

**Living With and Overcoming "*Middleness*":  
Korean Perceptions of Regional Governance and Order**

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## **I. Transitioning from “Old Middleness” to “New Middleness”**

Situated as it is in the middle of East Asia's continental and maritime divide, South Korea's role in the traditional East Asian balance of power has been shaped foremost by geopolitics and at the receiving end of the struggle for mastery in Asia. As noted in greater detail below, the overwhelming impact of political geography has largely defined the contours of Korea's strategic forays for much of its history: embedded deeply into the Sinocentric world order that prevailed from roughly from the 1500s to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, potent and disruptive great power politics from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and the still unknown and untested waters of early 21<sup>st</sup> century geopolitics and geo-economics commensurate with China's rise and a reconfigured role not only for the United States, but virtually all of the region's strategically consequential powers including Asia's core middle powers such as South Korea, Australia, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

Until its rapid economic development that began in earnest in the early 1970s, however, South Korea did not have the requisite capabilities as a middle power given its low level of economic development, ubiquitous dependence on the United States, and virtually non-existent ties and linkages with China or the former Soviet Union. Thus, only after its own rise as a formidable economic player in Asia—the region's fourth largest (\$1.5 trillion GDP in PPP) and the world's 12<sup>th</sup> largest—has South Korea been able to brand itself as a de facto middle power although “middleness” always came to define the conduct of South Korean foreign policies.

Today, variations of strategic angst persists such as the constant search for security, the costs and opportunities related to accommodating and managing great power relations including anxieties arising from over-dependence, and fear from abandonment. But unlike any other period in modern Korean history, Korea has been able to partially overcome and to exploit niche opportunities in the emerging Asian template including the crafting of policies and strategies related to enhancing a more stable and prosperous regional order based on four key denominators. For the first time, while Korea continues to feel the burdens and pressures of middleness (particularly in the context of the contrasting strands of its critical ties with the United States but increasingly deepening economies relations with China), it has also been able to partially overcome the most potent vestiges of Northeast Asian power politics through its relatively new standing as a core Asian middle power.

First, despite endemic sources of tension in the South Korean-Japanese and South Korean-Chinese relationships the core basis for a “new Northeast Asian order” has been constructed around irreversible economic relationships between China, Japan and South or the “BEST” network (Beijing-Seoul-Tokyo) as exemplified by the

launching of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) in September 2011.<sup>1</sup>Second, building upon South Korea's core political, trade, and cultural ties with China and Japan, key ASEAN partners, and even with traditionally out-of-area countries such as India, Seoul's economic capabilities have enabled it to expand its foreign economic and security under the rubric of a "Global Korea" policy agenda and growing "Asianization" as illustrated by South Korea's "New Asian Diplomacy" that was articulated as one of the cornerstones of the Seoul's foreign policy by the Lee Myung-bak Administration and more recently, the decision in February 2012 to designate an official ambassador to ASEAN.<sup>2</sup>

Third, maximizing the opportunities tendered by its long-standing alliance with the United States and as a by-product, expanding and deepening security and economic bonds with other core U.S. allies such as Australia and Japan although ties with Tokyo are always going to be constrained owing to deeply-rooted historical legacies. And fourth, contributing to regional and global governance through active participation in multilateral for a such as the ASEAN Plus Three network, the G-20 summits, ad-hoc initiatives on core global problems such as climate change, postwar reconstruction in Afghanistan, and enhanced ODA. Yet the extent to which these initiatives will bear key dividends for South Korea over the ensuing 20-30 years depends crucially on the magnitude of the core security challenges that it will confront, the range of volatile transitions it may have to absorb, and external determinants such as mid- to longer-term prospects for stability in North Korea, political permutations in China, and the depth of global shocks ranging from spillovers from an acute Eurozone crisis to instability in the Middle East.

