

THE UK'S RESET DIPLOMACY TOWARDS THE EU: IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA IN THE ERA OF POLYCRISIS

EUICHAN SHIN

081syc@naver.com

Assistant Professor at the Department of European Studies, Dongduk Women's University, Seoul (South Korea). Euichan Shin is Assistant Professor at the Department of European Studies at Dongduk Women's University. He received his PhD in International Area Studies with a specialization in the European Union (EU) from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

Abstract

This article examines the United Kingdom's post-Brexit reset diplomacy toward the European Union and explores its implications for peace and security on the Korean Peninsula in the era of polycrisis. Moving beyond the binary framing of rupture versus reversal, it argues that the reset represents a form of pragmatic diplomacy characterised by selective and functionally bounded cooperation conducted within enduring political and legal constraints. Conceptually, the article links polycrisis to a diplomatic environment in which adaptability, risk management, and issue-specific coordination take precedence, understanding it not merely as the coexistence of multiple crises but as their interaction across security, economic, and institutional domains that structurally limits diplomatic choice. Empirically, it shows how the UK–EU reset has unfolded through incremental initiatives aimed at stabilising interaction in specific policy areas, while deliberately avoiding the reopening of foundational disputes associated with Brexit. Building on this analysis, the article extends its framework to the Korean Peninsula, which is similarly shaped by interacting security dilemmas, great-power competition, contested sanctions governance, and geoeconomic fragmentation. Rather than proposing the UK–EU reset as a transferable policy model, it identifies broader analytical lessons on diplomacy under persistent structural constraint, arguing that peace and security are more plausibly advanced through multi-vector, issue-specific engagement and strategies of risk containment than through comprehensive settlement efforts or assumptions of institutional convergence.

Keywords

Polycrisis, Pragmatic diplomacy, UK–EU reset, Institutional constraints, Korean Peninsula peace.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a reorientação da diplomacia do Reino Unido em relação à União Europeia após o Brexit e explora as suas implicações para a paz e a segurança na Península da Coreia na era da policrise. Ultrapassando o enquadramento binário entre ruptura e reversão, defende que essa reorientação representa uma forma de diplomacia pragmática, caracterizada por uma cooperação seletiva e funcionalmente delimitada, conduzida dentro de restrições políticas e jurídicas duradouras. Conceitualmente, o artigo associa a policrise a um ambiente diplomático em que a adaptabilidade, a gestão de riscos e a coordenação específica em torno de questões específicas têm precedência, entendendo-a não apenas como a coexistência de múltiplas crises, mas como a sua interação nos domínios da segurança, da economia e das



instituições, o que limita estruturalmente as opções diplomáticas. Empiricamente, mostra como o reinício das relações entre o Reino Unido e a UE se desenrolou através de iniciativas incrementais destinadas a estabilizar a interação em áreas políticas específicas, evitando deliberadamente a reabertura de disputas fundamentais associadas ao Brexit. Com base nesta análise, o artigo alarga o seu quadro à Península Coreana, que é moldada de forma semelhante por dilemas de segurança interativos, competição entre grandes potências, governação contestada das sanções e fragmentação geoeconómica. Em vez de propor o reajustamento das relações entre o Reino Unido e a UE como um modelo de política transferível, identifica lições analíticas mais amplas sobre a diplomacia sob restrições estruturais persistentes, argumentando que a paz e a segurança são promovidas de forma mais plausível através de um envolvimento multivetorial e específico a cada questão e de estratégias de contenção de riscos do que através de esforços de resolução abrangentes ou pressupostos de convergência institucional.

Palavras-chave

Policrise, Diplomacia pragmática, Reajustamento das relações entre o Reino Unido e a UE, Restrições institucionais, Paz na Península Coreana.

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Introduction

The post-Brexit trajectory of the United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union (EU) has frequently been interpreted through a dichotomous lens of rupture versus reversal. Early policy narratives following the 2016 referendum emphasised regulatory autonomy, strategic diversification, and the pursuit of a "Global Britain" agenda beyond Europe. Yet, nearly a decade after Brexit, this binary framing has proven insufficient for capturing the evolving dynamics of UK-EU relations. As post-withdrawal legal arrangements have intersected with wider geopolitical and economic disruptions, the space for either sustained strategic detachment or institutional reintegration has become increasingly constrained.

