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# Evolution and modern trends in the development of the foreign policy of the Republic of Korea

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**Abstract:** The study analyzes the development of the Republic of Korea's foreign policy. The country has followed a path of strict dependence on the United States in both security and economics, while simultaneously working to strengthen its position as a "middle" and "global" power, influencing politics in the East Asian region and the world as a whole. The evolution of its foreign policy presents an interesting case study regarding the tools and mechanisms used to formulate strategies to achieve its interests. Although the Republic of Korea is limited in choosing a strategic course, it has managed to develop soft power mechanisms in the context of globalization, establishing itself as an important player in innovation and economics both regionally and globally.

**Keywords:** The Republic of Korea - USA alliance, interests, "soft power", "middle" power, "global" power actor.

**Introduction:** For many centuries, Korea has been dependent on China, building a picture of the world based on the Sinocentric system of the world order. Confucian ethics made it possible to build Korea's foreign policy relations into a hierarchical structure in which it interacted with China as a junior. For many centuries, Korea has been dependent on China, building a picture of the world based on the Sinocentric system of the world order. Confucian ethics made it possible to build Korea's foreign policy relations into a hierarchical structure in which it interacted with China as a junior. The 19th century brought changes to Korea – vassal relations with China ceased, but the country fell into colonial dependence on Japan, liberation from which, at the end of World War II in the 20th century, led to the division of the country. The Republic of Korea is

concluding a military-political alliance with the United States, and remains dependent on Washington's will at present [1].

After Japan's surrender at the end of World War II in 1945, the Korean peninsula was divided along the 38th parallel into two occupation zones. The United States occupied the south of the country, and the Soviet Union occupied the north. In 1948, two countries were created on the territory of the former unified Korea — the Republic of Korea in the south and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north. With the outbreak of the Korean War (1950-1953), American troops were sent to defend South Korea from the invasion of North Korea and then China. In 1953, US Army General Mark Clark signed a ceasefire agreement on behalf of the UN forces and approved the border between the two Koreas. American losses in this conflict were estimated at 30,000 people. After three years of the US military administration, the South Korean government was established, headed by Lee Seung-man. The United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK) signed a Mutual Defense Treaty in 1968, according to which Washington pledged to provide military assistance to South Korea.

The peculiarities of the post-war development of the Republic of Korea led to the division of its political forces into two main groupings, which form the foreign policy course within the framework of a common paradigm characterized by nationalistic content, as well as the desire to ensure the sustainable development of the country and security in the region. The power elite is represented by two party groupings, which are represented by right-wing and center-left forces that replace each other in power. In the foreign policy of the right and the left, there are major differences in views regarding cooperation with the United States and the DPRK (The Democratic People's Republic of Korea). None of the groups opposes an alliance with Washington, but the left-wing party coalition periodically resorts to anti-American rhetoric for tactical purposes.

Concerning the DPRK, conservatives, i.e., the right, oppose unconditional economic assistance to the DPRK. Leftist forces more often adhere to a policy of active economic and socio-cultural relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The thesis of the complete denuclearization of the DPRK and the nuclear-free status of the Korean Peninsula is common to all political forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan [2].

After the Korean War, South Korea found itself at an economic and security disadvantage, dependent on the United States with North Korea. Throughout the 1970s, it continued to maintain a strong alliance with

the United States. In domestic policy, President Park Chung-hee (1963-1979) embarked on an export-based development strategy that was heavily dependent on exports to the U.S. market [3].

He developed industrialization and improved the production of goods and services. He managed to attract a large number of foreign investments into the economy. His merit is considered to be the transformation of the country into a developed state that could defend itself in the event of war.

During the presidency of Chung Doo-hwan (1980-1988), the process of economic development continued. The country has become a recognized exporter of electronics and technology, and hosted the Summer Olympic Games in 1988. The country began the process of gradual democratization and established international relations. The country focused on an alliance with the United States, and in 1990, 37,000 U.S. troops were stationed in South Korea. In the 2000s, 3,000 South Korean troops, together with the American army, took part in a military operation in Iraq and 600 in Afghanistan. The development of military relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the United States was facilitated by the development of the DPRK's nuclear program.