For South Korea's longer term stability and greatest contribution to an emerging regional governance structure, however, the major focus has to lie in fostering institutionalized trilateral cooperation and enhanced transparency between China, Japan and South Korea. From an intrinsically South Korean perspective, such cooperation is essential in ensuring that the transition to a unified Korea is achieved with minimal fallout and with maximum security, economic, and political dividends for all of the principal players including the core members of the Six Party Talks. Only then will South Korea or at some future point, a unified Korea, really emerge from the

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<sup>1</sup> "Korea, China and Japan Launch Trilateral Body," *Joongang Daily*, September 28, 2011, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joinsmsn.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=2942055>

<sup>2</sup> For additional details, see *Global Korea: The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Korea*, Office of the President, Cheongwadae, March 2009. "Announcement of the Nomination of Ambassador to ASEAN," Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, February 25, 2012, <http://www.mofat.go.kr/webmodule/htsboard/template/read/korboardread.jsp?typeID=6&boardid=235&seqno=326855>

shadows of “Old Middleness” or the downsides of traditional geopolitics to a “New Middleness” or a Northeast Asian order that will be able to finally overcome the vestiges of the Cold War and decades of security angst driven by an anti-status quo North Korea. Thus conceptualizing a new security architecture for Northeast Asia cannot but begin with effectuating stable but definite change to the prevailing status quo.

Nevertheless, the emergence of and longer-term sustainability of a “New Middleness” including but not limited to the reconfiguration of the Korean Peninsula is going to also depend critically on other core issues such as the depth of cooperation and competition between the United States and China. And equally if not more important are the range of challenges confronting a “New Asia” or an Asia that is likely to be confronted by wide-ranging discontinuities stemming from decades of accelerated growth, potentially wrenching political transitions in key Asian states, the specter of a powerful Asian security dilemma, and negative demographic trends are likely to impinge upon South Korea’s major strategic choices well into mid-century.

## **II. The Weight of Geopolitics and South Korea’s Strategic Choices**

For much of its history, the crushing weight of geography or more precisely, the inability to extricate itself from the magnitude of geopolitics has defined Korea’s worldviews and attendant responses. This is hardly a uniquely Korean experience. Poland’s epic struggles at the heartland of Europe’s balance of power politics, Mexico’s relationship with the United States since the late 1830s, and Vietnam’s tortuously complex relationship with China are just some of the examples that come to mind. Of the three middle powers that are being examined here today—Australia, Canada, and South Korea—none more than Korea have paid a heavier price due to the crushing weight of geography. To be sure, both Hugh White and Paul Evans may indeed have different interpretations vis-à-vis Australia’s and Canada’s complex geopolitical configurations such as Canberra’s own growing balancing dynamics between Washington and Beijing and branding Ottawa’s strategic identity well beyond Washington’s preponderant footprints.

The main point here is not to dilute Canada’s and Australia’s multifaceted strategies as middle powers, but only to stress that the cumulative consequences—physical, political, ideational, and cultural—have been much more manifest and pervasive in Korea. Despite valiant efforts to stem the tides of great power rivalries, societal and economic modernization, and a new geopolitical compass or disentangling itself from the clasp of a Sinocentric world order, Korea’s foreign policy exertions from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries ultimately failed. In quick procession but with legacies that continue to be felt today, the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were marked by

dynastic collapse, brutal colonization, forced partition, a fratricidal war, and deeply-rooted ambiguity of great power politics. The scars and legacies of that earlier period when Korea was catapulted into the modern world system still remains but unlike the early 20th century when “default geopolitics” and wholly inadequate national capabilities severely limited Korea’s options, that is no longer the case today.

Over the past century, three tipping points amplified the grip of geopolitics in Korea: the collapse of the Joseon Dynasty in 1910 and annexation by Japan quickly followed by the end of China’s Qing Dynasty in 1911; the outbreak of the Korean War (1950-1953) and the globalization of the Cold War; and the collapse of the USSR in 1991 coupled with the simultaneous rise of China. How Korea responded to these three developments cannot possibly be simplified into a few pages but its capacity to reorient itself in the context of Northeast Asia’s power grid—spatially, politically, economically, and militarily—became the defining element of its foreign and security policies.

Korea’s forays into the modern world system began in the late 1870s when it first began to establish official relations outside of its Sinocentric comfort zone, i.e., diplomatic ties with most of the then great powers (Russia, the United Kingdom, and France) and emerging major powers (Japan and the United States). Critically, however, Joseon Korea was ultimately unable to stem the consequences flowing from a rapidly failing Qing China and more importantly, mitigating and counterbalancing Imperial Japan’s increasingly aggressive forays through alternative alliances. Japan’s victory in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) terminated centuries of Korea’s strategic dependence on China and an even briefer pivot towards Russia.<sup>3</sup>

Korea’s independence wouldn’t reemerge, and even then, only in truncated form, by Japan’s defeat in World War II and the partitioning of the peninsula into the South and the North. Geopolitics never left Korea in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and even if it wanted to, Korea didn’t have the ability, even partially, to transcend or to overcome the harsher vestiges of greater politics and the struggle for mastery in Northeast Asia. The iron-grip of geopolitics continues to demarcate South Korea’s core foreign policy choices and attendant security options, none more than coping with the range of challenges and threats emanating from the North. Unlike Europe, however, where the end of the Cold War resulted in a fundamental resetting of great power relations such as the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, Asia’s security remains relatively unchanged. To be sure, this is not to suggest that East Asia has remained static.

