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**Democratizing National Security:**  
Implications of Human Security Framework on Human Rights and Civil Society in the  
Republic of Korea

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## **Abstract**

This thesis analyzes the intersection among civil society, human rights, and national security narratives in the Republic of Korea. It first traces the evolution of civil society, human rights, and national security narratives in South Korea, followed by an examination of the aptness of current national security narratives and its impact on human rights and civil society. The thesis attempts to answer the following questions: first, what are the dominant national security narratives in contemporary South Korean society; second, what are the human rights implications of South Korea's national security narratives; and third, what are the significance and role of South Korean civil society under a new security framework? Finally, it argues for a shift toward a new security framework, namely one based on human security and comprehensive security frameworks.

## **Keywords**

Republic of Korea, Human Rights, Civil Society, Democracy, National Security, National Security Narratives, National Security Law, Human Security, Comprehensive Security

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### **Recent Political Developments on the Korean Peninsula**

At the time of writing, many political developments have been unfolding on the Korean peninsula. What was quickly termed ‘Choi-gate’ by the Korean media revealed a corruption scandal involving former President Park Geun-hye and her aides, as well as the chief executive of Samsung, the country’s largest conglomerate. The level of corruption and lack of government accountability sparked a series of remarkably peaceful anti-government protests around the nation. Gathering in Gwanghwa-mun Plaza, a symbolic political and historical location in central Seoul, protesters from all walks of life called for government accountability and reaffirmation of democratic principles. The series of peaceful protests triggered surmountable public pressure that eventually led to the prosecution and indictment of two important figures, Samsung chief executive and former President Park. The recent protests echo the massive demonstrations that forced the authoritarian Chun Doo-hwan government to hold democratic elections in 1987. As such, 2017 marks another democratic upheaval in South Korea.

On the diplomatic front, South Korea’s geostrategic position is called into question amid escalating Sino-American tension. In response to North Korea’s consecutive missile tests and increasing nuclear provocations, the United States and the Republic of Korea confirmed the deployment of THAAD (Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense) missile-defense system amid domestic and regional controversy. While the U.S. claims that THAAD deployment is solely for the protection of its South Korean ally against potential nuclear attacks, China perceives the deployment as an American geopolitical agenda to contain China and maintain control in the

Asia-Pacific. South Korea currently stands at an important junction, as it simultaneously boasts longtime military alliance with the U.S., as well as a substantial economic partnership with China. South Korea is already suffering from China's economic retaliation, as it is projected that the South Korean economy faces an economic loss of \$14.76 billion USD in the worst-case scenario.

Placed within the historical context of Korea, the significance of these events cannot be overstated. As South Korea prepares for its 19th Presidential election, many questions remain unanswered, especially with the growing threat of North Korea, rapidly changing geopolitics in Northeast Asia, and with the side effects of globalization altering the international security landscape. The major agenda items for the incoming administration can be summed up as the increasing threat of nuclear North Korea, THAAD (Terminal High-Altitude Aerial Defense) system deployment, rising domestic political tensions, and economic insecurity.

The intricacies of South Korea's political reality require a historical contextualization. First, the ongoing inter-Korean conflict that stemmed from ideological rivalry required the South Korean government to place greater importance on combatting the threat of North Korea and the Communist ideology. As North Korea continues to dominate South Korea's national security thinking, however, its implications on democratic principles remain severe. The National Security Law (NSL), enacted in 1948 against the North Korean threat, has been under international criticism for its misuse in curtailing dissent and repressing civil political rights of South Korean citizens. Although the amendment, or the repeal of the NSL continues to be

debated, insofar as the potential for abuse by the ambiguity of NSL threatens freedom of expression, assembly, and association, its threat to democracy remains an obstacle.

At this critical juncture in Korean history, the incoming administration faces unique challenges against the backdrop of a new international security environment, necessitating a vastly different national security thinking. With this in mind, I shall discuss the human rights implications of current national security narratives in South Korea, examine at the potential human rights implications of human security framework, and look to possibilities of South Korean civil society organizations under this new security framework. With two pioneering works by Hong and Suh on the reconfiguration of South Korea's national security framework as a point of departure, Part II will present a comparative analysis of their work. Part III will provide a thorough overview of national security narratives in South Korea, beginning with the conceptual understanding of political narratives and national security. Subsequently, in Part IV, South Korea's human rights progress, as well as human rights implications under the current national security framework will be assessed. Part V will discuss South Korean civil society in relation to the national security – human rights nexus. Part VI will then provide an intersectional analysis of human rights, national security and civil society in South Korea with a focus on a new security framework. Lastly, Part VII will conclude the thesis with some closing thoughts.



## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Re-imagining National Security in the Post-Cold War Era**

Constructing a new national security framework has been a topic of fervent discussion and debate in the post-cold war era. As globalization brought about unforeseen changes to the international security landscape, scholars and policymakers began addressing new security threats that emerged from the uncertainties of the global security landscape. During the Cold War, national security was imagined as a state's response to external threats. Cold war-era security thinking prioritized the values of 'nation-states' and their national and territorial sovereignty. This traditional conceptualization was wrought with militarism, which Suh refers to as "the phenomenon by which a nation's armed services do to put their institutional preservation ahead of achieving national security or even a commitment to the integrity of the government structure of which they are a part" (Suh, 2016, p. 53), reflecting the arms race that defined the cold war era.

In the era of globalization, the international security landscape underwent a drastic transformation. The concept of nation-states and borders began to falter with increased interdependence among states and the emergence of global citizenship. UNESCO defines global citizenship as a sense of belonging to a broader community and a shared human experience. This new concept emphasizes political, economic, social and cultural interdependency among states, as well as the interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global. A direct reflection of the globalized world, the core concept of global citizenship can be extended to other areas, including the security domain. In this vein, national security began to be re-conceptualized

to address non-military national security issues, such as economic, societal, and environmental security. Moreover, this broadened scope also recognized that national security threats can come from within and outside of a state's borders, and that the nature of security threats are transnational.

As such, several national security frameworks emerged in the post-cold war era to address new security threats. Particularly pertinent are the concepts of human security and comprehensive security. They will be examined through a comparative analysis of the following works: Bo-hyuk Suh's *Revolving the Korean Conflict through a Combination of Human Rights and Human Security* and Yong-Pyo Hong's *The Broadening of the Security Concept in the Post-Cold War Era and the Security Environment of the Korean peninsula*.

## **2. Literature Review**

In South Korea's national security narratives, the articulation of the North Korean threat is inevitable. As both Suh and Hong agree, the security thinking on the Korean peninsula has not escaped the Cold War mentality. As the subsequent analysis will show, Hong's comprehensive security framework argument is rather a macro-analysis, while Suh's support of a human rights-based (RBA) approach to human security employs a specific optic on the inter-Korean conflict. Yet both authors express concern regarding the adverse impact of the South Korean government's security narratives on human rights in the country. First, the state-centric and military-focused approach to national security is inadequate in addressing new security challenges. Second the politicization of the North Korean threat continues to be detrimental to

democratic principles in the Korean political landscape. Lastly, the state's stronghold on national security narratives restrict space for non-state actors' contributions, limiting creative security solutions and policies.

