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Kim, Wonjung

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How does the alliance security dilemma affect the ROK-US alliance?

Student: Wonjung Kim

Student number: S2180235

Supervisor: Dr Stephen Haigh

Co-reader: Dr Marco Verschoor

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Abstract

Although the number of interstate wars declined, alliances remain a vital element in contemporary international relations. This research analyses the influence of the alliance security dilemma on states' post-alliance formation strategies. Existing literature expands on the origins of alliances, and potential options state can choose. However, they do not clarify why states decide to adhere to or distance themselves from their partners. Therefore, it is imperative to understand how states react to external stimuli by adopting appropriate policies. This thesis aims to fill the gap by clarifying under which conditions do states select adhesion or distancing. It theorises around the realist school of thought, marrying structural realism with neoclassical realism. This paper uses the interpretivist method based on scientific realism to analyse the relationship between the alliance security dilemma and states' alliance strategy, utilising the political orientations of governments as intervening variable. This research insists that when a state fears abandonment, it adheres to its ally whereas, it distances from its partner when it fears entrapment. These findings indicate that states react to structural challenges more fervently than to political orientations.

Key words: Alliance security dilemma, entrapment fear, abandonment fear, political orientation, post-alliance formation strategy, adhesion, accommodation, hedging, distancing

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Alliance Security Dilemma and the ROK-US Alliance

Introduction

Despite the decreased occurrence of interstate wars, alliances remain a crucial element in international politics. Regardless of multilateral institutions that preserve world peace, powerful coalitions dominate security dynamics in perilous regions. As a result, there are broad literature on the origins of alliances that explicate why states form them. In the international relations scholarship, the realist school of thought dominates the discourse (Mearsheimer, 2014). Most notably, Waltz's (2010) balance of power theory and Walt's (1985) balance of threat theory present compelling illustration on the subject. However, in contrast to the vast literature on the causes of alliance formation, there exists significantly less attention on how states behave after the formulation. Still, scholars shed light on the relationship between external stimuli and states' alliance policies, often replacing the structural causes with state-level or individual-level variables. Amongst such works, Snyder's (1984) writing on the alliance security dilemma serves as the basis of understanding states' alliance strategy. Yet, they do not fully elaborate on why states often choose to adhere to their allies or distance themselves from their partners. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to theory-building on states' post-alliance formation strategy, concentrating on under which conditions they select adhesion or distancing.

This study will theorise around a realist logic of alliance politics. It will embrace bedrock assumptions of realism while seeking to refine it by formulating a mid-range theory. Thus, this research assumes that the international system is anarchic, coercing states to prioritise their survival and national interests (Mearsheimer, 2014; Waltz, 2001). Also, although structural realism's emphasis on the dominant role of system-level factors will remain

crucial in this paper, this study will marry it with neoclassical realists' stress on state-level variables.

Generating a theory will derive from the case of the alliance between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States (US). It is a complex case that entails multidimensional aspects that will contribute to the theorisation. Throughout history, it endured various structural and domestic changes that deserve attention and thorough analysis. Moreover, its current importance in international politics makes it a pivotal case for the study of states' alliance strategy. Therefore, this paper will theorise by asking the research question *How does the alliance security dilemma affect the ROK-US alliance?*

This research will adopt inductive reasoning to accomplish its goal. It will observe the case of the ROK-US alliance to identify a pattern and develop a sound theory. It will use an interpretivist approach based on scientific realism, concentrating on theorisation rather than hypothesis-testing. As there lacks sufficient literature on the subject, it is more meaningful to develop a theory through causal narrative (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2013). It will analyse the case by engaging in scholarly debate, interpreting the data, and devising sound hypotheses for the theory. Accordingly, this study aims to contribute to the accumulation of knowledge in the field with its findings.

The structure of the research is as follows. It will first illustrate existing literature on alliance politics, focusing on its origins and states' strategies. Then, it will delineate the theoretical framework and structure for this research. Following these, it will address the research design, including case selection, methods, and operationalisation. After establishing the nuts and bolts of the thesis, it will analyse the ROK-US alliance to generate a theory. Finally, it will conclude by discussing the findings and suggesting further research.

Literature Review

Origins of Alliances

Literature on alliance politics predominantly revolves around the realist school of thought. Scholars in this tradition tend to emphasise structural causes as the origins of the alliance system. Although other theories provide different insights into the subject, most notably constructivism, the core rationale of alliance formation largely remains states' national interest. Among the various approaches, the balance of power theory is the best-renowned theoretical proposition (Wohlforth, 2010). It assumes that because the international system is anarchic, states prioritise their survival as their prime goal (Waltz, 1967). Therefore, states worry about the dangerous concentration of power and aim to prevent one country's domination (Mearsheimer, 2014; Waltz, 2010; Wohlforth, 2010). States seek power equilibrium (Morgenthau, 2006) through strengthening their capabilities or aggregating their capacities with potential allies (Wohlforth, 2010).

However, Walt (1985) asserts that states do not necessarily balance against the concentration of capability. Instead, they form a coalition against the most threatening power (Walt, 1985). For example, after the Second World War, European countries allied with the most powerful state, the US, to constrain the dominance of the Soviet Union. Thus, what defines the threat depends on one's aggregate power, geographical proximity, and others' perceptions of belligerent intentions (Layne, 2006; Walt, 1985; Wohlforth, 2010). These realist theories show a strong tendency of treating external factors as fundamental determinants of alliance formation. Although system-level elements undoubtedly influence states' choice, they do not fully describe the phenomenon.

Contrary to the structural theories, liberal and constructivist approaches to the subject accentuate other state-level and individual-level variables as the driving forces of alliance formation. For instance, Morrow (1991) suggests that when it comes to alliance-building, what affects states' behaviour is not the aggregation of capabilities but a trade-off between their autonomy and security. According to this model, states' power influence the calculation. The

more power one has, the more it worries about its autonomy (Morrow, 1991). This attribute appears more explicitly among democracies. The institutional restraint increases the cost of violating alliance commitment for democratic leaders (Chiba et al., 2015). Apart from the influence of regime type, states' perception of others plays a substantial role in coalition-building. Shin et al. (2016) depict that positive media coverage of other state increases the likelihood of allying, while adverse reports decrease the possibility. Also, through the social construction of alliance and enemy, states' identity shapes their threat perception (Chun, 2000).