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<sup>3</sup> For additional details, see Chung Min Lee, “Coping with Giants: South Korea’s Responses to China’s and India’s Rise,” in Ashley J. Tellis, Travis Tanner, and Jessica Keough, eds., *Asia Responds to its Rising Powers*, (Seattle and Washington, D.C.: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2011), pp. 163-165.

The cumulative rise of China and since the early 1990s, India's accelerated economic growth, has resulted in an unprecedented development in Asia: the simultaneous co-sharing of the strategic landscape by three dominant Asian powers—China, Japan, and India—and a much more dynamic geopolitical and geo-economics template. "Asia is also increasingly a laboratory for the cross-cutting themes of what James Rosenau has called "the two worlds of world politics"—that is the old security agenda of modern realist geopolitics and inter-state rivalry and the new security agenda of post-modern globalized security and non-state threats."<sup>4</sup>

South Korea's overall posture in the early 21st century stands in sharp contrast to the series of upheavals it experienced at the opening of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If the first half of the 20th century was marked by brutal geopolitics, the second half of the 20th century was marked by relatively successful attempts at overcoming the harsher vestiges of geopolitics. For the first time, three major elements were decisive in enabling South Korea to detach itself partially from "default geopolitics": (1) firm attachment to the United States through the ROK-U.S. alliance that enabled South Korea to focus more clearly on postwar economic reconstruction and development; (2) although hardly visible in the 1960s or even well into the 1970s, the cumulative effects of a "maritime strategy" or export-led growth that literally forced South Korea's growing awareness of and linkages to the broader international system; and (3) the prominence of the South Korean development model given its successful economic transition, equally salient political transformation from authoritarian politics to one of Asia's most vibrant democracies, and since the 1990s, full embracement of the information revolution by developing one of the world's most internet connected societies. All of these strategic choices that were put into place successively from the early 1960s meant that for the first time, South Korea had the luxury of contemplating national strategies that weren't overwhelmingly dominated by responses to major power strategies and policies.

As South Korea peers into the next 20-30 years, key litmus tests lie in institutionalizing to the greatest extent possible the leverages it has gained since its ascendance as a key Asian middle power, minimizing fallouts from non-linear scenarios in the North, maintaining its robust alliance with the United States, coping with the rise of China but also calibrating the contrasting strands that are beginning to emanate from China, and mitigating spillovers from traditionally out-of-area developments such as potential instability in the Middle East and the Eurozone crises. Yet despite its key successes over the past three decades, the challenges confronting Korea in the early 21st century remain daunting given that one of the key side effects of successful economic development and globalization has been in the parallel rise in core vulnerabilities.

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Evans, "Power and Paradox: Asian Geopolitics and Sino-American Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *ORBIS*, no. 1, (Winter 2011), p. 86.

Nearly 93% of Korea's GDP is based on trade and as a country that imports 100% of its oil and natural gas, even if South Korea's net ability in helping to shape a global environment more conducive to its core interests have increased, such efforts still are quite marginal. Moreover, the fact that it still has to contend with key challenges in the South-North relationship and managing great power relations mean that even as Seoul maneuvers to navigate a "New Middleness," the weight of geopolitics is never far from the surface.

### **III. The Shifting Strands of Inter-Korean Relations**

The first major security cluster that deserves South Korea's unequivocal attention undoubtedly lies in managing South-North relations and building the foundation for eventual reunification. As it has ever since the creation of the two Koreas in 1948, Seoul's primary security objective remains focused on managing the inter-Korean relationship and more specifically, coping with changing internal dynamics in North Korea. The death of Kim Jong Il in December 2011 and the perpetuation of the Kim Dynasty under the leadership of Kim Jong Un opened an uncertain chapter in South-North relations. While it is too early to divine the stability and longevity of the Kim Jong Un regime, much less the key political, economic, and military choices that Kim Jong Un is likely to make, the status quo is unlikely to be sustained or at the very least, to be significantly strained including the all-important Sino-North Korean alliance. China continues to support North Korea as evinced by critical energy and food supplies to the North and Beijing's steadfast public backing of the Kim Jong Un regime. Despite international condemnation of North Korea's April 13 long-range missile test, the Chinese government continued to publicly praise the Kim Jong Un leadership. On April 23, Chinese President Hu Jintao reaffirmed China's backing of the Kim Jong Un regime:

