Abstract

Purpose: The ROK’s diplomatic maneuverability since the normalization of its relationship with the PRC in 1992 has received much undeserved skepticism from both Beijing and Washington. While Beijing acquiescently acknowledges the necessity of Seoul to maintain an alliance with Washington, it has become critical of it since the ROK’s decision to deploy THAAD in 2016. The paper aims at a better understanding of US intent and purposes of engaging with China over the years. To this end, it attempts to reveal the underlying intent of China’s Belt and Road Initiative by introducing its military nature and characters.

Method: This paper is basically researched using the traditional literature (English and Chinese) search method. In this paper, quantitative research methodology was not applied due to the distrust of the survey results in China. The interaction of China’s Belt and Road Initiative for the U.S.-ROK allied relationship was conducted through a traditional literature search method. In the future, this research topic is expected to be studied in a scientific analysis research method with proven objectivity.

Results: To overcome the dilemma that it conceives itself to be in the ROK must consider the following. First of all, the ROK must consider some of the following PRC will not change as long as the CCP remains in power and the Party upholds communism. Secondly, the ROK must expand its concept of the alliance to something beyond military cooperation. Opportunities for cooperation in areas other than security are bountiful. It must now overcome the restrictions it has put on itself and think globally with its ally since it can now afford to do so.

Conclusion: It concludes that the best viable way to defend ROK’s national interest is by protecting its values and ideology that it has upheld for the time being. ROK’s the dilemma between the U.S. and PRC will transpire into something unprecedented. It can be assured by the way the fourth industry is transforming that it will no longer be an economic market and security dependence. The strongest recommendation at this particular juncture is to check whether we are willing to defend our values and ideology.

[Keywords] Belt and Road Initiative, The US-ROK Alliance, China, Hegemonic Challenge, Indo-Pacific Strategy

1. Introduction

The ROK’s diplomatic maneuverability since the normalization of its relationship with the PRC in 1992 has received much undeserved skepticism from both Beijing and Washington. While Beijing acquiescently acknowledges the necessity of Seoul to maintain an alliance with Washington, it has become critical of it since the ROK’s decision to deploy THAAD in 2016. Beijing capitalized the occasion not only to impose economic sanctions on Seoul for its breach of its promise not to do so, but also to materialize its long-held aspiration to decouple Seoul and Washington from their allied relationship by incorporating a peace treaty into the premise of a permanent peace system as a peaceful solution to the DPRK’s denuclearization. The latter measure, presented in the form of “dual-track”
approach in 2017, aims to challenge the fate of the alliance as well as the legitimacy of U.S. forces in the ROK[1].

Since the PRC replaced the United States as the largest trade partner of the ROK in 2004, the ROK's ever-burgeoning economic relationship with the PRC has been alarming to the U.S. Washington is not concerned about the sheer economic implications, but rather about the strategic ramifications such as possible undermining effect on the foundation of the alliance. Washington became wary of Seoul as it was becoming disillusioned with the positive consequences of its growing economic dependence on the PRC and the rise of China as advocated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It was a natural consequence for the U.S. as the ROK at times seemed to be under the same illusion as the PRC that growing economic interdependence with the communist state would have a positive spillover effects on peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Had it not been for the alliance factor with the U.S., the ROK's growing economic reliance on another large market in addition to that of its ally would have not been objected by the ally. The U.S. would have also welcomed its ally's gains, which could in turn benefit the alliance. A state's actions to diversify the sources of its economic interests are regarded as normal behavior.

However, the ROK's case is different from others because of the aforementioned illusions and undermining effects on the foundation of the alliance for two salient reasons. One is the PRC being a communist state that holds a different perception of the security situation of the Korean Peninsula. The other is the PRC's lack of influence on its ally, the DPRK. The ROK believes the PRC can influence the DPRK's behavior according to its desired wishes.

Getting out of such an illusion is one of the best and most realistic ways for Korea to overcome the dilemma it confronts in choosing between the U.S. and the PRC. Towards this end, the paper argues that China's policy goals on the Korean Peninsula and East Asia is to undermine ROK-US alliance. As a means to defend its national interests, the paper emphasizes a better understanding of US intent and purposes of engaging with China over the years. It also reveals the underlying intent of China's Belt and Road Initiative by introducing its military nature and characters. It concludes that the best viable way to defend Korea's national interest is by protecting its values and ideology that it has upheld for the time being.