In the globalized era, national security is broadly conceptualized to include a plethora of security challenges such as environmental pollution, economic insecurity, and political instability. The threat of environmental pollution and climate change is not limited within a state's borders: Rather, it poses a grave threat to humanity, irrespective of territorial or political boundaries. Increasing scarcity of resources, such as clean drinking water, can also lead to socio-political instability. On the same token, as economic insecurity can undermine the economic underpinning of a state, it can lead to military and political insecurity.

Against this reality, Hong argues that since its inception, South Korea's governments have invoked the North Korean threat as a mainstay of national security narratives in order to secure each regime's repressive rule. Hong criticizes the limited approach to security conceptualization that still centers around militarism. It was only in the late 1990s that the Korean government began incorporating a broader conceptualization of security. He emphasizes the need for a comprehensive security policy and the input of civilians in policymaking as the complexities of the new security landscape require input from professionals and scholars of various fields that pertain to this multifaceted security landscape. In this vein, he stresses the importance of multilateralism, cooperation, and civilian participation. (Hong, 2002, p. 136)

Moreover, Hong points to South Korea's political chasm pertaining to North Korean issues as contributing to the country's political insecurity. The politicization of human rights in relation to Korea's division system impedes democratic growth while fueling divisive politics. In particular, the controversy surrounding the amendment or repeal of the National Security Law (NSL) continues to drive the political wedge further among the populace. Hong argues that despite the decline in using the North Korean threat for regime security ends, as domestic political disputes continue, this political security threat posed by North Korea bear negative consequences for South Korea's domestic political security.

Similarly, Suh (2016) problematizes the rights-security tension specific to South Korea, articulating that the "politicization of human rights, a nuclear division system, and militarism as an extreme type of security dilemma explain how human rights and security have taken wrong turns in the Korean Peninsula and produced a negative synergistic effect from the beginning" (Suh, p. 67). In the contemporary era, the North Korean threat continues to evolve with North Korea's successive nuclear tests, emergence of Kim Jong-eun as its new leader, and rising military tensions in Northeast Asia. This necessitates a re-configuration of South Korea's security framework vis-à-vis North Korea.

Suh criticizes the dominant national security narrative of militarism, under which the South Korean government spent an exorbitant sum on military spending and allowed its military policy to remain unchecked by civilian control and good governance. Also, he argues that the conventional security discourse heavily focused on the North Korean threat obscures the complexities of Korean peninsula's security dynamics. In other words, viewing the inter-Korean

conflict strictly from a conventional national security perspective is detrimental to the human rights improvement on the peninsula. As such, he proposes the right to peace and the rights-based approach (RBA) to human security as a new security framework that protects both national security and human rights.

According to Suh, the right to peace is defined in a negative and a positive dimension. The negative dimension refers to the right of people to live peacefully without violence, and the positive dimension underlines “the rejection of structural and cultural violence that undermine peace and sustainable life against violence and war” (Suh, p. 68). The positive right to peace includes disarmament, freedom of conscience and religion pertaining to an individual’s non-participation in military activities, transparency of military security policies, and the right to citizens’ participation in security policy matters.

Moreover, Suh encourages viewing inter-Korean relations through a human security framework. He argues that this framework highlights other, previously neglected issue areas such as “economic development and human rights, as well as the seven aspects of human security; food, health, environment, economy, personal integrity, community, and political security” (Suh, p. 69). This re-configuration of inter-Korean relations also accentuates the role of NGOs, local communities, and (inter-)governmental organizations, as the focus shifts from state-centric policies to those that are public-centric. As such, broadening the conceptualization of security on the Korean peninsula can reconcile security and human rights, and enhance the role of non-state actors, while meaningfully paving the path for peace.

As previously examined, Hong and Suh converge on the need for a new security framework, yet diverge on the specific security framework that should be implemented. Hong accentuates the need for a comprehensive security framework that addresses pre-existing security threats, as well as military, political, economic, societal, and environmental factors. On the other hand, Suh emphasizes a human security framework that places human rights improvement in security reconfiguration towards North Korea. Despite the differences in their approach, both authors argue that a re-configuration of national security is imperative in South Korea. They equally stress the role of non-state actors in the security sector, as well as the importance of multilateral cooperation. Regrettably, however, their analyses lack a profound examination of human rights implications and an articulation of the ways in which the role of non-state actors can be enhanced.

As such, this thesis will attempt to complement the insightful works by Hong and Suh by highlighting human rights implications of reconfiguring the national security framework in South Korea, and examining the role of civil society under a new security framework that emphasizes human security and respects the rights of citizens.

### **III. NATIONAL SECURITY NARRATIVES IN SOUTH KOREA**

## 1. Politics of a Narrative

*“In politics, language is a crucial medium, means, locus, and object of contest. It neither competes nor complements power politics: it is power politics. Through language, actors exercise influence over others’ behavior. Through language, political subjects are produced and social relations defined.<sup>1</sup>”*

Following the instrumentalization of language in the political as articulated by Krebs above, this section begins with a question: *what is a narrative?* Thought to exist exclusively in the realm of fiction, narratives occupy a powerful position in the political sphere. Narratives are essentially stories articulated, and thus satiate the human predisposition for storytelling. Krebs (2015) emphasizes the role of narratives as the ways in which people make meaning of, and make sense of, their reality (p. 10). It is a vital tool with which people navigate the disorder of the human experience. As such, narratives impart power from its cognitive and constructive function. Patterson and Monroe (1998) emphasize the role of narratives in constructing political behavior as such:

“Insofar as narratives affect our perceptions of political reality, which in turn affect our actions in response to or in anticipation of political events, narrative plays a critical role in the construction of political behavior. In this sense, we create and use narratives to interpret and understand the political realities around us” (p. 315-316).

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald R. Krebs, Narrative and the Making of US National Security (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015) p. 2.

Indeed, narrative serves as an instrument of power and contestation in the political sphere through its power to construct, compel, and distort. Political narratives do not simply come to be. They are fabricated with a political vigor, with its constructive power resting in the hands of the ruling elites who possess a degree of legitimacy. Payne (2014) states that American national security elites, including policymakers, strategically construct narratives to identify threats, advocate a specific set of policy actions in response, and to maintain support for the selected policy options (Payne, p. 13). Thus, the significance of a political narrative is its ability in constructing the political reality in which it exists. As diverse and fragmented political actors are, political narratives are equally diverse and disjointed. Therefore, the act of identifying the grand narrative becomes vital in assessing the political reality as constructed by the political elites.

This exercise in semantics launches another inquiry: *what, then, is a national security narrative?* Krebs (2015) states that “national security narratives weave together past, present, and future, offering a forecast based on the lessons they draw from signal past events” (p. 13). National security narratives can be defined as a set of a nation-state’s policy objectives on national security expressed in a storytelling format by political elites. Although national security narratives are easily legitimized when told by political elites due to the authority they possess, their narratives must also be produced in a manner that is easily accepted by the public. In other words, effective storytelling is essential in generating consensus among the citizens, which is ultimately conducive to generating support for the government’s security policies and strategies. Then, it must be asked: what kind of stories are told by the ruling elites in South Korea?

## **2. Narrating National Security in South Korea: The North Korean threat**



Recalling the ways in which political narratives construct a political reality, assessing a state's national security narratives can provide the contours of the political landscape of a country. According to Krebs, "dominant narratives of national security establish the common-sense givens of debate, set the boundaries of the legitimate, limit what political actors inside and outside the halls of power can publicly justify, and resist efforts to remake the landscape of legitimation. Dominant narratives thereby shape the national security policies that states pursue" (Krebs, p. 3).

