

U.S.-ROK Civil Society Ties: Dynamics and Prospects in a Post-Alliance World

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Paper presented at the KiFS/NBR conference –
“U.S.-ROK Alliance: Implications of an ‘Alternative Future’”
The Korea Institute for Future Strategies and The National Bureau of Asian Research
Seoul, South Korea
September 10-11, 2007

A revised version of this conference paper appears as part of a roundtable in the January 2008 issue of NBR's journal *Asia Policy*.

Introduction

To address the role of civil society as a significant component of the U.S.-ROK relationship is itself to acknowledge significant changes in South Korea resulting from its transition from authoritarianism to democracy in the late 1980s. South Korea's democratization and economic development are major factors behind a gradual convergence of social systems and democratic values between the United States and South Korea. However, another result of these developments is that leading South Korean civil society organizations have subjected the alliance to greater scrutiny, probing, and questioning regarding the relative priorities of the two sides and have demanded greater transparency than ever before regarding the internal workings of the security alliance, which has traditionally been managed by a small coterie of military specialists and senior diplomats on each side.

South Korea had already been firmly linked to the United States long before its democratic transition through the establishment of the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty in 1954 and because an open U.S. market was the primary destination for exports that drove South Korea's economic transformation during the 1960s and 1970s from a "basket case" to a leading industrialized economy. Grassroots ties and interaction with the U.S. system (through individual exchange programs in various fields, exposure to American media through the Armed Forces Network, military service side-by-side with American counterparts, and opportunities for higher education in the United States) played a background role in enabling the development of South Korean civil society, thereby encouraging South Korea's democratic transition. But the contribution of the security alliance to the development of—and the role of the U.S. government in promoting—South Korea's democratization remains contested. As a result, South Korean civil society and public opinion views the role of the United States and its relationship to South Korea's democratization with great ambivalence.¹

Although the establishment of the alliance predates both South Korea's democratization and the rise of civil society as an influence in South Korea's domestic

¹ See David Adesnik and Michael McFaul, "Engaging Autocratic Allies to Promote Democracy," *The Washington Quarterly*, 29, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 7-26; and Sun-hyuk Kim and Won-hyuk Lim, "How to Deal With South Korea," *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 71-82.

politics, South Korean civil society organizations cannot be ignored as a factor that has become increasingly important in alliance management, even if alliance issues are predominantly the responsibility of the two governments. The role of civil society as an influence on the U.S.-ROK relationship (and on the security alliance) has steadily become more relevant as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become influential actors with the ability to affect formation and implementation of ROK government policies.

The term “civil society” itself is usually defined as the sphere of voluntary non-governmental organizations that join together to work for the collective good within a society (the “third sector,” as opposed to government or business). For the purposes of this analysis of the implications for U.S.-ROK relations of a “post-alliance world,” I will also include the media and the private sector as important actors, even though the private sector is not usually included as a part of civil society. The paper will review the major non-governmental actors in South Korea and their ties to the United States, civil society roles and contributions as part of the U.S.-ROK relationship, and the influence of civil society actors on the alliance. The paper will also assess the relationship and relative influence of civil society on alliance management and the implications for major sectors of civil society if the alliance were to be dissolved. Finally, the paper will attempt to project the potential development of civil society roles in a U.S.-ROK relationship in which there is no longer a security alliance.

Security Alliance, Development of U.S.-ROK Relations, and Civil Society

Non-governmental ties between the United States and South Korea have traditionally lagged in importance compared to the respective roles of the governments in defining the relationship between the two countries. American involvement in the occupation of Korea and the U.S. decision to enter Korean War under UN auspices to defend South Korea against North Korean aggression led to the existence of a much closer relationship between the United States and South Korea than would otherwise have been the case. The existence of the alliance enabled a wide array of people-to-people

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exchanges, business relationships, and civil society interactions between the United States and South Korea that would probably not have developed otherwise, given the geographic distance and cultural and socio-economic differences between the two countries in the middle of the twentieth century.

The alliance provided the infrastructure for political, economic, and cultural interactions that would not have developed had South Korea not become a geo-strategic priority for the United States during the cold war. The interaction between the United States and South Korea was primarily government-driven in the service of the alliance commitment, as hundreds of thousands of American soldiers rotated through South Korea each decade on bleak tours of duty, or U.S. embassy officials managed international development programs designed to keep South Korea's economy afloat. Military-sponsored outreach programs to local communities provided Americans and Koreans with opportunities to interact on a limited basis. During the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. Peace Corps program provided a limited but significant sphere for person-to-person interaction, as American young professionals learned about Korea through efforts to improve South Korea's health and education infrastructure; many of these individuals have played long-term roles in promoting positive cultural and educational exchanges between the United States and South Korea.

