannot substitute for American power and leadership. The United States will

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Fontaine and Daniel M. Kliman, "At the G-20, Look to the Swing States," *World Politics Review*, November 2, 2011, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/10532/at-the-g-20-look-to-the-swing-states>.

therefore require a framework that both increases burden-sharing with like-minded Asian nations in a way that also reinforces American leadership. Accomplishing this difficult task will require a nuanced approach grounded in a deep understanding of regional dynamics.

### **3. Maintaining Public Goods**

In the past, American power and influence in the Asia-Pacific was derived principally by providing key global public goods that overlap with U.S. vital interests: regional stability, a vibrant global economy, and fair access to the global commons. Joseph Nye has argued that recognizing the relationship of American power to global public goods helps unveil “an important strategic principle that could help America reconcile its national interests with a broader global perspective and assert effective leadership.”<sup>27</sup> Viewing America’s Asia-Pacific strategy through this prism reveals how American leadership can be sustained not with preeminence alone but also by enabling likeminded countries to contribute to public goods.

Such leadership can be exercised in a wide variety of areas, utilizing multiple elements of national power. For example, allies and partners could contribute to the openness and stability of maritime commons by contributing their own maritime forces for counter-piracy operations and sealane patrols, by facilitating the presence of American maritime forces, and by supporting international laws and norms that protect global commons in international fora. While allies and partners may

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Nye, “Recovering American Leadership,” *Survival* (February/March, 2008): p. 63.

be able to conduct these activities on their own, collective action among several states will require continued leadership from the United States.

Similar opportunities for collaboration and integration to help alleviate demand for American power exist in humanitarian relief and disaster response (HA/DR) following natural disasters. The earthquakes and tsunamis that struck the Indian Ocean in 2004 and Japan's Tōhoku region in 2011, which cost a combined 240,000 lives and hundreds of billions of dollars in damage, demonstrated the Asia-Pacific's vulnerability to natural disasters.<sup>28</sup> Such threats will likely intensify in the coming years, as populations in the region's coastal areas expand dramatically.<sup>29</sup>

This situation is driving Asia's maritime powers to focus more on investments associated with HA/DR — both as key capabilities for their own militaries and civil societies and as a vital element of their engagement with external powers.<sup>30</sup> Efforts by the United States to build the capacity of its allies and partners to respond to natural

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<sup>28</sup> The Asia-Pacific region is the most natural disaster prone region of the world, according to a 2010 report by the U.N. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. See "Asia-Pacific prone to natural disasters," *UPI*, October 27, 2010. [http://www.upi.com/Business\\_News/Energy-Resources/2010/10/27/Asia-Pacific-prone-to-natural-disasters/UPI-40001288183258](http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Energy-Resources/2010/10/27/Asia-Pacific-prone-to-natural-disasters/UPI-40001288183258).

<sup>29</sup> See Kurt M. Campbell et. al., "The Age of Consequences: The Foreign Policy and National Security Implications of Global Climate Change," *Center for a New American Security*, November 2007.

<sup>30</sup> In recent years Indonesia and the Philippines have developed dedicated disaster response units as part of their military. Japan, Australia, Taiwan, and South Korea all highlight the intensifying threat of natural disasters to regional stability in their most recent defense white papers, and identify carrying out HA/DR missions as a core function of their respective militaries.



disasters would have multiple benefits for American leadership and regional stability.

#### **4. Confronting a Belligerent North Korea**

North Korea presents the most likely threat to regional stability over the short-to-medium term. Recent years have seen North Korea attack and kill South Korean sailors, Marines, and civilians while maintaining its commitment to develop nuclear weapons.<sup>31</sup> This belligerence, combined with South Korea's commitment to "proactive deterrence," has made the Korean Peninsula ripe for rapid escalation and a large-scale military confrontation that could involve the use of WMDs, bring the United States and China into opposite sides of a conflict (again), and threaten the lives of millions.<sup>32</sup> Defending South Korea and Japan from North Korean aggression will primarily remain the responsibility of the United States. Still, South Korea will play an increasingly central role in its own defense and is set to take wartime Operational Control (OPCON) in 2015.<sup>33</sup> Japan will also likely play

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<sup>31</sup> Choe Sang-hun, "South Korea Publicly Blames the North for Ship's Sinking," *The New York Times*, May 20, 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/20/world/asia/20korea.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/20/world/asia/20korea.html?_r=1) (accessed on August 8, 2012); Mark McDonald, "Crisis Status' in South Korea After North Shells Island," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/24/world/asia/24korea.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed on August 8, 2012); "U.S. Urged to Repeal Its Hostile Policy Toward DPRK," *Rodong Sinmun*, Korean Central News Agency, July 23, 2012, <http://www.kcna.kp/goHome.do?lang=eng> (accessed on August 8, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> "Proactive Deterrence" involves a South Korean commitment to quickly, and possibly disproportionately, retaliates to any attack from the North. See Abraham Denmark, "Proactive Deterrence: The Challenge of Escalation Control on the Korean Peninsula," *On Korea*, Vol. 5, pp. 145-157.

<sup>33</sup> The program to transfer wartime OPCON, named Strategic Alliance 2015, lays

an important role, both as a base for U.S. military operations and potentially as a target for North Korean attacks.

Still, the United States faces several obstacles in its alliance arrangements with both South Korea and Japan, including South Korean concerns about the capability of their own armed forces,<sup>34</sup> and Japanese legal prohibitions against the use of force.<sup>35</sup> For these and other reasons discussed below, the United States will face significant barriers to expanding the strategic role of its allies and partners.

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out American and South Korean wartime military responsibilities. The agreement expands South Korea's responsibilities for its own defense without sacrificing South Korean reliance on the United States, and may be an important model for other alliance and partner arrangements in the future. See <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/CUSKPNewsletter29SepWEB.pdf> and <http://www.army.mil/article/45373/sharp-korea-plan-synchronizes-capabilities/>.

<sup>34</sup> Small CFC Proposal, *The Korea Times*, August 6, 2012, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2012/08/137\\_116771.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2012/08/137_116771.html) (accessed on August 8, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Article 9 of Japan's Constitution states that Japan "forever renounce[s] war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes." Japan's Ministry Defense officially interprets that section as prohibiting Japan from "to stop[ing] armed attack on another country with armed strength, although Japan is not under direct attack." See Ministry of Defense, "Fundamental Concepts of National Defense," [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/d\\_policy/dp01.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/dp01.html).

### III. Adjusting to Changes in Alliance and Partnership Dynamics

In addition to the strategic dynamics described above that are changing the balance of power between Asia-Pacific states, significant changes within the polities of America's allies and partners themselves are shaking some of the key foundations of America's network of Asian alliances. For example, America's developed Asian allies today are far more prosperous than they were when the relationships were first established at the outset of the Cold War. As a result, allied governments are (at least theoretically) better able to afford greater investments in military capabilities. Yet economic stagnation, as well as looming demographic challenges, will likely drive investment toward domestic social programs and away from the military and foreign affairs.<sup>36</sup>

These dynamics are already playing out in regional defense budgets. Military investments by several rising regional powers have expanded dramatically in recent years, while those of Asia's established powers have stagnated. For example, while Indonesia's defense budget tripled between 2001 and 2011, and India's grew from \$26 billion to \$42 billion, the defense budgets of America's allies remained largely

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<sup>36</sup> See Nicholas Eberstadt, "Asia-Pacific Demographics in 2010-2040: Implications for Strategic Balance." *Strategic Asia 2010-11: Asia's Rising Power and America's Continued Purpose* (Seattle: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2010), pp. 237-278.

stagnant, and declined relative to total regional defense spending, from 43% to 31%.<sup>37</sup> While the budgets of America's allies remain large in an absolute sense, growth rates suggest the beginning of a fundamental shift in regional power that mirrors regional economic trends. This suggests that the U.S. military will need to focus on efficiency, capacity building, and interoperability with its allies and partners, and those considerations of economic and demographic outlooks should inform U.S. outreach efforts over the long-term.

Additionally, popular sentiment within America's Asian allies and partners — in which support for the U.S. is generally robust, but large segments of the population are often opposed to a large American military footprint and significant investments in defensive capabilities — can complicate relationship management and development.<sup>38</sup> These dynamics can be clearly seen in attempts by the United States and Japan to adjust the terms of American basing arrangements in Okinawa, where agreements to shift American military forces have been left unimplemented because of determined political opposition in Okinawa. Similarly, popular sentiment in South Korea over historical issues forced Seoul to scuttle a proposed intelligence sharing

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<sup>37</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Military Expenditures Database, <http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4> (accessed on August 8, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> The Chicago Council, and WorldPublicOpinion.org. World Public Opinion 2007. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. WorldPublicOpinion.org, 2007. [http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/userfiles/file/pos\\_topline%20reports/pos%202007\\_global%20issues/wpo\\_07%20full%20report.pdf](http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/userfiles/file/pos_topline%20reports/pos%202007_global%20issues/wpo_07%20full%20report.pdf) (accessed on August 9, 2012); Marvin C. Ott, East Asia and the United States: Current Status and Five-Year Outlook. Federation of American Scientists, September 2000, [http://www.fas.org/irp/nic/east\\_asia.html#link05](http://www.fas.org/irp/nic/east_asia.html#link05) (accessed on August 9, 2012); "U.S. Eyes Return to Some Southeast Asia Military Bases," Washingtonpost.com. *The Washington Post*, June 22, 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-seeks-return-to-se-asian-bases/2012/06/22/gJQAKP83vV\\_story\\_1.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-seeks-return-to-se-asian-bases/2012/06/22/gJQAKP83vV_story_1.html) (accessed on August 9, 2012).

agreement with Japan, and has recently inflamed bilateral tensions over disputed islands. Clearly, the Pentagon's goal of a force posture that is "politically sustainable" will only be accomplished by addressing the internal dynamics of each ally and partner.<sup>39</sup>

As a result of these and other trends occurring within U.S. allies and partners, Washington's ability to convince its Asian friends to play a more significant role in the region will be fraught. Asking too much will likely breed resentment and distrust, while threats to withdraw support will raise fears of abandonment.<sup>40</sup> The United States therefore requires a nuanced understanding of the calculations affecting each of its allies and partners, what is possible, and what is a bridge too far.

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<sup>39</sup> Lisa Daniel, "Flournoy: Asia Will be Heart of U.S. Security Policy," *American Foreign Press Service*, April 29, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=63755>.

<sup>40</sup> See David J. Berteau and Michael J. Green, "U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, August, 2012.

## IV. Looking Ahead

The above analysis strongly suggests that the strategic trends underway in the Asia-Pacific will alter the fundamental power dynamics of the region, threaten its long-term stability and prosperity, and drive greater demand for American power. Yet supply for that power will be relatively circumscribed by domestic economic and budgetary forces and diminished by the rise of other Asia-Pacific powers.

Several scholars and former senior American officials have recently written about the catastrophes that would result from the loss of American power in the world.<sup>41</sup> While this analysis is instructive in highlighting the importance of American power in the preservation of a liberal international system, the improbability of a complete American withdrawal from the Asia-Pacific requires considerations of more realistic scenarios. Therefore, if the United States remains engaged in the region but is not able to convince its allies and partners to play a greater strategic role, three broad scenarios are possible:

- **Ever-Expanding Commitments:** Washington could choose to

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<sup>41</sup> See Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), pp. 21-26; Ian Bremmer, *Every Nation for Itself* (New York: Penguin, 2012); Dana Allin and Erik Jones, *Weary Policeman, American Power in an Age of Austerity* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2012); and Michael O'Hanlon, *The Wounded Giant: America's Armed Forces in an Age of Austerity* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

continue the robust investments needed to unilaterally address the many security challenges facing the Asia-Pacific. Without substantial contributions or adjustments from its allies and partners, its basing structure and logistical infrastructure will become increasingly costly, and vulnerable. The Asia-Pacific will likely require a significant portion of American defense spending and deployments, which would have the likely dual effect of expanding budget deficits while reducing American military presence (and increasing strategic risk) in other parts of the world.

- **A Diminished Role:** Isolationist sentiments within the United States could gain ascendance, and drive Washington to limit the kinds of challenges it seeks to address in the Asia-Pacific. This will tacitly leave other issues to the whims of an anarchic international system or another power looking for a strategic vacuum to fill. The likely result would be weakened confidence in the reliability of American commitments, diminished stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific, a gradual fading of American leadership on several issues of strategic import, and a weakened liberal international order.
- **Hollow Leadership:** It is possible that the United States can continue to rhetorically expand its regional commitments but fail to provide the necessary resources to do so. Allies and partners, as well as adversaries, will be fully aware of the expanding gaps in America's rhetoric and its capabilities and likely react accordingly. The result would probably be little different than if the U.S. was open about accepting a diminished regional role. Confidence in American power would be diminished, regional stability and prosperity would be threatened, and the liberal international order would be weakened.

Drawing from research conducted by NBR's broad network of experts, a review of the existing literature, workshops, and field research, NBR will focus on several avenues of inquiry, including: • *How do allies and partners prioritize security challenges?* Since much of the Asia-Pacific does not face a clear existential threat, differences and similarities in how they define and prioritize security challenges will directly inform their views of cooperation with the United States and investments in defense capabilities.



## V. Implications for the Korean Peninsula

North Korea represents the most troublesome source of instability in the Asia-Pacific, and recent trends suggest that Pyongyang's behavior is not going to change significantly for the foreseeable future. In stark contrast, South Korea represents one of the region's most prosperous, responsible, and democratic nations that already contributes to regional stability and other international initiatives. Yet in the coming years, it is likely that different strategic priorities will challenge South Korea's ability to fully take on the regional roles that the United States will likely envision. In order to strategic thinkers and alliance managers to navigate these divergences, they must first understand them.

Efforts to manage China's continued rise will likely prove tricky in the coming years. For strategic, geographical, and economic reasons, Seoul will likely be hesitant to cooperate on initiatives with the United States that could damage ROK relations with Beijing. This will probably be especially true should tension between China and Japan in the East China Sea intensify. While the United States would likely look to Seoul to play some role in managing a crisis, domestic politics and economic considerations in South Korea would probably constrain its willingness to appear to be siding with Tokyo against Beijing.

The most significant divergence between Seoul and Washington in terms of prioritization will likely stem from preferences in addressing the tremendous security challenges posed by North Korea. The immediacy of the North Korean threat, combined with the reality of finite resources that Seoul will devote to its military and national security capabilities, will likely force Seoul to focus its strategic attention, shape its priorities, and drive its military investments and national security policies around the North Korean threat. While certainly justified and understandable, this would necessarily limit South Korea's ability to play the regional role that Washington may envision for Seoul.

Though previous ROK President Lee Myung-bak as well as several American scholars and officials often talked about a "Global Korea,"<sup>42</sup> recently intensifying belligerence from North Korea under Kim Jong-un suggests that such ambitions may be somewhat beyond the ROK's capabilities. This is especially true in the military realm, where significant investments to meet the North Korean missile threat — such as ground military forces, unmanned ISR over the DMZ, and medium-range missiles — will have little applicability beyond Northeast Asia.

Yet South Korea's focus on North Korea, combined with the policy and capability shifts related to the transfer of Wartime Operational Control (OPCON) to Seoul, presents an opportunity for South Korea to play an important role in the region and thus enable the shift in American strategy described above. Put simply, should South Korea

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<sup>42</sup> See Dr. Victor Cha, Lindsey Ford, Nirav Patel, Randy Schriver, Vikram J. Singh, Kazuyo Kato, *Going Global: The Future of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance*, Center for a New American Security, February 23, 2009.

substantially enhance its ability to defend itself from North Korean attack, U.S. forces could theoretically be reoriented toward other regional challenges while maintaining its extended deterrence commitment.

The primary challenge to this approach would be to sustain Seoul's confidence in American extended deterrence guarantees. While serious, these challenges are not insurmountable. U.S. forces stationed in South Korea have been reduced over time, yet South Korean confidence in the United States has persisted. The key will be to first ensure that the ROK military's capabilities have sufficiently improved to enable a more significant role in the defense of the South, maintain American leadership and support through the continued provisioning of enduring capabilities that only the United States can provide, and most importantly to work with the South Korean public to buttress public confidence in the changing alliance arrangement.

Such an initiative would be a long-term effort that both sides fully endorse, and should begin with an open, frank dialogue between the U.S. and ROK governments and militaries to discuss fundamental questions related to how both sides view the regional security environment, and the roles they seek to play in peninsular security and regional stability. This dialogue should gradually transition to the development of a roadmap detailing necessary investments, policy changes, and posture shifts. Following are several provisional questions to begin such a dialogue:

- How do South Korean leaders and strategists view China, and how does that affect their approach to the United States? Many allies and partners are wary of giving Beijing the impression that they

are working with Washington to contain or encircle China. This line of questioning will explore how allies and partners weigh these calculations, which will directly inform their willingness to play a greater regional security role.

- How do South Korean leaders and strategists believe the United States helps their country address or manage major security challenges? This will address the priority allies and partners give to top security challenges, as well as their perceptions of the benefits the United States provides. This analysis will be essential to understanding the benefits they see in their relationship with the United States.
- What would be the strategic implications of the United States abdicating responsibility for a major regional security issue, such as disaster relief, the defense of Taiwan, or the protection of the maritime commons? This will help identify the role United States plays in the region, and the consequences of a decreased commitment. It will also help prioritize issues, roles, and missions and identify areas where the United States could try to convince allies and partners to play a larger role.
- What are the domestic political and economic dynamics that will affect South Korea's willingness to play an expanded regional security role, or in the defense of South Korea itself? A nuanced understanding of a country's domestic political calculations will, for reasons described above, be vital to adjusting U.S. alliance and partnership arrangements. This line of inquiry will explore these dynamics, and identify opportunities and challenges for the United States.

- How would the continued rise of Chinese power, combined with persistent economic problems in the United States, affect Seoul's strategic calculations? The perceived credibility of American power, as well as perceptions of changes in the overall balance of power between China and the United States, will have a significant effect on allied and partner strategic calculations. This area of investigation will reveal regional views on these dynamics, as well as their underlying assumptions about the resiliency and reliability of American and Chinese power.