Rather than maintaining a posture of confrontation or seeking a return to pre-Brexit integration, the UK has gradually adopted a calibrated approach toward the EU that prioritises functional cooperation within the limits of the post-Brexit settlement. This recalibration became politically explicit following the Labour Party's return to government in July 2024. The new government articulated its European policy as a "reset" of relations with the EU, explicitly distancing this strategy from any intention to reverse Brexit or to re-enter core integration frameworks such as the Single Market or the Customs Union. Parliamentary briefings describe this approach as one aimed at reducing friction and improving cooperation while preserving the legal and political outcomes of withdrawal (UK Parliament, 2025a).

The concept of "reset diplomacy," as employed by the UK government, thus denotes an effort to normalise relations and enhance policy coordination without reopening the foundational terms of Brexit. Importantly, this approach frames cooperation as a practical and technical matter rather than a symbolic or constitutional one. By emphasising continuity with the existing legal architecture, the reset seeks to depoliticise aspects of UK-EU interaction while leaving core sovereignty claims formally untouched.

This paper argues that the UK's reset diplomacy toward the EU is best understood as an adaptive response to conditions of polycrisis. Polycrisis refers to the interaction and mutual reinforcement of multiple crises including geopolitical, economic, security-related,



and institutional that together constrain policy options more severely than any single crisis in isolation (Lawrence et al., 2024). In the European context, the prolonged war in Ukraine, energy insecurity, disruptions to global supply chains, and the economic adjustment costs associated with Brexit form an entangled crisis environment. Recent scholarship emphasises that polycrisis should be treated not as a temporary phase, but as a durable condition characterised by persistent uncertainty and the erosion of clear crisis-exit strategies. Under such conditions, policy approaches premised on rigid sovereignty or comprehensive disengagement tend to generate escalating costs.

Three structural pressures are particularly relevant in shaping the UK's reset diplomacy. First, the deterioration of the European security environment since 2022 has reinforced the strategic importance of close coordination among European states. Although the UK remains firmly embedded in NATO, the war in Ukraine has highlighted operational and industrial interdependencies linking European security actors, including EU institutions and non-member partners (European Council, 2025a). This has increased the practical relevance of EU-level coordination even for states formally outside the Union.

Second, uncertainty surrounding the future orientation and reliability of U.S. global engagement has encouraged European governments to diversify security cooperation and strengthen regional coordination mechanisms. This context has sharpened incentives for structured UK–EU engagement in defence and security-related areas, particularly where transatlantic guarantees alone appear insufficient.

Third, domestic economic pressures linked to post-Brexit trade frictions have generated growing demand for targeted forms of cooperation with the EU. Regulatory divergence has produced tangible costs in areas such as agri-food trade and carbon pricing, where small and medium-sized enterprises embedded in EU-facing supply chains are particularly exposed (UK Parliament, 2025b).

Within this environment, reset diplomacy can be characterised as a form of pragmatic diplomacy. In this paper, pragmatic diplomacy refers to an interest-driven, problem-oriented approach that prioritises practical outcomes over ideological coherence or comprehensive institutional alignment. Rather than pursuing either full regulatory autonomy or deep reintegration, pragmatic diplomacy operates through modular and sector-specific arrangements that can be negotiated incrementally and adjusted over time. Such an approach is particularly suited to polycrisis conditions, where overlapping risks and political uncertainty limit the feasibility of comprehensive bargains.

Empirically, the UK–EU reset has unfolded through a series of concrete initiatives since 2023, gaining momentum after the 2024 change of government. These include the restoration of regular political summitry, efforts to construct a new framework for strategic partnership, and negotiations over partial economic and regulatory coordination. While none of these developments amount to a reversal of Brexit, they collectively represent a shift away from confrontation toward managed cooperation.

Beyond the European case, this paper suggests that the UK's reset diplomacy offers analytically relevant insights for South Korea. The Korean Peninsula is likewise situated within a polycrisis environment shaped by great-power rivalry, alliance uncertainty, economic fragmentation, and persistent security dilemmas. The value of this comparison



lies not in institutional similarity, but in the shared condition of constraint under which diplomacy unfolds. Examining how a middle power such as the UK navigates cooperation and autonomy under crisis entanglement contributes to broader discussions on diplomatic strategies for maintaining peace and stability in environments where comprehensive solutions remain politically and structurally out of reach.

