

South Korea - U.S. Alliance Assessment

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Background:

The Republic of Korea - United States alliance is considered the “linchpin” of peace, security, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

In recent years, the alliance has faced geopolitical headwinds in the context of the rise of China and the unilateralism of the previous US administration.

Research Question:

What explains RoK- US alliance dynamics?

Literature Review:

Balance of Power

South Korea should accommodate China, lessen ties with US.

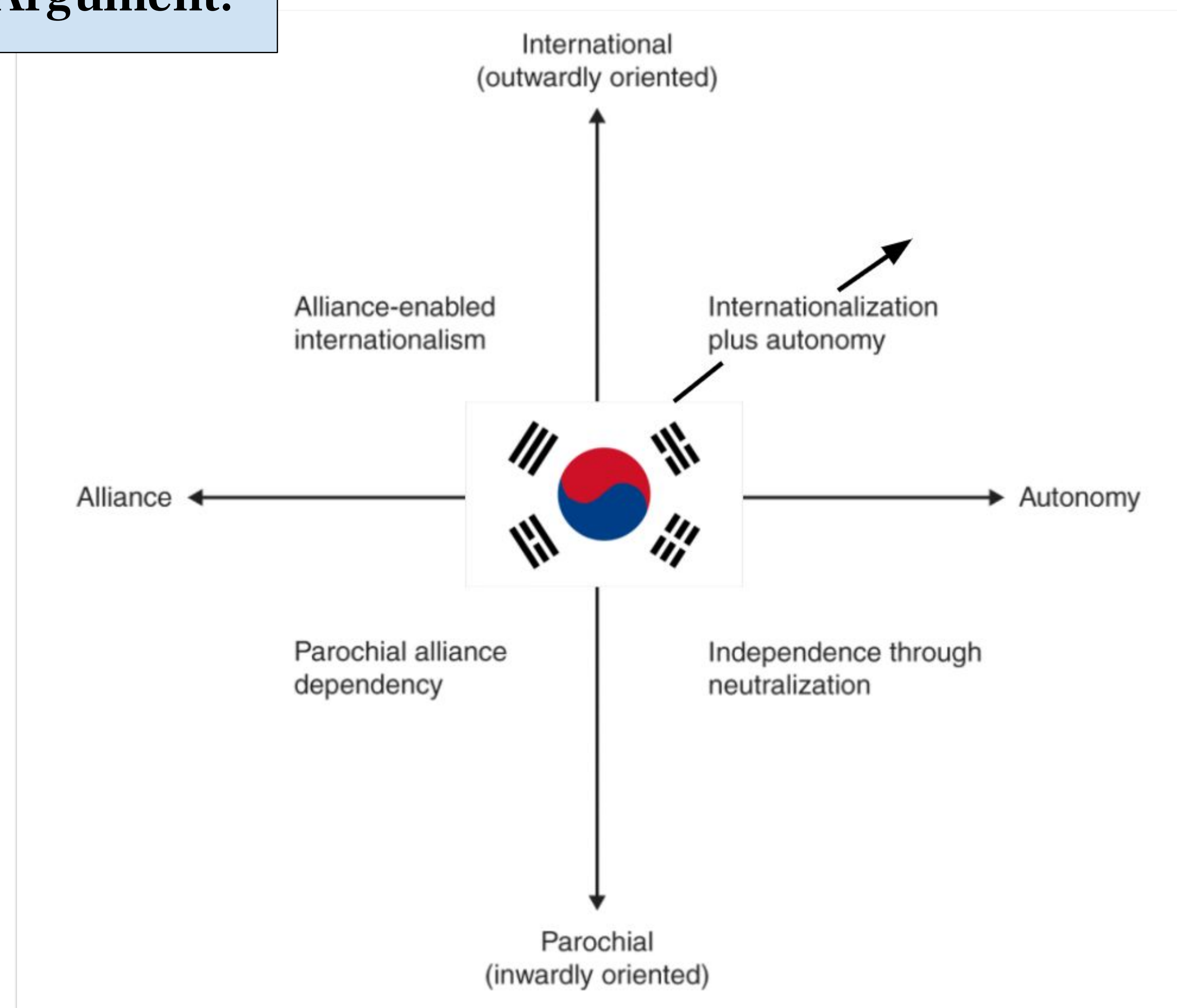
Balance of Perceptions

South Korea should pursue a nuanced approach focused on shared interests.

Balance of Interests

South Korea should ally with US while avoiding tension with China.

Argument:



South Korea’s pursuit of **strategic autonomy** has led it to diverge from US alliance dependence through strategies of middle power diplomacy and strategic ambiguity.

Research Design:

Case Study Selection:

- Decision to Not Join the Quad
- President Moon Jae-In’s New Southern Policy

Methodology:

- Illustrate South Korea’s middle power diplomacy and strategic ambiguity → strategic autonomy
- Recent developments with little scholarship

Sources: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/flag-of-the-United-States-of-America> | <https://www.britannica.com/topic/flag-of-South-Korea>

Findings:

Short term outlook for the RoK - US alliance looks relatively consistent.

Long-term outlook suggests RoK will continue pursuing alternative means of security beyond the US alliance.

Strategic Autonomy is a core tenet of South Korea’s foreign policy goals.

Implications:

South Korea’s receptiveness to US alliance will depend on the nature and scope of US diplomatic overtures.

While not abandoning the US alliance, South Korea will continue to carve space for itself to conduct an independent foreign policy.