In situating this definition of national security narrative in the South Korean political landscape, Baldwin's specifications for national security will serve as a useful framework for contextual understanding. He proposes that the concept of security in the most general sense can be understood in the following terms: security for *whom* and security for *which values* (Baldwin, 1997, p. 13)? First, South Korea's national security can be conceptualized for the South Korean people, and for the values of democracy and legitimacy. It is therefore useful to trace the national security narratives of the South Korean government since its inception.

The division on the Korean peninsula was borne out of an ideological strife; democracy in the South against Communism in the North. The conflict between North and South is ongoing, gridlocked in cold war-era tensions. Understandably, South Korea's national security objective has been safeguarding its territorial integrity and state sovereignty. Indeed, South Korea's dominant national security narratives pertained to an anticommunist ideology, in tune with the Cold War rhetoric of the United States during the Cold War. This is hardly surprising, as the

dominant national strategy of the U.S. in the Cold War era was its fight against communism, and simultaneously, the promotion of liberal democracy in “the Rest” of the world (Alagappa, 2004, p. 142). Yet as Cold War tensions persist on the peninsula, national security narratives in South Korea have largely stood unchallenged since the First Republic.

In the early years of the republic, anti-Communist rhetoric was frequently invoked as a centerpiece of national security narratives to legitimize the repressive rule of each regime. Syngman Rhee used an aggressive anti-Communist rhetoric to unite the country against the North, justifying his authoritarian rule. Subsequently, Park Chung-hee’s unveiled his economic plan to enhance his political legitimacy, justify his authoritarian rule, and respond to North’s military buildup. As such, national security narratives in the early stages of South Korea’s history served to provide a justification for repressive rule, rather than combating the ideological and military threat of the North Korean regime. Yet it continues to permeate the political discourse today, with each incoming administration re-branding its North Korea-related security commitment in ways that assuages the fears of the Korean public. This insalubrious practice of regenerating North Korean policy as a mere campaign rhetoric and a flashy banner under which to garner public support has stripped it of substance. In other words, issues related to North Korea are highly politicized in the country.

The politicization of North Korean issues is exhibited in the controversy surrounding the National Security Law (NSL). In response to the ideological and existential threat posed by North Korea in the early days of the Republic, South Korea enacted the National Security Law on December 1, 1948. The original intent behind the National Security Law rested in stabilizing

the country at a time where both Koreas were vying for legitimacy. The ideological threat of North Korea necessitated a stringent law to protect the sovereignty of the newly established state: The NSL. This debate epitomizes the rights-security debate in the country, and will be revisited in Part IV.

Although increasing attention has been devoted to recalibrating national security since the end of the Cold War, South Korea's national security narratives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century remain seeped in militarism. Indeed, North Korea's nuclear program and its military provocations continue to pose a grave threat to South Korea. While a glimmer of hope in inter-Korean relations briefly existed under the sunshine policy of President Kim Dae-jung, tensions soon reclaimed the Korean peninsula under the hardline stance taken by the conservative government of Lee Myung-bak.

In March 2010, the Joint Investigation Group (JIG) led by South Korean military announced that North Korea was behind the sinking of South Korea's naval war ship Cheonan, which claimed the lives of forty-six South Korean sailors (You, 2015, p.195). Tensions escalated further when later that year, in November 2010, North Korea launched artillery shells on Yeonpyeong Island of South Korea. Thus, Cheonan and Yeonpyeong provocations intensified confrontation following a decade of rapprochement under the progressive governments of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun (Snyder & Byun, 201, p. 74). Moreover, following a series of nuclear tests, North Korea announced its plans to test an Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) capable of reaching the United States with a nuclear weapon (Revere, 2017, p. 1). In response, the U.S. and South Korea confirmed the deployment of THAAD system despite domestic and regional

controversy. As such, the military threat posed by North Korea looms large on the Korean security landscape.

However, critics argue that the North Korean threat is disproportionately factored into South Korea's military thinking and defense budget. In a policy report issued by the People's Solidarity for Popular Democracy (PSPD) in 2016, concerns were raised regarding the continued increase in the government's defense budget. It addressed concerns regarding the proportionality of the defense budget vis à vis perceived threats to the state, arguing for a re-evaluation of the defense budget. According to this report, South Korea's proposed national defense budget reached unprecedented highs at 40 trillion won in 2017, which the group claim is excessive, and premised on unclear threat analysis. As such, a thorough and transparent assessment of the country's perceived threat from North Korea is critical at this juncture, where the security landscape has drastically changed.

With high youth unemployment rate of 10.7% in 2016 (OECD) and mounting income inequality, many young South Koreans are concerned more about their welfare and economic opportunities than the threat of North Korean invasion. The security issue of North Korea is a polarizing factor along political lines, but more importantly it is divisive along generational lines. South Korea's older generations have lived through, or have been closely affected by the Korean War, whereas young South Koreans were born into relative sociopolitical stability. Thus, national security concerns are perceived differently by each generation, whose sociopolitical realities have been shaped by very dissimilar events. As such, South Korea's generation gap on the notion of national security is a major factor to consider in the country's reassessment of security threats

and the formulation of a new security approach. In the following section, the multifaceted nature of the North Korean threat, as well as emerging security threats outside of the conventional military realm will be examined.

### **3. Non-military security threats**

As discussed in Part II, the evolving security environment demands a re-conceptualization of national security. In the South Korean context, the North Korean threat continues to occupy substantial space in the public discourse and in politics. Yet as non-military security threats become more normalized in policy circles and the public, the comprehensive security framework has gained much traction. The following section will survey the types of non-military security threats facing contemporary South Korean society, beginning with the multifaceted threat of North Korea.

It is important to draw attention to the evolution of the North Korean threat. The security threat posed by North Korea has evolved beyond purely militaristic dimensions. A defense and security report by Business Monitor International (BMI) published in 2016 notes three security concerns in this regard. First, there is a possibility of North Korean agents infiltrating the South disguised as defectors. Second, the growing instability of the North Korean regime accelerates an uncertain reunification scenario, which poses financial and societal distress on the South. BMI estimates the cost of reunification from 300 billion to 3 trillion USD. Third, the problem of social integration of North Korean defectors in South Korea may lead to domestic unrest as segregation between North and South Koreans becomes more pronounced. As such, the North Korean threat

has also broadened beyond a simply militaristic dimension to include social, economic, and political components. Therefore, a militaristic approach to national security is inadequate in addressing the multifaceted North Korean security threat.

As an international actor, South Korea is not immune to the emerging security threats of globalization. Non-military issues such as natural disasters economic insecurity, environmental pollution have entered the political discourse. South Korea has been directly impacted by neo-liberalist economic policies in the aftermath of the financial crisis in 1997, transboundary environmental pollution, and cyberattacks to name a few.

First, the 1997 financial crisis was a critical point at which economic insecurity was brought into the spotlight. Although South Korea's export-led economic growth benefited from globalization, the financial crisis of 1997 revealed a dark side of globalization. The implementation of structural adjustment programs as part of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout package significantly deterred societal development in Korea, and is the biggest obstacle in the improvement of human rights in the country (Gong, 2009, p. 673). South Korea suffers from growing inequality levels and polarization of wealth. Economic insecurity is a significant dimension of national security since high unemployment and extreme polarization of wealth can lead to political instability. Therefore, economic insecurity requires prioritization in the national security policy planning, and must be treated as a national security issue.

