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ABSTRACT
Mongolia and the Republic of Korea are in the same "partnership basket" for NATO in the Asia-Pacific. The two countries have burgeoning relations with NATO, which represent a relatively new dimension of international engagement for the region. Through the lens of Strategic Narrative Theory, we attempt to grasp how the strategic narratives of the two countries resonate with NATO-originated messages sent to partners in the Asia-Pacific. Both countries are attempting to reach a certain level of stability in terms of their respective geo-strategic positions in the Asia-Pacific. In the context of its "Third Neighbor" approach, Mongolia is applying a hedging strategy with regard to NATO and other actors in the region, including China, Japan, Russia, and the US. Korea assigns primary significance to its bilateral relationships with bigger powers, most obviously and predominantly the US, while considering NATO a broadly useful if sometimes perfunctory additional partner on a number of other security issues.

Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) made the first attempt to propose to the former Soviet Union talks on what was later formalized in the Helsinki Final Act.[1] Even though the attempt was unsuccessful due to the USSR's resistance to dealing directly with NATO on a variety of sensitive issues, including the confirmation of post-World War II borders in Europe, the intention was historically significant. Arguably, at the beginning of the 1970s, NATO was in search of a distinct political role within the international system and the establishment of a rules-based system within the European continent. In more recent times, a number of tectonic political changes are placing new pressures on the aforementioned international system. These include the end of the ISAF Mission in Afghanistan, a resurgent and assertive Russia, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the rise of ISIS as a threat to European and Asian Security, and the continued shift of global power to the Asia-Pacific region. In this context, NATO's interconnectedness with its "Partners across the Globe" – our focus in this article is on Mongolia and the Republic of Korea (ROK) – is ripe for analysis. Should NATO maintain a more global focus after the ISAF mission, and in that context, what is the opinion of the Global Partners on their relationships with NATO? How do they perceive relations with the world's biggest intercontinental military alliance? How do they strategize regarding their cooperation with NATO, given the organization's power and influence and the return of heightened geo-political tension in Europe and Asia? Are the partnerships perceived as being of high value to both sides, or are they treated by both Mongolia and ROK as perfunctory partnerships?

In the context of this Special Issue on regional perceptions of NATO, the current political environment represents an opportunity for the Alliance to learn more about how Asia-Pacific countries perceive NATO's global cooperative security mechanisms, and recognize strategic narratives that NATO is attempting to communicate. To allow for a comparative analysis with the other

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Table 1. Interviews conducted.

Country/Cohort	Political	Academic	Military
Mongolia	7	7	6
ROK	10	7	3

Source: NATO Global Perceptions – Views from the Asia-Pacific

articles in this volume, this material is divided into five sections. The first part provides some background on Mongolia and the ROK's relationships with NATO, contextualizing them within the changing geo-political situation in Europe and Asia. Section two examines NATO's role in the world as perceived by elites in Mongolia and ROK. Section three looks at perceptions of security threats in Mongolia and ROK. Section four examines perceptions of these countries' partnerships with NATO specifically. The final section explores NATO's public diplomacy as perceived by the two countries' elite representatives.

The analysis in the article is based on findings generated through 40 unique semi-structured interviews conducted with Mongolia and the ROK's high profile elite representatives, covering three cohorts (political, academic, and military). The overall breakdown of interviews conducted per country and per cohort is exhibited in Table 1. Interviews were conducted between June and December 2015.

Drawing on Strategic Narrative Theory, we argue that the two countries, in order to reach a level of stability in their respective geo-strategic positions in the Asia-Pacific, are inclined to apply different strategies against region-oriented actors. This argument is based on an academic extra-polation of a study conducted by Chen and Yang on strategies that ASEAN countries adopt in response to the rise of China.[2] They argue that when a country perceives its relationship with China to be based on either a high level of threat (HT) and positive economic expectations (PE), or a low level of threat (LT) and negative economic expectations (NE), that country will adopt a hedging strategy against the world's most populous nation. According to Goh:

> [h]edging is defined […] as a set of strategies aimed at avoiding (or planning for contingencies in) a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing, bandwagoning, or neutrality. Instead they cultivate a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side at the obvious expense of another.[3]

Singapore, with a visible HT/PE combination, was argued by Chen and Yang to be "a clear example of the hedging strategy in practice."[4] Of course, any analysis in this regard, especially with a focus on the Asia-Pacific, will carry a high level of conventionality due to the obvious factor of reciprocal hedging between China and the US.[5] Nevertheless, when this framework is extrapolated further to the NATO–Mongolia and NATO–ROK partnerships, we find that Mongolians are trying to imple-ment a form of hedging toward NATO, since the strategy usually invloves "persuading other major powers, particularly the United States, to act as counterweights to Chinese regional influence[,] entail[ing] complex engagement of China at the political, economic, and strategic levels[,] enmeshing a number of regional great powers in order to give them a stake in a stable regional order."[6] In the case of the ROK, conversely, the primacy of the country's bilateral alliance with the US is evident, while NATO is considered a useful additional partner in a number of areas. We further argue that the conceptual understanding of hedging constitutes a strategic narrative in itself, particularly in "signaling," which usually "generates ambiguity"[7] in relationships with NATO and other powers in the region.