2. The PRC's Revisionist Goal

Apart from its pursuit of a new international order since the foundation of the country in 1949, the PRC has been longing to expel "foreign influences" from the vicinity of its sphere of influence. That sphere of influence was once defined somewhat vaguely as areas and regions adjacent to the PRC's territories in East Asia during the Cold War. It is now defined in somewhat more specific terms to include those regions and areas.

Northern and western regions are those defined during the Cold War era. Southern ones are rather re-introduced in the post-Cold War era, and include those territories within the nine-dash line at a minimum and the first-island chain at a maximum. "Foreign influence" in the Cold War era used to mean foreign presence, that is, foreign military presence. The end results included the withdrawal of U.S. forces, scrapping of U.S. military bases, and abrogation of U.S. alliance treaties[2].

Of the five countries and areas the U.S. had stationed its military forces, the PRC saw its pull out from the three. With the end of the Vietnam War, U.S. forces were withdrawn and by unification under North Vietnam, U.S. military bases were gone and so was its alliance treaty with the South. With the normalization of its relationship with the PRC, the U.S. alliance treaty with Taiwan was renounced and U.S. military forces were therefore withdrawn. In the Philippines, a national referendum on the question of relinquishing U.S. military bases led to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the country and the end of the alliance.

Only two alliances in the region remain legitimate for the U.S. One is with the ROK and the other is with Japan. The latter's alliance with the U.S. does not worry Beijing, as evidenced by a conversation between Mao Zedong and Henry Kissinger during diplomatic negotiations in the early 1970s. Mao
respected and appreciated the role of the U.S.-Japan alliance as long as it prevented Japan from reverting to militarism and thereby fulfilling its long-sought dream of becoming “a normal state,” not to mention extending its military influence in the region. The PRC’s appreciation of the U.S.-Japan alliance in this context is still effective to date, despite recent revisions in the role of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces posture in supporting the U.S. in times of contingency.

The PRC is still sensitive to the ROK-U.S. alliance and keen to bring an end to it[3]. The end of the alliance is not within Beijing’s sight. However, all its diplomatic and political maneuvers in the Northeastern Asian region have been geared towards this end in recent times. Beginning in 2010, the PRC has “succeeded” in defining Korea’s western seas as “its own waters”[4][5][6]. No joint military exercises off the west coast of the ROK with the U.S. and no U.S. aircraft carrier sailing in these waters since 2012 demonstrate the success of Beijing’s claim. Joint naval exercises were moved to the east coast.

Another manifestation of Beijing’s diplomatic efforts to undermine the ROK-U.S. alliance lies in its promotion of the so-called “double suspension and dual-track approach” as a peaceful solution to the denuclearization of the DPRK. The PRC has been a fervent advocate of these approaches since 2017. By “dual suspension,” Beijing insists that the ROK and U.S. withhold joint military exercises while the DPRK restrains from military provocations including nuclear and missile tests[7]. By “dual-track approach,” Beijing wants the denuclearization process to begin simultaneously with building a permanent peace regime following swapping the military truce from the Korean War with a peace treaty[8].

The so-called “peace treaty” is where the PRC’s aspiration of expelling the foreign military presence from the Korean Peninsula is inherent[9]. When it comes to the question of replacing the Armistice with a peace treaty, Beijing and Pyongyang have been persistent in their demands on the status of U.S. forces on the peninsula[10]. They both want to include the withdrawal of U.S. forces and the end of the U.S.-ROK alliance. While Pyongyang has been explicit in its demand, Beijing has remained supportive. Although Zhou Enlai and Kissinger agreed to keep their respective control over the two Koreas in the early 1970s within the confines of the alliance, the PRC has failed to prevent the DPRK from developing nuclear weapons, whereas the U.S. succeeded in keeping the South away from nuclear weapons and provoking the DPRK[11][12].

Therefore, a peace treaty is a theme for the PRC’s solution to the DPRK’s denuclearization. It believes that denuclearization is only feasible and viable for the DPRK when its main adversary and threat disappears with the withdrawal of U.S. forces in the ROK and subsequent abrogation of the alliance treaty. The PRC has never disagreed with the DPRK on the reasons to pursue nuclear weapons. It is only natural for Beijing to include such conditions in its proposed peace treaty[13].

