



THE ROLE OF THE US-ROK ALLIANCE IN THE NATO-ROK GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

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ARTICLE HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

NATO's attention was directed to "enlargement" and "tight connection" with Global Partnership countries as prime agenda. In this context, the main objective of this paper is to find the cause of "a loose connection" between NATO and ROK by analyzing the geopolitical concern in NEA and comparing the US-ROK alliance. Besides, we will forecast the NATO-ROK partnership through 1) an exclusive interview with Major Hwang from Korean Army, currently working at NATO, which was conducted by Mo Rang KIM, 2) interviews with twenty Korean elites, and 3) a conversation with the Director of Security Policy and Partnerships at NATO. Judging from the study, it is highly probable that 1) the US-ROK alliance would cooperate in military security, 2) NATO-ROK Partnership would cover non-traditional security.

KEYWORDS

NATO Global Partners, Republic of Korea, US-ROK alliance, wartime operational control (OPCON) authority, Asia Pacific security, geopolitical concern, Quad, non-traditional security



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INTRODUCTION

NATO has gradually expanded its member states by overcoming geographic limitations. Furthermore, it has also transformed itself into "a global organization" rather than simply "a regional organization" through its partnership. Since 2005, the relationship between Korea and NATO has been 16 years. So far, very little research has been done in dealing with South Korea's position regarding NATO-ROK relations, and it is because that there has not been much progress in the relationship with NATO yet.

In this context, this research used two main methods to overcome the lack of studies in the NATO-ROK Global partnership and determine whether the US-ROK alliance is an obstacle or catalyst for the past and the future NATO-ROK Global Partnership. First, this research compared NATO and the US-ROK alliance. Through the comparison, this paper analyzed what type of alliance they have maintained (bilateral or multilateral alliance), when they signed (cold war era or post-cold war era), what current situation is (ceasefire or peacetime), who led forces (US or ROK or member states), how to make decisions (by consensus or unanimity) who guided forces (Military Committee or Military Committee),

who the leader is, what the component command is (Ground, Air, Sea), who the supreme commander is and what authority of supreme commander is. These categorized comparisons answered whether the US-ROK alliance would replace the NATO role in the Republic of Korea or not and how to identify NATO-ROK's future cooperation by considering wartime OPCON transition.

Second, through 1) an exclusive interview with Major Hwang from Korean Army, currently working at NATO, which was conducted by Mo Rang KIM, 2) interviews with twenty Korean elite representatives from political, academic, and military filed; and 3) a conversation with the Director of Security Policy and Partnerships at NATO, this paper forecasted what the possible NATO-ROK cooperation is. It focused much attention on whether the future NATO-ROK is possible in the field of traditional security or non-traditional security cooperation. Especially an exclusive interview with Major Hwang would contribute to further research. It is pretty reasonable that Major Hwang's current duty, mission, and aims to be dispatched to NATO would hint at the future NATO-ROK cooperation.

Therefore, in the first chapter, this article will analyze the obstacle of NATO-ROK relations in the aspect of geopolitical concerns. It will show how unstable geopolitical features led to an accelerating arms race with bilateral alliances in Northeast Asia instead of establishing an Asian-way NATO by defining North East Asia Region and how this will affect NATO-ROK relations. The second chapter will compare the NATO and US-ROK alliance. This comparison will answer why the NATO-ROK partnership maintains a loose connection by tracing the history of the NATO-ROK partnership since 2005. In the third chapter, how the wartime operational control authority brought the symbolic signs of rapid development between the NATO-ROK partnerships. Lastly, the fourth chapter will explore the future outlook on the NATO-ROK relationship and the US-ROK alliance.

1 GEOPOLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

It may be necessary to start by defining the Northeast Asia (NEA) region to understand the unique geopolitical characteristics of the Korean Peninsula and how those features affect the relations between NATO and the Republic of Korea.

