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# 2020 U.S. Presidential Election and Prospects for U.S. Policy toward East Asia

## Abstract

As a result of the 2020 U.S. presidential election, Joe Biden of the Democratic Party will take office for the upcoming four years. Although U.S. foreign policy is expected to be more stable and predictable in the Biden administration, it is likely that its foreign policy will produce a modified U.S. global leadership, which has the features of both Trump's America First foreign policy and the global leader of the liberal international order. Meanwhile, it is anticipated that U.S.-China relations could be more manageable in the Biden administration than it did in the Trump presidency even if U.S.-China strategic competition will persist. To maintain the strategic balance between U.S. and China, South Korea needs to pursue the 'principled diplomacy,' aimed at advancing its national interests based on the principles of 'openness, transparency, and inclusiveness.'

## Introduction

The 2020 U.S. presidential election was held on November 3, 2020 and Joe Biden of the Democratic Party defeated the incumbent president Donald Trump of the Republican Party. It was reported that more votes were cast in 2020 than in any other U.S. election in history and the turnout rate of the 2020 presidential election, 66.5% as of Nov. 25, was the highest in more than a century. More than 150 million voters cast ballots in 2020 and it is more than 20 million higher than the 2016 record of 137 million votes cast. President-elect Joe Biden has earned more than 80 million votes (51%) and it is the most votes cast for any presidential candidate in U.S. history. President Trump has received about 74 million votes (47%) and it is the second-most votes in history.<sup>2</sup> Biden carried 25 states plus the District

of Columbia and one congressional district in Nebraska, totaling 306 electoral college votes while Trump carried 25 states plus one congressional district in Maine, totaling 232 electoral college votes.

The most important issue of the 2020 presidential election was the COVID-19. Before the coronavirus hit the United States at the beginning of this year, president Trump's reelection bid was high because he had maintained concrete supporters and the status of the national economy had been in a good condition. However, the pandemic changed significantly the national conditions of the 2020 presidential election and negatively affected president Trump's approval ratings. President Trump emphasized 'China bashing' and 'law and order' to take voters' attention away from the COVID-19. However, president Trump tested positive for the coronavirus early October and the issue of the



COVID-19 came to dominate the presidential campaign again.<sup>3</sup>

President-elect Biden has made it clear that his administration would abandon President Trump's America First approach and restore U.S. global leadership. He mentioned during the presidential campaign that his administration would reactivate diplomacy based on democratic values and principles and would make efforts to reinvent its relationships with allies, partners, and international organizations. It is expected, accordingly, that U.S. foreign policy and its relationships with allies could be more stable and predictable in the Biden presidency than his predecessor.

In this article, I will examine the domestic and international factors that could affect the Biden administration's foreign policy to see how far it could restore U.S. global leadership. Then I will discuss the prospects for the Biden administration's policy toward East Asia focusing on the diplomatic and security matters on the Korean Peninsula.

## **Biden Administration's Foreign Policy: Full Restoration of U.S. Global Leadership?**

### *Domestic Conditions*

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2. Domenico Montanaro, "President-Elect Joe Biden Hits 80 Million Votes In Year of Record Turnout," *National Public Radio*, November 25, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/government-politics/2020-11-25/president-elect-joe-biden-hits-80-million-votes-in-year-of-record-turnout>.
3. Min, Jeonghun, "Analysis of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election Results and Its Implications," *Analysis of Major International Issues*, Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, November 18, 2020.

It was expected that vote choices in battleground states would significantly affect the outcome of the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Specifically, which candidate would be more successful in mobilizing supporters in six swing states, which include Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Florida, and Arizona, was expected to be critical to decide the winner of the election. Public opinion polls showed that vote margins of two candidates (Biden and Trump) would be narrow in the battleground states. As the polls expected, they had neck and neck competition in the six swing states on election day. Biden won four states (Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Arizona) by razor-thin margins while president Trump carried Florida and North Carolina.

The 2020 presidential election exit polls, which were conducted by the news consortium (ABC, CBS, CNN, and NBC news),<sup>4</sup> showed that over 90% of party supporters cast ballots to their party candidate. It means that both candidates succeeded in mobilizing their party supporters in 2020. In addition, party loyalty also affected how votes evaluated the main issues of the election such as COVID-19, economy, and racial discrimination. Most Democrats perceived that president Trump failed to cope with the COVID-19 and his response to 'Black Lives Matter' was controversial while many Republicans perceived that president Trump did a good job to cope with the coronavirus and economic recovery would be the most important issue of the election. These findings suggest that party polarization maintained its influence on voting behavior in 2020.

The exit polls also showed that vote choices of whites and independents in the six battleground states played a key role in deciding the winner of the election. Most importantly, white and independent voters in the three Rust Belt states (Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania) and Arizona increased their support for the Democratic

candidate in 2020 than they did four years ago and it was critical for Biden to carry the four states and eventually win the election.<sup>5</sup>

The significant impact of white voters' decisions in the Rust Belt on Biden's victory suggests that those voters' interests would be reflected in the Biden administration's policy. It is known that white voters in the Rust Belt supported Trump's 'America First' trade policy, which argued fair trade to prioritize American labor and industry's interests, in the 2016 presidential election. To bring their minds back to the Democratic side, Biden proposed 'Buy American' plan, which seems to be similar to Trump's America First trade policy, during the 2020 presidential campaign. It suggests that, instead of completely abandoning president Trump's America First trade policy, the Biden administration is likely to keep the main features of the fair trade argument to protect American labor and middle class' interests. Accordingly, whether the Biden administration will join 'Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership' (CPTPP) could be a useful indicator for its trade policy direction.

Meanwhile, even if president Trump failed to get reelected, he received about 74 million votes and it is the second-most votes cast for any presidential candidate in U.S. history. In addition, the exit polls show that president Trump received as many white votes in 2020 as he did four years ago. He also received more votes from Republicans (+6%), Blacks (+4%), Latinos (+4%), and Asians (+7%) in 2020 than he did in 2016.<sup>6</sup> These results suggest that 'Trumpism' still places itself in many voters' minds although president Trump was defeated in 2020. In addition, there are many Republican leaders and aspirants who want to embrace president Trump's concrete supporters and mobilize their support for their political fortunes in the coming years. Therefore, it is expected that president Trump's America First arguments will maintain its domestic influence for

some time.

### *International Political Environment*

Since the beginning of the 21st century, U.S. has gone through a series of mind-boggling events including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the 2008 financial crisis. Such events invoked a perception of American decline in the world, and American people have sent their support for focusing more on domestic issues and reformulating foreign policy to restore the national strength. Such political consideration has been reflected in both the Obama administration's offshore balancing strategy, and the Trump administration's America First foreign policy.

The Trump administration's America First foreign policy, which is featured by a tendency to put American interests first, pessimistic view on the role of the world's policeman, preference for bilateralism, stunted international cooperation, and dissonance among great powers, was spreading around the world during the Trump presidency. Such an international political environment became more pervasive through the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Many countries have been fighting against the coronavirus with entry ban and lockdown measures. They also feel that they need to bring the manufacturing facilities of vital medical supplies back home and it could lead to scale down the global value chain. In addition, the national crisis that the coronavirus created has contributed to making a nation state more important as a political actor and justified the need of a big government to protect public health and national security. Last but not least, taking into account that the world needs to cope with political and economic impacts that the pandemic crisis brought about within their borders, respectively, each country is going to focus its resources and efforts on dealing with domestic issues in the coming years.

These situations suggest that the features of the international political environment became sharper through the pandemic crisis and will maintain their influence for some time. It is not easy to expect that such characteristics in the international relations are likely to be changed abruptly with the advent of the Biden administration. Neither the U.S. Congress nor the American public wants their country to retake the role of the world's policeman.<sup>7</sup> The Biden administration will also have to pay most attention to addressing domestic issues like fighting against the COVID-19 and recovering its economy in its early days in office. Last but not least, the cold fact that no other country has the ability to fill the power vacuum created by U.S. in the short term indicates that there is no reason why the global power should completely turn away from the America First approach.

In sum, the domestic conditions and international political environment that the Biden administration is facing are not likely to be supportive of the Biden administration's determination to fully restore U.S. global leadership during its first term in office. It is likely, therefore, that the Biden administration's foreign policy will produce a modified U.S. global leadership, which has the features of both Trump's America First foreign policy and the global leader of the liberal international order.

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4. CNN, "2020 U.S. Presidential Election Exit Polls," <https://edition.cnn.com/election/2020/exit-polls/president/national-results>.
  5. Min, Jeonghun, "Analysis of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election Results and Its Implications," *Analysis of Major International Issues*, Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, November 18, 2020.
  6. CNN, "2020 U.S. Presidential Election Exit Polls," <https://edition.cnn.com/election/2020/exit-polls/president/national-results>.
  7. Richard Haass, "The Pandemic Will Accelerate History Rather Than Reshape It," *Foreign Affairs*, April 7, 2020. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-04-07/pandemic-will-accelerate-history-rather-reshape-it>

## Prospects for U.S. Policy toward East Asia

### *U.S.-China Relations in the Biden Administration*

It is anticipated that U.S.-China rivalry or U.S.-China strategic competition will maintain in the Biden administration. It is mainly because China's capabilities, like economic and military power, are getting closer to those of the United States. The Trump administration identified China as a revisionist and put more emphasis on competition over cooperation with China. U.S. military strategy is also changing from war on terrorism to war among global powers, which is mainly focused on preparing for the military competition with China.

It does not mean, however, that U.S. is willing to get involved in serious competition or jump in a war situation with China in a short time period. U.S. has maintained its relative advantages over China politically, economically, and militarily, and, thus, it is likely that U.S. wants to maintain the current balance of power. Meanwhile, U.S. will make efforts to enhance its military capabilities to cope with the situation where China will directly challenge U.S. hegemony in the long run.

Even if U.S.-China strategic competition will persist, it is expected that U.S.-China relations could be less tense and their competition will be highlighted around high tech industries in the Biden administration. It is anticipated that the Biden administration will consider both competition and cooperation with China although it will put more emphasis on competition. The 2020 Democratic Party Platform suggests that the Biden administration will continue to compete with China to preserve U.S. interests in trade and high-tech industries. However, it will not resort to self-defeating, unilateral trade wars or fall into the trap of a new Cold War because those mistakes would only serve to exaggerate China's weight, over-militarize U.S. policy, and hurt American workers. Instead, the Biden administration

will emphasize international norms and principles to correct China's unfair trade practices. In addition, it will closely consult with its allies to cope with the rise of China. Meanwhile, the Biden administration will be open to work with China to cope with global problems such as climate change, COVID-19, extremism, terrorism, and nuclear nonproliferation.<sup>8</sup>

China does not want to make U.S.-China relations get worse because it is relatively weaker in power competition with the United States. Chinese government is likely to argue that it does not want to challenge U.S. hegemony and alter the balance of power in the region. In addition, even if Chinese government maintains its strong response for its domestic audience when a conflict occurs between the two global powers, it is willing to make concessions to manage its overall relationship with U.S. by becoming more flexible in its trade with U.S. such as purchasing more American products to reduce U.S. trade deficit with China and negotiating with U.S. about reforming its state-owned companies to meet the international norms. Although the negotiating process could be tough, such Chinese proactive efforts could be positively received by U.S. and provide the Biden administration with more political ground and space to manage its relations with China.

