On examining the security paradigm of the Korean Peninsula during and after the Cold War, it becomes clear that it shows elements of both continuity and change. Although bipolarity in international politics has become a thing of past, on the Korean Peninsula there is still a continuation of two virtual-alliance systems, with few changes. While one virtual-alliance between North Korea, China and Russia has got significantly diluted, the other virtual-alliance between South Korea, US and Japan has not weakened to the same extent. The emergence of the North Korean nuclear and missile programmes has also contributed to the latter’s persistence. Furthermore, it has led to a sustained role of this virtual-alliance in influencing the security paradigm on the Korean Peninsula.

More specifically, the role of the US in constituting the security architecture of the Korean Peninsula has remained very significant. Thus, it has not been the case that the dilution of the first virtual-alliance has logically led to the weakening of the second virtual-alliance. More importantly, the prevailing US, South Korea and Japan virtual-alliance is perceived by North Korea as threatening to its security. In fact, the rationale for the North Korean nuclear and missile programmes has been a dilution of its security commitment by China and Russia, concomitantly with the persistence and even strengthening, of the contesting virtual-alliance in the post-Cold War era. However, the dilution of commitments by China and Russia to North Korea does not
mean that they have totally abandoned their Cold War ally. Although they have taken
congrete steps to build a pragmatic and mutually beneficial relationship with South
Korea, they continue to maintain their ‘special’ relations with North Korea.

Nonetheless, Russia and China’s relations with North Korea appear to be more
in the realm of realpolitik, with a view to improving their regional role and status. The
collapse of communism in the USSR has made the ideological factor in their
relationship irrelevant. Additionally, there is growing interdependence of both China
and Russia with the US and Europe, manifested in their burgeoning trade relationship.
Though China and the US clearly compete for regional dominance and have
differences of opinions and stands on issues like Theatre Missile Development (TMD)
programme, Taiwan, Tibet, Tiananmen and human rights, the economic
interdependence has led both to keep the politically volatile issues aside. As discussed
in Chapter 5, the PRC clearly does not want to directly confront Washington in the
region and appears focussed on the politic-economic processes in the region as well as
its own ‘peaceful rise.’ Similarly, Russian economic interactions with the US place
constraints over its policy priority vis-à-vis North Korea. It has shown willingness to
improve its relationship with North Korea so as to obtain a space in the political and
strategic dynamics of Northeast Asia. However, it also does not find it suitable to
directly challenge the US dominance in the Korean affairs.

Contrary to North Korea’s allies, South Korea still enjoys a more candid and
firm commitment by Washington for its security that is exemplified in the
continuation of their security treaty as well as broad agreement on the continuing
significance of the 37,000 troops stationed in South Korea. As discussed in Chapter 4,
though, there have been demands for the transfer of wartime operational control of
Korean troops from the ROK-US Combined Forces Command (CFC) to South Korea
and also an anti-American feeling in South Korea at the popular level, at the policy
level, the South Korean security cannot be conceptualized without the presence of the
US on the peninsula.
The most important change in the security paradigm of the peninsula is easily the growing role of China in the Asian security architecture, which would have serious long-term implications for the Korean Peninsula as well. Growing Chinese economic and other exchanges with South Korea, along with Beijing’s constructive role in the Six-Party talks has brought South Korea closer to China. South Korean domestic politics showed some degree of tilt towards China during the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations. But it is premature to speculate about a clear policy shift by South Korea in the near future. In the changing equations, the most reliable and stable relations have been between the US and Japan. Their security commitment and perceptions have not only strengthened but to an extent overlapped with each other. It has remained the strongest arm of the trilateral virtual-alliance among South Korea, the US and Japan, even in the post-Cold War era. The weakest arm of the virtual-alliance, viz, South Korea and Japan, has not improved in the changed world, even though they have a common ally and share a common threat in the form of North Korea. With the end of the bipolar international system, ‘soft issues’ have got more prominence in their relationship such as the issue of Dokdo, Comfort Women, and Japanese Prime-Ministers’ visit to the Yasukuni War Memorial Shrine. At the level of public opinion, these issues have got more space and have been a recurring source of friction between the two countries in the post-Cold War era. However, they still coordinate on the issues related to common security concerns and have significant economic, cultural and human resource exchanges.

