

THE RISE OF CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA'S STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY

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South Korea is often described as a paradigmatic case of behaviour, in that it is neither balancing nor bandwagoning.¹ While it is generally believed that small states tend to bandwagon the superpowers to gain strategic advantage, South Korea, aiming at political stability in East Asia, seems to identify an adversarial situation mainly with North Korea. It is known that both Koreas crave to balance their respective positions with China's rise, and that may drive various issues, however, the situation in the peninsula is kept stabilised. In this light, the issues in Seoul are whether, how, and to what extent, China can be a responsible participant in the Korean peninsula. How South Korea views China's power impacting on the peninsula and how South Korea's policy towards its neighbours affects the regional political dynamics has a bearing on China's rise.

Generally, the focus in discussing the interaction of China's neighbours with Beijing is whether each of them is repeating a historical pattern. One of the basic assumptions rooted in history is that China's rise corresponds with its policy preferences for regional stability. Despite China's global approach and peaceful rise, its adjacent states are both optimistic and pessimistic regarding the connotations of China's engagement with them. If China were

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1. David C. Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); and "Between Balancing and Bandwagoning: South Korea's Response to China", *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 9, pp. 1-28.

Is China's rise a threat or an opportunity? And in what ways? To what extent will Beijing's policy-making affect the international order?

to continue its progress, will the regional order be replaced with a Sino-centric order: and if yes, in what manner? And how will it influence South Korea's policy options? If not, why not, and how will China's role be limited?

DISPUTED PERSPECTIVES ON CHINA'S RISE

Ever since China decided to transform itself into a market economy, its political and economic power has rapidly increased. The possible future consequences of this rise of China are a matter of great debate among commentators.² China's high growth rate under a Communist dispensation ruling a market economy is undoubtedly a unique phenomenon. Following the general logical correlation of power with wealth, China's rise is itself an independent variable that can impact many dependent variables.³ The perception and logic of China's rise are closely linked to the perception and standards of individuals.⁴ Some have asked about how hard or soft China's rising power is and the nature of the response it generates from others. Also, will the increase in its power and influence lead to stability or instability? Therefore, is China's rise a threat or an opportunity? And in what ways? To what extent will Beijing's policy-making affect the international order?

According to the realist school in international relations theory, which views hard power as a crucial measure for theoretical understanding, China's rise is a matter of how to distribute power in an anarchical world. A broadly realist analysis of China's rise is based on the following basic assumptions: (1) a state is the main actor in an anarchical world; (2) a state primarily looks for survival; and (3) a state is a rational actor, often described as a black box. Realist theories refer to the balance of power, power transition, and so on,

2. Joseph K. Clifton, "Disputed Theory and Security Policy: Responding to the 'Rise of China' ", CMC Senior Theses Paper 141, 2011. http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1164&context=cmc_theses

3. Many scholars point out that a state's development is linked to its affluence, and its growing powers affect others; as such, China's rise has consistently focussed on international relations – how China impacts on regional actors as well as at the international level.

4. Richard Rosecrance, "Power and International Relations: The Rise of China and its Effects", *International Studies Perspectives*, 7, 2006, pp. 31-35.

to indicate how a state aspires for materialistic superiority, such as military power, to survive in the world.

The balance-of-power theory narrates the logic that each state wants the lion's share of the distribution of power to make for an optimal balance. Competition between states leads both to a tendency to break the balance and, at the same time, not to disturb the equilibrium.⁵ If one state rises rapidly, like China, other major powers and regional powers are motivated to attempt to restrain that rising power through unilateral, bilateral or coercive action. The power transition theory speaks of the possibility of confrontation or war if a newly challenging state reduces the gap between itself and a superpower. Offensive realism, in particular, demonstrates the pessimistic aspect of China's rise – why a state only trails the shadow of power. To quote Mearsheimer, "A state's ultimate goal is to be the hegemon in the system",⁶ but in his view, the cycle of hegemonic competition is destined to be a tragedy, as neither international nor regional hegemony allows for the possibility of a peaceful balance of power. All realist theories conclude that China's growing military capability will probably compel military confrontation, under suitable conditions.

