



South Korea as a Non-Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council 2013/2014

AJIN CHOI
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- On October 19, 2012 the Republic of Korea won its second term on the UNSC. It will begin its new term in 2013 and will endeavor to establish itself as a globally influential and responsible power.
- There are several pertinent issues that Seoul will wish to address during its tenure on the UNSC. The situation with North Korea will be a primary goal, the military and nuclear issues between Pyongyang and Seoul in particular.
- Besides reducing the tensions on the Korean peninsula, Seoul will concentrate on reducing regional tensions between nations such as China, Japan, Taiwan and Russia.
- Recognizing the importance of UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO), which facilitate the maintenance of international peace and security, South Korea will increase its participation in PKOs.
- Seoul has worked closely with Washington to keep North Korea from obtaining nuclear weapons. The 2013–14 membership of the UNSC is seen by Seoul as another venue in which it can enhance its multilateral nuclear non-proliferation goals.

Background: Korea and the United Nations

The relationship between the Republic of Korea and the United Nations Security Council dates back to the beginning of the country in 1948. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the United States jointly agreed in 1947 that the first presidential elections had been fair and that the outcome would be upheld. When North Korea attacked in June 1950 the Security Council was called upon again to decide on an appropriate response from both the United States and President Syng Man Rhee. On June 27, 1950 the Council agreed that Kim Il Sung had unlawfully invaded the Republic of Korea.¹ Sixteen foreign nations, including the United States, sent combat forces that would serve under the so-called »UN Command« (UNC). Five nations sent noncombatant personal, such as hospital and ambulance units. At its peak there were 932,964 troops serving under the UNC in Korea. The highlight of the UN's collective efforts was the September 15, 1950 amphibious landing at Incheon, which effectively turned the tide of the war towards the South and its allies. In 1953, the UN supervised the armistice agreement between North and South Korea.

In 1991, both the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea joined the UN. This was a major victory for Seoul and the Republic of Korea's then president, Roh Tae Woo as they had been seeking the support of North Korea's allies Russia and China in order to join the UN. Despite the North's claim that separate membership would legitimize the 46-year separation of the two countries, Seoul was of the opinion that joint membership would prove to be a »provisional measure«² for peace on the peninsula.

South Korea became a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the first time in 1996. During the two-year term one of Seoul's major goals was to gain legitimacy in international politics in order to secure a more prestigious position within its region. South Korea also worked towards upgrading the Council's transparency, protecting the human rights of refugees and attempting

to enhance the Council's capacity to deal with regional conflicts.³ In particular, South Korea »initiated an open debate on protection for humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in conflict situations, adopting four resolutions (1107-1110), and issued eight presidential statements (S/PRST/1997/25-32)«.⁴ The issues of South Korea's 1996–97 membership will carry into its 2013-14 membership as well.

The eighth United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, was elected on January 1, 2007. He is quoted as saying, »I grew up in war, and saw the United Nations help my country to recover and rebuild. That experience was a big part of what led me to pursue a career in public service«.⁵ He was unanimously reelected to the same position on June 21, 2011. The Secretary General's relationship with the Security Council is well-formed and amenable. In his January 25, 2012 Five-Year Action Agenda he declared that one of his priorities was prevention. Prevention included the goal of »revitalizing the global disarmament and non-proliferation agenda«.⁶ The Secretary General also mentioned a commitment to ending the threat of organized crime, piracy and drug trafficking. He has introduced new measures specifically aimed at making the UN more transparent, effective and efficient. All these issues will directly involve the UNSC and are close to the hearts of the leadership in Seoul. It is hypothesized that Seoul will consider the Secretary General's goals equally important to its own agenda.

On October 19, 2012 the Republic of Korea won its second term on the UNSC and in 2013 it will begin its new term on the UNSC, which it will chair in February 2013. Seoul is ready to step into its new role in the global regime and all of the responsibilities that come with it.

1. Stairs, Denis, »The United Nations and the Politics of the Korean War«, *International Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Canadian International Council, 1970, p. 303.