Another significant change that has taken place in the virtual-alliance structure on the Korean Peninsula is that the states of one virtual-alliance system are now able to deal with the states of the other virtual-alliance system without annoying their allies. The erstwhile North Korean allies, China and Russia, have been engaging with South Korea and their economic exchanges would create a new kind of ‘asset-specificity’

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1 A noted scholar Jae-jung Suh argues that the alliances get a life of their own by creating asset-specificity between the allies durable investments in support of the alliance which would become less useful outside the context of the alliance. Suh has outlined four types of asset specificity—equipment specificity, process specificity, human specificity and location specificity. These specificities also
which would make their political and strategic confrontation with South Korea a less feasible foreign policy option. The security paradigm of the peninsula in the post-Cold War world has been affected by the change in the nature of virtual-alliances, as they have become more porous and flexible. The flexibility of the virtual-alliances provides scope to the states to establish and increase their exchanges with the states of the competing virtual-alliance. The growing cross-virtual-alliance exchanges are certainly going to affect future of these virtual-alliances in long term.

As analysed in Chapter 2, North and South Korea’s positions in their respective virtual-alliance structures were different during the Cold War era. However, a commonality was that in both the virtual-alliances, one country had security treaties with the other two countries and it worked as a key member of the trilateral relations. The two other countries of the virtual-alliance did not have any security treaty with each other. In case of North Korea-USSR-China relations, North Korea had security treaties with both China and the USSR but the latter two did not have any direct security understanding with each other over the security matters of the region. Similarly, in South Korea-US-Japan virtual-alliance, the US had defence treaty with Japan and South Korea, but defence treaty between South Korea and Japan was absent. Thus, whereas in the first virtual-alliance, North Korea was the country which was playing the key role as a link between the two other countries, in the second virtual-alliance, the key role was played by the US. The unique nature of these virtual-alliances on the peninsula during the Cold War has an important bearing on the process of conceptualising the change in the aftermath of the Cold War.

The role of regional actors in constituting the security scenario of the peninsula was also affected by the change in the nature of the virtual-alliance systems. The US is still a critical external actor on the Korean Peninsula, which emanates not only from its status as the sole superpower, but also from its continued security cooperation with South Korea and Japan, in the region, as well as from the North

create alliance constituencies- army bureaucrats, military officers, politicians. Both of these factors help to make the alliance self-perpetuating (Suh 2007).
Korean insistence on dealing with it bilaterally. As examined in Chapter 4, North Korea still maintains that the 1953 Armistice Agreement could be replaced by a Peace Treaty between the original signatories of the Armistice- North Korea, China and the US, excluding South Korea. By negotiating directly with the US, North Korea hopes to secure recognition as the only legitimate regime on the Korean Peninsula. Hence, North Korea insisted on bilateral talks with the US as a precondition of its participation in the Six-Party talks. However, in the process, the role of Washington becomes central to the future developments on the peninsula.

South Korea and Japan had shown some inclination since 2000 to directly deal with North Korea and a relative marginalization of the US was witnessed in the initial years of George W. Bush administration. However, with the revelation of the North Korean attempt to enrich Uranium up to weapons-grade and emergence of second episode of nuclear crisis on the peninsula, Washington again has acquired the most significant position in the process. There is a view that the US deliberately exaggerated the issue of North Korean uranium enrichment to discourage South Korea and Japan from pursuing more reconciliatory policy towards North Korea (Harrison: 2005). Although the defence ties of the US with Japan and South Korea do not show any sign of weakness and there is convergence among the objectives of these countries, there has emerged divergence over the means to achieve the objective. Whereas the Bush administration has been in favour of a more tough and strict policy towards North Korea, Japan and South Korea, given their geographical proximity to the latter, favour increased engagement and diplomatic means to resolve the issue. The divergence among the US, Japan and South Korea over the means to achieve their common short-term objective, i.e. to dismantle the North Korean nuclear programme, has affected the efficacy of their collective impact in the Six-Party talks.