Liberalism argues more optimistically, linking China's rise to deepening institutional interdependence, in which state actors are likely to engage vigorously. While realism assumes that states will endeavour for strategic victory over one another, neo-liberalism emphasises the social element in international relations. Specifically, neo-liberalism posits a couple of assumptions: (1) the institutional mechanism drives actors rationally and cooperatively; (2) it can, in addition, reduce unnecessary cost and bring about less uncertainty through transparent sharing of information. The historic rise of diplomacy has seen states recede from mutual disagreement, basing themselves on rules, norms or other identifiable mediums.

On the possibility of conflict arising between China and others, this theory mostly depends upon the function of multilateralism. In this regard,

5. Yuan-Kang Wang, "Offensive Realism and the Rise of China", *Issues & Studies*, 40(1), 2004, pp. 173-201.

6. Clifton, n. 2, p. 17.

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the rise of China is anchored in its strengthening economic power and the concept of connection with others being a beneficial interaction. The liberalists refute the possibility of war and confrontation: war is not likely to break out, even if a number of conditions may exist in that direction, because (1) a state attempts to calculate the cost of war compared with the benefits of cooperation or benevolent neutrality through security agreements, and so on; (2) with the calculation of risk and benefits, state actors would be interested in being competitive and cooperative within an institutional framework.⁷

Proponents of this perspective point out the following regarding China. (1) It is participating in international non-proliferation and disarmament. (2) It is discussing energy, the environment, and other international issues in the global forum. (3) It is engaging with regional issues through multilateral channels like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).⁸ However, sceptics point out that China's engagement is not for peaceful purposes, but for the grand strategy of development, which needs comfort from external threats to maximise national security. The liberalists stress that while realism predicts that the Sino-American rivalry will imitate the Cold War rivalry of yesteryears, the fact that China is the United States' largest trading partner belies the prospect of that old rivalry between the superpowers. Economic interdependence will diminish interest in conflict, given that states calculate that cooperation is more beneficial.

THE ARGUMENTS APPLIED TO SOUTH KOREA

According to the traditional realist perspective, South Korea should be in trepidation of China's growing international presence.⁹ Mearsheimer (2005)

7. Ibid., p. 53.

8. David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order", *International Security*, 29(3), 2004/2005, p. 70.

9. Kang, n. 1.

strongly doubts the possibility of China having a peaceful rise, reflecting the realist perspective on China's emerging presence, stating, "Most of China's neighbours, including India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Russia and Vietnam, will likely join with the United States to contain China's power."¹⁰

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To go by this view, South Korea looks the most vulnerable country during the period of a power transition. Surrounding the Korean peninsula, China is close to the authoritarian North Korea, no matter that the bilateral relationship has fractured to some extent. North Korea itself is seen as a major threat to South Korea, owing to the hostile attitude of the former to the US-led alliance system.¹¹ At the same time, South Korea is not fully sharing its affiliation with Japan, another US ally in East Asia, due to its rivalry with that country in defence affairs. This situation so distorts the image of South Korea that Seoul has to be dependent on the West only in all its national affairs, which is partially true.

Throughout history, the Korean peninsula has been a field of military confrontation between the rivals in the power transition period. In geopolitics, Korea is located in a key position that touches all powers. Therefore, any state desirous of moving forward to other countries had to pass through this area in the past. In the current period, going by the realist theory, conditions are ripe for war in the Korean peninsula.

According to Hong-seo Park, China's military engagement in the Korean peninsula is similar to the situations in the past, such as in the power transition period confronting the two superpowers. In 1592, China's Ming dynasty decided to deploy its military force against Japanese expansion in the belief that it might hamper China's influence in the Korean peninsula. A similar political assessment was shown by China during the Korea War,

10. Ibid., p. 3.

11. The Korean peninsula is understood to be located on a regional strategic triangle: "Northern Continental Triangle" (North Korea-China-Russia) versus "Southern Maritime Triangle" (South Korea-US-Japan). See Young Whan Kihl, "Security on the Korean Peninsula: Continuity and Change", *Security Dialogue*, 33(1), 2002, pp. 59-72.