Second, South Korea is susceptible to transboundary pollution from its neighboring countries. Dust and sandstorm (DSS), also referred to as yellow dust, is a pervasive environmental

phenomenon in Northeast Asia that causes detrimental health effects (Chung, 2014, p. 2). A survey conducted by the Seoul Development Institute found that Seoul residents consider air pollution as the most urgent environmental issue, among whom 68.3% finding the level of air pollution to be serious. Although the origins of DSS are both national and international, the air pollution in China due to heavy industrialization severely affects the air quality in South Korea. This environmental threat requires the South Korean government to address the issue on a regional level, particularly with China. Yet the significance of such environmental problems is not fully reflected in various policies, and the historical experience of East Asia impedes regional cooperation. Chung notes that environmental issues are “still auxiliary to the economic development in Korea” (Chung, p. 3), and urges further contemplation on the interdependence of environment, society, and economy.

Third, as cyberspace has become one of the primary sites for human activity, the issue of cybersecurity has become urgent. Not only is the cyberspace occupied by political, economic, social, and cultural exchanges, but it is also becoming the center of individuals’ and corporate activities, as well as of national infrastructure such as administrative, energy, finances, and national defense structures (Shin, 2013, p. 90). Inevitably, security issues emanating from this increased dependence on and significance of cyberspace figure large in South Korea’s security environment. The security threat and consequences of cybercrime are wide in scope as it targets individuals, corporations, as well as the state. Specifically, because cyberattacks can come from anywhere in the world, and are often hard to pinpoint the location of the attacker, transnational cooperation is critical in combatting cybercrime.

This illustrates a major disjoint between South Korean government's national security narrative vis à vis the South Korean public's security perception. As examined above, South Korea is not immune to new security challenges in the globalized era. Its security landscape may hold one constant – the North Korean threat – yet it is undergoing significant transformation that demands flexibility and a re-thinking of the concept of national security itself. As the security challenges facing South Korea require greater international and regional cooperation, it is in its best interests to align its security conceptualization with its neighbors. Even though the country's shift toward a comprehensive security framework is laudable, it requires a fundamental transformation of national security thinking, not merely adding on to the laundry list of security challenges to tackle.

As previously observed in this section, the dominant national security narrative in South Korea is that of combatting the North Korean threat. While the country underwent a drastic socio-political transformation, and is now considered an exemplary democratic state, its national security narrative has remained unchanged since the Cold War era. Currently, national security narrative is narrowly defined against the North Korean threat, and discussions surrounding national security has been ineffectively political with no resolution or consensus. All the while, for decades, the public's discontent toward the government's inaction in addressing the security concerns of ordinary citizens has only been growing. As the subsequent analysis will demonstrate, this security status quo has negative implications for human rights.



## **IV. HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTH KOREA**

### **1. Evolution of Human Rights in South Korea**

South Korea's position on human rights has progressively improved, almost at par with most developed nations. It has ratified most of international human rights treaties except for the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW), Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED), Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture (CAT-OP), and the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR aiming to the abolition of the death penalty (CCPR-OP2-DP).

In 2016, Freedom House rated South Korea's freedom score as 82, yet it also reported setbacks in political rights and civil liberties in the country. Reports published by Amnesty International, UN Human Rights Council, as well as the Human Rights Report by the US State Department also expressed concerns over the fate of civil and political rights in the country. In the report by the US State Department, the primary human rights issues raised were government interpretation of the National Security Law, libel laws, and other laws to limit freedom of speech and expression and restrict access to the internet, and the continued jailing of conscientious objectors to military service. Similar concerns were shared in the other two reports. Amnesty International's report outlines six issue areas; freedom of expression, conscientious objectors, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, migrant worker's rights, and death penalty.

A relatively young democracy, South Korea made significant progress human rights in recent decades. Its transition from authoritarian rule to democracy saw a parallel improvement in the enjoyment of fundamental human rights. Thus, the human rights agenda in South Korea broadened alongside its democratic consolidation process. Gong (2009) categorizes the progress of South Korea's human rights as "the dark period, latent period, and the period of growth" (p. 670). The authoritarian rule under military dictatorship between 1970 and 1980, when civil political rights were severely repressed by the state, marks the dark ages for human rights in South Korea. The period between 1980 and the late 1990s marks latent growth for human rights during the democratization process and the differentiation of civil society; lastly, the 21<sup>st</sup> century marks a general improvement in human rights despite the international neo-liberalist thrusts and the rise of conservatism in the political opportunity structure (p, 670). Within this temporal framework, 1987 marks a critical turning point as the authoritarian regime of Chun Doo-hwan succumbed to the voices of the people and held democratic elections for the first time.

After the democratic breakthrough of 1987, the Lee Young-sam government celebrated the very first civilian presidency in the country's history. In the 1990s, human rights began to gain ground in South Korea with the institutionalization of human rights (Cho, 2010, p. 305). Under the presidency of Kim Dae-jung (1998 – 2003), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was established in 2001. NHRC has a policy recommendation system, yet is non-binding in nature. Consequently, under the Roh Moo-Hyun administration, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in 2005 to review past human rights violations during the Japanese colonial rule, the Korean War, and the authoritarian rule. Also, a human rights education began to be disseminated to cultivate a culture of human rights. Yet the conservative Lee Myung-bak

(2008 - 2013) and the successive Park Geun-hye (2013 - 2017) government narrowed the scope of activities of these human rights institutions. As such, the conservative rule that began in 2008 made for a rather antagonistic climate for human rights.

Under the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye governments, progress made in the realm of civil and political rights regressed in South Korea. This trend can be explained through the change in political climate and the government's attitude toward human rights. Baik (2013) states that "civic organizations and individuals were targeted by the law enforcement agencies for unclear reasons, [...] and the Lee government also refused to cooperate with international human rights institutions" (p. 888). The decline in freedom of expression was particularly evident in the Lee administration's reaction to critics of the government's handling of the sinking of Cheonan warship in March 2010. When the Joint Investigation Group, led by the South Korean military, announced that North Korea was responsible for the sinking of Cheonan warship, the public expressed its doubts. The Lee government's response to growing dissent was repressive and authoritarian. There was an increase in government's crackdown regarding Cheonan-related dissent, especially in cyberspace (You, 2015, p. 204). Many were accused and prosecuted for violating the NSL and defaming the military (p. 205).

This downward trend in civil political rights in the country confirms the observations of various human rights reports examined at the beginning of this section. The past decade under the Lee and Park administrations has indeed marked a regression in the country's human rights record as they actively repressed political dissent and activism. Both administrations, conservative in nature, justified their repression of civil and political rights under the promise of lofty economic

development goals. This zero-sum thinking may be a sign of a weakening democracy in the country, yet the massive anti-government protests that began in late 2016 indicate otherwise.

Interestingly, a drastic change in public opinion regarding the bifurcation of fundamental human rights also explain this decreased support for civil and political rights in the country. This is not to say support for human rights as a whole has decreased, but that greater importance has been placed on socio-economic rights. As such, the following section will discuss the transition of South Korea's rights talk from civil and political rights to socio-economic rights.

## **2. Human Rights in Contemporary Korean Society**

South Korea's democratic experience also transformed the country's conceptualization of human rights. Since the democratic consolidation process and the financial crisis of 1997, South Korea's human rights agenda expanded to emphasize economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR). This shift can be attributed to South Korea's historical experience. More specifically, it is driven largely by the democratic movement, the change in relationship between the state and society, and the financial crisis of 1997.

