Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find ways to overcome the asymmetry of the Korea-U.S. alliance in order to improve Korea's security autonomy. To this end, the Trump administration's foreign security, economic and military alliance policies were analyzed after considering the security-self-regulation exchange theory in light of the Korea-U.S. alliance. Based on the analysis results, policy suggestions were made to overcome the asymmetry of the Korea-U.S. alliance. This research led to the framework of analysis in Chapter 1 after examining the asymmetric alliance between Korea and the U.S. through the theory of alliance from the perspective of realism and the theory of security-self-regulation exchange. Chapter 2 analyzes the Trump administration's foreign security, economic and military alliance policies and examines what the Trump administration emphasizes and aims at in accordance with the U.S. First America stance. Chapter 3 explored ways to overcome the asymmetry of the Korea-U.S. alliance. Chapter 4 made policy suggestions to overcome the asymmetry of the Korea-U.S. alliance. The study concluded that: First, the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific strategy is strategically engaged in conjunction with South Korea's New South-ern Policy. Second, maintain continued economic cooperation with the U.S. to push for mutually beneficial economic policies for both Seoul and Washington. Third, Korea should improve its U.S.-dependent economic structure.

[Keywords] Korea-U.S. Alliance, Security-Autonomous Exchange Theory, Asymmetric Alliance, Realism, Trump’s Administration

1. Introduction and Frame of Analysis

Lee Myung-bak government is a world alliance to contribute to solving problems in agreement with the United States, ours is ‘value of alliance’, ‘comprehensive strategic alliance’ a new form of that. Park Geun-hye in May 2013, president and Obama the president of the Korea-U.S. alliance at the summit of climate change, energy security, energy, non-proliferation and global WMD to solve the problem. Led by Korea to work together for the unification of the supported from the international community has identified a ‘Global Partnership’ to make deployment[1]. Moon Jae-in, the government has Trump for president and the summit as specified in national security strategy, reciprocal of the Korea-U.S. alliance, pushing for comprehensive development[2]. From an economic point of view, the U.S. is a leading power in the international economy, so there is an asymmetry in the relationship between the two countries as Korea, which depends heavily on foreign countries, cannot overlook its economic benefits, and there is a typical asymmetric alliance because it is an alliance signed as a strong and weak nation. Unlike the Obama administration, the Trump administration’s foreign security and economic policies and alliance policies call for greater defense spending to maintain hegemony and stronger new roles for its Asian allies to keep China in check, as it advocates “peace through strength” and
“America First” Therefore, it will be possible to establish the Korea-U.S. alliance in a reciprocal and comprehensive manner while improving the autonomy of national security only when we analyze and respond effectively to the impact of the Trump administration’s alliance policy on the Korea-U.S. alliance.

Therefore, this study derived the framework of analysis after looking at the asymmetric alliance of the Korea-U.S. alliance through the theory of alliance from a realistic perspective and the theory of security-autonomy exchange. In Chapter 2, we analyzed the Trump administration’s foreign security, economic and military alliance policies and looked at what the Trump administration is emphasizing and pursuing. Chapter 3 explored ways to overcome the asymmetry of the Korea-U.S. alliance. In the conclusion of Chapter 4, a policy proposal was made to overcome the asymmetry of the Korea-U.S. alliance.

1.1. Concepts and form factors of asymmetric alliance

Morgenthau, a realist scholar of international political theory, saw the alliance between countries as a vital function for the balance of power in a multinational international system[3]. Snyder also said that the relationship was a joint military action to cope with aggression from countries other than the member states[4]. In his book “The Origin of the Alliance” Walt said it was an agreement between two or more countries for security cooperation, which meant an agreement to prevent armed attacks from virtual enemies or prevent military threats in advance[5]. Morrow divided the country into superpowers, superpowers and weak states according to the size of the national power, focusing on the physical factors of population, territory, resources, military power and economic power, and described the alliances among nations of the same size as symmetrical alliances and between countries of different sizes as asymmetric alliances[6]. When forming an alliance between countries, often by differences in national power, a symmetrical alliance between countries with similar powers has mutual equal expectations and obligations, while an asymmetrical alliance between powerful and weak countries with many differences in national power has different types of expectations and obligations. In other words, a weak nation, which is allied with a great power, is not guaranteed its own security, but it is limited in autonomy by a powerful nation’s participation in domestic politics.