when the US-USSR confrontation was considered to bring about regional instability, minimising China's prospects in dealing with Korea. China, it has been seen historically, has a tendency to respond with military engagement immediately, where a power rivalry exists in military formation. However, to gain a more objective viewpoint, China's deep engagement as a historical pattern needs to be analysed more systematically.¹²

While some argue that China "remains a generation or more behind the US in military technology",¹³ it is racing to catch up. Perhaps, China's growing military power will be more visible in the Korean peninsula, reflecting an advanced military ground force, depending on the situation.¹⁴ China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) is likely to turn more professional and well trained by priority funding for training, military infrastructure, modernised equipment and weapons. This speaks for a move towards a Sino-centric order in the region. An enhanced Chinese military force would enable the country to engage in a high-intensity modern conflict in the Korean peninsula. As Lonnie Henley points out, China's military expansion "adds great risks and costs for potential opponents" among China's neighbouring countries.¹⁵

On the other hand, South Korea and China seem to remain only in a cold relationship regarding military affairs.¹⁶ Whereas South Korea maintains a strong alliance with the US, it is not completely excluding China's geopolitical engagement in the Korean peninsula.¹⁷ Seoul has also attempted to get closer to China comprehensively over the last three decades. As the neo-liberalists argue, South Korea realises that China's rapid economic growth

12. Hong-seo Park, (박홍서). 신현실주의 이론을 통한 중국의 대한반도 군사개입 연구, 한국정치학회보, 32권 1호, 2006, p. 183.

13. Koch, ed., "China's Rising Military Power and What We Should Do about It", *Huffingtonpost*, January 12, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ed-koch/chinas-rising-military-po_b_807841.html

14. Robert S. Ross, "The Rise of Chinese Power and the Implications for the Regional Security Order", *Orbis* 54(4), 2002, pp. 525-545.

15. Lonnie Henley, "PLA Logistics and Doctrine Reform, 1999-2009," in Susan M. Puska, ed., *The People's Liberation Army After Next* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2000), pp. 72-73.

16. Dick K. Nanto and Emma Chanlett-Avery, "The Effect of the Rise of China on Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea", *Problem of Post-Communism*, 55(1), January/February, 2006, p. 42.

17. Kang, n. 1.

can diminish South Korea's security fears, if China boosts institutionalism constructively. South Korea, as well as other Asian countries, are seen to accommodate strong economic ties with China as a means, among other things, to stabilise East Asia.

In the 2000s, China became a dominant market for South Korean exports and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Earlier, South Korea for the most part relied on the US market. In 2002, the China-Hong Kong combined market was recorded as South Korea's largest export market in the period after World War II.¹⁸ From 2006 to 2009, South Korea's exports to this market were evaluated to be over twice the value of its exports to the US.¹⁹ China's economic development is considered to be creating a regional economic sphere.²⁰ Boosting economic interests probably does not reduce the gap in political interests, but as its relationship with China deepens, South Korea seeks ways to reshape the conventional concept of the China threat.²¹

Whereas South Korea maintains a strong alliance with the US, it is not completely excluding China's geo-political engagement in the Korean peninsula.

SOUTH KOREA'S POLITICAL ELASTICITY BETWEEN THE US AND CHINA

While many disputes continue between China and several of its neighbours, South Korea has manoeuvred and hedged its variations through multifaceted political difficulties to keep its national interests as free from uncertainty as possible, amidst China's so-called charm offensive.²² Given the overall impression of China's rise, South Korea faces a complicated future, depending on whether China turns into a responsible stakeholder in the region.²³

18. Ross, n. 14.

19. Ibid.

20. Nanto and Chanlett-Avery, n. 16, p. 35.

21. Kang, n. 1, p. 4.

22. Robert G. Sutter, *China's Rise in Asia-Promises, Prospects, and Implications for the United States*, Occasional Paper, 2005, Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies, p. 8. See also Shambaugh, n. 8, p. 67.

