The Capabilities-based Analysis of Alliance Transformation in the Asia-Pacific: Focusing on the ROK-US and US-Philippines Alliances

Jiyun Kih and Jaechun Kim

Contrary to the expectations that the US Cold War alliance system in the Asia-Pacific region would disintegrate with the disappearance of a communist threat as its *raison d'être*, the basic structure of the US-led hub-and-spoke system in the region remains largely in place. Nonetheless, the circumstances informing the US Asia-Pacific alliances are no longer the same as during the Cold War years. Some US Asia-Pacific alliances have undergone significant transformations and morphed into more robust and comprehensive strategic partnerships, whereas others have failed to follow suit. Such divergence in alliance transformation in the Asia-Pacific has largely resulted from the 'capabilities gap' among US allies in responding to US requests for the expansion of alliance functions and development of cooperative ties among its allies and other partners. A comparative analysis of the ROK-US and US-Philippines alliances suggests that the capabilities gap between South Korea and the Philippines has been the main reason for the divergent paths of transformation that the two alliances have taken.

Key Words: US foreign policy, alliance transformation, ROK-US alliance, US hub-and-spoke alliance system, capabilities-based assessment

We are witnessing an unprecedented historical phenomenon in international relations: the decades-long endurance of US military alliances. When the Warsaw Pact collapsed with the breakup of the Soviet Union, it was predicted that

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US Cold War alliances-the multilateral alliance of NATO in Europe as well as the bilateral alliances in the Asia-Pacific- would face similar fates. However, not only do they still persist even in the absence of the common threats that created them, but they also have been reinvigorated and morphed into global alliances to take on a set of new challenges in the post-Cold War world.

NATO's metamorphosis is unprecedented in the history of military alliances and is expected to have profound impacts on the security environment of the Euro-Atlantic and contiguous regions (Nelson and Szayana 1997). On the other side of the Eurasia continent and in the Pacific, US bilateral alliances have also been resuscitated to the extent that the US Pacific Command Chief declared that the five US alliances in the Asia-Pacific are "as strong and as confident as they have been in history" (Miles 2013). One interesting fact about the US bilateral alliances in the Asia-Pacific region is that some alliances are thriving while others have not fared as well. To be more precise, the US alliances with South Korea, Japan, and Australia have been reinforced and have evolved into comprehensive strategic alliances, with the scope of cooperation extending far beyond their Cold War missions, while America's bilateral alliances with the Philippines and Thailand have failed to follow suit (Campbell 2004).

How can we account for such divergent fates of US-led bilateral alliances in the Asia-Pacific? What would be a proper framework with which to analyze divergence in alliance transformations in the Asia-Pacific? In this research, we present a 'capabilities-based' explanation as to why these US bilateral alliances have moved through divergent paths of transformation. The rationale behind this 'capabilities-based' explanation is the shift from a 'threat-based' approach to a 'capabilities-based' one in the US military strategy spelled out in the US' Quadrennial Defense Review 2001 (QDR), which triggered a shift from 'threat-based' alliances to 'capabilities-based' ones.¹ Unlike structural 'threat-based' alliances, wherein allies were expected to fight in their region against a common threat and serve as bases for US operations, allies in nonstructural 'capabilities-based' alliances are expected to take on greater responsibilities for their own defense and embrace those situations where alliance cooperation has expanded in scope beyond the specific requirements outlined in mutual defense treaties, to include a broader range of security issues and threats.

The US' purposeful selection of more 'capable' alliance partners can account for divergences in alliance transformation in the Asia-Pacific. A renewed emphasis on the role of 'capable' allies in the evolution of US foreign policy strategy

¹ See Office of the Secretary of Defense, "2001 Quadrennial Defense Review Report," For more information, see <http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/qdr2001.pdf> (September 30, 2001).

explains why the US alliances with the Philippines and Thailand have stagnated compared to others, although the five US alliances in the region do share similar strategic interests. Here we define 'alliance transformation' as a mechanism by which a US-led security alliance continues to adapt to a changing security landscape and evolve over time into a more robust global partnership based upon common values and worldviews. The main drivers for alliance transformation are unarguably rooted in mutually beneficial relationships newly forged between the senior partner and the junior partner of a traditional US Cold War alliance. Less commonly observed is that the US request for capable alliance partners has leveled, to some extent, the asymmetry within the alliance relationship, redefining the traditional client role of the junior partner (Shin, Izatt, and Moon 2016).