2. Sanger, David, »North Korea Reluctantly Seeks U.N. Seat«, *The New York Times*, May 29, 1991, www.nytimes.com (accessed on December 4, 2012).

3. Nam, In-Soo, »Non-Permanent UN Security Council Seats: A Dummies Guide«, *The Wall Street Journal – Asia (Korea Real Time)*, October 19, 2012 (accessed on January 4, 2013).

4. Associated Press, »Peace Keeping Operations; South Korea and the UNSC«, www.un.mofat.go.kr. December 6, 2012 (accessed on: December 12, 2012).

5. Moon, Ban Ki, »United Nations Biography«, www.un.org, 2012, (accessed on: December 12, 2012).

6. Ban, Ki-Moon, »The Secretary-General's Five-Year Action Agenda«, www.un.org/sg/priorities/sg_agenda-2012.pdf (accessed on: December 3, 2012).

The Relationship with North Korea and its relevance for the term on the UN-SC

There are several pertinent issues that Seoul will wish to address during its tenure on the UNSC. The situation with North Korea will be a primary goal, especially the military and nuclear issues between Pyongyang and Seoul. The most recent example of a military issue is the December 12, 2012 rocket launch that North Korea conducted. Despite decades of attempts by South Korea to stabilize its relationship with its Northern counterpart, the Kim regime refuses to uphold its agreements and flaunts its disregard for the procedures of the United Nations and its allies. According to the UNSC the launch was »a clear violation of Security Council resolutions« and the Council is considering an »appropriate response«. ⁷ This statement was released after it held emergency consultations in New York on the day of the missile launch. This warning comes after North Korea was previously banned from holding ballistic missile tests after its 2006 and 2009 nuclear tests. South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung Hwan called the launch »a threat to peace on the Korean peninsula and around the world«. ⁸ Events such as the recent missile launch are not anomalies in North and South Korean relations: the constant push by the Kim regime in the north to see how far it can develop its military technology has been a source of constant conflict between the two nations.

Due to the instability in the Korean peninsula it is understandable that Seoul will prioritize issues concerning North Korea during Seoul's term on the council. Since the Kim regime announced its plan to launch a missile on April 13, 2012 South Korea has had growing concerns about the North's apparently continuing nuclear agenda. Despite pressure from countries such as the United States to discontinue its nuclear activities, North Korea has refused to give up its plans to build its own intercontinental ballistic missiles. The launch on December 12, 2012 seemed to prove once again that even under the youthful leadership of Kim Jong Un North Korea continues on its path towards nuclear armament. It should be noted that, at Seoul's insistence, the Security Council

has announced that North Korea has acted in direct defiance of Council resolutions 1718 (2006) and 1874 (2009)⁹ that banned North Korea from launching such missiles. Despite the unsuccessful launch in April 2012, the attempt alone severely undermined the fragile peace the two nations were attempting to restore after the previous attacks on the South. The more recent launch proved much more successful, but the outcome remains the same; North Korea has become further isolated, not only from South Korea and Japan, but from the majority of UN allies around the world. Now that South Korea will have a seat on the council, it will use its new position to further emphasize the Security Council's demands that North Korea does not proceed with any further nuclear programs, including any more ballistic missile launches. Seoul will be looking to get North Korea to reconfirm its preexisting commitments for a moratorium on the entire nuclear program.

At their conception in 2003 the six-party talks were a multilateral discussion among the United States, China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and North Korea in order to end North Korea's nuclear program, in particular the uranium enrichment plants. However, North Korea reacted by withdrawing from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and expelled the IAEA inspectors from the country. In September 2005 Pyongyang, once again, agreed to nuclear disarmament. But despite this step forward, the continuation of inflammatory behavior on the part of North Korea forced neighboring nations and companies to freeze North Korean foreign assets.

In 2007, Beijing convinced North Korea to rejoin the negotiations and the six members were finally able to agree on a denuclearization plan. This plan detailed a 60-day deadline for the cessation of the nuclear programs in return for the funds that had been frozen and additional aid. The United States was also convinced to hold bilateral discussions. By 2008 North Korea was persuaded to turn over nearly 18 thousand pages detailing the production of its nuclear program. Further action was taken towards nuclear nonproliferation when Kim ordered the implosion of the Yongbyon nuclear plant.