23. Jae Ho Chung, "The History War and Beyond", *Asian Survey*, 49(3), 2009, p. 468.

Noticeably, South Korea is eager to establish a well-planned and well-implemented unification plan with North Korea, while China weighs to prevent North Korea from collapsing by priority.²⁴ It is the momentous divergent policy preference between Seoul and Beijing that obliges South Korea to be strategically flexible. Though there is no fixed timetable for unification, it is foreseeable that Seoul will consistently attempt to accommodate peace-making, both for reasons of stability in the Korean peninsula and to allow the process of unification. The uncertain geo-political transformation in Korea has significant strategic implications for China's approach in East Asia.

One hurdle to Seoul's policy options vis-à-vis Pyongyang are the longstanding Beijing-Pyongyang relations, which have an underpinning of historical and geo-political needs. The relationship has not always been cordial: it has a disputed narration, yet it cannot emerge to the surface due to the US-South Korea alliance. The China-North Korea relationship is often described as being "one largely in name only".²⁵ However, despite friction, the two countries share a strategic interest that includes a wide range of cooperation against the US-South Korea alliance, excluding humanitarian aid. For example, South Korea is aware that the China-North Korea Defence Treaty signed in 1961 is particularly against the US alliance. In view of that, China's engagement with North Korea narrows down South Korea's policy options, confining Seoul's options vis-à-vis China to non-military issues.

Although the Asian regional order has undergone major changes in the last two decades, US presence in East Asia continues to be a problem for China. Whilst in the Chinese observation, to some extent, the US has been

24. There are differing opinions on whether China's foreign policy is favourable to Korea's unification or not and in what manner. See, for the opinion that China does not want the unification, Michael Raska, "Predictable Uncertainty: China's Rise and U.S.-Korea Security Dilemmas", *global-is-asian*, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, April-June 2011. On the other hand, some say China advocates Korea's unification under the certain condition that US military forces are withdrawn from the region to ensure regional stability. See You Ji, "China and North Korea: a Fragile Relationship of Strategic Convenience", *Journal of Contemporary China* 10(28), 2001, pp. 387-398.

25. You Ji, *Ibid.*, p. 390.

able to stabilise and reassure its alliance and preserve its hegemony,²⁶ China's strategic concern about competition with the US is that Chinese strategic thinkers mainly stick to the realist approach. After the events of September 11, 2001, the US launched a series of anti-terror policies to preserve its dominance of democratic international leadership. In the competition for influence in the regional order in East Asia, the Korean peninsula is pivotal to the United States' East Asia strategy, especially dealing with North Korea, clashing with China's interest in achieving a leading role in the region. One of China's concerns is that the US-South Korea Mutual Defence Treaty, signed in 1953, is intended for military cooperation against North Korea and China. Also, the US has revamped its policy regarding Seoul to avail for South Korea the same level of access to weaponry as that provided to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) countries, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

Seoul is yet to conclude its predetermined views on how to accommodate its national interest against the background of China's rise.

Interestingly, Seoul is yet to conclude its predetermined views on how to accommodate its national interest against the background of China's rise. Some say that it must be fully engaged with Beijing.²⁷ However, South Korea's diplomatic approach is fundamentally aimed at avoiding a military clash with the bordering countries, and maintaining strategic flexibility. For example, Seoul arrived at a rapprochement with China during the Cold War rivalry in the 1970s.

During the 1990s, while seeking wider strategic options, South Korea did not assert that China was posing a potential threat.²⁸ The economic dimension of relations between South Korea and China has been more accentuated officially. Consequently, *South Korea seems to put more value on how crucial China's presence is, rather than how argumentative China's emerging power is.*²⁹ China is in reality an unavoidable partner for South Korea in

26. Russell Ong, "South Korea and China's Security Objectives in East Asia", *Asia-Pacific Review*, 15(2), 2008, p. 104.

27. Scott Synder, *China's Rise and the Two Koreas: Politics, Economics, Security* (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner, 2009).

28. Chung, n. 23, pp. 468-483.

29. Kang, n.1.

developing its economic strategy and managing regional issues linked to North Korea.