## VI. Implications for Trustpolitik

The issues and dynamics involved in the long-term shifts proposed above directly relate to, and could potentially complement, an approach of Trustpolitik as described by candidate and president Park Geun-hye.<sup>43</sup> South Korea's leadership in managing and addressing North Korean belligerence will require direct communication between Seoul and Pyongyang. Washington has long supported robust and positive inter-Korean relations, and trust building between North and South would be compatible with U.S. strategy.

The United States is unlikely to shift its precondition for talks with North Korea that Pyongyang accept and follow through with its previous commitments regarding denuclearization. Nevertheless, inter-Korean talks — even without that precondition — could help reduce regional tensions and potentially pave the way for talks between Washington and Pyongyang.

The critical element to managing these talks, and ensuring that Seoul and Washington remain comfortable and supportive of one another throughout the entire process, will be robust bilateral dialogue between the two governments and militaries.

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<sup>43</sup> “A New Kind of Korea: Building Trust between Seoul and Pyongyang.” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68136/park-geun-hye/a-new-kind-of-korea?page=show>.

# Chinese Perspectives on the East Asian Security Environment and the Korean Peninsula

*Liu Ming, Wang Cheng-zhi, Cui Rong-wei*

## **I. China Rising Vs. American Re-balancing and Japan Right-wing Resurgence**

The year 2013 witnessed the constant development of the Sino-US relations in twists and turns. On the one hand, policy makers in Washington have been sticking to “the strategic rebalance to Asia” with an aim to harness China’s rise, despite domestic rifts in the US that culminated in a government crisis. On the other hand, Sino-US cooperation has reached a new level in the context of China’s continuing growth and in-depth reform. It is under such circumstances that both countries have been exploring and experimenting with a new type of relationship.

During their meeting at Sunnylands in June, 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping and American President Barack Obama reached a historic consensus on forging a new type of major power relationship, characterized by no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation. The idea initiated by President Xi is believed to be based on two assumptions: 1. as a rising power, China demands that its relationship with the only superpower in the world moves towards greater symmetry embodied in a true spirit of mutual respect; 2. it is possible for the two countries to digest, dilute and overcome major contradictions between them attributing to the unprecedented level of interdependence.<sup>1</sup>

However, efforts toward this new pattern of relationship have met serious challenges six and seven months after the Sunnylands summit, first by China's announcement of the new Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea in November and, then by the encounter between a Chinese and an American warship in the South China Sea in December. To Washington, Beijing's firm actions in safeguarding its sovereign rights in both cases have confirmed its image as a challenger to the status-quo in Asia and a potential threat to the US presence in the region. Washington's efforts in deterring Beijing from developing and displaying power for sovereignty are not confined to words; they include dispatching unannounced military planes to fly through China's zone to show defiance to China's decision and reinforcing military cooperation with regional allies and semi-allies such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Vietnam.

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<sup>1</sup> Pang Zhongying, "A 'New Type of Great Power Relationship' between China and US," *China US Focus*, July 2, 2013, <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/a-new-type-of-great-power-relationship-between-china-and-us/>.



To Beijing, Washington's anger with China's zone is groundless, not only because the US itself is the inventor of ADIZs, but it is the US reconnaissance activities in China's coastal waters that largely triggered the establishment of the zone. Moreover, Beijing has been annoyed by the biased attitude held by Washington in dealing with the maritime disputes between its Asian allies and China, including Japan's remilitarization in response to a rising China. By being tough in the two incidents, Beijing wants Washington to take China's determination in defending its sovereignty claims and national dignity seriously.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the recent military frictions, the optimistic reasons concerning the future of China-US relations should not vanish at all. Instead of joining Tokyo in an uncompromising gesture toward China's ADIZ that has greatly increased tensions, Washington's response regarding civilian aircraft traveling information reporting was milder and US officials suggested that civilian flights comply with the identification rules for safety reasons. It seems that Washington would rather take the role of a mediator in disputes between its major Asian ally and China.<sup>3</sup> The year 2013 also witnessed an upward momentum of high-level bilateral exchanges and interaction which have yielded a long list of tangible achievements in promoting bilateral trade and investment, boosting people-to-people exchanges, and expanding cooperation in fields such as trade, climate change, new energy and cyber-security. A noteworthy sign of progress was that the US has agreed to lift ban on high-tech exports to China at the 10th round of bilateral trade talks held in Beijing in the late December. For a long time, the US has made little policy change in boosting high-tech trade

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<sup>2</sup> Jiao Haiyang, "US Response to China's ADIZ Biased," *China Daily*, December 23, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Zhang Yiqian, "Biden Seeks Ease in Tensions," *Global Times*, December 4, 2013.

with China largely owing to Washington's worry about high-tech being used by the latter for military purposes. Another sign of progress lies in the upturn of military-to-military relations, long regarded as the weakest link in the overall China-US relationship. The military-to-military communication and cooperation, which accelerated since the Xi-Obama summit, have been proved to be fruitful in enhancing mutual understanding and reducing risks. In the case of warship encounters, if it were not for the effective communication between the Chinese and American ship commanders, the confrontation would have probably slid into a naval conflict.<sup>4</sup>

In 2013, China-Japan relations faced their grimmest situation since the two countries normalized their diplomatic ties in 1972. With weak confidence in improving the country's economy and maintaining Japan's global influence in a changing world, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his cabinet resorted to Abenomics, nationalism and remilitarization to enhance his political position and prolong their stay in power. Increasing Japan's deterrence against China has been a chief goal of Tokyo despite the great economic interdependence between the two neighboring countries.

First, Japan's nationalization of the disputed islands Diaoyu/Senkaku<sup>5</sup> in 2012 should account for the worsening relations between Beijing and Tokyo, since it unilaterally changed the status quo that was an acquiescent agreement reached by the two leaders in 1972 and 1978 and had been maintained until 2012. To deny its legitimization of

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<sup>4</sup> "China, US Communicate Effectively over Warship Encounter," *China Daily*, December 18, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Editor's comment: 'Senkaku' was added in referring to the disputed island for impartiality.

possession of the islands in permanence, China's public vessels (marine police) regularly have been moving around the waters of Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the past 15 months. Taking China's sovereignty administration as an intrusion and coercion, Japan has begun its military build-up and has taken more offensive measures to harass Chinese navy ships that were having normal military exercises in the international waters and frequently flew very low over Chinese oil-drilling platforms in the East China Sea on the China side, and it also threatened to shoot down China's drone, which sometimes patrols over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.

Second, irritated by China's announcement of the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over a large swathe of the East China Sea on November 23, 2013, which overlaps with the existing zone that Japan has enforced for 40 years and includes the airspace over Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, which Japan occupies and insists on its sovereignty over, Tokyo demanded Beijing to withdraw its announcement of the new zone, and emphasize that neither Japanese civilian nor military aircraft would respect it or comply with any of the requirements.

China has planned this ADIZ for almost 20 years since the 1990s, which is regarded as an equal arrangement to Japan's ADIZ that only has approximately 30 kilometers distance to the boundary line of China's air space. Whenever China's fighter jets fly over the East China Sea, Japan will claim Chinese jets enter into Japan's ADIZ, and Japan's Air Self-Defense Forces warplanes will scramble into the airspace to intercept China's jets. And Japan attempts to stop China's Marine Surveillance planes from having patrol mission over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Under these circumstances, China announced this ADIZ.

Third, by playing up the China “threat” theory, Tokyo is taking the diplomatic moves to lobby countries to join its effort to contain Beijing. In 2013, Abe has traveled abroad 13 times, covering more than 20 nations, proposing common strategies and joint actions to counter China’s normal activities overseas and on the seas.

In an effort to build Abe’s own legacy of leading Japan to be a normal country in the world and his firm image for resisting China and South Korea pressures on historic issues, Abe and his like-minded followers pay homage to war criminals at the Yasukuni Shrine, showing little remorse for the atrocities committed by the Imperial Japanese Army during the past wars of aggression.

Tokyo’s hawkish, nationalist policy has evoked anger among the Chinese people and policy makers in Beijing. Through official and unofficial channels, Beijing repeatedly urged Tokyo to correctly face its aggression history, and respect regional countries’ “fair and reasonable” security concerns.

In the context of “the rebalance to Asia” pursued by the Obama administration, Tokyo has been seeking Washington’s endorsement of its political and military aspirations by regaining the collective-defense rights through re-interpretation of its peaceful Constitution, and the strategy is proved to be working to some extent as it has won Washington’s promise to defend Japan should a military conflict breaks out between Japan and China over the disputed territories.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “US Criticises New China Zone that Includes Disputed Islands and Vows to Defend Japan,” *ABC News*, November 24, 2013, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-24/us-criticises-new-china-zone2c-vows-to-defend-japan/5113408>.

## **II. Chinese Policy on the Korean Peninsula: Balance and Denuclearization**

On the whole, China's policy towards the Korean Peninsula is to develop cooperative and reciprocal relations with both North and South Korea. Stability, peace and nuclear-free Peninsula are the three basic goals for China. It has been China's long policy that they pursue a parallel and balanced relations with both Koreas. North and South Korea are still in the status of "no war and no peace," and from time to time, they have been engaged in confrontations. Therefore, over the past twenty years, China has tried to avoid siding with one side on any conflict or crisis, lest that it should lead to the rupture of Sino-DPRK relations. Even on the nuclear issue, though Beijing strongly dislikes Pyongyang's plan, behavior and attitude of ignoring the international community's appeal for denuclearization, it seldom openly made condemnation of their deeds, nor stopped regular contacts and mutual visits with the DPRK.

China and North Korea have a long traditional friendship, but China doesn't accept and support North Korean policy on nuclear development and military provocation towards South Korea. Because of the inherited special relations with the North, Beijing maintains high-level reciprocal visits with Pyongyang and treats North Korea's top leader respectfully, though this relationship lacks substantial content or ideological consensus. In addition to maintaining the stability of this regime, the

essence of China's DPRK policy is to lure it to denuclearize and to restrain its recalcitrant posture and behavior against South Korea.

For China's South Korea policy, it wants to develop a comprehensive and substantial relationship with the ROK. The focal point of this policy is to deepen bilateral economic cooperation and build close consultative relations on the regional as well as on the global issues. Of course, China will closely cooperate with South Korea on the joint action to push North Korea to come back to its original commitment made in the joint statement issued at the Six-Party Talks on September 19, 2005. Beijing is also increasingly interested in strategic coordination for safeguarding stability in Northeast Asia and playing a constructive role in the regional integration mechanisms.

Because Pyongyang does not want to stop developing its nuclear weapons and may continue to conduct nuclear tests and make vocal threats to Seoul, China will have to keep at arm's length with North Korea, particularly in the years of Xi Jinping's leadership. President Xi has expressed his clear-cut position when President Park visited in Beijing and in the APEC meeting last October. So far, Xi Jinping hasn't allowed Kim Jong-un to visit China, which displays his displeasure over North Korea's nuclear policy and development.

The purge of Jang Sung-taek and his followers has further precipitated the distrust relations between China and the North Korea. If North Korea continues with more nuclear tests and missile firing, China definitely will side with the US-South Korea line and impose more tough sanction against Pyongyang. Before Kim Jong-un commits himself to Chinese leader about denuclearization, the Chinese leader may not

welcome this belligerent leader visiting China. This psychological trial of strength will last for a long time.

In the past, Chinese leaders would reluctantly use a coercive approach to press North Korea to stop nuclear development, but nowadays, China is more willing to wield the sticks to show its resolute position. Beijing's new leaders don't want to appease or indulge this young North Korean leader too much. The tough policies and measures may not inevitably lead to the demise of the regime, which is believed to have much stronger survivability than outsiders usually expect.

In comparison with the previous Chinese leader, the current leader will have a more distinctive attitude to condemn the DPRK if Pyongyang violates the Armistice Agreement again by assaulting the South Korean people or facilities without any legal reason. Xi Jinping's North Korea policy is based upon his bottom-line principle, wherever and whenever North Korea does something significantly damaging to the stability and denuclearization prospects on the Korean Peninsula, China will explicitly express its opposition. Peace, stability and denuclearization are regarded as the core interests for China, if the DPRK makes more trouble on the Peninsula and does not take China's interests into account, Beijing will no longer tolerate this wrong behavior.

Kim Jong-un's power base is not as solid as his father's. Therefore, he must do his best to seek trust and get assurance of support from China. Warming personal relations with Chinese President Xi Jinping and pretending to listen to Chinese advice are his goals.

The North Korean leader doesn't intend to completely drop its nuclear weapons, for one reason they will rely on the bombs for securing the regime and prolonging the rule. Libya CVID's model has reminded them of the final fate for discarding the nuke. In terms of this obstinate position, the goal of the denuclearization seems to be very difficult to be realized in the near future, which could be an unresolved issue over the long term.

In this regard, China wants to persuade South Korea to take a more flexible policy to encourage North Korea re-join the Six-party Talks. On the issue of North Korea re-pledging its sincerity to the denuclearization before resumption of the Six-Party Talk, China and South Korea, in fact, see eye-to-eye because of both having distrust of North Korea based on its bad record. However, they differ from each other in the tactical goal of the multilateral talks. Beijing may hold the resumption of and maintenance of the talks as more pressing than the goal of denuclearization itself, because the talks could, at least, halt North Korea's uranium enrichment program at the Yongbyon Nuclear Plant, and suspend its nuclear and long-range missile tests. Of course, DPRK suspension of its covert nuclear activities in other sites cannot be guaranteed.

Another factor that may urge China and South Korea to maintain contacts with North Korea is its internal situation. The most important and imminent goal for North Korea is to maintain a stable situation within its leadership after Kim Jong-un dismissed and executed his uncle, North Korea's No. 2 man, Jang Sung-taek. One option for the leader is to distract his people's attention from the tense power struggle to outside confrontation with the South, which could be realized through taking further provocative actions and creating a crisis.



Another option is to seek ways to improve relations with Seoul, building trust with President Park Geun-hye and obtaining more investments and projects from the South to revitalize North Korea's stagnant economy, which is in their best interest.<sup>7</sup> For China, it needs to avoid having the first option, and try our best to lure North Korea to adopt the second option.

It is China's basic position that it supports inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation, and ultimately, the unification of the Korean Peninsula. In the near future, we are unable to expect that the two Koreas could develop a kind of relations like one in the era of President Kim Dae-jung and President Roh Moo-hyun. Under this circumstance, China will take every chance to persuade both Korea's leaders to improve their relations and reduce tension on the Peninsula. And Beijing is willing to play a role in bridging the gap between two Koreas, if South Korea requests China to do so, while China judges it has the feasibility of conducting that role.

As for the unification, in principle, China is only concerned that the best possible means must exclude military force or unilaterally coercive action. There are many scenarios of unification, but at least in one of the scenarios, China might not immediately support South Korea to dispatch its forces to take over North Korea, when it is in the early stage of chaos. In the case of contingency situation, China, South Korea, and the US should keep consultations about any kind of intervention and explore common interests and maintain strategic trust, trying to avoid any unilateral action on the Peninsula.

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<sup>7</sup> Kim Jong-un's New Year message discloses that this leader now wants to improve the relations with the south, which may coincide with the second option the above text mentions.

China's ultimate position and policy on North Korean domestic change will be based upon the real situation trend that 'will carry the North to go.' If the government is toppled down and no party could maintain an order, then, China would think South Korea could play a leading role in restoring the order and arrange a process of unification with the consent of the UN.

### **III. Trustpolitik on the Korean Peninsula: New Approach, Uncertain Prospects**

The merits of this approach are balanced, middle-lined, neither soft, nor tough. It will adhere to the principle of nuclear-free, non-provocation and reciprocity; and it will display some kind of flexibility in carrying out North Korea policy. The flexible characteristics of this approach are tougher as well as softer according to the respective needs in the different issues.

The main difference of this new North Korea approach lies in three points: provision of humanitarian assistance to infants, pregnant women and those who cannot make their own living; advancing low politics cooperation — agricultural and environment cooperation, setting up an “environment community”; helping North Korea to build more infrastructures, such as power stations; road, railways and telecommunication. One of the objectives of this approach is to sever the vicious cycle of making progress and retrogression in inter-Korean relations in the past years. However, the common basis and the policy continuity is still there that South Korea must have sufficient deterrence first, and then it could promote the process of trust-building.

As a matter of fact, it is very difficult to seek trust from North Korea. North Korea will hardly trust South Korea, the US, and China

in terms of these countries' strategic intention behind cooperation, promise of peaceful co-existence or political support and sincere advice. The recent example reflecting such mentality was the failed reunion of the separated families in the last mid-autumn festival (추석, chu-sok) after two Koreas successfully reached an agreement on re-opening Kaesong Industrial Complex.

Though Seoul could tactically avoid stressing too much the importance of denuclearization and focus on promoting positive interaction between the two Koreas, Pyongyang would not give full honor or credit to this approach and stop implementing the two-track strategy — “Equal Emphasis Policy for Nuclear and Economic Development” (known as the “Byungjin Line”). And we cannot guarantee that the DPRK will disband its double-edged approach to inter-Korean relations, shifting back and forth between confrontation and cooperation. The nuclear issue will always be a time-bomb in interrupting the Trust-building Process. Whenever North Korea intensifies its nuclear tests, uranium program, and launches more long-range rockets, it will definitely force many countries to take more tough actions in the UN, which will damage the atmosphere on the Korean Peninsula and disrupt any regular contacts and dialogues. This will certainly lead South Korea to follow American pressure approach, and ROK will not continue the Trust-building Process.

In a regular situation and development, North Korea will never abandon nuclear weapons unless some urgent situation occurs.

Against this background, President Park needs to have more patience; trust cannot be established overnight. South Korea must start building trust from the easiest issues, establishing and consolidating cooperation

basis, developing more norms and raising stakes of its regime's interests and benefits. More importantly, through the cooperation, South Korea needs to increase North Korea's expectations that the continuing cooperation in the near future will bring latter more attractive benefits.