Polycrisis and Pragmatic Diplomacy: A Theoretical Framework

Polycrisis and State Behaviour under Structural Constraint

The concept of polycrisis has gained analytical prominence as scholars have sought to capture the growing complexity and instability of the contemporary global order. Unlike conventional crisis frameworks that treat shocks as discrete, sequential, and sectorally bounded, polycrisis refers to a condition in which multiple crises interact and reinforce one another across domains. These interactions generate systemic effects that cannot be adequately understood through linear or compartmentalised analysis.

The intellectual origins of the concept can be traced to Edgar Morin's critique of modern governance, which emphasised the interdependence of economic, political, ecological, and social systems. Morin argued that crises in complex societies do not simply accumulate over time. Instead, they become mutually constitutive, gradually eroding the capacity of institutions to respond through reductionist or siloed approaches (Morin & Kern, 1999). This insight is particularly relevant for contemporary international politics, where policy responses in one domain increasingly produce indirect consequences in others.

Building on this tradition, Lawrence et al. (2024) define global polycrisis as the causal entanglement of crises spanning multiple global systems, in which interconnected dynamics significantly diminish collective prospects. They identify three mechanisms through which polycrisis unfolds. Common stresses exert simultaneous pressure on multiple systems, while domino effects allow shocks to propagate across policy domains. Over time, feedback loops further intensify instability. This formulation shifts analytical attention away from the frequency or scale of individual crises and toward the structural conditions under which crises interact.

Within European studies, polycrisis has become a central lens for interpreting governance dynamics since the late 2000s. Zeitlin, Nicoli, and Laffan (2019) argue that the EU's experience of overlapping crises, including financial instability, migration pressures, Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine, has not produced a uniform trajectory of either integration or disintegration. Instead, polycrisis has reshaped political incentives and institutional practices. This has contributed to differentiated integration, the use of experimental policy instruments, and a growing reliance on informal coordination. Importantly, this literature emphasises that polycrisis does not determine outcomes in advance. Rather, it alters the constraints within which political actors operate.



From a broader international relations perspective, polycrisis affects state behaviour by increasing uncertainty, shortening decision horizons, and heightening sensitivity to cumulative and indirect effects. In such environments, the costs of policy rigidity rise substantially. Strategies grounded in ideological consistency, whether they prioritise sovereignty maximalism or normative integrationism, risk generating spillover effects that undermine performance in adjacent domains. As a result, states embedded in dense networks of interdependence increasingly prioritise flexibility, reversibility, and risk management in their external relations.

Polycrisis thus introduces a form of structural constraint that differs from traditional accounts centred on power asymmetry or formal institutional dependence (Lawrence et al., 2024). Constraints arise not only from external actors or legal rules, but also from the interaction of crises that narrow the range of politically and economically viable choices. This perspective helps explain why states may pursue cooperation even in the absence of trust or normative alignment. Under conditions of polycrisis, cooperation becomes less a reflection of shared values and more a pragmatic response to systemic risk.

For the United Kingdom, the post-Brexit period coincides with precisely such a condition of structural constraint. Economic adjustment costs associated with withdrawal from the EU, the destabilisation of European security following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, energy insecurity, and uncertainty surrounding transatlantic relations together constitute a sustained polycrisis environment. These overlapping pressures increase the relative costs of prolonged confrontation with the EU and make selective cooperation a rational adaptation rather than a normative concession. In this sense, polycrisis does not merely provide background context for UK–EU relations. It actively reshapes the strategic calculus through which post-Brexit diplomacy is conducted.

Pragmatic Diplomacy as an Adaptive Response to Polycrisis

Within environments characterised by structural constraint and persistent uncertainty, pragmatic diplomacy emerges as a distinctive mode of foreign policy adaptation. In this article, pragmatic diplomacy refers to an interest-driven and problem-oriented approach that prioritises practical outcomes over doctrinal coherence or comprehensive institutional alignment. Rather than seeking to resolve underlying political conflicts or to establish stable end-states, pragmatic diplomacy focuses on managing immediate challenges within the limits imposed by domestic politics, institutional arrangements, and external pressures.

The conceptual roots of pragmatic diplomacy can be traced to philosophical pragmatism, which emphasises experimentalism, learning through practice, and the evaluation of ideas based on their consequences rather than their conformity to abstract principles. Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009) introduce this orientation into international relations scholarship by arguing that pragmatism enables policy-makers to navigate complex environments through selective and situational reasoning. From this perspective,



diplomatic action is guided less by theoretical consistency than by assessments of feasibility under specific conditions.

