

Preface

The U.S. relationship with the Korean peninsula is both multidimensional and complex—multidimensional, because it spans virtually the entire spectrum of domestic and international issue areas (ranging from politics, military security, and economics to culture, science, and technology); and complex, because Washington's policies on these issues vary and interact in a complicated manner, sometimes reinforcing but at other times conflicting with one another. Multidimensionality and complexity have characterized the pattern of U.S.-Korea relations as they have evolved through many phases of continuity and change, and they will continue to do so in the future.

While the diplomatic relationship between the two nations dates back more than a century, the U.S. presence in Korea began in earnest with the end of World War II. From the 1945 division of the peninsula and the ensuing U.S. military rule of the southern half, through the Korean War and the rebuilding of the war-torn south, and to Seoul's emergence as an industrial power and its entry into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United States has been a peacekeeper on the Korean peninsula and a strong supporter of South Korea. With the end of the Cold War, pressures began to mount for the United States to reevaluate its relationship with the two Koreas. Hence, the Korean peninsula has once again become a focal point of U.S. foreign policy.

The end of the bipolar era has presented the United States with a new reality in Korea: while maintaining a defense commitment to Seoul, Washington can no longer treat Pyongyang solely as a target of deterrence. As the regime and society in North Korea search for a place in the post-Cold War international system, the United States is being asked to help it survive the transition. The difficulty is to do so without estranging South

Korea. Put simply, what should be Washington's policy toward Seoul and Pyongyang as the trilateral relationship undergoes structural transition?

The question is doubly challenging in that the structural shift is not isolated to the trilateral relationship alone. Instead, it influences and is influenced by interaction with the other three actors in the region—China, Japan, and Russia. In particular, Beijing and Tokyo have huge stakes in what happens to the trilateral relationship among Washington, Seoul, and Pyongyang, although China's interest is more political, whereas Japan's is more economic. Though it must be interested in Korean affairs, Russia does not appear to be in a position to have a critical impact.

Delineating the dynamics of the relationship among the United States and the two Koreas, especially in the regional context of Northeast Asia, is a truly demanding task, requiring systematic research. As a first step toward such an endeavor, the Forum on Korean Affairs at Northwestern convened an international conference in March 1997 in Evanston under the theme of "Washington-Pyongyang Rapprochement and Security of the Korean Peninsula." Contained in this volume are revised and updated versions of the papers presented at the conference. The basic premise underlying the book is that a new triangle is emerging among Washington, Seoul, and Pyongyang in which political, military, and economic variables interact in a hitherto unknown way.

For now, the triangle is not quite fully drawn, since Cold War-like confrontation is still a major determinant of inter-Korean relations. Yet, with the United States at the apex, a figure is definitely taking shape in which at least the two sides connecting Washington with Seoul and Pyongyang are clearly discernible, with the base of the triangle, linking the two Koreas, at a formative stage. This configuration is a reflection of the current situation, which requires that the United States play the role of a "balancer" or "arbiter" between the two Koreas, even though, in theory, Seoul and Pyongyang need to iron out their differences between themselves. Just as the triangle is at a state of infancy, our studies too are exploratory in nature. It is hoped that the arguments and analyses contained in this book will encourage both cross-Pacific and inter-Korean discussion on the future of the Korean peninsula and the role of the United States therein.

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The Forum on Korean Affairs at Northwestern was established in June 1996 as part of the university's plan to build a program of Korean studies. The Forum's primary function is to promote an understanding of Korean affairs in the United States and specifically the Midwest.

As in any enterprise, the beginning was the most difficult part. The Forum owes its birth to many people on both sides of the Pacific. President Henry S. Bienen of Northwestern University gave blessing and support to

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