

# South Korea under Rebalancing Challenges

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# Rebalancing in three dimensions

- There is a growing need for Seoul to rebalance its U.S.-centered foreign policy toward China.
  - Aligning or balancing: strengthen the ROK-US alliance and deepen the strategic cooperative partnership with China.
- There is a renewed interest in rebalancing toward regional multilateralism.
  - Create “systematic flexibility” in order to peacefully manage power shift in East Asia; design a regional architecture that restrains great powers from resorting to the use of force and accommodate interests of non-great powers .
- There is wide support for the notion that Korea needs to play a proactive global role commensurate with its material capability.
  - Middle-power diplomacy emerged as guiding concept for global policy.

# Park Geun-hye's foreign policy: *Trustpolitik*

- The trust-building process on the Korean Peninsula
  - Use both instruments of dialogue and pressure in order to build trust between the two Koreas based on a solid foundation of security.
- Northeast Asian Peace and Co-operation Initiative
  - A roadmap for implementing *trustpolitik* at the regional level.
  - Starting from developing a habit of cooperation among regional players on soft issues, it eventually contributes to addressing the region's thornier issues, thereby transforming the existing structure of mistrust and confrontation into one of trust and cooperation.
- Responsible middle power diplomacy
  - Play an active role in resolving global issues.
  - MIKTA network

# Policy toward the North

- An unpredictable, dangerous Kim Jong-un regime made a nuke test two weeks before the inauguration of Park, giving the country close to nuclear power status.
- But, the new type of great power relationship that emphasized the denuclearization of NK, along with improved SK-China relations, deters NK's dual strategy of nuclear development and economic growth.
- NK's "peace offensive" and "sudden change" scenario.
  - Is Kim Jong-un regime sustainable?
- US and Chinese positions

# Engage China

- Increasing asymmetry in economic interdependence in China's favor.
  - Would restrain SK's foreign policy choices.
- Count on China's constructive role in resolving North Korean problem.
- Alignment policy
  - Strike a right balance between ROK-US alliance and Strategic cooperative partnership with China.
- Hedging
  - Hedge against US abandonment by forging a regional multilateralism while hedging against Chinese economic predation by US security/economic entrapment

# Rebalance ROK-US alliance

- Asia rebalancing and retrenchment
  - US, the will on rise, the capability in decline
  - Rebalancing alliance not from bilateral, but regional perspective
- Rising expectations and more burden sharing for SK(and Japan), but...
  - Improved missile capabilities(KAMD)
  - “Conditions-based” transfer of operational control of the Combined Forces Command.
  - Defense burden sharing, revision of civil use of atomic energy.
  - By contrast, US-Japan SCC(“2+2”) on Oct 3.

# Cope with Japan problem

- Huge legacy from former president Lee Myung-bak: history problem
- Park stuck with hard-line policy and demanded for a correct attitude for responsibility.
  - Decision making overly centralized on Park, the Blue House.
- Standoff between South Korea and China on one hand and Japan on the other.
- Fear has been aroused by a rebalanced US-Japan alliance as well as Japan's military buildup.
- Increasing pressure from US and domestic public that worry strategic dilemma/loss caused by a worsened Korea-Japan relations.
- Exit strategy?? – a two-track approach
- “Thought leader”: Share a regional vision; take the initiative; pursue Japan-Korea FTA.

# Struggle with regional architecture

- Rival architectures: US versus China
  - Security
  - Economy
- Need to harmonize Seoul's regional vision with US and China, respectively.
- Details are slow in coming, but quickly overshadowed by NK's third nuke test as well as deteriorating relationship with Japan.
- Scope of the region: Northeast Asia vs. East Asia
- Middle power role:
  - Play as a broker or bridge making them coexist and compatible. Here, collaborating with ASEAN is essential.
  - Middle power network: Thailand and SK, middle power role.