Governments played a leading role in shaping opportunities for Koreans to come to the United States on exchanges or to pursue higher-level educational opportunities. The KATUSA (Korean Augmentation to the U.S. Army) program, involving selected Korean military staff (often individuals who are well-connected or on a "fast track" within South Korean society) provided Koreans with first-hand opportunities to experience American systems and an American working environment. U.S. Government-funded educational opportunities, The Asia Foundation, the Fulbright program, and U.S.-university based scholarship programs played important roles in building South Korea's human capacity, which in turn stimulated public sector development and contributed to improved governance. Through the largesse of a wide range of scholarship programs, many of which were developed because of the alliance, South Korea's intellectual elite was largely trained in the USA and returned to lead South Korea's economic and political development. American liberalization of immigration laws in the mid-1960s provided

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new opportunities for many Koreans to start a new life in the United States, bringing a strong work ethic and unyielding dedication to education for their children and in the process making important contributions to diversity of American life. These opportunities would not have been available to Koreans had it not been for the infrastructure forged by alliance ties. But the relationship has now expanded well beyond the security alliance to encompass many spheres; military ties are no longer the prerequisite for healthy U.S.-ROK relations.

Civil Society Actors, the U.S.-ROK Alliance, and Beyond

Major actors in the non-governmental relationship include the private sector, the education sector (the leading edge of grassroots person-to-person exchange) and religious organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the mass media as a major influence on public opinions and attitudes on each side. The following sections will outline the development of each component of civil society and its influence in the U.S.-ROK relationship, identify the contribution of the security alliance to the development of that sector, and examine the relationship of each sector to the existence of the security alliance.

Private Sector Exchange

The business relationship between the United States and South Korea initially grew out of links resulting from military ties as well as the need for development assistance to help South Korea recover from the Korean War. South Korea's economic situation also benefited from the economic presence provided by American bases in the immediate aftermath of the war. South Korea's export-led development under Park Chung-hee relied on the United States as a primary market for export of South Korean goods. Many of the capital and technology inputs in support of this strategy came from Japan, which also benefited from opportunities to export to South Korea.

Given the relatively small size of South Korea's economy in the initial stages of its economic take-off, it was not until the 1980s that major American firms began to take

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notice of South Korea as a potential market for U.S. goods in most sectors. At that time, South Korean import barriers became a source of friction as U.S. companies began to have greater interest in entering the South Korean market, which had been protected from foreign competition as part of South Korea's export-led development policy. This friction developed into a political issue in the late 1980s as the U.S. government, with support from the American private sector, put greater pressure on South Korea to adopt more liberalized economic policies. One result was a rise in tensions in the U.S.-ROK economic relationship as USTR took the lead to pressure South Korea to open its economy. Disputes over South Korea's market opening coincided with a wave of anti-American sentiment around the 1988 Seoul Olympics that also expressed itself in resentment towards the asymmetrical nature of the security alliance.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in Korea had the reputation during this period of being antagonistic toward protectionist South Korean government policies because they limited opportunities by foreign firms to enter South Korea's closed domestic consumer market. But the wide gap between the structures of the two economies and differing views about the role of the state in promotion of economic growth narrowed following the Asian financial crisis. The crisis also brought about a transformation in South Korean government policy toward much greater openness and liberalization in the South Korean consumer, financial, and equity markets. A by-product of South Korean government decisions to open its markets more widely to foreign equity and capital investment in order to recover from the crisis was that AmCham came to be seen as a friend and even an advocate for South Korean government interests in Washington, including the need for the continuation of the security alliance to bolster American economic interests in South Korea.

How does the private sector interact with the security alliance? There is a widespread assumption that the two are closely connected and that foreign investment is unsustainable on the Korean peninsula without a U.S.-guaranteed peace through deterrence of North Korean aggression. At an AmCham breakfast meeting held in Seoul in November of 2003, a participant asked whether U.S. security guarantees, as "a critical issue for guaranteeing [foreign investor] confidence," were being weakened by reductions in the level of U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK). Rumsfeld responded that he was

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sensitive to issues of business confidence and that the reconfiguration of the USFK would enhance U.S. capabilities and strengthen America's commitment to the defense of South Korea.² Judging by the continued international private sector presence in South Korea, either Rumsfeld's answer was highly reassuring, or business confidence of investors in South Korea is not directly correlated with the quality of the security alliance.