Broadly defined, the existing literature elucidates why states ally with each other. As discussed, there are various reasons, depending on the theoretical scope. However, there exists a gap between how the structural challenges affect states and their post-alliance policies. Although previous studies expanded on potential options states can choose from, they did not parsimoniously clarify what coerces states to select such policies.

Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics

The principal contribution to the study of post-alliance formation politics is Snyder's (1984) seminal work on the alliance security dilemma. He analyses the effect of entrapment and abandonment fear, applying Herz's (1950) conceptualisation of security dilemma to alliance politics. According to this model, states encounter the dilemma of entrapment and abandonment (Snyder, 1984). This dichotomy is an inverse relationship. If states enhance their alliance commitments to overcome the fear of abandonment, the likelihood of entrapment escalates. Contrarily, if they distance themselves from their allies, they increase the possibility of abandonment. Moreover, the dichotomous option is a double-edged sword as it can both weaken and strengthen the alliance (Watts, 2020). However, Watts (2020) contends that overlapping interests of allies can reduce the risk.

Drawing from these findings, scholars have applied them to devise potential strategies states can pursue. The dominant options are balancing and bandwagoning, in which states either balance against the concentration of power or join it (Kang, 2009). Other policies are accommodation and hedging. The accommodative strategy aims to cooperate with a malign state while not necessarily bandwagoning (Kang, 2009). Hedging is gaining attention from countries as a viable and affordable option in contemporary international politics. States adopting this choice attempt to maintain cooperative and confrontational elements towards others while not balancing against them (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019; Kang, 2009). These strategies appear more clearly in East Asia than in any other regions. As China rises, East Asian states that are US-allies face a difficult choice (Tan et al., 2020). Cha (2000) claims that states' capabilities, threat perceptions and surroundings alter their alliance strategy.

Literature addressed in this section deepened the understanding of the alliance security dilemma and states' potential strategies accordingly. However, as Cha (2010) argues, existing works do not specify under which circumstances states choose adhesion or distancing.

Factors affecting the ROK-US alliance

Apart from theoretical propositions that illustrate the general tendency in alliance politics, it is imperative to review existing literature on the ROK-US alliance. Overall, scholars employ two different causal variables. The first group asserts that what influences the ROK-US relations is structural constraints. Surrounded by great powers, the ROK has changed its alliance policies in reaction to structural changes. The rise of China in the region heavily affected the foreign policy of the ROK (AIPS & CSIS, 2013; Kang, 2006; Kim & Cha, 2016; Kim & Heo, 2016; Manning, 2014). Also, the North Korean nuclear threat alarmed the ROK, testing the durability of the alliance (AIPS & CSIS, 2013; Bae, 2010; Kim & Heo, 2018; S. Lee, 2008; Shin, 2020). These system-level factors often led to the reinforcement of the alliance and often to its

weakening. The ROK's decision to deploy its troops to Iraq is a quintessential example of alliance-enhancing policy whereas, threatening to terminate the General Security of Military Information Agreement with Japan represents a hedging strategy.

The second group highlights the importance of domestic elements such as the political orientation of the ROK and the US governments and domestic perception towards each other. One of the most pressing issues is the ideologically different views on the alliance between the conservatives and progressives in the ROK. Conservatives tend to value the alliance to deter the rise of China and the North Korean threat whereas, progressives are more favourable to China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and argue for more autonomy within the alliance (Chae, 2010; Choi, 2017; Chung, 2021; Kim & Heo, 2018; Shin, 2019; Shin & Izatt, 2011). Other concerns include the perception of the South Korean public towards the alliance (W. Lee, 2012) and the transfer of wartime operational control (Minnich, 2020).

Theorisation of Alliance Security Dilemma

Previous studies have elaborated on the factors affecting states' alliance behaviours and applied them to the empirical case of the ROK-US alliance. Nevertheless, there exists a void in an attempt to organise the pattern theoretically. Most importantly, they failed to clarify the relationship between the variables that leads to a sound theory. Therefore, this research will theorise states' post-alliance formation strategy, parsimoniously formulating under which conditions states choose specific policies.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Scope

The theoretical foundation of this research is realism. Hence, this study will embrace its bedrock assumptions. First of all, states are the primary actors in international politics

(Mearsheimer, 2014; Waltz, 1990). However, this does not signify that other actors do not play a role, but they are less relevant to this study, as the fundamental subjects are states and the alliance they formed. Secondly, the international system remains anarchic (Donnelly, 2010; Mearsheimer, 2014; Waltz, 2010; Wohlforth, 2010). Consequently, states are driven by their national interests, prioritising their survival. Yet, it is not the only goal of states, but it is the primary objective.

Although this paper will adopt realist premises, it does not agree with all the assumptions. As Ripsman et al. (2016) claim, although the rationality of states remains crucial in international relations, political leaders often behave in contrast to rational expectation. Their threat perception or ideological beliefs can reshape their preferences (Chun, 2000; Shin et al., 2016) that are often irrational. Furthermore, this research insists that states' national interest is not static. Realists tend to define states' interests as survival in the anarchical international system and underestimate the complex dynamics that can change them. However, interest is not a parsimonious concept, and it is essential to take various factors that influence it into account. Therefore, national interest in this study connotes not only survival but also states' strategic preferences.

This paper will marry structural realism with neoclassical realism to construct a theory. It recognises the significance of system-level variables in international politics while perceiving the relevance of domestic factors. Yet, this research acknowledges that although state-level and individual-level elements impact the dependent variables, they are not powerful enough to identify a causal relationship. Consequently, it will pursue the theoretical design of neoclassical realism by emphasising the structural variables as an independent variable and assigning the role of intervening variable to domestic components. In this regard, this thesis is a theoretically eclectic attempt to generate a sound theory.