The year 2009 saw Kim Jong Il renege on his agreement and restart his nuclear program, along with the pluto-

7. Plett, Barbara, »UN Security Council Condemns North Korea Rocket Launch«, www.bbc.co.uk, December 12, 2012 (accessed on: December 12, 2012).

8. Ramzy, Austin, »North Korea's Rocket Launch Riles Neighborhood, But Mild Response from China Expected«, www.world.time.com, December 12, 2012 (accessed on: December 12, 2012).

9. Associated Press, »UN »deplores« North Korea botched rocket launch«, www.bbc.co.uk, April 13, 2012 (accessed on: January 9, 2013).

nium and uranium enrichment programs. Kim stated that North Korea would not consider ending its nuclear program unless the United States held bilateral negotiations in order to normalize relations between the two countries; this demand was immediately rebuffed by Washington.

Despite the progress being made North Korea has still failed to include any details that either confirm or deny the suspected uranium enrichment. It has also ignored the claims that it was allied with Syria and Libya in proliferation activities. Finally, it has failed to disclose whether it possesses any fully produced and operable nuclear weapons. Despite the February 2012 re-opening of North Korea to IAEA officials, the United States and South Korea will use the next two years to push for tougher sanctions against North Korea via UNSC resolutions if North Korea continues to act provocatively. South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-Hwan urged North Korea to »make wise and right decisions ... by continuing policy coordination with our neighboring countries«. ¹⁰ This new term on the Council is seen by Seoul as a new level of diplomatic deterrent against the provocation of North Korea.

Peace and Security in East Asia

Besides reducing the tensions on the Korean peninsula Seoul will concentrate on reducing the regional tensions between nations such as China, Japan, Taiwan and Russia. The extraterritorial issues concerning islands have risen to new heights in recent years and Korea has an interest in keeping them from turning into armed conflict.

Furthermore, Seoul has stated that »having an additional member from Northeast Asia will allow more equal representation in this very important region.« ¹¹ At the regional level, South Korea sees its seat on the UNSC as a way to establish itself as a crucial actor that can intermediate or manage many conflicting issues for its neighbors and eventually promote regional peace and security.

10. Associated Press, »S. Korean FM calls on N. Korea to make »wise, right decisions«, *Yonhap News Agency*, January 1, 2013 (accessed on: January 4, 2013).

11. Asia-Pacific Global Group, »South Korea Seeks to Win U.N. Security Council Seat – 6 Important Issues«, <http://www.asiapacificglobal.com>, October 15, 2012 (accessed on: January 4, 2013).

Global Influence and Responsibility

In 2013–2014, the South Korean government will focus on Seoul's newly established path of establishing itself as a globally influential and responsible state. South Korea sees itself as a nation particularly well adapted to acting as an intermediary between developed and developing countries. It was not so long ago that Korea made its own way out from poverty and underdevelopment. Having successfully navigated the road to becoming a wealthy industrial and technological powerhouse, Korea feels that its role in the global community will be to mentor nations that are attempting to do the same. Korean officials have stated that »the Republic of Korea's membership of the Security Council in 1996–97 has provided us with a renewed motivation to take on a more proactive role for the promotion of international peace and security.« ¹² Based on its own experiences and expectations Seoul will be able to apply efficient and effective methods of working with all types of nations within the UNSC.

Seoul will also seek to increase its participation in future UN peacekeeping missions. ¹³ The Korean government has stated a willingness to »contribute to world peace and security ... making the world a safer place.« ¹⁴ As a member of the developed world of wealth and privilege, Korea will be looking to take on the role of emergency relief provider in a wide variety of aspects. Seoul's desire will be to increase its participation within the agencies and operations they are already working within.