EVALUATING DIVERGENCE IN ALLIANCE TRANSFORMATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC: THEORETICAL ASSESSMENTS

Realist, liberalist, and constructivist theories of international relations have offered their own interpretations as to why the US Cold War alliances have survived the demise of the communist threats that created them in the first place (Kim 2015). However, these meta-theories of IR cannot adequately account for why the US' five alliances in the Asia-Pacific have diverged and taken separate paths. Threat-centric realist explanations emphasizing balancing or hedging against threats posed by the rise of China, North Korean provocations, or non-traditional or transnational issues may be sufficient in accounting for why the five US alliance partnerships have been sustained. However, balance-of-threat theory fails to offer compelling answers as to why the five US treaty alliances in the region have diverged into different paths of transformation. For example, Thailand and the Philippines are geographically closer to China and almost invariably feel more threatened by China's military aggression than countries farther afield. Mearsheimer argues, "If China continues to grow economically, it will attempt to dominate Asia the way the US dominates the Western Hemisphere" (Mearsheimer 2014). In fact, China appears increasingly to see Southeast Asia as its "strategic backyard" and continues efforts to expand its influence in the Southeast Asian region (Foley 2005, 1). Nevertheless, their alliances with the US have not been upgraded in the same that US alliances with South Korea, Japan, and Australia have.

During the Cold War years, US-led bilateral security alliances developed sets of highly-sophisticated institutions and saw substantial investment in infrastructure. In the eyes of liberalists, especially liberal institutionalists, the institutional

underpinnings of Cold War alliances were flexible to the extent that they could tackle a host of post-Cold War security problems and adopt new missions (Keohane 1984). As with its realist counterpart, however, liberalist institutional theories of alliances cannot explain why both the US-Philippines and US-Thailand alliances, embedded in fairly sophisticated and flexible institutional settings, have remained stagnant, although these theories do offer explanations for why such alliances have outlived Cold War threats. Institution-centric explanations tend to downplay the interactive nature of alliance relations, thereby failing to explain the ways in which divergence in alliance transformation has occurred.

A constructivist, or identity-centered, approach also comes up short in explaining divergence in alliance transformations. South Korea, Japan, and Australia share similar values and identities because they all are liberal democracies with capitalist market economies, but it is also true that both the Philippines and Thailand share similar values and identities constructed by their long-term alliance relationships with the US. The US and the Philippines, its former colony, have deep-rooted historic ties. Often hailed as the “oldest treaty ally of the US in Asia” by virtue of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation signed in 1833, Thailand has been an effective and faithful partner of the US in Southeast Asia (Dalpino 2011, 2). Shared values and identities notwithstanding, these two Southeast Asian alliances of the US have not made the kind of progress that the other three US alliances in the region have. Despite similar values and a sense of shared purpose developed among these longstanding alliance partners, signs of duress have surfaced at one time or another in all five US alliances in the region.

EXAMINATION OF ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESES

DIVERGENCE IN THREAT PERCEPTIONS

Both the Philippines and Thailand face a multitude of ‘internal’ security threats and governance challenges including, *inter alia*, numerous types of terrorism, organized crime, and corruption. The inward-focused security policy of these two countries might have caused their bilateral alliances with the US to stagnate. The Philippine communist insurgency of the CPP-NPA-NDF (Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army-National Democratic Front), the South China Sea dispute with China, the ambiguity of several provisions in the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty, including its executory mechanisms, and US ‘strategic ambivalence’ in the case of conflict may have served individually or collectively as ‘disconnecting factors’ in the Philippine-US alliance (Pascua 2014). Thailand is also mired in internal challenges such as the protracted armed violence between

insurgent groups within the state, such as the insurgency in the deep South where Muslims are the majority, an ongoing issue since 2004, and the nation's prolonged political crisis that began with the 2006 coup d'etat, violent uprisings, and military crackdowns causing hundreds of casualties that have taken place as recently as 2010 (Prasirtsuk 2013). As border trade with neighboring countries has burgeoned, Thailand's current threats primarily come from those border areas and involve smuggling, drugs, and human trafficking where the US-Thailand alliance no longer plays a key role. One can say that Southeast Asian views of China's rise have not been closely aligned with how the US views China's emergence as a regional hegemon and world power. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence indicating that the Philippines and Thailand view China's rise as a significant threat to their security.²