Throughout the analysis, the influence of other theoretical paradigms will be minimal. Although liberalism and constructivism can add value to the subject, they do not play a critical role in this study. The emphasis put on regime types by liberals does not wield a notable effect in this research as both the ROK and the US have been democracies. Additionally, the role of multilateral institutions is unavailing due to its irrelevancy in this topic. The structural challenges the case underwent did not derive from international organisations but conventional security threats. Likewise, core arguments of constructivism, such as the social construction of identities and discourses, are beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, this paper postulates that a realist understanding of international relations is more appropriate to meet the aim of this research.

Conceptualisation

The core concept of this research will be the alliance security dilemma. Snyder (1984) defines it as a conundrum of choosing how firmly to commit oneself to potential allies and how solidly to support them in a conflicting dynamic. From it, two sub-concepts arise, entrapment and abandonment. Entrapment occurs when a state is involuntarily dragged into a conflict due to an alliance commitment (Cha, 2000; Snyder, 1984). Contrarily, abandonment refers to the de-alignment or abrogation of an alliance (Cha, 2000; Snyder, 1984). In the existing literature, there have been no radical changes to these notions. For this study, these concepts will act as a structural factor and an independent variable.

The dependent variable is the states' post-alliance formation strategy which consists of adhesion and distancing. Adhesive policies lead to the strengthening of the coalition while distancing weakens it (Cha, 2016). They form a scalar spectrum involving accommodation and hedging. Therefore, the scope indicates the degree of alliance commitment.

Alongside these factors, this paper will utilise political orientation. It is a distinction of ideological beliefs of political parties (Chae, 2010; Chung, 2021; Kim & Heo, 2018). It can range from conservative to progressive depending on the party systems. For example, the South Korean presidents have been either Conservative or Progressive. Similarly, the US presidents have been either Republican or Democrat. This research will analyse the political-orientation combination of two governments to understand its role in a pattern.

Although there are potential variables that can affect the relationship, they do not play a vital role in this research. For instance, Ripsman et al. (2016) assert that leader images and strategic culture can influence the causal relationship between variables. However, the ROK presidents demonstrated strong ideological identification with their parties but not their own unique beliefs. Also, the ROK showed a tendency of changing its strategic culture through various defence reforms, although the ROK-US alliance remained crucial. Therefore, although this research acknowledges the potential significance of these factors, they are omitted for this specific case study.

Theoretical Expectation

Unlike hypothesis-testing research, this study does not have explicit hypotheses that it aims to falsify. Yet, this thesis expects the variables laid out in the conceptualisation section to have a causal relationship. Firstly, the ROK will pursue adhesive policies if it has an abandonment fear. It will attempt to strengthen the alliance to guarantee its survival in the region. Secondly, the ROK will distance itself from the US when it faces an entrapment fear. However, complete de-alignment with the US is not a viable option for the ROK as it can risk its strategic interests. In the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, this paper anticipates that the intervening variable will control the degree of the independent variable's effect on the

dependent variable. The relationship between the ROK and the US government will affect the foreign policy of the ROK.

Research Design

Case Selection

This research will be a case study of the ROK-US alliance. The fundamental reason for selection is the academic and practical importance of the case. Academically, there has been an abundant amount of analysis on the subject from the perspective of the US. Previous studies highlighted the factors around the US but not the ROK. Also, most of the examples they use are historical cases that do not necessarily apply to contemporary international politics. Hence, this thesis aims to unfold a narrative from the viewpoint of the ROK. Practically, as the geopolitical circumstances in East Asia are reshaping states' options, it is essential to understand and predict the consequences. In this regard, the ROK-US alliance is a pivotal case for theorisation as it experienced various structural and domestic changes throughout history.

Another reason for selecting this case is the author's in-depth knowledge of the Korean language and the ROK-US alliance dynamics. This case selection method allows the researcher to enrich the analysis through his sophisticated understanding (Fenno, 1986). Regarding the design of the thesis, the emphasis is on the dependent variable as it will address the causes of states' post-alliance formation strategy. Although it identified potential independent and intervening variables, this paper is dependent variable-driven. Therefore, as Gerring (2008) claimed, exploratory design is more appropriate than confirmatory research.

Methods of Data Collection and Data Analysis

The central sources for this research are official documents, think tank publications, and academic literature. It will use official documents to analyse the official policies and

governments' tendencies. However, because official papers do not explicitly express their true motivations behind their strategies, think tank articles and academic literature will complement such points. This research will unravel the intentions and offer theoretical interpretations of the observed patterns. In terms of the time scope, this paper will refer to documents from the presidency of Kim Young-sam. After the thirty-two-year rule of military leaders, he was the first democratically elected civilian president in the ROK (Snyder, 2018). Therefore, this time frame will enable a more solid analysis of the political orientation of the ROK and the US governments.

As this paper adopts the rationale of scientific realism, it believes that reality comprises observable and unobservable components. Not only material factors shape results, but also imperceptible variables can create a causal relationship (Halperin & Heath, 2017). In this research, the political orientation of governments is such an element. Thus, this paper embraces George and Bennet's (2005) notion of interpretative case study design to generate a theory. As King et al. (1994) contend, this design is the most effective method to theorise. To accomplish the objective, it will analyse the data using the interpretivist method and analytical narrative. It will critically engage in theoretical debate within the subject by observing the case and analysing a pattern. Consequently, it will make an inference along the way. Also, it will develop falsifiable hypotheses and a sound theory, which is imperative in political science (Barakso et al., 2014; King et al., 1994).

Operationalisation

The independent variable of this study, the alliance security dilemma, consists of entrapment fear and abandonment fear. The operationalisation of entrapment fear is a structural change that increases states' concern for their involvement in unwanted conflict due to the alliance commitment. Contrarily, abandonment fear is a systemic alteration that intensifies their anxiety

of alliance de-alignment. These system-level transformations can arise implicitly and explicitly in the sources, but they are undeniably visible in reality. Such examples include the rise of China and the deterioration of inter-Korean relations.