During the presidencies of Roh Tae-Woo (1988-1993) and Kim Young-sam (1993-1998), South Korea established itself as a "middle power" beyond the Korean peninsula. Under these leaders, South Korea joined the United Nations and formulated a strategy for globalization. Although Roh Tae-Woo was a military figure, he sought to lessen the military's influence on political processes. The administration followed the "northern policy" program, which aimed to build relationships with other countries of the USSR and China in the Northeast Asian region. Under Roh Tae-Woo, the nation emerged as one of the "new industrial countries," a transformation spurred by rapid economic growth. Kim Yong-him continued this policy of fostering ties and focused on promoting tourism.

Under the administration of President Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003), success was achieved in overcoming the financial and economic crisis (the Asian crisis of 1998) through obtaining an IMF loan, aided by the public's swift repayment efforts. A "solar heat policy" was implemented in the DPRK, significantly warming relations between the parties. Under the leadership of Kim Dae-jung and his successor, Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2007), the open policy toward other regions continued. The Republic of Kazakhstan initiated the ASEAN+3 format, which later expanded. During this time, South Korea emerged as a key player in East Asia. Korea pursued the development of the China-Japan-Korea

format during Roh Moo-hyun's presidency. Notably, he presented persuasive proposals to China and Japan for a trilateral free trade agreement among the countries. A political report published in 2004 clarified that Korea envisions three roles in Northeast Asia: as a "connecting" state between regional powers, as a "hub" state for peace, finance, logistics, and tourism, and as a "promoter" of regional cooperation.

Korea's regional policy underwent major changes during the presidential term of Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013). Lee restored the U.S.-led bilateral alliance as a foreign policy priority and called the ratification of the Korean-American free trade agreement one of the most important goals during his tenure. He suggested that we should not limit ourselves to the Northeast or East Asia region, but rather develop a "Global Key State" program. Lee also showed great interest in hosting international organizations in Korea. As a result, in 2012, the Global Institute for Green Growth (GGGI) became the first international organization based in Korea. South Korea becomes a member of the G20. At that time, a strategy was being developed towards a "global key state", when the Republic of Kazakhstan would influence international processes.

In 2013, President Park Geun-Hye proposed her regional vision, the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI). This concept of "trust policy" is aimed at building trust between various stakeholders in Northeast Asia. The main goal is to formalize the "habit" of regional cooperation through existing intergovernmental mechanisms, multi-level structures, and non-governmental networks. The strategy was based on neo-functionalist beliefs in the effect of "spillover" and proposed to start interstate cooperation from non-traditional areas of security to high politics. Park Geun-Hye proposed creating a coalition between South Korea and the Middle Powers. After Park Geun-hye was ousted from power for corruption, Moon Jae-in became president (2017-2022). He advocated the peaceful reunification of the two Koreas through a policy of peaceful coexistence. The denuclearization of the Korean peninsula should be the main step towards cooperation, but a lot can be done in cooperation along this path. His management took place during the period of COVID-19 and the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The Republic of Korea has condemned the Russian Federation for its unprovoked aggression against Ukraine. The country joined the US and EU sanctions against Moscow.

#### **Changes in the foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan since 2022**

The tragedy unfolding in Ukraine since 2022 may be a

symptom of a new dynamic in global geopolitics. The shifting balance of power embodied in the rise of China and the weakening of American interest and determination to assert its traditional global role are leading the world into strategic uncertainty.

Conservative representative President Yoon Suk Yeol (May 10, 2022 to April 4, 2025, suspended as a result of impeachment for illegally declaring martial law) adhered to a radical orientation towards the United States, strengthening ties with Japan, and a tough stance on the denuclearization of North Korea. He also joined the sanctions against the Russian Federation and began to curtail cooperation programs. The main challenges include the denuclearization of North Korea, overcoming the consequences of the pandemic, the transformation of the global trading system and the restructuring of supply chains, climate change, and the threat to the values of liberal democracy in the world and the rules-based order [4].