The threat perceptions of the US and its three other alliance partners in the region do not perfectly converge with one another. The US may view China's rise as constituting a serious threat to US interests, but to South Korea, Australia, and even Japan, the rise of China has been viewed as much as an opportunity (economic mostly) as it has been seen as a threat. The five US alliance partners in the region have different perceptions toward the rise of China, but the difference is a matter of degrees, not in kinds. The North Korean nuclear and missile threats have been instrumental in justifying and resuscitating the ROK-US alliance, but threat perceptions toward North Korea diverge to a certain extent between the allies. North Korea poses an existential threat to South Korea, but not to the US. The US has urged South Korea to do more to deal with North Korean threats, while urging South Korea to bolster its capabilities to conduct expeditionary operations, the objective of which is widely regarded as containing China. The threat perceptions of the US and South Korea, Australia, and Japan are not neatly aligned, but somehow these alliances have made steady headway and have been transformed into more robust strategic partnerships.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

It is possible that the top political leadership in South Korea, Japan, and Australia have played a pivotal role in transforming their respective alliance partnerships with the US into more comprehensive strategic partnerships and, hence, become

² See "Asia Soft Power Survey 2008 - Soft Power in Asia: Results of a 2008 Multinational Survey of Public Opinion," The Chicago Council on Global Affairs in partnership with East Asia Institute of South Korea. For more information, see http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/dynamic_page.php?id=75 (July 10, 2009).

an indispensable part of US policy toward the Asia-Pacific region. However, all three countries have all undergone difficult times when more liberal political factions came into power, as exemplified by the ROK-US alliance under the more progressive back-to-back administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun from 1998 to 2006; the US-Japan alliance under the Hatoyama administration in 2009; and the US-Australia alliance under the nominally 'centre-left' Australian Labor Party administrations. Liberal governments in South Korea, Japan, and Australia have done a certain amount of damage to their alliances with the US, but still those alliances have made great strides forward more recently. In contrast, the US-Philippines and US-Thailand alliances have long remained dormant by comparison, even when those countries were under the stewardship of pro-American political leaders. Despite the efforts of pro-American political leaders to rejuvenate the stagnant US-Philippines alliance, the impasse in the alliance relationship continued until President Joseph Estrada and Defense Secretary Orlando Mercado, who voted against the new US bases agreement in 1991 as senators, although they did send the Visiting Forces Agreement to the Senate for approval where it was ratified in May 1999. As with the Philippines, evidence abounds that the US-Thailand alliance remains within the confines of Cold War interpretations of its mutual defense treaty, although the alliance is under the stewardship of top political leaders who are generally believed to be pro-American. Interestingly, liberal political leaders in South Korea, Japan, and Australia have made important decisions concerning the strategic flexibility of their respective relationships with the US military, allowing the dispatch of their troops to missions abroad in various US-led multinational military operations.

AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK: A 'CAPABILITY-BASED' EXPLANATION

A capabilities-based explanation, as a framework with which we will analyze divergence in alliance transformations in the Asia-Pacific region, is embedded in the context of the evolving nature of American security policy. US security policy has undergone paradigmatic changes in its strategic direction and planning principles from a 'threat-based' model that dominated Cold War security thinking to a 'capabilities-based' one (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2001). Such a shift in US security policy did not emerge overnight in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks. Transformation to a capabilities-based approach reflected the changing nature of security challenges that had become geographically dispersed