As examined in Chapter 5, the role of China has become more important in the peninsular security dynamics in the post-Cold War world. Even though, China characterises its relationship with North Korea as ‘special,’ it has still been able to forge a good relationship with South Korea on the basis of a balanced and conciliatory
approach in inter-Korean relations and by its economic interactions and exchange with Seoul. With the emergence of differences between the US and South Korea in the means and policy priorities over their dealing with North Korea, China has been utilising the opportunities in its favour. In the 1990s, China did not want to get directly involved in inter-Korean affairs and kept a low key. However, after the emergence of second nuclear crisis on the peninsula in 2002, it has shown a proactive approach by hosting the Six-Party talks. With the growing anti-Americanism in South Korea, the PRC’s ‘balanced’ efforts have created a new image of Beijing in South Korea as an ‘honest broker.’ The PRC’s cautious attempt to change its role in inter-Korean affairs could also be linked with the Chinese doctrine of ‘peaceful rise,’ propounded under the leadership of Hu Jintao. China also perceives that North Korean nuclear and missile programmes provide justification to the ambitious Theatre Missile Development (TMD) programme of the US, which would be very crucial for Chinese security. Beijing wants a nuclear weapons free North Korea but to achieve the goal of dismantling North Korean nuclear programme, it supports only diplomatic means unlike Washington’s offensive steps. Chinese stand is quite similar to the South Korean insistence on peaceful resolution of the issue.

Post-Soviet Russia did not intend to be engaged in any competition in the regional politics and was focussed on its economic recovery in the beginning. Its near total withdrawal from Korean affairs led to a possibility of major restructuring in the bilateral relationships of the region. China became, at one point of time, the only state which provided a window for North Korea to the outer world. However, Russia soon realised that its involvement in the Korean affairs was directly related with its influence in the regional politics and it tried to repair its relations with North Korea. As pointed out in Chapter 4, Russia re-acquired the trust of North Korea and was brought back in the process of the Six-Party talks only because of Pyongyang’s insistence. The talks were initially conceptualised as Five-Party talks but, reportedly, North Korea demanded Russian inclusion. This demonstrated that Russia still counted in the process of resolution of not only the North Korean nuclear issue but also in the
process of arriving at a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. Russia’s re-entry into the regional politics also provides more flexibility for North Korea and Pyongyang could once again extract some benefits by playing across China and Russia. China, which was considered to be having sole leverage over North Korea in the post-Cold War world, would appear to be conceding some ground to Russia in this regard. Economic imperatives have also made Russia rebuild its relations with North Korea without annoying one or other regimes of the Korean Peninsula, as it is the case with China.

Japan, as well, has shown more activism in the developments on the Korean Peninsula in the post-Cold War world. Japan, which was reluctant in taking a stand on Korean affairs during the Cold War days, has increasingly felt threatened by the North Korean weapons of mass destruction. The testing of Rodong 1 and Taepodong 1 missiles by North Korea has increased the threat perceptions of Japan from North Korea. Contrary to its earlier stand, various government documents and public opinion now identify the North Korean regime and its WMD programme as a definite threat. This growing threat perception has made it imperative for Japan to be involved with North Korea and establish direct contact. Thus, it has tried to remain, bilaterally and through multilateral institutions, like the KEDO and multiparty talks, engaged with Pyongyang. Japanese coordination with South Korea and the US on defence issues of the region has grown on this basis. Japan found itself closer to the Bush administration policy of dealing with the North Korean nuclear and missile issues and has supported Washington’s stand. In the Six-Party talks, when there has been clear indication that the North Korean denuclearisation has been decisively moving in a positive direction, Japan has raised the issue of Japanese abductees and is apparently more concerned about the latter than the issue of North Korean denuclearisation (Tanaka: 2007).

On the inter-Korean relations front, the animosity between them has been replaced by the attempts of the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations in South Korea to engage North Korea towards the building of a peace regime on the
Korean Peninsula. Successive South Korean efforts to build a working relationship, at least, have been able to break the impasse between the two regimes. With or without dialogue, the confrontation between them has been hallmark of the inter-Korean relations during the long Cold War years. But with the South Korean conciliatory approach towards North Korea, the confrontation has been substantially mitigated. In the post-Cold War era both the regimes simultaneously entered the UN and South Korea participated in the KEDO process by shouldering major financial and technical responsibilities. South Korea, under the sunshine policy of the Kim Dae-jung administration, tried to reach an accord with North Korea. The principle of comprehensive reciprocity bore fruit when two summit meets were held in June 2000 and October 2007. South Korea also provided unconditional and unabated humanitarian assistance to Pyongyang, in the wake of severe food and energy crisis in the post-Cold War era. Remarkably, even after the emergence of the 'second nuclear crisis' on the peninsula in late 2002 and subsequent deterioration in the North Korea-US relationship, inter-Korean relations were relatively less affected. It symbolises a fundamental change in inter-Korean relations, in as much it is not directly linked with or dependent upon the US. The inter-Korean relations have acquired a relatively autonomous momentum of their own.

