

SOUTH KOREA-U.S. RELATIONS

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This essay focuses on the politics around the U.S. military in Korea as a way to shed light on three challenges confronting the governments and foreign-policy elites in Seoul and Washington. The political consciousness and demands of local governments and residents in South Korea have become more salient in recent years. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have also taken on a more prominent role in forging and articulating national security and foreign policy issues. These interest groups have challenged and eroded the influence of the old political and bureaucratic establishment. As a result, the future of the alliance depends as much on these forces of democratization as on external threats.

Key words: U.S.-ROK alliance, U.S. military, South Korean politics, democratization

Introduction

The fiftieth anniversary of the U.S.-South Korea alliance came and went without much fanfare. There were public gatherings to mark and commemorate the relationship on both sides of the Pacific, but hardly a joyful note of celebration was struck on either side. Rather, the anniversary year of 2003-2004 began with tens of thousands of South Koreans spilling onto the streets to

light candles in the dark to demand accountability for the death of two Korean girls run over by an armored vehicle driven by uniformed U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) soldiers. They were protesting perceived American injustice and arrogance toward the Korean nation. Denunciations of the U.S. war on Iraq, anger over the Pentagon's *fait accompli* to reduce and restructure troops stationed in Korea, and disillusionment with U.S. policy toward the peninsula in general and North Korea in particular, continued through the months.

Americans were not in a partying mood either that year. Hurt over the "ungratefulness" of American sacrifice and heroism in the Korean War, confusion over how Korean sentiment could "all of a sudden" change from hot to cold, and doubts about South Korean rationality in pursuing unrequited reconciliation with the "evil" North Korean regime all perplexed the American public. Expressions of a growing "anti-Koreanism" in reaction to Korean "anti-Americanism" could be heard in Washington—couched in threats by some Americans and in fears by some Koreans. And Korean and American elites echoed one another's worries about the health and viability of the alliance and the need for some kind of change.

Change is indeed the key word to describe the current state of the U.S.-Korea alliance. With the implementation of the Pentagon's Global Posture Review underway, one-third of U.S. forces (12,500 troops) are about to leave South Korea, and thousands more will shift to new locations on the peninsula. The dispatch of 3,600 troops to Iraq marks the first time since the establishment of the Mutual Defense Treaty that permanently based troops have been deployed for a mission not related to the defense of South Korea. From November 2004, the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army took on sole responsibility for the near-sacred duty of guarding the demilitarized zone (DMZ), a commitment that had been primarily borne by the U.S. army since the demarcation of the 38th parallel. U.S. troops will concentrate their numbers south of the Han River within a few years and military technology will compensate for the increased distance from the North Korean frontline. And after decades of start-and-stop talks, the USFK headquarters will move out of Yongsan base in Seoul and free up precious urban real estate. At a joint press conference to announce the tenth round of the Future of

Alliance Talks, Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Asia-Pacific Richard Lawless optimistically claimed that by freeing up some land used by the American military, the U.S. government will be "thereby satisfying the longstanding wishes and desires of the inhabitants of those communities in Korea" and that "when fully implemented, the agreement will . . . greatly enhance, in our view, public support for our military presence in the Republic of Korea."¹

To facilitate these changes, the South Korean government must acquire new land and redevelop the tracts returned by the U.S. forces, adapt old and new infrastructure, and prepare local residents to accommodate the exit and entry of thousands of American troops, civilian personnel, and related family members around the southern half of the Korean peninsula. In many ways, this last task, negotiating with the Korean public, may prove to be the most difficult challenge.

The United States is transforming its military alliance with South Korea to reflect changes in strategy and advances in technology. But Washington has failed to take into account the profound changes that have taken place in the nature of South Korean politics and society. U.S. failure to understand these new democratic dynamics has contributed to increased tensions at an intergovernmental level, angry demonstrations in South Korea, and the lack of a united response to a variety of regional issues including the nuclear crisis with North Korea.

Digging out (of) Secrets

In early 2003, President Roh Moo Hyun kicked off his term with a campaign for "participatory democracy" and invited private citizens to help him form his cabinet by nominating members themselves. In addition to supporting greater civic participation in politics, Roh campaigned on a platform of greater military equality in the South Korean-U.S. relationship. These two programs, one the deepening of democracy at home and the

1. U.S. Department of State, International Information Programs, Foreign Press Center Briefing, Washington D.C., July 28, 2004, online at www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/new/2004/07/mil-040728.

other the application of democracy to foreign affairs, seem to have accentuated rifts in the U.S.-South Korean alliance.