and far more difficult to manage long before 9/11, as US forces had been more focused on fixed Cold War threats and, thus, were not as flexible in terms of the ability of those forces to be used for more expeditionary purposes; that is, forces able to be rapidly deployed to distant areas from their permanent bases (McDevitt 2007). The shift in how the US responds to the changing nature of security threats also forces its allies to reshape their roles, missions, and responsibilities in ways that are substantially different from those that were required in an era of 'threat-based' Cold War alliances. Economic difficulties, limited budgets, and negative public opinion about a permanent US military presence overseas in Europe and Asia have also contributed to placing renewed emphasis on the role of capable allies and interoperability in US military policy. The rush to transform the alliance system began in earnest under the Obama administration, which encouraged US allies to increase capabilities to defend themselves against a full-on attack from traditional threats and also to expand their security role to include regional and global missions beyond their immediate shores. Such transformations were inevitable given a number of constraints that the US has had to deal with both domestically and internationally. It seems that this new approach in US policy, reformulated in ways conducive to broadening and deepening its ties with a select group of more 'capable' allies across diverse fields of security, also has resulted in divergent paths of alliance transformation in the Asia-Pacific. The capabilities gap among US allies was one of the primary determinants of the different outcomes for similar partnerships: America's alliances with Japan, South Korea, and Australia, are thriving, while those with the Philippines and Thailand are stagnating by comparison.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING ALLIANCE TRANSFORMATION AND CAPABILITIES

What are the proper yardsticks with which we can analyze alliance transformations? How can we be sure that the US-led Cold War-era alliances have evolved into comprehensive strategic alliances with cooperation extending far beyond their Cold War missions? How can we evaluate whether some US alliances are faring better than others? Unlike the operational indicators employed to analyze alliance cohesion: homogeneity in goals, threat perceptions, strategic compatibility and command structures, the following indicators for alliance transformation measure whether, and to what extent, the US' five alliances in the Asia-Pacific have undergone 'transformational' change (Kim 2011).

The first criterion employed here is 'alliance burden sharing,' which measures

whether and to what extent a US ally bears more equal burdens that take shape in the forms of the Host Nation Support (HNS) program, the contribution to multinational forces operations in ad hoc coalitions, and support for the US'

Table 1. Criteria for Assessing Alliance Transformation

Criteria	Contents
Alliance Burden Sharing	Degree of equality in burden-sharing, including the Host Nation Support program, contributions to multinational forces operations in ad hoc coalitions, and support for US global defense strategy
Alliance Compromise	Acceptability of US defense and security strategy Acceptability of US-led security architecture in the Asia-Pacific
Reciprocity	Transition from 'material/personnel' to 'personnel/personnel' cooperation

global defense strategy. The second criterion is 'alliance compromise' and gauges whether and to what extent a US ally embraces the various components of US security policy in the form of missile defense or strategic flexibility, and others. Finally, 'reciprocity' measures the degree of mutuality between the US and its allies in making reciprocal commitments, such as dispatching their troops to US-led overseas military operations, and other forms of reciprocity (See Table 1).

Then how can we assess the US allies' capabilities, which are essentially multi-dimensional in nature? A nation's capabilities assessment requires a three-fold examination. First, it requires a general examination of the resources that are largely categorized into the following: human, physical, technical, informational, and financial. Second, an assessment should involve the examination of interoperability arising in the context of two levels: operational and politico-strategic (See Table 2). Interoperability is usually addressed in terms of combining systems for enhancing operational effectiveness.³ However, interoperability is no longer simply a question of standardization and compatibility but also involves issues of political will (Gause et al. 2000).

³ For example, following NATO's definition of systems being able to work together, the US Department of Defense defines interoperability as the "conditions achieved among communications-electronic systems or items of equipment when information or services can be exchanged directly and satisfactorily between them and/or their users."

Table 2. Capabilities Index

Categories	Contents
Human, Physical, Technical, Informational and Financial Resources Assessments	Size of defense budget as a percentage of gross domestic product and its distributional structure considering combat proficiency, force procurement, and R&D.
	Size and quality of the military workforce associated with the ability of a given military force to integrate and exploit sophisticated military technologies
	Extent and quality of military infrastructure, such as military bases and installations
	Number and quality of academic research institutions engaged in research, development, testing, and evaluation (RDT&E) activities involving combat
	Structure, extent, and quality of a country's defense industrial base, which essentially consists of firms or industries
	Military inventory and its combat support capabilities, such as information pertaining to the number and kinds of tanks, guns, ships, airplanes
Operational Interoperability	Interoperable command centers with standardized communications and computerized data networks, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) systems, and force elements, or through ad hoc techniques, procedures, and linkages that include extensive use of liaison officers
	Senior-level consultations and policy coordination to increase bilateral defense and security cooperation, helping to avoid wasteful duplication of efforts and ensure effective joint operations
Politico-Strategic Interoperability	Degree of harmonization in worldviews, strategies, doctrines, and force structures between the US and its allies, which is primarily represented by lack of domestic political or cultural impediments to working together