China's approach towards East Asia has unequivocally improved steadily and it has become more interactive through high-level diplomacy. Vis-à-vis South Korea, Chinese leaders are clear about two things: maximising economic interest, separated from political disputes with neighbouring countries; and stabilising regional issues in East Asia to secure China's military and economic power. Since all the regional players are present in Asian multilateralism, using as a tool the regional apparatus, China's involvement and leadership is seen to coexist with the US and its allies. China's engagement in the regional order is on the basis of an institutional framework that may be functional in constraining US influence in the region.³⁰ Considering the basic elements of China's foreign policy, Seoul's approach to China is aimed at widening relations beyond bilateralism. As the Chinese government also places importance upon improving its position in East Asia, South Korea and China have elevated their "comprehensive cooperative partnership" to a "security cooperative partnership" in 2008.³¹

SOUTH KOREA'S PATHWAY TO SHARE THE LOAD

Professor Chung-min Lee, Dean of the School in Yonsei University in South Korea, has noted: "While China's continuing economic growth trajectory has amplified regional cooperation based on trade, ... China's geopolitical and strategic position, coupled with its military modernization has progressively posed higher threshold dilemmas for Asia as well as the international system."³² South Korea needs to ascertain how to coexist with the sole superpower and other rising powers.

US-South Korea Alliance

South Korea regards the US, its strategic ally, as a pillar of defence in its present policy. The US presence and strategy during the Cold War depended upon hard power against the Soviet Union and it was widely comprehended

30. Shambaugh, n. 8, p. 73.

31. Ong, n. 26, pp. 102-103.

32. Raska, n. 24, p. 24.

in regional and global terms.³³ Recently, responding to China's growing military force, the US is redesigning its regional policy regarding changes to regional polarity, operational concepts, and weapon procurement and deployment in case of emergencies. South Korea perhaps does not have many options to break through the current stand-off with North Korea as well as overcoming other regional issues owing to the strategic ambiguity and uncertain future security scenario. Currently, South Korea is forced to have enmity with North Korea; this causes a dilemma that the China-North Korea ties call for withdrawal of US military presence in South Korea first.³⁴

Many expected the US-South Korea alliance to be strengthened in the post-Cold War period, which, however, has not happened.

The US-South Korea alliance is supposed to be more extensive against an external threat. Many expected the US-South Korea alliance to be strengthened in the post-Cold War period, which, however, has not happened. Some socio-political changes in South Korea also suggest a changed outlook on issues such as the conventional framework of alliance in the Korean peninsula. Since the 1990s, public opinion has started to favour the normalisation of relationship with the North, based on the ideological transformation, though most agree on no mutation of the alliance structure. Consequently, when dealing with Pyongyang, Seoul does not always respond favourably to the United States' hawkish gestures, for instance, considering a preemptive military strike targeting North Korea's nuclear facilities owing to the strategic deliberation of mass retaliation. Soon after North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1993, the Clinton Administration initiated steps of conciliation, with Pyongyang weighing the military option, that caused strong opposition in South Korea. In the Bush Administration, the military option was seriously considered to lead to the collapse of the Kim Jung-il regime and strengthen the United States' position in the region, which was vastly disparate from

33. Ibid., p. 25.

34. Ji, n. 24, p. 396.

the policy of the government in Seoul. In response, South Korea carried out a more independent policy toward North Korea, which further separated the bargaining issues between the US and North Korea. In 1998, President Kim Dae Jung of South Korea initiated a new phase in the inter-Korean relationship by declaring unprecedented assistance to North Korea.

Due to the differences in policy approaches between the US and South Korea, the conservatives in the US perceived South Korea as a hurdle to resolving the North Korean crisis.³⁵ When dealing with Pyongyang, Seoul consistently paid the price to stabilise the situation, to ensure that a war would not ensue in the region. In 2006, the South Korean President officially complained about the United States' strategic approach, which was arrived at without South Korea's political accord. South Korea stated that there would be deep disagreement between Seoul and Washington if the latter tried a military option against Pyongyang.³⁶

However, this does not imply that the momentum in the US-South Korea alliance has been lost. Washington and Seoul still broadly have a consensual outlook about the threat emanating from Pyongyang's diplomacy and domestic instability. Neither government wants an abrupt collapse of the Kim Jong-il regime, not only for its national and regional stakes but also for China's engagement in this region. From outside, North Korea is too volatile and unhinged a regime to be able to loosen the US-South Korea alliance system. Yet, there is a difference in how the US and South Korea perceive North Korea: according to US opinion, South Korea is seen to be emotionally attached to resolving the political issues with North Korea.³⁷

At the same time, Seoul is cautious about China's military appearance in the North Korean context. In January 2011, the Korean news media reported China's military presence in North Korea's Rajin-Sonbong Special Economic

35. Hyun-Wook Kim, "Domestic Events, Ideological Changes and the post-Cold War US-South Korea Alliance", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 63(4), 2009, p. 483.