There are varied definitions of Northeast Asia; therefore, it would not be an overstatement to say that there is "the lack of an agreed definition" in the NEA region. To put it differently, the range of the Northeast Asian area is not fixed but is determined by context. Generally, it refers to three countries, Korea, China, and Japan, in a narrow sense. However, the term "Northeast Asia" was originally introduced by American historian and scientist Robert Kerner in the 1930s. He defined the Northeast Asia region by including the Korean Peninsula, the Manchurian Plain, the Mongolian Plateau, and the mountainous regions of Eastern Siberia, stretching from Lake Baikal to the Pacific Ocean. (Kerner, 1939; Li & Cribb, 2014) Seen from the United Nations ESCAP, they recognize China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation as NEA countries. (UN ESCAP, 2021) Similarly, according to the Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia (1999), Russia, Mongolia, Japan, Korea, and China are also accepted as NEA areas.



Figure 1 Northeast Asia region by geopolitical definition

Source: <http://thetruesize.com>. (Edited by Morang KIM)

In other words, geographically, China, Japan, North Korea, and South Korea can be considered Northeast Asia region. However, politically, it is generally taken for granted that Russia and the US are also NEA regions. This paper shall not polemicize here on whether Russia is in the European or NEA region but introduce the definition of the region by Hemmer and Katzenstein (2002). As they understand, regions are not fixed naturally and inalterably by “geographical features,” but it is the “product of political construction.” Thus, political creation decides what country belongs to a region. Viewed in this light, it would be reasonable to say Northeast Asia is composed of China, North Korea, Russia, Japan, South Korea, and the United States.

These six countries are global economic and military powers and are located where communist and democratic systems coexist.

According to the 2020 GDP estimates analyzed by the IMF (2020), the United States ranked first, and China, Japan, and Korea respectively ranked second, third, and tenth. In other words, four out of six countries in Northeast Asia ranked in the top 10 in GDP. It is logical for economically powerful countries to increase national defense expenditures, especially if there is no regional economic/security organization based on mutual trust in their region. In connection with this, the security dilemma is widespread in the NEA region by intensifying the arms race. Global Firepower’s research gives a convincing example. In the 2021 World Military Strength Rankings, five of the six countries in Northeast Asia were ranked in the top six. The United States, Russia, China, Japan, and South Korea respectively ranked first, second, third, fifth, and sixth. Although North Korea was not in the top ten but ranked 28th, they have already implemented a strategy to negotiate favorable terms with the United States as “a nuclear-weapon state.”

Table 1 2020 GDP (Nominal) Ranking

1	United States
2	China
3	Japan
4	Germany
5	France
6	United Kingdom
7	India
8	Italy
9	Canada
10	Republic of Korea

Source: IMF, 2020

Table 2 2021 Military Strength Ranking

1	United States
2	Russia
3	China
4	India
5	Japan
6	Republic of Korea
7	France
8	United Kingdom
9	Brazil
10	Pakistan

Source: GFP, 2021

Created by Mo Rang KIM

From the above, one could logically assume that economic capabilities do not always guarantee military power. According to the 2020 GDP Ranking, Germany, France, United Kingdom, Italy, and Canada, which are all NATO members, have higher economic capabilities than South Korea and Russia. Then why do South Korea and Russia have higher military strength than those five NATO members? It is reasonably related to the geopolitical factor which led to the absence of multilateral cooperation. Because ironically, the distrust among NEA countries, which is based on geopolitical characteristics, built up the military power in their region. More precisely, communist countries (past Russia, China, North Korea) and democratic countries (USA, Japan, South Korea) in this region have been sharply opposed and distrusted each other.

In a nutshell, unstable geopolitical features led to an accelerating arms race with bilateral alliances in Northeast Asia instead of establishing an Asian-way NATO. Significantly, South Korea, surrounded by military/economic powers such as North Korea, Japan, China, and Russia, has experienced a vicious circle of the arms race after the Korean war. As a result, there is no agreed regional economic and security cooperation organization due to mutual distrust in the region such as the EU, NATO, or ASEAN in the NEA area. Instead, there are solid bilateral alliances between ROK and the US.

Proceeding from what has been said above, it is not hard to guess that these geopolitical circumstances also affected the NATO-ROK relationship. The relations between NATO-ROK partners cannot only be explained with natural geographical features. However, the relations should be analyzed in the aspects of geopolitics, which is the “product of political construction.” Therefore, the absence of multilateral cooperation resulted in the growing call for multilateral defense cooperation in the Indo-Asia-Pacific. According to Burgess and Beilstein (2018), the reason for the necessity of multilateral cooperation is China’s territorial expansionism and North Korea’s nuclear threat.