Taken together, it is more appropriate to posit that both countries do not want to go extreme in their relations. The two global powers are deeply interrelated with each other and they still need to work together for their national interests. In addition, they are willing to be open to cooperate with each other to cope with global problems. Last but not least, the Biden administration's policy on China would be more stable and predictable than his predecessor. It is expected, therefore, that U.S.-China strategic competition will persist but their relations could be more manageable in the Biden administration than it did in the Trump presidency.

### *ROK-U.S. Relations in the Biden Administration*

It is expected that the Biden administration will restore its alliance system. Biden mentioned during the presidential campaign that his administration would make efforts to reinvent its relationships with allies, partners, and international organizations. Therefore, ROK-U.S. alliance will be robust in the Biden administration. Two countries have many things in common in stably managing the security situation on the Korean Peninsula and maintaining U.S. leadership in the region.

It does not necessarily mean, however, that two countries have the exactly same interests in operating the ROK-U.S. alliance. What the Biden administration wants to reinvent its alliance system includes its allies' extended roles and contributions such as improving interoperability, enhancing defense capabilities, extending responsibilities for the regional security, and extended financial contributions. Accordingly, two countries need to closely communicate and cooperate with each other to narrow the gaps that they could have in operating the ROK-U.S. alliance such as burden sharing and North Korean issues.

Regarding the issue of burden sharing, for example, South Korea has offered to increase its cost sharing burden by 13 percent from 870 million dollars it paid under last year's agreement, but the negotiations are currently deadlocked because the Trump administration requested a 50 percent spike to 1.3 billion dollars. Biden criticized during the presidential campaign that president Trump extorted Seoul with reckless threats to withdraw U.S. troop from South Korea under the situation where its ally has been facing the serious nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. He also mentioned that, as president, he would stand with South Korea and strengthen the ROK-U.S. alliance to safeguard peace in East Asia. It is expected, therefore, that the issue of burden sharing

will be resolved reasonably with the advent of the Biden administration.

### *North Korea-U.S. Relations in the Biden Administration*

The Biden administration is expected to resume bilateral working-level talks with Pyongyang in close consultation with Seoul and Tokyo. During the presidential campaign, Biden criticized President Trump for failing to make substantial progress through his 'summit diplomacy' with Chairman Kim Jung Un and just legitimizing the Kim's regime. Biden made it clear that he would not rely on personal ties with Chairman Kim to resolve North Korean issues. Biden also mentioned that he would maintain sanctions on North Korea until the North abandons its nuclear and missile programs while his administration would strengthen its ties with Seoul and Tokyo and urge China to put pressure on North Korea. It is expected, therefore, that the Biden administration's North Korean policy will proceed through working-level negotiations. If there is substantial progress in the working-level talks, they will likely discuss the possibility of holding a summit meeting between Washington and Pyongyang.

It is anticipated, however, that it will take some time before U.S. is ready to resume the talks with Pyongyang. The Biden administration will have to pay most attention to addressing domestic issues like fighting against the coronavirus and recovering economy in its early days in office. In addition, it usually takes about several months for a new U.S. administration to form its cabinet and finish its policy reviews. Washington also wants Pyongyang to take additional denuclearization measures

8. Democratic Party, "2020 Democratic Party Platform," <https://www.demconvention.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-07-31-Democratic-Party-Platform-For-Distribution.pdf>.

to prove its commitment to denuclearizing itself to resume the nuclear talks. These situations suggest that North Korean issues are not likely to draw much attention to the Biden administration's early days in office and it is likely that North Korea-U.S. talks would be able to resume next summer at the earliest.

Pyongyang is expected to choose to improve the inter-Korean relations as a way of revitalizing North Korea-U.S. talks. North Korea has had difficult internal situations such as economic sanctions, COVID-19, and flood and it is inevitable to resume the talks with U.S. to essentially resolve the problems. If North Korean issues do not draw much attention to the Biden administration, Pyongyang's choice could be either making a serious provocation or improving the inter-Korean relations.

There is a possibility that North Korea will make a serious provocation to show off its improved Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) capabilities to attract U.S.' attention and enhance its bargaining power. Pyongyang could perceive that it does not need to observe the threshold of the talks with the Trump administration any longer and that demonstrating its improved ICBM capabilities could be a strategically useful way to enhance its bargaining power. If Pyongyang proves that its improved ICBM capabilities can pose a direct threat to the U.S. mainland, it would not be easy for the Biden administration to close the window of the talks with North Korea and return to the 'strategic patience'. Ignoring such a direct security threat to the U.S. mainland could be criticized domestically that the Biden administration does not take an appropriate response to protect U.S. citizens' safety and property from an unacceptable security threat of a rogue nation.

It would be inevitable, however, that North Korea-U.S. relations will get worse and it will take some time before they can talk about the resumption of the nuclear talks. In addition, The term of Moon Jae-in government, which has been willing to improve the inter-Korean relations,

will be over during the first half of 2022 and, thus, North Korea's serious provocation could result in losing the possibility of resuming the nuclear talks with South Korea's active mediating and facilitating roles next year. In addition, North Korea's serious provocation will push China to put more pressure on North Korea and make it harder for China to assist North Korea economically. Chinese assistance is currently vital for North Korea to manage its economy and, thus, it would not be an easy choice that North Korea is willing to make its relations with China worse by a serious provocation. These overall situations suggest that it is more likely that North Korea will improve the inter-Korean relations and expect South Korea's active roles for the resumption of North Korea-U.S. talks.

The outlook that North Korea is likely to choose to improve the inter-Korean relations as a way of revitalizing its talks with U.S. also reflects the situation that China could play a limited role to resume the nuclear talks as U.S.-China conflict has been intensified. To make progress in the talks between North Korea and U.S., a third party's mediating and facilitating roles are needed because they have wide differences in their situational awareness and opinions. South Korea or China could play such mediating and facilitating roles for the nuclear talks. It is not easy to expect, however, that China would play an active role for the nuclear talks because of the intensifying U.S.-China conflict. Many Washington experts point out that it would not be easy for the two global powers to actively cooperate with each other for North Korean nuclear problems under the situation where U.S.-China conflict has been intensified. It is more likely that the Biden administration will push China to fully implement sanctions against North Korea rather than ask Beijing to play an active role to persuade Pyongyang to change its positions on the denuclearization.

The situation that Washington is getting more



aggressive to check the rise of China is the biggest challenge for Beijing. As a way of coping with such a challenge, China is trying to maintain good relationships with its neighboring countries, such as South Korea and Japan, to prevent them from leaning toward U.S. It is not likely, therefore, that China is willing to cause diplomatic troubles with U.S. and its allies to actively assist North Korea. In addition, China has considered its relations with U.S. when it makes decisions on North Korea-China relations. Accordingly, it is unlikely that China is willing to expand the scope of the conflict with U.S. to support North Korea more actively under the situation that its relations with U.S. is already the biggest challenge for Beijing. China cannot afford it.

These situations suggest that China is likely to prioritize managing North Korean issues stably, rather than actively support for North Korea's interests in the international community, for some time and continue to economically assist North Korea silently. Such limited levels of Chinese support will not be able to meet Pyongyang's expectations and need and, thus, Pyongyang will perceive that it would be a better option to utilize Seoul to resume the talks with Washington. Accordingly, it is more likely that North Korea will take a policy direction to improve the inter-Korean relations and expect South Korea's active roles to reactivate the nuclear talks. It is expected that North Korea will be more actively responsive to South Korea's proposals for improving inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation in the coming months. These situations suggest that there would be the second round of the bilateral talks between Washington and Pyongyang with Seoul's active mediating and facilitating roles with the advent of the Biden administration.

It is necessary to prepare for the second round of the nuclear talks among South Korea, U.S. and North Korea. The Biden administration will go through its policy reviews for several months and then its North

Korean policy will be more specified. Moon Jae-in government is required to play active roles to prevent North Korea from making a serious provocation and prepare for the resumption of the nuclear talks by closely communicating with Pyongyang and Washington.

In order to provide a momentum to resume the nuclear talks, it is necessary to discuss how to set the starting point of the negotiations. After the two summit meetings, both sides came to be fully aware of what the other side wants with regard to North Korea's denuclearization. Many Washington experts mention that the Trump administration's maximum pressure policy on North Korea has not met expectations. They point out that the possibility of North Korea's giving up its nuclear weapons is very low. Washington needs a more realistic approach to North Korean nuclear problems because Pyongyang has advanced its nuclear capabilities despite tough economic sanctions. Meanwhile, some point out that the Biden administration should not abandon what the Trump administration has achieved in the talks with North Korea, such as communication channels with Pyongyang and Steve Biegun team's discussions about North Korea's denuclearization process during the Trump administration.

Based on what has been discussed between Biegun team and North Korean delegation, it is necessary to come up with a more flexible denuclearization process that both sides could accept. Specifically, on the one hand, it is needed to clarify the end state of North Korea's denuclearization. It is essential to make sure that North Korea's complete denuclearization is the goal of the nuclear talks to stably manage the entire negotiating process. If it is not clearly set, there is a possibility that future negotiations could face difficulties arising from changes in strategic or political environments. Therefore, it is necessary to propose a more flexible and sustainable end state of North Korea's denuclearization. 'Complete dismantlement of all nuclear weapons and existing

nuclear programs and middle and long range ballistic missiles and ICBMs' could be an acceptable definition of North Korea's complete denuclearization.

On the other hand, it is necessary to provide North Korea with motivations for bringing it back to the negotiating table. Washington needs to provide Pyongyang with its list for corresponding measures showing how it could relieve or lift economic sanctions imposed to North Korea and guarantee North Korean regime security in accordance with Pyongyang's denuclearization measures. North Korea has argued that it already took denuclearization measures such as suspending nuclear and missile tests, shutting down Punggyeri nuclear test site, and handing over the remains of American soldiers killed in the Korean War. Pyongyang argues that it is Washington's turn to take corresponding measures in accordance with such denuclearization measures. It is expected that Washington's list for corresponding measures could provide Pyongyang with a useful justification for returning to the negotiating table, and increase its chances of accepting deals in the denuclearization process.

Last but not least, it seems appropriate for North Korea's denuclearization process to proceed with two steps: 'nuclear freeze' and 'nuclear dismantlement'. To restart the denuclearization process, Pyongyang needs to freeze its nuclear capabilities which include suspending nuclear and missile tests and nuclear materials production, and shutting down facilities to produce fissile materials. Washington then needs to provide Pyongyang with corresponding measures such as partial lifting of economic sanctions, the end-of-war declaration, and establishment of liaison offices. Both sides' sincere commitment to taking such initial measures would not only contribute to enhancing mutual trust but also function as a momentum to make further progress in the negotiations. Then the two sides will be able to gradually move on to the second step of the denuclearization

process. What involved parties learned from the negotiating process for the September 19 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks and the following implementation measures is expected to contribute to facilitating the negotiating process.