The intervening variable, the political orientation of the ROK and the US governments, comprises two pairs of dichotomous categories. In terms of the ROK government, it has been either Conservative or Progressive. For this study, there are three Conservative presidents and three Progressive presidents. Similarly, the US government also has been either Republican and Democrat. Beginning from the presidential term of Kim Young-sam, there have been five US presidents. Two of them are Republicans, and the rest are Democrats. This paper will analyse the combination of governments to understand the influence of this factor. For instance, it will examine how the political orientation of each government affect the explanatory power of the independent variable. Therefore, it will group the cases into four categories: Progressive-Democrat, Progressive-Republican, Conservative-Democrat, and Conservative-Republican.

Ultimately, the dependent variable, states' post-alliance building strategy, will be divided into four options, as Figure 1 illustrates.

Figure 1

Scalar Spectrum of States' Post-Alliance Strategy
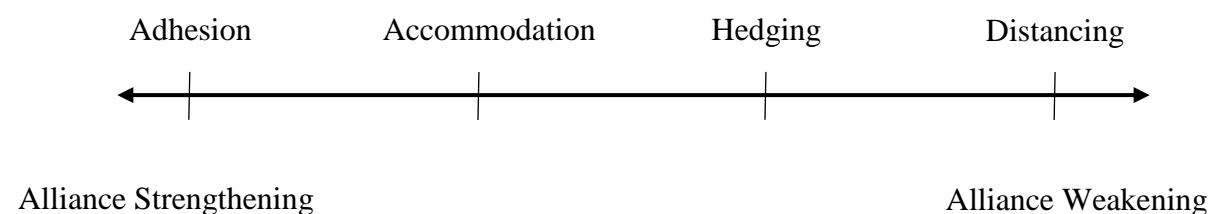
On the one side of the spectrum is adhesion, which entails policies that aim to strengthen the ROK-US alliance without any animosity. On the other end is distancing, which

encompasses any action that intentionally weakens the stability and durability of the partnership. In between these policies lie accommodation and hedging. The accommodative policy involves attempts to cooperate despite having diverging opinions, whereas hedging includes the pursuance of disparate interests while maintaining the alliance commitment.

Analysis

This research will analyse the behaviour and pattern in chronological order of South Korean presidents. Therefore, this section will lead to six cases with ten combinations based on the political orientations of presidents. After presenting the findings, this paper will theorise based on them, formulating a theoretical model of states' post-alliance building strategy.

The ROK-US Alliance in 1993-1998

During the presidency of Conservative Kim Young-sam, the ROK was living in a post-Cold War environment. Yet, the region remained treacherous as great-power rivalry did not end. Initially, President Kim wanted to improve inter-Korean relations. However, unsatisfied with the gesture, the DPRK announced its withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (IAEA, 2014), increasing the regional tension. Thus, the US started to negotiate with it to prevent nuclear catastrophe in East Asia. Unfortunately, the rapprochement between them generated abandonment fear in the ROK. As the negotiation proceeded, the ROK government worried about the possibility of reduced US alliance commitment towards the ROK. Also, the US' consideration of decreasing the number of US forces in Korea (USFK) intensified the concern (Snyder, 2018). Therefore, the ROK government appealed to the US not to agree on a comprehensive political settlement with the DPRK. Nevertheless, the Agreement Framework of 1994 entailed a gradual normalisation of the political relationship with the DPRK (IAEA,

1994). The subsequent enhanced US-DPRK relations reshaped the foreign policy of the ROK towards the US.

To overcome the abandonment fear, the ROK pursued an accommodative strategy. Although President Kim wanted to improve inter-Korean relations on his terms, he compromised with reality, acknowledging that it is challenging to take an autonomous action without the support of the US. Thus, despite his hawkish view on the DPRK, he decided to cooperate with the US by enhancing the ROK-US alliance. His speech at the National Assembly depicts this change. He addressed that the DPRK must recognise the altering international politics and attempt to reconcile and cooperate with the ROK (Kim, 1996). Also, he persuaded President Clinton on the strategic significance of the ROK and illustrated his vision to engage with the DPRK. As a result, the US reassured its alliance commitment by publishing the *U.S. Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region* (Nye, 1995; U.S. Department of Defense, 1995). This document implicitly outlined the US' principle of halting the reduction of the USFK and maintaining the current number to preserve the deterrence capability.

The abandonment fear the ROK had due to the betterment of US-DPRK relations coerced it to pursue the accommodative strategy and invigorate the ROK-US alliance. However, the ROK did not fully adhere to the US due to the different political orientations of President Kim and Clinton. While Conservative President Kim was more hawkish towards the DPRK based on anti-communism, Democrat President Clinton was closer to the dovish approach, emphasising dialogues. These perspectives derived from their political party affiliation. Conservatives in the ROK tend to emphasise a harsh stance towards the DPRK (Chae, 2010) whereas, Democrats in the US prefer negotiation (Snyder, 2018). Hence, the ROK considered the US naïve in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue (Snyder, 2018). This difference was visible from the summit meeting between them in 1993, where President Kim and Clinton

could not conceal their conflict (Ahn, 2007). Still, the influence of the abandonment fear overwhelmed the conflicting approaches of presidents and prevented the ROK from choosing hedging or distancing. It chose to desist from pursuing a unilateral North Korea policy in return for US' security guarantee for the ROK. Therefore, throughout the presidency of Kim Young-sam, the ROK selected accommodation in reaction to its abandonment fear, although it disagreed with the US.

The Alliance in 1998-2003

In the first half of Progressive President Kim Dae-jung's presidency, the abandonment fear of the ROK decreased, but it did not fully diminish. The US and the DPRK maintained their improved relationship, raising questions for the ROK concerning the alliance's future. Yet, due to inherent disadvantage on material capabilities (Snyder, 2018), the ROK decided to reinforce the relationship. In line with the dialogue-based approach of the US, President Kim adopted a benign North Korea policy called the Sunshine Policy (Hogarth, 2012). The ROK participated in the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group in 1999 with the US and Japan and strengthened the regional cooperation with them.