...Constantly consolidating and developing Chinese-North Korean friendly cooperation is the firm and unbending policy of China's party and government...We are confident that under the leadership of Comrade Kim Jong-un, the Korean Workers' Party and government will certainly be able to lead the North Korean people in unified struggle, forging forward to constantly score new successes in building a strong and prosperous socialist country.<sup>5</sup>

Yet despite such public backing by Pyongyang, it is also noteworthy that Beijing supported the April 16 U.N. Security Council's Presidential Statement that severely criticized North Korea for the April 13 missile test. The statement, in part, noted that

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<sup>5</sup> "Chinese President Lauds North Korea Ties Despite Tension," *Reuters*, April 23, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/23/us-china-korea-north-idUSBRE83M0R720120423>

"The Security Council *demands* that the DPRK immediately comply fully with its obligations under Security Council resolutions 1718 (2006) and 1874 (2009), including that it: *abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner; immediately cease all related activities; and not conduct any further launches that use ballistic missile technology, nuclear tests or any further provocation.*"<sup>6</sup> (Emphasis added). Thus, notwithstanding Beijing's funding and support of Pyongyang, China's "North Korea dilemma" is likely to worsen in the years ahead unless North Korea undertakes a significant U-turn on its nuclear program coupled with meaningful economic reforms. For the time being, North Korea continues to provide nominal benefits to China such as a strategic buffervis-à-vis South Korea, Japan and the United States but seen from the perspective of China's longer term interests as a great power, one cannot rule out the possibility that Beijing will increasingly perceive Pyongyang as a strategic liability.

According to long-time Korea watcher Gordon Flake of the Mansfield Foundation, Beijing's core policy objectives have been centered on the so-called "Three No's" or no nuclear weapons, no collapse, and no war. "By emphasizing too much no collapse, they actually increased the risk of war and they allowed North Korea to announce its uranium enrichment program with no consequences...[and] you can argue that by focusing on one no, you are really messing up the other two nos."<sup>7</sup> In the midst of a critical election year in South Korea, the contours of Seoul's future South-North policy could surface as an important campaign issue and it is true that the ruling and opposition parties have divergent North Korean policies.

That said, recent polls indicate that inter-Korean issues are unlikely to emerge as a critical game changer in the upcoming presidential election. For example, in a tracking poll conducted from April 2011 until April 2012 by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, only 14.8% of the respondents replied that South-North relations was the most salient issue in the December 2012 presidential election (reaching a high of 21.5% in April 2011).<sup>8</sup> Importantly, however, in the aftermath of North Korea's sinking of South Korea's naval vessel the Cheonan in April 2010 and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in December 2010 (the first time that North Korea directed an artillery attack against the South since the Korean War), the South Korean public remains both wary of North Korean motivations despite concurrent concerns on the absence of engagement under

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<sup>6</sup> "Security Council Condemns Democratic People's Republic of Korea's Satellite Launch as Breach of Resolutions Barring Country's Use of Ballistic Missile Technology," Security Council SC/10610S/PRST/2012/13, April 16, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> "Bo's Ouster May Alter China's N.K. Policy," *Korea Herald*, May 23, 2012, <http://view.koreaherald.com/kh/view.php?ud=20120523001043&cpv=0>

<sup>8</sup> Jiyeon Kim and Karl Friedhoff, "The Asan Monthly Opinion Survey" The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, April 2012, p. 4.



the Lee Myung-bak Administration.