Generally speaking, unless North Korea voluntarily changes its policy from the top-down through some important revolution, it will not embrace this South Korean approach with all its heart. It will try to lead the direction of the development of the inter-Korean relations, instead of just following the South.

## **IV. China-South Korea Relationship: Achievements and Prospects**

It has been about one year since Park Geun-hye became the President of South Korea. During this period, the bilateral relationship between China and South Korea is greatly improved compared with that in the Lee Myung-bak presidency. The reason for this, someone might say, is closely related to the Park Geun-hye administration's idea. Indeed, it is quite natural for President Park to adopt an amicable attitude towards China based on her past life experiences. But the deeper reasons lie in the facts that both new leaders clearly understand that the tense situation on the Korean Peninsula and the growing economic interdependence between two countries demand them to exert their wisdom and courage to strengthen their cooperation. Within one year, the two countries may indeed adopt many measures to upgrade the strategic cooperation partnership to a much higher position.

The achievements made in the China-South Korea bilateral relationship mainly lie in the following aspects.

First, economic cooperation between two countries made substantial progress. China so far is South Korea's number-one trade partner, primary export partner and the largest importer. South Korea so far is China's the third largest trade partner and the third largest foreign direct investment incoming country. With trade volume increased

dramatically from mere \$6.4 billion in 1992 to \$270 billion in 2013, the figure grew more than 40 times. Two leaders decided to strengthen macroeconomic policy coordination and jointly respond to external economic risks. The bilateral trade target is to reach trade volume of \$300 billion by 2015, and gradually achieve trade balance.

As for the most important economic cooperation progress between two countries in 2013, it must be the ongoing negotiation of China-South Korea bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA). We all know that the economic links between the two countries have already become very tight after twenty years of cooperation. Considering that economies in both countries are complementary in respect of market, natural resource, and technology, there is every necessity to further intensify economic cooperation in order to make full use of potentials. Chinese enterprises are very interested in going out for investment, so Korea needs to take more attractive measures to attract Chinese investment, while upgrading Korean investment in China in emerging and high-tech industries. China's urbanization development strategy will also create new opportunities for Korean entrepreneurs.

Among the results of the first phase talks of the FTA in early September 2013, the most important one is that the rate of tariff reduction has been set to 90 percent in terms of the whole items, and 85 percent of imports in terms of their monetary value. This lays the stable base for further negotiations. Now the second phase of negotiations has started, it will consist of 8 rounds of talks. Both governments expect the negotiation to be concluded in the year 2014 since the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) talks are well in progress and the 12 members can probably strike a deal in the first quarter of 2014. Then the non-TPP countries will lose competitiveness in the world market.

In addition, many observers hope the two governments will make much bolder determination to raise the currently low standard of tariff exemption in the FTA package deal.

Second, security and political relationship are further developed. Since President Park learned Chinese at the age of 30 for some time and since then she has been fond of Chinese ancient culture very much. She received honorary doctoral degrees from the Chinese Culture University in Taiwan in 1987. Because of this experience and cultural affections, President Park, as she became the President, tries to move closer to Beijing politically in comparison with other major power instead of relying too much on the U.S. as in the Lee Myung-bak government. In her mind, the key to the solution of North Korea nuclear program and containment of the DPRK's provocation lies with China.<sup>8</sup> In the past few years, Beijing's role on the issue of security and nuclear development on the Korean Peninsula was relative passive; one of the causes was that the two top leaders lacked close personal relations.

Therefore President Park Geun-hye's visit to China in June 2013 represented a fresh start to bilateral relations. The two leaders agreed to establish a direct communication channel between China's state councilor for foreign affairs and the South Korean presidential national security chief, to make sure their foreign ministers visit each other regularly. This is really a breakthrough for the bilateral strategic relations. Furthermore, military leaders from both sides decided to

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<sup>8</sup> President Park said the success of peacekeeping initiatives with North Korea "largely depends on how much co-operation she can get from China," see Kim Wall, "South Korean President Puts China Ahead of Japan in Visiting Beijing," *South China Morning Post*, June 26, 2013.



establish a mechanism for routine communications between high-level military officials. And the joint statement issued by two presidents almost touched upon all the major or potential issues that are of importance for two sides, which include some thorny and long-perplexed issues.

For example, the undecided maritime delimitation on the Yellow Sea (West Sea) has led to dispute on some isles or reefs concerning ownership and respective administration (known as Suyan Reef in China and Socotra Rock or Ieodo in South Korea); though it is difficult to reach an agreement considering the conflicting public opinion, both sides have decided to start negotiations. The maritime conflicts between South Korean coast guards and Chinese fishers within the Korean management zone have also been growing over the recent years, which has the effect of intensifying a bad impression of China in South Korean media and public opinion. Now both leaders realize that we need to jointly take pragmatic measures to contain this dangerous escalation of confrontation. Joint patrol and administration by two fisheries departments within these overlapping waters are one of several feasible options. China-ROK Joint Committee on Fisheries and other relevant existing fisheries are encouraged to establish well-functioning practices through consultative mechanism.

To obtain increased trust from China, President Park offered to return the remains of 360 Chinese troops killed in the 1950-1953 Korean War and buried in South Korea.

In 2013, there were three summits between Park Geun-hye and Xi Jinping. In every instance, the two leaders exchanged opinions on common issues of interest and expressed a desire to upgrade bilateral relations.

However, the bilateral strategic relations are still very fragile and are seen skeptically by some people in South Korea. When China declared the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) on November 23, 2013, which overlaps a bit with South Korean claimed Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), South Korea had a strong reaction to China's unexpected action. Since the two countries haven't reached a consensus on the delimitation line between the two countries' EEZ, China thinks it has the right to temporarily cover this area for management. And more importantly, China's act was aimed at restraining Japan's intrusive ADIZ over China's airspace. Beijing expressed explicitly that it wanted to have consultations with Seoul about how to avoid collision over the overlapping space between China's and Korea's ADIZs.

Third, in addition to the economic and security cooperation, people-to-people exchanges are also very important, which could serve a solid base for inter-governmental organizations cooperation. The two presidents' joint statement announced that the China-South Korea Cultural and Educational Exchange Joint Committee, as an inter-governmental coordinating body, will regularly convene working meetings to plan exchange programs and guide the implementation. That means that people-to-people exchanges between the two countries are institutionalized and it will help better understandings and trust between the two societies and inevitably produce a positive impact upon bilateral relations in the long run. The programs will include students' exchange visits; the language understanding improvement exchange; citizens' understanding and knowledge of the other country; promotion of sustainable development of cultural relations; promotion of films; cooperation in cultural industry such as television, games, music drama, etc.

Fourth, the biggest obstacle in relations between China and South Korea is not in the bilateral relations, but in the two external factors, North Korea and the US. Whenever North Korea adopts some risky or provocative action, or there is some frustration in the process of denuclearization, South Korean media or government will pressure China, accusing Beijing of not exerting enough influence on Pyongyang, or not taking sufficient measures to cut off its economic relations with North Korea.

While China often feels a bit anxious when South Korea imports too many American weapons or plans to build an American model of MD system to deter North Korea threat, in turn, North Korea will take more steps to develop nuclear weapons and missiles so as to offset South Korea's military superiority. Beijing doesn't want to see a large number of American warships, fighters and aircraft carriers to be involved in military maneuvers in the Yellow Sea, which is a body of water adjacent to China's capital — Beijing, and important military naval bases — Bohai Gulf.<sup>9</sup>

With the advancement of America's "pivot to Asia" strategy, US hedging on military deployment shifts more on China, in their strategy, the US-ROK and US-Japan military alliance are regarded as an indispensable part. The US actually is dubious about the intimate cooperation between China and South Korea. Washington questions whether Seoul will do its utmost to support the US military operation, in case of a conflict between China and Japan, as presumably the US would get involved in the East China Sea. Under this complicated

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<sup>9</sup> Luo Yuan. "Why China Opposes US-South Korean Military Exercises in the Yellow Sea," *People Daily*, July 16, 2010, see <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90780/91342/7069743.html>.

structure, South Korea has to keep subtle balance in diplomacy between China and the US, since China and South Korea have respective interests from these two bilateral relations.

Of course, in regard to the North Korea problem, China and South Korea can work together. China and South Korea should keep close consultation and take a similar position, or at least a position complementary to each other for stabilizing the tense situation, if North Korea takes some irresponsible moves, i.e., ranging from coordinating a stance, exchanging information to taking suitable action. We can let North Korea know the grave consequence for their risky actions and emphasize that there are no rewards for their aggressive behavior.

China is actively propelling the construction of “new type of major powers” for Sino-American relations. The US starts to cooperate with China along with this line, notwithstanding the skepticism at the beginning.<sup>10</sup> The formulation of the relations will definitely create an opportunity for China and South Korea to cooperate, since it is not termed as G-2 that must base on the same ideology, strategy and national outlook. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi put it clearly at the Brookings Institution, on September 20, 2013 that China wants to start the building of this new model of relationship from the Asia-Pacific region. Specifically speaking, he stated that cooperation over hotspot issues in the Asia-Pacific, in which Korean nuclear issue is a case in point, could prove the relationship to be successful.<sup>11</sup> From his

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<sup>10</sup> The US officially is using this concept a slight differently, i.e. “a new model of major power relations”; or “a different kind of relationship for the 21st century.” At a Georgetown University speech on November 20, 2013, US National Security Advisor Susan Rice said the US seeks to operationalize a new model of major power relations. *China Daily USA*, December 2, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Speech is made by China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Brookings Institution, September 20, 2013.

remarks, China, South Korea, and the US must be the main players for cooperation. If this model could be accomplished, South Korea could avoid choosing either side amidst two competing major powers. This implies new strong triangular relations should play a dominant role in maintaining peace on the Peninsula while diluting military functions in the already existing triangular relations among United States, South Korea, and Japan.

There are also other problems that could bring about negative impacts on bilateral relations such as historical problems and maritime disputes. Historical nationalism cannot be solved in the foreseeable future, but both China and South Korea should take an attitude of “looking forward,” emphasizing common interests rather than staying entangled in the past. In another words, both countries should carefully cope with the above obstacles, and at least not let them become harmful to bilateral relations. As time goes by and common interests accumulate, two countries will have more wisdom and vision to address this issue in the future.

Finally, in Northeast Asia, another issue could probably put China and South Korea together with common interests, i.e. Japan’s re-militarization and denial of post-world war regional order. As Japan is moving further to the direction of right wing rule, and the days of their re-possession of collective defense right are numbered, China and South Korea should form a unified front to restrain Japan’s future military and political ambition. Both China and South Korea have territorial sovereignty disputes with Japan, and we are all highly concerned about Japanese politicians’ attempt to distort the war history, covering its war crimes, which occurs repeatedly in the issues

of history textbook, comfort women, and visit to Yasukuni Shrine, in which 12 A-class war criminals are honored.

Both South Korea and Japan are allies of the US. Now the US has indulged itself in a conviction that a remilitarized Japan will do good for American strategic interests, which could play a balancing role to a rising China. However, the US underestimates one point that a remilitarized and nationalistic Japan could stimulate Beijing to take a more offensive posture towards Tokyo; and an assertive Japan will easily stir up a conflict with China on the disputed islands because of miscalculations, which certainly will damage the stability of the region and even drag the US and South Korea into an escalated war against China.

Such a concern and judgment is not contrived, it is already proved by a statement made by Shinichi Kitaoka, a key security adviser to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. He stated that the right to exercise collective self-defense should be applied “to any country which is very close to Japan, ... in other words, if that country is heavily damaged and that might bring a serious threat to Japan, then this is a situation in which Japan may consider exercising the right of collective self-defense.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the future security situation in East Asia is very dangerous. South Korea, as an ally, could give the US some advice that encouraging Japan to re-gain the collective self-defense right will have counterproductive effects. It is not out of the question that a

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<sup>12</sup>Linda Sieg, “Japan Collective Self-Defense Right Should Include Others, Not just the US,” *Reuters*, November 6, 2013.

re-militarized Japan will be involved in a contingent situation on the Korean Peninsula without getting prior permission from South Korea if they think the American troops are engaged in a war and it is in their interest to play a leading role at the earlier stage. The strategic dialogue between Japan and South Korea or various multilateral security partnerships could not disable their determination and capability to become a military power in the region.<sup>13</sup>

Though Japan is a democratic country and an ally of the US, it will not confine its role as a peace lover and no one can guarantee it will not resort to force to consolidate its territorial claims and re-shape the regional order. So China and South Korea need to foster their strategic cooperation and keep vigilant against Japan's ambitious goal.

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<sup>13</sup> Park Young-june, "Japan's Assertion of the Right of Collective Self-Defence and Policy Recommendations for South Korea," November 19, 2013, Interview-2013-09, The East Asia Institute, Korea.





# Changing Security Environment in Northeast Asia and the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula

*Shen Dingli*

## **Summary**

Northeast Asia is experiencing a sea change of security environment. China's rise is altering the regional balance and its interaction with the US rebalance has led East Asia more prone to be divergent. Japan's conservative shift, as well as North Korea's uncertain trajectory, all do not bode well for peace and trust-building on the Korean Peninsula. Fundamentally, it is up to all Koreans to forge inter-Korean trust-building process, though the present situation has not been favorable. Interaction among external stakeholders could either promote or discourage the Trust-building Process on the Peninsula. This paper has analyzed the main external factors that affect such trust building.

Northeast Asia is at a crucial time given its historical antagonism which is being rekindled lately. Ideologically and subsequently geostrategically, this region has been torn apart by alliance-politics and military-hedging, leaving two unifications of China and the Korean Peninsula long unfulfilled. Unlike the rest of the world, the Cold War has not totally receded here, as evidenced by Japanese revisionist Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Yasukuni Shrine near the end of 2013, and North Korea's persistent pursuit of a nuclear deterrent.

Meantime, Northeast Asia has been undergoing a significant change of security environment. Given China's economic reform and opening, it has much transformed its Cold War ideology and has now employed a market economy, enabling itself to share great common interests with many other stakeholders in the region. This has facilitated its normalization of official relations with South Korea in 1992, while unfortunately leaving North Korea to feel more isolated as Pyongyang is unwilling to follow suit of Beijing's opening. China's rapid rise has made it the second biggest economy in the world, rendering it more capable and confident. Such growth has affected the regional balance of power in favor of China incrementally, so the Obama administration has had to launch its "rebalancing" strategy in East Asia to sustain the order of Pax Americana. Undoubtedly, the ever-intensifying Beijing-Tokyo relations have much to do with China's rise and the US "rebalancing" that has emboldened Japan, on the dispute over Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in particular.

Deeply rooted in this intertwined regional imbalance/rebalance is the lack of trust between various stakeholders. Ideologically, the US, as an offshore balancer in Northeast Asia, and Japan and South Korea,

all have deficit of trust with China and North Korea, though South Korea and Japan also have disputes concerning in history and territory between themselves. Strategically, the US and Japan have increasingly more difficulties with China's intentions and direction, while South Korea has been caught in between. It is also noted that China and North Korea are far less trustful of each other now, concerning respective mode of ideology and development. Presently, Beijing and Pyongyang also differ fundamentally in regard to the latter's nuclear weapons development. Their divergence in this regard has become more apparent after Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un have each taken command.

Such a pervasive lack of trust among almost all actors in Northeast Asia will most likely be sustained for the rest of this decade. To some extent, the ongoing negative trend could possibly become worse. This makes Northeast Asia rather unstable and insecure, certainly unhelpful for the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula.

## **I. Changing Security Environment in Northeast Asia**

The Northeast Asia has consisted of the top three world economies — the US, which has prominent existence here, and China as well as Japan. Since the 1950s, the US has fostered two parallel America-centered military alliances with Japan and South Korea. Given Japan's geographical location and overall competitiveness, Washington has tapped Tokyo as its “unsinkable” aircraft carrier in order to implement its forward deployment strategy, containing the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea.

The end of Cold War has much changed such a security landscape. With the demise of the former Soviet Union and given China's reform and opening, international relations in Northeast Asia have been far less confrontational for the two decades of 1990s-2000s, but have become more turbulent in the past several years. Presently, this region is witnessing two trends simultaneously: regional and global economic integration which brings nations together, and rebalancing and reshaping of regional order that tends to be more intensive. As it is likely that America may no longer be the sole superpower in the next two decades, the pace of the changing security environment in Northeast Asia could be more hastened accordingly, and the consequent major-power relations could become more uncertain.

## 1. China's Rapid Rise

China's rapid rise since 1978/1979 has been phenomenal. In 1979, China's per capita GDP was merely RMB 200 yuan, or US\$125 (or 1/150 of the US). By 2013, however, it has reached some US\$7000, or about 1/8 of the US, amounting to US\$9.43 billion in total, or 57% of the US, making it the 2nd biggest economy in the world. In 2010, China's GDP overtook Japan. China surpassed Japan by 42% in 2012, but by 2013 its GDP became twice as big as Japan (partly due to currency conversion of the two countries).

From 2000 to 2013, China's total GDP rose from US\$1.07 trillion to US\$9.43 trillion, increasing more than threefold, or nearly doubling every four years. If this could be sustained, by 2016, China could be on a par with the US. Though China's economic rise is now slowing, it still grows at about 8% per year, which permits Beijing the chance to catch up with the US before 2030, with a conservative estimate. In terms of purchasing power parity, China would attain this much earlier than 2030. The US National Intelligence Council predicted in its *2030 Global Trend* report of 2012 that "by 2030, the US would not be the sole superpower of the world."

Regarding defense, China hikes up similarly. In 2001, Chinese defense spending was mere US\$15 billion, or less than 1/18 of the US; but by 2013, it is close to US\$120 billion, or 1/5 of the US in the same year, increasing also nearly by threefold in 12 years, or doubling every four years. Projecting linearly (though unrealistically), by around 2020, China's military spending could reach some US\$500 billion, much closer to the current US level, if America would stick to its sequestration by cutting defense spending by US\$1 trillion in total from 2012 to 2020, compared to its spending in 2011.