Similar foreign policy orientations of President Kim and Clinton facilitated the interaction between the ROK and the US. They preferred continuous negotiations over fierce attitudes towards the DPRK. Also, their mutual understanding enabled harmonious coordination. President Kim spearheaded the effort to engage with the DPRK, and President Clinton agreed to his plan (Lim, 2012; Moon, 2012). Yet, the related political orientations did not lead to complete adhesion in this case as well. The fundamental reasons were the ROK's consistent desire for autonomy and its strategic ambiguity on the alliance's future after the Korean unification. In his speech at Freie Universität Berlin (Kim, 2000), President Kim expressed his determination to resolve the geopolitical tension in East Asia but not how the

alliance will adapt to new dynamics. Hence, the ROK adopted an accommodate strategy during the Kim-Clinton period to achieve the common goal of denuclearisation while having an option of increasing its alliance autonomy.

However, as Republican Bush became the next US president, the US-DPRK relations deteriorated. His scepticism towards the DPRK immediately froze the relationship, heightening entrapment fear of the ROK. As inter-Korean relations started to progress from 1998, the ROK actively sought to communicate with the DPRK to ease the conflict and maintained its peaceful approach towards the DPRK. Nevertheless, President Bush's (2002) provocation on the DPRK strained the interaction. In contrast to President Clinton, who upheld the Sunshine Policy, the Bush administration withdrew its support. Consequently, it led to the nuclear weapons programme in the DPRK, alarming the ROK.

The new security dynamic worried the ROK as President Kim wanted to maintain a peaceful relationship with the DPRK. In reaction to a potential military conflict between the US and the DPRK, President Kim played a mediator role. Recognising that the ROK cannot unilaterally take crucial decisions due to its weak capabilities, it continued its accommodative strategy. Although it did not abolish the Sunshine Policy, it altered its North Korea policy to reflect the conflicting US-DPRK relationship.

During this period, President Kim and Bush had an intense disagreement on North Korea policy. President Bush's distrust towards the DPRK challenged the peaceful approach of President Kim. Still, due to the significance of the alliance for the ROK government, it could not select hedging or distancing. Instead, it chose to accommodate the US' concern and did not pursue autonomy that could have triggered de-alignment with the US. During the Kim-Bush period, the political orientations of governments did not have a significant effect as the national security of the ROK was at stake. In this regard, the entrapment fear of the ROK led to its accommodation with the US despite having different preferences.

The Alliance in 2003-2008

Since the Progressive presidency of Roh Moo-hyun, the entrapment fear of the ROK escalated. As the US-DPRK relations regressed, the ROK wanted to gain more autonomy. From 2003 to 2006, the ROK government decided to distance itself to overcome the entrapment fear. It chose to pursue diverging interests as it considered that the alliance was not necessarily helpful to accomplish its national interests. Apart from the worsened US-DPRK relations, President Bush's War on Terror worried the ROK. The Bush administration's request to the ROK for security assistance shocked the South Korean public (Cha, 2004).

During this time, the political orientations of President Roh and Bush deepened the pre-existing conflict between them. Most notably, Progressive President Roh succeeded the Sunshine Policy and favoured autonomy over enhancing the ROK-US alliance. Contrarily, President Bush condemned such policies and considered them unrealistic (K. Lee, 2008b). Also, President Roh's desire to revise the wartime operational control (OPCON) agreements with the US sparked a debate concerning the alliance's future. At that point, the USFK was in charge of the wartime OPCON, so President Roh wanted to take it back to reinvigorate the autonomy of the ROK. He portrayed his initiative in his speech at the Korea Air Force Academy by insisting to bring the wartime OPCON back within ten years (Roh, 2005). In this period, the diverging political orientations amplified the influence of entrapment fear, enabling the ROK to distance itself from the US.

From 2006, the entrapment fear changed to abandonment fear. The DPRK officially announced its withdrawal from the NPT and conducted its first nuclear test (Snyder, 2018). As a result, the ROK had to ensure that the US will support it in case of potential military conflict with the DPRK. To reduce such abandonment fear, the ROK reshaped its alliance strategy from distancing to accommodation. One of the measures it took was deploying South Korean troops

to Iraq to support the US and fulfil the alliance commitment (Kim, 2013). The vital purpose of this choice was to gain the favour of the US to assure that it will comply with its obligation to the ROK. Also, the ROK supported the financial sanctions on the DPRK to prevent further nuclear crisis and recover the ROK-US relationship. The change was most visible in the Joint Statement of President Roh and Bush, which articulated that the ROK perceives the new security challenges and will side with the US (U.S. Department of State, 2006). These measures successfully brought them closer to each other, reducing the abandonment fear.

Since 2006, the structural cause dominated other factors, including the political orientations of the ROK and the US governments. Due to the imminent nuclear threat posed by the DPRK, they had no other option than closely cooperating. Consequently, the relationship between President Roh and Bush improved, allowing the ROK to justify the change of its alliance strategy. Nevertheless, President Roh did not abolish his peaceful approach towards the DPRK. He maintained the policy but prioritised the coordination with the US because he could not make further progress in inter-Korean relations. Overall, during the presidency of Roh, the systemic challenge overrode the influence of diverging political orientations of presidents and shaped the foreign policy of the ROK.

The Alliance in 2008-2013

After the conflicting relationship between President Roh and Bush, Conservative Lee Myung-bak became the ROK president. Due to the weakened alliance, US-DPRK relations, and inter-Korean relations, the ROK faced an abandonment fear. Therefore, reinforcing the ROK-US alliance was the primary goal for the Lee administration. His inauguration speech (M. Lee, 2008) reveals that he prioritised the coalition over other issues. This ambition led to adhesive alliance policies throughout his presidency. The quintessential example of such an approach was the new North Korea policy. His Denuclearisation and Opening 3000 emphasised

conditionality, promising economic aid for the DPRK's denuclearisation (ROK Ministry of Unification, 2008). The principal objective was to signal to the US that the ROK will support the Bush administration's North Korea policies.