Still, had Roh's conservative opponent Lee Hoe Chang become president in 2002, much of the tensions in the bilateral relationship would have occurred anyway, given the deep and rapid structural changes occurring within and outside Korean society. Domestically, Koreans were experimenting with various dimensions of democracy and clearing new political space and articulating new voices. They were encouraged by and acted in tandem with the growing regional transnational networks and international norms of democracy, transparency, globalization, human security, and civil society empowerment popularized by Western governments, the United Nations, and public opinion makers around the world during the ephemeral decade of post-cold war relief and euphoria. These new forces, more than the political platforms of any given Korean politician, had a powerful impact on relations with the United States.

For starters, South Korea in the 1990s joined a global trend of digging out secrets and atrocities that had been buried in official narratives and the popular conscience. As the millennium approached, this trend turned into a near obsession for uncovering and claiming redress for past wrongs—recovering the stolen art of Holocaust victims, recovering the corporate collusion with Nazis, bringing to trial the rapists, torturers, and genocidal killers from former Yugoslavia, and activating the South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In Korea, meanwhile, both the government and independent commissions investigated the Kwangju uprising and massacre and the missing persons under the authoritarian rule of Park Chung Hee, Chun Doo Hwan, and Roh Tae Woo.² Foreign powers became a particularly well-publicized target of inquiry into past abuses of private citizens. The *cheongsindae* (“comfort women”) movement took center stage in the first half of the decade as activists and survivors filed lawsuits against the Japanese government, lobbied the United Nations for support, and captured international

attention and sympathy at various conferences. After fifty years of silence, news of the alleged U.S. army massacre of hundreds of Korean civilians at Nogun-ri during the Korean War made headlines around the world.

At the same time, violence against Korean women by foreign militaries reverberated as a political theme with the brutal murder of the prostituted bar-worker, Yun Geumi, in the fall of 1992 in Dongducheon City. Immediately following Yun's death, civic groups such as the Dongducheon Citizens' Committee, the taxi drivers' union, the teachers' union, and various student associations protested against the brutality of U.S. soldiers and demanded that the Korean police undertake a thorough inquiry. They also conducted their own investigations of the incident and declared that the Korean government should have jurisdiction over the case and should have custody of the alleged killer, Private Kenneth Markle, a member of the U.S. Second Infantry Division. In addition, civic groups circulated petitions and staged large demonstrations at the front gates of the division headquarters; the taxi drivers' union and some local merchants refused to serve American military personnel. This was the first large-scale public display of anger and pursuit of redress for the violated life of a camptown (*kijich'on*) prostitute.

Although other women had died in similarly brutalized states, allegedly at the hands of U.S. servicemen, Koreans generally had held to their moralistic view of such women as “throw-aways” and had ignored their plight and suffering. Local residents and the national public tried to ignore the camptown, for they viewed it as synonymous with prostitution, crime, the black market, drug and alcohol abuse, moral decadence, and mixed race children. The few attempts by the prostituted women themselves to stage public protests against the U.S. bases for what they felt was unfairness or injustice either received scant attention outside of the local camp areas or were suppressed by local authorities.³ Although officials in Seoul and Washington often have waxed romantic about the “special relationship” bound in blood between the two countries, “special” for the Koreans living and working in or near U.S. bases has

2. See R.O.K. Presidential Truth Commission on Suspicious Deaths, *A Hard Journey to Justice: First Term Report by the Presidential Truth Commission on Suspicious Deaths of the Republic of Korea*, English ed. (Seoul: Samin Books, 2004).

3. Katharine H.S. Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University, 1997).

meant social stigma and marginalization from the rest of Korean society. Needing the U.S. military for national security purposes was deemed legitimate, but not living closely with Americans in uniform. The alliance meant very different things for people who conducted it on paper in contrast to those who had to haggle over an extra dollar or won and endured racial slurs to feed their families and themselves.

The New Role of Citizen Activism

The grievances generated by the presence of the U.S. bases and the behavior of American troops have remained quite consistent throughout half a century, but the way they get framed politically, their social legitimacy, and various institutional responses to them have become radically different, pre- and post-democratization. During authoritarian times, the public expression of grievances toward the U.S. forces could be equated with political dissidence and punished severely under the National Security Law. But after 1987, these grievances have been transformed into political “interests”—and matters of local autonomy, human rights, and “quality of life” issues—as citizens increasingly spoke out, mobilized, and pressured the central government under the flag of democracy. Under the two civilian presidents, Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung,

[i]mproving the quality of life, overshadowed over the years as a result of the country’s growth-first strategy, was now to be an important part of the government’s mission. Multiple dimensions of national security from economic and ecological security . . . to communal and societal security . . . were also emphasized as forming the new and more comprehensive foreign and security policy agenda for South Korea.⁴