Already, China's defense spending has more than doubled compared to that of Japan, and quadrupled compared to that of India. With much increased economic and defense resources available, China is now able to send astronauts to space and aspire to place its first operational space station in orbit around 2020, possibly the only such functioning station in the space at that time. China has launched its own regional navigation and positioning system, BeiDou Navigation Satellite System, or BDS, and will make it a global system around 2020. It has demonstrated both missile defense and anti-satellite capability, with fast modernization of its air force, navy, and space capacity. In conjunction with its precision missile prowess, China is believed to have already acquired certain area denial capability. Meantime, it is improving its land-based rapid transportation and overseas air-lifting capacity.

China's rise is greatly changing the strategic background of Northeast Asia. With Beijing's defense building up, the US is less certain to be able to maintain its dominance in the region, especially in the airspace and waters close to China. In the East China Sea area, with its failure to persuade Japan not to nationalize the three main islands of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, China had quickly launched a tit-for-tat campaign to illustrate its jurisdiction over the area since September 2012. As this still has not succeeded in making Japan admit disputes over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, China announced in October 2013 its East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), covering the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and its territorial space. Though the US and its allies refuse to admit the legitimacy of this East China Sea ADIZ, they have allowed their civilian airlines to observe China's regulation, indicating that China has received much international acceptance of its jurisdiction over the zone, at least for the civilian

part. This signifies, in a way, international recognition of the existence of a dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, as Japan's claim has overlapped this area.

China's rise has ramifications beyond Northeast Asia. In Southeast Asia, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a Maritime Silk Road during his visit to Indonesia and Malaysia in June 2013, suggesting cooperation on regional infrastructural connectedness. China's financial and technological resources have given it an edge in offering public goods at a time when the US is fiscally mired. Such an expansion of Chinese soft power could make the US nervous so Washington evoked its "return to Asia" policy to strike an overall rebalance in East Asia. In particular, the US is concerned about China's maritime expansion infringing upon its neighbors' exclusive economic rights, possibly disrupting freedom of navigation in international water and space.

## **2. Japan's Conservative Shift**

Japan's changing political framework and foreign policy constitutes another key element in the current complex security environment in Northeast Asia. In general, Japan's post Cold War defense posture has been geared toward its so called "normalcy," allowing itself a normal country status, possessing all normal states' rights. Apparently, the post WWII American occupation imposed a peaceful constitution upon Japan, depriving its right of war waging. As a result, for a long time Japan was not permitted to a whole range of military rights: it could only have Self Defense Force rather than state standing force, with its mission to only defend within its territory, without rights to

defend outside Japan. For ages, Japan only had Defense Agency, rather than Department of Defense, and its top official is at the bureau level rather than as a Ministerial/Secretarial. Consequently, the Japan-US Defense Treaty has not allowed Japan to assist in US military action outside Japan, as Tokyo is not permitted a “collective defense” right.

The conservative force in Japan has been unsatisfied with this status and has long pushed to restore Japan’s “normalcy.” Over time, Japan has managed to replace the Defense Agency with a Ministry of Defense, and has tapped various opportunities to dispatch its armed force abroad under the term of UN Peacekeeping Operations. Presently, given China’s rapid rise and increasing tensions over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, Prime Minister Abe is determined to revise the Japanese Constitution so as to attain its right of collective defense. Through assisting the US military mission in the region, Japan will be able to legitimize its state normalcy and eventually become a “normal” country without constitutional restraints. Facing China’s fast growth and maritime expansion, the Obama administration has relaxed its reign over Japan’s constitutional change, embracing Japan’s military build up as a part of Washington’s rebalancing approach. This has been particularly the case as the US has clearly shifted its position on the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the past few years, from being ambiguous to being clear - its Defense Treaty with Japan will be applicable to this dispute.

Since the end of WWII, Japan’s clear move to amend its constitution to allow room for normalcy and collective defense rights has alarmed many, given its persistent reluctance in admitting its imperialist aggression and brutality. In the eye of conservative Japanese, Japan’s colonial rule over East Asia was simply a repetition of American and



European colonialism, and Japan's war with America and European powers was nothing different from inter-imperialist competition. Though such frank testimony makes sense to some extent, it never punished the imperialists who committed war crimes and the need that Japan shall face its historical wrongs with courage and sincerity.

Prime Minister Abe's aggressive push for revising the constitution and taking the leadership role in East Asia to challenge China's rise has reached such an extent to pay tribute to Yasukuni Shrine which hosts 2.5 million of the Japanese war-dead, including 14 A-class criminals and some 2000 B-class and C-class criminals as sentenced by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. His rampant provocation has invited international criticism — China has announced that he is unwelcome and severed all top-level contact with Japan. Russia has aligned its position with China, and South Korea has indicated that it will consequently re-orientate relations with Japan. The United Nations, the US and UK, etc. have all expressed disappointment with Abe's disrespectful move. Obviously, such a regional environment is not conducive to the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula.

### **3. North Korea's Uncertainty**

North Korea is one of the two immediate stakeholders on the Korean Peninsula, which promises great opportunities in the inter-Korean reconciliation process in the long run. At present, however, one has to deal with ongoing challenges due to Pyongyang's leadership stability and nuclear weapons development, none of them being immediately hopeful in offering an assuring settlement.

The separation among Koreans on the Peninsula is one of the long lasting Cold War remains. Against the trend of development in most other places in the world, Pyongyang has retained its closed system and society, with its per capita GDP much less than 10% of Seoul. With the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, North Korea has lost one of its main allies and economic suppliers. In addition, with China's peaceful transformation to be a market economy, Pyongyang and Beijing have diverged in terms of practice — China has employed international cooperation to boost its competitiveness, while North Korea has maintained its Juche idea and confrontational approach, making its system sluggish and impoverished.

Therefore, North Korea has played the nuclear card in the recent decade after quitting the NPT Treaty in 2002. On the one hand, Pyongyang might feel that it has gained a free hand in building up its nuclear weapons program, assuring its independent defense sufficiency with its nuclear deterrent. On the other hand, it could use this nuclear tool to trade for external economic collaboration. The Six Party Talks have been used by Pyongyang as an institutional mechanism to seek an interim security haven and economic benefits, without honoring its own nuclear abandonment obligation. Since October 2006, North Korea has conducted three nuclear tests and launched two satellites with ballistic missile technology. At this stage, there is no sign that it will cease these programs for good as mandated by various pertinent United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Prior to and during its leadership change of the past few years, North Korea has provoked a number of crises in and around the Peninsula. In addition to its nuclear, missile, and satellite tests, it shot artillery shells against Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010, triggering an

acute crisis which invited American and Chinese joint intervention. In March 2013, Pyongyang's new leadership evoked the nuclear threat against the US, in the aftermath of the UNSC resolution against its 3rd nuclear test of February 12, 2013. North Korea's repeated nuclear threats have so much annoyed the Chinese government that President Xi Jinping delivered his Bo'ao Asia Forum speech in April 2014 by stating that "no single country is permitted to throw the region and the entire world into chaos." For the rest of the year, the Six Party Talks were still not able to be reopened despite China's persistent efforts. The chance to have a meaningful dialogue involving Pyongyang in this regard looks gloomy in 2014.

North Korea's decades-stable regime has often frustrated outsiders who wish for regime change that can lead to policy alteration. Then the sudden purge of Jang Sung-taek in December 2013 has projected both hope and setbacks — the positive side is the understanding that the North Korean regime is not iron clad, while the negative side is its reform-minded faction, though charged as corruptive, could hardly survive the brutal system. This situation also shed light for analysts: while Kim Jong-un still firmly grabs power, the long-term hyper-stable regime has to pay a big cost including executing its non-compliant top colleagues.

#### **4. The US Rebalancing Strategy**

America is still rising despite frustration. Its GDP increased more than 60% from 2000 to 2013, despite the two wars it conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan during that period. Its political system has

worked to allow the GIs to be withdrawn from the two wars in about ten years. Its stock market has rebounded to a historical high and its social program such as the Obamacare is advancing despite setbacks. However, America's rise has been much outshined by China's during the same period. While the US GDP increased by 60% in 13 years, China's GDP expanded more than threefold. The anti-terror war in Iraq has been so controversial that both American hard and soft power have been undermined. Its healthcare reform has been ill-prepared, especially when its fiscal balance is in deep trouble. Fundamentally, America's political institution, as demonstrated by its check-and-balance system, has been less effective, since its partisanship has generated one after another federal fiscal cliff, and since its anti-terror surveillance system seems to function out of control.

Despite these, the US is able to quit two wars and re-orientate itself to the changing regional and global security environment. With non-traditional security threat receding, the US government is attaching more importance to traditional security again, with state actors as its main focus. In this vein, China's rise and its future direction has drawn much attention of the Obama administration, so the White House has put forward its new security strategy of rebalancing in the Asia-Pacific, primarily in East Asia.

The US has interpreted this strategy as an overall effort to strengthen its military, economic, and trade resources to assure peace and stability in East Asia. In the trade area, America has picked up Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to lift regional free trade to a higher level. Militarily, the US armed forces would redeploy its global asset more in Asia, with 60% of its navy stationing in this area and with an air-sea battle framework. For this purpose, it is restructuring its force

deployment in Japan, and stressing the importance of Guam. Washington has encouraged Japan to revise its national security strategy with latest national defense program guideline. The US has, for the first time, deployed marines in Darwin, Australia. It is strengthening military partnership with the Philippines, and offered defense aid to Vietnam.

To relieve China's security concern, the Obama administration has repeatedly expressed that its rebalancing strategy, initially termed as "pivoting" and "return to Asia," is not geared against China. Indeed, the US has made gesture to engage in Chinese military for bilateral and multilateral exercises, such as China-US bilateral naval search-and-rescue drill, and the bi-annual Exercise RIMPAC. However, these may not have had great effect on China's perception. China has hurried its own version of defense modernization to counter the US rebalancing effort. Such lack of trust does not bode well for their cooperation or for the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula.

## II. Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula

Since President Park Geun-hye commanded the Blue House in 2013, her administration has set the goal of inter-Korea reconciliation through the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula. She has addressed the essential approach to peace and stability on the Peninsula, as without trust among the Koreans, it is hard to build and sustain peace and stability in the region. Just like the incident of Cheonan sinking of March 2010, South Korea would not trust North's denial of the charges against it for torpedoing the corvette. Cheonan sinking, Yeonpyeong shelling, Gaeseong Industrial Complex closing, and nuclear threatening as aforementioned, are all harmful to building trust on the Peninsula. In this context, President Park's initiative has been embraced by China and the US when she presented the idea during her visit to the two countries in 2013.

Fundamentally, the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula entails trust fostering among all Koreans. Nevertheless, as far as the surrounding security environment in Northeast Asia is concerned, regional players could also affect trust building process on the peninsula. In particular, the relationship amongst the relevant stakeholders bears greatly on the outcome of this process. The trust-building among those external actors, and between external players and North/South Korea, will all affect the process.

Scanning all these relationships, it is noted that the following factors would contribute positively to trust building on the Korean Peninsula:

- the building up of China-South Korea strategic partnership;
- the sustaining of China-North Korea relations along a positive direction;
- and, the making of China-US new type of major-country relations.

On the negative side, the following factors are unhelpful to trust building on the Peninsula:

- the deteriorating Sino-Japanese relationship;
- the difficult South Korea-Japan political relationship;
- North Korea's internal development and inter-Korean relationship;
- and, the mutual-hedging of China-US relationship.

## **1. China-South Korea Relationship**

On the plus side, Beijing and Seoul have built a strong relationship since 1992. Despite the incidents of Cheonan and Yeonpyeong in 2010, they have withstood the challenges thereafter. In 2013, the two countries each had its new leadership and their strategic partnership was lifted to new heights. China and South Korea have found respective roles that are of more strategic importance in stabilizing the Peninsula and the entire Northeast Asia. With great fatigue and frustration in dealing with North Korea over the past decade, China has to search for a new regional strategic stabilizer to partner with and Seoul increasingly fits China's radar screen. With President Park Geun-hye's visit to Beijing in 2013, the two countries have strengthened their

trust which shall facilitate their cooperation in the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula. Lately, China's President Xi Jinping has sent a letter to congratulate President Park on her birthday and expressed his desire to visit South Korea in 2014, under the background that their respective relations with Japan are all souring.

Presently, China has had little interest in hiding its dissatisfaction with North Korea's nuclear weapons development. Interestingly, this nuclear program has, inadvertently, brought China and South Korea closer. Similarly, Pyongyang's nuclear ambition has largely smoothed over Beijing-Washington collaboration for the past decade. However, given the fact that North Korea is still pushing for its 'nuclear envelope,' China's credibility in managing this issue has been questioned — whether Beijing is capable of containing North Korea's nuclear ambition, and, if it is interested in devoting all its resources in this endeavor. With President Xi's speech in Bo'ao in the spring of 2013, Beijing signaled that Seoul and Washington should increase their confidence in Beijing's shared interests with them. It shall be mentioned that America is standing between China and South Korea due to the Washington-Seoul security alliance. Even though South Korea might manage the problem and not to let it be harmful to Seoul's relations with Beijing at a time of challenge, it remains to be an issue.

## **2. China-North Korea Relationship**

The two long-time allies are re-orientating their relations with difficulty. As China has embarked on reform and opening, the two countries have now much different discourses and practices, and therefore



have taken divergent contours. Since North Korea first conducted its nuclear blast in 2006, China has, on the record, repeatedly avoided to reaffirm its military alliance with North Korea. In many ways, China is detaching from its special relationship with North Korea. Instead, it is building up a “normal” bond with its old ally.

There is an inherent dilemma herein. On the one hand, such a trend is helpful to the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula, as China encourages North Korea to stage its own reform and opening, and discourages the latter to go nuclear. On the other hand, Pyongyang will definitely feel isolated and could be more inclined to creating an independent nuclear deterrent. As long as North Korea perceives its alliance with China no longer credible, it will obviously opt for total self-defense, with nuclear deterrent at its core. Then, China-North Korea relations would become more distrustful, increasingly spiral down. This has been often manifested by North Korea’s surprise moves without consulting China in advance. For instance, Pyongyang has conducted three nuclear tests, and executed Jang Sung-taek, its top-most China hand, without consulting China. As such, China’s diminishing influence on North Korea doesn’t much help its promotion of the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula.

Considering such factors, China has attempted to balance its policy toward North Korea. It has used export control to leverage North Korea’s nuclear and missile development, as part of the international concerted sanctions. It has been reported that China didn’t give ad hoc food assistance despite Vice-Marshal Choe Ryong-hae’s visit to Beijing in May 2013. However, China still offers regular economic aid such as food and energy so as to maintain a normal relationship. It has not supported the conclusion of international investigation on

the sinking of Cheonan by a group of countries including South Korea. Though the concept of North Korea as a buffer between China and the US force on South Korea has been lately challenged, Pyongyang's lingering strategic value in China's hedging vis-à-vis the US rebalancing cannot be underestimated.

### **3. China/Korea-Japan Relationship**

Forty years after the normalization of the diplomatic ties between China and Japan, the relationship is undergoing its worst period. Their dispute over Diaoyu/Senkaku Island has much flared up, and an incident military clash is not unlikely. This has been further exacerbated by China's announcement of East China Sea ADIZ, which overlaps with that of Japan including what Japan has termed as Senkaku Islands. With Abe's visit to Yasukuni Shrine at the end of 2013, Beijing has closed all talks with him. Nationalism in both capitals has never been so high. This ever worsening relationship between China and Japan makes the prospect for the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula dim, as the two countries have increased the hurdles for consultation and coordination on various prominent issues, Korean trust building being no exception.

However, Japan itself is hardly a key player to advance trust building on the peninsula. Since Japan has colonized the peninsula and repeatedly stirred up controversy by denying its historical wrongs, it is naturally a subject for the two Koreas to forge unintended consensus to oppose, no matter the topic, be it concerned with the territorial dispute over Dokdo island, or about Japan's bidding of permanent

membership of the UNSC, or about Abe's recent tribute to the Yasukuni Shrine. It is also noted that during the Six Party Talks, Japan kept raising the abductees issue at the negotiation table, derailing the major focus of the talks on nuclear disarmament, and consequently the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula. Despite the fact that both South Korea and Japan are US allies, Seoul and Tokyo have yet to find a tangible issue to substantiate the trust building on the Korean Peninsula.

#### **4. Sino-US Relationship**

The Sino-US relationship is perhaps the most crucial external factor to affect trust building on the Korean Peninsula. As China and the US have a great deficit in trust, they tend to tackle the Korean Peninsula as part of their geostrategic competition, traditionally with US-South Korea on one side, and China-North Korea on the other. China-US rivalry, with the Taiwan issue at the core, has seriously undermined their trust building, subsequently affecting their national security perceptions and behavior. Unfortunately, the Korean Peninsula has become their regional playground for hedging.

The Taiwan issue is thus the core which has been closely intertwined with the Korean Peninsula. A century ago the Qing Dynasty sent its navy to Korea at the request of the latter in 1894, but the Qing fleet was ambushed by Japan. China lost the war and had to cede Taiwan, including the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, to Japan. Losing the protection of the Qing, Korea subsequently was colonized by Japan until 1945 when Japan yielded its control over Taiwan and Korea. Then, the

Korean War made the US and China archenemies, during which the Truman administration decided to defend Taiwan which has forged the current separation of the mainland China and Taiwan. But, unification with Taiwan remains the mainland's core mission and from this perspective, the US is the main barrier that impairs China's primary interest.

Against this backdrop, pushing the US armed forces in the region as far away as possible has thus been in China's national security interest. In accordance with classical realism, the Korean issue has been intrinsically interlinked with the Taiwan issue, as the sheer existence of North Korea could provide China with a security buffer. For decades, China has committed to sustaining its special bond with North Korea for the sake of ideological and geostrategic reasons, till it reprioritized its mission to develop its economy in partnership with the US, Japan, and South Korea. China's expanded interests have made it redefine its tie with North Korea, which in turn makes the latter anxious, building up an independent nuclear weapons program as Pyongyang's ultimate security guarantor.