One measure of the diminished influence of rising security tensions on private sector business confidence is the South Korean stock market's reaction to the North Korean nuclear crisis as well as the reconfiguration of the USFK in South Korea, as measured through the KOSPI index. On the day that the news of the second North Korean nuclear crisis broke, the KOSPI rose to 644.66 on October 17, 2002, despite news that North Korea had admitted developing nuclear weapons and a same-day downturn on Wall Street.³ On January 10, 2003, the day that North Korea announced its withdrawal from the NPT, the market showed volatility within an hour of North Korea's announcement, but ended up only slightly lower, at 628.36.⁴ A downgrade by Moody's Investors Service of South Korea's ratings outlook from "positive" to "negative" on February 13, 2003, jolted the market, which closed at 575.98 on concerns about geopolitical risks, but local analysts assessed that the influence of the downgrade would be "temporary" and "marginal" in light of solid economic fundamentals. But following the establishment of a dialogue channel with North Korea in April of 2003, the Korean stock market appears to have decoupled from lingering concerns about the North Korean nuclear issue, as the KOSPI barely registered a reaction to North Korea's attempts to escalate the crisis.

The *Financial Times* seemed prescient in its assessment that "Investors in Northeast Asia have tended to ignore the threat posed by North Korea to the stability of the region and their money," but proved to be less sure-footed in its prediction that "fund managers can no longer ignore the geopolitical risks attached to their investments in South Korea and Japan."⁵ By March 17, 2003, the KOSPI hit bottom at 515.24, before

² Remarks by former Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld at American Chamber of Commerce Joint Breakfast Meeting (as released by the Pentagon), Defense Department Briefing, Federal News Service, Washington, D.C., November 18, 2003.

³ "Seoul Stocks Advance for 5th Straight Day," *Korea Times*, October 18, 2002.

⁴ "NK's Nuclear Threat Spooks Stocks in Seoul," *Korea Times*, January 11, 2003.

⁵ Andrew Ward, "Funds yet to wake up to Korean threat," *Financial Times*, March 11, 2003, 26.

making a sustained recovery. The KOSPI reached the 1,000 level on February 25, 2005, and topped 1,500 on April 8, 2007, almost tripling its capitalization value despite the protracted nuclear crisis, including North Korea's February 10, 2005, announcement that it had nuclear weapons capability; the July 5, 2006 North Korean missile tests; and North Korea's October 9, 2006, nuclear test. Tellingly, foreign investors bought heavily to arrest the KOSPI's fall during trading even before the end of the day of the nuclear test.⁶ The rise in the KOSPI has stimulated recent analysis that the "Korean discount," the relatively lower capitalization of Korean assets compared to assessments of their real worth due to concerns about tensions on the Korean peninsula, is gradually fading away despite the fact that the North Korean nuclear imbroglio remains unresolved.⁷ Based on an analysis of market responses following ten events related to the North Korean nuclear crisis, the *Korea Times* reported that foreign investors took net buying positions in half of the cases and took net selling positions in half of the cases. The market sustained a loss during the week following new nuclear-related events in only one case: the week following North Korea's decision to remove IAEA seals from the Yongbyon nuclear facilities in December of 2002.⁸

A separate but related question is whether the withdrawal of U.S. troops—or a sharp spike in tensions with North Korea—might have a dramatically negative effect on foreign investment in South Korea in the future. Future of the Alliance (FOTA) and Security Policy Initiative (SPI) negotiations over the reconfiguration of the U.S. presence, including a reduced level of U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula, occurred regularly during 2003-2007. At no point was there a public suggestion that these negotiations had an influence on the behavior of Korean equity markets. The data presented above clearly suggest that the reconfiguration of the USFK in South Korea and the de-linking of the level of U.S. troop presence from the North Korean nuclear crisis, as well as North Korean crisis escalation tactics, have had a minimal influence on investor confidence in South Korea's equity markets.

⁶ "Moody's Downgrade Jolts Financial Market," *Korea Times*, February 13, 2007; "KOSPI Closes at 18-Month High Despite Hiccups," *Korea Times*, December 29, 2003; "Stock Market Enters 4-Digit Era," *Korea Times*, February 26, 2005; "KOSPI Surges Above 1,500," *Korea Times*, April 9, 2007; and Jung-a Song, Tom Mitchell, and Tony Tassell, "Markets' Reaction to N. Korea is Muted," *Financial Times*, October 10, 2006, 42.

⁷ Hyong-ki Park, "'Korea Discount' Shows Signs of Easing Now," *Korea Times*, July 6, 2007.