Realists believe that the international community is anarchy in which no unit exists beyond the state in which it can control its actions, and that each nation has allied itself with other countries to ensure its own security. In particular, a weak nation in the international community chooses an alliance as a strategy supported by a powerful nation to maintain its survival and security. But the alliance between weaker and stronger nations is likely to become asymmetric, as it cannot guarantee its interests at an equal level between each other. In other words, a “alliance dilemma” arises in which small countries yield their own security autonomy in return for receiving the military support of powerful nations for their survival and security. As such, the alliance, which results in a correlation between security and autonomy in the alliance forged by weak and powerful countries, is called a “non-representative alliance”[7]. In these asymmetric alliances, it tends to be a relationship in which small and medium-sized countries are given the means to ensure their security from the superpowers, while unable to make their own policy decisions autonomously. In other words, instead of guaranteeing the security of weak countries, the powerful nation restricts the autonomy of weak countries[8].

1.2. Security-autonomous exchange theory

The security-autonomous exchange model is a similar concept to the theory of the back-to-back relationship, meaning that the weaker depends on the power of the powerful under the asymmetric alliance to obtain the security benefits, the weaker the security autonomy of the weaker countries is under-
mined by the influence of the stronger. Morrow said security and autonomy are inversely related[9]. These claims have shown a valid explanatory power in explaining the relationship between the former weaker and stronger nations. But unlike Morrow’s model, as the security environment, the level of threat and the capabilities of the allies change, the weaker countries make efforts to expand autonomy without compromising their own. In other words, a nation whose national power has grown strong enough to improve the expected decline in security level through its own efforts through securing autonomy seeks to increase security and autonomy at the same time in asymmetric. In the asymmetric alliance, the weaker countries want security support from the stronger even if their autonomy is limited, and the stronger countries want to exercise their influence while supporting the weaker ones with security, thereby forming a mutual interest is formed. Thus, a security-autonomous exchange can be seen as a kind of deal that will result in favorable outcomes for both big and small powers. But instead of receiving security support from powerful nations, the weak countries may be limited in their own security autonomy, and the relationship between security and autonomy is established in a semi-proportional relationship, and the weak countries experience conflicts of autonomy[10].

When analyzing the Korea-U.S. alliance as a security-autonomy theory, the reason Korea’s security environment has changed differently from the Cold War, but Korea’s autonomy has not improved much in the future because its security dependence on the U.S. has not changed much in the course of the Cold War, and the U.S. role in the process of reunification of the Korean Peninsula will be an important factor[11]. Thus, to overcome the security-autonomous exchange dilemma, the weaker countries should make self-rescue efforts to improve their own security capabilities, even if they are supported by a powerful nation. This is because, as many realists claim, the alliance can be dismantled at any time if the interests of the alliance are removed from each other.

1.3. Frame of analysis

The Trump administration is America First, Peace through Strength, The U.S. has a strategy centered on national interests and the importance of alliances as its major policy keynote. For South Korea, the U.S. is trying to eliminate North Korea’s nuclear threat in the face of growing political and economic confrontation and competition between the U.S. and China. The two sides should work together to strengthen the South Korea-U.S. alliance and develop relations between Korea and China[12]. The Korea-U.S. alliance has been one-sided by the U.S. since Sept. 11, China’s growing influence on the Korean Peninsula, and rising anti-U.S. sentiment in Korea. It is in a difficult situation, including Japan’s economic sanctions and conflicts over history issues[13]. To address this situation, the Korea and the U.S. have established policy-significant measures. It has maintained a partnership for mutual national interests. However, recent changes in the security environment at home and abroad and various situations in Korea and the U.S.. It could weaken the maintenance of the Korea-U.S. alliance, and it could weaken North Korea’s nuclear threats and trade disputes between South Korea and Japan[14]. Demolition of the General Security of Military Information Agreement(GSOMIA)[15] and demand an increase in defense cost sharing under the circumstances[16], the Korea-U.S. alliance may also be called for a change in its relations with regional powers.

After the Cold War, the concept of U.S. security was not only in the traditional security field, but also in the non-military sector. Be included in the scope of the concept as a result, the scope of the alliance is climate, energy, environment, etc. It has been extended to other areas that affect security. In particular, since the inauguration of the Trump administration, the factors behind the alliance’s formation have increased in importance to economic interests in previous trust. Given these changes, the framework for the analysis for this study was derived as shown in <Figure 1>.
Figure 1. Framework of analysis.