Despite China's altering of development mode, the US is still wary of China's rapid rise that promises to reshape the regional and even global security balance. America is apprehensive of China's increasing confidence and assertiveness in the air, maritime and cyber space. While collaborating with China to restrain North Korea's belligerent moves, the US has ushered a rebalance strategy so as to sustain its dominance in East Asia. The US support for Japan's jurisdiction over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, its encouragement of Japan's amendment to its constitution, its continuing arms sales to Taiwan, and its forceful pivoting in collaboration with allies and partners in the region, all bode unwell for China.

Consequently, despite China's promotion of "a new type of major-country relationship" with America, China is balancing America's rebalancing. China's rapprochement with Russia, its proposals for a Eurasia Silk Road Economic Belt and southeast bound Maritime Silk Road etc., are all part of its geostrategic response to America's rebalance. Furthermore, Beijing is amending or revamping its ties with quite a number of neighbors such as Pakistan, Cambodia and some other countries in South Asia, Central Asia and Southeast Asia. In Northeast Asia, China has and needs to work with North Korea despite its unwillingness to follow China's urging for reform and nuclear abandonment. Such peculiar partnership has not made China effective in forestalling North Korea's nuclear quest and letting Pyongyang to accept Seoul. Subsequently, there is still a long way to go for China to be truly successful in bridging the two Koreas for trust building.

## **5. Inter-Korea Relationship**

Fundamentally, trust building on the Korean Peninsula relies mostly on the intent of the two Koreas. If North and South Korea are interested in and able to build trust, it is unlikely that external forces will be able to stop them. Likewise, if they are interested in reaping benefits from sustaining tensions, then external players are not capable of imposing trust upon them.

Technically, the two Koreas are of the same Korean ethnic root and it is in their common interests to build a trust-based inter-Korean relationship. However, they differ significantly in their definition of

and approach to peace and hence, trust. Their different social institutions, value system, and security mode render them varying definitions of domestic peace and national security. But due to the vast gulf of difference in these areas, their mutual perception of peace has much diverged. A suppressive while stable North Korean regime may not be perceived as peaceful and trustworthy by the South. Similarly, in Pyongyang's perspective, securing nuclear weaponry would make it most secure and peaceful, but South Korea would view exactly such developments as threatening and non-trustworthy.

Presently, the existence of the above-mentioned different notions of peace has prevented the two Koreas from constructing trust. In the near term, it is hard to forge significant change of such rivalry. Basically, it is up to both countries to exercise tolerance, and work towards accommodating each other, so as to reduce mutual suspicion. Despite their mutual denial, the two Koreas need to promote exchanges in order to allow incremental improvement of mutual understanding and respect, if not mutual appreciation.

In sum, inter-Korea relations are the core factor which affects the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula, with external stakeholders and their interactions playing subsidiary roles in this regard. Given the complex regional security environment in East Asia, both positive and negative external circumstances exist at present, promoting as well as discouraging trust building on the Peninsula.

# Thoughts on the Future of Myanmar's Transition

*Nicholas Farrelly*

## **Myanmar in Flux**

Prognostication is the least reliable of the tools available to social scientists, a fact well established by the repeated failures of politics experts to predict the future (Tetlock, 2006). Predicting where Myanmar's transition will lead is an especially fraught task and this paper begins with the premise that haphazard and unexpected outcomes are likely. In the Myanmar case, any effort to come to grips with the future are complicated by the pace of change, the inconsistent impact of long-term military rule on society, and the prevailing scarcity of clear information on the longer-term ambitions of important political players, including the armed forces (see Selth, 2008: 399; 2009: 273; 2010: 439-440). In the scholarly literature on Myanmar, ideas about 'change' (Haseman, 1988), 'stability' (MacDougall and

Wiant, 1986), and ‘transition’ (Shen and Chan, 2010), have been given regular scrutiny and yet the situation facing analysts in the contested period from the 2010 election to the prospective 2015 poll challenges many prevailing preconceptions about political and social phenomena. Already there are pointed questions about the genesis of the changes in the country (Farrelly, 2013a), but for any discussion of the future of Myanmar’s ongoing transition those become subordinate concerns. Instead, the weight of analytical attention must quickly shift to the major issues that remain unresolved after the country’s early phases of political (Joseph, 2012) and economic (Jones, 2014) re-organisation.

Today Myanmar is becoming ‘normal’ (Holliday, 2013), in its own style, and presents itself to the world as a remarkable story of political change. Dictatorship exerted its dominance from 1962 to 2010, with two coups, in 1962 and 1988, punctuating and reinforcing military control of Myanmar society (Callahan, 2003; Farrelly, 2013b). For many critics of this system, the legacy of dictatorship has yet to be adequately re-imagined for a more participatory political future. After almost five decades of such rule it is only natural that the world is intrigued by any unexpected developments, especially when they appear positive. Few were confident to predict that Myanmar would embark on such a bold path even though, in hindsight, many of the signals were clear. Reading statements from the Myanmar government during the final decade of military rule (from 2001 to 2010) it is apparent that the goal of moving to a more democratic, prosperous and outward-looking society was always there (see South, 2004). That it took so long to reach even today’s tentative point in the transition from military rule led many to doubt the government’s commitment to its stated outcome. Now, the future



of Myanmar's transition should be understood, as a first principle, through recognition of what this transition entails. It is a process of sustained and yet inconsistent political, economic, social and cultural reform which has its catalyst, and takes its leadership, from the former military dictatorship itself. Some imagine this is an effort to 'legitimise' the former military government, yet its ambitions go far beyond that modest goal (Ganesan, 2013).

The trends and new mentalities that have been embraced by Myanmar's reformists appear to be leading the country towards a more inclusive style of development and governance. Change has been rapid and, naturally, incomplete. The formalisation and legitimisation of opposition politics and political parties, such as Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, are a key step in the process of political change. The by-election that saw so many democratic voices elected in April 2012 is especially noteworthy in this regard (Tin Maung Maung Than, 2013). But not everything can be judged as warmly: some are inclined to caution against those whose views deemed 'far too optimistic about what recent changes in Myanmar can lead to' (Lintner, 2013: 108). There is still a considerable risk that the overall pattern of Myanmar's transition will be interrupted by a re-balancing, such as through a coup that puts the army back in charge.<sup>1</sup> The current moment of nascent democratic reform is an especially vulnerable one and there is a clear need to understand the risks of Myanmar's transition ending in violence or further upheaval. Simply put, such an outcome cannot be eliminated from any calculus

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<sup>1</sup> In this context it should be noted that on August 12, 2013 the Australian National University hosted an event titled "What's the chance of a coup for Myanmar?" The considered views of the experts gathered on that occasion were that, in the years ahead, a coup was a distinct possibility. For follow-up discussion see Selth (2013).

of Myanmar's immediate political prospects. There is therefore a need to interrogate the future of Myanmar's transition process without taking too much of its current progress for granted. The prospect of abrupt and negative changes remains real, even though it would likely prove disastrous for Myanmar society and its place in the region.

To assist with any efforts to avoid such a calamitous result, this paper is informed by history to offer an assessment of the future of Myanmar's transition. The transition carries hope of finally consummating some of the dreams carried by the protestors of 1988 who campaigned for a more inclusive political system with economic opportunities for all Myanmar's people (Maung Maung, 1999). In the years after the tragic events of 1988 there were glimpses of a better and more peaceful future yet they remained unfulfilled (see Seekins, 1999). The frustrations only began to end with the implementation of the 2008 constitution and then the General Election of November 2010. Since that election the transformation of Myanmar society has proved astonishing.

In this paper, I set out my understanding of Myanmar's reform process as a tentative, incomplete, often incoherent and generally haphazard process where new dynamics, beyond the direct control of the government, are powering significant changes to Myanmar society. While this is not an appropriate forum to rehearse the variety of explanations for the changes, it appears likely that Cyclone Nargis' devastating impact in May 2008 is at least partly responsible for the reformist impetus (Larkin, 2010). In the wake of that natural disaster, at the highest levels of government there was a new appreciation that the system needed to change. It is from these starting points that I

introduce what I expect will be the four major issues that will determine the future of Myanmar's political and economic transformation: ethnic conflict, reform of the armed forces, creation of economic opportunity and violence in politics.

Dealing with these issues will likely leave Myanmar vulnerable to further turbulence if far-sighted leadership, augmented by popular and international goodwill, fails to adequately manage the variety of destructive forces that will be brought to bear. This argument does not crudely imply that the future is bleak for Myanmar society. There is every chance that the process of political reform and democratic consolidation will succeed. The corollary of this optimistic tone is the need for much greater consideration of the diversity of issues that are likely to gain destructive momentum in the years ahead. Some of that momentum will make it more difficult for the Myanmar authorities, irrespective of which political party is in-charge, to determine the next steps in the nation's future. As such, this analysis does not presuppose specific electoral or economic outcomes. Rather, it begins with the premise that any Myanmar government will face broad trends that require careful management in the long-term.

The four major issues are described as distinct categories although, in practice, it is fair to imply that they interact with each other, and respond to signals and incentives from across the breadth of Myanmar society. The processes that mesh them together are unstudied, at least in the Myanmar context. Disentangling them could be an impossible task and for that reason the analysis offered in this paper goes only part of the way towards a clear demarcation of the issues. Still, there are good reasons to explain these four different themes as sufficiently distinct to merit their own analytical treatment.

Each of them — ethnic conflict, the armed forces, economic opportunities and political violence — relates to the other in ways that will not always be obvious from the brief treatment offered here. It is, however, reasonable to suggest that each of these four issues is systemic in the sense that without attention to its particular role in the future of Myanmar's transition then the entire project will struggle for success.

## I. Resolving Ethnic Conflict

The most pressing issue that needs attention is Myanmar's long-term ethnic conflict. There is no greater threat to the positive trajectory of change in the country today. The persistent challenge for Myanmar governments is to integrate the country's various ethnic political and military organisations into a single set of national regulations and legal mechanisms. Since the State Law and Order Restoration Council took control of the country in September 1988, the Myanmar leadership has struggled to develop popular consensus around its management of ethnic affairs (see South, 2003; Lintner, 1994). Ceasefire agreements with more than a dozen different armed groups led to a modicum of more peaceful interaction and yet the government struggled to bend these into final peace deals (Rajah, 1998). Instead, many of the ceasefires fell unevenly between peace and war, with sporadic clashes, persistent tension and permanent distrust defining interactions between the government and those they sought to govern. It was often only through lucrative economic concessions, usually centred on extractive development projects like mining or logging, that the previously warring parties could embrace their mutual interests. In general, the ceasefires that were agreed after the collapse of the Communist Party of Burma in 1989 also served to limit the political coherence of ethnic resistance movements. (This is a change from the period when the Communist Party was a single political vehicle). As some groups and individuals prospered, and as other struggled to

continue their resistance to Myanmar government rule, the fractures in ethnic forces became ever more apparent. Some groups, like the United Wa State Army, prospered out of all proportion and received the peace dividend they had craved (Kramer, 2007). It was, however, the inconsistency of ceasefire experiences that is most relevant to any discussion of resolving ethnic conflict.

The specific and often exceptional arrangements enjoyed by particular ethnic groups or political movements are now being tested by revived efforts for a grand negotiation. For instance, as Walton (2013: 22) argues 'adopting a perspective that is sensitive to Burman privilege puts the focus squarely on Burmans as the only group in a position to challenge structures of Burman privilege.' At this stage, the government is captured by such 'privilege' and insists that Myanmar's national-level legislature (the *Pyindaungsu Hluttaw*) is the appropriate forum for the resolution of ethnic conflict. They hope to encourage armed ethnic groups to demobilise their forces, or co-opt them to government militias, as a mechanism for increasing trust. Ethnic leaders have stated their reluctance to accept these terms and fear that the emasculation of the ethnic resistance will lead to unsatisfactory and unjust political outcomes. Instead, they call for a national conversation, culminating in a grand compromise, which generates a new constitutional framework founded in principles of equality, democracy and self-determination. Advocates for ethnic rights may eventually get their way, but only after being subjected to a process of de-politicisation. As Egreteau (2012: 313) suggests, '[a]swith the current military/civil transition, which was envisioned by a 7-Step road map announced in 2003, a new road map is needed to address Myanmar's ethnic conundrum.' For the government of Myanmar, there is arguably no greater challenge. It comes with risks in many directions.

What are those risks? First, while it is true that the situation in ethnic areas is, in general, calmer than it has been for years (Ball and Farrelly, 2013) there remains a chance that flare-ups will lead to further major conflict. There is a recent example from northern Myanmar where from June 2011 to May 2013 a tense local political situation generated wide-spread fighting (Farrelly, 2012). Thousands were killed, with very heavy casualties on the government side. Since a new and tentative ceasefire between the Kachin Independence Army and the government, this region has seen only occasional fire-fights. On the frontlines, these sporadic clashes between the two sides indicate that there is a lack of trust and a real possibility of future escalation. Elsewhere, particularly in the Shan State, tensions remain high. What this means, crudely, is that if the government or an ethnic group misjudge the situation, then further conflict may ignite. For a government that is managing an already difficult political situation in Myanmar's major cities — Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyitaw — the difficulty of new ethnic wars is all too apparent.

Second, the Myanmar government faces a variety of risks when managing sentiments among the country's majority population, the Bamar, who are likely to see the erosion of their special status. As almost two-thirds of Myanmar's people, in the official count, the Bamar majority have enjoyed special 'privileges' (as discussed in Walton, 2013). As the direct result of the former system of military rule, it cannot be assumed that such privilege will be maintained after the country's political reforms are fully implemented. At the same time, the demarcation of boundaries for powerful lower house constituencies in the People's Assembly (*Pyithu Hluttaw*) suggests that ethnic populations are, at least by population, over-represented in the legislature (Chit Win, 2013). The interaction of these different

dynamics, in a context where the government seeks to finalise peace agreements with ethnic groups, is potentially explosive.

Nonetheless, the overall trend towards greater negotiation is one for which the current Myanmar government deserves credit, and there is every chance that future governments will follow a similar path. The government headed by President Thein Sein has now brokered deals with all of the major armed groups, including the Karen National Union, which had fought against the government since 1949 (Farrelly, 2013c). The recent pause in that decades-long conflict, the establishment of liaison offices in government-controlled Myanmar, and the intention to integrate the Karen leadership into future peace negotiations is part of steady effort to end the country's civil conflicts. Former generals spearhead these efforts, most notably Aung Min, who as President's Office Minister takes central control of the peace-making effort. His gregarious manner and years-long tasking has provided plenty of opportunity for ethnic leaders to become more comfortable with his presence (Egreteau, 2012: 312). Yet, concerns remain about how to best organise the management of this diverse terrain (Dean, 2012), with many wondering whether the Myanmar armed forces are finally prepared to negotiate with those they have considered enemies. The future of Myanmar's transition likely rests on the relationship between ethnic conflict and the role of the Myanmar armed forces.



## II. Re-prioritising the Myanmar Armed Forces

The Myanmar armed forces are widely reported to have an approximate and notional strength of 250,000-400,000 uniformed personnel (for discussion see Selth, 2009). During the years of military dictatorship they took on a baffling range of administrative and political responsibilities and, as befits the ideology of military rule, often expressed scepticism about the capacities of civilian leaders. This bureaucratic system, welded to an intensely nationalistic official culture (Gravers, 1999), gave Myanmar a coherence which is today most apparent in Naypyitaw, the new capital city first imagined by the military leadership as a home for their rule. In many parts of the country, the armed forces have a relatively low-key posture, defined by sprawling garrisons on the outskirts of towns and villages. In other places, naturally enough, they take on a more assertive guise, ready to respond to local security contingencies.

In a fundamental way, the modern Myanmar armed forces have been designed for internal security operations. Large numbers of Infantry and Light Infantry Battalions, to say nothing of the Police Combat Battalions and the extensive internal security intelligence apparatus, are tasked to rapidly mobilise security personnel in any potential flashpoints (for useful details see Selth, 2012). The size of the Myanmar armed forces means that around bridges of even marginal strategic

value, there has been a tradition of stationing sentries. In the most sensitive zones, the armed forces have an overwhelming presence, predicated on the long-held idea that without their protective presence the entire country will unravel (for an explanation see Farrelly, 2013d). This idea has remained potent enough that around 20 percent of the national budget is devoted to the armed forces, with provisions for undisclosed 'special funds' to be spent for the military's purposes. This material and symbolic dominance has yet to truly fade. On state-run television, military programming and advertisements still take great precedence, and every night there are anthems to the virtue and potency of men in uniform.

Arguably, more pervasive influence comes from the variety of ways that the armed forces have infiltrated all of the decision-making elements of the state apparatus. The Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, currently General Min Aung Hlaing, is constitutionally empowered to take a leading political role. A National Security Council is an over-arching executive body for sensitive topics, including internal security matters. One of the country's Vice Presidents is also drawn from the ranks of the armed forces, as are 25 percent of the members of all provincial and federal legislatures. In many government ministries, former senior military officers continue to hold the most important positions. It will likely be generations before the assertive role of the armed forces and its personnel is diminished to any significant extent. A purge of such figures would have the unfortunate collateral impact of diminishing the pool of talent and expertise on which the country can rely. Motivating the armed forces to play a constructive role in Myanmar's transition is therefore crucial to the future of the process as a whole.

It is apparent that President Thein Sein, himself a former general and a senior member of the military clique that ruled Myanmar until 2010, has crafted a cabinet leavened with former generals and colonels, and that draws on their significant experience. This preponderance of military experience may not be entirely desirable but it does offer a semblance of stability. Their attitude towards political change appears to vary and yet, many have found the confluence of incentives for reform extraordinarily tasteful. Their treatment by what was once a sceptical, even jaundiced, international community has provided a refreshing introduction to world affairs. Such former military men are constantly bombarded by requests for meetings, speeches and decisions. The world has now queued to get to know them. This relatively warm embrace has come, for some, as a late career surprise; a novel departure from their earlier, far more cynical, engagements with the world. Keeping them motivated to serve the people and the nation is a simple enough goal. The consequences of any de-motivation would be profound and potentially irrevocable.