In practical terms, pragmatic diplomacy manifests itself in several recurring patterns. Cooperation is typically organised around discrete policy areas rather than comprehensive agreements. Institutional arrangements are treated as provisional and subject to adjustment, rather than as fixed endpoints. Fragmentation and differentiated participation are accepted as normal features of contemporary governance, particularly in contexts where political consensus is limited. These features align closely with practice-oriented accounts of diplomacy, which emphasise routines, informal coordination, and tacit knowledge as central to the functioning of international cooperation (Pouliot & Cornut, 2015).

Changes in the structure of contemporary diplomacy further reinforce the relevance of pragmatic approaches. Hocking (2016) observes that diplomatic practice has become increasingly network-based and polycentric, reflecting the diffusion of authority across state and non-state actors and the proliferation of issue-specific policy arenas. In such settings, diplomacy rarely unfolds through singular negotiating forums or comprehensive treaties. Instead, it operates through overlapping channels that connect governments, international organisations, and specialised agencies. Pragmatic diplomacy is well suited to this environment because it does not depend on hierarchical institutional control or normative convergence.

Importantly, pragmatic diplomacy should not be conflated with opportunism or policy inconsistency. Although it avoids rigid doctrinal commitments, it remains strategically purposeful. Its defining feature lies in the prioritisation of feasibility and risk mitigation under conditions of uncertainty. In polycrisis environments, this often results in cooperation that is limited in scope and framed in technical terms, thereby reducing domestic political exposure while preserving the possibility of future adjustment.

From this perspective, pragmatic diplomacy occupies a middle ground between classical realist and liberal institutionalist approaches. It does not reject cooperation in favour of unilateral power projection, nor does it assume that durable cooperation requires deep normative alignment or institutional integration. Instead, it treats cooperation as a contingent and context-dependent practice shaped by structural constraints. This orientation is particularly relevant for actors operating outside formal membership frameworks, such as the UK in its post-Brexit relationship with the EU, where political red lines limit the scope of institutional engagement but do not eliminate functional interdependence.

Under conditions of polycrisis, pragmatic diplomacy thus represents not a temporary deviation from established strategies, but a durable mode of adjustment. As overlapping crises continue to interact across security, economic, and institutional domains, diplomatic practices that emphasise flexibility, reversibility, and issue-specific coordination are likely to remain central to the management of international relations.



Analytical Implications for the Study of UK–EU Relations

The combined perspective of polycrisis and pragmatic diplomacy provides a coherent analytical lens for understanding the United Kingdom's reset diplomacy toward the EU. Polycrisis generates shared pressures across security, economic, and institutional domains that weaken the viability of ideologically rigid positions. In such environments, diplomatic strategies premised on either sustained confrontation or comprehensive reintegration tend to incur escalating political and material costs. Pragmatic diplomacy offers an alternative logic by enabling cooperation to proceed within clearly recognised constraints.

This framework helps explain both the timing and the form of the UK–EU reset. The recalibration of relations did not emerge from a fundamental reassessment of Brexit as a political project. Instead, it reflected a gradual adjustment to the cumulative pressures generated by overlapping crises. Security uncertainty, economic volatility, and regulatory interdependence interacted to narrow the range of feasible policy options, making selective cooperation increasingly attractive even in the absence of political trust or normative convergence.

Analytically, the emphasis on modular and issue-specific cooperation is particularly significant. Rather than pursuing a single overarching agreement, the UK–EU reset has unfolded through discrete initiatives that address concrete policy needs while avoiding politically sensitive questions of institutional membership. This approach reduces the risk that setbacks in one domain will undermine cooperation in others. It also allows both parties to recalibrate engagement over time in response to changing conditions, a feature that is especially valuable in polycrisis environments characterised by uncertainty and rapid change.

The framework further highlights the importance of recognising political and institutional constraints as constitutive elements of diplomacy rather than as obstacles to be overcome. In the UK–EU case, domestic political red lines in the UK and legal-institutional limits on the EU side shape not only what forms of cooperation are possible, but also how cooperation is framed and justified. Treating these constraints analytically helps explain why the reset has taken an incremental, technically oriented form rather than moving toward deeper institutionalisation.

Finally, this perspective clarifies the distinction between cooperation and convergence. The UK–EU reset demonstrates that functional cooperation can be sustained without shared long-term integration goals or normative alignment. Cooperation emerges as a contingent practice aimed at managing specific risks rather than as a pathway toward systemic transformation. This insight is central to the broader argument of the article, as it allows the analysis to move beyond debates over integration outcomes and toward a more grounded understanding of how diplomacy operates under conditions of structural constraint.