⁸ Jae-hyun Cho, "Time for Cool-Headed Investment," *Korea Times*, October 12, 2006.

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South Korean analyses of factors affecting levels of inward direct foreign investment during this period do not even take into account Korea's division as a factor.⁹ Trade flows are not influenced by Korea's division and have not fluctuated in response to a rise in tensions related to the North Korean nuclear crisis. Unless the end of the U.S.-ROK security alliance is tied to a significant downturn in the overall U.S.-ROK political relationship, there does not appear to be evidence that significant events related to the North Korean nuclear crisis are directly influencing private sector relations between the two countries; rather, economic regulations—including additional liberalization measures in connection with a KORUS FTA—are likely to have a much greater impact on private sector relations than the continuation of the alliance.

Educational Exchange

Another sphere in which the U.S.-ROK people-to-people relationship has flourished is in the area of educational exchange. The number of South Korean students in the United States has continued to grow steadily, and American Ph.D.'s are highly valued as a credential in South Korea's highly competitive labor market. This grassroots contact has played a major role in solidifying close grassroots ties between South Korea and the United States.

One elite program within the ROK Army that was established together with USFK is the KATUSA (Korean Augmentation To the U.S. Army) forces. In the early days of the program, KATUSA positions were highly prized as vehicles for gaining language capability and preparing for rare higher-education opportunities in the United States and symbolic of aspirations to work closely with USFK, but as South Korea has opened up and the range of opportunities for language education and travel has expanded in the last generation, the value of the KATUSA position—and the level of respect by Korean KATUSAs for American counterparts, has dropped. These days, Korean conscripts would prefer to meet their obligations by working in tech firms or local Korean offices rather than be assigned to an office of USFK. Koreans preparing for

⁹ Kwon-yul Oh, "Foreign Direct Investment in Korea: A Foreign Perspective," *Korea Economic Research Institute Research Report*, 2003, http://www.keri.org/eng/board/skin/Eng/Eng_List.asp (accessed August 16, 2007).

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graduate education in the United States are no longer inspired by the opportunity to work in offices with U.S. Army colleagues who do have a less competitive educational background or aspirations.

Despite these changes in the military-to-military relationship, grassroots educational exchanges between the United States and South Korea have exploded in recent decades, with South Korean students flocking to American universities and graduate programs. The number of South Koreans studying in the United States has grown dramatically in recent years. The Institute of International Education reports that 58,847 South Korean students enrolled in universities during the 2005-2006 academic year, a 10.3 percent increase over the previous year (an increase from 49,046 Korean students in the United States during 2002). Korean students now represent the third largest foreign student group in the United States, trailing only India and China.¹⁰ Over 93,000 Korean students at all levels are reported to be in the United States, and demand for an American education is rising based on demand by Korean students to take the TOEFL.¹¹ On a per capita basis, South Korean students are more likely to come to the United States for educational purposes than students from any other country in the world. Individuals who have obtained higher degrees from American universities are widely known to be competitive for the top jobs in South Korea, to the extent that Ph.D.'s from other countries or homegrown Ph.D.'s feel that they are at a disadvantage. Long ago, the number of Korean economists trained in the United States spawned its own acronym, ATKEs (American Trained Korean Economists).¹²

The Bush administration has recently authorized South Korea to join the visa waiver program from July of 2008. The end of mandatory visas for entry to the United States for the purpose of tourism will likely enhance ties and promote additional exchanges between the United States and South Korea, broadening and deepening common experiences and grassroots relationships between the two peoples. Although the security alliance may be a legacy and relic of the past relationship, it is no longer the

¹⁰ Institute of International Education, "Open Doors Online Report 2006," http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/file_depot/0-10000000/0-10000/3390/folder/50084/Open+Doors+2006_FastFacts_FINAL.pdf (accessed August 16, 2007).

¹¹ Su-hyun Lee, "South Koreans Jostle to Take an English Test," *New York Times*, May 17, 2007, 12.

¹² See Alice Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

centerpiece. A vibrant grassroots relationship between the United States and South Korea is likely to outlast the security alliance, although the alliance retains a certain psychological and symbolic importance for some Koreans, especially among the older generation. Unless the atmosphere between the two governments turns sour, the convergence of values between rising generations in Korea and the United States will continue, even if political differences that complicate management of the relationship were to arise.