This does not mean that the role of other regional players and virtual-alliance systems has become irrelevant- it mainly implies that inter-Korean dynamics have acquired their own trajectory which at times does not converge with the moves of the other regional players. There has also been significant increase in the attention on the part of South Korean civil society towards North Korea. Many South Korean NGOs and civil society organisations have been making a distinction between the North Korean regime and North Korean people or civil society. Although they are critical of the Kim Jong-il regime, they support and actively work towards providing aid and assistance to North Koreans, who are victims of the political establishment. Growing civil society exchanges would play an extremely significant role in the security paradigm of the Korean Peninsula in future. It is a positive sign for building a peace
regime on the peninsula that South Korean civil society attempts to reach the North Korean people, which is in accordance with the South Korean government's efforts for an comprehensive engagement with North Korea. Basically, the changed role of South Korean civil society organisations is closely linked with the changes in its domestic polity. The strengthening of democratic polity in South Korea has fundamentally affected inter-Korean relations. As analysed at length in Chapter 4, the sentiment of reunification, which was not as pronounced or expressed during the Cold War, has become more assertive in the changed situation. The process of rapprochement between the two countries could be attributed to popular support in South Korea for an engagement policy towards North Korea. The South Korean superiority over North Korea in the economic and military fields has promoted the government to make more generous overtures towards North Korea in the post-Cold War era. On the other hand, the North Korean domestic issues, such as its economic and energy requirements severely constrain Pyongyang's options.

Although, North Korea persists in its war of legitimacy with South Korea, it has to accept all the assistance and aid from Seoul. North Korea has also not been in a position to dictate its terms to either China or Russia due to its economic vulnerability. China, especially, effectively leveraged North Korean compulsions to change its identity from a North Korean ally, to a 'balancer' on the peninsula. The roles of China and the US in inter-Korean affairs and their images have also been changing with the changes in the domestic politics of South Korea. Growing sympathy and appreciation of the Chinese efforts regarding the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue in South Korea, is coupled with the perceived US role as an impeder. The transformation of domestic public opinion might also be a source of change which would affect the security landscape of the Korean Peninsula in a more fundamental way in the future.

After an evaluation of the continuities and changes in the security architecture of the Korean Peninsula, it seems that the explanatory frameworks of both Neorealism and Constructivism- are by themselves inadequate to fully explain the process. As analysed in detail in Chapter 3, there is no denying the Neorealist claim
that changes at the international system level affect the behaviours of the units. In Northeast Asia as well, the systemic change led to restructuring of equations among the states. Arguably, the end of Cold War was more significant for Northeast Asia as the Soviet Union had been one of the superpowers and directly concerned with the region. Post-Soviet Russia withdrew from the peninsular or regional politics to transcend its Cold War identity of a partner in the one of the two virtual-alliances. Its withdrawal certainly affected the security paradigm of the Korean Peninsula.

Moreover with the changes in the international system, the virtual-alliance solidarity was also diluted. The change in the PRC’s outlook and policy in formally accepting both states of the peninsula as legitimate, could be certainly linked to the change at the systemic level. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the establishment of relationships and growing exchanges between two states of contending virtual-alliances in Northeast Asia could be attributed to the systemic change. However, even in the changed circumstances, the attempts by the units to fully transcend their allies of the Cold War days have not been fully successful. The units find it difficult and politically less feasible to arrive at an understanding with the erstwhile members of the opposite virtual-alliance system. For example, after a brief period of coldness in China and Russia’s relationship with North Korea in the 1990s, these countries realised that to get a foothold in the Korean affairs they have to move forward through North Korea only. Their economic interactions with Seoul might have compelled them to restrict their unconditional support to Pyongyang, but they understood that abandoning North Korea would hardly be conducive to their objective of having a greater role in the regional politics. During the Cold War, an ‘asset-specificity’ has evolved in the relationship of the partners of the virtual-alliances and it would not be easy for them to change their identities easily.

