

Politics and international relations of south korea

Politics



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South Korea to prosper in East Asia region

Republic of Korea or South Korea's flourishing democracy and expeditious economic growth have laid a considerable footprint on her foreign relation policies, including the strategic alliance with the United States. Despite said influence on international stage, South Korea remains a relatively fragile country confined by a list of powerful, some of them aggressive, neighbours. The contradiction between the country's 14th global economic ranking in term of GDP in purchasing power parity and their regional standing as the weakest power in comparison with East Asia nations, arises an enigma for South Korean diplomats and strategists to resolve (World Bank, 2017).

And whereas Seoul's fruitful accomplishment in resolving unconventional international security challenges, involving in UN peacekeeping and healthcare initiatives, this emerging power confronts serious regional security threats, coming both from their northern border and western water. Konishi and Manyin (2009) proposes an ambitious foreign affairs agenda including the construction of symbiotic complex networks appropriate for a new order in East Asia, the establishment of a new inter-Korean relationship with a co-evolution strategy, as well as Seoul's active participation in architecting a new regional and global governance framework through middle power diplomacy. In such complex networks, should South Korean diplomats weave interdependent beneficial bonds, tying and limiting risky movements from China and North Korea. Commercial bonds restraints offensive military operations by encouraging business folks to keep aggressive generals in check. And the middle power diplomacy suggests South Korea to host variety of conferences, discussion, trade deals, and <https://assignbuster.com/politics-and-international-relations-of-south-korea/>

diplomatic agreements bridging major powers from Tokyo, Beijing, to Washington and Pyongyang.

A fragile tie with her brother in the Pyongyang

Seoul sunshine policy with Pyongyang was embraced and abandoned from times to times during Lee Myung-bak iron militaristic offensive, Park Geun-hye government standing against the north missile testing, and Moon Jae-in administration to rebuild peace talks. Termed after Aesop's legend narrating the competition between sun and wind to persuade a wandering traveller to remove his cloak, the sunshine policy hypothesizes that inter-Koreas engagement with economic assistance, infrastructure development programmes, tourism and cultural exchange might lead to an open and prosper Korean peninsula (Park, 2017). But history may shift away from prosperity towards destruction in the hand of outraged populists and reckless generals. The two Koreas reaffirmed the spirit of the June 15 Joint Declaration in 2007, and had conferences on variety issues related to settling the inter-Korea relations, peace and denuclearisation on the Korean Peninsula, shared prosperity and even the unification of Korea (BBC News, 2007). Then came the sinking of 1, 500-ton Cheonan corvette with 104 unfortunate crew members on March 2010 and two sides opened fire on November 2010 over South Korea's Yeonpyeong island resulted in two marines, two civilians casualties and several injured. And attilleries were deployed once more on August 2015 over the city of Yeoncheon, before Mr Moon entering office in May 2017 with a promise to restore the sunshine policy. Consequently this policy is but a considerably fragile tie holding the peninsula altogether. Since taking office, Mr Moon has pushed through

significant changes to South Korea's foreign policy with their unexpected northern brother. Ten years under Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye diplomatics of unrestricted reconciliation with North Korea, designated as said sunshine policy, the new administration embraces mutuality and emphasizes progress towards denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula. On April 2018 Mr Moon signed Panmunjeom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula in conjunction with the north controversial leader Mr Kim Jong-un. The two leaders portentously declared in front of 80 million Korean people that the Korean war has concluded and peace has been bestowed upon the long-struggled peninsula. Sharing a solid commitment to eliminate a relic of the cold war and of division, Mr Moon and Mr Kim boldly unfold new hope for national reconciliation, peace, and wealthy development for both Koreas. This momentous declaration takes place at a historic site of Panmunjeom, noting a significant milestone for uphold a fragile tie between Seoul and her brother Pyongyang.

A forgotten alliance with now-troublesome America

South Korea positions as a great importance to the United States in East Asia region, despite an emerging power from mainland. The country's critical location and emerging capitalistic economy amid the turmoil East Asia region has driven them closer to the US for decades. It stands blocking China reach to the Pacific, joining Tokyo and Taiwan in a chain of obstacles preventing Sino contemporary naval aggression. It reaches \$1. 834 trillion worth of gross national income in purchasing power parity, which is 35 times larger and 240 times greater trade volume than the northern brother (IndexMundi, 2017). Signing the US-South Korea Mutual Defense Treaty on October 1953,

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Seoul entered a golden age of accelerated economic growth, social prosperity, national wealth, and technological advances under the American nuclear umbrella guaranteed protection, eliminating security threats from neighbouring communist regimes.