Background and context

In the last few decades, Asia has become increasingly visible for the West and has assumed a heightened importance in the political, economic, and security calculations of practically all NATO members. This shift in focus is part of a broader historical trend stemming from the outcome of the

Chinese Civil War in 1949, which placed the People's Republic of China firmly on the political map. Among the most recent geo-strategic initiatives of this emerging power is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – one element in China's new vision on how to implement a neighborhood policy that unifies previously separate policies towards different parts of the world (Asia, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Caucasus, and the Baltic Sea areas) into a single comprehensive policy.[8] Elsewhere in Asia, the 1954 fall of the French fortress Điện Biên Phủ to the Việt Minh turned the eyes of many Western experts towards Asia's southeast for the first time.[9] In that year, the ROK had a similar annual per capita GDP to Ghana.[10] Since that point, the ROK's economy has taken its place among the world's most developed nations. In 2016, the ROK's nominal GDP ranked 11th globally.[11] Its GDP per capita is USD 34,569, showing annual growth of 2.8 percent in 2016.[12] Today, as noted by Zielonka, Asian powers have a heightened and powerful presence in high-level negotiations in trade,[13] and scholars have started talking seriously about different paradigms of governance and administration, namely Chinese, Western, and Islamic.[14] Almost a generation ago, a certain level of "demand for cooperation on an intra-Asian basis"[15] was already noticeable. Thus, there was no major surprise among experts in the field when both the ROK and Mongolia signed up for the Chinese BRI. The Asian continent is a mature hub of global activity with a myriad of its own original narratives, and actively involved in constructing and ascribing its own "meaning to past, present, and future in order to achieve political objectives."[16] The latter activity is what constitutes a narrative strategic.

Mongolia and the ROK are in the same partnership grouping with NATO, despite being very different countries in many respects. Conversely, the two Asian nations are facing the same challenge of factoring powerful and sometimes troublesome neighbors into the scope of their foreign policy-related activities. For example, Mongolia borders only two nations, Russia and China, and both of them are regional hegemons. The country is also facing a number of emerging challenges. In 2011, Mongolia experienced an astronomical annual GDP growth rate of 17.3 percent,[17] mainly due to a significant increase in foreign direct investment in the mining industry as well as higher pricing trends for commodities. However, due to the temporary nature of the growth as well as questionable economic policies implemented by the government, the country's GDP growth rate fell to around 2 percent in just four years. This instability had a direct effect on Mongolia's economic relationship with China, its largest trading partner. The significant relative decline of economic growth also reflects, to a certain degree, instability in domestic politics.

As well as economic challenges, the recent turbulence in international relations is strongly felt in Mongolia. The Crimean crisis and the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyudao islands have presented a set of challenging situations for Mongolia that the country responds to through one of the pillars of its foreign and security policy – the so-called "Third Neighbor" policy.[18] Within the scope of this policy, Mongolia attempts to balance the influence of its two neighbors – China and Russia – with third parties. After the end of the Cold War, Mongolia actively pursued good political, economic, and cultural relations with highly developed, democratic states. Through this, Mongolia gained much needed investment and expertise to fuel the development of the country. Despite this, the "Third Neighbor" policy has become a point of criticism from the country's two immediate neighbors. In its early days, it was seen as a pro-Western and, more importantly, a more pro-American policy. For example, as noted by Batbayar in 2002, the then Mongolian Prime Minister Enkhabayar's vision was to see "India as a Third Neighbor in [a] cultural sense, [...] Korea and Japan as Third Neighbors in economic terms, and [...] the United States as a Third Neighbor in strategic terms."[19] However, the modern manifestation of the policy and its overall narrative is more nuanced than simply a tool to further bilateral relations.[20] Arguably, relations between Mongolia and NATO fall within the realm of the "Third Neighbor" policy. The country signed the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program with NATO in 2012 and ascended to become a "Partner Across the Globe." Additionally, Mongolia has deployed troops to NATO-led missions in both Afghanistan and Kosovo.

In the case of the ROK, the most significant security challenge for the country is the North Korean question. Kim Jong-un's political regime has accelerated its missile tests in recent years and

declared that it would develop nuclear-armed ballistic missiles, which could reach the US mainland.[21] If North Korea reaches its goal, there will be further profound implications for the geopolitics of Northeast Asia. Furthermore, Pyongyang is intensifying its cyber attacks against the ROK. In June 2016, North Korea hacked into more than 140,000 computers at 160 South Korean firms and government bodies, planting malicious code under a long-term plan for a massive cyber attack.[22] As recently as May 2017, Pyongyang was linked by security analysts to the WannaCry ransomware code, which had effects on business, hospitals, and governments in 150 countries.[23] In this context, the geopolitics surrounding the Korean peninsula is becoming more complicated. The deployment of THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) – a US-originated anti-missile system – in the ROK was seen as a provocation by China. Tensions between the US and China have worsened, and the latter has retaliated against the ROK by blocking trade in South Korean online goods.[24] Japan has mobilized its military power by revising its self-defense laws and the US–Japan alliance has recently been consolidated.[25] Having been hit hard by internal political crisis, the ROK is somewhat marginalized.

NATO's relationship with the ROK dates to December 2005, when the then Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-Moon paid the very first official visit to NATO Headquarters in Brussels. Since then, slow and steady progress has been made between the two parties. In 2006, ROK was enlisted as one of the "contact countries" for NATO, together with Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. The highlight of the burgeoning relationship was in April 2013, when the then-NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen visited Seoul to meet then Korean President Park Geun-Hye. The ROK has also actively participated in NATO-led operations such as ISAF in Afghanistan since 2010.