The decentralization of government functions and authority particularly emboldened local citizens and politicians and challenged the central government’s long monopoly on power, espe-

cially in the area of national security and foreign policy. The 1991 law permitting the establishment of elected local councils and the 1995 law allowing the popular election of local government officials served as the foundation for new autonomy from the provincial level on down. And the new Laws Relating to the Disclosure of Information by Public Organizations (established in 1996), which grew out of local initiatives for citizen access to government information, became another legal tool that citizens could use to demand government transparency, accountability, and consultation on relevant issues at all levels of government.⁵

Therefore, since the mid-1990s, not only have Korean officials and government agencies increasingly been subjected to local residents’ scrutiny; so have U.S. authorities and individual Americans. Still, politicized locals have gotten frustrated with the seemingly irrelevant and impotent Korean laws with regard to U.S. actions: The very laws that boost local residents’ access to information, transparency, and self-governance are not applicable within USFK compounds because the latter are governed by the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). Activists therefore have tended to view the SOFA and other limitations on citizen access to national security policy and information as an obstacle to exercising local democracy. Koreans had periodically clamored for the revision of the SOFA to reflect a “more equal” relationship between the two allies as the South Korean economy and polity grew in strength and status. But only during the 1990s, when national laws and political culture changed to empower and protect them, were activists able to turn SOFA reform into both a rallying cry against U.S. dominance and a political objective.

As outgrowths of this new democratic culture, citizen groups have targeted U.S. bases as objects of scrutiny, investigation, and policy critique. The economic, environmental, and social impact of military basing and closure has attracted much national and local attention in the United States and facilitated at times the cooperation of unlikely political partners.⁶ The same holds true for Korea. Indeed, the responsiveness of some local

4. Jung-Hoon Lee, “Globalization, Nationalism, and Security Options for South Korea,” in Chung-in Moon and Jongryn Mo, eds., *Democratization and Globalization in Korea: Assessments and Prospects* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1999), p. 130.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

6. Fred Rose, *Coalitions Against the Class Divide: Lessons from the Labor, Peace, and Environmental Movements* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

governments to residents' complaints about the U.S. presence and their cooperation with progressive civil groups is one of the most remarkable developments in the country's democratization process. Until only a few years ago, local officials and citizen-activists who criticized the U.S. military presence or advocated for the (alleged and real) victims of crimes and abuses by U.S. personnel had treated one another with distrust and hostility. And generally, local governments had kept a lid on local tensions and conflicts related to U.S. troops in order to avoid the ire of the authoritarian Park and Chun regimes, as well as negative reactions from the U.S. commands. Local leaders had served at Seoul's whim and pleasure; local camptown economies were dependent on the U.S. bases for employment and revenues from the 1950s until the 1980s.⁷

No longer dependent on the bases for income, as they had been for decades, camptown residents and leaders today have grown ambitious about pursuing more competitive and productive modes of income generation as well as "upgrading" the image of the town. In May 2000, officials of the fourteen local governments that house U.S. bases established a "nationwide consultative body" of local governments and later submitted legislation to the National Assembly that called for increased central government grants and aid to local governments, the establishment of local development committees at central and local levels, and thorough environmental impact assessments undertaken by the national government around U.S. base areas. The consultative body explicitly stated that local areas near the U.S. installations have long borne a disproportionate share of economic and social dislocations, as well as political underdevelopment as a result of the presence of foreign forces.⁸ For the first time in nearly half a century, local leaders began to challenge the central government's near-monopoly of power over

policies regarding the military alliance and to modify the notion of national security by insisting that external security be balanced with the needs of local residents and governing bodies. Their legislative proposal also urged the central government and the general public to remember that ultimately both the center and periphery are on the same side and should cooperate to strengthen their power and credibility in negotiations with the U.S. side.

This kind of politics from below has been altering the dynamics of the alliance relationship from a top-down dictating approach, which had characterized Korean politics for most of its contemporary history, to a push-pull mode between organized citizens and the central government. For example, officials of the USFK and the South Korean government had a taste of local "people power" in the first part of the 1990s. When the Pyongtaek region, where the Osan Air Base is located, became the prospective site of the relocation of the USFK headquarters at Yongsan Garrison, a handful of Pyongtaek residents tried to prevent the move, eventually creating a nationwide campaign by the mid-1990s to reclaim the land that the U.S. military occupied, used, or had open access to for training, storage or other official purposes. Called the "Return of Land" (*banhwan*) or "Reclaiming our Land" (*Uri ddang dwechatgi*) movement, this effort helped bridge ideological, tactical, and resource gaps between Seoul-based activists and local camptown campaigners. A national network of hitherto disparate actors and interests related to U.S. bases and national security issues was in the making.