The other PRC effort involves its interference in the internal affairs of the ROK. The case of THAAD speaks volumes. Beijing’s decision to place tacit sanctions on the ROK was a solemn alert. It was only the beginning. Many more such attempts to exert Chinese influence on the ROK’s policy community followed, as evidenced by Xi Jinping’s remarks to Moon Jae-in at the Osaka G-20 meeting. Xi solemnly warned that Moon was susceptible to outside influence when making decisions. Xi’s implication was obviously directed towards the U.S. The message was a reiteration of Kim Jong-un’s New Year address of last year. It basically demonstrates that when it comes to U.S. issues in ROK defense and diplomatic affairs, the PRC is clearly on the side of the DPRK. His warnings might have come from his foreseeable concerns related to the possible deployment of intermediate-range missiles and the ROK’s position on U.S. pressure not to use Huawei and other Chinese technologies for cyber security reasons[14].

The PRC understands that the deployment of THAAD and other weapon systems to American military bases is solely and exclusively the decision of the U.S., and out of ROK’s jurisdiction. It was mostly the case before THAAD deployment. In many past cases, most U.S. weapons were deployed without the South Korean government’s knowledge. Deliveries of goods to U.S. bases in the ROK are not subject to reporting to and inspection by the Korean customs office. The practice is customary and the PRC is also clearly understands it.

The South Korean government had to be involved in the THAAD case largely because the citizens
of Pyongtaek City opposed the deployment for health reasons. The circumstance transpired into the
Korean government’s involvement as it had to offer land for a new U.S. military base, a land that is
effectively capable of hosting the deployment of such a weapon system and remote enough to avoid
any possible harm to the health of the South Korean people. It was then that the government’s in-
volvement was subject to the PRC’s criticism and eventual sanctions.

The PRC already began to signal its concerns and warnings to the South Korean government and
policy community on possible U.S. deployment of intermediate-range missiles. Exactly five years and
one day after China’s ambassador to Korea delivered the first warning on the deployment of THAAD,
he once again explicitly alerted South Koreans on intermediate-range missiles. On November 28,
2019 at a conference in the National Assembly of the ROK, he reminded the consequences of THAAD
and warned to avoid other ones that could only be more severe.

The Chinese ambassador’s message was clear: the PRC is ready to intervene once again should the
ROK allow the U.S. to deploy intermediate-range missiles to American bases. The warning at the am-
bassadorial level cannot be overlooked. There is a pattern for the PRC’s government to exercise such
a warning. It starts with its ambassador in the host nation, and then moves up to a higher level, the
ministerial level, for example. There is living proof in the way such a pattern was exercised from 2014
to 2016[15].

China’s ambassador to the ROK delivered the initial warning and then in the first few months of
2015, visiting Chinese ministers or their assistants gave more extensive and expansive warning mes-
sages to their counterparts and sometimes directly to the president[16][17][18][19]. It would contin-
ue to escalate to the highest level. In March 2016, for instance, Xi would make the PRC’s position and
concerns known at the highest level. This time it was directly to the American President Obama, and
not the South Korean president, at the Nuclear Security Summit[20][21][22].

The PRC’s intervention in the ROK’s internal affairs is violation of Korean sovereignty, as well as a
breach of its own diplomatic principles in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the backbone
of Chinese diplomatic principles. The PRC’s implicit goal is to exert influence on the ROK so as to
force it to fall into a dilemma of choice between economy and security. It is also to undermine the
foundation of the ROK-U.S. alliance by subjecting the ROK to such a dilemma. At the same time, it
wants to extend it influence over the two Koreas by incorporating the South into its sanction list. Not
only is the North currently under Chinese sanctions for nuclear and missile tests, but so is the South
for the deployment of THAAD. It is an unprecedented case whereby the two Koreas are simulta-
neously under Chinese sanctions.

3. America’s Efforts to Change China

One factor that gives rise to the ROK’s dilemma between the U.S. and PRC is ideology, which is a
critical factor in shaping one’s perceptions. Had the PRC become a nation that shares a similar if not
identical ideology with the ROK and the U.S., it would most likely be that the two nations would not
be having conflicts that are otherwise unnecessary and unwanted. Because of the PRC’s growing
emphasis on ideology in all walks of life, it is getting more unrealistic and less likely that the PRC will
share a similar perception of the world with others. For instance, the PRC will remain adamantly
supportive of the DPRK for ideological reasons.

Robert Jervis in his famous book Perception and Misperception analyzed the role of ideology in
shaping one’s perceptions. Ideology basically defines one’s perceptions for one simple reason[23].
That is, one wants to see only what one likes to see within the confines of the ideology one reveres,
and therefore, wants to hear only what one likes to hear. Perception is very much dictated by ideolo-
gy for its impact on information processing. From collecting information to analyzing the information
gathered in accordance with the ideology one upholds, the end result of such a process can only be
biased and subjective. No objective result can be expected from such a process. This is the main rea-
son why the PRC would perceive the security situation, for example, not in the same terms as others,
but the DPRK.
According to Jervis, ideology is important for one’s selection of values. Ideology determines the values that one will deem proper for the society that one belongs to. Therefore, different values that different nations hold in their political practice, including decision making and governance, will engender different perceptions[23]. Nations with different values will only conceive and interpret the meaning of the same phenomenon in different terms, thereby paving the way for different perceptions and conclusions. Different conclusions based on different perceptions become a major source of conflict.

