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# South Korea's Eurasian Initiative: Balancer vs Follower

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**Abstract**

The ousted South Korean President Park Geun-hye proposed "Eurasian initiative"in 2013, which is regarded as an ambitious plan to shape the fundamentals of the global economy, diplomacy and the geography of national security. The aim of the paper is to answer the question whether South Korea is able to put the initiative into the practice as well as to be a balancer or a follower. South Korean international status has risen and been a middle power in recent year with no doubt. However, it is still unable to overcome the challenges from North Korea, China and Russia to realize the initiative by its own capability. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that South Korean role is somewhere between a balancer and a follower in the region and more or less is leaning to the side of a balancer due to itsmiddle power base.

**Keywords:** South Korea, Eurasian initiative**,**balancer**,**follower**,** middle power

## Introduction

The ousted South Korean President Park Geun-hye proposed the so-called "Eurasian initiative." on October 18, 2013, in her opening speech at the International Conference on Cooperation in Eurasia held in Seoul.[2] As Konstantin Asmolov noted, that is an ambitious plan that would see a change in the fundamentals of the global economy, diplomacy and the geography of national security.[3]In Park Geun-hye's speech, she raised the concept of "one continent", "creative continent", and "peaceful continent".[4]That emphasizes the idea of the creation and development of South Korea with the countries of Eurasia by a single and unified system of transport, energy, trade networks, along with the implementation of economic cooperation and exchanges within the spheres of science, technology, and culture, including at the level of interpersonal relationships, and thus improving inter-Korean relations based on trust.[5]However, the questions are why it was raised at this particular time and what measures needed to be taken to achieve the goal. Right before Park Geun-hye proposed her initiatives; the "Silk Road Economic Belt" concept was introduced by PRC President Xi Jinping during his visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013. [6]In a speech delivered at Nazarbayev University, Xi suggested that China and Central Asia cooperate to build a Silk Road Economic Belt.[7]

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[2]MOFA of ROK,"Remarks by President Park Geun-hye at the 2013 International ConferenceonGlobal Cooperation in the Era of Eurasia,"http://www.mofa.go.kr/webmodule/htsboard/template/read/engreadboard.jsp?typeID=12&boardid=14195&seqno=312966. Retrieved on April 19, 2017
[3]Konstantin Asmolov, "The Eurasian initiative by the President of South Korea", http://journal-neo.org/2014/08/28/rus-evrazijskaya-initsiativa-prezidenta-rk/.Retrieved on Oct 19, 2016.
[4]MOFA of ROK,"Remarks by President Park Geun-hye at the 2013 International Conference on Global Cooperation in the Era of Eurasia,"
[5]Konstantin Asmolov, "The Eurasian initiative by the President of South Korea".
[6]The State Council of the PRC, "Chronology of China's Belt and Road Initiative",http://english.gov.cn/news/top_news/2015/04/20/content_281475092566326.htm. Retrieved on April 19, 2017
[7]Ibid

It was the first time the Chinese leadership mentioned the strategic vision as the State Council of the RPC said.[8]Park Geun-hye proposed to build the Silk Road Express in her speech, which will run from Busan all the way to Europe via North Korea, Russia, China and Central Asia, by connecting the northeastern part of Eurasia with railways and roads to establish a multi-purpose logistics network, which would eventually be extended to Europe. It is surely no coincidence that Park's "Eurasian initiative" has something to do with Xi's Silk Road Economic Belt. It is fair to say that Eurasian initiative is either inspired by Silk Road Economic Belt or trying to balance it. It is not the first time for South Korean President to raise an ambitious initiative toward the region. The concept of "Northeast Asian balancer" unveiled by former South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun is another example. Roh Moo-hyun argued that Korea should play the role of a balancer or honest broker between China and Japan, and also between the United and China, so as to reduce tension in Northeast Asia.[9]All these proposals raise the questions whether South Korea is able to be a balancer or simply just a follower in the region and how to fulfill the plan in favor of its position. In order to answer the above questions, first of all, it is to introduce "Eurasian initiative"and discuss what should be done to reach the goal of the initiative. Secondly, it is to analyze whether it is feasible for South Korea to put the initiative into practice. If that is not the case, what else should South Korea do to secure its interest in the region? Thirdly, it is to discuss what challenges South Korea would face in realizing the initiative and how to overcome them. Finally, the focus will be put on what next about the initiative after Park Geun-hye stepped down as President due to corruption charges.