The treaty has created a win-win situation for Seoul to guardedly strengthen their economy with relatively low military budget, and for America to establish their continental base to counter Chinese and Soviet intimidation during the cold war. But all wartime promises have come to an end with 21st century remarkable diplomatic and geopolitics milestones. That is to substantially transform the alliance. Contemporary argument consists in withdrawal of US forces in South Korea's border with the north for regional sustainability, and that such militaristic presence will only result in the spread of conflict (Bandow, 2017). South Koreans also express the concern of being involved in an unwanted conflict in which Seoul is dragged in by Washington strategic flexibility in defense and foreign policies. Second argument revolves around Seoul rising confidence in political and economic progress, as well as well-defined self defense and combatant capabilities. An active air force equipped with F-35A, a naval tradition, and the deployment of THAAD missile interceptor launchers all reinforce the stagnant but stable balance in Korean peninsula (Lee and Griffiths, 2017). Third argument evolves with America's history of trustworthiness. After the US to embarrassingly withdrew forces in the Vietnam War, their allies realised that it maybe dangerous to stand against Washington as an enemy, but it is deadly to be its ally. Thus depending on America's generous reinforcement will prove vital for Seoul long-term geopolitics strategy, especially when

there is a cunning board of Chinese communist elites ready to abandon their socialist paradise to shake hands with its once-enemy. Those arguments provoked the alliance in which South Korea is protected under American nuclear umbrella. The treaty is declining on its reason to being.

Threats from an expansively emerging Sinosphere

Relations with China is considered the trickiest deal for South Korean diplomats given the communist regime realism and cunning approach to the principles of free and fair trade, the rules of law, the stability of regional geopolitics, and their evading tactics to comply with international standards. It reflects the complex nature of Seoul-Beijing bilateral relationship on both perspectives of interdependency and competitive rivalry. Their cooperative relationship has reached a peak when the Roh administration enjoyed Beijing-Pyongyang disagreement in 2008. And China has, in fact, replaced the US as South Korea's main trade partner, accounting for roughly 22% of its exports and 18% of its imports in 2008. The trade amount hit a record \$32.5 billion in 2009 and total trade between the two nations surpassed \$300 billion in 2014 (Harding, 2018). However as economic growth fuels nationalistic movements, the Chinese authoritarian regime finds difficulties in keeping themselves content. Growing confident with recent achievement on the world stage, China lures their newly refurbished naval forces against neighbouring nations, causing concerns across Asia Pacific region as they took oil wells, burnt fisherman ships, and built artificial islands on conflicting waters. A focal point in Mr Moon and his successors will consist in striking the right equilibrium between economic competition, trade relationship, and

guarding national interests and even protecting South Korea sovereignty against future Sino acts of aggression.

A growing tie with South East Asia community

The last two decades have seen economic relations between Southeast Asia countries, especially ASEAN, and South Korea to evolve immensely. ASEAN has recently become Seoul's second largest trade partner as well as foreign direct investment destination. There has been a considerable surge in Seoul trade amount with ASEAN, jumping from \$5 billion to \$79 billion in 2012, to \$125 billion in 2017, while imports from ASEAN rose from \$5 billion to \$52 billion in said period (Lee and Bang, 2012).

The trade concentrates in crude petroleum and natural gas (28.5 percent), radio, television and communication equipment (13.9 percent), wood and cork (10.2 percent), and agricultural products (6.1 percent). As for investment, South Korea's foreign direct investment to ASEAN increased from \$321 million in 1992 to \$4,291 million in 2012 and \$5,890 million in 2016 with perspectives as follows: financial and insurance activities (6.3 percent), real estate activities and renting and leasing (5.3 percent), wholesale and retail trade (5.2 percent), construction (3.9 percent), professional, scientific and technical activities (3.0 percent), and transportation (2.8 percent). Should East Asia continue to drive economic growth, the South Korea-ASEAN economic tie will be the main engine to boost regional and even global wealth. Mr Moon paid a visit to Singapore on July 2018 in a wider endeavour to embolden Asia Pacific trade partnership. His administration stresses the New Southern Policy addressing South Korea's further and strengthened trade relationship and development in South East Asia. Moon's predecessors

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have been trying with the region and realising their significance in an effort to settle down conflicts with North Korea, as well as challenging China's aggressive rise.

The Blue House continues its consistent approach with ASEAN trade to build out the said middle power diplomatic strategy, in which Seoul acting as a host and a bridge connecting major geopolitics power. And that includes nations from the South East. Concluding South Korea wise movements to the south, international observers may see South Korea has established the middle power networks, proposed a new regional architecture favouring trade with Seoul, and resolved regional maritime disputes and territorial conflicts to aim at a common collaborative sustainability in South East Asia.

A plausible agenda for regional prosperity Should South Korea establish a long term and comprehensive diplomatic strategy in Korean peninsula, Southeast Asia region, and on international state, her governments shall continue to embrace Seoul strategic vision of peaceful power transition in the region by minimizing the strategic distrust between Washington and Beijing. Korea should also maintain systematic flexibility to buffer the impact of transition in the coming decade.