The conflicts arising from different values and ideologies make it difficult if not impossible for states to reach a peaceful solution. Ideological conflicts are difficult to solve, as the world has witnessed in the past. Negotiations often fall into an impasse, stalemates lead to ever-widening gaps in perception, and this more than often not entraps states in security dilemmas. Escalation in security dilemmas sometimes heightens military confrontation and results in military clashes.

Because of such concerns, the U.S. has tried to convert PRC into a Christian nation and a democratic state for more than 200 years[24]. At the outset in the late 18th century when the first commercial vessel from the U.S., Empress of China, embarked to China, the U.S. had one political goal, that is, to change China into a democratic and Christian state. The goal was never realized after the Kuomintang’s defeat to the Chinese Communist Party in 1949. Thereafter, the U.S. had to wait another 30 years to resume its pursuit of converting the PRC into a democratic state. It was made possible in 1978 when the PRC finally decided to open up the country and adopt an economic reform policy.

Since 1978, the ultimate goal of America’s China policy is to transform it into an open and democratic society through engagement. The proselytization of the PRC was no longer a valid goal of U.S. policy in the setting of the Cold War. However, an open and democratic nation that embraces a market economic system became the top priority for Washington. As long as the U.S. conceived the PRC moving in that direction, it was willing to take the trade deficit inflicted by the PRC’s unfair and unjust trade practices. Since 1983, the U.S. has been in a perennial deficit with the PRC. Nonetheless, it could afford the economic loss at the price of its long-sought goal of 250 years[25].

Successive administrations and Congress members all shared one hope and goal. That is, to see a democratic PRC. This is why the United States was sometimes compelled to take a containment stance toward the PRC, but would not completely fold on its engagement policy. At worst, it would simultaneously be in pursuit of both containment and engagement strategies, as evidenced in the late 1990s and early 21st century when it introduced the so-called “congagement policy.” The government in Washington, with bipartisan support from the U.S. Congress, would never relinquish the effects that it envisioned from an engagement policy[26].

The U.S. adheres to an engagement policy for one simple conviction, based on Immanuel Kant’s “perpetual peace” argument[27]. Should an engagement policy persevere through ideological suppression and discrimination, it would lead the PRC to a path of assimilation on all and every front, ranging from ideological to cultural and institutional adaptation and democracy. Furthermore, the more the PRC is democratized, the less the chance for war to arise from a conflict with the U.S. The logic behind this argument is apparent in the Democratic Peace theory[28]. Even if the PRC rises to the extent that power parity with the U.S. is realized, the prospective conclusion of power transition theory can be denied as long as the PRC becomes a democratic nation.

Washington’s hope and goal to date, however, has not been realized. Beijing’s fervent defense against and denial of the Chinese people’s access to Western ideology and values has only perpetuated the PRC’s fate as a communist state. Since the opening of the country, the PRC has been implicit in official statements on its position on Western ideologies and values. In official statements and public addresses by the CCP’s top leaders, the PRC wants the world to respect the diversity of culture, ideology, values, race, ethnicity, religion, and language, and therefore, everyone’s sovereign right to choose their path of development and governance system. They have successively called the world to respect the individual state’s choice of governance system, a choice based on the judgment of what the state deems best suited to its own predicament and circumstances as well as best serving the interests of its people and society.
The CCP’s defense against Western values and ideologies was later elaborated in a new concept. It was introduced in the notion of so-called “core interests.” In 2009, then Senior Councilor Dai Bingguo interpreted the CCP’s core interests to include (1) a fundamental system and state security; (2) state sovereignty and territorial integrity; and (3) the stable development of the economy and society[29]. Since then, the scope of the PRC’s core interests has been broadening. The 2011 White Paper added “peaceful development” and “national reunification” to the “PRC’s core interests”[30].

Basically, any (foreign) challenges to the CCP’s governance system and leadership would be perceived as a threat to the regime. The right to sustainable development and social stability will be protected at all costs and by all and any means. Extending from the Anti-Secession Law of 2005, the regime declares its intolerance for any attempts, both internally and externally, to challenge the integrity of Chinese territory[31].