By establishing these analytical implications, this section provides a conceptual bridge between the theoretical discussion of polycrisis and pragmatic diplomacy and the empirical analysis of the UK–EU reset that follows. It sets the stage for examining how



these dynamics have been translated into concrete diplomatic practices, while remaining attentive to the limits imposed by post-Brexit political and institutional realities.

The UK–EU Reset under Polycrisis: Structural Pressures and Pragmatic Diplomacy

Structural Pressures in a Polycrisis Environment

The recalibration of UK–EU relations has continued to unfold within a polycrisis environment characterised by persistence rather than resolution. Since 2025, overlapping security, economic, and institutional pressures have not stabilised into a new equilibrium. Instead, they have evolved in ways that reinforce one another, further constraining diplomatic choice. Within this context, the UK–EU reset has increasingly been framed not as a discretionary policy initiative, but as a functional response to sustained uncertainty.

From a geopolitical perspective, the European security landscape remains unsettled. Although the war in Ukraine has entered a protracted phase, its implications for European defence planning and strategic coordination have deepened rather than diminished. The EU has continued to expand its role in defence-industrial coordination and sanctions governance, while debates over burden-sharing and strategic autonomy have intensified (European Council, 2025b). These developments underscore the extent to which European security governance now operates across multiple institutional layers, including NATO, EU frameworks, and partnerships with non-member states. For the UK, this has increased the practical costs associated with sustained distance from EU-level coordination, even as formal boundaries related to membership remain firmly in place.

Economic pressures have likewise persisted and accumulated. Post-Brexit trade frictions continue to intersect with broader challenges related to supply-chain resilience, energy security, and sluggish growth. Parliamentary briefings published since 2025 indicate that non-tariff barriers and regulatory divergence have become structural features of UK–EU economic relations rather than transitional effects (UK Parliament, 2025c; House of Lords Library, 2026). Over time, the cumulative impact of these constraints has heightened political sensitivity to the economic costs of limited cooperation, particularly in sectors where regulatory divergence generates disproportionate adjustment burdens.

What distinguishes this phase of UK–EU relations is not the emergence of new crises, but the interaction of existing ones. Security uncertainty, economic adjustment, and institutional separation increasingly reinforce each other, narrowing the range of politically viable strategies. Under such conditions, approaches premised on either sustained confrontation or comprehensive reintegration become difficult to sustain. The reset should therefore be understood less as a change in strategic ambition than as an effort to manage exposure to systemic risk within a prolonged polycrisis environment.



Security Recalibration and Cooperation beyond Membership

Security cooperation has remained central to the evolving UK–EU reset, particularly as the limits of purely alliance-based frameworks have become more apparent. Although NATO continues to function as the primary pillar of European collective defence, the expansion of EU-level initiatives in defence-industrial coordination, procurement cooperation, and military mobility has increased the functional relevance of EU institutions for European security governance (European Commission, 2022). This development does not displace NATO's role, but it does complicate the institutional landscape within which European security cooperation now operates.

By early 2026, this dynamic had translated into renewed discussions concerning UK participation in selected EU defence-related mechanisms (Tidey & Jones, 2026). Public statements and media reporting suggested that the UK government was reassessing its position on engagement with EU initiatives linked to joint procurement and industrial capacity-building. These discussions were framed explicitly in functional terms. Rather than signalling a move toward institutional reintegration, they reflected shared concerns regarding capability gaps, production constraints, and the sustainability of defence support in a prolonged security crisis.

This recalibration points to a layered approach to security cooperation. The UK has continued to emphasise the primacy of NATO and the transatlantic relationship, while increasingly acknowledging that effective European security governance depends on coordination across multiple institutional venues (European Council, 2025b). Cooperation beyond formal membership thus emerges as a strategic compromise. It allows the UK to retain political autonomy while reducing the operational costs associated with exclusion from EU-led coordination frameworks. Under conditions of persistent security uncertainty, this form of pragmatic engagement becomes less an exception than a practical necessity.

Economic and Regulatory Adjustment after Brexit

Economic and regulatory adjustment constitutes a second core dimension of the UK–EU reset. While the Trade and Cooperation Agreement continues to provide the baseline framework for bilateral economic relations, its limitations have become increasingly visible as regulatory divergence intersects with broader shifts in industrial and climate policy. EU initiatives related to economic security and climate governance have generated external pressures on UK firms integrated into European value chains, particularly in sectors characterised by tight regulatory coupling (European Commission, 2023).