First, while the state was perceived as the primary perpetrator of human rights under authoritarian governments, the state was perceived as the primary protector of human rights from transnational threats, such as the neo-liberal capitalist agenda. Second, Cho points to the proliferation of interest-oriented rights discourse that accompanied South Korea's post-democratization democratic process. Cho states that "although the concept of human rights

began to be widely accepted, this proliferation of rights claims diluted the foundation of human rights in the country” (Cho, p. 310). Third, the financial crisis of 1997 led to a greater recognition of economic, social and cultural rights. The South Korean government’s implementation of structural adjustment measures as part of the bailout package with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) following the financial crisis of 1997 exacerbated inequality and polarized the wealth gap. As such, the recognition that globalization has brought on a plethora of economic, social and cultural problems, has in turn opened a new opportunity for social movements and human rights in Korea.

The emphasis on ESCR is demonstrated by a recent study by Chung, Koo, et al (2014) that outlines the evolution of South Koreans’ awareness of and attitude toward human rights from 2005 to 2011. The research finds that South Koreans display divergent attitudes toward economic, social and cultural rights on one hand, and civil political rights on the other. While displaying increased interest in economic, social and cultural rights, South Koreans display a critical stance towards civil and political rights. The research points to a linkage between globalization and the diffusion of human rights as thus: while the conceptual disintegration of nation-states also diluted the idea of civil and political rights, the concept of global citizenship began to gain momentum.

This survey shows that among most South Koreans, economic security takes precedence over other security matters. It can be concluded that while the North Korean threat persists, and the majority of the public still believes North Korean poses a threat to the country’s security, their attitudes follow a global pattern where security matters governing one’s daily life is deemed

more important. This trend can be easily understood through the country's historical experience. South Korea's human rights and democracy has been sacrificed in the name of national security since the inception of the country. Chung adds that South Korea's human rights "were scarified further under the banner of economic growth" (Chung, 2008, p. 179).

While a greater recognition of ESCR is changing the public's perception of national security, such shift has yet to create sufficient ripples on the legislative level. The dominant national security narratives retain their status quo, limiting the space for other narratives to be considered, constructed, and propagated. Against this backdrop, an analysis of the National Security Law is imperative. The NSL is a specific legislation designed to domestically counter the ideological threat of North Korea. Precisely because it is the single most authoritative legislation in the realm of national security, its impact on national security narratives cannot be overstated. Highlighting the symbiotic relationship between law and culture, the NSL and its impact on socio-cultural perception of national security in South Korea cannot be refuted.

### **3. Human Rights Implications of Dominant National Security Narratives**

As previously discussed in Part III, South Korea's dominant national security narrative is combatting the North Korean threat in militaristic terms. As such, an analysis of the National Security Law (NSL), which epitomizes the rights-security debate in South Korea, will be insightful in gauging the human rights implications of the dominant national security narrative.

The NSL was enacted in 1948 in the newly created Republic of Korea with the goal of stabilizing the country against the ideological threat of North Korea. More than half a century after its enactment, the NSL has been at the epicenter of the rights-security debate in South Korea, as its critics condemn the NSL as undemocratic and anachronistic, and supporters draw attention to North Korea's continuous military provocations. The legitimacy of the NSL has been called into question in recent years, especially since the democratization process that gained momentum in the late 1980s.

In the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association on his mission to the Republic of Korea, the Special Rapporteur expressed concern regarding the potential misuse of the NSL to “stifle political plurality and peaceful dissent.” He also believes that the strong democratic credentials that ROK possesses can withstand minority expressions of North Korea without resorting to drastic actions such as the NSL. The report recommends that the ROK abrogate article 7 of the National Security Act.

South Korea has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in April 1990 and has signed the optional protocol to the ICCPR in the same year. However, the arbitrary use of the NSL by the South Korean government violates Article 19, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression. It does include a limitation clause which states that the freedom of expression, as provided in Article 19, may be restricted ‘as provided by law’ and are ‘necessary for the respect of the rights or reputation of others or for the protection of national security or of public order.’ The South Korean government has, naturally, invoked the limitation clause in order to justify its use of NSL, yet its grounds for limitation has been contested.

Although Paragraph 3 articulates the limitations a state party may express regarding Article 19 of the ICCPR as “for the protection of national security,” such limitation must be expressed on reasonable grounds. Yet the South Korean government’s recent usage of the NSL to suppress political dissent can be described as illegitimate, and in violation of Article 19 of the ICCPR. According to the Siracusa Principles on the Limitation and Derogation Provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Siracusa Principles), “national security cannot be invoked as a reason for imposing limitations to prevent merely local or relatively isolated threats to law and order”.

Moreover, Professors for Democracy, and Korea Academic Research Council have also called for the repeal of the NSL, arguing that the NSL endangers academic freedom. Several publishers, bookkeepers, academics and students have been arrested under the NSL for purchasing and possessing books related to North Korea, as well as for allegedly propagating and disrupting public order through public discussions on reunification. As such, the South Korean government’s arbitrary use of the NSL has stunted the blossoming of liberal democracy by suppressing political opinions it deems unpalatable. A society in which differing views are constantly silenced thereby not allowing existing views to be challenged, cannot be considered a truly democratic society.

The debate on South Korea’s National Security Law clearly demonstrates the tension between national security interests and human rights principles. However, according to the Australian



Human Rights Commission, the characterization of human rights as antithetical to national security is inaccurate, and unproductive.

Although a stringent national security measures must be in place, especially in the presence of the North Korean threat, such measures must not undermine the fundamental rights of the citizens. The Australian Human Rights Commission also emphasized that human rights principles be incorporated into national security paradigms of the government, and that:

[An approach combining principle and pragmatism] can be used by lawmakers to achieve national security without disproportionately limiting the very rights and liberties that are essential to the maintenance of the rule of law, and ultimately, our sense of security.

Such national security realm is rather a relic of the Cold War than an accurate representation of the state's security needs. On the other hand, the security narrative vis-à-vis the North Korean threat has long been a staple and a beloved catchphrase in presidential campaigns and pledges; however, only slight vacillations characterized its formulation. In other words, a different narrative that challenged the dominant one hardly emerged. A notable example of an alternative national security narrative is President Kim Dae-jung's introduction of the Sunshine Policy, for which he received a Nobel Peace Prize. The essence of his policy was premised on engagement and dialogue with the North, with the aim of improving inter-Korean relations. Yet with no significant progress in inter-Korean relations, the dominant national security narrative regained authority.

As such, the NSL demonstrates the fallacy of an inaccurate national security narrative. Its rigidity and anachronism, like the very narrative at play, is disconnected from the reality on the ground. Since it does not allow room for other national security narratives, it renders a re-calculation of the North Korean threat, as well as a broader re-conceptualization of national security nearly impossible. The politicization of national security talk adds an additional barrier to rethinking national security in South Korea. It is in this vein that the potential role of civil society will be examined.