COMPARATIVE CASE ANALYSIS: US-PHILIPINES AND ROK-US ALLIANCES

In order to investigate the ways in which capabilities have complicated the transformation of US Asia-Pacific alliances, we compare the ROK-US and US-Philippines alliances. The selection of cases is based on the “most-similar-sys-

⁴ The most similar systems design focuses on comparing cases that are most similar in as many ways as possible but differ only in the dependent variable, while holding constant the external influences of all other causally relevant variables.

tems" defined by Lijphart (1971, 682-693).⁴ One may doubt whether these two alliances are sufficiently similar to adopt the most-similar-systems comparative case study design. Although we admit that the two alliances are quite different in nature, and the objective of our comparison is not to test the hypothesis in a rigorously scientific manner, there are similarities that allow for the usage of the similar-systems research design. First, both the US-Philippines and ROK-US alliances have undergone a period of duress due to divergence in threat perceptions. Fears of entrapment and abandonment have surfaced in both alliances. The Philippines expects a strong American military commitment in case of military conflict with China, but the US may want to avoid entanglement in unwanted conflicts. During the standoff between the Philippines and China over the Scarborough Shoal in 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "The US would cautiously not take sides on the competing sovereignty claims to land features in the South China Sea ... oppose the threat or use of force by any party to advance its claim" (US Department of State 2012). The US government confirmed that the mutual defense treaty forged in 1952 between the US and the Philippines does not extend to territorial disputes involving the Spratly Islands (USA International Business Publications 2006). The threat perceptions of South Korea and the US toward North Korea and China are not perfectly convergent. The US wants to avoid unnecessary conflicts on the Korean peninsula, while South Korea wants to avoid unwanted conflicts with China.

Second, both alliances have undergone tumultuous times when liberal political factions were in power. In 1991, the Philippine Senate voted down the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Security that would have allowed the US 10 years to phase out its bases (Park 2011). As a consequence, the US decided to discontinue port visits of the US Navy in 1996. In the same year, the Philippine Supreme Court failed to approve the extension of a pre-existing Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the consequence of which was the US decision not to hold joint military exercises in Philippine territory (Fisher Jr. 1999). President Roh proclaimed that South Korea would take on a "balancer's role" in Northeast Asia (*The New York Times* April 9, 2005), and his anti-American rhetoric as well did significant damage to the ROK-US alliance to the extent that "it was likened by a former senior US diplomat to a marriage closer to a divorce" (Kim 2015, 33, 46-47). Despite the similar roles that threat perceptions and political leadership have played in both alliances, their trajectories of transformation diverged in that the ROK-US alliance has evolved into a comprehensive strategic alliance with a wider range of cooperation extending beyond territorial defense to multinational expeditionary missions, while the US-Philippines alliance has remained within the confines of the Cold War interpretations of its mutual defense treaty.

CAPABILITIES ASSESSMENT IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

For the argument that divergence in alliance transformation in the Asia-Pacific has largely resulted from the capabilities gap among US allies to be valid, it is expected that the capabilities that have facilitated the transformation of the ROK-US alliance have been insignificant in the US-Philippines alliance. What follows is an analysis of the capabilities gap between the Philippines and South Korea, and how this gap has led the two alliances down different paths of transformation. Capabilities gaps are measured along the following three dimensions: human, physical, technical, informational and financial resource assessments; and operational and politico-strategic interoperability.