**The review of Northeast Asian balancer**

Before looking into Eurasian initiative, it is necessary to review the concept of "Northeast Asian balancer", the similar great plan as that, in order to know what the fate of South Korean great plan will be. As mentioned above, the idea "Northeast Asian balancer" was raised by former South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun, and was seen as closely related to his North Korea policy.[10]This idea would emerge, simply because there was gap between the US Bush administration's brand of conservatism and the Roh administration's very liberal policies toward North Korea at that time.[11]In his speech at the Korea Air Force Academy on March 8, 2005, Roh remarked that South Korea would begin to play a balancing role in Northeast Asia and added that the power equation in Northeast Asia will change, depending on the choices we make.[12]That statement is regarded as a clear objection to turning the United States force in Korea a regional expeditionary force.[13]Even though the document issued later by National Security Council of Roh administration stated that South Korea's assumption of a proactive role as a balancer-coordinating regional policy within the U.S.-China-Japan triangle-would be in line with the U.S. policy stance to establish a cooperative order with China,[14] it was still unable to stop harsh criticism from the conservatives domestically and internationally. For instance, a 2005 editorial of the Chosun Ilbo, one of the prominent conservative newspapers in South Korea, viewed the idea of "Northeast Asian balancer" as obviously contradictory to the U.S.-ROK alliance by saying that "the idea of Northeast Asian balancer sounds as if South Korea could jump onto the side of China to succeed as a balancer. Is that even possible?"[15]South Korean scholars based in the U.S. also commented on the Roh administration's proposition as a premature, if not totally improper, vision driven by nationalist identity. [16]The strongest accusation on South Korean balancing role probably came from the ousted South Korean President Park Geun-hye, head of the largest opposition party, the Grand National Party at that time.

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[8]Ibid

[9]Shin-wha Lee, "Strategic Thought toward Regionalism", Gilbert Rozman, In-Taek Hyun, and Shin-whaLee .*South Korea Strategic Thought toward Asia,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp.225-249.

[10]Choong Nam Kim, The Roh Moo Hyun Government's Policy toward North Korea, *International Journal of Korean Studies,* Fall/Winter 2005, Vol.IX, No.2, pp.1-34.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Dae-Gyeong Kim, "The Politics of Asian Regionalism in Korea: Identity Politics and Its Implications for U.S.-ROK Relations", *Cornell International Affair Review,* 2010. Vol.4. No.1, pp.1-7.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

In a speech at the Korean National Assembly, Park Geun-hye said that South Korea could not take a balancing role while at the same time strengthening its alliance with the United States. [17]Park Geun-hye further elaborated that the role of a balancer is possible only when we have the power and capability, and other countries recognize us as a balancer, but China, Japan, Russia, and even North Korea do not recognize us as a balancer.[18]
Without domestic and international support, it is very easy to know what the destiny of South Korean balancing role would be. Nonetheless, it does not mean that South Korea could not play any crucial role in the region, since it still has middle power base. The problem is that the plan is overly idealistic and overzealous, and it did not result in any meaningful outcomes as favorable conditions were not given time to mature, as Lee Sang-Hyun said.[19]In other words, if South Korea comes up with more piratical plan, it still has chances to make it become a reality with its power and capability.

**What is Eurasian initiative all about？**

In her speech, Park first of all draws either a blueprint or a roadmap for Eurasian countries by saying that "The construction of transnational transport infrastructure is making it possible to save shipping costs and efficiently utilize energy, mineral resources and agricultural produce. If trade barriers were gradually dismantled and regional economic integration was accelerated by turning Eurasia into a free trade zone, it would be possible for the Eurasian continent to emerge as a massive single market just like the European Union."[20]No wonder why this initiative would be regarded as an ambitious plan, because it seems too quick to jump to a conclusion. It simply suggesting that Eurasian continent can be a massive single market without considering how hard those European countries have tried and what sacrifices they have made to build European Union, which are not easily met by Eurasian countries, not to mention Brexit. There are some other questions about how South Korea could fit in the Eurasian single market and what advantage South Korea does have for Eurasian countries willing to accept its role in the region. In order to achieve the goal of truly one continent, Park emphasized that," if we combine the comparative advantages of Korea and other Eurasian countries on the basis of logistics, trade and energy infrastructures, I am confident that we would be able to bring an era of shared prosperity in Eurasia closer to reality."[21]South Korea does have some advantages on information technology, which would help Eurasian countries increase their logistics and trade efficiency. However, South Korea is not the sole country in the region that could provide similar services to Eurasian countries. The question is whether South Korea has the first priority to do or not. Concerning a continent of creativity, Park stated that, "we need to create an environment where creativity of the people in Eurasia can be fully demonstrated and industries, technology and culture can be fused. Building on such a foundation, we need to usher in a new era when a new economic paradigm can emerge and new cultures flourish in a harmonious manner."[22]It is obvious that Park was implying that South Korea could play the role in helping Eurasian countries create a new economic paradigm and new cultures for economic development in the region. Again, the question remains why Eurasian countries have to work with South Korea in such a way instead of other countries, since Park mentioned Russia's plan to realize an innovative economy and China's policy to develop new technologies on its own initiative.[23]As for a continent of peace, Park pointed out that, "threats to peace and security are our biggest obstacles to trade and cultural exchanges, and they must first be resolved before a new era in our history can begin; in recent times, we have found ourselves confronting various new challenges in security—nuclear safety, natural disasters and climate change.