## Conclusion

As examined above, it is expected that U.S.-China strategic competition would persist in the Biden administration. The outlook poses a serious challenge to South Korean diplomacy that needs to maintain the strategic balance between the two global powers. How can South Korean diplomacy find a breakthrough facing such a great challenge? South Korea's effective, successful handling of the coronavirus outbreak provides a strong momentum for the middle power to pursue a 'principled diplomacy,' aimed at advancing its national interests based on the principles of 'openness, transparency, and inclusiveness.'

The coronavirus, whose first case was reported in the Chinese city of Wuhan, was spread to South Korea. Faced with the spike in confirmed COVID-19 cases, South Korean authorities formulated and implemented a systematic model designed to combat the virus through fast diagnosis, contact tracking, and strict isolation measures. Combined with the devoted efforts of medical staffs and health officials and Korean people's mature civic awareness and cooperation, situations were brought under control in a rapid and timely manner. As a result, the Korean model of containing the virus without entry ban and lockdown measures drew international attention, and many countries came to perceive that the model was built on the universally acceptable principles of 'openness, transparency, and democratic procedures' and South Korean medical supplies are reliable. In other words, the international community witnessed how

successfully South Korea was coping with the pandemic crisis based on the universal principles and obtained a positive perception that South Korea is reliable and trustworthy.

The global spread of the principles of the Korean model has offered a strong momentum for South Korea to push forward its middle power diplomacy with universal principles: openness, transparency, and inclusiveness. Moon Jae-in government has expressed its intention to cooperate with core regional players based on the diplomatic principles. Specifically, with an open mind, South Korea welcomed both Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision of the United States and China's Belt and Road Initiative. It is also making consistent efforts

to figure out how its New Southern Policy could move forward with them.

South Korea's middle power diplomacy with the universal principles will support its strategic moves under the situation where the two global powers put pressure to South Korea to take a side between them. It is because such universal principles provide South Korea with a superior cause and allow the middle power to justify its strategic decisions between U.S. and China. When South Korea makes consistent efforts to pursuing its principled diplomacy, Korean middle power diplomacy will also be able to secure diplomatic ground and space to go with other middle power countries and expand its global influence.



# US Turn against China, 2020 Elections, Implications for South Korea

## Abstract

The American government's broad ranging efforts targeting an array of challenges to US interests posed by the policies and behavior of the Chinese government developed through close collaboration between the Trump administration and both Democrats and Republicans in the Congress. Emerging erratically in the first year of the Trump administration in late 2017, the US government's hardening against China later demonstrated momentum in gaining greater support in the United States. It reached a high point during the heat of the 2020 presidential election campaign as the most important foreign policy issue in the campaign. South Korea has shown more angst over its vulnerability to negative fallout from the growing US-China rivalry than any other regional power. South Korea is very exposed and has few good options for dealing with the intensifying US-China rivalry. Prevailing assumptions are that a tough US policy toward China will continue in 2021 and strong Chinese retaliation will follow South Korean moves to align with the United States in the rivalry with China.

## Introduction

Understanding how and why the sharply negative turn in American China policy came about during the Trump administration and the impact this turn had on the 2020 US elections has great importance for Americans and concerned foreigners, including US allies in South Korea. This assessment offers an explanation of the determinants and methods of the hardening of US policy and their implications regarding the US 2020 election. Following the results of the November election, the tough American opposition to Chinese challenges continues to have strong momentum and robust support from bipartisan majorities in Congress and an aroused American public. This makes the negative turn against

China hard to reverse amid prevailing circumstances impacting the incoming administration of Joseph Biden.

South Korea has been put in a vulnerable position, arguably more vulnerable than any other country, in the deepening Sino-American rivalry. The rivalry forces a South Korean balancing act as Seoul endeavors to sustain and advance close relations with its longstanding strategic ally, the United States, and its most important economic partner and powerful neighbor, China. This assessment concludes with an examination of the key factors that complicate decision making as South Korean leaders endeavor to satisfactorily balance often clashing US-China interests in charting approaches to these powers and regional affairs. The outlook is for more trouble ahead, though the Biden administration

will be more accommodating and responsive to South Korean concerns than the Donald Trump government.

## Countering China's challenges with a "whole of government" campaign, 2018

The Trump government's National Security Strategy of December 2017 and its National Defense Strategy of January 2018 employed harsh words about China not seen in official administration documents since before the Nixon administration. Signaling a fundamental shift in US policy toward China, the strategies viewed Beijing as a predatory rival and the top danger to American national security. Added to China's military power and assertive actions in the Asia-Pacific was the danger China posed to the United States as it carried out its plan to be the leading country in various high-technology industries seen as essential for sustaining US international leadership and national security.<sup>2</sup>

In communications with Congress, administration leaders repeatedly highlighted the latter danger, which represented a newly prominent and important issue in 2018 added to longstanding American grievances against China. US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer issued a dire warning against the many covert and overt ways China unfairly took advantage of the United States. He said such practices represented "an existential threat" to the United States. Meanwhile, FBI Director Christopher Wray highlighted for Congress another newly prominent issue, Chinese overt and covert influence operations, including espionage in the United States. He warned repeatedly that America needed a government and society effort to counter Beijing's perceived nefarious intentions.

Congressional Members of both parties agreed with the administration's serious and urgent warnings and began to take action, making 2018 the most active period

of consequential congressional work on China since the tumultuous decade after the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989. However, the broader impact on American politics was diluted for several reasons. First, President Trump did not use and appeared to disagree with the anti-China language seen in the administration strategy documents. And he repeatedly expressed friendship and respect for President Xi. Second, senior administration officials remained seriously divided on economic issues with China. White House economic advisor Gary Cohn's resignation in March 2018 weakened the moderates. Initial punitive tariffs ensued. Third, public opinion generally was unaware of the China danger and stuck to its longstanding view of not liking the Chinese government but also seeking to avoid trouble with China. Fourth, media remained largely unaware of the major shift.

The specific steps Congress used in hardening policy toward China involved:

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1. Robert Sutter is Professor of Practice of International Affairs at the Elliott School of George Washington University (2011- ). He also served as Director of the School's main undergraduate program involving over 2,000 students from 2013-2019. His earlier fulltime position was Visiting Professor of Asian Studies at Georgetown University (2001-2011).

A Ph.D. graduate in History and East Asian Languages from Harvard University, Sutter has published 22 books (four with multiple editions), over 300 articles and several hundred government reports dealing with contemporary East Asian and Pacific countries and their relations with the United States. His most recent book is *Chinese Foreign Relations: Power and Policy of an Emerging Global Force* Fifth Edition (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

Sutter's government career (1968-2001) saw service as senior specialist and director of the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division of the Congressional Research Service, the National Intelligence Officer for East Asia and the Pacific at the US Government's National Intelligence Council, the China division director at the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research and professional staff member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

2. White House, *National Security Strategy of the United State* (December 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>; US Department of Defense, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United State* (January 2018), <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

- extensive hearings on the challenges Chinese policies and practices pose for American interests
- a variety of individual bills on specific issues, some of which were incorporated into such important legislation seen as requiring congressional approval as the annual National Defense Authorization bill, and
- letters to the administration signed by bipartisan congressional leaders warning of Chinese actions and urging firm responses.

Broad ranging US government action against China's challenges became the law of the land with the passage in August of the National Defense Authorization Act FY-2019, the most important foreign policy legislation in 2018. Harsh language accused Beijing of using military modernization, influence operations, espionage and predatory economic policy to undermine the United States and its interests abroad. In response, the law directed a whole-of-government US strategy. On military issues, it required the Defense Department to submit a 5-year plan to bolster US and allied and partner strength in the Indo-Pacific region; extended the authority and broadened the scope of the Maritime Security Initiative covering Southeast Asia to include the Indo-Pacific region; required a US strategy to strengthen military ties with India; prohibited China's participation in Rim of the Pacific naval exercises; required a public report on China's military and coercive activities in the South China Sea; broadened the scope of the annual report to Congress on Chinese military and security developments to now include "malign activities" including information and influence operations, as well as predatory economic and lending practices; and limited Defense Department funds for Chinese language programs at universities that host Confucius Institutes.<sup>3</sup>

The Act's provisions on Taiwan reaffirmed various aspects of longstanding American commitments to Taiwan. The Act contained a separate set of provisions

to modernize, strengthen and broaden the scope of the interagency body, the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), to more effectively guard against the risk to US national security seen posed by Chinese and other predatory foreign investment. It also included key reforms in US export controls that would better protect emerging technology and intellectual property from Beijing and other potential adversaries.

At this time, Chinese officials responsible for US-China relations continued to reflect the optimistic view that whatever differences President Trump had with China could be dealt with readily through negotiations and making what the US president called "deals" that perhaps would involve some economic or other comparatively minor concessions from China. Thus, they and more senior Chinese leaders were not well prepared for President Trump decisive use of punitive tariffs against China beginning in June 2018.<sup>4</sup>

An administration announcement in June promised steep tariffs on \$50 billion Chinese higher technology imports seen to have benefited from China's abuse of American and international intellectual property rights. An announcement in July said planned punitive tariffs of 10% would be imposed on \$200 billion of Chinese imports. An August 1 announcement increased the rate of those proposed tariffs to 25% at the end of the year. As those tariffs were implemented in September, the United States threatened tariffs on an additional \$267 billion of Chinese imports if Beijing retaliated, which it promptly did with Chinese punitive tariffs covering most of China's imports of American products.

Throughout the fall, administration officials continued to turn up the rhetorical heat on China. In September, President Trump condemned China for influence operations seeking to undermine the Republican Party in U.S. midterm elections. National Security Council (NSC) senior China official Matthew Pottinger at Chinese Embassy National Day

celebrations issued a blunt warning of impending US competition. National Security Advisor John Bolton and Secretary of State Michael Pompeo doubled down in criticism of China in prominent media interviews.

Vice President Michael Pence inaugurated a new public phase of the Trump government's toughening against China in a speech in October 2018 explaining to the American people, media and international audiences the wide extent of the US policy shift and its purported durability. Citing the administration's national security strategy, he detailed key elements in the current wide ranging Trump administration response to China's many challenges.<sup>5</sup>

A negative atmosphere prevailed at the Trump-Xi summit at the G-20 meeting in Argentina on December 1. The summit resulted in a temporary halt to escalating US punitive trade tariffs against China, pending agreement involving extensive US demands by March 2019. Substantially adding to the negative atmosphere was the arrest on December 1 of the chief financial officer and daughter of the president of China's leading telecommunications firm, Huawei, by Canadian authorities in Vancouver for extradition to the United States. The US charges involved Huawei's involvement in subverting US sanctions against Iran. Beijing reacted strongly, arresting and detaining Canadians in China; but it avoided actions against the United States. More negatives followed with National Security Advisor John Bolton's strong attack on China's policies in Africa in a speech on December 13 and with President Trump's signing on December 31 of the Asia Assurance Initiative Act which provided \$1.5 billion in funding to support Asian allies and partners against China.