Even during the Cold War, the behaviour of the units was affected by ‘soft issues’ such as culture, norms, identity and historical experiences, which have been emphasised by the Constructivist theories. An outstanding example of the importance of the role of history could be seen in the interaction of South Korea and Japan during
the Cold War. Although they were part of the same virtual-alliance system and they had a bilateral defence treaty with the US, they took a long time to normalise their relationship. Even after that they were not able to fully endorse each others' positions regarding issues of common interest. The psychological image and perception of Japan as colonial exploiter did not allow South Korea to forge a close relationship with Japan. The relationship between China and the USSR became overtly strained in the early 1960s, however their commitment to North Korea was not diluted on account of their bilateral rift. They continued to provide various kinds of assistance. Their commitment to North Korean security, epitomised in their separate defence agreements with Pyongyang, made a peculiar case of commitment between the two antagonistic regimes to the security of same state. This can only be explained in terms of their ideological identity as communist countries.

However, in the post-Cold War era, culture, norms, identity and historical experiences have become more significant in determining the matrix of security in the region and on the peninsula. The issue of identity provides a useful tool to explain why in the changed global security architecture, the US-South Korea-Japan virtual-alliance, rather than getting diluted, has become more strengthened. The role of identity and the building of 'asset specificity' seems to be among the primary underlying factors.

South Korea has normalised its relationship with China and Russia in the post-Cold War period and trade and economic exchanges between these countries have been growing steadily in recent decades. It has led to the beginning of the process of new 'asset-specificity' creation, which could further alter the security structure of the peninsula in future. The role of culture in the changing security dynamics could be seen in the growing relationship between China and South Korea. In recent years, the cultural affinity with China makes it easier for South Korean public opinion to accept the leading role of China in Korean affairs. Similarly, a changed perception about North Korea and China makes South Korean public opinion feel less threatened by North Korea or the growing dominance of China in the region. In the above context, it
is understandable that public opinion in South Korea did not shift drastically, despite the controversy between China and South Korea over Koguryo kingdom or North Korean nuclear and missile tests in 2006.

Furthermore, though in the post-Cold War world, South Korea and Japan share a common threat from the North Korean nuclear and missile programmes along with the common ally of the Cold War days, they have not been able to come closer at the popular level. Growing defence cooperation and economic exchanges prevented them from transcending the history of colonial period. A duality has emerged in their relations and military and economic cooperation between the two do not have sufficient spillover in their political relations.

Another source of change in the security paradigm of the peninsula has been change at the domestic level, which provides additional explanation for the change. The change in the nature of regimes is directly related with the conceptualisation of security by both the regimes. In the same security environment, change in the regime also leads to a distinction between the security of regime, state or nation. It also gets reflected in a shift in ‘referent of security.’ For example in North Korea, regime security is still considered synonymous with state security. On the other hand, the South Korean democratic political system has made the distinction quite clear.

In conclusion, it could be reiterated that Neorealism and Constructivism, by themselves, are not sufficient to explain the nature of security paradigm of the Korean Peninsula. The security paradigm which evolved during the Cold War days in the peninsula was the product of the impact of the international system, role of regional actors and other soft issues related to culture, norms, identity and historical experiences. Thus the change in the international system in the post-Cold War era does not mean a complete change in the security paradigm of the peninsula. Some other variables, such as historical-cultural legacies, identity, mutual perceptions, etc, which contributed to defining and shaping the security paradigm, also need to undergo a transformation for a decisive shift to occur. Till then, the evolution and establishment of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula would be elusive.
Nonetheless, there are several positive trends in regional politics, which could be helpful in arriving at the goal of a peace regime. The first important trend is growing role of China in Korean security affairs, which so far has adjusted well with the US presence in the region. Secondly, massive economic exchange among the states of the Northeast Asia would also make them less inclined to allow political and security tensions to escalate beyond a point. Although Northeast Asia does not have any formal multilateral institution to deal with and coordinate intra-regional economic exchanges, there have been few initial proposals such as the Northeast Asian economic community.

At present, the idea of a regional economic community might look a far-fetched dream, but there is strong possibility that enormous economic exchanges among these countries would create the need for a regional institution. The progress in this direction would lead to shift of focus from military security to human security in the region and would in turn impact the Korean security paradigm. Thirdly, there are also indications of the emergence of multilateralism in the region. In the Six-Party talks, the participating countries have proposed the establishment of a sustained multilateral arrangement to deal with political and strategic issues of the region. If the nascent proposal for multilateralism grows into a full-fledged trend and institution building, it would definitely help the establishment of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula and region. Fourthly, growing civil society exchanges can easily be seen as the silver lining in the current scenario. The process has decisively affected the threat-perceptions of South and North Koreas and has the potential to contribute towards the building of a peace regime on the peninsula.