36. Ibid.

37. Junwung Kim, "Ambivalent Allies: Recent South Korean Perceptions of the United States Forces Korea (USFK)", *Asian Affairs*, 30(4), 2004, p. 279.

Zone (SEZ).³⁸ Earlier, China and North Korea signed an investment pact to build new roads and a port in the SEZ. China's military presence in the region could be either to suppress rebellious public opinion and avert a sudden collapse of the regime or to support the creation of the SEZ, which establishes a new infrastructure from Rajin-Sonbong to Quanhe in Jilin, China.³⁹ No matter what the actual reason, Seoul reckoned that China would support Pyongyang's decisions.

In part, to enable enhanced balancing, South Korea is looking for partnerships beyond its immediate neighbours.

With all possible scenarios surrounding the region, Seoul preserves a defensive military posture. It can neither be fully against Washington's decisions nor completely supportive of them.⁴⁰ In the meantime, Seoul needs to calculate that reinforcing the US military force in the Korean peninsula may cause an arms race, encompassing China's military presence in North Korea. Domestically, South Korea needs to reconsider how to update an old-fashioned alliance relationship in the light of what the politicians and the public suggest. Overall, South Korea certainly faces a challenging phase in reducing the escalation of political and diplomatic peril in its territory.

India-South Korea Ties

In part, to enable enhanced balancing, South Korea is looking for partnerships beyond its immediate neighbours. The India-South Korea tie is more or less on the right track to face the challenge posed to both countries by the rise of China.⁴¹ It also seems to be linked to the relative decline of US presence in East Asia.⁴² The two regional powers share the concern of whether China's presence and rising stature will translate into its being a

38. "Chinese Troops Stationed in N. Korean Special Zone", *Chosunilbo*, 17 January 2011; http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/01/17/2011011700465.html

39. Ibid.

40. Doug Bandow, "The US-South Korea Alliance: Outdated, Unnecessary, and Dangerous", *Foreign Policy Briefing*, No. 90, 14 July 2010, p. 3.

41. Sujit Dutta, "Managing and Engaging Rising China: India's Evolving Posture", *The Washington Quarterly*, 34(2), 2011, p. 139.

42. Rajaram Panda, "India-Republic of Korea Military Diplomacy: Past and Future Projections", *Journal of Defense Studies*, 5(1), 2011, pp. 16-38.

dependable stakeholder in respect of the possibility of a "realignment of power relations in Asia".⁴³ Both countries need their capabilities to balance the regional order in terms of economic development, expanding diplomacy and shaping regional institutions. The current link between South Korea and India involves a series of communications with reference to economic ties, defence cooperation and a civil nuclear deal. This affiliation is predicted to evolve and become established in protecting increased strategic convergence across Asia.⁴⁴

It has been pointed out that the Soviet Union advised India and South Korea to have close bilateral ties in the light of the prospect of China's emergence during the Cold War.⁴⁵ In monitoring the relationships among China, South Korea and Japan, Moscow endeavoured to have India build up a friendly stance towards South Korea; but this did not come about.⁴⁶ For a long time, India refrained from engaging in other regional issues, and maintained its image as a Third World country. But currently, South Korea is interested in expanding its relationship with India, and India is looking for greater East Asian contacts in the pursuit of its own Look East policy. Initially, New Delhi did not carry much weight with South Korea compared to other regional powers due to her domestic and regional political convulsion, however, India currently counts for a great deal in Seoul's outlook, given their bilateral economic ties, India's fast-growing economy, and the prediction that India will become an economic world leader in the medium term. The India-South Korea relationship, elevated to the level of a strategic partnership, has evolved rapidly due to the necessity to maintain the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region.