In short, burgeoning relations with NATO represent a new dimension in terms of international engagement for both Mongolia and the ROK's elites. Similarly to other country-specific contributions to this Special Issue, this article links its discussion with the main postulates of Strategic Narrative Theory (formation, projection, and reception),[26] attempting to grasp how the two countries' contemporary narratives resonate with NATO-originated messages sent to Mongolia and ROK. Narratives are of great importance, and according to Neumann, "a discourse maintains a degree of regularity in social relations, [...] produc[ing] preconditions for action."[27] Therefore, discourses may have "a structuring effect upon narrative action"[28] in NATO's relationships with Mongolia and ROK.

NATO's perceived role in the world: Views from Mongolia and the ROK

NATO's ability to perform its main role

When asked about NATO's main role in international relations and the organization's ability to perform its role, Mongolian elites' most common response was that NATO, according to the Alliance's legally binding documents, should primarily focus on the defense and security of its own member states. Nine out of 20 interviewees directly spoke of "defending its members"[29] as NATO's main role. At the same time, there was a sizable group of interviewees (seven respondents) who talked about NATO being more broadly linked with "maintaining international peace and security,"[30] "stabilizing international relations,"[31] "being a world policeman,"[32] and "guaranteeing security for Europe and the North Atlantic, but also for the entire world."[33] There was also some mention of "containing non-democratic and totalitarian states."[34] This second view was especially prevalent among the academic cohort – the role of NATO, particularly after the end of the Cold War, was seen as a major deterrent to emerging threats and as an enforcer of international law and order.

NATO's ability to perform its main role was, in general, positively perceived by Mongolian interviewees, with 16 out of 20 respondents giving positive answers. A typical answer was that NATO had performed its role "quite well within their capacity of scope of influence."[35] Ukraine and conflict in the Middle East were each mentioned only once, with NATO being described as "not very capable" in those contexts.[36]

On whether or not NATO should have a global role, Mongolian elites were split into two equal "camps," with the military cohort showing the most skepticism regarding the Alliance's global leadership, advising NATO to concentrate on Europe and North Atlantic (five respondents). However, the same number of interviewees from the Mongolian academic cohort were in favor of NATO having a global role. When asked why they thought the way they did, a number of reasons emerged. The first was that NATO was perceived as the most institutionalized military organization with an unprecedented capacity to handle a plethora of challenges and threats – and that this framed the organization's ability to maintain international peace. Some participants also noted that this level of capacity gave the Alliance a responsibility to act morally. Another argument was that some of the NATO member states have global interests, and therefore, in order to defend them, NATO will most likely have to play a larger role in international affairs. Some said that because the threat to their members has become global in nature, NATO would have no choice but to act on that level to defend itself.

Those Mongolian respondents who answered that NATO should be confined to Europe and the North Atlantic reiterated their previously expressed opinion that the organization should respect the constraints of its main legal documents. It was noted that the Alliance could have a global presence, but its allegiance and duties were linked with its members and no one else. An intriguing perception was present that NATO could not have a global role as it is a military alliance and a military alliance without something to defend (and an enemy to defend itself from) makes little sense. Therefore, NATO must be strictly of a regional nature or dedicated to a particular group of countries only.

In respect of NATO's post-Cold War expansion to take in many new members and the impact of this process on international security, seven Mongolian respondents expressed a positive attitude, stating that the addition of new members established stability by providing them with security. This reaffirmed the stabilizing and pivotal role of the Alliance on the European continent and created a constant point of reference in the chaotic international order of the post-Cold War era. On the other side, nine interviewees (with five being from the political and military cohorts) argued that NATO expansion led to a deterioration in international security – the Alliance could have been a more effective and capable actor without the new members. Additionally, there were four Mongolian respondents who stated that the process of NATO's enlargement had both positive and negative impact on international security. More specifically, as noted by two members of the military cohort, the expansion to the east antagonized Russia.

When asked about NATO's new partnerships in the Asia-Pacific, most of the Mongolian respondents (15 in total) had a cautiously positive outlook. The events in Ukraine were mentioned once to illustrate a potential consequence of partnership with NATO, if the organization's partner is in Europe – but it was underscored that Mongolia is in a different region.[37] The interviewees argued that the globalization of security challenges and the growing international interests of its member states led NATO to play a more active role in the Asia-Pacific. The political and military cohorts suggested that enhanced cooperation, capability, and training with partners in the region would have a stabilizing impact on regional security. There were three representatives of Mongolian elites (two of them from the political cohort) who suggested that NATO "has little impact on the Asia-Pacific." In a significant addition, some interviewees pointed out that NATO developing partnerships in the Asia-Pacific is very sensitive for Mongolia. One participant stated that "NATO is a European organization now operating in the Asia-Pacific, and this causes conflict."[38] This was also seen as potentially raising attention and suspicion from Russia and China.

The most common response on NATO's main role in international security among the Korean interviewees was that NATO is a collective security system between the US and Europe. Whilst 14 out of 20 respondents shared this view, five other interviewees treated NATO as a military alliance between Europe and the US. All of the military interviewees, especially, tended to view NATO as a military system rather than a political forum. There was an interesting point that NATO could develop further in order to effectively deal with new emerging security threats such as cyber security and ISIS terrorism.