2. Analyze the Trump Administration’s Policies

2.1. Security policy

The main principles applied to the Trump administration’s foreign security policies are as follows. First, it is “America First” which measures the cost-effectiveness. Recognize strategic security interests in conjunction with economic interests. In other words, security that does not give tangible benefits is perceived as a subordination to the current profitable economy. What emerges as a result is the strengthening of protectionism. Second, they are “selective intervention” and “enhancing national defense” with “Peace through strength” President Trump emphasizes the management of foreign policy through power at a time when the U.S. is as advantageous as possible on the strong foundation of military and economy. But peace through force does not mean active involvement in international disputes or conflict resolution. Rather, it seeks more cautious intervention than before. In early October 2019, Turkey’s betrayal of Kurds, which was a key ally in the fight against Syria’s Kurds, was criticized for abandoning the alliance, and was evaluated as a failure of deterrence, a decline in the liberal international order and a crisis of trust in the alliance system, but this ultimately confirmed the principle that the country’s security should be kept on its own[17].

In June 2019, the Pentagon released a report titled “Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparatory, Partnership and Networked Areas” Calling China, Russia, North Korea and transnational issues a threat to the region, the report argues that the most important threat is China, which is seeking hegemony in the region[18].

The U.S. India-Pacific strategy is expected to evolve into the Obama administration’s official regional strategy and the U.S. strategy against Asia. The geographic concept of ‘Indo-Pacific’ is not ‘India annexed to Asia-centric Asia’ but ‘the geographic concept of placing India on either the core or both axes’ while emphasizing the connectivity of the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific[19]. It is also a U.S. strategy for Asia to check China’s rise and a countermeasure to China’s “one-to-one strategy”. This idea of not losing the initiative in global capitalist growth while besieging China is seen as an active reflection of the U.S. hegemon will[20]. South Korea, which needs to make progressively adjustments to the alliance between the U.S. and South Korea in the process of transferring wartime operational control and a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. Closely observe the process of shaping the Indo-Pacific strategy, Based on our national interests, we should seek the future direction of the Korea-U.S. alliance.

2.2. Economic policy

In his presidential bid, President Trump pledged to minimize the burden on the U.S. and reduce the trade deficit in order to revive the economy. Since his election, NATO members and allies have called for increased contributions to secure support, while China and many other countries have imposed tariffs, demanding a correction of trade imbalances[21]. President Trump’s foreign economic policy is the area where the “America First” stance is most emphasized. The U.S. foreign economic policy stipulates that it seeks to restore U.S. jobs and fair trade supporting industries. To that end, President Trump is emphasizing protectionist foreign economic policies. First, they argue that free trade zones and bilateral free trade agreements are neither fair nor reciprocal. Shortly after his inauguration, he withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership(TPP) and also emphasized the reopening of NAFTA. Since the election, he has insisted on revising or scrapping the Korea-U.S. FTA, pointing out that
trade with South Korea is unfair to the U.S. However, South Korea cannot make a hasty choice because the situation like China’s economic sanctions, which have been tainted by the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, could recur again[22]. Second, it claims to impose retaliatory tariffs and is advocating protectionism through antidumping investigations. In particular, it justified the imposition of punitive tariffs, arguing that “unfair” practices such as exchange rate manipulation in China, Mexico and Japan, and unfair government subsidies, worked against the U.S., resulting in a trade surplus. Third, it insists on introducing a border tax that levies only on imports and does not impose on exports. Rather than importing goods into the U.S. market by levying border taxes on imports, multinational companies from the U.S. and other countries are trying to lure investment and production to the U.S. This is an economic policy that would encourage people to buy U.S. goods by expanding tax revenues and increasing American employment. Fourth, the U.S. trade deficit claims that the other countries are responsible for currency manipulation, which arbitrarily devalues their currency’s value. Because China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Germany and Switzerland have something in common to earn a sizable surplus in trade with the U.S., warning of designation as currency manipulators. Fifth, the most important determinant of the Trump administration’s external economic policy is its economic growth and job creation. Securing jobs is one of the Trump administration’s key economic policies, promising to provide large-scale tax exemptions and remove corporate regulations to U.S. multinational companies that moved overseas, stressing their return to Korea, and pressuring and cashing in on U.S. investment to foreign companies.

President Trump is making it clear in the economic sector that he has no will to maintain and protect the negative free economic order in the United States. Rather, the Trump administration is pushing for a protectionist trade policy that protects the U.S. market and industry, or a free trade order in favor of American goods and services. It could be done whenever it is deemed necessary for the U.S. national interest, such as adding demands or tariffs on security sharing costs to its allies.