Citizen efforts did not go ignored or unheeded by those in power. The Land Partnership Program (LPP), negotiated by Korean and American military officials and formally announced in March 2002, was in part a direct response to the civic demonstrations and demands by citizens and local governments for access to lands officially occupied by the U.S. forces. Through the LPP, the United States committed to returning a bit over 50 percent of the land the USFK was using at the time of the negotiations, with the final transfers to be achieved by 2011. The consolidation effort was intended to increase the readiness and efficiency of the U.S. forces and to meet Korean demands for land. The status of the Yongsan Garrison was not subject to the LPP

7. For a detailed description of the evolution of and the politics and social interactions in U.S. military camptowns in Korea, see Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, chap. 1.

8. Republic of Korea National Assembly, Bill #16102, *Migun kongyo chiyok chiwon mit chumin kwon'ikpoho e kwanhan pomlyulan* (Legislative bill on support to the USFK regions and protection of the rights and interests of residents), online at www.assembly.go.kr.

negotiations, which took place before the George W. Bush administration's talk of global repositioning.

Simply put, the politics around the issue of U.S. bases dramatically shows how messy, complex, and difficult foreign policy and national security planning and management have become in the context of the ROK-U.S. relationship. What is astounding about the first dozen years of democracy in Korea has been the ease with which the personal became political after decades of government suppression of individual rights and opinions and repression of personal desires and needs in service of the collective, be it family, society, or nation. Democracy has enabled the transformation of private complaints into political interests. Both private citizens and local communities are measuring the requirements and benefits of national security and foreign policy against what they consider to be unfair costs to them.

Organizing: NGOs and the Internet

Since the early 1990s, not only local governments and residents but also an ever-growing and fast-changing configuration of civic organizations has entered the foreign policy arena with a sense of empowerment provided by new legal rights. For example, 74.2 percent of Korean NGOs were established in the first decade of democratization (1987-1996). The most concentrated growth occurred during the administration of Kim Young Sam between 1993 and 1996 when 62 percent of civic organizations were established (as well as roughly half of all environmental, youth, and human rights organizations).⁹ Until recently, the term "NGO" was nearly synonymous with progressive, liberal, or left-oriented causes. Many activist leaders had participated in anti-government demonstrations and campaigns during the turbulence of democracy activism in the 1980s.

In particular, the first half of the 1990s served as a crucible for the creation of organizations that have assumed leading roles in the organized criticism of U.S. policies and the bilateral alliance. For example, in 1993 activists created the National Campaign for

the Eradication of Crimes by U.S. Troops against Korean Civilians in response to the brutal murder of Yun Geumi, who posthumously became a nationalist symbol of Korea's powerlessness and "victimization" by the United States and a catalyst for organized activism around the U.S. troop presence.¹⁰ In 1994, local activists launched the aforementioned *banhwan* (return-of-land) movement to protest the proposed relocation of the Yongsan base to Pyongtaek/Osan. Additionally, in the middle of the decade, the progressive Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and the aggressive environmental organization Green Korea United emerged as key backers of the coalitions that target U.S. foreign policy. In 1997, politically assertive feminists created Women Making Peace. Moreover, People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, the large nationwide umbrella organization for progressive issues and citizen representation in domestic and international policy matters, was established in 1994. And from 1995 on, when negotiations on the revision of the SOFA resurfaced on the bilateral security agenda, activists and NGOs began to make their voices heard through the media and transnational networks. This coalition, though small in terms of active political workers, tirelessly mobilized at home and abroad for more advantageous terms for South Korea. They also readily publicized what they viewed as unfairness—to the Korean side—in the negotiation process or inadequacy on the part of their government officials to press their American counterparts.

And like the "comfort women" movement, which made its cause an international one, many new NGOs, particularly those criticizing U.S. policy, have actively engaged in transnational networks to disseminate their positions, share information with similar groups, and learn about protest methods, lawsuits, petitions, and other instruments of political influence. They have received moral support for their political causes from a broader audience, which in turn has served to put additional pressure on governments. Korean NGOs have developed good working relationships with counterparts in the Philippines, Okinawa and Japan, the United States, Vieques (Puerto Rico), Canada, Australia, and other countries where peace movements and anti-militarist

9. Hyuk-Rae Kim, "The State and Civil Society in Transition: The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in South Korea," *Pacific Review*, vol. 13, No. 4 (Winter, 2000), p. 603.

10. See Katharine H.S. Moon, "Gender, Nationalism, and 'Anti-American' Activism in South Korea," unpublished manuscript, 2004.

groups, human rights, women's rights activism, and environmentalism are salient in public life. Korean society is neither discreet nor as discrete as policymakers would like it to be. The fact that civic scrutiny of foreign policy, opposition to U.S. policies, and criticisms of Korea-U.S. relations are not simply "made in Korea" make the alliance management much more challenging for Korean and American elites alike.