Regarding the evaluation of NATO's performance, there was no dominant view among the respondents. Eight people expressed positive opinions on the role of NATO, and one of the main reasons for this was that "[NATO] has an ability by possessing the frame of performing military plans with the participation of many nations."[39] Among the rest, six interviewees gave a negative evaluation of NATO, and the other six said it is hard to make a judgement. One of the negative answers was that "the US intervenes for guaranteeing the US role in international politics and economics, so it is difficult to determine that this issue is value-neutral issue, but, in fact, NATO is intervening in international issues."[40] As for the reason why the evaluation is difficult, one elite representative from the ROK's military cohort stated the following:

> [W]hen we look at NATO's role-playing abilities and the aspects of organized nations, I think NATO has a quite outstanding ability. Especially, now, including the US, the US as a head, and then other five nations including Western nations, I think NATO has a role-playing ability, but in terms of dealing with mediating and proceeding in one direction, at the end, in the process of decision making, I am curious about whether this is appropriate.[41]

On the question whether or not NATO should go global, there was a neck-to-neck division of views. Ten out of 20 respondents stated that the Alliance should go global, and eight said NATO should remain regional as it has been. Interestingly, the political cohort was divided into two equal halves. One of the political interviewees was negative about NATO's being global because "NATO's characters, and then, NATO's global role performances are quite abstract."[42] Another opinion was that, since NATO is "not an aggressive alliance but a defense cooperation, it could focus on its role in European and North Atlantic security."[43] One of the contrasting arguments from the same political cohort was as follows:

> As for spontaneous terrorism problems, for instance, it doesn't seem to be possible for an individual nation to handle them successfully. About this, NATO, which has its knowledge base, could establish cooperation with other vulnerable nations, and then NATO can play a supportive role in exchanging its experience and capability.[44]

The academic cohort tended to be more positive about NATO's globalization. One of them mentioned that "there is an opportunity for NATO to participate in the securing of Africa or NATO's neighbouring regions or further across to the Asian region. On the positive side, on the level of global security, I think NATO can fill in the gap for global peace."[45]

Ten out of 20 Korean respondents considered that the influence of NATO's post-Cold War membership expansion around the world was helpful to strengthen international security. The main justification for these positive views was that NATO could play a stabilizing role in establishing world order and promoting peace. Conversely, negative views included that there is no point judging the influence of NATO's membership expansion across the world. As one of the political cohort said, "NATO has been led by the US with NATO's budget, and the US has performed its core competencies since the post-Cold War. Russia has accepted the fact that NATO expanded its influences up to the Baltic states."[46] Therefore, what matters more is how NATO's basic roles have been changed over the period.

Korean elites' responses to the question on the impact of NATO's multiple partnerships in the Asia-Pacific were less optimistic than in Mongolia, but ten interviewees answered the question with a positive view. The argument in general was that security issues are becoming multinational and more difficult to resolve by any single country. Since there was no existing meaningful multilateral security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, NATO could play an important role in establishing cooperative security partnerships in the region. One of the positive respondents pointed out in this context that "NATO could develop its global partnerships in emerging security areas such as piracy, terrorism or cyber security."[47] Those who took a more negative view (seven respondents) claimed that NATO's development in the Asia-Pacific is "just a perfunctory partnership, a new concept setting a certain relationship with non-member states. [...] In order to reinforce such a concept, it is necessary for NATO to develop global partner nations into cooperating nations."[48] Different Asia-Pacific

countries have different security environments, and this would make it difficult to find common areas for a uniform NATO role in the region. One of the other related perceptions was that since the US played a core role in NATO, the latter's development in the Asia-Pacific means US influence in the region is enhanced. Accordingly, this might increase the possibility of a collision of China and the US in the region.[49]

Ukraine, Afghanistan, and ISIS

In terms of NATO's response to the crisis in Ukraine and its implications for both the Asia-Pacific (in general) and Mongolia (in particular), a significant majority of the answers (11 in total, with eight being recorded in academic and military cohorts) firmly indicated that NATO's response was ineffective. Two interviewees took the view that it was "too early to assess."[50] The majority of Mongolian respondents agreed that the Ukrainian crisis had little to no impact on Mongolia and the Asia-Pacific. However, some argued that, as a direct result of the crisis, Russia had to pivot towards Asia, specifically China, to ensure uninterrupted trade.[51] It was perceived that this could either be good for Mongolia, as the country could play a transit role between the two powers, or it will lead to negative consequences, as Russia would want to exercise more power over Mongolia. Additionally, some participants noted that the Ukraine crisis taught Mongolia an important lesson in foreseeing Russia's expansionist outlook.[52] On a more theoretical level, Russia's actions were seen as a challenge to the rule and sanctity of international law.[53] For small nations, this was highly detrimental to security. Several respondents in the academic cohort suggested that a change in the global balance of power is occurring resulting from or simultaneous with the events in Ukraine. One respondent said that the economic sanctions against Russia were felt in Mongolia, as the country imports food products from Europe through Russia.[54]

The rise of ISIS and NATO's response was also a focus of the interviews. The majority of respondents from the three cohorts specified that the ISIS crisis has no direct impact on Mongolia. The political and academic cohort saw ISIS as a threat in the near future and pointed out that Mongolia should have policies and contingencies in place for the unthinkable. The military cohort, in general, noted that ISIS might potentially have some influence over or is close to having some leverage or presence over Mongolia through the national and religious minorities of the country. Some military respondents stressed that Mongolia has a common border with the Muslim regions of China and to a lesser degree Russia.[55] As for the response of NATO against ISIS, the answers were greatly varied. Some argued that unless ISIS directly threatens a NATO member, the Alliance should stay idle. Others expressed the view that NATO should organize non-combat missions and measures against ISIS, such as surveillance and refugee-linked mechanisms. Academics mostly represented the group that advocated for a NATO intervention. However, their opinion came with the condition that any NATO operation against ISIS should be based on cooperation with Russia and, to a lesser degree, with China.