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[17]Sang-Hun Choe, "South Korea's 'balancer' policy attacked", *New York Times*, April 5, 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/09/world/asia/south-koreas-balancer-policy-attacked.html?mcubz=0&_r=0. Retrieved on May 16, 2017.
[18]Ibid.
[19]Sang-HyunLee, "The Northeast Asia and Cooperation Initiative: A Vision toward Sustainable Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia", *TheAsan Forum,* Dec 15, 2014. http://www.theasanforum.org/the-northeast-asia-peace-and-cooperation-initiative-napci-a-vision-toward-sustainable-peace-and-cooperation-in-northeast-asia/Retrieved on May 16, 2017.
[20]MOFA of ROK,"Remarks by President Park Geun-hye at the 2013 International Conference on Global Cooperation in the Era of Eurasia,"
[21]MOFA of ROK,"Remarks by President Park Geun-hye at the 2013 International Conference on Global Cooperation in the Era of Eurasia,"
[22]Ibid.
[23]Ibid.

Although North Korea wasn't mentioned as a threat in Park's speech, it is quite clear that North Korea was regarded as a major threat to peace in the region from South Korean point of view. Nonetheless, the key to reach the target is whether Eurasian countries share same security concern with South Korea remains to be seen. Unless Eurasian countries can be convinced that North Korea's nuclear program is an eminent threat to peace in the region, it is unlikely that the idea of a continent of peace will be able to become a reality. Kim Taehwan elaborated Eurasia initiative in three dimensions. First ,in the geo-economics dimension, he said, it sets forth not only South Korea's vision of economic integration with the Eurasian space, but also calls for the participation of the countries in the region in collaborative multilateral economic projects. [24]Second, in the security dimension, it is a practical proposal to improve on the security situation on the Korean Peninsula, particularly by involving North Korea in multilateral economic cooperation and eventually inducing changes.[25]Third, in geopolitical strategy dimension, it is to resolve the problem of "dual reliance" on the United States and China, as South Korea becomes increasingly caught in their strategic rivalry.[26]Based on the above analysis, it seems not so easy, if not impossible, for South Korea to play a leading role in putting "Eurasian initiative" into practice, since it is very difficult to make a detour away from encountering North Korea as well as not to be affected by both China and the United States strategically. One of the most difficult parts of the initiative is how to convince Eurasian countries that it is purely based on economic development and cooperation without any political or ideological bias, which may force them to choose sides.

**How feasible for Seoul to realize the initiative?**

After getting known the major content of Park's Eurasian initiative, the next question remains to be answer will be how feasible for Seoul to put the initiative into practice. Konstantin Asmolovis is very pessimistic about the realization of Eurasian initiative by Seoul and raises argument from three aspects. Firstly, every South Korean President should have a legacy project, such as the "low-carbon green growth economy of Lee Myung-bak, regardless of how active and realistic such a project is to achieve.[27]Secondly, this project can be seen as a cautious attempt to secure a space for political maneuver similar to the "northern policy" of Roh Tae-woo. Thirdly, this project can be seen as another attempt to internationalize relations between North and South Korea so that Russia and other Eurasian countries that have an interest in creating a "united, peaceful and creative continent" begin to exert some pressure on North Korea, and set the stage for preparing the integration of the North with the South.[28]Konstantin Asmolov went on further to say that the project has not yet been fully developed and a clear program with established goals is yet to be defined.[29]It is obvious that Konstantin Asmolovsee the initiative purely from the angle of security without considering South Korea's regional profile and advanced economic momentum. It is worth further discussing whether it is too narrow to look into the initiative at this way. To deepen South Korean ties with that energy-rich but geopolitically volatile region and show the determination with the initiative, Park Geun-hye made her high-profile six-day visit to Central Asia in July 2014 to put further momentum to her "Eurasia initiative".[30]That can be viewed as Seoul's action plan to the initiative. On the other hand, Seoul took the global financial crisis as an opportunity to raise its regional and global profile by making use of a number of different instruments available, such as its new membership to the OECD DAC and its G20 presidency in 2010.[31] It means that South Korea still has a role to play in the region by its more and more influential regional and global profile. How successful has its new role been?

