



The Debate Revolving around Grand Strategy of the US and Its Implication for South Korea

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Executive Summary

This study aims to analyze how effective the concept of “grand strategy,” which is often used without a clear definition, is to understand the US policy direction and to set up South Korea’s responding strategy. The concept of grand strategy and its effectiveness is crucial in terms of our understanding of the US, a global superpower which exerts a great influence on the security of the Korean Peninsula. Accurate perception of the US grand strategy may allow us to prepare appropriate response strategies by inferring the policy direction of the US in advance, while a failure to grasp the concept can increase the possibility of forming unnecessary responses or misguided policies. Therefore, it is highly necessary to clarify the concept of grand strategy for the future discussions of policy directions.

Given the discussions related to a grand strategy, the essential of this strategy lies at the full utilization of all available resources for the achievement of national interests or goals recognized by the state. Furthermore, the concept of grand strategy covers the entire world in terms of area, and in terms of time, it maintains its validity for a long-term regardless of regime changes. Such understanding of the concept derives from the experience of the US strategy of containment during the Cold War period. However, it is now nearly impossible for the US to make a political consensus about its threat perception since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a major security threat

at that time. Recent discussions among experts surrounding the definition and understanding of a grand strategy can be divided into three dimensions: (1) a plan, (2) a guiding principle and (3) a pattern of behavior. Nonetheless, even in the US, which is believed to possess such strategy, the term “grand strategy” is used as a mixture of above three concepts without a clear definition.

In the past, the US was able to pursue the concept of grand strategy due to the apparent external threat that existed beyond changes of administrations. However, since the end of the Cold War, it seems difficult for the US to establish a grand strategy, which lasts for a longer period apart from regime changes, based on recent debates revolving around this issue. In this perspective, the strong threat perception of China revealed in all strategic reports published by Trump administration raises interest in whether the US can make a domestic political consensus on its external threats and in what direction the US will develop its grand strategy. With this uncertainty in the US policy direction, South Korea should refrain from making hasty judgements and maintain close diplomatic relations with the US. ♣

※ Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.

※ This article is written based on the author's personal opinions and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.