## Countering China in 2019-- implementation and uncertain resolve

### *Implementation*

As trade negotiations dragged on in 2019, administration spokespersons were publicly more restrained in criticizing China. But evidence of the whole-of-government pushback against Chinese practices continued. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and Assistant Secretary of State for Asian affairs David Stilwell delivering a series of speeches in Washington and elsewhere endeavoring to build understanding and support in the United States and abroad for the harder Trump administration approach to China. Pompeo made special efforts to persuade allies, US high technology companies, and US governors of the wisdom in avoiding interaction with the controversial Chinese high technology company Huawei on grounds of national security. The US government led efforts to create a growing united front of like-minded governments targeting Chinese predatory investment practices and industrial espionage seeking dominance in high technology industries and covert and overt influence operations among developed countries. There was closer collaboration among the United States and its allies and partners to share intelligence and other information and adopt mutually supportive countermeasures thwarting Chinese adverse practices. Notable results were tightening export controls and investment approvals, statements condemning Chinese

3. US Congress, House Armed Services Committee *Reform and Rebuild: The Next Steps—National Defense Authorization Act FY-2019* (July 2018), [https://armedservices.house.gov/sites/republicans.armedservices.house.gov/files/wysiwyg\\_uploaded/FY19%20NDAA%20Conference%20Summary%20.pdf](https://armedservices.house.gov/sites/republicans.armedservices.house.gov/files/wysiwyg_uploaded/FY19%20NDAA%20Conference%20Summary%20.pdf); Robert Sutter, "The 115<sup>th</sup> Congress Aligns with the Trump Administration in Targeting China," *PacNet Newsletter* No. 62, August 30, 2018. Available at <https://sigur.elliott.gwu.edu/2018/09/05/robert-sutter-pacific-forum-insight/>.
4. Evan Medeiros, "China Reacts: Assessing Beijing's Response to Trump's New China Strategy," *The China Leadership Monitor* (March 1, 2019), <https://www.prcleader.org/medeiros>
5. "Special Report: China and America," *The Economist* (May 16, 2019), <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2019/05/16/trade-can-no-longer-anchor-americas-relationship-with-china>

economic espionage, and strengthening surveillance of Chinese influence operations and espionage in a wide range of developed countries. US efforts to mobilize government and private sector investment in the Asia-Pacific to compete with China enjoyed strong support from allies and partners, Australia and Japan in particular.<sup>6</sup>

With increased funding from Congress, the US military increased the frequency of its freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea by warships and B-52 bombers challenging the massive Chinese territorial claim deemed illegal by a UN Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) tribunal in 2016. The American military operations were supported or complemented by military operations of allies Australia, France, Great Britain, Japan, and South Korea. Allied leaders along with India called on China to conform to the UNCLOS tribunal ruling and to refrain from militarization of Chinese holdings in the South China Sea.

The collapse of the protracted US-China trade negotiations amid considerable mutual acrimony in May 2019 saw President Trump and his government move swiftly to raise the tariff rate on \$200 billion of Chinese imports from 10 percent to 25 percent, and to begin consideration of tariffs on the remaining Chinese imports valued at \$250 billion a year. Amid intense US pressure on allies, partners and other countries to avoid allowing the controversial Chinese firm Huawei access to their communications and other sensitive information networks, the US issued an executive order imposed restrictions on exports to the firm that endeavored to cut it off from supplies of advanced computer chips the Chinese company relied on for substantial portions of its production. Departments in the government also were working on broader export controls as part of the pushback against China's challenges.

For its part, Congress sustained an anti-China drum beat with legislation, hearings, letters and other public bi-partisan demonstration to reassure Asia of US support in the face of China, to criticize China-Russia

cooperation, to condemn acute suppression in China's Xinjiang, to support demonstrators opposed to Chinese rule in Hong Kong, and to spotlight dangers posed by Confucius Institutes.

By this time, mainstream America media were no longer so distracted by President Trump's antics and they focused on the Chinese challenges to America. Showing some negative change in public opinion on China, a widely respected annual Gallup poll in early February 2019 found 21% of Americans now considered China the country's greatest enemy, compared to 11% at the same time in 2018. The level of American popular disapproval of the Chinese government also grew from the previous year.

American popular opposition to Chinese challenges grew especially among groups of disgruntled Americans now more focused on the China danger. Those groups, seen as key elements of President Trump's so-called political base, included 1) people afraid of being displaced by immigrants and perceived pernicious foreign influence; 2) workers concerned about being sold out to China and angry about the complicity of US business and government elites in the betrayal; 3) manufacturers worried about having their technology stolen and market access blocked; and 4) Christians frustrated with obstacles to proclaiming the Gospel with China as the largest malefactor. Meanwhile, Politico reported that China was "the global menace" featured above any other international danger at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference that President Trump addressed at length in March 2019.

One consequence of growing tensions between the US and Chinese governments was the atrophy of the scores of official dialogues used in the past to manage tensions and build positive interchange in Chinese-American relations. A similar atrophy impacted the wide variety of cooperative US-China programs fostered by many US government departments and agencies with Chinese counterparts.

China remained on the defensive, seeking to protect



its rights and interests but avoiding initiatives that might worsen the situation. Avoiding confrontation, Beijing focused on limiting risks while it pursued some opportunities for gains in the turmoil created by American policy and practice. Xi Jinping took personal responsibility to carefully manage U.S. demands. Xi and his colleagues also reassured the international community that China would be a source of stability and prosperity. They took some measures to stabilize China's immediate Asian periphery to limit its exposure to confrontation with Washington; looked for opportunities to expand its presence and influence; and advanced relations with Russia and others seeking to oppose and weaken U.S. power.

*Countercurrents showing uncertain resolve*

US public opinion of China continued to reflect little of the urgency and danger seen in Trump administration and congressional deliberations. In light of this political reality, the Democratic Party candidates seeking the nomination for the presidential race in 2020 and the media covering their campaigns showed little attention to China during 2019. Beijing's human rights abuses in Xinjiang and control in Hong Kong were uniformly and frequently criticized, usually without calling for strong US countermeasures to punish China. Media interviews with the candidates saw issues with China, if they came up at all, addressed toward the end of the discussion, not in the beginning.

Vice President Biden backed away from his remarks earlier in the campaign about the insignificance of China's challenge, but he repeatedly emphasized Chinese weaknesses in comparison to US strengths, asserting that China was in a much worse position than and no match for America. Senator Amy Klobuchar she seemed to graphically illustrate the campaign's limited interest in China when among the 100 steps she proposed to take in the first 100 days of her presidency

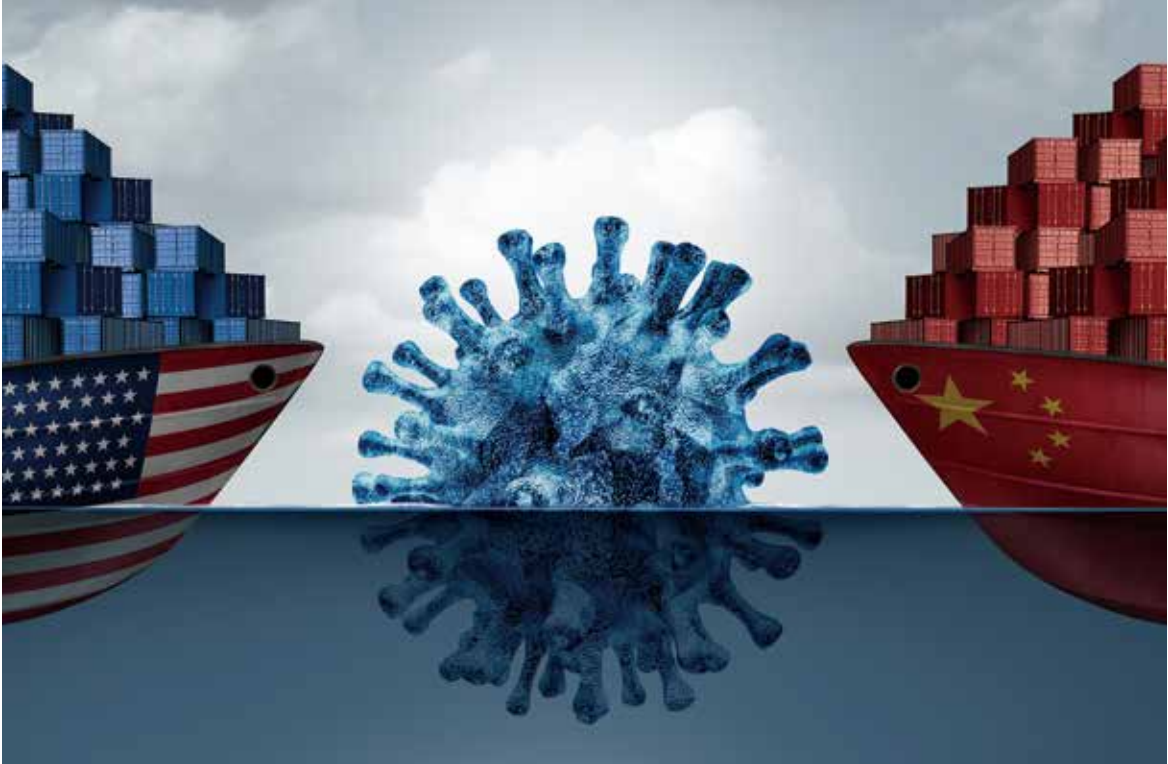
only one, against Chinese steel dumping, was about China and it came far down the list. Using recent polling data on US public opinion on China, Jake Sullivan, who served as Vice President Biden's National Security advisor, strongly endorsed in an interview in June 2019 a much more moderate American approach to China than seen in Trump administration-congressional deliberations.<sup>7</sup>

Congress seemed to add to ambivalence in US resolve to counter China's challenges in 2019. The most important foreign policy legislation of the year, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2020, had scattered provisions dealing with China, but showed little of the priority and substance given to China in the previous year. China issues were addressed in many other proposed bills, but the vast majority of such legislation garnered little congressional support.

Meanwhile, President Trump remained avowedly unpredictable, capable of switching from a hard to soft policy or the reverse, depending on his assessment of the pros and cons. Seemingly underlining this reality were the contested claims by former National Security Adviser John Bolton in a book publicly available in June 2020 that the president during the summit meetings with Xi Jinping in December 2018 starting the US-China trade negotiations pleaded with Xi for China to buy more American products in order to help the US president get reelected.

6. For a review of relevant developments in 2019-2020, see Robert Sutter and Satu Limaye, *A Hardening of US-China Competition: Asia Policy in America's 2020 Elections and Regional Responses* Honolulu: East-West Center November 2020, p. 8-22.

7. "Episode 135: How might a Democratic president deal with China?" Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy: China in the World podcast cast transcript (June 25, 2019), [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Episode\\_-\\_How\\_Might\\_a\\_Democratic\\_President\\_Deal\\_with\\_China\\_1.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Episode_-_How_Might_a_Democratic_President_Deal_with_China_1.pdf); Robert Sutter, "Has US government angst over the China danger diminished?" East-West Center Washington, *Asia-Pacific Bulletin* No. 497 (January 2020).