The notion of a fundamental system also means the CCP’s right to rule and respect for its leadership. Any challenge to its right and leadership will be conceived as a threat to the Party [32]. In other words, any challenge to Party doctrine, ideology, values, and its right to rule and lead the nation will not be tolerated and met with all countermeasures including forceful measures, as evidenced in the past.

The integrity of the Party is founded in the institutions under its auspices and leadership. These institutions are built on the utmost respect towards the ideology and values upheld by the Party. Therefore, any challenges to these institutions will be regarded as a threat to the Party as well. Conversely, the Party is entitled to monitor any potential challenges and has the right to censor and control all activities of the general populace[33].

Under these circumstances, there is not as much leeway as the U.S. would like to see for Western values and ideologies to penetrate into Chinese society. As long as the CCP stays in power, it will be difficult to see the PRC transform into a democracy with a market economic system as the U.S. would like to expect. The PRC will continue to adhere to a communist ideology and socialist values with its firm belief in them as a prerequisite to the success of a utopian world that it foresees to create in 2049. This utopian world, dubbed a “Tonghua” or “Datonghua” society in Chinese, is already a declared goal of the CCP[34].

It is for this reason that U.S. President Trump introduced his “America First” policy when he came into power. The notion of “America First” is not merely about fixing the trade structure with the PRC. It is about practicing fair and just trade based on rules and norms, while respecting extant laws and institutions that are built on democratic values. To the dismay of many successive American presidents, the PRC, defied all the promises it had made and never respected the requisites to the success of compromises that the two nations had made. Trump was not going to tolerate the PRC’s persistent defiance and total ignorance of compliance[35].

He apparently saw two possible options, coercion and negotiation. He wanted to press the PRC hard with all available measures to fix its own behavior. Trump therefore decided to not to be hesitant in waging a trade war against the PRC. Unlike his predecessors, he was not intimidated by a game of chicken, as evidenced in his trade war with the PRC and blackmailing the DPRK in 2017. Simultaneously, he had a peaceful option available in negotiation. Amending one’s behavior through negotiation cannot be discarded against a nemesis like the PRC, whom the U.S. also depends on economically. While conducting negotiation with the PRC, however, he wanted to initiate and leverage the process and not be led by the PRC like his predecessors.

The U.S. now realizes that sheer engagement is no longer effective in achieving its goal of 250 years. After 40 years of engagement during the PRC’s opening era, Washington now has come to the realization that it will have to force the PRC at times to embrace not only Western institutions, but also embedded principles and values.

At other times it will have to lead it to respect compliance practices and other necessary requirements to follow the rule of law. Should the PRC remain firm on preserving communist doctrine and ideology, the U.S. will be left with no other choice but to further its pressure and coercion[36]. This is perhaps the last resort for Washington and also for Beijing to avoid any dire consequences that power transition theory projects.
4. The Military Aspects of China’s Belt and Road Initiative and US’ "Indo-Pacific Strategy"

There is an illusion by PRC’s peaceful and economic justifications for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). On the surface, with the establishment of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRI’s peaceful and economic aspects defy many. However, the illusion arises from our overlook of how the BRI has been converging with the Chinese scheme of protecting its growing “overseas interests (haiwai liyi)” in the past few years [37].

The notion of “overseas interests” is nothing new in Chinese diplomacy. It started to receive recognition from the Chinese authority as the PRC embarked on a so-called “zouchuqu (going abroad)” strategy designed to facilitate the PRC’s outreach to foreign oil and gas fields in the early 21st century. It would not be until 2011 when the Chinese authority would recognize the need to strengthen its “overseas interest” protection measures [38]. Libya went into turmoil and 36,000 Chinese workers at the time had to be evacuated. The incident was a turning point in PRC’s realization of the necessity to have a better contingency plan to protect its “overseas interests”[39][40][41]. Then, only 2 years later, the BRI was introduced by Xi Jinping.

Since 2014, the Chinese government has promoted a discourse on military security as a premise of the BRI’s success. There were two occasions in 2019 when the discourse was proactively sought: One was the Fifth National Maritime Defense Conference, and the other was the Central Economic Cooperation Conference. Xi himself attended the former, and reportedly said that efforts should be made to integrate various security archives in the areas of politics, military, legislation, economic and ecological environments, as the BRI strategic initiatives are fostering a traditional unified maritime defense [42].