When asked about the legitimacy of NATO as an international actor, Mongolian respondents universally agreed that NATO is a legitimate actor. Some participants said that NATO has existed for many decades and is a real actor; therefore, regardless of whatever anyone says, NATO has already established its own legitimacy. Some respondents also stated that NATO's future goals will determine its legitimacy.

Finally, on NATO's perceived role in the world, Mongolian interviewees were asked to assess the impact of NATO's mission in Afghanistan on (a) international security, and (b) NATO as an organization. Respondents from the political and military cohorts answered that the actions of NATO had mostly stabilizing effects and led to the consolidation of the government in Afghanistan. However, a slight majority in academia felt that the mission was counter-productive and worsened the situation. The people who had a positive outlook on NATO's mission said that it contained a serious threat. However, an almost equal number of people thought that of the mission was ineffective in containing and defeating the Taliban. Academics agreed that the mission had

stabilized international relations in the short term but that it was too early to correctly assess the after-effects of the mission. On an organizational note, the representatives of the military stated that NATO increased the level of trust and enhanced interoperability among member states as well as partners. Although most were in favor of the effectiveness of the operation, some had doubts about NATO's ability to fight prolonged conflicts, especially against national militaries.

As for the effectiveness of NATO's responses to the Ukrainian crisis and its implications for both the ROK and the Asia-Pacific, more than half of the Korean interviewees (12 out of 20) shared a negative view, stating that NATO did not react effectively to the crisis in Ukraine. Seven of them argued that this effectiveness is due to the fact that Ukraine is not a NATO member state, so the Alliance was not able to exercise a stronger course of military action.[56] Yet, since the neighboring member states of Ukraine or Russia might feel immediate threats, NATO, in order to prepare for the threats or substantial military conflicts, established the Rapid Reaction Forces (RRF) and deployed them.[57] However, NATO basically does not have any restricting body or system. Such restrictions can only be imposed on the EU-level, and what NATO could do is emphasize its military power capability if threatened or attacked, and show its political willingness to apply Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. NATO would face a difficult situation resolving such issues.[58] Concerning the implications of the Ukrainian crisis for the Asia-Pacific and the ROK, one political interviewee raised two points: first, this is a case where NATO could not play a direct or effective role in solving the Ukrainian issue. NATO has deficiencies in restricting Russia's continuous actions, so it is proved that the concepts of collective or cooperative security are not enough. Second, Russia caused a deepening of its conflicts with the Western world. Therefore, this issue has implications with regard to Russia's active and closer engagement in the Far East Asian region.[59] This second point over-lapped with another political interviewee's comment that the ROK should take greater care to communicate its reliability to the US in the context of the US–Korea alliance.[60]

When it comes to the rise of ISIS and the role of NATO, more than half of respondents (11 out of 20) stated that the rise of ISIS would not be a direct threat to the ROK. However, one academic interviewee stressed that "the random expansion of terror or terror-equivalent attacks can, in the end, happen all over the world," which is a dangerous factor for Korea's counter-terrorist security.[61] NATO may not be able to play an active role on this issue at the moment, but in the least, it can provide some support to the nations or regions concerned in order to lower the level of threat.[62] As for the way NATO could contribute to dealing with the ISIS threat, quite a number of interviewees (five out of 20) suggested that NATO could share or exchange some information on ISIS with its partner countries. As the range of ISIS activity widens and internationalizes, it is useful to have international cooperation including information-sharing. Since the US has much information on this issue, and European nations have active international cooperation, these actors could co-ordinate under NATO's initiative. In this context, NATO could even re-identify itself as "an entity of counter-terrorism defense."[63]

As for the legitimacy of NATO as an international actor, most of the Korean respondents (17 out of 20) stated that NATO is indeed a legitimate international actor. However, they also addressed the point that the Alliance's position has much changed – from a military alliance to a political security system – in the post-Cold War era. NATO has been successful as a collective security institution in European region. Now it is time to benchmark and further explore to apply it to the Northeast Asian region.[64] Furthermore, it is necessary for NATO to clarify its future vision and identity. NATO has been perceived as a safety pole in terms of traditional security,[65] and needs to re-position its identity in a new global context. The Korean elites commonly argued that NATO should continuously find out new security areas where it can make contributions.

In assessing the impact of NATO's mission in Afghanistan on international security and NATO as an organisation in the eyes of the Korean elites, positive and negative views were roughly equally divided. There were slightly more negative views (nine out of 20) than positive ones (eight out of 20). Those who were positive agreed that the mission in Afghanistan was "one of NATO's most successfully conducted military operations" since the Cold War.[66] The mission has significance all

the more because NATO fulfilled its mission successfully outside Europe.[67] According to them, NATO should have learned diverse kinds of beneficial experiences through the Afghan operation, increasing its influence in the broader region. However, those who were negative about NATO's impact commonly pointed out that the Afghan mission was not a NATO-led but a US-led mission. One academic interviewee emphasised that "NATO cannot take on the whole process alone. On that side, I see that NATO's operation was a practical exercise showing how NATO establishes a division of labour with other international partners."[68] In the same vein, another academic interviewee argued that "the US is involved with NATO, so I think NATO influence upon Afghanistan is a reflection of the US influence upon NATO."[69] Unless NATO can rebrand itself not as a US-centred multinational military alliance but as a new collective security cooperation institution, such negative images seem set to continue.