## 2020 Election Campaign, Pandemic, and Public Opinion Solidify US Against China

The plans of both the Republican and Democratic election campaigns were upended with the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic hitting the United States with devastating consequences involving over 200,000 dead by September 2020 and the deepest dive in economic growth and employment since the Great Depression ninety years earlier. The Trump campaign plan was overtaken by events. Self-isolation required to curb the virus' lethal impact not only reinforced economic decline but curbed the president's tools to mobilize electoral support through mass rallies held in key battleground states. For a time, Mr. Trump and his political advisors employed the president's personal leadership in daily White House media briefings on the "war" against the virus as a means to portray him as a "wartime president" before the public. But the president's performance was erratic, showed lapses of judgment and poor knowledge, and coincided with widespread complaints by state and local officials of the ineffective US government responses

to the crisis. One result was a decline in approval ratings of the president's leadership.

The need for campaign messages that would help reelect the president coincided with an increase in leadership invective in US-China relations. With the phase one trade deal concluded in January 2020, the whole of government counters to Chinese challenges resumed with greater prominence. The Attorney General and the FBI came out strongly in February against Chinese theft of US high technology information and the negative enormous consequences of China's quest for high technology leadership at American expense. Secretary Pompeo made speeches critical of China at home and abroad; Pompeo, Defense Secretary Mark Esper and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi pressed anti-China warnings at the annual Munich Security Conference in February. The Defense Department for the first time in April deployed US warships to counter Chinese harassment using Coast Guard and maritime militia of other South China Sea claimants surveying for oil and gas in areas within China's broad territorial claim. The State Department was much more public in rebuking Chinese "bullying" and supporting the other South China Sea claimants, viewing

Beijing's claims as illegal.

As the coronavirus hit the United States with a vengeance beginning in March, Beijing sought the global leadership spotlight as a benefactor supplying needed protective equipment abroad and providing a model of efficient methods in checking the spread of the virus in China. The Chinese narrative ignored China as the source of the virus and the poor initial Chinese handling of the virus leading to devastating consequences for other countries including the United States. A tipping point came when the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman and other Chinese diplomats abroad suggested in March that the virus was clandestinely planted in Wuhan by visiting US military delegates. The very strong US reaction saw President Trump emphatically call the virus the "Chinese" virus for several days, even though American opinion leaders judged the term racist. Secretary Pompeo pressed international bodies to examine the source of what he called the "Wuhan" virus. Chinese leaders responded negatively to the "smear" campaign.

The acrimonious charges and countercharges undoubtedly influenced American opinion of the Chinese government. A wide variety of polls showed unprecedented levels of disapproval of the Chinese government, even more than following the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989. Chinese leader Xi Jinping was viewed with no confidence by over 70 percent of Americans. China was seen as a threat by 9 in 10 Americans. Republicans were more supportive than Democrats in calling for tougher US measures in response to Chinese responsibility for the crisis, but all registered broad antipathy for the Chinese government and its leadership.<sup>8</sup>

By April the Trump administration and associated political action committees set an agenda for the campaign that featured President Trump standing up firmly to Chinese challenges and depicting Vice President Biden as a holdover from the failed China

policies of the past. The president stopped publicized communications with Xi Jinping as he pursued a tougher posture toward China. In April he said he was "tired of China." In May, he threatened to "cut off the whole relationship" and advised in regard to negotiations with Xi Jinping that "right now I don't want to speak to him." He was ambivalent about the phase one trade deal with China, advising that "I feel differently about that than I did three months ago."<sup>9</sup>

Concurrently, the administration went forward with what one administration official labeled an explosion of administration initiatives countering Chinese challenges. The US government added restrictions impeding advanced chip exports to Huawei. It blocked visas for Chinese students with affiliation with Chinese military institutes who were involved with US university research on advanced science and technology. Administration officials announced success curbing the tendency of US companies to "off shore" manufacturing to China and other locales and sought further decoupling of the US and Chinese economies. President Trump blocked substantial US government pension funds investments in China.<sup>10</sup>

The Trump administration conducted major shows of naval and airpower in the South China Sea married with strong advances in American diplomatic support for Vietnam, the Philippines and other claimants against what the US government emphasized as China's illegal territorial claims. There followed a remarkable series of

8. Kat Devlin, Laura Silver and Christine Huang, "US views of China increasingly negative amid coronavirus outbreak," *Pew Research Center* (April 21, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/04/21/u-s-views-of-china-increasingly-negative-amid-coronavirus-outbreak/>; Marc Caputo, "Anti-China sentiment is on the rise," *Politico* (May 20, 2020), <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/20/anti-china-sentiment-coronavirus-poll-269373>

9. Morgan Phillips, "Trump on China trade deal," *Fox News* (May 19, 2020), <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trump-china-trade-deal-i-feel-differently>.

10. Josh Rogin, "Trump's China hawks are on the loose," *Washington Post* (June 26, 2020), A 23.

affronts against China involving coordinated speeches by administration leaders depicting the escalating competition with China in stark Cold War terms. Sanctions against top level Chinese leaders and many companies involved in the crackdown on Xinjiang were imposed. The US revoked Hong Kong special status in US government regulations, furthered efforts to cut Huawei's access to high level computer chips, further restricted visas for Chinese journalists, and cancelled visas for 3,000 Chinese graduate students with ties to the Chinese military. It abruptly ordered the closing of the Chinese consulate in Houston. With the president no longer interested in contact with China and Republicans seeking to use harshness toward Beijing against the Democrats in the election, the whole of government effort reached new heights, with future actions including the possible refusal of visas for Chinese Communist Party members, sanctions on banks in Hong Kong, and blocking Chinese firms from US stock exchanges.<sup>11</sup>

The administration's hard line against China provided the backdrop for President Trump and his supporting campaign apparatus to target Vice President Biden as weak on China, and Biden returned in kind. As Beijing moved to impose a national security law on Hong Kong despite US and other international opposition, Biden said on May 23 that Trump has given China "a pass on human rights"; he added, "it's no surprise China's government believes it can act with impunity to violate its commitments. The administration's protests are too little, too late—and Donald Trump has conspicuously had little to say." In response, Trump signaled he was willing to scrap his trade progress with China in order to punish China over the coronavirus and Hong Kong, adding in a tweet on May 26 that "Nobody in 50 years has been WEAKER on China than Sleepy Joe Biden. He was asleep at the wheel. He gave them EVERYTHING they wanted, including rip-off trade deals. I am getting it all back!"<sup>12</sup>

Though some commentators in the United States, China and elsewhere warned of a new Cold War,

Americans broadly agreed with the hawkish policy toward China. Foreign Policy concluded on the basis of recent polling published by the Pew Research Center that "American public attitudes toward China have hardened for good, which indicates that the Trump administration's aggressive approach could become the new norm burying 50 years of engagement" with China.<sup>13</sup>

## Election Results and Outlook

The impressive recent momentum of domestic forces supporting strong American opposition to the broad range of challenges posed by Xi Jinping's China will be hard to stop. For its part, the Chinese government continues its offensive challenges with little sign of meaningful compromise and Xi Jinping promises to stay in power for a long time to come.

The incoming Biden administration won a narrow victory amid an acutely divided electorate. It faces runoff in two Senate races in Georgia in early January which are likely to result in continued Republican control of the Senate, precluding Democratic control of the national policy agenda in the coming two years. President elect Biden has avowed interest in a nuanced approach to China, seeking cooperation with China on common interests while staying firm on areas of difference. Nevertheless, significant easing of US pressures on China without substantiated concessions from Beijing will almost certainly face strong Republican criticism in the Congress and perhaps some Democratic criticism given the continued bipartisan support in Congress for an across the board hardening targeting China. American media and public opinion also generally favor a resolute US approach against an untrustworthy Chinese leadership. Against this background, wisdom may argue against the Biden government initiating such a contested debate over China when domestic support is needed for higher priority concerns including dealing



with the pandemic, its negative economic consequences, and protracted racial injustice.

Of course, circumstances influencing the recent negative dynamic in US-China relations could change. For instance, the Chinese government could see the advantage of accommodating some to the American concerns about Chinese government policies and practices. A US-China military confrontation might cause one or both sides to seek negotiations in the interest of avoiding war. Americans' willingness to counter Chinese practices could be deemed as too costly amid economic and budget crises now facing the United States. For now, none of these possible changes seems likely.

## Implications for South Korea

South Korea shows more angst over its vulnerability to negative fallout from the growing US-China rivalry than any other regional power. South Korea is very exposed and has few good options for dealing with the intensifying US-China rivalry. Prevailing assumptions are that a tough US policy toward China will continue in 2021 and strong Chinese retaliation will follow

South Korean moves to align with the United States in the rivalry with China. South Korea joining US efforts to restrict Huawei and other Chinese high technology companies, and South Korea working more closely with US security measures such as purported deployment of longer-range US missile systems in South Korea, are salient examples of actions that are seen likely to prompt harsh Chinese countermeasures against South Korea.<sup>14</sup>

Adding to this dilemma is the fact that escalating US pressure on China recently involves extreme rhetoric

11. Edward Wong and Steven Lee Myers, "Hawks set China and US on path to lasting divide." *New York Times* (July 26, 2020) A1.

12. Sabrina Rodriguez, "Trump increasingly cornered on China," *Politico* (May 26, 2020), <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/morning-trade/2020/05/26/trump-increasingly-cornered-on-china-787870>

13. Dan Haverly and Augusta Saraiva, "When it comes to China, Americans think like Trump," *Foreign Policy* (July 30, 2020), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/30/pew-research-trump-china-american-public/>; Laura Silver, Kat Delvin and Christine Huang, "Americans Fault China for its role in the spread of COVID-19," Pew Research Center (July 30, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/07/30/americans-fault-china-for-its-role-in-the-spread-of-covid-19/>.

14. The judgments in this section are based heavily on the author's extensive interviews with 20 Korean specialists in October 2020 and summarized in Sutter and Limaye *A Hardening of US-China Competition: Asia Policy in America's 2020 Elections and Regional Responses* p. 35-38

including ideological attacks against China's ruling communist party which implies US goals of containment and possibly regime change which South Korea cannot support. The absence of a clearly defined US goal in its tougher posture toward China is a major problem for South Korean decision makers trying to find a suitable path forward between pressures from the US and China. The difficulty in finding such a path was compounded by the possibility that President Trump's interest in making deals could have resulted in a surprising US-China breakthrough. The difficulty remains as President Biden seeking cooperation on important issues such as climate change could prompt a substantial thaw with China. Such developments were seen by South Korean specialists as likely to jeopardize US allies that have joined American-led efforts to counter China's challenges.

Other factors also complicate South Korean decision-making on the US-China rivalry. First, North Korea's nuclear weapons development and threatening posture toward South Korea, which enhances the importance of close alliance with the United States, requires Seoul to work constructively with both Washington and Beijing. Second, the high priority that the current, progressive South Korean president continues to give to improving relations with North Korea despite profound obstacles enhances the importance of working cooperatively with China as well as the United States to influence North Korea. Third, the unprecedented pressures from the Trump administration for major increases in South Korean host nation support for US forces deployed in South Korea and repeated disparaging remarks by President Trump about South Korea alienate South Korean public opinion and add to difficulties in the South Korean government's management of relations with both the United States and China. The latter complication is forecast to moderate with the Biden administration's emphasis on cooperation and coordination with allies, including South Korea.