2.3. Military alliance policy

The U.S. and its key allies are recently trying to transform themselves into global partners, expanding their shared strategic interests. Building a global partnership in the U.S. back in 2001. It can be understood in the course of the transition of the defense strategy from a threat-based approach to a capability-based approach, as specified in the Quadrennial Defense Review. During the Cold War, the U.S. clearly supported the security interests the allies would gain by providing deterrence and defense against military threats to their allies, while the U.S. seeks to reorganize its allies on the basis of whether they can share the security interests through preemptive cooperation on a preventive level.

The term “global network” was first used in 2015, indicating that the U.S. “national military strategy” continued to pose a lingering problem with this shift in its military strategy. This comes as the need to strengthen the “network” between the allies, in which the U.S. expects new roles, missions and responsibilities from its allies. As a result, the U.S. expects to select areas of cooperation considering the capabilities of its allies and establish a network of alliance cooperation accordingly. In other words, the U.S. wants to draw on the evolution of selective alliance cooperation in consideration of its allies’ capabilities and perceived threat, thereby establishing a support base for maintaining U.S. national interests. White House Report on America’s Asia-Pacific Balanced Strategy. Fact Sheet: Advancing Rebalancing to Asia and the Pacific(2015). It also shows that the U.S. wants to use its regional partner capabilities to maintain and strengthen its rule-based order and to strengthen cooperative ties to address regional and global-level challenges. The Trump administration is making more concrete in the course of discussions with its Asian and Pacific allies, expecting comprehensive cooperation in various areas such as
missile defense, cybersecurity, maritime security and disaster relief.

In 2015, the U.S. and Japan announced the ‘New Defense Cooperation Guidelines’, declaring their rise to a global partnership and seeking to evolve from a military alliance to a global alliance that will comprehensively cooperate on various global issues on climate change, poverty eradication and space exploration. Japan has strengthened its alliance with the U.S. since the advent of the Abe administration, and is well illustrated by its desire to improve its security and diplomatic autonomy by expanding the application of its foreign and security policies to other regions. The U.S. and Australia have also sought a transition to a multidisciplinary and comprehensive alliance ranging from development cooperation, peacekeeping operations and cybersecurity since 2011. In order to keep China in check, the U.S. is also promoting cooperation in the security of soda through the linkage of the U.S.-led alliance in Asia and Thailand, and the Australian Institute for Strategic Policy (ASPI) argues in a research report that Australia should shift its defense strategy to counter China’s rapid expansion, and that it should form a military alliance with Japan[23]. South Korea Lee Myung-bak government, Park Geun-hye from the current Moon Jae-in, through the government to commonly emphasize a comprehensive alliance with the U.S.. Under the concept of comprehensive security, which broadly applies not only traditional security confined to military areas but also non-military ones, the process of building alliances between the United States, Japan and Australia under the Indo-Pacific strategy gives much meaning to the future development of the South Korea-U.S. alliance.

3. A Study on Overcoming the Asymmetry of the Korea-U.S. Alliance

Korea and the U.S. are working together in the Asia-Pacific region on various security issues. For the reciprocal and comprehensive establishment of the Korea-U.S. alliance and future development, the geopolitical position facing Korea, the aspects of security threats and the aspects of national security interests will make important decisions in the reciprocal and comprehensive alliance.

At the time of the Korea-U.S. alliance, the asymmetrical alliance has been maintained in the context of security and economy, which Seoul is forced to follow unilateral choices and decisions by Washington rather than selective demands on Washington. But such asymmetrical alliances are also slowly changing after the Cold War, with changes in the international situation, the security environment on the Korean Peninsula and, above all, various self-rescue efforts to strengthen the nation’s national power. The changes will have a more synergistic effect only if they are carried out in accordance with U.S. foreign policy. In this context, it is necessary to strategically implement the Indo-Pacific strategy, which the Trump administration is actively pursuing in response to China’s one-to-one initiative, in conjunction with the current administration’s New Southern Policy. This is important for expanding diplomatic space through diplomatic diversification by deepening cooperative ties with various countries to expand their international roles as a middle power amid geopolitical tension and rivalry in Northeast Asia. This will allow the U.S. to gain an upper hand and participate in the Indo-Pacific strategy. A special Korea-ASEAN summit held in Busan in November, after meeting in the Moon Jae-in, the president of the ASEAN countries with the leaders of the joint vision statement[24].