Perceptions of security threats in Mongolia and the ROK

More than half of the Mongolian participants (14 respondents across all three cohorts) named "economic security" as the greatest security threat to Mongolia. During the time when the interviews were conducted, Mongolia was experiencing and continues to experience an economic crisis caused by mismanagement of resources and misinterpretation of world economic trends.[70] Most interviewees pointed out that the state of the economy and its future will have the most effect on the long-term security of the country. Furthermore, they noted that if the economy is not stable, all other facets of security will be at risk. A majority of the academic cohort identified the stability of the government and political institutions in general as the second most frequently occurring challenge. The economy and governance are commonly seen as two sides of the same coin in Mongolia. This partly explains the high occurrence of this answer among the participants. Within the military cohort, half of the participants named the potential loss of Mongolian culture and identity as well as the impact of foreign culture as the second challenge. So far, all challenges have been domestic problems. However, the political cohort almost unanimously agreed that the state of international relations and current events were of great importance to Mongolia. Another security threat named mostly by the political and academic community was environmental degradation and global climate change (eight respondents mentioned this). This answer has two dimensions. On the one side, the question of climate change is an issue that must be addressed at all levels. However, on the other side, the economic driving forces of Mongolia, namely mining and agriculture, are environmentally damaging. Therefore, the interviewees point out, if a sustainable way to continue animal husbandry and mining is not found, the very foundation of the economy and the nomadic way of life will be in jeopardy.[71] Other answers include elaborations on the state and readiness of the Mongolian military to defend the country, illegal immigration, food security, the clash between nomadic and sedentary lifestyles, cyber security, and terrorism.

When asked about NATO's relevance to the previously identified security challenges, the majority of the Mongolian interviewees stated that because most challenges and threats were domestic in nature, the Alliance has little to no relevance. Nevertheless, the cohorts named the following roles for NATO to aid Mongolia overcome some of its difficulties. The political cohort identified NATO as a vehicle/platform to express national interests and opinions as well as a way to source military technology and training.[72] An interesting answer was that NATO is an important aspect of Mongolia's security policy as it can help the country balance against uncontrolled dynamics.[73] The military cohort saw NATO as a partner for joint training, information security, capacity-building and institutional reform.[74] The academic cohort named the previously mentioned as roles of NATO but added that joint research must be done to further develop the understanding of the nature and value of the relationship.[75]

In the Korean case, the high-profile respondents commonly pointed out the following three security challenges that the country is facing: North Korea (and its nuclear threat), the geopolitical dynamism of regional partnerships, and the emergence of new security issues. Many respondents

agreed that North Korea's unpredictable behavior aggravates regional instability in Northeast Asia. The geopolitical dynamism of regional partnerships is related to the changing environment of the powers surrounding the Korean peninsula. China's emergence is causing tensions *vis-a-vis* the US, and Japan is arguably reinforcing its military power by introducing its collective self-defence legislation.[76] In this respect, tensions are rising in US–China, Korea–Japan, and Korea–China relationships, while the existing traditional alliance between the US and Korea was expected to possibly change accordingly. As for new security issues, terrorism, pandemic diseases, and cyber security are emerging as serious threats at the global level. For the past few years, Korean people have heard how seriously ISIS causes threats globally, including to Korea. During the interview period, a contagious disease called *MERS* (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) struck the entire nation. From the news that 186 people were infected and 38 died just within six months since the outbreak, Korean people were alerted about a new type of security threat. Such experiences seemed to influence the Korean elites' concept of security. Many interviewees were aware that such security threats go beyond the traditional remit. One academic interviewee, in particular, argued that such kinds of pandemic disease are "a new type of non-traditional security threat," and stressed that "we might do something to deal with the pandemic with NATO, and this will be ground-breaking."[77]

As for the relevance of NATO in dealing with the aforementioned security challenges, more than half of the ROK elite representatives across the three cohorts (11 respondents) did not see much relevance. One political interviewee stated that "for NATO, as a player, its stage is not the global level but the regional level. Therefore, it is difficult to associate NATO with Korea's security issues at the current stage."[78] This view was supported by a representative of the academic cohort in his extensive statement:

> Korea is not directly related with NATO, and in 2012, I believe both parties put their signatures on partnership agreement, in terms of that, it is difficult to see NATO as a relevant actor for Korea. In some sense, NATO and Korea will establish their cooperative relationships. However, this has not been presented more in detail, especially, now NATO–Korea cooperation is closely related with the relationship with the US because of US–Korea relations and alliances. Therefore, America's pivot to Asia and its influence upon Korea, this is closely related with China at the end. Thus, in the context of US–China relations, how Korea should take a certain stance has become an immediate diplomatic issue, as and when the Korean government expands its partnership cooperation with NATO, or when there is a regional conflict. NATO opened the possibility of intervention, which is important, but I do not think NATO could intervene in this region in a direct manner.[79]

Many interviewees from the three cohorts mentioned that most of NATO's members are also EU member states, and these individual nations are closer to Korea than NATO as an organization. Since NATO is currently focusing on European security in Europe and its neighboring regions, NATO cannot be involved directly in Northeast Asia, including the Korean peninsula. The interviewees also thought that when there was a need arising, Korea could use its individual partnerships with NATO member states.