Under this circumstance, it may be a massive opportunity for the Republic of Korea to expand its security scope to a partnership with NATO rather than simply being satisfied with the bilateral alliance with the US. Thus, the next chapter will review the history of the NATO-ROK relationship and analyze the current cooperation between South Korea and NATO.

2 HISTORY OF NATO-ROK PARTNERSHIP

The history of the NATO-Republic of Korea partnership dates back to 2005 when Ban Ki-moon, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea and former UN Secretary-General, visited NATO headquarters. During his speech to the North Atlantic Council (NAC), the position of South Korea, which is looking forward to cooperation with NATO, was delivered. This was the starting point of the NATO-ROK relationship.

2.1 Building and Institutionalizing Partnership

A year later, at the 2006 Riga Summit, NATO announced its plan to develop relations with potential contributors, referred to as “Contract Countries,” to NATO operation. The Republic of Korea has been designated as a contact country with Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Of particular significance in this decision is that Contact Countries can access any activities offered under NATO’s structured partnerships. (NATO, 2009)

Since the 2008 Bucharest summit, Contract Countries have been referred to as “Partners across the globe” or simply “global partners.” NATO also discussed strengthening cooperation with Partners across the globe. As part of that, NATO negotiated TCPs (Tailored Cooperation Packages) with Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. TCPs are similar to what NATO has provided to the Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative States. It is cooperative activities tailored to individual countries based on NATO’s priorities and the specific interests of partner countries. Moreover, the NATO-Republic of Korea regular meeting has provided great opportunities to strengthen mutual understanding and share strategic interests.

In 2009 the Republic of Korea signed an MOU between Korea and NATO on information security. It must be admitted that the Republic of Korea can be allowed to access the information NATO provides to its member states. In particular, NATO and the Republic of Korea share information related to the activities of the International Security Assistance Forces dispatched to Afghanistan, including the Afghanistan war. In other words, it is a procedure for NATO to approve the dispatch of ROK troops to Afghanistan and has the meaning of completing the preparation for dispatch internationally. (KBS WORLD, 2009)

Furthermore, the Republic of Korea and NATO agreed on an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP) in 2012 and was renewed in 2017 and 2019. Such a regular renewal system for partners contributes to developing cooperation on mutual interest matters. Generally, the goal of IPCP is to interact and cooperate effectively in various areas by following the detailed road map. After signing IPCP, the Republic of Korea has participated in the Interoperability Platform with 24 partners. (NATO, 2021; Embassy of the Republic of Korea to the Kingdom of Belgium and the European Union, 2018)

2.2 ROK’s Support

From 2010 to 2013, the Republic of Korea has supported NATO-led missions and operations in Afghanistan for international peace and stability with NATO partners. South Korea established the Korean Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) to help them stabilize the provincial government’s capacity, restore peace and pursue social and economic development. PRT supported them for their health, education, rural development, and governance. In 2012,

the Afghan government took over PRT from the ROK. Finally, South Korea withdrew the Ashena unit due to the completion of the PRT mission in 2014. (NATO, 2021; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Korea, 2014)

Table 3 History of NATO-ROK Partnership

Year	Major Events	Place
2005	Ban Ki-moon, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea and former UN Secretary-General, visited NATO headquarters and gave a speech to the North Atlantic Council	NATO HQ, Brussels, Belgium
2006	At Riga Summit, The Republic of Korea has been designated as a Contact Country along with Japan, Australia, and Newzealand	Riga, Latvia
2008	Contract Countries were referred to as “Partners across the globe” NATO negotiated TCPs (Tailored Cooperation Packages) with Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the Republic of Korea.	Bucharest, Romania
2009	MOU between Korea and NATO on information security	NATO HQ, Brussels, Belgium
2010	Korea and NATO Signed the ISAF Participation and Financing Agreements ROK established the Korean Provincial Reconstruction Team(PRT)	Brussels, Belgium/ Afghanistan
2012	ROK signed the first Individual Partnership Cooperation Programme (IPCP)	NATO HQ, Brussels, Belgium
2014	ROK withdrew the Ashena unit due to the completion of the PRT mission	Afghanistan
2020	ROK joined a NATO Foreign Ministers Meeting for the first time	NATO HQ, Brussels, Belgium