As Sung-Hoon Park pointed out, Korea's role as the host of the 2010 G20 Seoul summit was generallyevaluated as positive, especially on development and green growth, Korea's initiative to adopt a standstill

[24]Kim Taehwan, "Beyond Geopolitics: South Korea's Eurasia Initiative as a New Nordpolitik", *The Asan Forum,*Feb. 16,2015, http://www.theasanforum.org/beyondgeopoliticssouthkoreaseurasiainitiativeasanewnordpolitik/
Retrieved on Oct 19, 2016.
[25]Ibid.
[26]Ibid.
[27]Konstantin Asmolov, "The Eurasian initiative by the President of South Korea".
[28]Ibid.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Richard Weitz, "Park's Central Asia Tour Reaffirms South Korea's Eurasian Vision", July 1, 2014 http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/13895/park-s-central-asia-tour-reaffirms-south-korea-s-eurasian-vision. Retrieved on April 19, 2017
[31]Sung-Hoon Park, "Implication of the Global Economic Crisis for Korea", Richard Young (ed.), *A New Context for EU-Korea Relation,* (Spain: Fride, 2013), pp.33-40.

position in protectionism wasanother success; following the initiative of the Korean President,APEC was the first to adopt the members'pledge not to raise thelevel of protection.[32]From the above perspective, South Korea does have an opportunity to play a role in the Eurasian economic integration with its growing influence in the regional and global economic matters. In terms of the development agenda, As Sung-Hoon Park further stated, Korea has focused relativelystrongly on one area in which the country enjoys a comparativeadvantage: trade. That includes promoting export capabilities, providing"aid forTrade", offering least developed countries the possibility of dutyandquota-free access to developed economies'markets, and servingwelcome policy environments for developing and leastdeveloped economies to utilize more effectively their development potential.[33]It is fair to say that South Korea definitely is capable in helping Eurasian countries with development agenda.South Korea now is the 11th largest economy in the worldand definitely has capacity to play more important international role in the region.[34]Besides, South Koreaalso went through serious reform after being hit hard by both 1997 Asian financial crisis and 2008 global financial crisis, which upgraded theinternational competitiveness of Korea's key industrial sectors andmade the Korean economy more resilient to external shocks.[35]This, in turn, as Sung-Hoon Parkemphasized, has prepared the country to assume more importantinternational roles.[36]In other words, South Korea may not have economic power as big as China- the world second largest economy or Japan-the world third largest economy does, it still has some advantage to play important role in Eurasian economic integration. Especially, Korea's strengthened global profile was alsoaccompanied by an enhanced role in a number of regional agendas,such as (i) addressing development issues at both the regional andglobal levels, and (ii) contributing to the strengthening of the crisisprevention mechanism in the Asian region.[37]Nonetheless, It doesn't mean that South Korea would not face any challenges in putting the initiative into practice. This topic will be addressed in the next section.

**What challenges ahead?**

As mentioned above, the Eurasian initiative is trying to build the Silk Road Express, which will run from Busan all the way to Europe via North Korea, Russia, China and Central Asia, by connecting the northeastern part of Eurasia with railways and roads to establish a multi-purpose logistics network. Apart from those Eurasian countries, South Korea definitely would face challenges on the way to Europe from North Korea, Russia, and China.With regards to the challenges from North Korea, South Korea has actually not much to do to overcome that by its own, since thefailure of "Sunshine Policy"conducted by former President Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun from 1998-2008 with no positive changes to Pyongyang's behavior despite a decade of mass aid and encouragement.[38] In other words, if South Korea wants to overcome the challenges from North Korea, it has to rely on those more influential countries in dealing with North Korean affairs, such as China and Russia. Currently, as Jim Kai pointed out, China-South Korea relations seem to be at their lowest point since President Park Geun-hye took office in early 2013.[39] The reason for close relationship between Beijing and Seoul to turn sour is the South Korean government's seemingly unexpected decision to deploy the U.S. Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system on South Korea's territory.