The Republic of Korea feels strongly that »peacekeeping mandates should be more clear and achievable, and that a mechanism for closer consultations with troop-contributing countries should be prepared and implemented«. ¹⁵

12. Associated Press, »Peace Keeping Operations; South Korea and the UNSC«, <http://www.un.mofat.go.kr>, December 6, 2012 (accessed on: December 12, 2012).

13. The Act on Participation in UN PKO was enacted in 2010 in order to promote the Republic of Korea's prompt participation in UN PKO. This law allows the Republic of Korean government and the UN to establish provisional agreements that about 1,000 peacekeepers can be deployed prior to the approval of the National Assembly. See: http://www.mofat.go.kr/ENG/policy/pko/overview/index.jsp?menu=m_20_50_10. Accessed on: January 22, 2013.

14. Associated Press, »Peace Keeping Operations; South Korea and the UNSC«, www.un.mofat.go.kr, December 6, 2012 (accessed on: December 12, 2012).

15. Associated Press, »Peace Keeping Operations; South Korea and the UNSC«, www.un.mofat.go.kr, December 6, 2012 (accessed on: December 12, 2012).

In recent years South Korea has provided troops for and financially supported the UN peacekeeping missions. As such, Seoul has a growing interest in expanding Korea's role in peacekeeping. South Korea's seat on the UNSC provides the perfect setting for Seoul to actively participate in a wide variety of discussions concerning the new peacekeeping opportunities and challenges being presented to both the UNSC and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. Currently, South Korea has 642 troops deployed on eleven peacekeeping missions, including the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

Finally, Seoul will look towards this term in the council as a way to increase its presence at a global level. Seoul's foreign ministry issued a statement saying that »South Korea will be able to take a leading part in the UN's efforts for world peace and security and holding a seat again on the Security Council is also expected to contribute to the stable management of the situation on the Korean Peninsula«. ¹⁶ Seoul is looking to move to the next phase of global leadership by turning from a security consumer to a producer of security resources.

Non-Proliferation

The 2013–14 membership of the UNSC is seen by Seoul as another venue for furthering its multilateral goals of nuclear non-proliferation. Korea has worked closely with the United States to keep North Korea from obtaining nuclear weapons but has also agreed that it itself will not develop nuclear weapons. Korea is a leading exporter of nuclear reactors and it uses nuclear power as an energy source for its capital city. However, it has pledged its support to the United States-driven policy of nuclear non-proliferation. Korea has participated in international efforts to prevent North Korean rearmament. Its term on the UNSC is the next step in assuming a position of international leadership with regard to nuclear policies. Moreover, with its close proximity to North Korea and China, South Korea will use the next two years to vocally express its desires not only for its own region, but for the global community, as shown by the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit held in Seoul.

Korea has supported the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) since it was founded. This has put Seoul at odds not only with North Korea but also with countries such as Iran. A position on the UNSC gives Seoul a chance to pursue a step-by-step approach, taking into account the inherent complexities of the issue. Some of the possible goals for South Korea in the coming year will be to strengthen existing disarmament agreements with countries such as Iran and North Korea, as well as creating new, more binding agreements.

Conclusion and Outlook

Recent instability in the Korean peninsula and the surrounding region has cemented Seoul's goals for its 2013–14 membership of the UNSC. In particular, the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster and the recent missile launches in North Korea have re-emphasized the importance of global non-proliferation. Seoul is working to make not only its region, but the entire globe a safe environment, promoting peace and security through active cooperation. Therefore, UNSC membership in 2013–14 will also see Seoul establishing itself as a staunch supporter of peace and stability in the global community and of the goals of the UN in general.

16. Associated Press, »S. Korea elected to UN Security Council«, *The Korea Times*, October 19, 2012 (accessed on: December 3, 2012).



About the author

Dr. Choi is an Associate Professor at the Graduate School of International Studies at Yonsei University, Seoul. She teaches UN and International Organizations and International Conflict Resolution.

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Global Policy and Development
Hiroshimastraße 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Marius Müller-Hennig, Global Peace and Security Policy

Tel.: ++49-30-269-25-7476 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9246
<http://www.fes.de/GPol/en>

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