NATO partnership as perceived by Mongolian and Korean elites

On a more country-specific note, interviewees were asked about the impact of the Mongolia–NATO partnership on the country's security. Nine respondents out of 20 confirmed that NATO's relations with Mongolia had a positive impact on security. However, all these participants said either that it is positive because of the limited scale of cooperation or that it fits under the narrative of the "Third Neighbor" policy. Two interviewees described the partnership as having a distinctly negative effect on the national security of Mongolia. A big concern for them (as well as for those who noted both sides of the effect) was that, first, NATO is a military alliance and, second, that Mongolia's two neighbors, Russia and China, would be antagonized due to this.[80] Participants noted that caution should be a great priority when cooperating with NATO. One respondent added that it was too early in the development of the partnership to correctly assess its impacts.

With regard to whether Mongolia–NATO relations are military or political in nature, nine representatives went for "political," seven for "military," and three for both dimensions equally. Academic interviewees predominantly saw relations as political, whereas the military cohort focused more on the military dimension. When asked about how Mongolia–NATO relations affected bilateral relations with the US, 10 respondents confirmed that bilateral relations were enriched through the partnership with NATO and that the US acts as a bridge to NATO as well. This response was most common among the military and academia. The majority of the political cohort said that the two dimensions should be viewed as separate and had little practical relevance to each other. When asked to elaborate their responses, the participants stated that NATO serves as a bridge between Mongolia and the US and creates more avenues of cooperation, with ISAF a concrete example among others. Conversely, some argued that NATO falls under US European Command and Mongolia under PACOM, therefore, the overall benefit is very limited. With regard to whether the partnership with NATO primarily provides benefits in the realm of traditional or non-traditional security, the number of people who responded traditional and non-traditional was almost equal (eight and nine interviewees, respectively).

When Mongolian interviewees were asked if they had any additional comments, a common observation was that NATO needs to improve its image among decision makers and the general public.[81] This comment may have arisen due to the fact that the current decision makers were brought up in a time when NATO was the enemy. One respondent said that Mongolia might have reached the limit of cooperation with the Alliance and that anything further would realistically be inadvisable for both parties. Others commented that the partnership has become somewhat flat and that it must be reinvigorated. An academic interviewee commented that Mongolia should participate more in NATO missions to enhance and widen cooperation. A common comment was that the relationship should move away from politics and focus more on training and capacity building, especially in non-traditional areas such as technology, cyber, and information security.[82] This was followed by concern about Russia and China, as they might see the partnership as a threat or challenge to their security.

Regarding the impact of the Korea–NATO relationship on security challenges in Korea, ten interviewees expressed negative views, and six were on the positive side. The reason for the negativity was that NATO is only one of Korea's partners globally, so it is difficult to detect a broad range of mutual obligations between Korea and NATO. If NATO's role is to seek stabilization in the Eurasian region and that does not work well, this would lead to a negative influence rather than a positive one. In addition, NATO has not been able to make a significant connection yet with the ROK in dealing with the latter's security issues. Even if NATO is an alliance including the US, NATO did not consider the possibility of North Korean nuclear proliferation as its own issue.[83] In that respect, NATO's influence on Korea security should be limited and minimal. However, on the other side, there are some positive opinions regarding impact. The point is that when Korea wants to get some concrete results on its own security – including relating to North Korean issues or human rights – it is desirable to have many supporting partners at an international level. In that case, NATO and its cooperation could be a foundation from which the ROK could receive such support. Since there is an increasing need to address non-traditional security areas – cyber-security, for instance, the partnership with NATO could be helpful for the ROK.

The second point concerns whether or not the Korea–NATO relationship adds benefits beyond the Korea–US relationship. Unsurprisingly, 14 respondents out of 20 underscored that the Korea–US relationship is more important in dealing with Korea's national security. There was no single elite representative who would go for the Korea–NATO relationship. Quite straightforwardly, many added that without the Korea–US alliance, it would be difficult to talk about relations with NATO because this is the axis of ROK security. However, some expectations were expressed as well on the Korea–NATO partnership. Although the Korea–NATO relationship was not for territorial defense, cooperation could be developed in new security areas. NATO, in other words, could be an important organization that supplements the existing Korea–US alliance.

Finally, the overwhelming majority of Korean interviewees (15 representatives) across all three cohorts stated that the Korea–NATO relationship provides benefits in non-traditional areas of security. For NATO, it is difficult to intervene militarily in Korea in a direct manner, so it could cooperate with Korea in new security areas such as counter-terrorism and cyber security. In this regard, NATO's accumulated experience and knowledge could be helpful to Korea.

Perceptions of NATO's public diplomacy in Mongolia and the ROK

When asked about the information channels NATO was using to communicate, most of the respondents noted that there were no active channels that they knew of, and none of the respondents actively used NATO's existing channels for information. A common suggestion was for NATO to publish a weekly or monthly newsletter in the Mongolian language for people who work in this field.[84] The interviewees suggested that language is a strong barrier[85] for them in regards to having access to information. Therefore, a Mongolian language newsletter would be very effective in disseminating information primarily to people who work in the field but also the general public. During the interviews, it was also observed that several participants had erroneous information about NATO. Interviewees acknowledged their shortcomings and suggested that an introductory seminar for individuals whose work is NATO-related should be organized.[86] When asked about their general sources for security-related news and analysis, the majority replied that news websites and TV news are most common. Academics and representatives of the military cohort tended to use research papers and analysis more often than others. Here, it was observed that because they depend on the knowledge of a second language, their sources of NATO-related information and ultimately their attitude towards NATO were very different.