Jim Kai went further to say that, Seoul's decision to deploy the THAAD system in South Korea's territory may further corner South Korea in the region, pending China's continued reaction.[40] Not surprisingly, the retaliatory

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[32]Ibid.
[33]Ibid.
[34]Knoema.com, "World GDP Ranking 2016", https://knoema.com/nwnfkne/world-gdp-ranking-2016-data-and-charts-forecast.Retrieved on April23, 2017
[35]Sung-Hoon Park, "Implication of the Global Economic Crisis for Korea", Richard Young (ed.), *A New Context for EU-Korea Relation,* (Spain: Fride, 2013), pp.33-40.
[36]Ibid.
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[38]Ronald Popeski, "Sunshine Policy Failed to Change North Korea: report", *Reuter,*Nov. 18, 2010http://www.reuters.com/article/us-korea-north-sunshine-idUSTRE6AH12520101118. Retrieved on April23, 2017
[39]Jim Kai, "3 Stages of Park Geun-hye's China Diplomacy", *The Diplomat,*December 29, 2016, http://thediplomat.com/2016/12/3-stages-of-park-geun-hyes-china-diplomacy/.Retrieved on April23, 2017
[40]Ibid.

measures by the Chinese government against South Korea's decision to deploy THAAD have been damaging to the export-oriented economy of South Korea.[41]According to a recent report by a senior researcher from the Economic Research Institute of the Industrial Bank of Korea (IBK), this economic retaliation by China may cost South Korea from $7.69 billion up to $14.76 billion in the worst-case scenario.[42] Daiwa Capital Markets cut its forecast for Korea's economy to 1.75 percent from 2.3 percent in 2017, noting rising tensions with China.[43]All the figures show that tension between Seoul and Beijing would affect South Korea economic capability and international profile very much. Under the current circumstances, it is highly unlikely for China to help South Korea dissolve North Korea nuclear program or help South Korea put its Eurasian initiative into practice. What about next President? It seems that China may be more willing to talk with Moon Jae-in, a former leader of the main opposition Democratic Party, is the front-runner in the presidential race, who has said that the decision on the missile defense should be made by the next government after public discussion. [44] However, Moon has criticized China's recent actions against Korean companies. It means whether Moon would change defense-missile-system policy still in the air. In other words, South Korea is hard to get support from China on Eurasian initiatives.

Neithereasily is getting support from China for South Korea on Eurasian initiatives, nor is simplygaining green light from Russiaon that matter. There are two major obstacles ahead on the wayfrom Russia side. One is that there may be some overlap between Russian and Korean interests, but to believe that the Korean side understands the concept of "Eurasia" in the same manner as Russiashouldn't be taken for granted. [45] This understanding, as Konstantin Asmolov emphasized, may differ significantly from the "Eurasianism" in the sense it is promoted in Russia.[46]It is understandable that if two countries didn't share the same concept, the chances for them to work together would be very slim.The other block is lack of mutual trust between South Korea and Russia. In Konstantin Asmolov's interpretation, the aim of Eurasian initiative is trying to prevent or mitigate any possible regional confrontation associated with the fact that in the face of the effects of the Ukrainian crisis two opposing blocs (Russia, China, North Korea – the U.S., Japan and South Korea) may arise in the region.[47]Furthermore, Theinitiative by Pak Geun-hye to some extent was regarded as to reflect the aspirations of previous presidents of South Korea, who dreamed of turning "Korean island" into an industrial and transport hub within the Asian wheel.[48]In other words, from Russian perspective, it doesn't think that the initiative is on mutual-benefit basis but leaning solely to South Korea interest. In general, economic cooperation between two countries is mainly mutual-benefit based; otherwise FTA would not be the mainstreaminthe international economics. It is understandable for Russia to draw a conclusion like this, once it looks into the initiative simply from the perspective of security instead of trade and investment. It also indicates that there would be hard for two countries to cooperate with each other with on mutual trust. In other words, it is not easy for South Korea to overcome the challenges from the Russia side.