This led to the explanation that the security concept of the PRC’s maritime defense governance should be urged to shift from the traditional “defense posture” to the modern vision of “active utilization” [43]. In other words, the geopolitical function of maritime defense should be shifted from the management of national administration to the exploitation of national strategic interests [44]. Xi emphasized this by introducing a diversified modern defense concept that could oversee the offshore defense [45].

At the latter meeting, the Chinese Communist Party called for a "strategic enactment plan," dividing participant areas into three areas: core areas (Central Asia), extended areas (South Asia and Eastern Europe), and radiant areas (Europe). At the same time, the sea range was covered from the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Thus, the scope of China’s overseas interests in the one-to-one region of the Communist Party begins with a geographical thinking that encompasses both Eurasia and Africa [46].

The discourse about connecting the BRI to military readiness within the Communist Party and the government began to spread to the military. The discourse within the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) was focused on justifying the construction of outposts for military operations in the PRC and on a one-to-one basis and rationalizing existing government principles against the establishment of foreign military bases. The main reason why the contradictions between the two discourses could be totally eliminated was the change in the Chinese military’s perception of its international political position.

At the meeting, an active duty general of the PLA emphasized that the shift in the perception that the PRC is now out of regional power and becoming a global power strengthens the necessity and legitimacy of foreign military bases. One interesting fact is that in overturning the existing government’s position and principles, and explaining the legitimacy of the PRC’s overseas base construction with its historical mission, it differentiates itself from its strategy. The PRC’s differentiation strategy is demonstrated by two facts.

The first difference is that all these military activities proceed in terms of the PRC’s legitimate rights. This is explained by the Chinese military’s right to use foreign ports and aerodromes, and to use them fairly without violating its territorial sea and airspace sovereignty. In other words, because they are built in accordance with the principles of international law and the right to use ports, it is not necessary to maintain 500 overseas bases and 8-90 SOFAs.
The second difference is that there are inherent differences from U.S. military bases abroad. The PRC does not need to pursue the long-term overseas presence of the PLA or the prolongation of these bases as military bases like the U.S. At the same time, the use of these bases by the Chinese army is justified for two reasons. In other words, it emphasizes that the basic mission is to maintain anti-terrorism and peace in regions and countries[47]. It is emphasized as a responsible act of fulfilling the duties and missions given as a large country[48].

The PRC emphasizes that such responsible actions are not unilateral and arbitrary. This is because the PRC’s principle of sending troops abroad proceeds according to international principles. The PRC maintains its position to send troops overseas based on three principles: First, it adheres to the principle of dispatching troops within the scope of compliance with UN resolutions. Second, the request of the dispatching party must be premised. Third, it must proceed within a multilateral framework[48]. At the same time, even if requested by the dispatching party, a multilateral response is required to participate.

Nevertheless, as the PLA’s involvement in the PRC’s one-on-one project expands, doubts about the purpose of expanding overseas military bases have been raised. The main reason for this is that the PRC’s one-on-one military action in business areas is inconsistent. Although the presence of Chinese troops in these areas is long-term and not large, the military presence is strengthening day by day.

The PRC secured military bases in Pakistan’s Gwardar Port, beginning with securing military expiration bases in Djibouti in Africa in 2010. Djibouti’s ports and Gwadar’s ports were handed over to China for long-term leases of 99 and 43 years, respectively, due to failure to pay off debt. Reportedly, Djibouti has already built a military facility that can accommodate 3,000 to 4,000 troops. In 2017, the PLA used a large tank mobilization for military training in Djibouti.

Prior to these meetings, the Chinese authorities have remained relatively quiet about the BRI’s military security features and implications. But with the rise of the PRC, the sense of insecurity in neighboring countries is growing, and Beijing is doing its best to alleviate such concerns by highlighting the BRI’s economic aspects. Recently, however, the PRC started to look like it was losing its grip. This is largely because the premise of the BRI’s demand for openness is exposing the PRC to non-traditional security threats. Along with this, traditional security threats have recently been aggravating, and in turn, the BRI process is naturally enhancing its call for the PRC’s military readiness.

On the non-traditional security front, better border management to protect interests in the Chinese definition of “freedom of navigation” and “safety of navigation” against the rise of the so-called “three threats” of ethnic separatism, terrorism, and religious extremism. The purpose also contains some economic aspects such as sustaining stable and smooth transportation routes for energy resources in the context of non-traditional security interests. Toward this end, the PRC was proud to declare that it completed its mission to defend the voyages of more than 6,700 ships by sending 34 naval squadrons as of December 2019[49].