If South Koreans opt to elect an opposition candidate for the presidency in December 2012, there will be shifts in policies towards the North with a greater emphasis on engagement but neither do South Koreans today automatically or reflexively support de facto unconditional engagement with the North. According to a November 2011 poll conducted by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, only 21% of South Koreans felt that North Korea was “one of us” while 26% perceived North Korea as a “neighbor” and 22% perceived it as an “enemy.”<sup>9</sup> The same poll indicated that 81.1% of South Koreans believe that North Korea possesses nuclear weapons and 92.9% believe that North Korea is unlikely to abandon them.<sup>10</sup> And while 96% of South Koreans feel that inter-Korean ties are in trouble, 69.7% place the blame on North Korea and 10.6% and 10% respectively on China and the United States.<sup>11</sup>

South Koreans’ distrust of North Korea was also highlighted after the April 13 North Korean missile test. In an April 2012 poll conducted by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies after the North Korean missile test, 72.4% of South Koreans responded that it was a clear provocation although a much higher percentage or 83.9% of respondents who supported the ruling conservative party (the New Frontier Party) saw it as a provocation compared to 46.9% of those supported the opposition (the Democratic United Party).<sup>12</sup> Most interestingly and buttressing the earlier assertion that unconditional engagement with the North is no longer supported by the South Korean public is “the conservatism of South Koreans in their twenties.

While their attitudes are more in line with those in their thirties and forties, when it comes to social issues such as the redistribution of wealth and the president’s job approval ratings, they are far closer to those in their sixties with regard to North Korea.”<sup>13</sup> 77.2% of those in their 20s and 71.2 in their 30s felt that North Korea’s April 13 missile launch was a provocation while only 15.4% and 20.3% respectively felt that it wasn’t.<sup>14</sup> Overall, South Koreans remain fairly evenly divided on the question of engagement. 50.4% believe that South Korea should seek economic engagement with the North while 45.9% oppose it and with respect to food and fertilizer aid to the North, 55.8% opposed it while 40.7% were in favor or an almost exact reversal of the

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<sup>9</sup> Jiyeon Kim and Karl Friedhoff, “South Korean Public Opinion on North Korea and the Nations of the Six-Party Talks,” October 2011, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, [http://asaninst.org/upload\\_eng/board\\_files/file1\\_506.pdf](http://asaninst.org/upload_eng/board_files/file1_506.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Jiyeon Kim and Karl Friedhoff, “The Asan Monthly Opinion Survey” The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, April 2012, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

same question that was asked in December 2011. This suggests that while South Koreans had hoped for an improvement in inter-Korean relations following the death of Kim Jong Il in December 2011, ensuing actions by the North since then have not endeared the South Korean public to the idea of robust engagement with the North under the leadership of Kim Jong Un.

Conversely, if the ruling New Frontier Party ends up winning the December presidential contest, South-North relations aren't likely to undergo significant changes from the current administration's policies although the leading candidate for the NFP's nomination and consistent leader amongst the major contenders (as of late May 2012) for the presidency, Ms. Park Geun-hye, has noted that if elected she would pursue an "Alignment Policy" or one that emphasize a more holistic approach to inter-Korean relations. The opposition Democratic United Party has been traditionally perceived as the party that has the upper hand in promoting South-North relations given the history of the "sunshine policy" that was emphasized by two previous progressive presidents such as Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Ms. Park's approval rating among those who consider South-North issues to be an important campaign issue in the upcoming December presidential poll (14.8% of respondents) remained significantly higher than her perceived rivals: 54.1% for Ms. Park, 20.4% for Dr. Ahn Chul Soo (the founder of the software vaccine company Ahn Chul Soo Lab and leading independent candidate for president), and only 10.3% for Mr. Moon Jae In, the former chief of staff to President Roh Moo Hyun and one of the leading presidential candidates within the DUP.<sup>15</sup>

The 2012 Korean presidential contest is likely to become one of the closely contested elections since the restoration of democracy in 1987 and the margin of victory may well be slight, i.e., between 500,000 to 700,000 votes. While it is impossible to predict the actual margin and more importantly, even which party's candidate is likely to emerge victorious, the overwhelming majority of South Korean voters are concerned about economic prosperity, job creation and security, and social welfare programs. As noted above, even though South-North relations remains ever present in the minds of the Korean public, the overall political salience has dropped not insignificantly over the last several years.

#### **IV. Coping with a "New Asia" and Korean Responses**

If conceptualizing future trends on the Korean Peninsula are complex with a range of unknowns, South Korea's ability to navigate the waters of a "New Asia" is going

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid, p. 9.

to consume an increasingly larger share of South Korea's resources and policies. Asia's rise is arguably the most important geo-political and geo-economic shift to take place in world affairs in the latter half of the 20th century. China's, and more recently, India's, accelerated growth combined with Asia's overall economic development over the past three decades has resulted in Asia's transformation as the world's third major strategic pillar after the United States and the European Union.