RESOURCES ASSESSMENTS

Having the eighth longest coastline (33,000 km) in the world, the Philippines is subject to highly porous borders and coastlines, which place constraints on the acquisition of long-range radar systems. This means that the Philippines is a country that faces major technical and geospatial challenges in handling threats to maritime surveillance operations and external defenses.⁵ Despite the geographically challenging environment in which the Philippines is located, the Washington-based think tank the Jamestown Foundation reported that the Armed Forces of the Philippines have one of the weakest military forces in Southeast Asia; it has insufficient capacity to deal with the nation's internal security challenges as well as its external ones (Storey 2007). General Yano, former Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, said, "The Philippine military cannot fully defend the country from external threats due to a lack of weapons and a preoccupation with crushing the long-running communist and Muslim insurgencies" (Gomez 2008). The country's proposed defense budget for 2015 was \$2.6 billion, a 29 percent increase over military spending in 2014, which amounted to 4.4 percent of total government spending for 2015 and 0.8 percent of GDP. With this amount of money going into the defense budget, however, the Philippine government still is unable to qualitatively enhance the Philippine military. The Philippine Defense Reform Program and the Armed Forces of the Philippines Modernization Program, long regarded as essential prerequisites for upgrading the US-Philippines alliance, also remain hampered by bureaucratic inertia and corruption among high-ranking government officials. In sum, the

⁵ See Wikipedia, "Armed Forces of Philippines."

Philippines lacks the resources that are instrumental to transforming the US-Philippines alliance into a comprehensive strategic partnership.

In contrast, South Korea has steadily increased capabilities to expend tangible and intangible support and resources to narrow the capabilities gap and promote interoperability through standardization with the US (Walshe 2008). For instance, the ROK Armed Forces have now turned into a capable, modern military operating in an effective partnership with US forces.⁶ South Korea has steadily increased military spending. It now has the 12th largest defense budget in the world, with a 2014 budget of \$32.7 billion representing 14.5 percent of the national budget and 2.49 percent of the country's GDP. It has acquired new capabilities, such as F-15K fighters and AH-64E Apache heavy attack helicopters and is also expected to procure Patriot PAC-3 ballistic missile defense systems, Global Hawk surveillance aircraft, and F-35 Joint Strike Fighters. It also plans to develop and implement new joint and combined command, control, communications, computers and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities that are fully integrated and interoperable with US forces. Furthermore, Seoul is developing a missile defense system, which will facilitate implementation of an 'alliance counter-missile strategy' required for their combined defense.

In short, South Korea has lived up to the expectations of the US that its partner would share the alliance burdens and increase capabilities in ensuring regional and global security. The limited resources of the Philippines have constrained the transformation of its alliance with the US, while South Korea, with increased resources amenable to US defense goals, has been able to transform its alliance with the US into a more comprehensive strategic partnership.

OPERATIONAL INTEROPERABILITY

After the 9/11 attacks, the US and the Philippines worked on new defense agreements and innovative mechanisms to expand the parameters of the alliance with a particular focus on bilateral cooperation to address non-traditional security threats. They also signed the Mutual Logistic Support Agreement in 2007, which gave US troops limited but strategic access and rights to base equipment in the Philippines and justified the continuing presence in Mindanao of at least 600 US troops (Banlaoi 2013). The two countries also hold annual military exercises, including the Balikatan exercises and the PHIBLEX amphibious landing exercises (Greitens 2014), and signed a new defense pact in April 2014 that allowed US

⁶ More than 1,100 South Korean military members are deployed to 12 US-led or United Nations-mandated missions.

forces to deploy to Philippine military bases (Moss 2015). In March 2016, they held the sixth Bilateral Strategic Dialogue, recognizing the need to deepen their alliance across a broad range of shared values, interests, and priorities. Despite these recent developments in the US-Philippines alliance, the Philippines has not been able to narrow the gap in operational interoperability between itself and the US. For instance, although the new defense pact allows for an enhanced rotational presence of US forces in the country, it did not return US military bases. Such limitations restrict the scope of cooperation and operational interoperability between the two militaries (Francisco and Spetalnick 2014).

In contrast, South Korea and the US have exerted sincere efforts to increase allied operational interoperability and these have paid off. The 'Guidelines for the Republic of Korea-US Defense Cooperation' at the 42nd Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) in 2010 provided future directions for strengthening the combined defense posture on the Korean peninsula and expanding the alliance's strategic contribution to increased security in East Asia and the world. The two countries also agreed to establish the 'ROK-US Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD),' a senior-level policy consultation framework to integrate, coordinate, and manage various security consultative mechanisms at the 43rd SCM in 2011 (Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Korea 2012). In 2012, the second ROK-US Foreign and Defense Ministers' Meeting (2+2) reaffirmed the 'Joint Vision for the Alliance' and agreed to start developing capabilities to counter North Korea's growing missile threat. They also agreed to enhance peace and stability in the region and the world through such regional multilateral mechanisms as ASEAN, ARF, and EAS (Ibid., 77). SCM has proven to be an effective channel through which the ROK and the US have been able to improve operational interoperability (See Figure 1 for the consultative mechanism of the SCM). In the 44th SCM, they established a foundation to develop the alliance into a future-oriented strategic alliance that goes beyond the Korean peninsula to contribute to peace and stability in the region and the world (Ibid.).⁷ The 47th SCM and 2015 Joint Fact Sheet, the 'Republic of Korea-United States Alliance: Shared Values, New Frontiers' reaffirmed these renewed alliance commitments (*Yonhap News* November 1, 2015).