In the long-term, what are the most important issues for military reform? First, the Myanmar armed forces could be encouraged to gradually de-emphasise their active political responsibilities, and dilute their influence on the day-to-day affairs of state. Second, the armed forces will need to shrink, perhaps very considerably, to no longer threaten the overall political balance. The demobilisation of large numbers of junior servicemen will come at a high price in terms of retraining and reintegration. In many cases, there will be no post-army career, and so pension entitlements will be required to

ensure social harmony and livelihoods. Third, what remains of the Myanmar army will need to take on a more obvious role as a national defence institution. Fighting against internal enemies cannot be deemed a productive use of resources. A defence force which can secure Myanmar's borders and prepare for regional contingencies, perhaps also contribute to international humanitarian missions and United Nations peace-keeping, could be a proud addition to the Southeast Asian security landscape. These are, in their own ways, all very significant reforms which would require major and ongoing attention from Myanmar's senior leaders.

The alternative to such reform of the armed forces would see a continued political role, a bloated and inefficient military bureaucracy and the prospect that the army continues to generate internal conflict to justify its existence. If any of these issues are not adequately managed by Myanmar's leadership there is a risk that problems, including those of a very drastic nature, may emerge. The chance of another coup in Myanmar may not be high, but it cannot be eliminated from all reckoning. The culture of the armed forces will need gentle moderation and manipulation until such a time as a professional and outward-facing armed forces have disavowed their traditional political entanglements. The experience of the near neighbourhood, and especially in countries as different as Thailand and Bangladesh, suggests that this process will take generations. The Thai example shows, very clearly, that a continued political role for the army is one of the possible outcomes (see Farrelly, 2013e). In this context, the armed forces will remain a key component of Myanmar's transition and for the success of the changes unfolding in the country.

One further positive trend is the re-engagement of western democratic militaries with their Myanmar counterparts. For the first time, Australia will soon have a Defence Attaché based permanently in Yangon and Naypyitaw. This is a major change, and one that is being followed by the United Kingdom. The efforts of the United States to re-imagine their connections to the Myanmar armed forces are also noteworthy in this respect. There is much for all sides to learn and with that new knowledge, there are special economic opportunities that may emerge.

### III. Expanding Economic Opportunities

If Myanmar remains poor, the prognosis for its political system will remain an issue. While, at Myanmar's level, there is no simple correlation between economic growth and political development it is apparent that increased wealth, especially at the lower levels, will improve the country's chances of political stability. The relationship between economics and politics is sometimes difficult to discern but in Myanmar's case, it is clear that without economic growth, and more equitable distribution of resources, there could be hardships ahead. The challenge of diversifying the economy is significant, with a GDP of approximately \$1200 per capita, Myanmar remains one of the poorest countries in Asia. Regional differences mean that some parts of the country receive significantly lower average income than the national average with places like Rakhine and Chin States faring especially poorly. Their lackluster economic performance is partly explained by their relative geographical isolation and disconnection from the national mainstream. Myanmar has an especially dire infrastructure deficit that means decades of investment in ports, railways, roads and bridges, to say nothing of schools, hospitals, community facilities and universities, will now be required. The management, or even manipulation, of these interlocking demands will be immense.

Furthermore, most of Myanmar's population currently work in agriculture, although there is great expectation that industrial

activities and manufacturing will move to re-deploy 'surplus' rural labour. In the stark terms favoured by many economists, this could foster a process of positive growth trajectories, matched by raised living standards and greater economic opportunities. The risk of large-scale social dislocation, urban decay and ghettoisation also often accompany rural-to-urban migration. In Myanmar, the number of people living in cities is growing rapidly, with obvious effects on quality of life in both Yangon and Mandalay. For the first time, Yangon now experiences regular traffic jams, a novel gripe for a population more used to complaining about the lack of affordable motor vehicles than their abundance. It is these changes that will ultimately re-shape Myanmar's economic horizons. Talk of transforming Yangon into a 'mega city,' similar to Seoul or Bangkok, may be premature but there is an obvious appetite from both the city and national leadership for Yangon to take a leading role in the national conversation (Kyo Phyo Tha, 2013). That will require a significantly larger population, many of whom will be drawn from Myanmar's poor, rural society.

The fundamental risks that will arise concern equity, especially given the low levels of education (Hayden and Martin, 2013) and health care (Risso-Gill, *et al*, 2013) experienced by most of Myanmar's people today. Over generations, they will need to be empowered, as human resources, for the good of society-at-large as part of a wider 'equitable development' agenda (Burnley, 2013). Ensuring that adequate provisions are made available for education, health and social security is a challenge for Myanmar's reformists. The country's parlous economic condition has generally undermined any effort to fully develop a nationwide safety-net. In most parts of the country, under-resourced public hospitals struggle to treat the large numbers

of impoverished patients seeking even the most basic care. Government schools naturally vary in standard, but for most Myanmar citizens they provide a rudimentary introduction to the national language, mathematics and history, before students join the workforce in their early teenage years. Higher education has also received little central government support, partly for political reasons.

The challenge for Myanmar's leaders is to arrange economically viable, socially informed and politically appropriate mechanisms for garnering investment. Foreign firms are returning to Myanmar with an appetite for new projects. High-profile companies like Coca Cola and Pepsi are just the most obvious examples, with the return of multi-national corporations based in Western democracies beginning a new trend towards economic engagement. When the World Economic Forum was held in Naypyitaw in mid-2013, many senior executives visited the country for the first time. The potential for an economic boom, with double-digit annual growth, is being discussed widely. The challenge, though, is to manage these new conditions for the benefit of Myanmar's people. It will be taken for granted that the well-to-do and well-connected will be enriched by the changes that are unfolding. It is far less clear that the Myanmar people as-a-whole, including those in remote and ethnic regions, will necessarily benefit to the same degree. Without careful stewardship, there is the potential for economic growth to merely entrench disadvantage and inequality, leading to further rounds of political strife and violence.



## IV. Minimising Political Violence

Since mid-2012, violence in Myanmar has coalesced around an age-old fault line between the country's Buddhists and Muslims. This division is most readily apparent in Rakhine State where the citizenship of many local Muslims has been actively questioned, justifying purges of Muslim populations. The Rohingya, a group of Muslims with a disputed claim to long-term residence in Myanmar, have been forced to flee in large numbers. Hundreds have been killed in this violence between the Rohingya and the local Rakhine Buddhist population, with an estimated 90,000 currently counted among Myanmar's internally-displaced. Their tragic circumstances are a symptom of a much deeper issue for Myanmar society during its transitional phase. Indeed the prospect of social harmony in transitional Myanmar is based, in large part, on the capacity of society to respond to the tensions between different religious, social, and ethnic groups. Myanmar's leaders are regularly quoted in the national media on the topic of religious harmony. Yet living together, even in an uncomfortable compromise, has been difficult to manage, and violence has become a regular outcome of local problems. A movement of Buddhist nationalists under the banner '969' has also sought to make the status of Muslims a national political issue, fortified by online campaigns of hate (see McCarthy, 2013). So, how can political violence be minimised and how can diverse communities learn to live together?

What this question implies is that the challenge for Myanmar's reformists is not only to find common ground between the Bamar majority and the country's ethnic minorities, but also between the wide varieties of other social cohorts. There is a need to develop protocols for harmonious social interaction that will weld together all the different groups. The prospect of inter-communal violence, especially where ethnic differences remain potent markers of local authority and position, is very real. Sadly, Myanmar has a history of rolling political strife, and recent violence between Muslims and Buddhists is simply the most recent example. Over time, the perceived differences between communities and individuals may begin to fade, but there will still be many years when Myanmar remains a potential powder-keg of competing social concerns. On class, religious, ethnic, economic, gender, sexuality or linguistic lines, there are many potential areas of conflict, and when several of these categories are blended together, the risks are amplified. It is hardly inevitable that Myanmar will face persistent communal conflict and yet the history of violence in politics suggests that it is a major risk.

To illustrate the potential for problems where a number of these factors merge, it is worth describing one potential cleavage and future conflict. Arguably, one of the most destructive scenarios would see conflict between Myanmar's Chinese and non-Chinese populations. In this case, the differences are marked along class, ethnic, economic and linguistic lines. Since a surge in the number of Chinese living in Myanmar commenced in the late 1980s, there has been sustained growth in their numbers. It is now reasonable to estimate that around 2.5 million Chinese live in the country (Shannon and Farrelly, 2013). Some have acquired Myanmar citizenship, learned to speak local languages, and now integrate, to an extent, with Myanmar society. In

other places, particularly in Mandalay and the Shan State, a very different dynamic has emerged with Chinese commercial leadership distancing them from the rest of society. Resentment against the Chinese for their commercial success is a potentially dangerous trigger for anti-Chinese violence. During the 20th century, there were anti-Chinese riots in Myanmar's cities and there is lingering resentment, in some quarters, of the Chinese role in Myanmar society over the long term (Fan, 2012). The prospect of such ideas coalescing against the Chinese to form a political campaign cannot be ruled out.

And this is merely one scenario whereby violence continues to inform Myanmar politics. With the 2015 election, there will be a need to ensure the peaceful conduct of campaigns. Myanmar has relatively little experience of highly contested electoral situations and examples from neighbours like Thailand and Cambodia suggest that violence will follow. With the potential for unruly street protests, intimidation tactics and even assassinations, Myanmar will need to grapple with a new balance between political freedom and civil political engagement. Taking disagreements to the legislature is likely to be the best long-term solution, where they can be discussed and debated using a set of common rules and understandings. But such rules and understandings remain tentative. When the balance is unsettled, the risks for the country are immense and it is in such a context that the issues discussed in this paper, notably ethnic conflict, reform of the military and economic development, become even more pressing. Adequate management of those issues during the coming years of political change will likely be all that stands between Myanmar and a further period trying to escape from the quagmire of dictatorship and despair.

## Conclusions on the Next Steps

The next steps in Myanmar's reform process will benefit greatly from lessons learned in recent years. Myanmar's current generation of political leaders are well aware of the responsibilities they hold, the opportunities within reach, and the immense challenges that remain to be managed. The four issues discussed in this paper are clearly entangled in ways that will ultimately determine the future of Myanmar's transition. It is too early to assess the relative merits of the various ideas about reform that have circulated and yet there is still an understandable optimism about what will happen next. As such, Myanmar's young will require incentives to remain loyal to a system that was, until recently, a military dictatorship. The risks of unravelling that system too quickly are apparent to many people in Naypyitaw, while the disaster that waits if change grinds to a halt is just as palpable. Sequencing the changes so that risks are minimised to the extent possible appears to be an over-riding concern.

With so many risks apparent, Myanmar's transition has further anxious moments. New opportunities to consolidate the country's image and progress towards more representative government began with the Southeast Asian Games, held in Naypyitaw and Yangon in December 2013, and will flow through to Myanmar's inaugural chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 2014. Taken together, these are unprecedented opportunities to present Myanmar as a

stable, peaceful and outward-looking society. Happily, the risks of mediocre performance on the ASEAN stage are outweighed by the considerable goodwill that these efforts will generate. Across the region, Myanmar's rehabilitation is taken, quite justifiably, as a sign of the success of the local formula for empathetic political engagement and non-intervention in messy domestic affairs. The idea that Myanmar is now improving because of the judicious efforts of leaders and diplomats from across Southeast Asia has gained wide currency. From Jakarta to Hanoi, and Singapore to Bangkok, the neighbours are proud of their roles.

Yet the real test will come somewhat later, with the proposed election to be held in Myanmar in 2015. This poll will give critics of the current government many opportunities to voice their displeasure, and the fundamental challenge of the period will come with a transition to a new generation of leaders, many of whom may be drawn from the opposition National League for Democracy and ethnic political movements. How will the military and the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party adjust to this competition? On current trends, there are many reasons to expect that the changes that would come with a peaceful hand-over of power will be welcomed across society, even in the military itself. Managing expectations, however, will be a further trial, especially if the current government continues to exert significant influence. Sometimes it is incremental changes that have the greatest chance of long-term success.

For other situations of long-term dictatorship, Myanmar's nascent transition holds some further lessons. From this perspective, it is difficult to attribute these changes to any specific external policy setting. Engagement, sanctions and all the rest were tried, for

Myanmar, in various combinations. It seems likely that this unruly mix of signals eventually convinced the Myanmar side that the benefits of re-engagement with international critics far outweighed the risks. But the final assessment of this process will need to wait many years, until parts of the future sketched here have been digested by a society emerging from decades of trauma and discontent. And in the context of a wider discussion of societies where a dictatorship, supported by brutal military force, has controlled almost all aspects of decision-making, it is clear that these processes are never entirely smooth. Indeed it would be miraculous if Myanmar emerges from its current period of audacious reform to simply mimic the patterns of democratic development that one finds elsewhere. The process will continue to be pursued in the Myanmar-style, and with an overwhelming focus on the needs and aspirations of Myanmar people themselves. For now, those with precedence are drawn from among a very small elite but with democratic enfranchisement there are likely to be policies that benefit a wider array of interests. If Myanmar executes the acrobatics necessary to make this transformation work, at home and abroad, then, its future may well give us all hope that new opportunities can emerge from unlikely beginnings. It is only then that we may stop guessing about what Myanmar's future holds.

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# Historical and Comparative Commentary on (Partly) Previous Burmese Regimes, Current Reforms and (Im)possible Applications for North Korea

*Myint Zan*

## Introduction

Several months after a 'new' government was established in Burma/ Myanmar<sup>1</sup> on March 30, 2011, it began to initiate some reforms. The

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<sup>1</sup> The author is aware of the name-changes made by the Burmese (in their words) Myanmar military junta since 1989. First to 'Union of Myanma' on May 27, 1989 then to Union of Myanmar on June 18, 1989 and then to Republic of Union of Myanmar on January 31, 2011. To make a political point and as a general rule 'Burma' will be used though at times 'Myanmar' will also be used to refer to and distinguish it from the previous (pre-1989) official names which were 'Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma' (March 1974 to September 1989) and Union of Burma (March 1948 to March 1974 and September 1988 to June 1989).

reforms were such that it received widespread acclaim from many sources including those from Western media.<sup>2</sup>

In the first part of the article, a historical perspective and brief narration will be made on the issue of political detainees in Burma during the pre-1962 parliamentary era with reference to a Burmese Supreme Court decision given in 1949 (a year after Burma's independence). This is in sharp contrast with the denial until at least 2011 by the partly previous military regime<sup>3</sup> and even in at least the first year of U Thein Sein's administration that there was not a single political prisoner or 'prisoners of conscience' that existed in the country.

In the pre-1962 era, the Burmese apex courts (which were abolished by the first military junta when it took over power in March 1962) had, in quite a few landmark cases, ordered the release of political prisoners.

This was in stark contrast to the passive, pliant and complicit role the Burmese/Myanmar judiciary has played in eroding democratic rights and being fully subservient to the executive of the one-party and military regimes since at the latest by the early 1970s and continuing with the current Myanmar judiciary (since 1988 to present).<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Patrick Boehler, "Behind the Story: Time's Hannah Beech on Burma's President Thein Sein." *Time*, January 10, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Since many, if not most, of the previous military regime's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) are also now important top members of the executive, legislature and even the judiciary. The author has in this article used the word 'partly previous military regime' to refer to the regime which preceded the current administration of President U Thein Sein.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent (since 2012 only) selected of publications by the author on this topic see: Myint Zan. 2012. "New Supreme Court and Constitutional Tribunal: Marginal

second part of the article will deal with a general overview with Burma/Myanmar relations with North Korea since the early 1980s. It will also state and explain as to why reforms that are being made in Myanmar since 2011 are unlikely to occur in North Korea at least in the near future.

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## **I. Glimpses of Political Freedoms in Burma in the Late 1940s, Early 1950s and under Current Reforms**

### **1. The Ma Ahmar Case of 1949: The Different Fates of the Denigrators and Honorers of Former Prime Minister U Nu**

The late U Nu (May 25, 1907-February 14, 1995) was the Prime Minister of Burma from January 1948 to June 1956, from March 1957 to October 1958 and from April 1960 to March 1962 when on a coup that took place on March 2, he was overthrown and was put in detention for 4 years and eight months before being released on October 27, 1966.

Soon after Burma obtained independence on January 4, 1948, on March 28, 1948, the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) went underground starting an armed rebellion against the then government led by Prime Minister Thakin Nu. The CPB had both underground (as it is termed 'UG') and above ground (operate within the 'legal fold') elements.

A few sympathizers of the CPB above ground distributed leaflets which stated (in translation) Prime Minister Thakin Nu as a 'fascist murderer.' The local executive authorities and the police arrested the leaflet distributors under the *Public Order Preservation Act 1947*. The detainees challenged the legality of their detention and to the then Burmese Supreme Court under the writ of *habeas corpus*. The late

Burmese Supreme Court released them stating that the mere distribution of leaflets which called the Prime Minister as ‘a fascist murderer’ is not a sufficient ground for detention under the *Public Order Preservation Act*.<sup>5</sup>

U Nu was overthrown on March 2, 1962 and put under detention. He was released on October 27, 1966. In February 1969, he left Burma. On August 27, 1969 in a Press Conference in London, he declared that he was still ‘the legal Prime Minister’ of Burma.<sup>6</sup>

Starting from March 1988, there were initially sporadic and later wide spread demonstrations against the then Burmese regime. On September 9, 1988 in Rangoon, U Nu (again like in August 1969 in London) declared that he was still the legitimate Prime Minister of Burma. With the army coup of September 18, 1988, the nation-wide uprising was brutally crushed.