Religious Exchange

South Korea has had extensive interactions with the United States on an unofficial level through religious exchange. This area does not usually receive much attention, but has played an important role in the construction of an informal network of institutional ties among church leaders, especially among Protestants. Initially, such exchanges were initiated more on the American side by missionaries sent from U.S. churches aware of the rapidly growing Korean Christian population in the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequently, the interaction has become more balanced, as prominent Korean church leaders have risen to take leadership roles in international denominational networks and other religious institutions. Korean mega-church pastor Billy Kim led the Baptist World Alliance from 2000-2005. Although many of these networks at the international level appear to have symbolic significance rather than generating practical action, the existence of these networks has at times been closely related to the alliance and have been partially mobilized in the past to serve common objectives related to North Korea. In response to the North Korean famine, faith-based organizations like World Vision mobilized dual approaches through Korean and non-Korean networks in response to the crisis. The World Vision response to North Korea's humanitarian crisis was initially led internationally due to the poor state of inter-Korean relations, but as the inter-Korean situation improved, World Vision Korea has taken the lead in responding to the humanitarian situation in North Korea.

South Korea's two Catholic cardinals receive considerable veneration and their rare comments on political matters are treated seriously, a legacy of the credibility that

the Catholic Church earned as a safe haven for student and labor activists during the authoritarian period. The World Council of Churches and other progressive religious denominations, many of which had previously worked with each other in opposing human rights violations under South Korea's authoritarian rule in the 1970s and 1980s, have been at the forefront of promoting engagement with North Korea.¹³ Many South Korean progressives—including South Korea's current Minister of Unification, Jae-joung Lee—remain closely connected through progressive religious networks dedicated to enhanced relations with North Korea. Many of these groups are strong critics of U.S. policy toward North Korea.

Conservative religious leaders have also attempted to mobilize international networks to oppose North Korea's human rights situation and pursuit of nuclear weapons. The North Korean human rights issue has galvanized organizations such as the Commission to Help North Korean Refugees, founded by former Seoul mayor Kim Sang-chul, to network internationally to gain attention and support for this issue. His organization has actively networked with the UK-based Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) in an attempt to bring international attention to North Korean refugee needs. These networks of relatively conservative religious leaders have been active in mobilizing anti-North Korean demonstrations in Seoul and have mobilized international cooperation to criticize North Korea's oppression of human rights and religious freedom. Many Korean religious conservatives are also staunchly and vocally pro-American and pro-alliance in the face of an anti-American spike in South Korean public sentiment during 2003.

These religious networks have little direct connection to the security alliance and would probably continue to develop even in the face of its dissolution. But a review of these sorts of international religious networks illustrates the complexity of South Korea's international connections and illustrate the extent to which South Korea has internalized Judeo-Christian and democratic values. Although right and left may fight over the expression of these values, South Korea's democratization has left a legacy that is far deeper than one might otherwise think, and the growth of international Christian religious

¹³ For additional information on the role of religious organizations in anti-Park demonstrations in the 1970s, see Kim Sun-hyuk, *The Politics of Democratization in Korea: The Role of Civil Society* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 60-61.

networks on both the right and the left is a testament to the long-term influence on South Korea of Western missionaries, an association that predated but has also been reinforced by the security alliance. The full embrace of common values by Korean Christian leaders on both the right and the left makes it difficult to imagine that cultural or geo-strategic factors will be able to squelch deep strains within South Korean society that identify primarily with core Western values, although this identification is inevitably less-deep rooted than the civilizational ties that bind the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Even if the U.S.-ROK alliance were to end, a substantial reservoir of connections through religious networks would remain, leaving a strongly committed plurality of constituents likely to contest Korean policy directions inconsistent with these core values and to advocate the restoration of close ties with the United States as a critical component of South Korea's long-term security strategy.

South Korean Civil Society and U.S.-ROK relations

The initial entry of the United States into Korea following the end of World War II proved to be antagonistic to an emerging post-war bottom-up social network that U.S. forces saw as too close to communist influence. According to Kim Sunhyuk, the U.S. Army's entry into Korea following the war "terminated the dominance of the bottom-up organizations and dramatically changed the whole political landscape in Korea." The U.S. military and South Korean civil society actors had an antagonistic relationship with each other from from the early days of the arrival of U.S. forces in Korea in 1945.¹⁴

This antagonistic relationship between the USFK and civil society continued as a flashpoint for cultural differences and as a reservoir for widespread resentment among the South Korean public at perceived U.S. "arrogance" connected with the prerogatives USFK has assumed along with its responsibilities for ensuring South Korea's national defense. American presence was a necessity, but it was also a burden; Seoul was so close to the DMZ that the priorities connected with the war-fight persisted as the armistice turned into a cold peace. Choi Won-ki questions whether Korean anti-American