The ROK's effort to adhere to the alliance was successful as President Bush welcomed President Lee's conditions-based approach towards the DPRK. Also, their similar political orientations accelerated the strengthening of the partnership. Both presidents considered the DPRK a threat to their countries and preferred a hawkish stance (K. Lee, 2008a). Their political similarity allowed the ROK to enhance its regional influence by closely coordinating with the US. Hence, during the Lee-Bush period, the political orientations of governments amplified the effect of the abandonment fear positively.

In 2009, President Lee faced his new counterpart, Democrat President Obama. Initially, the ROK government worried about the possibility of the US' hasty decision to engage with the DPRK (Snyder, 2018). However, inter-Korean relations and the US-DPRK relations rapidly deteriorated due to several North Korean provocations. The DPRK tested its nuclear weapons in 2009, sank the South Korean warship Cheonan using a torpedo, and attacked Yeonpyeong island. Consequently, the abandonment fear of the ROK surged, forcing it to preserve its adhesive alliance policies and take collective action. Alongside these incidents, the growing North Korean nuclear weapons programme coerced the ROK to side with the US to guarantee its security.

To demonstrate its willingness to adhere to the alliance, the ROK cooperated with the US concerning the North Korean aggression. It supported the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council Resolution 1874 (UN Security Council, 2009) and held a ministerial meeting with the US to discuss a joint measure towards the DPRK. As then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2009) argued, the US and the ROK strongly condemned the provocative behaviours of the DPRK, and they would ensure the robust alliance commitment towards each other. These

efforts progressed and led to the announcement of the US-ROK Joint Vision Statement. It envisaged US deterrence capabilities in the ROK and the American support for Korean unification (The White House, 2009).

Throughout the Lee-Obama time, the ROK fervently pursued adhesive strategy due to its abandonment fear. The tension created during the Roh-Bush period contributed to the ROK's fear of de-alignment, pressuring it to devote to the partnership. Surprisingly, the different political orientations of President Lee and Obama did not have a crucial impact on the relationship between the abandonment fear and the ROK's alliance policy. From 2009 to 2013, the abandonment fear of the ROK overwhelmed such dissimilarity. As realist would contend, the systemic factor did not leave room for domestic variables to play a role. Also, the US recognised the influence of the North Korean aggression on the ROK and responded positively to the ROK's adhesive policies. Therefore, the political orientations of the presidents did not necessarily control the extent of the abandonment fear on the alliance strategy.

The Alliance in 2013-2017

With the end of the presidency of Lee came that of Conservative Park Geun-hye. Succeeding her predecessor's favourable policies towards the US, she aimed to maintain the relationship. Yet, two critical issues arose during her presidency. Firstly, China's strategic importance for the ROK surged, testing the ROK-US alliance. In contrast to traditional South Korean conservatives, President Park chose to improve the relationship with China due to its strategic importance on the North Korean nuclear issue. She considered that there would be no need to choose between the US and China. Thus, she held a trilateral summit with China and Japan to strengthen its role in the region. Her congratulatory address (2015) illustrates her ambition, stressing the need to promote economic and cultural interaction between the participating states.

However, her objective shattered into pieces due to another structural factor that would reshape the ROK's foreign policy.

Throughout her presidency, the DPRK conducted three nuclear weapons tests, once in 2013 and twice in 2016. Despite her effort to use China as leverage to this matter, it failed. Consequently, she had limited options, so she chose to cooperate with the US. Yet, her pro-China policies at the beginning of her presidency worried the US government. The US had already regarded China as a challenger to its global position. Hence, President Park decided to accommodate American interests despite her interest to maintain a positive relationship with China. For instance, despite the fierce objection of China, she introduced the American anti-ballistic missile defence system, the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (Glaser & Collins, 2017).

To overcome the abandonment fear and to further strengthen the ROK-US alliance, President Park aimed to recover ROK-Japan relations. Historically, they had conflicting interactions because of their bitter experience during the Japanese colonisation (Arrington & Yeo, 2019; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2015). Still, President Park regarded ROK-Japan relations as a key to extend the ROK-US alliance by enlarging the trilateral cooperation between the democratic states. The US praised such effort and facilitated partnership as it deemed the trilateral coalition a crucial element to its East Asia strategy (Miller, 2016).

The deployment of the THAAD and reinforcing the diplomatic tie with Japan demonstrate the will of the ROK to reduce its abandonment fear. Similar to the Lee-Obama combination, the Park-Obama relations remained likewise. Due to the shared threat perception on the DPRK, President Park and Obama closely cooperated despite their different political orientations. Also, as delineated earlier, President Park wanted to enhance ROK-China relations. However, the North Korean nuclear crises depicted that the ROK should prioritise its alliance rather than ROK-China relations. Therefore, the ROK government accommodated

with the US, renouncing its original plan. Overall, the disparate political orientations of presidents did not have a significant effect during the presidency of Park Geun-hye.

The Alliance in 2017-2021

The impeachment of President Park led to the inauguration of Progressive President Moon Jae-in. Similar to his progressive predecessors, President Moon pursued a peaceful approach to the DPRK. At his inauguration, he claimed that he would do anything to solve the security challenges that the ROK faced (Moon, 2017). However, his endeavour to restore inter-Korean relations soon encountered two obstacles. Firstly, the US-DPRK reached its bottom as President Trump threatened the DPRK to denuclearise, mentioning the possibility of military actions. The hostile interaction between them raised an entrapment fear of the ROK. Secondly, the US-China rivalry intensified, pressuring the ROK to choose a side (Armitage & Cha, 2019). While the US demanded the ROK to strengthen its ties with the US and Japan (Glaser & Mastro, 2019), the ROK wished to gain more autonomy and pursue its interests.