## **V. CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTH KOREA**

### **1. Civil Society in the Post-Cold War Era and Beyond**

The conceptual ambiguity and breadth of civil society requires clarification before further analysis. The (re)emergence of civil society in recent years has lent itself to an increased usage of the terminology. Some mainstream thinking of civil society requires rectification, as such inaccuracies may espouse analytical inaccuracies. The common misconceptions of civil society are as follows: (1) the common tendency to conflate civil society with non-governmental organizations (NGO) and non-profit organizations (NPO); (2) civil society is a static, monolithic concept; (3) civil society is inherently democratic, or that all civil society organizations are pro-democratic. These misconstructions are a product of the cavalier consumption and popular reproduction of the concept of civil society that bore out of prolific usage of the terminology that went unmatched or unparalleled by equal academic measure and attention. Therefore, the demystification of civil society is as valuable a cognitive exercise as a political exercise: it

demands a reconceptualization of the division of society, and the relationship among the state, the market, and civil society.

The civil society – democracy nexus has been the subject of intense debate in the civil society literature. The collapse of the Soviet Union marked an important juncture in civil society discourse for the following reasons. The role of civil society in bringing down communist and authoritarian rule, as well as its role in democratic transitions were celebrated in eastern and central Europe, as well as in several parts of Asia. To posit that the conflation came from prolific civil society literature that examined its role in democratization, is not an exaggeration.

Alex de Tocqueville imagined civil society as a positive force in maintaining democratic principles of social equality, and decentralized, or a weak government. Hegel defined civil society as a sphere of market relations, regulated by civil law, intervening between the family and the state. Lastly, Antonio Gramsci described civil society as providing multiple sites to undermine existing value systems and inculcate new ones “in the counter-hegemonic struggle against capitalism” (Alagappa, p. 28). In other words, the Gramscian view separated civil society from other social institutions that pertain to production, government, and family.

In contemporary political discourse, Robert Putnam and Robert Cox provide insight into the post-Cold War conceptualization of civil society. The concept of social capital is central to understanding civil society. Putnam (1995) defines social capital as “features of social organizations such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (p. 66). Moreover, in the stream of contemporary thought that

necessitates the civil society-democracy connection, associative life (participation in associations) is believed to produce social capital that is key to a healthy democracy. According to Alagappa, such view holds that a robust civil society is a prerequisite for effective democracy.

However, critics of Putnam's social capital and democracy nexus point to the potential of voluntary associations in deepening societal conflict, creating excessive burdens on the government, and undermining the integrity of democratic regimes (Berman, 2001). Therefore, while social capital is a valuable means to reach a social goal, it does not guarantee democratic outcomes; it is contingent upon the political ends for which social capital is used. Robert Cox contemplates civil society as an important site of strategic action to envision and construct a different social and world order. Depicting globalization of production and neoliberal economic orthodoxy as benefitting the integrated class and encouraging "exclusionary and covert politics," he views civil society as the "crucial battleground" for citizens to regain control of public life and as a potential agent from transformation of the state." Also bestowing democratic merit, Jürgen Habermas recognizes the significance of civil society in its ability to defend democracy against the encroaching power of the state in the public life. In this sense, civil society in contemporary political thought is imagined as a positive force that can protect the tenets of democracy, and thereby providing a solution against neoliberalism and excessive state power (Alagappa, p. 29).

Alagappa posits that civil society occupies a space distinct from that of the market and the state, thus constituting the "Third Sector" of society. It must be noted that civil society is not monolithic; it is made up of multiple moving pieces, of diverse groups of individuals with

equally divergent interests. According to Alagappa (2004), civil society can be characterized as such:

“Like the society at large, civil society is a realm of power, inequality, struggle, and conflict among competing interests. It is populated by diverse formal and informal groups and organizations, and although these may choose to cooperate on certain issues on reach accommodation of their conflicting interests, there is no necessary consensus among them. Civil society is invariably competitive and heterogeneous. Agency applies to organizations that populate the civil society space, not to civil society as a single entity. The tendency to use civil society in a shorthand fashion may mask the diversity, inequality, and struggle within the realm” (p. 33).

Therefore, it would be naïve to speculate civil society’s specific roles in reconstructing national security narratives, or under a new security framework. However, the history and experience of civil society in the West may allude to the potential path their Korean counterparts can take in this endeavor. This will be examined further, yet it is imperative to first look at South Korea’s civil society experience.

## **2. Civil Society in Korean Terms**

Despite disagreements regarding the origins of civil society in South Korea, there is consensus in the academic community that civil society began to flourish especially after the democratic transition that began in 1987 when nationwide demonstrations forced the authoritarian Chun

Doo-hwan government to hold democratic elections. Although there is no necessary connection between democracy and civil society, this link is hard to refute in the South Korean experience. Indeed, Diamond (1996) stresses that democratic change in South Korea [...] cannot be comprehended without reference to civil society” (p. 16). Kim (2004) stresses this link as such:

“[...] it was civil society groups that initiated and directed the process of democratization by forming a prodemocracy alliance within civil society, creating a grand coalition with the opposition political party, and eventually pressuring the authoritarian regime to yield to the popular upsurge from below. An oppositional, resistant, and rebellious civil society was one of the most significant reasons behind the most prominent political change in South Korea’s postwar history, namely, democratization” (p. 139).

It was principally civil society organizations that facilitated, if not directly caused, various phases of democratization in Korea. In particular, analysts have emphasized the role of student groups, labor unions, and religious organizations in their intense pro-democracy struggles since the early 1970s. United under the leadership of several national umbrella organizations, South Korean CSOs mobilized powerful democratic alliance against the authoritarian regime in 1987. As such, South Korean CSOs during the process of democratic consolidation were oppositional in nature, and were characterized by their effective alliance-forming strategy. Consequently, from the late 1980s, civil society organizations began to address a broader range of issues, notably economic democratization, women’s rights, environmental issues, and peace and reunification with North Korea (Yeo, 2013, p. 3). The progressive governments of Kim Dae-jung

(1998 - 2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003 - 2008), and their acknowledgement of civil society-government partnership also contributed to the growth of civil society. Sunhyuk Kim (2004) claims that one of the remarkable developments in South Korean civil society since 1988 has been the explosion of new “citizens’ movement groups (*simin undong tanch’e*)” (Kim, p. 148).

South Korea’s transition from authoritarian rule to democratic consolidation was accompanied by an equally transformative civil society development. In the pre-democratic consolidation period, labor movements, student’s movements, and educational labor movement dominated the civil society landscape. According to Jeong, in the post-democratic consolidation period, “support for women’s rights, consumer rights, and environmental rights increased dramatically” (Jeong, p. 4). Moreover, while CSOs under authoritarian rule were militant and oppositional, they turned to strategic, non-violent approaches, and became cooperative with the state on certain issues. Thus, the change in political climate saw the transformation of relationship between civil society and the state from confrontational to moderately cooperative.

After the democratic consolidation of the late 1990s, the role and significance of civil society began to change. As the space for civil society grew, CSOs began to advocate for various issues in addition for their movements for political reform. Since the late 1980s, several CSOs have campaigned for economic reform and economic justice. Especially after the economic crisis of 1997, many other civil society groups began to focus on economic reform. Alagappa states that after the 1997 financial crisis, “[T]here have been two major movements for economic reform: the campaign to monitor National Assembly hearings on the causes of financial crisis and the

minority shareholders' rights movement, led principally by People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD)" (Alagappa, p. 156).