¹⁴ Sunhyuk Kim, *The Politics of Democratization in Korea: The Role of Civil Society* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 26-27. See also Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

attitudes—which reached their peak of expression in 2003, following the accident in which two South Korean middle school girls were killed by an American military vehicle—are correctly categorized as “anti-Americanism” or “anti-baseism,” noting that “South Koreans are passionate about their dislike of the way they are treated by the U.S. military stationed on their land.”¹⁵ This is one reason why the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) or environmental issues concerning land returned by USFK to the ROK government continue to be such sensitive issues in the security alliance. U.S. military vehicles did not require permission from local jurisdictions to utilize South Korean public roads or highways, and the U.S. camp network remained scattered throughout Korea’s largest cities until the establishment of the Land Partnership Plan returning many of these U.S. bases in 2001. In contrast, U.S. military consolidation in Japan took place in the early 1970s.

In Korea’s prior authoritarian context, citizens had little redress and no place to complain; but with a democratic transition, more complaints came out as expressions of anti-Americanism. Katherine Moon has detailed the challenges that the most vulnerable members of Korean society faced as members of camp towns on the edge of American bases. In a changing domestic social context, and in light of a remarkable economic transformation, USFK has increasingly become a focal point for Korean frustrations, especially when actions symbolizing American impunity are politicized, as was the case with the 2002 deaths of two Korean schoolgirls and subsequent acquittal of the vehicle’s drivers in an American military court.¹⁶ Although South Korea has democratized and civil society has flourished, USFK has not been quick to adjust to the new environment. South Korean NGOs have a louder voice and greater levers they can use to press their case within South Korean society through the media or even through lobbying of government officials, many of whom in the progressive Roh Moo-hyun administration may have come from NGOs. To the extent that events make USFK a focal point for attention and confrontation, management of alliance issues is considerably more difficult

¹⁵ Brent (Won-ki) Choi, “Anti-Americanism or ‘Anti-Baseism,’” in *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States: Changing Dynamics*, ed. David I. Steinberg (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 309.

¹⁶ Katherine H.S. Moon, “Citizen Power in Korean-American Relations,” in *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States: Changing Dynamics*, ed. David I. Steinberg (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 233-45.

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today than it was when the two governments or the two militaries could settle the issue in a closed-door meeting or through the assuaging of upsets on a personal level.

Korea's economic growth has changed the circumstances for USFK, into a situation in which the U.S. military is viewed more as a social liability that damages living standards rather than guaranteeing security and prosperity. The challenge of managing these day-to-day issues has been a catalyst for transnational cooperation among anti-base citizens' groups, as South Korean NGOs face the same types of challenges in living with the U.S. military as their counterparts in Okinawa. Some sharing of tactics and information has strengthened the movement and served to put the U.S. military under greater pressure to develop global standards for management of SOFA and for implementing environmental standards.¹⁷

On the issue of North Korean human rights, organizations such as the South Korea-based Citizens Alliance for Human Rights in North Korea, with funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, have helped to spearhead a growing international coalition of NGOs dedicated to promoting change in the human rights situation and governance of North Korea. On an issue-by-issue basis, Koreans who have spent time in the United States have brought back the experiences, examples, or analysis of the methods that American civil society counterparts have used to advocate for their issues in an American context. But the limited use of English among Korean civil society groups has meant that there remain relatively few issue-based transnational NGO linkages between American and South Korean counterparts.

Aside from these issues, there is relatively little historical interaction between the development of civil society as a domestic force in South Korea and the U.S.-ROK relationship. Pro-democracy protests were primarily focused on domestic change in South Korea, although perceived American complicity with General Chun Doo-hwan's ruthless suppression of the Kwangju Uprising is the primary source for the core of anti-American activists who lead demonstrations on issues involving the U.S.-ROK alliance.

Unlike NGOs in the Philippines that have actively sought out international ties with like-minded groups in the international community, Korean NGOs have primarily

¹⁷ Sheila Smith, "Shifting Terrain: The Domestic Politics of the U.S. Military Presence in Asia," *East-West Center Special Reports*, no. 8 (March 2006).

been home-grown and have been slow to build international coalitions. Although Korean civil society groups as they have developed can find a wide array of non-governmental counterparts in the United States, the language barrier and geographic distance appears to have inhibited the development of such ties between American and South Korean activists. The U.S. Congressional resolution calling for the Government of Japan to recognize and apologize for treatment of “comfort women” marked a step forward in such cooperation, but also illustrates the relative weakness and unsustainability of such ties.

