

Research Brief

The U.S.-South Korea Security Alliance After 9/11

Recent issues have emerged between the United States and South Korea that put their decades-long security alliance under stress. For example, there is a sense in the United States that South Korea does not share America's post-9/11 security priorities. There is also growing concern over North Korea's nuclear program. In South Korea, rising nationalism has created the demand for a more "equal" relationship with the United States.

Yet the alliance continues to benefit both countries. For example, it ensures South Korea's defense and bolsters prospects for continued economic growth and political stability. The alliance also gives the United States access to much of Asia while reducing pressure on U.S. bases elsewhere in the region. If the two Koreas unite, the alliance will facilitate the spread of democratic institutions and free-market economies to North Korea and beyond.

RAND Project AIR FORCE studied the U.S.-South Korea relationship to identify initiatives that can strengthen and improve security cooperation. The study addresses both short-term alliance management issues and longer-term measures to adapt the relationship to new global and domestic conditions.

- **The two countries must redefine their common purpose.** The United States and South Korea must agree on what constitutes a "threat" and how to deal with it, as well as the appropriate nature, size, and configuration of U.S. forces deployed in South Korea. Most critical in the short term, they must agree about how to deal with North Korea.
- **The United States should ensure that the U.S. commitment to South Korea's security remains credible, identify concrete South Korean roles in the global war on terrorism, and encourage enhanced South Korea capabilities.**
- **South Korea needs to assume greater responsibility for the health of the alliance.** For example, it must demonstrate that it considers North Korea's nuclear program and the war on terrorism to be alliance issues rather than just problems for the United States. South Korea must also provide adequate training facilities and housing for U.S. troops.

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RB-131-AF/KF (2004)



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