Meanwhile, South Korean specialists see no

substantial positive advantage for South Korea in the US-China rivalry. The perceived economic costs of the US-China competition are particularly salient. South Korean businesses are deeply interconnected with the Chinese market and production chains involving China. Thus, South Koreans worry over where and how South Korea fits into evolving US efforts to diversify supply chains away from China and how it can align with US objectives on pushing back on China's economic statecraft, especially China's legal and illegal efforts to acquire technology, without punishing Chinese retaliation. Korean specialists note that their country's industries are very concerned that they will be forced into a situation where they may be isolated or marginalized by a US economy decoupled from China; and be subject to harsh reprisals from China for any acquiescence to US demands for pushing back against China's economic statecraft and decoupling. There is a deep sense that Korea has benefited economically from thirty years of dual-engagement with both the United States and China, which has made Korea a top ten global economy, but that the outlook for such positive achievements is challenged. A key Korean judgment was that "the United States cannot simultaneously pursue a China containment policy and a broader economic decoupling and protectionist policy."

In sum, American domestic politics have led to legal mandates for a whole of government campaign to counter China's challenges that has broad congressional, media and public support. The momentum supporting this broad US effort is strong and the acute American rivalry with China is forecast to continue into 2021. The consequences of the sharp negative turn in US China policy are particularly complicated and hard to balance for South Korea. The incoming Biden government promises a more accommodating US posture toward allies, including South Korea, but the continuation of the overriding US competition with China will continue to vex South Korean policymakers in the days ahead.

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# The Interdependencies of Security Conceptualization and Provision: National, Environmental, and Human(e) Security<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Security is an increasingly contested concept in terms of referent object and the scope of issues covered in its conceptualization and provision. Traditional approaches have addressed the survival of states in a hostile operating environment focusing on questions of war and peace from the perspectives of national or systemic interstate security. Even if traditional approaches can be seen to have functioned reasonably well within the limited parameters of the old state-centric operating environment, they have fallen short in addressing new challenges to state and international security that do not originate from state actors. They have also proven to be very limited in their ability to embrace nontraditional security (NTS) perspectives relevant to the provision of human security for vulnerable individuals and groups, or biospheric security. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding and consideration of the intersections and interdependencies between different levels of security analysis and policy provision. This paper, therefore, advocates a holistic model of understanding of the mechanisms of the contemporary security operating environment, and comprehensive policy prescription to address old and new security challenges, traditional and NTS issues, and the spillover between them.

## Introduction

In contemporary discourse and increasingly in practice, security is an essentially contested concept in terms of referent object, the scope of issues covered (the degree of securitization), and indeed within specific issues. New thinking on security has come to the fore, with input from academics, and from practitioners in international organizations (IOs) and middle-power states. The rise of nontraditional security (NTS) perspectives and 'new security challenges' have seen the broadening of the scope

of enquiry along the x-axis of issues from a strict focus on national survival in a hostile operating environment and

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2. Based on a presentation by the author at the Jeju Peace Forum on November 7, 2020; prepared for the *Jeju Forum Journal*.

questions related to war and peace, to include some or all of the following: a focus on non-military rather than military threats, transnational rather than national threats, and multilateral or collective rather than self-help security solutions.<sup>3</sup> Within both security and peacebuilding discourses, there have also been increasing emphases on individual human beings and the planet or global biosphere, corresponding to a bi-directional expansion along the y-axis of referent objects.<sup>4</sup>

In policy terms, the quest for security is the attempt to secure freedom from existential threat for a referent object, whether state, international system, individual, or biosphere. Each of these referent objects faces an expanding multitude of threats, no longer limited to that of violent conflict. Conceptualizations of security in the academic and policy communities need, therefore, to embrace a comprehensive understanding of security. In a similar manner, peace can no longer be characterized as the simple absence of war, (if that was ever truly the case), but rather, in our efforts to construct a truly sustainable peace, we need to broaden our understanding of those forces which stimulate conflictual relationships.<sup>5</sup> Johan Galtung has characterized this as the difference between ‘negative peace’ and ‘positive peace.’<sup>6</sup> Through such an understanding, it becomes possible to generate policies and initiatives that will alleviate conflictual pressures.

This paper first, therefore, addresses the mechanisms of traditional understandings of security, and the descriptive, predictive, and prescriptive capacities of the dominant state-centric security paradigms. These traditional approaches do a reasonable job of assessing state and systemic security challenges and policies but are unable to address human-centered or transnational societal security concerns. The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at all levels of society, and growing awareness of the challenges to mankind from the natural environment as well as from mankind to the biosphere, have demonstrated that the old, state-centric models of

security are insufficient to address the contemporary threat environment. Hence the second analytical section explores the evolution of the NTS, human security, and humane security paradigms and their intersections. The third section explores the complexities, interdependencies, and interrelations between the different security conceptualizations, and concludes with a call for comprehensive security conceptualization and governance policy prescription.

## **Traditional Security Analysis and Policy Prescription**

Traditional security considerations dominated domestic and international agendas throughout the Cold War, when two geopolitical blocs posed existential threats towards each other, and the dominant powers on each side engaged in arms proliferation to a degree that went far beyond mutually assured destruction (MAD). They still tend to be the default mindsets of many security actors. In terms of ‘winning’ or managing conflicts in one’s national interest, deterring acts of aggression from others, and the building of peace, the focus of traditional state-centric or national security provision has been on changing the rational payoffs associated with different courses of action. Specifically, measures have been considered whereby the consequences of decisions likely to lead to war would be made costlier, or the pursuit of peace the more attractive option. This representation of security decision-making has been termed the rational actor model (RAM).<sup>7</sup> This leads to a “conception of international politics as ‘essentially bargaining situations’ in which alert, intelligent, coordinated nations speak and move in order to influence other nations by changing their expected payoffs.”<sup>8</sup> The RAM and its implications for strategic engagement, therefore, form the basis of policy prescription for both neorealist coercive approaches and





neoliberal engagement and transformative approaches.

From a realist perspective, the costs of unfavorable decision-making outcomes can be increased either at the implementation means stage (defense), or at the post-action ends stage (deterrence). Conflict is inevitable but can be managed in one's interest through the strategic application of coercive forces.<sup>9</sup> The decision whether to launch an attack is based on rational calculation of the costs of carrying out the assault combined with the probability and scale of an improved post-bellum operating environment. Thus, if one wishes to persuade an aggressor not to attack, one or both variables must be altered. This can be done through strategic acts involving defensive measures and spending.<sup>10</sup> Alternatively, in contrast to dissuasion by defense, dissuasion by deterrence operates by frightening an opponent out of attacking, not because of the difficulty of launching an attack and carrying it home, but because the expected reaction of the attacked will result in one's own severe punishment.<sup>11</sup>

Liberal approaches work on the other end of the equation outlined. An opponent is likely to embark on a course of action that will result in an outcome detrimental

to one's interests, if, for them, the costs of the action are less than the difference between an unhappy status quo and a happier post-bellum operating environment. Rather than increasing the costs to them of the action (defense)

3. Amitav Acharya, "Human Security: What Kind for the Asia Pacific?" in Dickens, D. (Ed.) *The Human Face of Security: Asia-Pacific Perspectives*. Canberra Papers in Strategy and Defence, No 144 (Canberra: Australian National University, 2002).
4. Alpaslan Özerdem and SungYong Lee, *International Peacebuilding: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2016), p.146.
5. Özerdem and Lee *International Peacebuilding*, p.82.
6. Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research" *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 6, No. 3 (1969), pp.167-191
7. See generally, Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban missile crisis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Longman: New York, 1999).
8. Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), p.22.
9. Oliver Richmond, *Peace in International Relations Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2020), pp.62-67.
10. Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma" in Betts, R.K. (Ed.) *Conflict After the Cold War: Arguments on Causes of War and Peace* Fifth Edition (New York: Routledge, 2017) pp.389-404: 393-7.
11. Kenneth N. Waltz, "Why Nuclear Proliferation May Be Good" in Betts, R.K. (Ed.) *Conflict After the Cold War: Arguments on Causes of War and Peace* Fifth Edition (New York: Routledge, 2017) pp.418-430: 420.

or decreasing the desirability of the outcome (deterrence), one should instead increase the desirability of the status quo. This can be achieved either through the offer of direct incentives (appeasement) or through a process of making everybody better off through cooperation and the generation of collective goods.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, economic interdependence exacerbates the costs of war.<sup>13</sup> Incentives for conflict are lower as “in a relatively open liberal international economy, access to raw materials, finance, and markets is obtained at less cost and on a greater scale than would be possible via military control of territory or spheres of influence.”<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 1: Rationality and the Decision to go to War<sup>15</sup>**

Status Quo Operating Environment	Macro-Decision (War implementation stage)	Post-Bellum Operating Environment
[a] Systemic costs of operating environment for state actor.	[c] Cost of waging war.	[e] Benefit of post-bellum.
[b] Systemic benefits of operating environment for state actor.	[d] Benefit of waging war	[f] Cost of post-bellum.
Inducements/Appeasement	Defense	Deterrence

Figure 1 maps out the cost-benefit equation referred to in the assessment of both realist and liberal rationales for war and peace. If  $[a]-[b]>[c]-[d]$  or  $[c]-[d]<[e]-[f]$  then it is rational for a revisionist state to resort to the use of force to change the status quo. Those states who do not wish to see the status quo changed, or force resorted to, can use the strategies in the third row to alter the cost benefit analysis of the revisionist state in any of the columns, so that either  $[a]-[b]>[c]-[d]$  or  $[c]-[d]>[e]-[f]$ .<sup>16</sup> These rational inducements for peace also apply at the systemic level of conflict management. It is important that no state develops the capacity as well as the rational incentive to endanger what international order and systemic security is present in the international operating environment. In other words, no state should be granted the opportunity and motivation to become a ‘revisionist’ state.

A stable international security system is one in which all great powers are satisfied with the distribution of authority in the system to the degree that there is no benefit for any actor greater than the cost involved in changing the system. An unstable international system is one in which changes in technology, the distribution of power, or other variables, either mean that benefits of change for one or more influential actors now exceed the costs, or that the relative benefits and costs are unclear and thus it may be worth a gamble. This means that one or more of the great powers is dissatisfied with the current system and may seek to change it due to a shift in their cost-benefit analysis calculations, thereby becoming a revisionist power.

Stability can be ensured through reducing the desire of a revisionist power to enact change, reducing their capacity to achieve it, or through presenting them with an overwhelming concentration of power in the hands of forces committed to the maintenance of systemic peace and security. These forces could be represented by a hegemon (hegemonic stability theory and hegemonic peace), by a winning coalition of likeminded great powers, or through the mechanisms of collective security (discussed below). In a similar manner, Lepgold and Weiss contrast decentralized (realist) and collective (liberal modernist) types of international security systems, as detailed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Conflict Management Systems<sup>17</sup>**

	Decentralized Conflict Management	Collective Conflict Management
<b>State behavior is</b>	Unconstrained by general norms	Coordinated with others, based on general norms
<b>Decision criteria are</b>	Individualistic self-help: what particular states think is best	Pursuit of broad, group-based self-interest
<b>Goal of action is</b>	Pursuit of narrowly defined self-interest	What is best for group or system
<b>Military forces are</b>	Independent: no need to share resources, command, etc.	Part of a collective force: resources, command, etc. are joint
<b>Action occurs when</b>	State’s individual interests are at stake	Peace and stability of self or others is threatened

A decentralized conflict management order is essentially one based on self-help in pursuit of national interest – i.e. states only intervene when directly affected. Leggold and Weiss define collective conflict management (CCM) as a pattern of group action, usually but not necessary sanctioned by a global or regional body, in anticipation of, or in response to the outbreak of intra- or interstate armed conflict, including any systemic effort to prevent, suppress, or reverse breaches of the peace where states are acting beyond the scope of specific alliances.<sup>18</sup> Implicit in this description is the concept of automatic response to breaches of the peace.