In 2010, China replaced Japan as the world's second largest economy and combined with the strategically consequential states of Asia, the region has become the major driver of the world economy. Although Asia's economic and political rise is undeniable and most likely will be sustained well into the 2050 and beyond, Asia's rise has also brought to the fore key complications and problems. Indeed, coping with Asia's success in addition to unforeseen opportunity costs are likely to assume greater prominence in the years and decades ahead. In this regard, five major problems can be highlighted commensurate with Asia's rise that all have core implications for South Korean foreign policy.

First, Asia is home to some of the world's most pronounced historical, territorial and security disputes. Nearly seven decades after the end of World War II, the region faces a range of political disputes such as the on-going competition between the two Koreas, territorial disputes between Japan and Russia, China and Japan, and Korea and Japan. As Minxin Pei has noted, "it is meaningless to talk about Asia as a single entity of power, now or in the future. Far more likely is that the fast ascent of one regional player will be greeted with alarm by its closest neighbors."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, key historical legacies from the pre-World War II era continue to resonate in Asia chiefly although by no means fully, with respect to Japan's pre-wartime and wartime atrocities. China continues to highlight the so-called "Century of Humiliation" beginning from the Opium Wars until the Chinese Civil War. The possibilities of a more stable and cooperative Asia depend crucially on its ability to overcome long-lasting historical legacies—one of the critical factors that enabled postwar Europe to conceptualize and to eventually implement deeper integration.

Second, Asia has to overcome pronounced military tensions and competition as evinced by key geopolitical hotspots such as the Korean Peninsula, the Taiwan Strait, and the Indo-Pakistani dispute. Moreover, as China continues to emphasize its military strength particularly in the maritime domains, naval competition amongst the greater powers is likely to intensify. According to some naval analysts, "there is also a widely held view among security experts that China is trying to establish a 'bastion' or a sanctuary for its nuclear-missile submarines, which could launch nuclear ballistic

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<sup>16</sup> Minxin Pei, "Asia's Rise," *Foreign Policy*, July/August 2009), p. 33.

attacks against the U.S., China has recently built an underground submarine base on Hainan Island, which faces the South China Sea."<sup>17</sup> The world's largest conventional armies all reside in Asia and preventing a major security dilemma stands as a key test for Asian states as a prominent German newspaper recently noted.

All indicators point to the fact that Asia will have a huge impact on the 21st century. The global order, however, will not necessarily become safer as a result. The old bi-polarity is being increasingly replaced by multiple poles of power, and the Asian powers are increasingly underlining their ambitions with missiles and a greater focus on military might. An end to the arms race is not in sight. Even if the US wanted to, its influence in Asia would no longer be enough to slow this development.<sup>18</sup>

Third, notwithstanding Asia's unparalleled economic progress, the region also faces key pockets of socio-economic disparities and problems. Asia's developed countries such as Japan and South Korea are already rapidly becoming aging societies with falling birth rates. Indeed, even China is becoming a rapidly aging society. On the other hand, the less developed parts of Asia (particularly South Asia) will see huge population surges into 2050. Combined, demographic trends in Asia alone are going to result in huge welfare, education, and environmental challenges. Fourth, Asia's rapid growth has also triggered unprecedented energy and environmental problems and the region is fast becoming a major instigator of global warming. As China's and India's energy consumption (particularly oil and coal) increases, other problems such as available water and food supplies will also come to the fore. Sustainable development stands out as one of the most important challenges the region faces in the 21st century.

Fifth, Asia's political and institutional development also faces huge hurdles such as uneven political development, vastly contrasting political systems, the specter of failed and fragile states, and key human rights and democracy deficits are going to become much more problematic in the years ahead. While more countries have shifted to democracies since the 1980s, rollbacks are not impossible. These tasks, by definition, are going to be mitigated and incrementally prevented only through a combination of enhanced institutionalism, far-reaching domestic reforms, coordinated foreign policies, and political leadership. In more ways than one, therefore, tackling the magnitude of problems confronting a "New Asia" or an Asia that has arisen is the *sine qua non* of Asian governance in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. For South Korea and for the rest of Asia's strategically consequential states, the quest for a more stable order is really just beginning.

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<sup>17</sup>Yoichi Kato, "China's Naval Expansion in the Western Pacific," *Global Asia*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Winter 2010), p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> "The Asian Arms Race is Starting to Look Ominous," *Der Spiegel*, April 20, 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,828744,00.html>