**What next after Parkleft?**

Eurasian initiative was raised by former South Korean President Park Geun-hye, who paid a high-profile six-day visit to Central Asia in July 2014 to put further momentum to the initiative. However, Park Geun-hyehas stepped down as the president due to corruption charge. Whatis thenext step of the initiative will be the question definitely needed to be answered. Will it be dead or transformed into another similar plan to be raised again?

No matter who is the next South Korean President, he needs to spend some time in dealing with domestic issues instead of foreign affairs for sure. As Duyeon Kimstated, Korean people will choose someone who will offer to narrow the income disparity, lower unemployment, and reform the country's governance, which has been rocked by

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[41]Viet Phuong Nguyen, "What Can Vietnam Learn From China's Economic Retaliation Against South Korea?",*The Diplomat,*March 29, 2017, http://thediplomat.com/2017/03/what-can-vietnam-learn-from-chinas-economic-retaliation-against-south-korea/.Retrieved on April23, 2017; Jiyeun Lee, and Hooyeon Kim, "South Korea's Economic Woes Will Bedevil Its Next President" https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2017-03-10/south-korea-s-economic-woes-will-bedevil-whoever-is-president.Retrieved on April23,

[42]Viet Phuong Nguyen, "What Can Vietnam Learn From China's Economic Retaliation Against South Korea?",

[43]Jiyeun Lee, and Hooyeon Kim, "South Korea's Economic Woes Will Bedevil Its Next President"

[44]Ibid.

[45]Konstantin Asmolov, "The Eurasian initiative by the President of South Korea".

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid.

the Park-Choi corruption scandal.[49] Especially, the mid-career generation and college graduates are particularly frustrated with the current glass ceiling.[50]However, as a president of middle power, South Korean Presidenthas to raise some reginal plan to fit its role in the region, or his approval rating will be harmed by being seen as a weak president without promoting Korea profile in the world. In the past, the role of middle power is usually ignored in the power politics of international society. However, middle power theorists pointed out that a middle power can "change the position of great powers and defend its own position on matters related to national or regional security that directly affect it".[51]In other words, the fact proves that applying the simple dichotomy, states that have structural level of influence and states that do not, to reality has limitations.[52]Because some states change behaviors of great powers but others even fail to defend their own positionin reality, it is necessary to separate a middle power from a weak state.After all, South Korea is developing into an important middle power. For example,South Korea has hosted high-profile global conferences (notably the G20 and Nuclear Security summits), contributed military forces and development assistance in Iraq and Afghanistan, joined peacekeeping operations, and strongly contributed to regional nonproliferation efforts.[53]On top of that, South Korea's culture of innovation and its top-rate human resources allow it to do more in order to enhance greater middle power strength, which should be a top priority for the next South Korean administration.[54]This could explain why the concept of Northeast Asian balancer and Eurasian initiative was raised by different South Korean President respectively. Whether Eurasian initiativewill be dead or not depends on how the next South Korean Presidentsees it as a tool to promote its regional and global profile as well as to stimulus economic growth. However, the role of middle power will definitely encourage the next South Korean President to come up with some substitute plan, if he doesn't want to continue working on Eurasian initiative.

**Conclusions**

The aim of the paper is to answer the question whether South Korea could play the role of a balancer or just a follower in the region. Simple answer to the question is that it is still not the ripe time for South Korea to become a balancer due to its limit power base. However, it doesn't mean that South Korea has not plan to be a balancer in the region, to raise the concept of Northeast Asian balancer and Eurasian initiative represents that South Korea is very much willing to play more influentialinternationalrole in dealing with regional and global matters, but its capability doesn't allow it to act like that. As mentioned above, it is not easy for South Korea to overcome the challenges from North Korea, China, and Russia by its own capacity so as to put Eurasian initiative into practice. Under such circumstance, South Korea is illegible to be a regional balancer. How come a balancer has to heavily rely on other countries' help to fulfill its mission?The same situation happened to the concept of Northeast Asian balancer. If that idea has become a reality, then South Korea will be looked a lot different from the current status as a result.Not to be a balancer is no same meaning with a follower. As stated above, South Korea is middle power with the capability to change the position of great powers and defend its own position on matters related to national or regional security. Therefore, it is fair to say that the international status of South Korea is somewhere between a balancer and a follower in the region. Of course, the international status of certain country is not status quo; it will be changed according to its growing power base. Needless to say that South Korean took the global financial crisis as anopportunity to raise its regional and global profile by making use of anumber of different instruments available. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that the current international status of South Korea is leaning to the side of a balancer

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