The end of the alliance would deprive the activists of a focal point for some of their protests, but anti-American activism remains on the periphery of Korean NGO concerns, which generally fall much closer to home, in the realm of policy advocacy on domestic political and quality of life issues in South Korea, where there is no special need to build international coalitions. To the extent that progressive Korean NGOs have linked up with American counterparts, for instance, to protest war or specific instances of military cooperation and mobilization between the United States and South Korea, the end of the alliance would deprive such groups of opportunities for deeper cooperation.

Media, Public Opinion, and U.S.-ROK Relations

The expanded role of the media as an influence on South Korean public opinion—and, by extension, on the security alliance—is another by-product of South Korea’s democratic transition. Under authoritarian rule, the ROK government was able to use the media as an instrument to influence public opinion on issues involving the security alliance, but the media had no independent role. Following South Korea’s democratic transition, the media became a powerful actor independent of the South Korean government that was strongly influenced by South Korean civil society advocacy and in turn became a major shaper of South Korean public opinion.

A major instance in which ROK government use of the media to influence South Korean public opinion has had a lasting impact was Chun Doo Hwan’s suppression of U.S. statements regarding the Kwangju Incident in May and June of 1980. Kwangju remains perhaps the most significant event affecting South Korean views on the alliance,

and the views of a generation of South Koreans toward the United States at this critical moment in Korean history were distorted by Chun's suppression of U.S. criticisms of his forcible assumption of power in South Korea.¹⁸

Following South Korea's democratic transition, the South Korean media's willingness to challenge powerful individuals and institutions within Korean society has continued to grow, making the media itself an institution capable of decisively influencing South Korean public opinion, including on issues related to the U.S.-ROK security alliance. The media has been an effective vehicle by which civil society activists could rally public opinion and thereby challenge the most entrenched and unwelcome aspects of the U.S.-ROK security alliance. On many issues related to the U.S.-ROK security alliance, the way the media frames the issues at hand is an important influence on the formation of South Korean public opinion.

The Korean and international media have an active relationship as Korean publishers have taken an active role in international media organizations, but that relationship has had relatively little direct influence on U.S.-ROK relations. For instance, prominent Koreans such as *JoongAng Ilbo* publisher Hong Seok-hyun and the *Chosun Ilbo*'s Bang Sang-hoon have led and hosted the International Press Foundation (IPF), and through their influence, the IPF has made occasional statements critical of South Korean government efforts to regulate the media in recent years.

The alliance has not been a focal point of those interactions, but the Korean media has attempted to utilize its influence in support of the alliance, for instance through the hosting of prominent Americans who work on security issues in Seoul and through partnership with American think tanks or with partner media institutions such as the *Washington Post* to feature alliance-related issues. The *Chosun Ilbo* has held an annual conference hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on alliance issues, *Donga Ilbo* co-hosted a conference on similar themes at Georgetown University in early 2007, and *JoongAng Ilbo* partnered with the *Washington Post* for a major media event on U.S.-ROK relations in 2004. Each of these conferences were led by pro-U.S., conservative establishment media, which feel a vested interest in maintaining a strong

¹⁸ William H. Gleysteen, Jr., *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence: Carter and Korea in Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 66, 144-6.

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U.S.-ROK security alliance and to some degree have been disturbed by rising criticism of the alliance from other sectors of society.

Ultimately, South Korean public attitudes are likely to be an important factor in shaping the sustainability of the alliance or South Korean attitudes toward the United States in a post-alliance context. A comprehensive review of South Korean public opinion conducted by the RAND Corporation in 2003 shows that South Koreans have consistently recognized the importance of the U.S. troop presence and that seven in ten believe that U.S. forces should remain in South Korea for at least five years or more.¹⁹ A bi-national survey on attitudes toward the U.S.-ROK relationship was co-sponsored by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the East Asian Institute in 2004. Results from that survey showed South Korean concern over “perceived U.S. unilateralism, especially how relates to American use of force.” The survey revealed that most South Koreans think that the United States has more influence on South Korean foreign policy than any single actor in South Korea’s own government, and that the U.S. presence is beneficial to South Korea’s security. The United States was overwhelmingly selected as South Korea’s preferred partner in international affairs by 53 percent of respondents.