Source: NATO, 2021. Created by Mo Rang KIM

Beyond NATO-ROK’s operation in Afghanistan, South Korea supported them financially as well. ROK contributed USD 755 million from 2011 to 2020 to the NATO-run Afghan National Army (ANA) Trust Fund. In 2020, ROK took the ANA Trust Fund’s co-chair. (NATO, 2021)

Another cooperation between NATO and ROK is counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. Moreover, merchant vessels that pass through the Horn of Africa are escorted by the ROK navy. (NATO, 2021)

2.3 NATO-ROK Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme

The Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP) is a document that defines the framework of cooperation between NATO and partner countries and is not legally binding and is renewed every two years. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Korea, 2014)

The goal of cooperation between NATO and ROK is to promote interoperability; create opportunities for technology and science exchange; and cultivate competency through the exchange of education and training. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Korea, 2014)

Priority Cooperation Sectors with NATO seem more related to non-traditional security. It includes cyber defense; countering terrorism; energy security; Science for Peace and Security (SPS) program; consultation, command, and control; deployment, maneuver; defense research and technology; arms control, disarmament, Non-proliferation; defense policy and strategy. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Korea, 2014)

As we have seen, the non-traditional security cooperation between ROK and NATO has been more prominent than traditional military security since 2005. Besides, the 16-year cooperation was somewhat formal, and Korea's passive attitude was shown. The cause can be found in the geopolitical factors of the Republic of Korea, as mentioned in the previous chapter. In the next chapter, this paper will compare NATO and the US-ROK alliance, which are very similar to NATO, and analyze how the US-ROK alliance affects the NATO-ROK partnership.

2.4 US-ROK Alliance

If NATO was so successful in Europe, why did the ROK not take an active attitude toward NATO as a global partner? Before going on with the question, it is necessary to compare US-ROK Alliance and NATO.

The US-ROK alliance has many similarities with NATO. It means the bilateral alliance also provides almost what NATO did for their member countries. Those similarities can be represented as shown in Table 4. Although NATO and the US-ROK alliance differ somewhat in form as the multilateral alliance and the bilateral alliance, most importantly, both alliances originated from the Cold War NATO. In other words, NATO opposed communism and maintained peace within Europe. In common with NATO, the US-ROK alliance stood against North Korean communism on the Korean peninsula and maintained the status quo on the Korean peninsula. (Park, 2020)

Table 4 Comparison of NATO and the US-ROK alliance

US-ROK Alliance	VS	NATO
Bilateral	Form of Alliance	Multilateral
1953	Sign	1949
Ceasefire	Condition	Peacetime
US	Forces led by	US
Consensus	Decision	Unanimity
Military Committee	guided by	Military Committee
Each Minister of National Defense / Leaders	Military Committee Follow Guidelines of	Each Minister of National Defense / Leaders
Ground, Air, Sea	Component Command	Ground, Air, Sea
US	Supreme Commander	US
Operational Control	Authority of Supreme Commander	Operational Command
Peacetime: ROK Force Wartime: US Force	Operating System	Peacetime: NRF (NATO Response Force)

Source: Park, 2020. Created by Mo Rang KIM

I would like to close the discussion on the comparison of NATO and the US-ROK alliance by answering the question at the beginning of this chapter. “If NATO was so successful in Europe, why did not the ROK take an active attitude toward NATO as a global partner?” The Republic of Korea pays scant attention to NATO because a strong US-ROK alliance which is very similar to NATO can provide much of what NATO can offer to its member states.

Interview which was conducted by Yoon et al. (2018) with ROK’s high-profile elite representatives will offer further evidence that a robust ROK-US alliance may weaken the partnership with NATO. Twenty interviewees consist of three cohorts from political, academic, and military filed. (See Figure 2). Those three groups responded to whether the US-ROK relationship is more important than NATO-ROK relations in dealing with Korea’s national security (See figure 2 below). It is no wonder that “no single elite representative” said the NATO-ROK relationship is more critical than the US-ROK alliance. In addition, how the US-ROK alliance influences the NATO-ROK partnership is repeatedly stressed by many elites. They mentioned that the NATO-ROK partnership could not be discussed without the US-ROK alliance. In other words, Korea still tends to view the NATO partnership as a subsidiary relationship to the ROK-US alliance.