Consequently, President Moon decided to hedge against the US to reduce his entrapment fear. Although he highlighted the significance of the alliance, he took independent actions towards the DPRK and China. During this period, the ROK engaged with the DPRK, holding summit meetings between President Moon and Chairman Kim Jong-un. Yet, the ROK did not go completely rogue. It closely coordinated with the US to ease the regional tension and facilitate the summit talks between the US and the DPRK. In terms of China, President Moon aimed to enhance ROK-China relations as it remained negative since the deployment of the THAAD (Glaser & Collins, 2017). Throughout the Moon-Trump period, the US pressured the ROK to join its China-targeted initiatives, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Yeo, 2020), and improve the ROK-Japan relations. However, the ROK disregarded such propositions and pursued independent policies towards China to act as a regional balancer.

From 2017 to early 2021, the ROK-US suffered from a severe difference in the political orientations of the presidents. While President Moon preferred a peaceful approach towards the DPRK and a balanced relationship between the US and China, Republican President Trump desired to suppress them. The most notable conflict between the presidents was the negotiation on cost-sharing for the USFK. President Trump's reckless demands angered the ROK (Cha & Bera, 2020; Cha et al., 2019; Yang, 2021; Terry, 2020), provoking it to hedge against the US. The continuous disagreement led to the ROK's decision to pursue its objectives while not entirely distancing itself from the US to protect its strategic interests. Therefore, during the Moon-Trump period, the conflicting political orientations of the presidents magnified the influence of the entrapment fear on the ROK's alliance strategy.

From January 2021, the alliance entered into a new phase with the inauguration of Democrat President Biden. Since then, while the North Korean nuclear threat lulled, the US-China rivalry worsened. As a result, the entrapment fear of the ROK deepened, coercing it to take appropriate measures. Up to this point, the ROK is maintaining its hedging strategy. It is hesitant to join the Quad (Kim, 2021; Pardo, 2021) but wants to sustain its balancer position. Yet, it is showing its willingness to adopt an accommodative strategy gradually. President Moon (2021) expressed that he will restore the ROK-US alliance and coordinate its North Korea policy with the US at the planned summit meeting. Overall, the related political orientations of the presidents are reducing the impact of the ROK's entrapment fear, bringing the ROK and the US closer to each other.

Theorisation

The findings from the analysis demonstrate that the ROK changed its alliance policy in reaction to the systemic factors it encountered. Figure 2 visualises the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable. The x-axis signifies the degree of alliance security

dilemma the ROK experienced, ranging from abandonment fear to entrapment fear on a sliding scale. Similarly, the y-axis reproduced Figure 1, indicating different alliance strategies the ROK could have chosen. The options are placed based on a scalar range, adhesion and accommodation representing the measures to strengthen the alliance, whereas hedging and distancing as options that weaken it.

Figure 2

Charting the Relationship between the Alliance Security Dilemma and Alliance Strategy
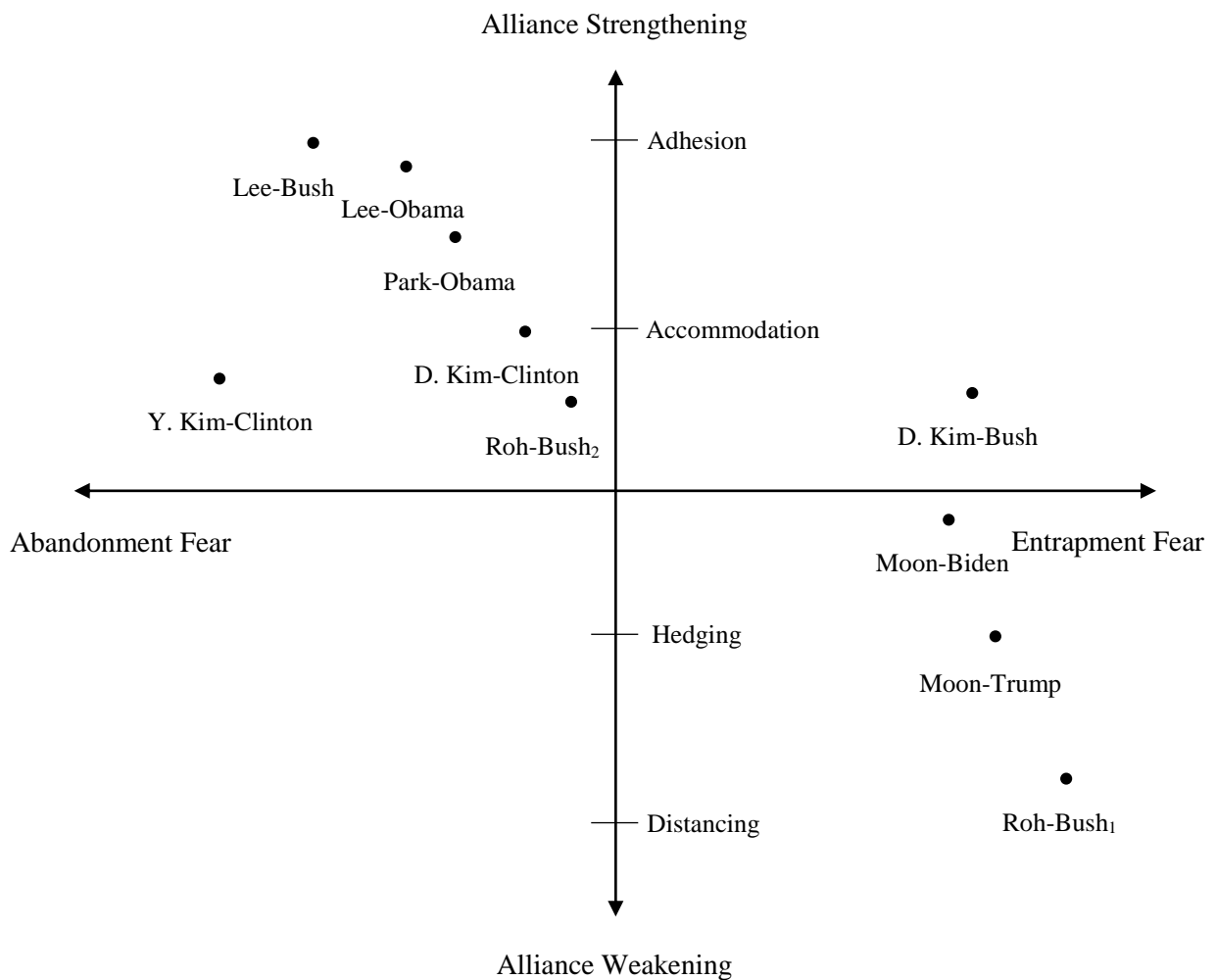
According to the quadrant, there is a causal relationship between the alliance security dilemma and states' alliance strategy. Six cases that underwent abandonment fear led to the selection of policies that enhances the alliance. Interestingly, it was the hostile inter-Korean relations and US-DPRK relations that intensified the abandonment fear. Contrarily, three cases that chose options that undermine the partnership experienced entrapment fear. The fundamental reason for increased entrapment fear was the gap between relatively improved inter-Korean relations and deteriorated US-DPRK relations. One exception to these tendencies is the period of 2001-2003. During this time, President Kim Dae-jung recognised that the ROK could not pursue any alliance-weakening policies due to its incapacity to guarantee national security. Consequently, despite having the entrapment fear, the ROK selected an accommodative strategy.