According to this survey, the future of the U.S.-ROK security alliance is contested within South Korean society, with many South Koreans (32 percent) preferring a continuation of the status quo. A slight plurality of respondents (37 percent) preferred a stronger relationship with the United States, but 31 percent of respondents wanted to see South Korea take a more independent role in foreign affairs.²⁰ A more recent poll of over 1,000 Korean respondents sponsored by the Fulbright program in 2007 showed that 92 percent of respondents believe the U.S.-Korea alliance should be maintained or strengthened, while only eight percent say that the alliance should be weakened or terminated. In that poll, 20 percent of respondents chose China as the country with which

¹⁹ Eric V. Larson, Norman D. Levin, Seonhae Baik, and Bogdan Savych, “Ambivalent Allies: A Study of South Korean Attitudes Toward the U.S.,” *Rand Corporation Technical Report* (March 2004), 51-65, http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/2005/RAND_TR141.pdf (accessed August 17, 2007).

²⁰ The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, *Global Views 2004: Comparing South Korean and American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004), http://thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/Global_Views_2004_US_Korea.pdf (accessed August 17, 2007).

Korea should maintain close ties for the sake of its national interest, while 79 percent chose the United States.²¹

These numbers suggest that the South Korean public would be concerned under current circumstances about a withdrawal of U.S. forces, and that the end of the alliance would be considered as a significant event that would require considerable adjustments in South Korea's world view. On the one hand, South Koreans might welcome the potential for added autonomy and independence that would accompany the end of the alliance. On the other hand, South Koreans remain aware of and insecure about their neighborhood, and particularly the possibility of a rise in rivalry between South Korea's two geographically closest neighbors, Japan and China.

The end of the alliance would probably have a significant impact on public opinion in South Korea. Already one can see the impact of hedging on South Korean opinion and policy as the future of the alliance is not so solid. But the end of the alliance would hardly spell the end of the U.S.-ROK relationship, given the extensive personal networks and mutual opportunities that have been developed in each of the spheres mentioned above. In this respect, the U.S. experience with the Philippines is instructive. Although anti-American sentiment was an important factor in the Philippine legislature's decision to call for the dissolution of the U.S.-Philippine security alliance in the early 1990s, that decision did not mean the end of the U.S.-Philippine relationship. Despite a relative downward adjustment in the political profile of the Philippines in Washington, D.C., the U.S.-Philippines relationship at a grassroots level continues to thrive in many aspects despite the end of the alliance.

Conclusion: The End of the Alliance and Its Likely Impact on Korean Civil Society

This paper has attempted to review the interactions between the U.S.-ROK security alliance and Korean civil society, broadly defined. It has found that while the existence of the alliance itself probably facilitated the development of a wide range of

²¹ Haesook Chae and Steven Kim, "Not the South Korea We Thought We Knew," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 13, 2007.

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grassroots interactions, Korea's democratization and the deepening of civil society organizations within South Korea were not directly tied to the existence of the security alliance. South Korean NGOs have had a somewhat antagonistic relationship with USFK in some spheres.

South Korea's democratic transition has brought with it dramatic development of civil society organizations that desire greater transparency and responsiveness in many areas, including the management of the U.S.-ROK security relationship. However, the security alliance is no longer a central concern or necessary foundation for the existence of a complex web of ties in the non-governmental sector. Educational and religious exchanges were stimulated by the existence of the alliance, but the alliance is hardly relevant to development in these spheres. South Korean NGO activity has boomed with Korea's democratic consolidation. The major focus of these organizations has generally been on advocating social change within South Korea; to the extent that the U.S. military presence has been seen as an obstacle to South Korea's social betterment, it has become the target for criticism and demonstrations by South Korean civil society. Issues related to the U.S. presence are increasingly debated and contested within South Korean society, but public opinion remains supportive of the continuation of a U.S. security presence on the Korean peninsula, even as they desire greater transparency and accountability in the management of the security relationship.

What would the U.S.-ROK relationship look like in the absence of an alliance? The above alliance suggests that the existence or absence of a security alliance between the United States and South Korea would probably not have a decisive impact on civil society interactions across all spheres; the end of the alliance (and more specifically the U.S. military presence in Korea) would actually remove a focal point for frictions among South Korean NGOs that have sought to bring greater transparency and accountability to the U.S.-ROK military relationship.

But the existence of the alliance as the basis for building such a broad array of educational, religious, NGO, and private sector interactions between the two countries also carries with it a type of unexpected momentum and convergence between the two countries through the promotion of common values. This convergence has been facilitated by Korea's democratic transition, but the more profound influence lies with the

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educational heritage of Koreans trained in the United States to lead their own society and in the religious heritage of a population that contains a plurality of Christians who identify strongly with the United States not only as a protector, but also as a model worthy of emulation and as a partner worthy of continued cultivation. Even with the end of the alliance, the above influences in Korean society suggest that despite China's cultural and geopolitical centripetal attractions, a significant portion of Koreans will continue to look to the United States for partnership, leadership, and inspiration.