Nevertheless, the ongoing construction and fortification of the PRC’s military bases along some BRI routes are explicit, thereby prompting concerns by regional states. In 2010, the construction of a military base in the South China Sea began in earnest. The first overseas port base for the People’s Liberation Navy was in Djibouti, Africa. Efforts to build these marine military bases are racing on two routes. According to a BRI route map released in 2015, one route extends to the Indian Ocean and the other to the South Pacific, where the bifurcation is the South China Sea in Southeast Asia.

In the U.S. media, the dynamics of the PRC’s military bases were also detected in the vicinity of the economic corridor, which connects the PRC’s Xinjiang region with Afghanistan’s Wakhan region. Similar Chinese actions were observed on Tajikistan’s border with Afghanistan. According to Australian media, negotiations on building a military base for the PRC have even been reported in the small South Pacific country of Vanuatu. Vanuatu is considered a country of strategic value, considering the geographical distribution of the South Pacific archipelago and the country 2,000 km away from Australia.

Concerns over the PRC’s military expansion are growing. In March 2019, the PRC established a BRI relationship with Italy and agreed to build port facilities and investment projects in Trieste, which is located on the border with Slovenia, Genova, which is adjacent to France, Palermo in Sicily, and Ra-
venna, which faces the northern Adriatic Sea. For the PRC, it has been a big step forward in establishing a foothold for its entry into the Mediterranean, one of the key areas of the maritime Silk Road. Western analysts have suggested a "Trojan horse" for the PRC to enter Italy. At the same time, it raised concerns that the occasion is providing a foundation for the Chinese military’s pursuit of the so-called “pearl necklace” strategy.

The PRC’s BRI military strategy is not just about physical expansion of these military uses. There are implications for further strategic geographic space and ideas[50]. For example, the PRC has a double-track idea to actively use it to check Afghanistan and India by expanding military relations with Pakistan. In Southwest Asia, the PRC is firmly committed to defending geopolitical strategic interests in India and Afghanistan by taking full advantage of Pakistan’s all-weather partnership. It is a strategy that uses the contradiction between India and Pakistan as a force to check India in its conflict with India. At the same time, the PRC will move to Southwest Asia, reducing the pressure on India. The strategy is to expand strategic security interests in Western China by collaborating with Pakistan on terrorism in Afghanistan[51].

The idea that the PRC will combine its business and military powers with the BRI and fulfill its obligations and responsibilities as a large power is considered a response strategy by the Chinese military to counter the "Indo-Pacific" strategy of the U.S. and Japan. The Chinese military is looking for the reason why the two countries have pushed ahead with the "Indo-Pacific" strategy since 2010 in response to the PRC overpowering Japan. Since disputes over territorial sovereignty and conflicts in the South China Sea have been unfavorable due to the rise of the Chinese navy, the “Indo-Pacific” strategy has been initiated as an inevitable strategy for strengthening their checks with the PRC[52].

Therefore, the expansion of the scope of overseas military activities will continue in the name of protection of business and overseas profits. If a summit forum was held one-on-one this year to dispel suspicion of Western China’s “debt diplomacy,” the forum, which will be held in two years, will be a propaganda forum to reduce concerns about the PRC’s expansion efforts. The ROK military authorities will have to closely observe the dynamics of the Chinese military on the BRI, and strengthen Korea’s strategic thinking and voice in discussing this issue with our allies before the BRI summit forum is held.

The PRC has long been obsessed with America’s containment policy at the advent of the Korean War. Shortly into the war, the U.S. decided to sign alliance treaties with states it perceived to be critical to its strategic security interests in the areas around the Korean Peninsula. It first signed an alliance treaty with the Philippines in August of 1951, ANZUS and Japan in September, the ROK in 1953, SEATO in 1954 and Taiwan in 1955. No doubt the Korean War drove the United States to the formation of alliances with these states and regions. The outbreak of the war also prompted the U.S. to seek military and defense measures to protect the inception of the San Francisco Treaty in 1951.

SEATO, the first regional security organization, was founded with an aim to more effectively preserve the foundation of the regional order based on the treaty. Washington apparently wanted the organization to be a collective defense shield against communist expansionism in the region. Just like the North Atlantic Treaty was transformed into a military organization in the aftermath of the Korean War[53], Washington envisioned the need for a similar defense establishment for political and economic reasons.

The U.S. was much more preoccupied with the economic reconstruction of Western European states and their defense against the Soviet Union at the time. It could only less afford to do so in East Asia, and especially following the war when it ended. Thus, Washington wanted to incorporate ANZUS into the defense scheme of SEATO along with Britain and France, which opposed the invitation. Japan at the time was not in any position to assume any military and defense duties and responsibilities on behalf of SEATO.