This is also the foundation of the principle of collective security upon which both the League of Nations and the United Nations (UN) were founded. Under such systemic security conditions, peace seen as being indivisible, and an attack on one is regarded as an attack on all. If all acknowledge and commit to a duty to come to the aid of any victim of aggression, and punish the aggressor, regardless of the identity of either, then peace ensues from the rational impossibility of any one state winning a war against all the rest. Furthermore, rule utilitarian evaluation of the benefits of a peaceful operating environment versus the costs of a Hobbesian war of all-against-all, makes it rational for all to sign up to such a regime, even if, at times, based on simple utility, defection would seem to be the dominant strategy.

Yet many contemporary threats to national and regional security do not lend themselves to the machinations of state-centric rational payoffs, revolving as they do around trans-state or sub-state issues such as climate change, environmental degradation, pandemics (including COVID-19), refugee flows and forced migration, poverty and distributive injustices, and natural and, given the role of human agency, nature-induced disasters. These new security challenges and NTS issues threaten national and international/systemic security, but they also threaten the human security of

vulnerable human beings and groups, individually and collectively.<sup>19</sup>

## NTS, Human Security, and Humane Security

New thinking on security has tended to come not from those great powers most preoccupied with relative distributions and concentrations of military power and war-fighting capabilities, but rather from academics and practitioners associated with IOs such as the UN, as well as from middle power states, notably Canada and Norway, but also, perhaps most importantly, from Japan.<sup>20</sup> Critical and postmodern perspectives have tended to conceive of security as emancipation, or the autonomy to carry out what one would freely choose to do, while the constructivists of the Copenhagen School introduced the concept of securitization, examining how certain issues are transformed into a matter of national security by those

12. See generally Bruce Russett and John O'Neal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: Norton, 2001).

13. Özerdem and Lee *International Peacebuilding*, p.40.

14. Barry Buzan, and Gerry Segal, "Rethinking East Asian Security" in Klare, M.T. and Chandrani, Y. (Eds.) *World Security: Challenges for a New Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

15. Figure developed by author based on his own research.

16. Brendan Howe, "Comprehensive Security and Sustainable Peacebuilding in East Asia: Reflections on a Post-COVID-19 Operating Environment," *Korean Journal of Security Affairs* 25(1) (2020): pp. 11-12.

17. Adapted from: Joseph Leggold and Thomas G. Weiss, 1998. *Collective Conflict Management and Changing World Politics*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 6.

18. Leggold and Weiss, *Collective Conflict Management* p. 5.

19. Amy L. Freedman and Ann Marie Murphy, *Nontraditional Security Challenges in Southeast Asia: The Transnational Dimension* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2018) pp.1-5.

20. Nicholas Thomas and William T. Tow, "The Utility of Human Security: Sovereignty and Humanitarian Intervention," *Security Dialogue* 33, no. 2 (2002): 177-92, 180.

acting on behalf of a state.<sup>21</sup> In the early 1980s Japan adopted a 'comprehensive security' (*sogo anzen hoshō*) policy under the direction of Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki. Comprehensive security not only looked beyond the traditional security elements of individual self-defense by focusing on regional and global security arrangements, but also stressed the need to take into account other aspects vital to national stability, such as food, energy, the environment, communication, and social security.<sup>22</sup> It was an explicitly inclusive approach that emphasized multilateralism, and that can be traced to Japanese thinking on security as far back as the 1950s.<sup>23</sup>

These NTS agendas have grown in impact and popularity to the extent that they amount to a post-Cold War security norm, at least from the perspectives of good governance, both domestic and international. In particular, Human security is nested within the distinct strands of new thinking on security. Indeed, soon after the collapse of the Cold War world order, at the start of the 1990s, within the UN system, it was first given explicit acknowledgement by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in the 1992 Agenda for Peace, where the concept was cited in relation to preventative diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict recovery. The concepts related to this strand of NTS, however, had a significant pre-history in the work of international commissions.

The Brandt Report focusing on development issues has been produced by the Independent Commission, first chaired by Willy Brandt (the former German Chancellor), since 1980. It argues for a comprehensive conceptualization of security combining social, economic, and political threats with the more traditional military ones. Likewise, in 1982 the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues—commonly (known as the Palme Commission) adopted its first Final Report published under the title 'Common Security,' by which was meant "States can no longer seek security at each other's expense; it can be obtained only

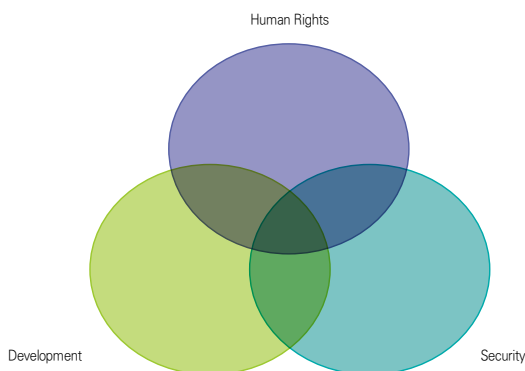
through cooperative undertakings." Finally, the 1987 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, otherwise known as the Brundtland Report, linked aspects of security, development, and the environment, in an important international precursor not only to global governance initiatives on human security and human development, but also to the humane security paradigm developed below. "The Commission focused its attention in the areas of population, food security, the loss of species and genetic resources, energy, industry, and human settlements - realizing that all of these are connected and cannot be treated in isolation one from another."

The seminal text on human security at the UN is usually considered, however, to be the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Report 1994, which examined new dimensions of human security and focused attention on the dual agenda of freedom from fear and freedom from want.<sup>24</sup> This report outlined seven components of human security including (i) economic security which requires an assured basic income; (ii) food security which means all people have both physical and economic access to basic food; (iii) health security which means freedom from diseases and infection; (iv) environmental security such as freedom from dangers of environmental pollution; (v) personal security which is physical safety; (vi) community security which ensures survival of traditional cultures and ethnic groups; and (vii) political security which means protection of basic human rights and freedoms.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, the Commission on Human Security (CHS) established under the chairmanship of Sadako Ogata, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate in Economics, in its final report *Human Security Now*, defines human security as protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations, and creating political, social, environmental,

economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity.<sup>26</sup>

Fundamentally, human security is a multi-disciplinary paradigm for understanding global vulnerabilities at the level of individual human beings. It incorporates methodologies and analyses from a number of research fields including strategic and security studies, development studies, human rights, international relations, and the study of international organizations. It exists at the point where these disciplines converge on the concept of protection.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, there is a close relationship between human security envisioned as the protection of persons, and human development as the provision of basic human needs.<sup>28</sup> As former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan observed, “we will not enjoy security without development, development without security, and neither without respect for human rights. Unless all these causes are advanced, none will succeed.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, human security exists at the intersection of the three governance pillars of the UN: Security, Development, and Human Rights, as portrayed in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: The Three Pillars of the UN**



Human security, while widely accepted globally, remains controversial and subject to competing interpretations in two ways. First, the two elements

of freedom from fear and freedom from want have received different degrees of emphasis, resulting in ‘narrow’ definitions focusing primarily on the former, and broader definitions which encompass human development perspectives to a much greater extent. There is even a geopolitical divide, with ‘Western’ states and commentators emphasizing narrow freedom from fear and the protection of human rights, whereas ‘non-Western’ interpretations place a greater emphasis on development. These geopolitical divides are also reflected in the second area of contestation, the relationship between human security, the responsibility to protect (R2P), and national sovereignty. Non-western states and commentators, in particular those that have been subject to colonialization, fear that the human security paradigm is little more than an attempt at continuing Western interventionary hegemonic practices. Essentially the ‘West’ holds a narrow view of human security, but an interventionary interpretation

21. Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997).
22. Tsuneo Akaha, “Japan’s Comprehensive Security Policy: A New East Asian Environment,” *Asian Survey* 31, no. 4 (1991): 324–40.
23. *Comprehensive Security in Asia: Views from Asia and the West on a Changing Security Environment*, ed. Kurt W. Radtke and Raymond Feddema (Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 2000).
24. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: UN, 1994).
25. UNDP *Human Development Report 1994*: pp. 24-33.
26. Commission on Human Security (CHS), *Human Security Now* (New York: CHS, 2003): p. 4.
27. Timo Kivimäki, “Western and East Asian Protection of Human Security” *Asian International Studies Review* Vol.21 No.1 (2020) pp.1-24: 3-4.
28. Oscar A. Gomez and Des Gasper, “Human Security: A Thematic Guidance Note for Regional and National Human Development Report Teams” (UNDP: 2013) [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/human\\_security\\_guidance\\_note\\_r-nhdrs.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/human_security_guidance_note_r-nhdrs.pdf).
29. Kofi Annan, “In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All” *Report of the Secretary-General* (2005). [https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/in\\_larger\\_freedom.shtml](https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/in_larger_freedom.shtml).



of the R2P, with the two being closely linked; whereas in other regions the linkage between the two is rejected, and a broad conceptualization of human security along with a non-interventionary understanding of the R2P dominates.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, Bong-hyun Kim, President of the Jeju Peace Institute, initiated the paradigm of ‘Humane Security’ which was then further elaborated upon by Seung-chul Chung.<sup>31</sup> According to this conceptualization, while the emergence of the human security concept has shifted the focus from the security of states to that of individuals, humane security shifts attention once more toward nature, highlighting the

“importance of an equal and fair relationship between humans and nature, while also paying attention to nature’s character in generating the sources of new threats such as climate change and pandemic.”<sup>32</sup> It challenges the recognition of human beings as the sole sovereign subjects possessing inalienable rights and authority to use and exploit nature, emphasizing a need to accept nature as a sovereign subject, not as an object. “In other words, humans and nature should form a relationship that mutually respects each other as equal subjects. Only when such a relationship is established can humans refrain from over-exploiting nature and seek a harmonious and sustainable relationship with it.”<sup>33</sup>

The concept of humane security, therefore, embraces elements of both the human security paradigm as detailed above, and the environmental security tradition. Environmental security is a policy area in which all the classes of political actor interact; both affected by and able to affect significant elements of the paradigm. It is of growing importance in absolute terms (the biosphere is increasingly endangered by human activity), relative terms (when compared with other security conceptualizations), and academic terms. Policy options and implications are increasingly cross-border or global and are not amenable to RAM pressures. Rather than the tit-for-tat nature of traditional security interactions, environmental security is best modeled by the game theoretical model of a 'tragedy of the commons,' whereby if each actor pursues their narrow selfish interests it will result in catastrophe for all.