Alongside these propensities, the ROK started to prefer strategies that grant it more autonomy as its abandonment fear decreased. On the other hand, as the entrapment fear curtailed, it favoured the policies that guarantee its national security more evidently. These behaviours derive from the realist emphasis on the primacy of survival. The ROK adopted policies that would maximise its survival depending on the systemic challenges it faced. Predominantly, the structural causes dictated the preference of the ROK over time. These results generate the following hypotheses:

H_1: *When a state experiences an abandonment fear, it will adopt alliance-enhancing strategies.*

H_2: *When a state undergoes an entrapment fear, it will choose alliance-weakening policies.*

The intervening variable of this research, the combination of political orientations of governments, had the role of amplifying or diminishing the influence of the independent

variable. Figure 3 elaborates the analysis of ten pairs. Since 1993, when the South Korean presidents were Conservative while American presidents were Democrats, they had a positive relationship. Often they revealed differences in their approach, but they prioritised the alliance. Likewise, the Conservative-Republican combination showed the strongest partnership due to their similar political orientations. The Progressive-Democrat combination oriented towards alliance-strengthening as well. Contrarily, the alliance suffered the most during the period of the Progressive-Republican pairs because Progressive South Korean presidents favoured autonomy over the coalition.

Figure 3

Political Orientations of ROK-US Governments

		US	
		Democrat	Republican
ROK	Conservative	Cooperation (3)	Cooperation (4)
	Progressive	Cooperation (2)	Conflict (1)

Note. The numbers indicate the degree of alliance enforcement with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

From these findings following hypotheses arise:

H₃: When a state has a cooperative political orientation with its ally, it will pursue an alliance-enhancing strategy.

H₄: When a state has a conflicting political orientation with its ally, it will select an alliance-weakening policy.

The hypotheses illustrate that the alliance security dilemma dominates states' alliance strategy. Although political orientations of governments often magnify or dwindle the effect of the independent variable, they largely depend on the permissiveness of the international structure. If the system is permissive, when a state has low entrapment or abandonment fear, the intervening variable can wield greater effect. Contrarily, if the system is restrictive, it has less control power. Following these, this research concludes that the alliance security dilemma shapes states' alliance strategies, while the political orientations control the effect.

Conclusion

The analysis illustrates that although there have been ups and downs, the ROK-US alliance remained firm. Both states prioritised the alliance over their ideological preferences, signalling the stability of the coalition. This thesis asked the question *How does the alliance security dilemma affect the ROK-US alliance?* As shown, the alliance security dilemma overrode the effect of other factors and directly influenced the ROK-US alliance. Regardless of the political orientations of presidents, the ROK reacted to the systemic challenge it encountered. When it underwent the moment of abandonment, it chose to adhere to the alliance. Contrarily, it distanced itself from the US when it feared entrapment. Often, the political orientations of governments altered the alliance strategy but not to a significant extent.

This research aimed to contribute to the theory-building in the international relations scholarship by identifying under which conditions states choose to adhere to or distance from their allies. Throughout the research, it adopted inductive reasoning with an analytical narrative to generate a sound theory. The use of empirical examples and qualitative data strengthened

the interpretation by adding more in-depth knowledge to the subject. Also, by analysing a particularly revealing case, it achieved its primary goal of filling the gap in the literature. The ROK-US alliance depicted how states respond to the alliance security dilemma and which choices they make. Also, this study aimed to sub-divide the case into six sub-cases with ten combinations based on political orientations of governments to overcome the problem of external validity.

However, despite the development of sound hypotheses and theory, there are points of improvement for this paper. For example, the Conservative-Republican pair had only one substantive case, which is the Lee-Bush period. Yet, this pair only lasted a year, which is not robust enough to generate a reliable result. Also, there was a brief moment where President Park and Trump could have interacted in 2017 to create another pair of the Conservative-Republican combination. Unfortunately, there was no meaningful interaction during a month, as President Park was close to her impeachment. As a result, it is challenging to produce substantial analysis. On a different note, the use of more cases could have increased the external validity of this study.

Overall, this thesis identified the causal relationship between the alliance security dilemma and states' post-alliance formation strategy using the ROK-US alliance. Still, further research is essential to overcome the problems this study entailed. For instance, future study should apply the hypotheses and theory of this paper to test their reliability. One can analyse the US-Japan alliance considering its practical significance in contemporary international politics. Also, studying the trilateral cooperation of the ROK, the US, and Japan will broaden the scope of the theory. Such endeavour will be of great value to the field and the general public.

Ultimately, the findings of this research strengthened the realist school of thought in alliance politics. Its emphasis on structural variables appeared in this study as well and dictated the choices the ROK made. Yet, this paper illustrated that domestic-level variables play a role

in the causal relationship between the independent and dependent variable. Therefore, the author wishes that the secondary goal of this research, to establish an eclectic theory based on realism, advanced the field. This thesis concludes by insisting that further eclectic theorisation of international relations will broadly benefit the international relations scholarship and contribute to the accumulation of knowledge.

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