## **2. The Past is a Foreign Country: Stark Contrasts of The Late Burmese Supreme Court and the Myanmar Supreme Court under the Military Regimes involving the ‘case’ of Prime Minister U Nu**

On December 29, 1989, U Nu was put under house arrest for refusing

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<sup>5</sup> *Ma Ahmar v. Commissioner of Police and One. Burma Law Reports* (BLR) 1949, Supreme Court (SC), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> The full text in original English of U Nu’s declaration in London on August 27, 1969 that he was still the former Prime Minister of Burma was reproduced in then two state-owned English language newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Working People’s Daily* and in Burmese translation in all the state-owned Burmese language newspapers on September 1, 1969.

to formally abolish the government, which he said he had formed in September 1988. U Nu was released from house arrest on April 23, 1992. He died on February 14, 1995. During his funeral some young people sang democracy songs in honor of U Nu. The executive authorities arrested them, charged them under various laws and the court sentenced them to various terms of imprisonment of no less than five years. But unlike those who distributed leaflets and had called him a fascist murderer in 1949, those who honored him at his funeral by singing songs were not released either by the Myanmar Supreme Court of 1995 or by the executive. It is hard to believe that the two incidents involving the same person (Prime Minister U Nu) had very different outcomes. This reminds of the opening statement in A. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*: 'The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there.'

### **3. The Denial of Existence of Political Prisoners and Retreat from Such Denials: Grateful for 'Small' Mercies**

How about the present or the relatively recent past? It needs to be mentioned that President U Thein Sein who became President in March 2011 was also the Prime Minister in the (partly) previous military regime.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> President U Thein Sein who under the *2008 Constitution* was both Head of State and Head of government was also Head of Government (Prime Minister) in the State Peace and Development (SPDC) regime. Thura Shwe Mann who since about mid-2013 is the Speaker of *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw* ('Union Legislature') was also a top-ranking member of the military regime. Since former Generals are now serving in positions of power in the current 'civilian government,' the 'previous military junta' is actually the 'partly previous military regime.'



In an open letter to the President U Thein Sein by the then newly formed Human Rights Commission, Chairman U Win Mra used the phrase ‘prisoners of conscience’ and specifically stated ‘what is referred to as “prisoners of conscience”’ in quotation marks as well as with the qualifier ‘what is referred to.’ The Chairman of the Myanmar Human Rights Commission also stated apologetically that his ‘Commission recognizes and appreciates the position of the Government that these are prisoners who have been sentenced to imprisonment for contravening the existing laws.’<sup>8</sup> Since about 2012, the U Thein Sein administration has belatedly, reluctantly, and ambiguously seemed to acknowledge that there were or are prisoners what can be called as prisoners of conscience. A committee to scrutinize the matter of political prisoners or prisoners of conscience was formed.

In July 2013, during a visit to London, President U Thein Sein stated that by the end of 2013 all or almost all political prisoners would be released. This is a positive development. However, release of the political prisoners were all initiated by the executive government on what can be termed as its ‘good will’ or the Burmese word *cetana*.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Request submitted in open letter of October 10, 2011 by members of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission to the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar’ (in English translation) at the Myanmar Human Rights Commission Website. <http://mnhrc.org.mm/en/statements-2/request-submitted-in-open-letter-by-members-of-the-myanmar-national-human-rights-commission-to-the-president-of-the-republic-of-the-union-of-myanmar/>. Again the quotation marks appeared in another letter of November 12, 2011. The Commission Chair U Win Mra again used the same phrase “what is referred to as ‘prisoners of conscience”’ (at paragraph 4 of the letter) <http://mnhrc.org.mm/en/statements-2/open-letter-to-the-president-of-the-republic-of-the-union-of-myanmar-by-the-myanmar-national-human-rights-commission>. However, in a report written in the Burmese language of its activities for the period from January 2012 to March 2013, it mentioned political prisoners without a ‘quotation mark’ (at page 7 of the Report) <http://mnhrc.org.mm/en/about/>.

They were not 'ordered to be released' by the current Myanmar Supreme Court as it was done in the 1940s and 1950s.

In order to foreground the comparison of Burma/Myanmar and North Korea, a study and analysis of the previous relations between the two regimes is necessary.

## **II. (Im)possible Applications for North Korea of Current Burmese/Myanmar Reforms**

### **1. A Prediction in 1997 of Long-Lasting Regimes of Asia**

On October 5, 1997, on the British Broadcasting Service (radio program) entitled 'Talking Point,' the author made a 'phone-in' and posed a query to the panelists. I asked the three panelists whose name and affiliations I do not recall, that though in recent years (i.e. pre-October 1997) quite a few strong regimes, including military regimes in Asia, have either collapsed or transformed into less authoritarian regimes there were three long-lasting dictatorial or military regimes' in the Asia-Pacific region namely (in order of the authoritarian and totalitarian regimes endurance record, so to speak): they were North Korea, Burma, and Indonesia.

But as of October 1997, the authoritarian regimes (or in the case of North Korea) and totalitarian regime in the three countries (North Korea, Burma, and Indonesia) were firmly in power as they had been for several decades. In light of that situation, I asked the panelists which regime: the North Korean, Burmese or Indonesian regime would collapse first. All three panelists on the Talking Point program agreed that the North Korea regime would collapse first, then the Burmese, and lastly, the Indonesian regime.

I do recall clearly the reason one panelist gave for saying that the then Indonesian regime (under the late President Suharto) would either collapse or change for the better later than the regimes either in North Korea or Burma.

According to the panelist, the then Indonesian regime, unlike the then Burmese regime and the then (and current in early 2014) North Korean regime, has had lots of Western support through investment (and at least in comparison with the then Burmese and then and now North Korean regimes) better diplomatic and commercial ties with the Western countries.

The rest, as they say, is history. Less than eight months after the October 1997 unanimous 'prediction' of all the three Talking Point panelists on BBC Radio that the New Order Indonesian regime would last 'longest,' on May 21, 1998, President Suharto was forced to resign and significant changes and moves towards democracy occurred in Indonesia.

And North Korea remains the same regime with, of course, different leaders but the very (very) strong authoritarian, if not totalitarian, regime would appear to be as firmly established, as it was in 1997, when the (unanimous) 'collapse first' prediction vis-à-vis the North Korean regime was made.

## **2. The then Burmese Government's Withdrawal of Diplomatic Recognition of the State of Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 1983 and Re-recognition of the State of DPRK and Re-establishment of Diplomatic Relations with the DPRK: An Unnoticed but Peculiar 'Foot Note' in the Modern History Concerning International Law of Recognition of State**

A brief retrospective look at North Korea-Burma relations needs to be analyzed.

The events of October 9, 1983, where North Korean agents in their attempt to assassinate the then President Chun Doo-hwan of South Korea by planting a bomb at the martyr's mausoleum in Rangoon killing 21 persons including at least three South Korean Ministers, other South Korean and Burmese officials is well-known.

After the North Korean agents were arrested and after substantial evidence of the North Korean regime's involvement in the Rangoon bombing were discerned, the Burmese government issued a statement severing not only diplomatic relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, but also 'the withdrawal of recognition of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.' The author has seen the announcement in both the Burmese and English version. Neither version states that the Burmese government was withdrawing recognition of the government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It stated that it was withdrawing recognition of 'the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The world wide web search indicates that a South Korean publication of 1983 entitled *Massacre in Rangoon: North Korean terrorism*. (Seoul, Korea: Korean Overseas

Even though withdrawal of recognition of governments has occurred, withdrawal of recognition of States has occurred very rarely and though only of theoretical interest, this anomaly which, as far as the author is concerned, has never been noted hitherto and is mentioned here first.<sup>10</sup>

### **3. Reestablishment of Diplomatic and Cozy Relationship between North Korea and Myanmar and (a Partial Retreat?)**

Yet in politics there are no permanent friends or enemies: only permanent interests. Less than 20 years after the severance of diplomatic relations and withdrawal of recognition of the state of North Korea, the ‘Myanmar’ and ‘DPRK’ relationship has become (especially in the 2005 to 2011 period) ‘too close for comfort.’ In 2008, then member of the military junta and now Speaker of the Pyindaungsu Hluttaw (the joint house of the Union Legislature) Thura U Shwe Mann, a former

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Information Service, [1983] Korea (South) Haeoe Kongbogwan) as cited in the booklet by Andrew Selth, *Burma and North Korea: Conventional Allies or Nuclear Partners* (Griffith Asia Institute at p.7 and p .24) indicated that Burmese leader Ne Win ‘even withdrew recognition of North Korea as an independent State.’

<sup>10</sup> The late Professor Hersch Lauterpacht (admittedly writing ‘quite some time ago’ in 1947) states: ‘Probably there is no case on record where recognition has been withdrawn from a State without a corresponding measure of recognition being granted to its successor.’ Hersch Lauterpacht. 1947. Reprint with new edition, 2013. *Recognition in International Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 351. In 2013, the State (and the government of North Korea) has not collapsed and there has not been in 2013 and also in 1983 (when the then government of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma withdrew recognition of the State of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) there was ‘a successor State’ as such to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. This issue, anomalous as it is, is now moot in that both the ‘Union of Myanmar’ prior to 2011 and ‘Republic of the Union of Myanmar’ (after March 2011) has re-established diplomatic with the DPRK but also *a fortiori* ‘re-recognized’ both the State and government of the DPRK.

general, secretly visited North Korea and also signed a memorandum of understanding for military cooperation with General Kim Kyok Sik, North Korea's then Chief of General Staff of the Korean People's Army (KPA).<sup>11</sup> The 'cozy' (perhaps too close for comfort) relationship between the Burmese and North Korean governments may have been reduced, but it has not substantially or even moderately diminished — at least to some pundits or observers even in late 2013.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. The Nature of One of the World's Longest Surviving Praetorian (and Partly Previous) Burmese Regimes since 1962 and the Longest Surviving Totalitarian and Dynastic North Korean Regime since 1948**

##### ***a) Burma/Myanmar (1962-2013)***

Explicit formal military rule in Burma started in March 1962 and perhaps even earlier with a brief stint of the military-led caretaker government (from late October 1958 to early April 1960), and in a certain form even up to the current (at best) quasi-civilian government.

Even now, the nature of the government and the style of governance are still partly military dominated or at least military influenced.

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<sup>11</sup> Bertil Lintner. 2013. "Is the Burma North Korea Relationship A Thing of the Past?" *NK News*. <http://www.nknews.org/2013/09/is-the-burma-north-korea-relationship-a-thing-of-the-past/>.

<sup>12</sup> See Ankit Panda. 2013. "Can Myanmar and North Korea Say Good Bye?" <http://thediplomat.com/2013/11/can-myanmar-and-north-korea-say-goodbye/>; Curtis S. Chin. 2013. "Questioning Myanmar's North Korea Connections." <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/opinion/8814-questioning-myanmar-s-north-korea-connection.html>.

**b) A comparison of Burmese Military Regimes and Military Dominance with that of South Korea**

In the author's opinion, full-fledged military rule in post World War II South Korea started only with the military coup of 1961 when Park Chung-hee took over. Even though it was a coup, Major-General and later President Park did not transform South Korea into a one-party cum military dictatorship, while in Burma the coup leader General Ne Win (July 6, 1910?-December 5, 2002) transformed Burma into just that.

For more than 20 years since 1993, South Korea is (at least in comparison to Burma/Myanmar since 1962) much less military dominated, much less authoritarian, and much less un-democratic.

**c) A Comparison of Burmese Military Regimes since 1948 with that of Pakistan**

Pakistan is another country in the Asian region which has experienced a succession of military regimes which started in 1958. Out of 65 years of Pakistan's independence, a total of about 33 years can be argued to be that of military rule.

Neither the Constitution of Pakistan constitutionally mandated a one-Party State as in the *1974 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma* (in force between January 3, 1974<sup>13</sup> and September 18,

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<sup>13</sup>For the elaborate charade and rigmarole leading to the adoption of the *1974 Constitution* and the features of it, see Myint Zan. 1999. "Law and Legal Culture,



1988) nor does it require that one-fourth (25%) of the Legislatures both at the Union (Central) level and one-third (33.33%) at the state (local) level be directly appointed members of the Army as the current 2008 Myanmar Constitution stipulates.

**d) A Comparison of Burmese Military Regimes with that of Indonesia and the Military Representation in the Burmese and Indonesian Legislatures**

Under the 2008 Constitution in addition to one-fourth (25%) military presentation in both Houses of the Legislature, a third (33.33%) of the regional and State Legislatures (*Hluttaws*) are directly appointed from among the Defense Service Personnel.<sup>14</sup>

Before the 2008 Constitution was adopted, Burma was ruled in various guises either directly or indirectly by the military since March 1962. Even if the March 2011 ‘transfer of power’ is considered a retreat from military rule, it has lasted 49 years.

In contrast, even if Indonesia has military representation (25%) in the Legislature (though not by a formal Constitutional provision), this has ceased since 2004 and there is no more military representation in the Indonesian Legislature.<sup>15</sup>

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Constitutions and Constitutionalism in Burma.” In Alice E. S. Tay, ed. *East Asia-Human Rights, Nation-Building, Trade*. Nomos Publications, Baden-Baden. pp. 180, 236-250

<sup>14</sup> Section 161 (d) of the 2008 Constitution.

<sup>15</sup> Tim Lindsey. 2002. “Indonesian Constitutional Reform: Muddling Toward Democracy.” *Singapore Journal of International and Comparative Law*, Vol. 6, pp. 244, 252-268.

Hence, in comparison with Asian countries with previous authoritarian regimes such as those of South Korea, Pakistan, and Indonesia, Burma/ Myanmar has more intense, longer and more pervasive and more authoritarian military domination in most of its post-independence history.

***e) The Non-Choice Constitutional Referenda of 1973 and 2008  
and Perpetuation of One-Party and Military Rule in Burma***

In Burma, from March 1962 to March 1974, the military ruled directly by issuing decrees. A new Constitution was adopted through a non-choice bogus referendum in December 1973 which constitutionalizes *a fait accompli* — the leading role of the sole political party- The Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). Under the *1974 Constitution*, power was ‘transferred’ from the Revolutionary Council to the sole leading party and a unicameral Legislature in which virtually all members of the Legislature are also members of the constitutionally-mandated sole ruling Party. The Chairman of the Revolutionary Council was U Ne Win. The Chairman of the Burma Socialist Programme Party was also U Ne Win.

In none of the regimes mentioned above, South Korea from 1961 to 1992, Pakistan during the various stints of military regimes and particularly Indonesia, has there been two bogus and non-choice referenda held more than 34 years apart in December 1973 and May 2008. They are non-choice referenda because if the draft Constitutions were rejected the military councils of pre-March 1974 and pre-March 2011 would have remained in power.

The person who became the President under the *2008 Constitution* President U Thein Sein is also — like President U Ne Win who became President in March 1974- the prime minister in the partly previous military regime. U Thein Sein like U Ne Win before him became President after being Prime Minister for some years from October 2007 to March 2011. Under the SPDC regime U Thein Sein served as Head of Government. (Senior General Than Shwe who assumed Chairmanship of the State Law and Order Restoration Council occupied the position of Head of State during the SPDC period from April 23, 1992 to March 30, 2011).

The above analyses deal with the longevity and mode of administration of the Burmese regimes since 1962, mainly in a comparative Asian context. A brief look into authoritarian regimes with a particular comparison of a late dictator or ‘strong man’ of a small South American country with that of General/President/Chairman Ne Win of Burma is made below for the purpose of illustrating the rare nature of the previous Burmese authoritarian regime led by General Ne Win.

#### ***f) Comparison between the Two ‘Strong men’ Alfredo Stroessner of Paraguay and Ne Win of Burma and the Nature of the Regimes***

One small South American country, Paraguay and its strong man Alfredo Stroessner (November 3, 1912-August 16, 2006) who ruled Paraguay from May 4, 1954 (when he took over power in a military coup) until his overthrow on February 3, 1989 can be referred to, since there are some similarities and sources for comparison with Burmese strong man Ne Win. Since independence, the military

dominance in Burma is (or at least was) almost peerless. The ‘peer’ in terms of the longevity of Burmese military dictatorship dominated by one person is, in the author’s opinion, the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner of Paraguay.

The author became aware of the similarities between these two strong men when the author read an editorial that (from recall) appeared in either the September 19, 1988 or September 20, 1988 of the newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* (UK)<sup>16</sup> in the immediate aftermath of the brutal crushing of the initially student-led nationwide uprising in Burma by the Burmese military.

From memory, the author recalls that *The Daily Telegraph* stated that the then Ne Win one-party regime was (as of September 1988) the third longest lasting personal and military dictatorship after North Korea (in September 1988, under the tutelage of Kim Il-sung since 1948: Kim Il-sung died in office July 1994), Paraguay (in September 1988 under the rule of Stroessner since May 1954: subsequently overthrown in February 1989, died in exile in Brazil in August 2006) and Burma (under military rule since March 1962 led by Ne Win, in September 1988 freshly ‘retired’ from all political posts but still the power behind the scenes for about ten years, put under house arrest in March 2002, died under house arrest in December 2002).

There are both similarities and differences between the long-lasting rule and almost personal as well as military dictatorship of Ne Win and the 34 year rule of Alfredo Stroessner. Both of them came to

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<sup>16</sup> “Burma Cul De Sac” *The Daily Telegraph* (United Kingdom), September 19, 1988. As of the time of writing the author is attempting to obtain a copy of the Editorial but the author mentions from firm memory of what is written in the Editorial.

power through military coups — Stroessner on May 4, 1954<sup>17</sup> and Ne Win on March 2, 1962.<sup>18</sup> (In fact, since Ne Win was the power behind the scene for at least ten years if not more even after he ‘retired’ (from September 1988 to about the year 2000) (from 1962 to about 2000) Ne Win’s rule matched if not exceed the rule of Stroessner.) Stroessner was overthrown on February 3, 1989<sup>19</sup> after 34 years and 9 months in continuous power ‘winning’ eight consecutive victories in ‘elections.’