In view of the power shift in Asia, what really counts in this relationship is the convergence of security interests. In the 2000s, South Korea was eager to build up a cordial relationship with India, and India responded positively.

43. Ibid., p. 17.

44. Harsh V. Pant, "China's Rise Adds Urgency to India-South Korea Ties", *World Politics Review*, 2010, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/6340/chinas-rise-adds-urgency-to-india-south-korea-ties>

45. Panda, n. 42, p. 20.

46. Man-Woo Lee, "The Prospects for Normalization of Relations between Moscow and Seoul", *Korea and World Affairs*, 4(1), Spring, 2002, p. 189.

In 2005, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on defence, industry and logistics, which was followed in 2006 by another MoU in the area of naval cooperation to guard the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden for energy security reasons and against piracy. In 2010, their bilateral military cooperation was demonstrated at an event presided over by Indian Defence Minister A.K. Antony, during a visit to South Korea.

A civil nuclear deal to balance the entire nuclear enigma in South Asia and East Asia is also gaining thrust. North Korea and Pakistan, the two old foes of South Korea and India, respectively, have been trying to establish a tactical linkage with China in the nuclear and missile domain. Formulated by the A.Q. Khan network, the North Korea-Pakistan relationship is aimed at sharing nuclear and missile science and technology, nuclear materials, and intelligence advice. According to an Indian expert, Rajaram Panda, China follows similar schemes against India, South Korea and Japan, to confine them to their own influential territorial space and to balance them by encouraging friendly cooperation with other countries in the region, comparable to the “containment strategy” used by the Soviet Union during the Cold War.⁴⁷ The present relationship between India and Korea, built on strategic convergence, is now in a new phase of balance of power.

While this cooperation needs to be valued separately from the US-South Korea alliance, the growing strategic cooperation between New Delhi and Seoul coincides with the rise of China. It would, however, be premature to overemphasise the military and security aspect of this strategic cooperation.

CONCLUSION

South Korea's foreign policy reflects the accommodation of a peaceful power shift. Throughout history, South Korea has been pointed to as an example of a realist in pessimism. Though this logic still seems to prevail, currently South Korea is a clear case of a country associated with China's rise in power in East Asia.

47. Panda, n. 42, pp. 16-38.

Seoul's policy toward China is an attempt to separate political issues and economic interdependence.

Seoul's policy toward China is an attempt to separate political issues and economic interdependence. South Korea's diplomatic manoeuvres suggest hedging policy options since Seoul does not want merely to adopt either bandwagoning or balancing strategies as regards neighbouring countries. A political confrontation between the US and China or China's dominant role in the Korean peninsula would suggest for South Korea an opportunity for a fine balance in the peninsula since the North Korean issue is extremely volatile. The US-China-South Korea strategic triangle has played a critical role in suppressing North Korea's assertiveness within a multilateral framework.

On one side, Seoul calculates that a strong China might be helpful to stabilise the region. South Korea does not, therefore, want to fix the role of China as a threat to reshaping the regional order, if it is helpful in stabilising North Korea's hostile attitude. On the other hand, the rise of China tends to minimise the diplomatic space available for South Korea to deal with the US and North Korea. China, with its massive demography and territory, may push Seoul to deal with their other disputed issues, while Seoul distinguishes its economic ties with China from disputed political issues.

Meanwhile, South Korea is concerned about the unification of the two Koreas and the prevention of North Korea's collapse, which will trigger political and economic turmoil in the peninsula. In this context, China's increasing economic and military influence in North Korea is keenly observed for its helpful or damaging potential to South Korea's long-term interests.

In exploring solutions, South Korea accepts US leadership in East Asia but is widening its strategic scope to seek a stable partner like India. Fortunately, the two countries have a great commonality in their national interests.

Despite the various views on China's rise and South Korea's path, it still seems significant for South Korea to strengthen its cordial relationship with China in this transition period. It would reduce the pessimistic foretelling of Seoul's strategies. At the same time, given the uncertainty entailed in the transition period of China's rise, it will be beneficial for Seoul to strengthen its cordial relationship with both the US and India.