Despite U.S. failure to transform the “hub and spoke” structure of its alliance system into a more or less collective form such as NATO and METO(founded in 1955 and later renamed CENTO in 1959), the bilateral alliance system was deemed efficient enough to deter communist expansion into Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia from the Asian continent. From Beijing’s perspective, America’s alliance structure, which stretched from Japan to the ROK to Taiwan and the Philippines, was a formidable
defense line.
It was an emulation of the so-called “Acheson Line,” only including more geopolitically and geo-strategically vital states and regions with a much more formidable U.S. military presence in the respective allies. The sheer size of military personnel and sheer power of weapons including nuclear weapons deployed by the U.S. simply overwhelmed both the PRC and the Soviet Union[54]. It was particularly the case with the PRC as Beijing’s anxiety over security became evident in its decision to pursue nuclear weapons in 1955.

America’s scheme, which I’d call it an “unfinished business of 1955” of building an intra-alliance system in Asia, is being revived in the Indo-Pacific strategy. Successive amendments to the U.S.-Japan alliance treaty over 60 years has put Japan in a better position to assume a military partner role and responsibility commensurate with its economic status and diplomatic influence. Furthermore, ANZUS and Japan have been successful in moving towards greater security cooperative relations, as evidenced by the so-called “QUAD,” a quadrilateral security cooperation establishment. Now the four states are enticing India to join.

Although the core states of the Indo-Pacific strategy have claimed the strategy is not security oriented, their presentation of the strategy is more than often lopsided to defense concerns and security issues[55]. However economic aspects are emphasized, the strategy always concludes on a military dimension so as to explain that the military needs to protect economic interests[56][57]. The strategy’s emphasis on the need to protect sea lanes to guarantee the freedom of navigation, for example, depicts its inherent security aspects of regression instinct. For these reasons, there are clearly more reasons for the PRC to believe it is another scheme by the regional states to contain the PRC.

5. Conclusion

The one major reason why the ROK often finds itself stuck in a dilemma between the U.S. and the PRC is fundamentally because the politicians do not know how to be bipartisan about their nation’s security interests. Emotional sympathy and sentiment towards the DPRK cannot come in as a determinant. There is only room for them within the confines of the human rights situation in the DPRK. Without bipartisanship in the policy-making community of the ROK, it is most likely that the ROK will remain in this dilemma for good.

What the ROK needs to confront is the obvious reality that the PRC is a communist country. It is a country that upholds values and ideology that are not compatible with those of democracy. The stone-cold reality is that the PRC will never see and perceive Korea’s interests in the same way. The ROK will have to admit and accept it against its will. Ideology and values dictate one’s cognitive learning, perception building process and therefore the end result of perception. As a result, one’s behavior will have to be different from others that have different values and ideologies.

Therefore, to overcome the dilemma that it conceives itself to be in the ROK must consider the following. First of all, the ROK must consider some of the following PRC will not change as long as the CCP remains in power and the Party upholds communism. The PRC will continue to wage an ideological struggle with others. It will continue to attempt to decouple alliances that it perceives to be encircling it. It will continue to seek ways to expel U.S. forces from its vicinity and dominate its surrounding regions and areas. Remember Xi’s 19th Party Congress report in which he declared that the PRC’s order includes not only the surrounding areas, but also cyber space and outer space.

Secondly, the ROK must expand its concept of the alliance to something beyond military cooperation. Opportunities for cooperation in areas other than security are bountiful. From non-traditional security issues to traditional security issues, from world heritages protection efforts to environmental protection, there are many issues and areas where the ROK-U.S. alliance can contribute to the well-being of humanity. Unfortunately, the ROK has restricted its own concept of alliance to the confines of security and defense. It must now overcome the restrictions it has put on itself and think globally with its ally since it can now afford to do so.

Lastly, there will soon be a fundamental change in the ROK’s trade structure with the U.S. and PRC.
One indicator lies in the persistent shrinking of the ROK's surplus in these two markets. The ROK's industry has yet to do a complete makeover and therefore relies on a limited number of goods for export. Without a fundamental change in the ROK's export structure, it will be difficult to expect the surplus to recover in the foreseeable future. Therefore, ROK's dilemma between the U.S. and PRC will transpire into something unprecedented. It can be assured by the way the fourth industry is transforming that it will no longer be an economic market and security dependence. The strongest recommendation at this particular juncture is to check whether we are willing to defend our values and ideology.

6. References

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7. Appendix

7.1. Authors contribution

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