In Burma, General Ne Win first ruled as(‘Chairman of the Revolutionary Council’) from March 1962 to March 1974, during a time when there was not even a pretense of any sort of elections- either single party (as it was after the 1974 *one-Party Constitution* was adopted.). The ‘elections’ held in Burma between 1974 and 1985 were one-Party elections, where only one candidate from the sole legal ruling Party stood for election and all of them get ‘elected.’

Hence if a pure chronological survey is made, it would seem that Stroessner’s rule as dictator of Paraguay from May 1954 to February 1989 is longer than that of Ne Win. But in February 1989, Stroessner was really overthrown and he had no more roles to play behind the scenes.

In contrast, it is widely believed and claimed that for about ten years after his supposed resignation that Ne Win continued to be a power

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<sup>17</sup> For a contemporaneous report of the coup by Stroessner in May 1954, see “Paraguay: Unwanted Revolution,” *Time Magazine*, May 17, 1954.

<sup>18</sup> For a contemporaneous report of the 1962 Burmese military coup, see *Time* magazine, “Burma Deteriorating Situation,” March 9, 1962.

<sup>19</sup> For the news item of Alfredo Stroessner being overthrown in a military coup in February 1989 nearly 35 years after he came to power in 1954, see Jill Smolowe, “Paraguay: Extinction of a Dinosaur,” *Time Magazine*, February 13, 1989.

behind the scenes. Unlike Stroessner, Ne Win never was exiled<sup>20</sup> or went into exile and also unlike Stroessner, there were never attempts or any political or legal move to try<sup>21</sup> or even to investigate Ne Win's actions during his rule.

As far as style is concerned, from the obituaries reports and profiles of Stroessner, he did try to develop a (minor) personality cult. The New York Times obituary of Alfredo Stroessner stated that

President Stroessner's ... name, written in neon, flashed nightly over the Asunción cityscape during his reign, and his face was plastered daily in newspapers and on television.<sup>22</sup>

Also, a Washington Post obituary stated that

... he enforced a cult of personality ... Even opposition party members kept pictures of him in prominent rooms of their homes and offices. An entire city bore his name, Puerto Stroessner.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The obituary of Alfredo Stroessner in *The Telegraph* (United Kingdom) stated that 'Stroessner was originally placed under house-arrest, and later allowed to go into exile in Brazil' *The Telegraph*, August 17, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> For unsuccessful attempts to extradite Stroessner from Brazil to Paraguay less than two years before his death when he was already 91 years old see BBC news item "Paraguay seeks Stroessner return," <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3643510.stm>. Three of Ne Win's grandsons were tried, initially sentenced to death but later commuted and all three of them were released in November 2013. See Nyein Nyein, "Ne Win's Grandsons Among 69 Released Prisoners" *The Irrawaddy*, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/politics/ne-wins-grandsons-among-69-released-political-prisoners.html>.

<sup>22</sup> "Stroessner, Paraguay's Enduring Dictator, Dies," *New York Times*, August 16, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/16/world/americas/16cnd-stroessner.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

<sup>23</sup> Adam Bernstein, "Alfredo Stroessner, Paraguayan Dictator," *Washington Post*,

In contrast, even though Ne Win was according to The Guardian (UK) the 'last great Asian despot,'<sup>24</sup> he was also 'a reclusive leader who shuns public appearances and has never tried to build a personality cult.'<sup>25</sup>

Ne Win lived for at least 91 years or 92 years and Stroessner lived for 93 years. Ne Win, unlike Stroessner, was not overthrown and only spent the last ten months of his long life in comfortable house arrest.

Worse as the previous Burmese and Paraguayan dictators were, the North Korean regime since 1948, with its extreme personality cult, totalitarian nature and practices exceeded them in both longevity and intensity of control over the populace. And both Paraguay and Burma, in recent years, have made (at least in comparison with North Korea) significant political reforms.

### **g) North Korea (1948-2013)**

Even though the section on Burma/Myanmar starts with 1962, this

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August 17, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/16/AR2006081601729.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Smith, "Obituary: General Ne Win," *The Guardian*, December 6, 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2002/dec/06/guardianobituaries>. As it was Martin Smith has not considered at least Kim Jong-il the North Korean despot who was alive in 2002 when Ne Win was termed the 'last Asian despot.' In that at least in North Korea in the past 65 years there have been three 'great Asian despots' whose rule are continuing the epithet that Ne Win was 'the last great Asian despot' is not that 'fair' or accurate.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara Crossett, "Exhausted Burma Struggles in Isolation," *New York Times*, March 23, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/03/23/world/exhausted-burma-struggles-in-isolation.html?pagewanted=2&src=pm>.

section on North Korea describing the system of governance would be from the year 1948 (if not a year or two earlier) since the Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-un, father-son-grandson dynasty started around that time.

The cult of personality from grandfather to son to grandson of the Kim dynasty is such that the author recalls hearing around late 1983 on an American television program, an American official who has been to North Korea stating that the cult of personality of then (in 1983) the father and the ‘Great Leader’ Kim Il-sung ‘makes Stalinism look like an exercise in self-abnegation.’

Thirty years later, the lineage of the dynasty as well as the extreme oppression continues as it can be discerned by two news items concerning North Korea that appeared in January and February 2014.

First is the news items about public executions of up to 80 persons in North Korea<sup>26</sup> and second was the execution of Kim Jong-un’s uncle where Kim Jong-un himself has stated that ‘that national unity had strengthened “by 100 times” following the purge of “counterrevolutionary factionalists” — an apparent reference to his uncle, Jang Sung-taek, who was executed on December 13, 2013 for treason.’<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See for e.g. Agence France Presse, “North Korea Publicly Executed 80 People South Korean Paper Reports,” *The World Post*, February 3, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/11/north-korea-public-execution\\_n\\_4252610.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/11/north-korea-public-execution_n_4252610.html).

<sup>27</sup> Chico Harlan, “North Korea’s Kim Jong Un Says Purge of Uncle was Correct Decision,” *Washington Post*, January 1, 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/n-koreas-kim-says-purge-of-uncle-the-correct-decision/2013/12/31/dbae19b0-729a-11e3-9389-09ef9944065e\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/n-koreas-kim-says-purge-of-uncle-the-correct-decision/2013/12/31/dbae19b0-729a-11e3-9389-09ef9944065e_story.html).



In Burma, in the past 65 years since independence in 1948 as far as the author is aware of, there has not been public executions, (certainly not to the extent of summoning up to 10,000 people to witness the executions) though extra-judicial executions have taken place.

This contemporaneous news item that also appeared in December 2013 regarding Burma is of comparative interest.

Burma's leading political activists and the family members of political prisoners who died in custody have demanded an apology from members of the country's former military regime and anyone involved in atrocities committed during the junta's rule.

Thousands of people were locked up on political or trumped up charges during decades of military rule in Burma. In prison, as well facing abuse and torture by officials, inmates were kept in harsh conditions and routinely denied access to medical treatment.

According to advocacy groups, 175 political prisoners died in prisons or interrogation centers throughout the military regime that came to power in 1989 [sic in September 1988] following a mass uprising, and was replaced by a nominally civilian government, still made up largely of former generals, in 2011.<sup>28</sup>

To the credit of the current administration, such expression of public demand would not have been possible, say, even in the year 2010 in Burma.

As of early January 2014, the Myanmar government announced that almost all if not all of the remaining political prisoners have been

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<sup>28</sup> Kyaw Phyto Tha, "Calls for Apology over Deaths in Custody under Burma's Junta," *The Irrawaddy*, January 2, 2014, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/multimedia-burma/calls-apology-deaths-custody-burmas-junta.html#>.

released. Still, there are claims that even though more than a thousand political prisoners have been released by the end of 2013, about forty-six political prisoners remain to be released.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, a *New York Times* news item based on an Amnesty International report in May 2011 stated that North Korea's 'network of political prisons holds 200,000 prisoners.'<sup>30</sup>

The first segment of the section deals with the release of political prisoners in the first year of independence by the long defunct Burmese Supreme Court in 1949. The situation most rapidly deteriorated since 1962, and for the next fifty years, military regimes and one-party regimes in Burma arrested thousands of persons who can only be considered as political prisoners or prisoners of conscience.

Up until about 2011 and definitely before that, there has been a blanket if not shameful (indeed shameless) denial by military hacks writing under pseudonyms in the government propagandist sheets that there was 'not a single political prisoner in Myanmar.'<sup>31</sup> By early 2014, a change (albeit not unambiguous) has taken place where

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<sup>29</sup> Soe Sandar Oo, "MI Officers Could be Released Soon," *The Irrawaddy*, January 2, 2014, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/mi-officers-released-soon-lawmaker.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Mark McDonald, "North Korean Prison Camps Massive and Growing," *New York Times*, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/05/world/asia/05korea.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/05/world/asia/05korea.html?_r=0). See also 'Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea' 24th Session of the Human Rights Council, Oral Update by Michael Kirby, Chair of the Commission on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, (United Nations document) <http://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/coidprk/pages/commissioninquiryonhrindprk.aspx>.

<sup>31</sup> See for e.g. the Burmese language article, Naing Myint (Taungthar), "Political Crimes, Political Prisoners and Myanmar Law Provisions," *Myanma Alin*, July 22-24, 2008: pp. 8-9.

President Thein Sein himself used the term ‘political prisoners’ in a radio speech given to the country and as reported by a news item on the Myanmar President’s Office website.<sup>32</sup>

## **5. The Inapplicability if not (almost) Impossibility of the Myanmar’ Reforms to North Korea**

The reforms and partial retreat from naked military and very strong authoritarian rule in Burma since 2011 is noted and is given credit. Nevertheless, compared with the retreat from military rule in South Korea, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Paraguay, the retreat of the Burmese military from direct rule is at best only partial, and the (quasi) ‘civilian’ Burmese government is still much more military dominated than any of the countries that are mentioned and discussed above.

As for North Korea, its system of governance not only has ‘nothing to envy’<sup>33</sup> but has almost everything to recoil from.

U Thein Sein is generally (though not universally) praised domestically and internationally for the reforms that he has initiated since about mid-2011.<sup>34</sup> Contrast this generally positive analysis of U Thein

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<sup>32</sup> “Committee for Scrutinizing the Remaining Political Prisoners Healthy Constitution must be Amended from Time to Time to Address National, Economic, Social Needs of Society,” <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/?q=briefing-room/news/2014/01/02/id-3135>.

<sup>33</sup> The Phrase is Taken from Barbara Demick, *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (Spiegel and Grau, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Fuller, “A Most Unlikely Liberator in Myanmar,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2012, [www.nytimes.com/2012/.../a-most-unlikely-liberator-in-myanmar.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/.../a-most-unlikely-liberator-in-myanmar.html). For a less laudatory take on President U Thein Sein in relation to his being a

Sein's reforms in the same newspaper with the (at best) ambiguous analysis of the new North Korean leader<sup>35</sup> who has since the report further consolidated his power.

Reforms in Burma can be said to be 'top-down' though at least the uprisings in Burma since 1988 and in the 2007 Saffron Revolution can be said to have been the original initiators for such reforms.

President U Thein Sein is apparently in his late sixties. The current North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is in his early thirties. He is not even half the age of President U Thein Sein.

It is not possible that Kim Jong-un would initiate the political reforms that U Thein Sein has initiated since about 2011: at least not to the extent that U Thein Sein has done so. Considering only the issue of political prisoners even during the partly previous military regime, estimates even by opponents of the Burmese military regimes claim that in a country of about 60 million there are about 2000 prisoners of conscience in Burma in the year 2010, a few years before the current reforms took place.<sup>36</sup>

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nominee for the 2013 Nobel Peace prize see Myint Zan, "Should U Thein Sein Get the Nobel?" *Asian Sentinel*, October 8, 2013, <http://www.asiasentinel.com/society/should-u-thein-sein-get-the-nobel/>.

<sup>35</sup> Carol Giacomo, "Scrutinizing an Unscrutable Leader," April 12, 2013, *New York Times*. [http://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/12/scrutinizing-an-inscrutable-leader/?\\_r=0](http://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/12/scrutinizing-an-inscrutable-leader/?_r=0).

<sup>36</sup> In March 2011, the month when President U Thein Sein's government took office the Associate of Political Prisoners (Burma) then based in Maesot, Thailand stated that there were 2,073 political prisoners in Burma, <http://www.aappb.org/pressreleases.html> (Report for 2011).

The North Korean regime has denied and will continue to deny the existence of vast prison camps and up to 200,000 prisoners.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, the Myanmar government albeit obliquely, eventually appeared to have retreated around 2012 from the previous denials that were any political prisoners or prisoners of conscience.

In 2014, more than 16 years have passed since the three pundits on BBC Talking Point in October 1997 stated that North Korea would collapse first which has manifestly been proven to be wrong. In the light of what has not happened in North Korea, the predictors were perhaps too optimistic. The author is of the view that even much milder versions of the reforms that have taken place in Burma since 2012 are very unlikely to take place in North Korea.

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<sup>37</sup> See the DPRK delegation refutation of the 'allegations' contained of human rights abuses including the numerous prison camps and political prisoners from paragraphs 5 to 16 and paragraphs 80 to 90 of the Human Rights Council Agenda Item 6 *Universal Periodic Review, Report of the Working Group on Universal Periodic Review*, UN Document A/HRC/13/13.

## Conclusion

The author has made more historical, comparative and contextual analyses and commentary as regarding authoritarian regimes in Burma in commenting on the current reforms. It constitutes part of the author's attempt to delve in historical and comparative context the nature of the previous military dominated regimes in selected various parts of the world with that of Burma/Myanmar military dominated regimes and the current Myanmar government.

It is also to indicate that even if the current reforms such as the reluctant and ambiguous acknowledgment of the existence of and release of political prisoners is to be noted, these developments are not comparable to the bold and innovative decisions of the late Burmese Supreme Court in releasing political detainees in the 1940s and 1950s. Such a 'revert' to the independence and professionalism of the past Burmese judiciary is not envisaged under the current circumstances and by the current Myanmar judiciary.

As for North Korea, if a tiny segment of the North Korean population, rather than the elites, have heard of the current reforms in Myanmar — they could well be advised or perhaps would have been sensitized to thinking that they have indeed 'nothing to envy.'

To the author, there is something to envy in the ease of overthrowing (compared with that of the partly previous Burmese military regimes)

the less authoritarian regimes in the Philippines,<sup>38</sup> South Korea, Pakistan, and Indonesia and their democratic developments in recent years. Nevertheless, the Burmese people can at least take solace in that they can probably state: ‘We are not North Korea!’<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The People’s Power uprising in the Philippines in February 1986 took three days, from February 22 to 25 and it occurred mainly if not exclusively in the capital Manila. After three days President Marcos whose authoritarian rule (even if it can be said to have started in 1965 when Marcos was elected; at least he was elected in multiparty elections initially) a ‘mere’ 21 years (or more realistically the authoritarian rule of Marcos can be said to have started in September 1972 and when he declared martial law and till late February 1986 it lasted less than 13 ½ years) came to end when Marcos fled to Guam and then to Hawaii. The author clearly remembers an image from the successful Filipino uprising of 1986 where Catholic nuns were putting carnations on the barrel of guns of Filipino troops. Over two years later in the March to September 1988 uprising which occurred in Burma and which is not restricted to the capital Rangoon but spread to forty towns and lasted sporadically over six months and in which hundreds if not thousands may be up to 3,000 or more Burmese were shot and killed by Burmese troops (unlike the Filipino uprising which lasted a mere 3 days with very few casualties) took place - and it failed. Another image which the author recalls from the 1988 Burmese uprising is that of an elderly man sitting on the ground and kowtowing to Burmese troops (perhaps at least begging the troops not to shoot and to join the Burmese uprising as the Filipino Army did in the People’s Power uprising). In retrospective far from any segment of the Burmese Army joining the uprising the Army shot and killed hundreds if not thousands of Burmese which at least in the Filipino People’s Power uprising of 1986 Filipino troops did not do so.

In early 2013, the author heard a story from a Burmese lawyer. Perhaps the story may be apocryphal but it is imbued with significance: in a public demonstration in the Philippines some demonstrators was said to have carried banners stating ‘We are not Burma!’ Indeed. The Burmese people spent (about fifty years) three to four times longer than the Filipinos under authoritarian rule under Marcos (about 13 years) and gave much more blood, tears and sweat (literally) to ease (but not necessarily to end) the authoritarian and oppressive military rule.

<sup>39</sup> See *id* as regards ‘We are not Burma!’ The fact that the Burmese can say “We are not North Korea!” needs to be qualified.

Apart from the possible or at least alleged nuclear ties with North Korea there are also admirers of North Korean system among a few of the Burmese elites which could take the sheen off the very modest statement that of Burmese people (and

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not the rulers) can say 'We are not North Korea! As an example of the statement 'We are not North Korea!' being made only by the people and not the governing party and elites of the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) of Myanmar see the statement made in June 2013 during a visit by the [North] Korean Workers' Party [KWP] delegation headed by KWP Secretary and International Department Director Kim Yong-il. "NORTH KOREA LEADERSHIP WATCH KWP Delegation Returns After Myanmar Visit," <http://nkleadershipwatch.wordpress.com/category/dprk-myanmar-burma/>. The statement made by the acting Chairman of USDP which, even taken into account diplomatic niceties, smacks of an underling kowtowing to or at least obsequiously praising the 'great successor' Kim Jong-un and his forbears. The excerpts from the statement issued during the visit of the North Korean Worker's Party reads: 'The organizational secretary, on behalf of the party, government and people of Myanmar, sincerely hoped that the dear respected Kim Jong-un would lead the Korean people to shining victory. The DPRK turned into an invincible power under the guidance of President Kim Il-sung and leader Kim Jong-il, peerlessly great men, he stressed. It is a great fortune of the Korean people to hold Kim Jong-un in high esteem as supreme leader [sic].' Hence among the Myanmar ruling party elites the slogan would be not 'We are not North Korea' but 'We greatly admire North Korean leadership' with the conscious wish that 'we want to have power like them.'





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