

Pacific War, it was the United States that defeated Japan, and it was the United States that occupied Japan for seven years. The results of the U.S. occupation, the reemergence of Japan as a country of democratic values and economic strength, and the creation of a new alliance with the United States all have proceeded extremely well to date. Perhaps the underlying historical issue with the United States should not have emerged, in order that the political situation centered on further consolidation of this alliance based on common values could be further strengthened. Yet, in reality, the historical memory issue characterized in Japan as an identity issue remained unresolved not only toward Asia but also toward the United States, as seen from three perspectives: (1) the Tokyo Tribunal, put in the perspective of international law; (2) the nature of the war waged by Japan against China and against the United States; and (3) the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Japan's possibly related approach to U.S. POWs. No definite direction has emerged on any of these issues. Serious efforts are intensifying, but no consensus has emerged in any area.

At this juncture, it is best to stress that Japan's historical memory toward the United States remains obscured after many decades of neglect. This is not a result of lack of importance, but of specific historical circumstances that left the Japanese divided and hesitant to address some sensitive issues directly. These circumstances have been changing, as seen in increased willingness to debate the issues raised in this chapter. Enhanced debate in political and intellectual circles should improve understanding and trust between Japan and the United States.

U.S. Leadership, History, and Bilateral
Relations in Northeast Asia

edited by Gilbert Rozman

Hardback 9780521190565

Copyright © 2010 Cambridge University Press

Selection: Chapter 3, Values and history
in US-South Korean relations,

by Gi-Wook Shin

Cambridge book website:

[http://www.cambridge.org/us/knowledge/
isbn/item5600455/?site_locale=en_US](http://www.cambridge.org/us/knowledge/isbn/item5600455/?site_locale=en_US)

Values and History in U.S.-South Korean Relations

Gi-Wook Shin

The U.S.-South Korean bilateral relationship has increasingly become more than a matter of military alliance or economic relations, although security and trade are still the two defining issues. As a result, it has become much more complex and challenging to manage. With emphasis on Korean reasoning about values influenced by memories of history, this chapter explores relations in the first decade of the twenty-first century between Washington, in search of a response to a more insecure world, and Seoul, newly attentive to fellow Koreans in the North and to a regional role in dynamic Northeast Asia.

Largely based on state-to-state interactions, U.S.-Republic of Korea (ROK) relations until the 1970s remained robust if not free of tension and conflict. If a rift occurred, it centered on policy matters such as U.S. plans to withdraw troops from the peninsula. South Koreans did not question the rationale for the military alliance, and any anti-American voice was immediately suppressed by the authoritarian regimes that ruled the country. For instance, discussing the killings of civilians by U.S. troops during the Korean War, which would become a hot issue later, was taboo in the highly anticommunist state. U.S. cooperation with authoritarian regimes during the cold war era occurred in sync with its lead on matters of national security.

Things began to change as South Koreans struggled to realize democratization, led by the development of a vibrant civil society, along with the end of the cold war, which undermined the rationale for anticommunism.

I have benefited from insightful comments from Gilbert Rozman, David Straub, and Donald Keyser. Hilary Izatt and Soo-Kyung Kim offered research assistance for the chapter.

Many South Koreans began to rethink the rationale for relations with the United States and North Korea, the two significant others that shape their national identity. As the U.S. role in Korea's unfortunate past came under scrutiny, three issues, in particular, spurred this questioning: alleged U.S. complicity with the dictatorship and the Kwangju massacre; the U.S. role in national division and the mass killings of innocent civilians during the Korean War; and the issue of policies toward North Korea. Closely linked, they all relate to issues of history, values, and national identity.

Led by progressive intellectuals and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the reassessment of historical issues contributed to a new perspective that significantly differs from the American one and from what both countries shared in the past. This not only led to strains between the allies but also aroused intense contention between conservatives and progressives within the South, who remain split in their views of the alliance.

The first issue led South Koreans to rethink the U.S. role in Korean affairs, which in turn provoked anti-American movements in the 1980s during the struggle for democracy. Many appreciated the value of the alliance, but resented U.S. economic and political dominance over their nation, linking it to perceived collaboration with the dictators. While denying involvement in the Kwangju massacre, the United States seemed to have learned its lesson when it intervened to support South Korean democracy in the summer of 1987, which ended decades of authoritarian rule. Today South Koreans have successfully addressed issues of "transitional (in)justice" during the democratization process, including the Kwangju issue, and it appears no longer to affect relations; yet, activists who had fought for democracy in the 1980s with anti-American slogans became the policy elite (known as the "386 generation") during the Roh Moo-hyun administration and memories of their democratic struggle shaped policies that took a tough stance toward the United States.

The second issue provoked another wave of anti-American sentiment that culminated in the 2002 presidential campaign. Despite a collaborative investigation of the No-gun Ri incident by the U.S. Army and President Clinton's statement of deep regret, the public mood in the South wreaked with anti-Americanism, helping to elect human rights lawyer Roh Moo-hyun as president. Roh, who ran a campaign critical of the United States, paid keen attention during his tenure in office to issues arising from the unfortunate past, including wartime mass killings. Subsequently, the Roh administration established various state-sponsored organizations to deal with these issues, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which revealed additional cases of mass killings of Korean civilians by U.S. troops during the Korean War.