By early 2026, sector-specific negotiations had moved from abstract debate toward exploratory discussions focused on technical and transitional arrangements. In the agri-food sector, renewed attention to sanitary and phytosanitary measures reflected growing concern over supply disruption, administrative burden, and competitiveness (UK Parliament, 2025d). Similarly, discussions surrounding emissions trading coordination were driven less by normative alignment than by awareness that regulatory divergence could impose asymmetric costs in an already strained economic environment.



These developments highlight the evolving logic of economic cooperation under the reset. Regulatory coordination is increasingly framed as a tool for risk mitigation rather than convergence. By pursuing targeted adjustments in areas where divergence generates disproportionate costs, the UK seeks to stabilise economic interaction with the EU while maintaining the political narrative of post-Brexit autonomy. This pattern is consistent with the broader logic of pragmatic diplomacy under polycrisis, where cooperation is justified by functional necessity and bounded by political constraint.

Political and Institutional Constraints of the Reset

Despite growing incentives for cooperation, the scope and form of the UK–EU reset remain shaped by enduring political and institutional constraints on both sides. These constraints help explain why the reset has taken an incremental and selective form rather than evolving into a comprehensive framework for renewed integration.

In the UK, Brexit continues to carry significant political salience. Successive governments have reiterated commitments to core Brexit red lines, including the rejection of EU single market membership, the customs union, and free movement of persons. These constraints limit the political feasibility of deep or highly visible forms of integration and steer policy toward technocratic, sector-specific arrangements that attract less public scrutiny (House of Lords Library, 2026). As a result, the reset is framed in terms of normalisation and improvement rather than reversal.

On the EU side, institutional constraints are equally consequential. The legal architecture of the EU and concerns about precedent-setting restrict the depth of cooperation that can be extended to third countries without corresponding obligations (Fabbrini, 2020). Internal divergences among member states regarding the strategic value of closer engagement with the UK further complicate efforts to institutionalise cooperation beyond narrowly defined areas.

Taken together, these constraints reinforce a modular approach to the reset. Rather than pursuing a single overarching agreement, both parties have favoured incremental progress through discrete initiatives and structured dialogues. This approach allows cooperation to advance where mutual benefits are clear while containing political and legal risks. In this sense, the reset reflects not a transitional stage toward reintegration, but a relatively stable equilibrium shaped by the enduring legacies of Brexit and the pressures of polycrisis.

Implications for Peace and Security on the Korean Peninsula

Polycrisis on the Korean Peninsula: Interlocking Security and Geoeconomic Pressures

The Korean Peninsula constitutes a paradigmatic case of polycrisis in which security, geoeconomic, and institutional pressures interact in ways that significantly constrain diplomatic choice. Unlike episodic crises that can be addressed through discrete policy



interventions, the peninsula is shaped by the persistence of unresolved confrontation, the accumulation of risk across domains, and the absence of stable mechanisms for crisis exit. These conditions generate a structural environment in which policy flexibility is limited and the costs of miscalculation are particularly high.

At the core of this polycrisis lies the unresolved legacy of the Korean War and the continued development of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s nuclear and missile capabilities. The International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly reported that it remains unable to conduct verification activities in the DPRK, while continuing to monitor relevant facilities through open-source and satellite-based information (IAEA, 2024). This lack of verification does not merely represent a technical limitation. It constitutes a structural source of uncertainty that complicates risk assessment and undermines the predictability required for sustained crisis management.

Sanctions governance forms a second, closely related layer of polycrisis. While United Nations Security Council sanctions formally remain in place, their enforcement and monitoring have become increasingly contested. Resolution 2680 (2023) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts only on a temporary basis, and the Panel's final report documented persistent evasion practices and growing obstacles to coordinated enforcement (United Nations Security Council, 2024). The subsequent termination of the Panel's mandate has introduced an additional element of institutional fragmentation, weakening shared situational awareness and complicating multilateral coordination.

A third dimension of polycrisis emerges from the growing salience of geoeconomic competition. Global debates on economic security, supply-chain resilience, and technological controls increasingly intersect with traditional security concerns. The World Economic Forum (2026) identifies geoeconomic confrontation and the weaponisation of economic interdependence as among the most significant short-term global risks. For the Korean Peninsula, these dynamics are particularly consequential. South Korea's security remains anchored in alliance commitments, while its economic model is deeply embedded in global value chains exposed to strategic trade controls and technological decoupling.