The Internet has facilitated this transnational organizing. It has become the preferred political playing ground for Korea's eager cybercrats (they call themselves "netizens"), most of whom are young and free-wheeling in their thinking and writing. Korea is one of the most wired nations in the world, surpassing Japan and Taiwan in terms of Internet usage. In 1998, Seoul jumped to first place in the number of domain registrations outside the United States.¹¹ Young Koreans are constantly on line or never far away from being connected. According to one recent study, 77.3 percent of Koreans in their twenties reported that they had uploaded their opinion on an online site.¹² Misinformation, empirically questionable interpretations, and at times vulgar rants about anything and everything the United States does and does not do abound, together with thought-provoking essays, calls for citizen deliberation, and clarification of laws and regulations that guide the bilateral alliance.

The expansion, diversification, and popularity of the Internet, mass media, art, and film industries in Korea have made critical scrutiny of politics in general and the U.S.-Korea relationship in particular an important part of the public domain. Since the 1990s, novels, feature films, documentaries, and television programs have popularized such contentious topics as the corruption and abuse of Koreans by American troops, the U.S. government's role in dividing Korea, Japanese atrocities and Korean collaboration during colonial rule, and of course unification with the North. And among progressive activists and college students,

cultural festivals to raise funds for assisting camptown women and Amerasian children abandoned by American fathers or to express criticism of the United States (and raise the political awareness of the larger society) have become commonplace. Rather than clandestine or secretive activities, these were explicit, public, and hopeful expressions of Korea's "people power" in the eyes of the organizers.

Although negative depictions of foreign powers tend to dominate, Koreans are also engaged in self-reflection about their own abuses of power and victimization of foreign neighbors. Korea's role in Vietnam is a case in point. The "official" storyline boasts of the bravery, self-sacrifice, and aggressive anti-communism of the Korean troops who fought in Vietnam at the behest of the United States. To counter this heroic narrative, Korean journalists and NGOs began a campaign for "truth-telling" and the redress of atrocities waged on Vietnamese civilians by Korean soldiers. Since the late 1990s, the Korean House for International Solidarity (KHIS) has investigated and publicized the need for people-to-people reconciliation between Korea and Vietnam. In 2000, they helped organize a goodwill "mission" to Vietnam, in which Korean dentists and other medical professionals volunteered their services for Vietnamese villagers and their descendants who had suffered violence at the hands of Korean troops.¹³ Even as they continued their coalitional work to press for a revision of the SOFA, KHIS organized and staged an annual music/arts festival to raise funds to assist Vietnamese victims of war and has been working with the progressive *HanKyoreh Sinmun* (HanKyoreh News) to attract money for a "peace park." According to one of the leaders of KHIS, their fundraising efforts for the Vietnam project drew larger sums than any "anti-American" protest or program.¹⁴

The work of KHIS is noteworthy for three reasons related to U.S.-Korea relations. First, in contrast to the frequent complaints of American officials that Koreans only seek to criticize U.S. policies and actions but overlook their own country's faults, KHIS has insisted that Koreans take responsibility for past wartime

11. *Korea Herald*, April 10, 2003, online ed. Thanks to David Kang of Dartmouth College for this reference on Korea's domain registration ranking (source: Network Solutions).

12. Samsung Economic Research Institute, *CEO Information: Hanguk Sahoe ui gachigwan geupbyeon gwa hondon* (Rapid changes in value systems and confusion in Korean society), Seoul, April 23, 2003.

13. *Saram i saram ege* (Seoul: Korean House for International Solidarity, April/May 2000), pp. 16-20.

14. Conversation with KHIS organizer, Ilsan, South Korea, Spring 2002.

atrocities and assist those who have survived rather than simply point fingers at Japan and the United States for their military abuses. Second, contrary to popular views that nationalism drives anti-Americanism, KHIS is addressing an issue that is quite “anti-nationalist” and unpopular among Koreans, especially political elites and veterans. And third, KHIS staff are intent on using the new democratic freedoms and the transnationalization of ideas and politics to address issues, interpretive frameworks, and audiences up until now neglected or ignored by other Korean NGOs/activists and the general population.