The plan calls for sharing the values of co-prosperity and peace in various fields, including economy, society and culture, while opposing protectionism and promoting peace on the Korean Peninsula. After the meeting, the government will establish the New Southern Policy 2.0 and implement it in earnest from 2021[25].

Therefore, if pushed in conjunction with the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, it will be able to push ahead without any impact despite the restoration of trust for internalizing cooperative partnership with China and the strengthening of close communication channels. Korea-China relations should also be dealt with
carefully, as the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) has already caused diplomatic and economic difficulties with China.

The Trump administration values economic and national interests, as shown by the U.S. priority and protectionist trade policy stances. Therefore, the demand for an increase in the Korea-U.S. defense budget should be set so that the security posture will not be compromised, considering the internal political opinions and economic conditions of the two countries in consideration of the Korea-U.S. FTA, which was renegotiated in 2018. If a review is made on various options, including command and transfer of wartime operational control of U.S. troops in Korea, it will not only bring economic interests but also a new type of Korea-U.S. alliance and security environment to both countries.

It should maintain its alliance with the Trump administration, which prioritizes economic benefits, while improving Korea’s economic structure dependent on the U.S. to overcome and improve the asymmetry in security-self-reliance relations. To do so, the two countries should diversify their trading partners according to the New Southern Policy discussed earlier. There should be improvements in strategic and policy support and systems at the national level to improve the quality and design of products based on technology development. There is also a need for consultations on mutual tariffs.

If the Trump administration implements an alliance policy that puts U.S. economic interests first, and South Korea pushes for economic policy in a way that increases its policy autonomy to demand corresponding benefits, the two allies will be built in a mutually economically beneficial manner. If Korea strategically approaches the future design of the Korea-U.S. alliance so that it can enhance Korea’s image and status as a middle power in the international community from a long-term perspective and develop it from an asymmetric alliance to a more autonomous one, both security and autonomy will be enhanced, thus establishing a reciprocal and comprehensive alliance between Korea and U.S.

4. Conclusion and Suggestion

The following are policy suggestions for building the Korea-U.S. alliance in a reciprocal and comprehensive manner. First, participate in the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific strategy strategically linking the New Southern Policy actively pursued by the incumbent administration. The U.S. also wants South Korea to actively participate in its Indo-Pacific strategy. If South Korea participates, it would be an opportunity to boost Seoul’s international standing by pushing the alliance into a future-oriented relationship and strengthening cooperation with a number of ASEAN countries along with Japan, Australia, New Zealand and India, which are already participating. Therefore, also suffers similar battle for supremacy between the United States and South Korea and Southeast Asian countries, and Moon Jae-in, because they are looking to diversify its foreign New Southern Policy of the president. Based on trade as well as to increase security cooperation with Southeast Asian countries are also needed. Second, it should continue economic cooperation with the U.S. to pursue mutually beneficial economic policies for both Korea and U.S.. It will not be easy to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, so South Korea should come up with a solution with the U.S. The Trump administration is pushing North Korea with both strong pressure and dialogue, but its North Korea policy stance may change if a new administration takes office after 2020. Therefore, it is also necessary to check the candidates’ foreign security, economy and alliance commitments and take preemptive action. The U.S. should take a policy response depending on the internal political situation, but respond flexibly while considering the possibility of change. Third, the U.S.-dependent economic structure should be improved. Strategically pushing for diversification of trading partners, technological and design development of export items, and mutual tariff consultation will reduce economic dependence on the U.S. so that agreements such as FTAs can be carried out in Korea’s favor and the autonomy of security from the economy.
5. References

5.1. Journal articles


5.2. Books


5.3. Additional references

Lead Author
Choi Won-sang / Chungnam National University Researcher
B.A. Chungnam National University
M.A. Hansung University
Ph.D. Chungnam National University

Research field

Major career
- 1994~2016. Department of Defense, Officer
- 2016~present. Ministry of the Interior and Safety, Emergency Planning Professional Officer

Co-Author
Moon Hyeon-cheol / Chodang University Professor
B.A. Chosun University
M.A. Chosun University
Ph.D. Chosun University

Research field

Major career
- 2007~present. NSC, MND, JCS Policy Advisory Committee, Member
- 2019~present. National Crisis Management Association, Director

Corresponding Author
Shin Jin / Chungnam National University Professor
B.A. Sungkyunkwan University
M.A. Seoul National University
Ph.D. Seoul National University

Research field

Major career
- 2011~present. Chungnam National University, Director of National Institute of Strategic Studies
- 2011~present. The Institute for Peace Affairs, President