Today, we see a rapid change in the political landscape with new challenges and threats. The events of recent years indicate a global transformation in international relations. What is the Republic of Korea today, and will it be able to build an independent policy and security?

More recently, in the context of globalization, at a time of increasing competition between the United States and China, Korea used the strategy of "middle power" diplomacy and very often used the tools of "niche diplomacy." The example of South Korea shows the construction of a niche with the help of soft power, which could complement its foreign policy. Soft power has contributed to ensuring national competitiveness and expanding Seoul's diplomatic space through its active influence on the global agenda [5]. The concept of a "middle power", which, without claiming regional political leadership, is capable of pursuing an independent and diversified regional policy, is focused on pragmatic economic cooperation and strengthening ties with neighboring states. 1) Focus on expanding the diplomatic network of cooperation 2) Practical integrated diplomacy 3) Peaceful coexistence, prosperity of inter-Korean relations, and guidance for the future of the security system [6].

The Republic of Korea is one of the top ten economies in the world and, therefore, has economic power, has 15 free trade agreements, including trade agreements with economically powerful powers - China, the EU, and the United States. It is a member of the Comprehensive Regional Economic Partnership (RCEP), the largest regional agreement in terms of economic size. South Korea also has a very strong army and has established the production of weapons. Its army includes 599,000 active personnel and 3,100,000 reserves (in 2021) and

ranks 6th in the world. Since 1994, the military of this country has begun to take an active part in UN peacekeeping operations. Established in 1961, the National Intelligence Service aims to protect Koreans from external threats. This service also includes cybersecurity units.

The Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy is also used as a product promotion agency. Launched back in 1962, KOTKA has offices in 127 business centers around the world. High-tech Korean chaebols and other enterprises and their products, such as semiconductors, electric batteries, environmentally friendly ships, cars, robots, smartphones, and vaccines, in general, a wide range of products without which the economy cannot develop and function. South Korea and its capabilities as a global economic force are being integrated into the global supply chain. Countries across America, Asia, and Europe want to earn the attention of Korean firms. This provides economic leverage for South Korea. South Korea has global brands such as Samsung, Hyundai, and Kia, and is a leading country in the field of digital economy and information and communication technology (ICT).

In the global diplomatic index of 2019, South Korea was ranked 13th in the world and fourth in Asia. South Korea also has one of the strongest diplomatic academies, and its diplomats are highly qualified; some of them have reached leading positions in international organizations. And as you know, Ban Ki-moon was the UN Secretary General from 2007 to 2016.

The Korean Foreign Ministry has organized the KOICA agency, which includes 44 offices in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. South Korea is one of the first countries to move from the position of recipient, i.e., recipient of aid, to the position of donor in 2010. In 2020. South Korea spent 2.5 billion dollars on official development assistance. USD, which is 0.14% of GDP. This puts South Korea in the middle position in terms of volume, but closer to the end in percentage terms among OECD member countries [7].

South Korea considers soft power to be one of the important tools of its foreign policy. The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism has established a cooperation support department for Hall. Another agency, such as the Creative Content Agency (KOCCA), promotes modern Korean culture. In addition, the agency has managed to open 33 Korean cultural centers throughout Africa, America, Asia, and Europe. These centers focus on the traditional and modern culture of Korea. By 2021. The Republic of Korea ranked 11th in the world and 3rd among Asian countries in terms of its "soft power" influence [8].

We mentioned the "middle power" policy, the strategy

when the Republic of Korea seeks to influence the global agenda, but we should not forget about the orientation towards autonomy, which many presidents of the country had in mind, where autonomy did not mean isolation. For decades, the Republic of Kazakhstan has maintained strong partnerships with the United States, participated in regional initiatives, and adhered to multilink as a means of achieving autonomy. In modern conditions of turbulence, crises, and uncertainty, if the United States under Trump chooses a policy of isolationism, the accumulated experience in economic development, diplomacy, and the capabilities of the armed forces will help maintain security in balance between competing powers.

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