In Korea, the respondents mentioned a wider spectrum of sources from which they collected information on NATO. Mostly, they tended to refer to the Internet and academic research papers. News media was another important source for them, but they commonly said that they rely on foreign sources rather than domestic ones, as the latter rarely deal with NATO issues. The sources they mentioned for their reference include *The New York Times, The Financial Times*, and *CNN*. Some of the respondents said they use the NATO website, but they feel that the information given on the website is limited. They preferred to use their personal human network if available or to get relevant information from NATO member state embassies instead.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what are the main narratives that can be identified in the ROK and Mongolia cases, and what do the interviews tell us about the general state of the partnerships? This study did not detect a high level of similarity in overall patterns of perceptions of NATO in Mongolia and the ROK. One of the main findings of this research was the contrast between relatively positive general views on NATO among elites found in Mongolia as opposed to more skeptical views observed in the ROK. This finding is explained by the significantly different and complex geo-strategic situations of both countries. There is also some level of ambiguity in the responses. For example, in the Mongolian case, while the overwhelming majority of respondents praised the Alliance's ability to perform its main role, there was still an equal split in answers given to the direct question on whether or not the organization should have a global role. In the case of the ROK, the country is firmly attached to the importance of its traditional ally, the US, and this factor makes any other prospective partner secondary. As such, most of the interviewed elites, even though they were not specifically asked, were skeptical in their further elaboration that NATO could take the role of the existing ROK–USA alliance, even to some extent.

A high level of divergence was detected in the narratives of Mongolia and ROK in regards of the two countries' main security challenges. In Mongolia the main challenges to security were domestic, whereas for the ROK the main security challenges were external in nature. In both cases, NATO's

relevance for effectively tackling the respective sets of security challenges for both countries was not confirmed by the elites. Another important narrative concerned the impact that NATO's multiple partnerships in the Asia-Pacific are having on international security. There was significant curiosity about NATO: in the Mongolian case, the elites' attitude towards the aforementioned interactions could be interpreted as overwhelmingly positive; the Korean case markedly less so.

Mongolia and the ROK are trying to develop and apply country-specific strategies towards NATO. In the Mongolian case, the ambiguity of the country's geo-strategic position does not allow it to covert its relatively positive "curiosity" towards prospectively beneficial partnership with the Alliance into something more specific, rather than a useful "bridge" in the relationship-building process between Mongolia and the US. Therefore, partnership with NATO solidifies the country's inborn disposition and strategic imperative to act with caution, always looking back at China and Russia and "watch[ing] their policies with apprehension."[87] This practice helps to explain the variation on a hedging strategy that Mongolia arguably develops with regard to its cooperation with NATO. A high level of apprehension or even threat (HT), which comes from any development that could prospectively jeopardize the three-million-strong country's relations with China and/or Russia, co-exists with a high level of positive expectation (PE) and geo-strategic "excitement" from the fact that Mongolia has a partnership with the world's biggest intergovernmental military alliance.

In the case of Korea, the country is in a different geo-strategic "league" to Mongolia. The LT/HT-PE/NE model can hardly be applicable for the ROK. NATO's global role may be a hard-to-ignore factor, but the ROK, whilst being geopolitically "surrounded" by China, Japan, Russia, and the US, heavily and sincerely relies only on the US–Korea bilateral alliance that has been solid for more than half a century. Anything else is a definite bonus.

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30. Political cohort, Mongolia.

31. Academic cohort, Mongolia.

32. Military cohort, Mongolia.

33. Political cohort, Mongolia.

34. Political cohort, Mongolia.

35. Political cohort, Mongolia.

36. Political cohort, Mongolia.

37. Academic cohort, Mongolia.

38. Military cohort, Mongolia.

39. Political cohort, ROK.

40. Political cohort, ROK.

41. Military cohort, ROK.

42. Political cohort, ROK.

43. Political cohort, ROK.

44. Political cohort, ROK.

45. Academic cohort, ROK.

46. Political cohort, ROK.

47. Academic cohort, ROK.

48. Political cohort, ROK.

49. Academic cohort, ROK.

50. Political and military cohorts, Mongolia.

51. Media cohort, Mongolia.

52. Political cohort, Mongolia.

53. Military cohort, Mongolia.

54. Military cohort, Mongolia.

55. Military cohort, Mongolia.

56. Academic cohort, ROK.

57. Political cohort, ROK.

58. Political cohort, ROK.

59. Political cohort, ROK.

60. Political cohort, ROK.

61. Academic cohort, ROK.

62. Political cohort, ROK.

63. Academic cohort, ROK.

64. Political cohort, ROK.

65. Political cohort, ROK.

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78. Political cohort, ROK.
79. Academic cohort, ROK.
80. Military cohort, Mongolia.
81. Political cohort, Mongolia.
82. Military cohort, Mongolia.
83. Academic cohort, ROK.
84. Media cohort, Mongolia.
85. Media cohort, Mongolia.
86. Military cohort, Mongolia.
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