Contemporary South Korean CSOs diverge and converge on different issues, yet they display a sharp division on the issue of policy toward North Korea, reflecting the ideological polarization as displayed in the political landscape. Richardson reports a sharp divide between the left, which advocates reconciliation, cooperation, and aid, and the right, which stresses a hardline stance toward North Korea. This ideological chasm has been present in the Korean political landscape since its inception, and is manifested within the third sector as well. In other words, South Korean CSOs are deeply divided on the issue of North Korea, which reflect the political reality of the country. Yet attention must be paid to CSOs' operational merit and locational advantage, which can provide an opening for CSOs under a new security framework. Richardson states that South Korean "CSOs have a unique position that enable engagement with North Korean people and possess autonomy in pursuing creative cooperation projects" (p. 174).

South Korean civil society organizations have a rich experience, despite its relatively short history. Similar to the controversial claim that correlate civil society and democratization, civil society has played a crucial role in South Korea's democratization, and continue to be an integral part of Korean society. Unlike other civil society organizations, however, South Korean CSOs possess unique qualities that reflect the country's socio-cultural norms and historical experience. The following section will examine the strengths and weaknesses of South Korean civil society.



### **3. Strengths and Weaknesses**

Based on the experience of civil society organizations abroad and in South Korea, their strengths and weaknesses can be assessed. South Korea's civil society followed a development path specific to its historical experience. Its role in society has enlarged as a result of the democratic consolidation process, yet new challenges confront South Korean CSOs today. Although the democratization process granted legitimacy and facilitated the expansion of space for CSOs in the country, the institutionalization of CSOs brought unforeseen challenges. Because of their dependence on service fees and charges, rather than philanthropic donations or government funding, CSOs in South Korea do not have a solid financial base. Participation of volunteers and personnel is also relatively low, and the membership base is weak. In sum, South Korean CSOs suffer from an unstable social and financial capital, which undermine their very foundation. This is in part because philanthropic culture has yet to become a socio-cultural norm in the country. Moreover, in recent years, the fragmentation of civil society, as well as a conservative political climate under Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye undermined the impact of civil society in South Korea.

According to Soo-Bok Jeong, CSOs in contemporary Korea face numerous unique challenges. First, the anticommunist ideology that permeated post-War Korea remains in contemporary Korean society. This easily leads to politicization of matters related to national security, especially around discussions about North Korea. Therefore, overcoming the politicization of issues pertaining to national security and North Korea poses a surmountable challenge for civil society in Korea. Second, Confucianism has a negative influence on civil society in that it

hinders the organization of social groups based on social trust in a larger sense than the family unit. In other words, it is difficult to mobilize Korean citizens along specific issue areas and form organizations based on specific issues because blood ties are regarded as most important. The Confucian emphasis on vertical hierarchical social structure also pose operational and structural difficulties for Korean CSOs. Ironically, however, this importance on blood ties can be easily overcome, as the history of South Korean CSOs have demonstrated. Third, the problem of consumerist culture of mass consumption among the younger generations tend to place greater importance on individual happiness over socio-political issues. Lastly, the localization and globalization of civic movements ironically pose as obstacles to overcome for civil society in Korea. In era where localized grassroots movements, as well as transnational solidarity are key to effective activism, Korean CSOs lack a grassroots approach and solidarity with other CSOs around the world.

On the other hand, Korean civil society organizations possess several strengths. Despite Korean society's emphasis on blood ties and family units on individual levels, Korean CSOs can easily form alliances along issue-specific lines with other CSOs, as well as with political parties, labor unions, media, corporations, international governmental organizations, and governments. Also, CSOs have a distinctive decision-making process that emphasizes discussions and consensus-building as opposed to top-down commands. Despite the Confucian tradition that emphasizes a vertical hierarchical structure, democratic leadership and stakeholder participation are more prominent in the third sector than in other sectors. South Korean CSOs' capability to overcome socio-cultural barriers, particularly the country's Confucian legacy, can be attributed in part to globalization, and increased access to and interaction with Western academia. More specifically,

the concept of civil society, as understood in the West, bore influence on South Korea's conception of civil society.

In sum, South Korean civil society has unique challenges specific to its culture and historical experience, notably the country's Confucian tradition and anti-communist sensitivity, as well as problems of weak membership base, weak financial base, and low participation levels. However, the nature of civil society organizations and the historical experience of Korean CSOs point to the ways such challenges can be overcome. They can easily form alliances with other stakeholders along issue-specific lines, emphasize horizontal organizational structure and democratic leadership, stress their counter-narrative role, and highlight their flexibility in their position and relationship with the state and the public. The assessment of strengths and weaknesses of civil society in South Korea will lead to the next analysis, which will examine a new security framework for the country and the significance of civil society under a new security framework.

## **VI. ANALYSIS**

In the new security environment of the globalized era, the security challenges are transnational in nature: environmental pollution, cyberattacks, terrorism, and economic crises are some of the challenges confronting today's world. As the importance of international and regional cooperation is highlighted and the role of the third sector increasingly prominent in tackling these new security challenges, a broad understanding of national security is critical. Moreover, as

the nature of emerging security threats demonstrate, the realm of national security can no longer remain the sole domain of the military or the state. As an emerging international actor, South Korea can also benefit from a reconceptualization of national security and a democratization of the national security space. In this vein, a new security framework centered around human security and comprehensive security will be examined, and the role of the third sector under such framework will be analyzed subsequently.

### **1. Shift Toward a Human Security Framework**

In the era of globalization, South Korea faces similar security challenges as other states around the world. Rise in global terrorism, cyberattacks, disseminations of viruses, and the devastating consequences of climate change are just a handful of new security threats facing the global community. Transnational in nature, these new security threats also require concerted international efforts, regional cooperation, and greater legitimacy to civil society actors.

The new security landscape accompanying globalization also amplifies existing security threats that are specific to South Korea. Yet the dominant national security narratives of the day embody a cold war rhetoric of militarism. Furthermore, the ambiguity of the NSL curbs the enjoyment of civil and political rights, and hinders an important public discussion surrounding national security and the North Korean threat as the security sector has largely been the domain of the state. As previously examined, the nature of the North Korean threat has evolved, and economic insecurity threatens the livelihoods of the very individuals who constitute the South Korean

society. It is imperative that national security be re-imagined to accurately reflect the realities of the country.

In tackling both the country-specific and international security threats, amplifying concept of both comprehensive security and human security is significant. South Korea's national security requires re-configuration on two pillars: comprehensive security and human security. While broadening the concept of national security under a comprehensive security framework with a human rights perspective at its core.

First, a comprehensive security framework that addresses pre-existing security threats, as well as emerging threats pertaining to political, economic, societal, and environmental factors is necessary. As long as the North Korean threat persists, South Korea's national security objective will be centered around defending itself from its northern rival. However, a comprehensive security framework would broaden the scope of security to include additional security challenges that linger on the horizon, so that the country is able to effectively include and address all its security challenges under a broader security framework. Establishment of such security framework can facilitate policy formulation and vibrant inter-agency and transnational cooperation. As such, a transition in optics in thinking about security will fundamentally transform how South Korean citizens and government identify and tackle security issues. Although the country already has a broader understanding of security, it is vital that this reconfiguration be fully incorporated into the country's legislation.

Along with a comprehensive security framework, a rights-focused security framework will place the protection of human rights at the very center of national security. Despite the rights-security controversy that views the relationship between human rights and national security as irreconcilable, such framework can bridge the gap between the two objectives. In other words, a rights-focused security framework can counter the zero-sum thinking that permeates the rights-security public discourse in South Korea and beyond. Moreover, this framework is particularly pertinent to South Korea, as inter-Korean hostilities remain gridlocked. Under a new security framework, inter-Korean relations can be re-envisioned with human rights of North Koreans at the center as well. Suh (2016) states that “transforming national security into human security, or at least coordinating the two kinds of security, helps the security issue enhance and promote civilian control and reconcile both security and human rights” (p. 67).