From a global governance perspective, the UN has launched multiple initiatives, but remains challenged in its aspirations by the legacies of traditional national security and national interest considerations. These include the 1972 UN Conference on the Human environment in Stockholm which contributed publicity, a declaration on principles, an action plan of recommendations, and a resolution on institutional and financial arrangements. The Stockholm declaration established limitations to sovereignty, noted duties incumbent on state actors, as well as the common heritage of mankind's resources. It also established monitoring networks, created the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to serve as a propagation and organizational framework, and stimulated NGOs and individual governments to act. This was followed by the above-mentioned Brundtland Commission which introduced the concept of sustainable development; the 1987 Montreal Protocol addressing ozone depletion; the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio which launched the United Nations Framework

Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); the 1997 Kyoto Protocol which extended the UNFCCC with more stringent measures; and the 2015 Paris Agreement, which was an agreement within the UNFCCC, dealing with greenhouse-gas-emissions mitigation, adaptation, and finance. The environmental security paradigm has created lots of awareness, some government, IO and NGO action, but not enough enforcement or binding mechanisms.

The intersection of human beings and the environment from the perspective of mutually constituted security threats has also been referenced in the development of the concepts of the 'Anthropocene' and 'ecocide.' The Age of the Anthropocene refers to that era when the greatest impact on mankind's natural operating environment is Man himself. Much of this impact has been negative, an unfortunate byproduct of modernization and development. Ecocide, which also reflects a legalist approach advocated by the initiators of the humane security paradigm, literally means 'killing the environment.' Proponents argue that the crime should be listed alongside and in addition to the four international crimes detailed in the R2P: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression, and thereby perpetrators should be subject to prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC).<sup>34</sup> Table 1 outlines the parameters of these different conceptualizations of security and their relationship to threats.

30. Brendan Howe, "Human Security, Peacebuilding, and the Responsibility to Protect in East Asia" *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* Vol. 7 No. 2 (2019): pp. 183-218; p. 184.

31. Seung-chul Chung, "Humane Security: nature as a sovereign subject" *Jeju Peace Institute Peacenet Issue 2020-22 (2020/8/25)*. <http://jpi.or.kr/?p=15575>

32. Chung, "Humane Security"

33. Chung, "Humane Security"

34. Sophie Yeo, "Ecocide: Should killing nature be a crime?" *BBC* November 6, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20201105-what-is-ecocide>

**Table 1 Levels of security/insecurity and existential threats**

Type of security	Main actors	Existential threats from	Referent objects	Issues
Traditional	States	States	States	Defense, deterrence, balance of power
Comprehensive/ New security	Inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), states	Non-state actors, environment	States and communities	Water, food, environmental hazards, "natural" disasters, energy, terrorism, international crime, pandemics.
Environmental/ Humane security	States, IGOs, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Biosphere	States, multinational corporations (MNCs), communities, development	Ecospheres, biosphere, localized ecosystems	Climate change, global warming, sustainability, the Anthropocene, ecoide, biodiversity, the global commons, pollution, consumption, pandemics, legal personality, responsibility to protect (R2P).
Human security	IGOs, states, NGOs, international community	Environment, states and non-state actors	Individuals and vulnerable communities	Explosive remnants of war (ERW), peacekeeping operations (PKOs), R2P, humanitarian intervention, shelter, food, water, stability, sustainability, "nature-induced" disasters, conflict transformation, basic human needs.

Despite remaining distinct in terms of focus and referent objects, there is a close relationship between traditional and NTS approaches, and considerable spillover between them. All forms of security imply the existence of a referent object free from threats to its continued existence. Likewise, insecurity means that the referent object is not able to enjoy such freedom from threat. Vulnerabilities relate to the likelihood that the referent object(s) will be exposed to existential threats. All of these levels of security and insecurity are intricately linked in a non-hierarchical causality, with the potential to spill over across realms in any direction. These intersections are further developed in the final section.

## Complexities, Interdependencies, Interrelations, and Prescriptions

The negative consequences of conflictual operating

environments and relationships can spill over both downwards from international and national insecurities to human vulnerabilities, and in the opposite direction. National insecurity can divert resources from human development, distort budgetary allocations, leaving little for human-centered development and resilience building, and exacerbate both distributive injustice and environmental degradation.<sup>35</sup> It can create a permissive political circumstance where national security is privileged over human rights.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, it is likely to produce and perpetuate an operating environment within which the exceptional use of internal as well as external violence by the state becomes a permanent feature of the state.<sup>37</sup> The human costs of modern conflicts are borne, primarily, by the most vulnerable sections of society.<sup>38</sup>

The legacies of conflicts can impact on the human security of the most vulnerable for years, decades, or even generations to come. Postbellum threats to both life and well-being include the breakdown of law and order, the spread of disease due to refugee camp overcrowding, poor nutrition, infrastructure collapse, scarcity of medical supplies (although ironically often a proliferation of illicit drugs), and continued criminal attacks on civilian populations, unemployment, displacement, homelessness, disrupted economic activity, stagflation, and perhaps, most directly, explosive remnants of war (ERW) contamination. ERW include unexploded ordnance (UXO), landmines, and abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO). Negative effects include physical harm, amputation and death, psychological trauma, food insecurity, infrastructure limitations, and increased rebuilding costs. The costs of funerals or extended medical care can impose insupportable burdens on poor families and communities, thereby functioning as a poverty multiplier, as these vulnerable individuals and groups are forced to sell off the very assets they need to lift themselves out of their desperate conditions in order



to meet them.

On the other hand, human insecurity can lead a group of victims to take refuge in a neighboring country, impacting upon the latter's security conditions. Furthermore, those refugees may regroup and undermine the security of those who forced them to flee. Lack of food or energy can undermine national cohesion and weaken national strength, increasing national insecurity, or likewise lead to trans-border migration. Environmental degradation can also pose national security challenges through the intervening variables of human insecurity and climate refugees.<sup>39</sup> Desperate conditions among the disaffected youth of refugee camps or inner cities have the potential to produce fertile breeding grounds for religious extremism or terrorism. Indeed, the root of many conflicts in the contemporary international operating environment can be found in the sub-state level of domestic societal tensions, whether relating to the frustration of basic human needs, lack of distributive justice, structural violence, or expectancy gaps.

Health crises impact the socio-economically most vulnerable populations with the greatest severity, as has been seen during the COVID-19 pandemic mortality rates. Furthermore, in many countries, those with pre-existing and undiagnosed chronic diseases will not get care and may die from lack of attention and treatment.<sup>40</sup> Thus, poverty serves as a health insecurity multiplier. At the same time, COVID-19, and government responses to it, have served as a poverty multiplier, thrusting many more into conditions of human insecurity in terms of lack of freedom from want. The lockdown policies of many governments have corresponded with an uptick in domestic violence and suicide statistics, further demonstrating the increased insecurity of vulnerable individuals and groups.

Despite clearer skies and waterways as a result of the lockdown, potentially leading to fewer deaths as a result

of environmental health issues, researchers are now uncovering a link between pollution and the severity of the impact of the disease.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, concerns are emerging over the huge amount of non-biodegradable waste being produced, used, and discarded, in terms of masks and personal protective equipment (PPE). Finally, the poor are most vulnerable to the consequences of environmental degradation, poverty often precludes sustainable development practices, and natural disasters are exacerbated by environmental degradation.<sup>42</sup> Thus, a vicious cycle of insecurity exists beyond the reach of state-centric security models and policymaking.

Within governance literature, human security, development, and poverty are readily understood as interrelated and connected in a complex causality. These linkages are even more apparent when it comes to consideration of environmental degradation and

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35. UNDP *Human Development Report* "What is Human Development?" (2015). <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/what-human-development>.
  36. David C. Unger, *The Emergency State: America's Pursuit of Absolute Security at All Costs* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012).
  37. Jae-Jung Suh, "Rethinking National and Human Security in North Korea." In Park, K. (Ed.) *Non-traditional security issues in North Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), p.5.
  38. John Tirman, "The Human Costs Of War: And How To Assess The Damage," *Foreign Affairs*, October 8 2015. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2015-10-08/human-cost-war>.
  39. Simon Lauder, "Climate Change a Huge Security Problem: Keelty" *ABC News*. 25 September 2007. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2007-09-25/climate-change-a-huge-security-problem-keelty/680208>.
  40. Andrew Y. Chang and Michele Barry, "Covid's medical devastation will be felt by millions who never contract the disease" *CNN* April 21, 2020. [https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/21/opinions/medical-cost-of-covid-19-is-bigger-than-virus-chang-barry/index.html?utm\\_content=2020-04-22T00%3A30%3A26&utm\\_source=fbCNNi&utm\\_term=link&utm\\_medium=social&fbclid=IwAR1U-fddYQ56HCZ686n4iSLjSJ2ot6T0XouBMw2hztFQjQD2yaxukmZ55c](https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/21/opinions/medical-cost-of-covid-19-is-bigger-than-virus-chang-barry/index.html?utm_content=2020-04-22T00%3A30%3A26&utm_source=fbCNNi&utm_term=link&utm_medium=social&fbclid=IwAR1U-fddYQ56HCZ686n4iSLjSJ2ot6T0XouBMw2hztFQjQD2yaxukmZ55c).
  41. Isabelle Gerretsen, "How air pollution exacerbates Covid-19" *BBC* April 28, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200427-how-air-pollution-exacerbates-covid-19>.
  42. Brendan Howe, "Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar: The Perfect Storm?" in Hernandez, Kim, Mine, & Ren (Eds.) *Human Security and Cross-Border Cooperation in East Asia* (London: Palgrave, 2018), pp.111-132.

natural disasters. Natural disasters lead to human and economic losses with the potential to have a long-term impact on national economies, in turn leading to a new generation of vulnerable extreme poor. The extreme poor need resources to survive, and often resort to short-term desperate and unsustainable measures degrading the natural environment. This degraded environment in turn increases vulnerability to natural disasters. In this circular linkage, the poor are the most vulnerable when natural disasters occur, and human security issues are the most pronounced in areas of heaviest dependence on natural resources.

In order to break these vicious cycles of insecurity spillover, resilient communities must be constructed, and they must be built from the bottom up in harmony with local values and nature, rather than the top down and imposed through national security and development policy platforms, focusing on the domination of nature. Furthermore, as families, neighbors, and local authorities are likely to be the first responders assisting those affected by natural disasters, local communities must not only be educated and trained but also empowered. Contemporary critical perspectives call for “positive, proactive programs that promote peace building, rather than negative, reactive programs intended to reduce violence” and a focus on promoting “harmony, understanding, and effective problem solving.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, a focus on how to bring people constructively together to build a whole greater than the sum of the parts, rather than on how to keep them apart in order to mitigate against the worst manifestations of conflicts of interests. The logical implications of this broader, deeper, transformative approach to peacebuilding include a much greater focus on both human security and humane security rather than the security of states.<sup>44</sup>

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43. Paul Kimmel, “Assessing the Impact of Peace Building Processes.” *Modern Science and Vedic Science* Vol.5, No.1-2 (1992), p.125.

44. Earl Conteh-Morgan, “Peacebuilding and Human Security: A Constructivist Perspective.” *International Journal of Peace Studies* Vol.10, No.1 (2005), p.69.