Shifting Identities

In Korea, past efforts to democratize society have produced laws, political institutions, and unexpected configurations of social mobilization. But they have also produced progressive-minded, experimentation-oriented, and outspoken youth who seem to confuse and confound the worldview and political sensibilities of older Koreans and most Americans. As sociologist Sook-Jong Lee points out,

One consequence of democratization and institutional reforms has been the economic decline of the older generation and the rise of the younger generation. . . . The older generation is also being pushed to the political and social sidelines. This generation is perceived as supporting the status quo and resistant to reform. . . . In addition, [the younger generation’s] easy access to information [technologies] and ability to create and mobilize political networks gives them the ability to be an effective political force.¹⁵

No one on either side of the Pacific outwardly blames democracy for making a mess of the “special alliance.” But Koreans and Americans both have eagerly echoed each other’s “explanation” that younger Koreans are to blame for the tensions, misun-

derstandings, and divergent interpretations and priorities that plague the two countries.

“Such is the temper of the times that South Korea’s most popular “bubblegum pop” girl band—a heretofore entirely apolitical group with a reputation for extreme wholesomeness—released a harshly anti-American MTV-style video,” writes Nicholas Eberstadt. Youthful ignorance, short-sightedness, and “wishful thinking” (that North Koreans are not so dangerous and that South Koreans can afford to dislike the United States) form the refrain in his 2002 article in the *National Interest*. To underscore the correlation between naiveté and youth, he states that a 2001 survey of fifth and sixth graders in one of the most conservative provinces in the South found that 42 percent “identified North Korea as ‘the friendliest nation toward South Korea,’” with the United States playing second fiddle (39 percent).¹⁶ He blames the Kim Dae Jung administration and its overly optimistic brand of engagement policy for swaying the Korean public toward foolhardiness. Eberstadt is not a lone voice; such judgments abound in the United States, Korea, and other East Asian nations.

Indeed, age and support for the United States and the bilateral relationship do correlate. Even in the pre-democracy days of 1985, 78 percent of youth (versus 56 percent of the general public) believed that “Korea was too closely identified with the United States.”¹⁷ Major Korean surveys conducted between 1990 and 1992 also revealed that a higher proportion of those in their twenties (even more so among college students) held a negative opinion of the United States than people in their fifties and older.¹⁸ In the midst of heavy protests in the winter of 2002-2003, a U.S. State Department survey found that only 32 percent of Koreans in their twenties viewed the United States favorably compared to 69 percent of respondents in their fifties and older. Moreover, only 22 percent of the younger cohort versus 42 per-

15. Sook-Jong Lee, “The Rise of Korean Youth as a Political Force: Implications for the U.S.-Korea Alliance,” paper presentation, June 16, 2004. Available through the Center for Northeast Asia Policy Studies, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.), p. 20, online at www.brookings.edu/fp/cnaps/events/20040616.htm.

16. Nicholas Eberstadt, “Our Other Korea Problem,” *National Interest*, No. 69 (Fall, 2002), p. 113.

17. W. Scott Thompson, “Anti-Americanism and the U.S. Government,” in Thomas Perry Thornton, ed., *Anti-Americanism: Origins and Context*, special edition of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Washington, D.C.: SAIS/Johns Hopkins University, 1988), p. 25.

18. Gi-Wook Shin, “South Korean Anti-Americanism: A Comparative Perspective,” *Asian Survey*, vol. 36, No. 3 (August, 1996), pp. 795-96.

cent of the older group considered the U.S. military presence in Korea to be “very important.”¹⁹

But younger Koreans are not unique in their critical attitudes toward the United States. According to the 2002 Pew Global Attitudes survey, 44 percent of Canadians below 30 years of age had unfavorable views of the United States compared to 20 percent in the 50-64 age group.²⁰ Two decades earlier, during a time of anti-nuclear/anti-U.S. protests led by the Greens and other progressives in West Germany, “[t]he German rejection of and mistrust toward the United States” was “especially pronounced among the younger generation.”²¹

Youth by itself does not explain foreign-policy orientation, and it does not necessarily translate into historical amnesia, blind nationalism, radicalism, or anti-Americanism. For example, in Japan, the traditional “enemy” of modern Koreans, the older generation, keeps its eyes, ears, and minds closed to the realities of Japan’s war atrocities, while the younger generation is more willing to acknowledge past wrongs, mend old wounds, and forge new friendships with their regional neighbors. Japanese youth busily exchange views on the Internet, work together with Korean NGOs, and admire the cultural products (film, videos, music) imported from their nation’s ex-colony. And in turn, Korea’s most popular Internet portal, Daum, recently hosted 10,000 blogs and cafes dedicated to Japanese culture, compared with just fifty that promote anti-Japanese views; a newspaper survey also indicated that only a quarter of Koreans in their twenties said “they did not like Japan.”²² Since the Kim Dae Jung administration’s initial elimination of legal prohibitions against Japanese cultural imports in 1998 and the lifting of bans on imported Japanese films, computer games, and comics, Korean youth have become avid consumers and producers of

pop culture that is sweeping the East Asian region. The *Financial Times* called this “Korean Wave” a “phenomenon.”²³