⁷ At the 44th Security Consultative Meeting held in 2012, the US and South Korea established a foundation for a comprehensive alliance response system to prepare against diverse threats posed by North Korea and agreed to fully cooperate in dealing with new threats, such as those in the domains of space and cyberspace. Additionally, they agreed to initiate a joint study on the 'Defense Vision of the Alliance,' set to be completed by 2030, to develop a future-oriented strategic alliance.

Figure 1. Security Consultative Mechanisms between the US and the ROK

Source: *Defense White Paper 2012* (Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Korea 2012)

Both the Philippines and South Korea have exerted substantial efforts to enhance operational interoperability, but there is some discrepancy in their individual abilities to work with the US. Both countries have striven to participate in major military drills with the US, which have afforded unique opportunities to improve operational interoperability. However, the Philippines has not invested properly to enhance the country's military capabilities, which is required to increase interoperability. Rather, the country continues to urge the US to grant significant amounts of military aid, insisting that the current funding level is too meager to build the desired military capacity to work side-by-side with the US (Banlaoi 2013). A set of institutions and investment in infrastructure created by a number of defense agreements between the US and the Philippines did not result in future-oriented developments in the alliance. The Philippines' lack of sufficient capabilities to improve operational interoperability with the US was one of the primary reasons why the US-Philippines alliance has failed to evolve into a more comprehensive strategic partnership.

POLITICO-STRATEGIC INTEROPERABILITY

Politico-strategic interoperability is needed to reconcile divergent views and develop shared interests between allies. As one group of scholars has pointed out, "At the highest level, interoperability issues centre on harmonizing the world views, strategies, doctrines, and force structures of the United States and its allies." (Hura et al. 2000, 9). Achieving politico-strategic interoperability requires a close political relationship and mutual trust, which means substantial political

and strategic integration (Lockyer 2013). Lack of domestic political or cultural impediments is an important prerequisite for achieving high levels of politico-strategic interoperability. Although Manila finally accepted the deployment of thousands of US troops to the Philippines to curb international terrorism and cope with China's military muscle-flexing in the South China Sea, the Philippine constitution explicitly bans the stationing of foreign armed forces on its soil "except under a treaty duly concurred in by the Senate and, when the Congress so requires" (Lum 2012, 28). These constitutional barriers work as impediments to improving not just the operational interoperability but also politico-strategic interoperability with the US. In addition, the prevailing strategic culture that focuses on counterinsurgency and asymmetric warfare has constrained the projection capabilities of the Philippines' policy resources. Due to this strategic culture, the Philippines is hesitant to expend limited resources on conventional defense against external threats (Lantis 2014). Since its independence in 1946, governing elites of the Philippines have developed inward-oriented strategic preferences and a propensity to rely on external powers in addressing external challenges (Castro 2014). In addition, the Philippines, as a founding member of ASEAN, may have more of a multilateral outlook toward the region's security architecture, one that is different from the US'. The US-centered regional security architecture that is, by and large, bilateral, trilateral or quadrilateral alliance networks of hub-and-spokes, can be at odds with ASEANS' s propensity for multilateralism.