What distinguishes the peninsula's polycrisis is not the presence of multiple challenges per se, but the way in which these pressures reinforce one another. Nuclear risk intensifies sanctions politics, sanctions governance intersects with great-power rivalry, and geoeconomic competition feeds back into security calculations. Under such conditions, diplomatic strategies premised on comprehensive settlement or linear progress become difficult to sustain. The polycrisis of the Korean Peninsula should therefore be understood not as a temporary convergence of challenges, but as a structural condition that narrows the space for diplomatic manoeuvre and elevates the importance of risk management (World Bank, 2024).

Analytical Lessons from Pragmatic Diplomacy under Polycrisis

The UK–EU reset examined in Chapter 3 does not offer a transferable institutional model for the Korean Peninsula. Its analytical relevance lies instead in the mechanisms through which diplomatic cooperation has been recalibrated under conditions of structural



constraint. These mechanisms provide insight into how diplomacy functions in environments where comprehensive settlements are politically and institutionally unattainable.

A first analytical lesson concerns the logic of selective cooperation. Under polycrisis conditions, attempts to pursue all-encompassing agreements tend to raise the political threshold for engagement to a level that is difficult to sustain. The UK–EU reset illustrates how cooperation can be organised around discrete functional domains without reopening foundational disputes. Analytically applied to the Korean Peninsula, this suggests that limited forms of engagement may remain possible even when progress on core security issues is blocked, not because political relations have improved, but because functional coordination serves to manage specific risks.

A second lesson relates to incrementalism and modularity. Rather than constructing a single overarching framework, the reset has proceeded through layered and reversible arrangements that contain political exposure. This feature is particularly relevant in contexts characterised by domestic political volatility and security uncertainty. Incremental mechanisms allow interaction to continue without requiring irreversible commitments or assumptions of linear progress.

A third lesson concerns the treatment of constraints as constitutive elements of diplomacy. In the UK–EU case, domestic political red lines and institutional limits are not framed as temporary obstacles to be overcome, but as parameters within which cooperation is designed and justified. Strategic documents produced by the Republic of Korea similarly acknowledge that national security policy operates at the intersection of military threats, economic security, and great-power competition (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, 2022). Recognising these constraints analytically reduces the risk of overestimating the feasibility of ambitious diplomatic initiatives in structurally constrained environments.

Finally, pragmatic diplomacy under polycrisis underscores the distinction between cooperation and convergence. The UK–EU reset demonstrates that functional cooperation does not require institutional convergence or normative alignment. Cooperation emerges as a contingent practice aimed at managing specific risks rather than as a pathway toward political reconciliation or systemic transformation. For the Korean Peninsula, where institutional integration analogous to the European experience is neither feasible nor analytically appropriate, this distinction is particularly significant.

Taken together, these analytical lessons do not point toward solutions or policy prescriptions. Instead, they clarify how diplomacy adapts when its scope is narrowed by persistent uncertainty and structural constraint. In this sense, pragmatic diplomacy under polycrisis provides an interpretive framework for understanding diplomatic practice in high-risk environments rather than a blueprint for conflict resolution.

Multi-Vector Cooperation and Risk Management on the Korean Peninsula

If the Korean Peninsula is understood as a setting shaped by polycrisis, diplomatic engagement oriented toward a single institutional or strategic track is unlikely to provide



a stable basis for managing risk. An analytically more appropriate framing is multi-vector cooperation, understood here not as a prescriptive strategy, but as a descriptive concept capturing the plurality of channels through which interaction is organised under conditions of structural constraint.

In the international relations literature, multi-vector foreign policy has been used to describe how states navigate competitive environments by cultivating pragmatic relations with multiple power centres rather than aligning exclusively with a single actor. Research on secondary and middle powers emphasises that such an approach is not driven by ideological neutrality, but by efforts to preserve autonomy and manage exposure to external risks in environments where dependence on any single partner may generate vulnerability (Vanderhill et al., 2020). This conceptualisation provides a useful analytical lens for examining diplomatic practice on the Korean Peninsula, where structural constraints limit the feasibility of singular or linear approaches to engagement.

Empirically, elements of multi-vector engagement are already visible in the peninsula's diplomatic landscape. South Korea's security posture remains anchored in alliance-based deterrence, while its diplomatic practice extends across multilateral institutions, regional partnerships, and issue-specific forms of coordination. This plurality reflects a context in which no single framework is capable of addressing the full range of security, economic, and geopolitical pressures confronting the peninsula.