In a sense, Asian youth are overcoming their received nationalism through the regionalization of pop culture, making connections across national and historical boundaries and stepping away from old enmities that the governments and the older generation seem unable or unwilling to do. Such developments are not without some cost to American power and influence. Japanese anthropologist Koichi Iwabuchi observes that there is a connection between the relative decline of American cultural power and the rise of “localized,” “Asianized” pop in much of East Asia in the last decade.²⁴

Such observations should not be mistaken for wishful thinking that hip hop and film can bridge decades of mutual suspicion and pave the way toward cooperation and peace for the future generations in Asia. Indeed, a survey published in the well-known monthly, *Chosun Wolgan* found that 60.3 percent of Koreans in their twenties had unfavorable views of Japan, as opposed to 39.7 percent with favorable views.²⁵ Yet, the article emphasized that there is a substantial generational gap in anti-Japanese nationalist sentiment between the young and those in their fifties. Among the latter, only 17.7 percent had favorable views of Japan, while a decisive 73 percent had unfavorable views. The causes of the generational shift in such sentiments are not clear, but if “soft power” through cultural attraction, imitation, and adoption is as potent a facilitator of shared values and supportive actions between national communities as Joseph Nye purports, then the increasingly shared culture among East Asian youth may be more politically loaded than currently recognized.²⁶ It is not impossible to imagine the evolution of novel and creative regional identities among Asians in the next fifty years to come. The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations points to such trends: “Perhaps most striking, two-thirds of South Koreans favor the creation of a bor-

19. U.S. Department of State, Office of Research, “Opinion Analysis: Trends in South Korean Opinion of the U.S.,” April 9, 2003. Face-to-face interviews with 1,556 adults were conducted in Korea during January 24-February 4, 2003.

20. Pew 2002, p. 56.

21. Paul Hollander, *Anti-Americanism: Irrational and Rational* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1995), p. 382.

22. Andrew Ward, *Financial Times Weekend Magazine* (London), August 7, 2004.

23. Ibid.

24. Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), chap. 1.

25. *Chosun Wolgan*, June 30, 2002.

26. Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

derless and integrated regional community of East Asian countries, including South Korea, China, and Japan, that would be similar to the EU. . . . Additionally, 78 percent favor (19 percent strongly) its creation *without U.S. participation.*"²⁷

Democracy and the Future of the Alliance

A profound transformation has taken place in South Korea with the rise in political influence of the younger generation. This trend reflects a shift away from the traditional anti-communist and pro-U.S. conservatism of the Korean government, which has also been the dominant philosophy of major corporations, the military, and the mass media. "Although [people in their twenties and thirties] do not yet form the core of the new South Korean leadership, the policies of the Roh Moo Hyun government reflect the opinions and views expressed by the younger generation," political scientist Jung-Hoon Lee writes. "What is seen as the convergence of the perspective of the younger generation and the policy orientation of the government underscores a revolutionary change in the makeup of South Korean society, especially the elite ranks."²⁸

There is no doubt that the younger generation is in flux, that it is ascending to positions of power, and that its future orientation toward the hobbled system in the North, the ever-growing Chinese giant next door, and the hegemon across the Pacific is unknown. Korean young people lack a fixed identity and certainty of worldview, political ideology, and policy preferences, which sets them apart from their parents and grandparents. The older generation lived in a world where being Korean was a given attribute, where the world was filled with conquerors and conquered, where life and death could be determined at the

whim of a powerful landlord, Japanese authority, or Korean dictator. While communism was abhorrent, it was also seductive, and this generation feared that an economically, culturally, and spiritually weak South Korea could easily succumb to the forces of communism. During such times, building the national economy was a moral imperative and cooperation with the United States a moral good.

A small Korean elite of bureaucrats, academics, businessmen, and media both produced and managed this Manichean worldview. The political circle was limited to the chosen few, and most of them shared socioeconomic attributes as well as worldviews. Much of this elite had the privilege of education or professional training in the United States and the prestige of English as a facile second language. They were close to elites in Washington, who considered them to be representatives of Korea. Working closely and smoothly with Americans was deemed a requirement for both personal and national success. And successful relationships with Americans in turn advanced their careers.