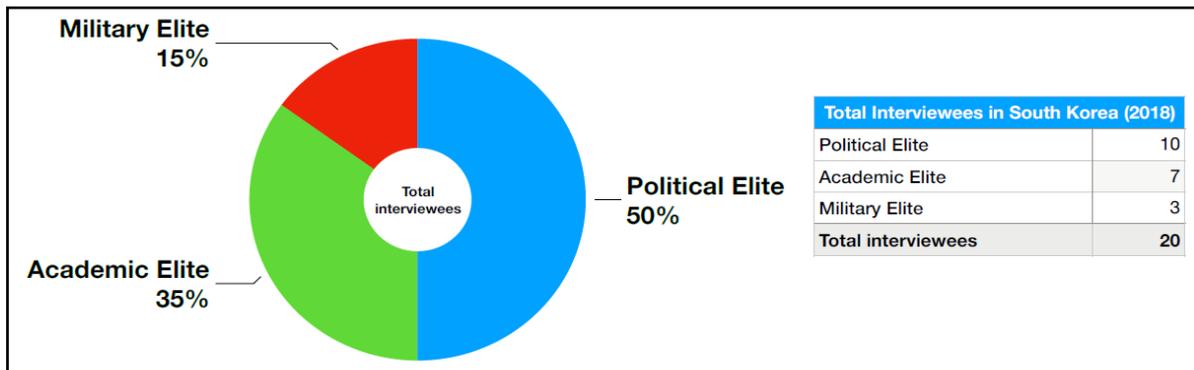


Figure 2 Interview with Three Korean Elite Groups

Source: Yoon et al., 2018. (Created by Mo Rang KIM)

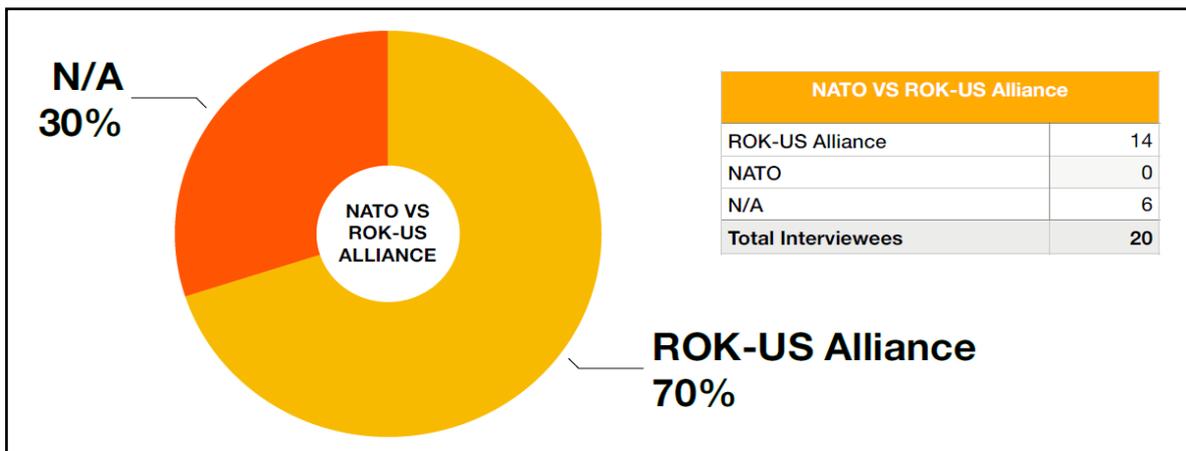


Figure 3 Whether the ROK-US relationship is more important than ROK-NATO relations in dealing with Korea’s national security

Source: Yoon et al., 2018. (Created by Morang KIM)

In the next chapter, I will try to show how the debate of the wartime operational control (WT-OPCON) authority between the US and the ROK has developed the most recent NATO-ROK relations.

3 THE WARTIME OPCON TRANSITION

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, it is clear that the robust US-ROK alliance brought stability and prosperity to the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, this 67-year-old relations between the US and the ROK led the NATO-ROK partnership to weaken relatively and maintain them as formal relations.