From an analytical perspective, the significance of multi-vector cooperation lies in its relationship to risk management across domains. Goeconomic tensions associated with supply-chain restructuring, technological controls, and industrial policy increasingly interact with traditional security concerns. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has noted that economic security risks linked to global value chains and strategic technologies now directly shape national security calculations, particularly for economies deeply embedded in international production networks (OECD, 2024). Under such conditions, disruptions originating in one domain can rapidly spill over into others.

In this context, dispersing diplomatic engagement across multiple vectors may reduce the likelihood that shocks cascade uncontrollably across policy areas. Security escalation can disrupt economic and diplomatic channels that contribute to broader stability, while unmanaged goeconomic confrontation may exacerbate security dilemmas. Multi-vector engagement, understood analytically, draws attention to how diplomatic practice can mitigate such cross-domain spillovers without presupposing convergence or political reconciliation.

Domestic political dynamics constitute an additional dimension of risk under polycrisis. Survey research conducted by the Korea Institute for National Unification indicates that public attitudes toward inter-Korean relations and unification have become increasingly heterogeneous and contingent (Korea Institute for National Unification, 2025). This variability complicates the sustainability of diplomatic initiatives that rely on singular narratives or narrowly defined policy tracks. Viewed analytically, multi-vector engagement highlights how diplomatic interaction can persist despite fluctuations in domestic preferences.



Importantly, multi-vector cooperation does not imply strategic ambiguity, nor does it entail the dilution of existing security commitments. It also does not presuppose progress toward conflict resolution. Its analytical value lies in drawing attention to how diplomacy under polycrisis prioritises risk containment, adaptability, and systemic resilience over linear advancement toward settlement. In this sense, multi-vector cooperation captures a mode of diplomatic practice oriented toward stabilising interaction in an environment where uncertainty is not episodic, but enduring.

Conclusion

This article set out to examine the United Kingdom's reset diplomacy toward the European Union as a case of pragmatic cooperation under conditions of polycrisis, and to explore its analytical implications for peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. Rather than interpreting the reset as a transitional step toward reintegration or as a symbolic political shift, the analysis conceptualised it as a mode of diplomacy shaped by enduring structural constraints and overlapping sources of uncertainty.

Drawing on the concept of polycrisis, the article argued that contemporary international politics is increasingly characterised by the interaction of multiple crises across security, economic, and institutional domains. In such environments, diplomatic strategies premised on comprehensive settlement, institutional convergence, or linear progress become difficult to sustain. Instead, diplomacy tends to prioritise adaptability, risk management, and functionally bounded forms of cooperation. Chapter 2 established this analytical framework by linking polycrisis to pragmatic diplomacy as a mode of adjustment rather than an exception to established practice.

Against this backdrop, Chapter 3 analysed the UK–EU reset as an empirical illustration of how diplomacy operates under constraint. The reset has been driven not by normative convergence or a return to pre-Brexit integration, but by cumulative pressures associated with security uncertainty, geoeconomic competition, and regulatory interdependence. Cooperation has therefore proceeded in selective and incremental ways, bounded by persistent political and institutional limits on both sides. Rather than resolving underlying disputes, the reset has stabilised interaction by enabling limited coordination in specific domains while preserving domestic political constraints.

Chapter 4 extended this analytical lens to the Korean Peninsula, which constitutes a particularly acute case of polycrisis. The analysis demonstrated that unresolved military confrontation, contested sanctions governance, and intensifying geoeconomic pressures interact to narrow diplomatic choice and elevate the costs of rigidity. Rather than offering policy prescriptions, the discussion identified analytical lessons regarding how diplomacy functions when comprehensive solutions are structurally out of reach. In such settings, diplomatic practice is more plausibly oriented toward managing risk, containing cross-domain spillovers, and sustaining engagement through multiple and issue-specific channels.

Taken together, the findings of this article suggest that diplomacy in the era of polycrisis is increasingly judged not by its capacity to deliver definitive outcomes, but by its ability



to reduce systemic risk and stabilise interaction under conditions of persistent uncertainty. The UK–EU reset illustrates one such mode of pragmatic adjustment. Its relevance for the Korean Peninsula lies not in what it achieves, but in how it operates under constraint. By focusing on the forms and logics of diplomatic practice rather than on institutional end-states, this article contributes to a broader understanding of how peace and security may be pursued when resolution itself remains a long-term horizon rather than an immediate possibility.

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