The ROK-US alliance also had been plagued by a low degree of political and cultural interoperability during the period from 1998 to 2006. However, the political leaderships of the two states now seem to share the view that the ROK-US alliance is the lynchpin of security not only for the two countries but for the Pacific region as a whole (US Department of Defense 2011).⁸ The two countries ratified a free trade deal in 2007, expanding alliance cooperation to the area of economic relations (Cossa et al. 2009). The free trade deal between the two countries enhanced politico-strategic interoperability; hence, it has become a strategic symbol of expanded alliance cooperation (Manyin et al. 2014; Sung-Woo Kim 2012). The Philippines might have reservations about the US' vision of what should be the region's security architecture, but South Korea has fully embraced Obama's rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific. South Korea understands that the ROK-US alliance and US rebalancing are mutually reinforcing, not just at the

⁸ The transfer of wartime operational control from the ROK-US Combined Forces Command (CFC) to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) has been delayed again until the year 2018.

level of military relations, but also in the realms of the political and economic. South Korea arguably is the most vibrant capitalist-liberal democracy in the region. This status of South Korea dovetails nicely with the US rebalancing strategy, as that strategy also seeks to promote the values of democracy and capitalism in the region. As ROK President Park Geun-hye said, "The Korea-US alliance ... could reinforce President Obama's strategy of rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific" (*Yonhap News* May 8, 2013).

We do not deny the importance of having shared threat perceptions to the continuation and robustness of alliance partnerships. In fact, there are a number of reasons why alliances endure or collapse (Walt 1997). Nonetheless, our research indicates that there is no positive relationship between 'alliance cohesion' primarily fostered by the presence of shared threat perceptions and 'alliance performance.' In fact, the US bilateral alliances with Thailand and the Philippines appear to be increasingly more valid and cohesive under the threats posed by China's increasingly aggressive moves in the South China Sea, which were ratcheted up in earnest after the 2008 US economic crisis. However, these alliances have failed to move beyond the limits of traditional patron-client relationships in effect during the Cold War. In contrast, the US alliances with Japan and Australia, which currently are informed by no clear or immediate threats, have taken important steps towards developing comprehensive strategic partnerships, although their trajectories may have varied considerably in practice. From a purely threat-centric perspective, this divergence in alliance transformation is ironic because the two Southeast Asian allies of the US are more proximate to China than are their Pacific counterparts. Our study suggests that the North Korean factor was not the only reason why the ROK-US alliance has followed a similar path to the other two US alliances with Japan and Australia.

CONCLUSION

The US-Philippines alliance has made little progress in transforming itself into a more comprehensive strategic partnership. The Philippines has not exerted sincere efforts to cultivate the capabilities required to cope with both traditional and non-traditional security challenges (Banlaoi 2013). As a result, Manila lacks the capacity to share alliance burdens and, hence, relies too much on Washington to secure the Philippines' territorial claims in the South China Sea. The level of interoperability in the US-Philippines alliance is not substantial. The Philippines is not in a position to reciprocate if it is asked to dispatch troops to US-led multi-lateral military operations overseas. Due to the lack of sufficient capabilities on

the part of the Philippines in responding to the US request for allies to contribute their fair share of support to ensuring regional and global security, the Philippines' security partnership with the US still remains an asymmetrical Cold War-era alliance.

In contrast, "South Korea can evidently defend themselves autonomously from potential conventional attack on its peninsula based on the sheer size of their military forces and the stability of their economy" (Lee 2014). Furthermore, South Korea has exerted sincere efforts to shoulder a heavier burden in maintaining and upgrading the alliance and to share in the responsibilities of making the region secure, not just to secure the Korean peninsula. Since the end of the Cold War, South Korea has steadily increased its military and financial contributions to the alliance to the extent that Washington regards it as a vital US ally in the region. In addition, South Korea readily accepted the US military strategy by increasing its participation in joint military activities and supporting multilateral military operations overseas. There was controversy over the concept of the 'strategic flexibility' of the USFK, but eventually South Korea embraced the concept. The expanded military capacity of South Korea allows the alliance to perform off-peninsula security functions, thereby enabling it to evolve from a patron-client relationship to a global security partnership. Enhanced interoperability with the US now provides a stronger basis for South Korea to participate in international missions such as anti-piracy operations and post-conflict stabilizations abroad.

South Korea's enhanced capabilities have made it an increasingly more attractive and important alliance partner for the US. The overall trajectory of both ROK-US and the Philippines-US alliances during the Cold War period may look similar, but they are now on different tracks. The US is in need of capable, interoperable, and trustworthy partners who will be able to share burdens and responsibilities in making peace beyond their immediate borders. It seems that the ROK-US alliance has met these US strategic needs, whereas the US-Philippines alliance has not.

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