However, recently, there have been symbolic signs of rapid development between the NATO-ROK partnership. In what follows, I explore how the debate on the wartime operational control (WT-OPCON) authority between South Korea and the United States developed NATO Partnership.

As pointed out, Park (2020), the most significant difference between NATO and the US-ROK alliance is the process of alliance formation. Hwang (2020) also gave plausible explanations that The US-ROK alliance was formed “asymmetrically” from the beginning, characterized by “unilateral demands” and “unilateral contributions.” The US attempting a ceasefire responded to South Korea’s alliance demand to approve and control the South Korean government against the ceasefire.

Consequently, the initial asymmetrical and unilateral US-ROK alliance caused the operating system issues between the US and the ROK. Table 4 above also shows a fundamental difference between the US-ROK alliance and NATO in the operating system. In other words, NATO Response Force (NRF) operates during Wartime and Peacetime. However, the ROK military has taken over “peacetime operational control” from the US since 1994 (Ministry of the Interior and Safety, National Archives, 2006), also has been planning to take over WT-OPCON Authority from the US since 2006. (Hankyoreh news, 14 July, 2017)

Although the WT-OPCON was originally scheduled to transfer to the ROK government in 2012 and 2015, it was all postponed. (Hankyoreh news, 14 July, 2017) Besides, it was known that the WT-OPCON authority would be transferred to the ROK in 2022. (Air Force Magazine, March 18, 2021) However, at this New Year’s press conference, the Minister of National Defense of the ROK, Wook SEO, expressed a somewhat ambiguous position that “I will achieve the further result during my term” concerning the transition of wartime OPCON. (New Year’s Press Conference of the Minister of National Defense, 29 January, 2021) Namely, it is highly likely that the year for the transition of wartime OPCON will only be agreed with the United States within Moon Jae-in’s presidency. As we have seen, transferring the WT-OPCON to South Korea from the United States Forces Korea (USFK) has been discussed since 2006. In this overall perspective, one could say that it is unlikely to be feasible.

Nevertheless, South Korea has constantly attempted to take over the WT-OPCON Authority for “military sovereignty.” I shall not polemicize here whether it should be considered military sovereignty or not but will examine how the destabilizing element led the OPCON debate.

The WT-OPCON debate began in South Korea to minimize the security threats that occurred by changes in the US policies. For example, US forces in Korea have been steadily

decreasing with the peak of the Korean War (Hwang, 2020), and a policy to withdraw US troops in Korea was also promoted at certain times. (Han, 2012)

Thus, in this sense, it is no wonder that there is no basis for concluding that the US-ROK alliance will continue unconditionally. Also, the future of the US-ROK alliance cannot be predicted simply. Such signs of unstable US-ROK alliance change paradoxically have taken on renewed importance of the NATO-ROK partnerships.

On the 22nd of May 2021, US president, Joe Biden and the president of the Republic of Korea, Moon Jae-in, agreed to terminate the South Korea Ballistic Missile Range Guidelines that limited the country’s missiles to 800 kilometers. (The Korea Herald, 22 May 2021) With the abolition of the guidelines, Korea has fully secured “missile sovereignty,” and rocket technology can be used without restrictions on fuel (solid, liquid), range, warhead weight, and usage (military, civilian). It means the ROK could and would make significant changes in space security.

In this sense, the end of South Korea Ballistic Missile Range Guidelines has some hints, which might be interpreted as suggesting the possibility of the transition of the wartime OPCON authority. Therefore, even if the transition has low feasibility, Korea should be prepared for the worst by developing a relationship with NATO.

4 FUTURE OUTLOOK ON NATO-ROK RELATIONSHIP

There has been little research on the NATO-ROK partnership due to the solid US-ROK alliance, leading to the lack of interest in NATO. Therefore, this chapter will analyze the future of the ROK-NATO relations mainly through 1) an exclusive interview with a Korean Army, Major Hwang currently working at NATO, 2) interviews with twenty high profile elites which were conducted in 2018, and 3) a conversation with James Mackey (Director of Security Policy and Partnerships, NATO HQ) and Mark Tokola (Vice president, KEI).

PSP-officer Major Youn-Im Hwang from the Republic of Korea recently joined the NATO Standardization Office (NSO) and has worked in the Policy and Coordination Branch in the Section for Partner Coordination since March 2021. Officially she is the first Korean who is working for NATO, but unofficially the second one.