But with the leftward turn in political leadership under Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun, the old power establishment has been shaken up by new arrivals who are flexing their muscle and trying to consolidate their power. Conservative Koreans readily charge that the "leftist" Roh administration is naive, inexperienced, and unrealistic about the ability of the South to pursue a more independent foreign policy vis-à-vis the United States.²⁹ They bemoan the generational and ideological shifts taking place in society and blame Roh and the youth for damaging the alliance with the United States and endangering national security. In the context of the Future of Alliance negotiations over the relocation and reduction of troops, the *Chosun Ilbo* declared that the "ruined Korea-U.S. alliance has passed the point that can be covered up by the government's glossy words."³⁰ For the *Joong-Ang Ilbo*, "only a shadow of our alliance is left" and the reduction "is of great concern because it is going

27. Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, *Global Views 2004: Comparing South Korean and American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, 2004, p. 14. Emphasis added.

28. Jung-hoon Lee, "The Emergence of 'New Elites' in South Korea and its Implications for Popular Sentiment Toward the United States," in Derek J. Mitchell, ed., *Strategy and Sentiment: South Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.-ROK Alliance* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004), p. 61.

29. Ibid.

30. U.S. Department of State, International Information Programs, Office of Research, Issue Focus: Foreign Media Reaction, "Reduction of U.S. Forces in South Korea Labeled 'Shocking'," June 16, 2004, online at www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2004/06/www40616.

to leave a big hole in our security.”³¹

Yet, the majority of the population does not share the histrionics of the right or the “make friends, not war” wish of the left. *Hankyoreh Sinmun*, for example, told the nation to take the troop reductions in stride and to look on the positive side: “we urgently need to work for peace and arms reductions on the peninsula. There is even a possibility that the upcoming USFK reduction talks might call for revision of the ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty, opening the way for a fundamental change in our security environment.”³² The Chicago Council’s survey reveals a public that is not quick to judge, jump ship, or rock the national security boat: “Surprisingly, given the high level of concern expressed in both South Korea and the United States over recent policy differences, most South Koreans (54 percent) do not think there has been a change in bilateral relations since the inauguration of President Roh Moo Hyun in December 2002.”³³ And the public, in contrast to the political elites, did not react dramatically to the issue of troop reductions. “When told that officials in Washington have proposed reducing the number of U.S. troops in South Korea by about one-third and then asked to choose between saying that this would be good or bad for South Korea’s security, 60 percent think this would be good. . . , while 40 percent say it would be bad. . . .”³⁴ Moreover, 81 percent of South Koreans support the continued presence of U.S. troops “for a considerable, but not permanent, period of time.”³⁵

Realist explanations aside, the changes going on within Korean society—the rise of local governments and residents in national security politics, the prominence of NGOs in all areas of politics, the generational and accompanying identity shifts, and the power struggles between old and new elites—significantly explain the state of flux and uncertainty that the U.S.-Korea alliance is currently undergoing. Put another way, Korean democracy is sending the alliance into a tailspin. How political forces within the U.S. base areas accept and adapt to the reloca-

tion and reduction plans—and how the Korean government integrates or alienates civil society in the context of alliance management—will directly influence the future course of the bilateral alliance. But the possibility of inflicting the single most damaging blow to the alliance lies not with the Koreans but rather with the Americans. It is U.S. unilateralism, in policy and process, which is resented by all Koreans, center, left, and right. Koreans who are exploring the relatively new terrain of democracy know first-hand the negative consequences of unilateralism; they endured it under Japanese colonialism and later under military authoritarianism. These new democrats react intuitively to the imposition of power backed up by the gun. They now have few constraints on how to direct and express that reaction.

The Bush administration is both zealous and sincere about the power of democracy to transform citizens, societies, and polities, as democracy has indeed transformed South Korea. Unfortunately, the Bush administration in its first term has not adjusted very well to democracy in practice. The administration has sought credit for giving birth to democracies—for instance in Afghanistan and Iraq. But it has not liked the way that new democracies can be unruly, assertive, and quite willing to challenge the power of the United States, interpreting such behavior as disobedient, naive, and ungrateful. These reactions have in turn fed South Korean skepticism toward U.S. policies. For instance, many South Koreans viewed the Pentagon decision to reposition and reduce U.S. forces on the peninsula as “punishment” for their recent protests against the U.S. troops and foreign policy. The fact that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld blurted out the decision as a done deal caught both Korean conservatives and liberals by surprise and heightened their sense of vulnerability to and resentment of the interests and whims of U.S. policymakers. Consultation with the Korean government on restructuring came after rather than before the fact.

Both the U.S. and South Korean governments have made good efforts to improve the alliance relationship since the strained period of 2002 and early 2003. We have yet to see what kinds of lessons both governments have learned about democracy and foreign policy. The South Korean case teaches us that political processes are just as important as policies and that democracy as a process requires more skill and nuanced management than the

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs, p. 18.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

35. *Ibid.*

projection of policy outcomes. This is a lesson that the Roh administration has been forced to struggle with and one that the second Bush team should heed in Korea as well as elsewhere in the world.

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