As such, a shift to comprehensive human security is critical to better prepare South Korea against a multitude of security threats, both old and new. This shift will also lead to democratization of the security sector where civilian input is highly valued, particularly in the policy-making process. Accordingly, the significance of civil society organizations in this endeavor will be examined below.

## **2. Role and Significance of Civil Society Under a New Security Framework**

A new national security framework centered on human security and a broad conception of security as discussed above also expands the space for civil society participation and increases their impact on society. More specifically, as this paradigm shift democratizes the security sector

and emphasizes the importance of human security, civil society can play the following roles: providing civic oversight, narrative building, and overcoming the absence of a regional security apparatus.

Democratization of security sector entails the inclusion of various stakeholders outside of the realm of the military. In many Western countries, more governments are consulting with CSOs in security, foreign policy, and defense areas as CSOs can provide specialized knowledge. In this endeavor, the flexibility of civil society should be harnessed. According to Caparini, “the malleability and complexity of civil society allow it to be a partner of the state at times, and adversaries at others” (Caparini, 2004, p. 11). While CSOs can play the role of a watchdog, demanding government accountability and responsibility, they can also serve as partners to the states in different capacities, especially in the context of the security sector. Caparini adds that most CSOs have dual roles in defense and security affairs as they are composed of intellectual elites who occupy the space between the state and the public. In this specific case, their expertise allows them to work with the government in formulating or recalibrating policies, while spreading knowledge so as to encourage comprehensive policy formulation. This is related to CSOs’ role of providing civic oversight. As a distinct sphere detached from governmental influence, civil society can help oversight through various mechanisms. An example of a civic oversight body is the formation of an independent review board comprised of civilians with expertise.

Next, responses to new security threat must be as diverse and far-reaching as the emerging security threats. Since today’s security threats encompass many different sectors, innovative

thinking and creative solutions that are most facilitated with the engagement of a multitude of actors are crucial. The third sector encompasses equally various constituents and interest groups, as well as ordinary citizens rallying around a specific issue. By tapping into this repository of ideas, a set of creative solutions to tackle security threats can emerge. Moreover, such multisector engagement can lead to a vibrant security community. In this sense, civil society can play a pioneering role in establishing a new security community in the country. Active participation of public organizations and socially responsible citizens in ensuring national security is crucial.

Another specific role of civil society is its counter-narrative function. According to Park et al, “the counter-narrative role [...] serves two functions: first, it exposes the deficiencies of the social and political structure, the hollowness of the claims of the incumbent rulers, and their abuse of state power; second, it offers an alternative framework for governance and the moral bases for organizing resistance.... Similarly, the counter-narratives constructed by civil society organizations in [...] South Korea [...] comprised features that were peculiar to each country, but democracy was a key theme in all of them” (Park et al, p. 488). This counter-narrative function can counter the Cold War era security narrative that has dominated South Korea. To effectively address security concerns of different sectors and civic groups, the construction of new national security narratives should be conducted by the citizens through dialogue, cooperation, and education. By harnessing their organizing power, citizens can reconstruct national security narratives that accurately reflect their concerns, instead of perpetuating the state’s narrative authority on national security. National security narrative reframed as human security is important, but more critical is for civil society to construct new national security narratives on



the grassroots level on what constitutes national security. However, since non-electoral participation (NEP) levels are low in South Korea, encouraging active participation of citizens in NEP activities will be a challenge to overcome.

Lastly and most importantly, the role of civil society in establishing a transnational network of security cooperation cannot be overstated. The transnational nature of the emerging security threats requires a transnational cooperation, particularly regional cooperation. However, even in the age of regionalism, the historical experience of East Asian region poses an obstacle to successful and sustained cooperation. Unresolved issues, most notably that of comfort women by the Japanese imperialist army during the Second World War, as well as historically sensitive areas, such as the controversies surrounding Yasukuni Shrine have developed a deep resentment and mistrust between Japan, China, and the two Koreas. Although cooperative initiatives and mechanisms exist, such as the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) 10+1, they are informal and lack institutionalization. This institutional deficiency can be remedied by building solidarity among regional CSOs. Civil society can overcome historical trauma in the region, and effectively cooperate to either build a non-governmental regional security body or pressure their governments to establish a regional security institution.

As both Putnam and Tocqueville would agree, civil society strengthens democratic state rather than undermining it. South Korean civil society is being received with more legitimacy, yet it will take time for it to successfully navigate the Korean society between and overlapping with the state and the chaebols (South Korea's mega-corporations). According to Dr. Kazlauskaitė-Markelienė, the activeness of citizens and public organizations enforces state institutions and the

government to comply with the value system of the democratic state, and take decisions which reflect the interests of the majority of society” (p. 232). As such, strong civic participation and a vibrant civil society will be key for the future of South Korea.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

In the fall of 2016, the largest political scandal in contemporary South Korean history involving former President Park Geun-hye reverberated the nation to its core. The massive protests that followed provided a space for ordinary citizens to air their grievances and construct a shared vision of the country’s future. Remarkably, the protests drew participants from all walks of life, from elementary school students, family units, the elderly, as well as the politically inactive demographic. In a nation that stands polarized on various issues from welfare to national security, the active engagement of various demographics was nothing short of a miracle. Not only did the incredibly peaceful nature of the massive protests demonstrate the maturity of South Korea’s democracy, it upheld the resilience of the Korean people. This may well be the beginning of another democratic upheaval in the country’s history.

As previously examined, the pressing security concerns of South Korean citizens no longer pivot around the North Korean threat. Economic insecurity beset by neoliberalism, worsening environmental pollution, and mounting cybersecurity vulnerabilities precede the military threat posed by North Korea’s nuclear development, as well as the ideological threat of the North. The North Korean threat has also evolved, along with the South Korean public’s perception of the North Korean threat. South Koreans are more concerned about the socio-economic consequences posed by the growing influx of North Korean defectors and the possibility of regime collapse.

The rapidly evolving international security environment requires a re-configuration of national security in South Korea.

More importantly, national security is no longer a sole domain of the state and military. Cox states that “civil society has become the crucial battleground for recovering control of public life” (Cox, p. 116). Indeed, citizens play an integral part in reaching a contemporary understanding of national security, and the role of civil society therefore bears greater significance. The concept of security has evolved, yet South Korea is gripped with a rigid conception of national security. The dominant national security narrative that has plagued the country’s democratic well-being is a Cold-War era relic to be ridded of. In this sense, a comprehensive security framework that places greater importance on human security and human rights is crucial for the country to move forward and adapt to a new security environment.

Globalization, technological advances, and the global power shift pose great uncertainties for South Korea and beyond. The concept of nation-states, physical borders, and citizenship no longer bear relevance, while the role and significance of the third sector is increasingly being considered and recognized on local, regional, and international levels. Civil society’s flexible nature and inherently democratic structure make it a powerful actor in the globalized world. After all, the security of a nation is contingent upon the security and well-being of its citizens, and the decision-making process also belongs to the people. Now is the time to reclaim the rights of the people in establishing a comprehensive security framework centered around human security, and in realizing the full potential of civil society organizations under this framework.

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