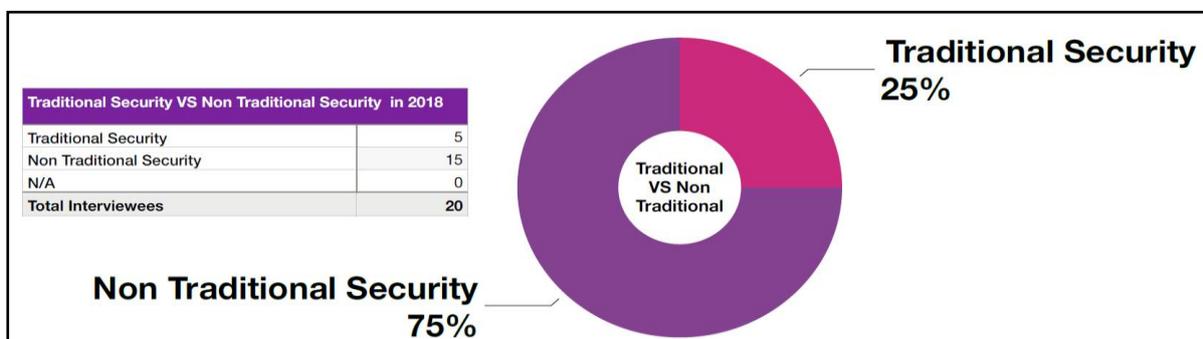


Figure 4 Whether ROK-NATO relations provides traditional or non-traditional security

Source: Yoon et al., 2018. (Created by Mo Rang KIM)

Major Hwang's position and duties at NATO could probably be an essential clue for predicting the future relationship between NATO and South Korea. Judging from Major Hwang's duty, it is natural enough that South Korea would expand the scope of standardization not only to "NATO alliances" but also to "partner countries" in the future. In addition, it should be noted that "I could not tell the details, but the ROK Ministry of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff have a will to expand exchanges with NATO." (by Major Hwang) It can be a crucial clue to forecast the future of the NATO-ROK relationship.

According to Major Hwang (2021), "standardization" is an essential element for upgrading to a NATO Alliance, so countries wishing to become members must go through standardization. Besides, as non-traditional threats increase, the scope of standardization is expanding to partner countries.

Another interview showed that the cooperation between NATO and Korea would be remarkable in "non-traditional security." (See Figure 4) 15 experts out of 20 considered NATO-ROK cooperation mainly would be carried out in the field of non-traditional security.

According to James Mackey, Director of Security Policy and Partnerships at NATO, South Korea shares the same values and challenges that NATO members face.

"South Korea shares the values of the NATO member states. It is a liberal democracy. It is a member in good standing of the United Nations. It is an open society which is based largely on the same type of open economy, the liberal economy that we have..... we share some common security challenges, and that we are stronger when we work together on those shared challenges." (Korea Economic Institute of America, 28 April 2021, "South Korea's Partnership with NATO: Origins and Future Direction")

Mackey also regarded that the non-traditional security field such as cyber defense and disinformation would be more reasonable to cooperate for the NATO-ROK partnership.

"It is almost even easier than the traditional challenges..... it is not very cost-effective to send troops from Korea to Europe in order to train. But if we are talking about non-traditional challenges like cyber defense and disinformation. That is much more in the information space. So those are the area where we can certainly work very closely together. In fact, Korea has been involved actively in a number of NATO exercises that focus on cyber defense." (Korea Economic Institute of America, 28 April 2021, "South Korea's Partnership with NATO: Origins and Future Direction")

All this considered, it is hard to escape the conclusions of future outlook on NATO-ROK relationship that the US-ROK alliance would take a central role in the military security, and NATO-ROK Partnership would cover non-traditional security. This could be a relatively safe option for South Korea than Quad Plus, which is called "Asian NATO." Because participating in Quad Plus would not be able to avoid diplomatic conflicts with China and resultant economic losses. Furthermore, for South Korea, China is not only a merely neighboring country geographically but also the largest export/import partner economically.

Therefore, it is desirable for South Korea to establish friendly relations with other NATO members and partners while co-responding to non-traditional security issues as a NATO partner.

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