Progressive activists continue to raise this issue, demanding another U.S. apology as well as compensation. Although an unexpected event such as the death of the two schoolgirls in 2002 could provoke renewed anti-American sentiments, it is unlikely that this issue will directly impact U.S.-ROK relations in any significant way.

Finally, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) issue has been a point of strain on U.S.-ROK relations in the recent past. The progressive governments of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun had differing views from the Bush administration regarding weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and human rights, on the one hand, and inter-Korean relations and unification on the other. At a fundamental level, the differences stemmed from the fact that these matters were closely tied to the larger question of national identity for Koreans, while they were a matter of security policy for Americans.¹ Thus, despite sharing values such as democracy and human rights, the different approach toward the North Korean issue created a schism within the alliance. Although policy coordination has improved and the Lee Myung-bak government promotes a DPRK policy that is much more similar to that of the United States, South Korean society is deeply divided about its approach toward North Korea and the politics of identity continues to pose a policy challenge for the United States.

Given South Korean historical perceptions, memories, and value inclinations, we must pay closer attention to the nonmilitary, non-economic aspects of this bilateral relationship grown out of the military alliance. As perceptions matter in international relations, so too do views of history, as they shape those values and perceptions. This chapter concludes with policy suggestions to mitigate and manage potential sources of tension resulting from the increasing role of values in U.S.-South Korean relations.

Security and Trade in U.S.-ROK Relations

Beginning in 1945, when Korea was liberated from four decades of Japanese colonial rule, the United States became involved in Korean affairs in earnest. It established a military government in the South (1945–8) and fought the communists in defense of the southern regime during the Korean War (1950–3). U.S. aid and market access were instrumental to South Korean modernization. In the process, the United States became,

¹ For more discussion on the perception gap existing between South Korea and the United States regarding the DPRK, see Gi-Wook Shin, *One Alliance, Two Lenses: U.S.-Korea Relations in a New Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

arguably, the most important “significant other” shaping identity, along with North Korea and Japan.

Security and trade have been the two main pillars of the bilateral relationship. Formed as a response to a common threat – communist North Korea – at the end of the Korean War, the military alliance developed into a robust relationship in the following half century. Along with the U.S.-Japan alliance, the U.S.-ROK alliance formed the hub-and-spokes of U.S. security arrangements in East Asia, a region with no multilateral security architecture. The United States enjoyed rights to a strategically significant forward deployed location – at the conjuncture of three major powers in the Northeast Asian region, Japan, China and Russia – at a relatively low cost, and was even able to garner South Korean troops in Vietnam in support of the U.S. fight against communism. For decades, the U.S.-ROK alliance represented an exemplary military partnership, not only because it continued successfully to deter the North but also as a result of both governments and their constituents believing that the purpose for the alliance continued to serve their respective interests.

The other pillar has been economic and trade relations. With the U.S. security guarantee and large amounts of economic and military aid, the ROK accomplished impressive economic growth, boasting today the thirteenth largest economy in the world. The United States was South Korea’s largest trading partner until recent years and the South rose to become the seventh major trading partner of its ally. Recently the two negotiated a free trade agreement aimed at strengthening economic ties. Yet, South Korean trade with China has grown rapidly over the past two decades to far exceed trade with the United States, altering the calculus of economic dependency.

That security and trade have been the two dominant issues in defining the bilateral relationship is well illustrated by the media coverage of the relationship. In the Korean media, as Table 1 shows, security issues account for almost 60 percent of the coverage of U.S.-ROK relations, while economic and trade issues comprise 15 percent.² In the U.S. media, economic and trade issues receive more coverage than security (45.47 versus 33.77 percent). Yet, looking closely, the *Washington Post* pays much more attention to security than economy/trade and the *New York Times* also gives slightly more attention to security (see Table 1).

² The Korean data are based on 1,724 editorials and columns that appeared in the two Korean newspapers from July 1 1994, to July 31, 2003, and the U.S. data are based on 5,122 articles that were published in the three American papers from July 1, 1994, to January 31, 2004. For more detailed information on the data, see Chapter 2 in Shin, *One Alliance Two Lenses*.

TABLE 1. Most Prevalent Issues in South Korean and U.S. Media

	Chosun (%)	Hankyoreh (%)	Total (%)	
Security	48.62	68.27	59.09	
Economy/Trade	18.43	13.45	15.78	
General	18.82	8.97	13.58	
Diplomacy				
Others	14.13	9.31	11.55	
Total	100	100	100	

Issues	Nyt (%)	Wp (%)	Wsj (%)	All (%)
Economy/Trade	34.34	15.46	70.53	45.47
Security	38.55	46.39	23.16	33.77
General	13.25	13.40	2.11	8.61
Diplomacy				
Others	13.86	24.75	4.2	12.15
Others	100	100	100	100

Notes: NYT = *New York Times*; WP = *Washington Post*; WSJ = *Wall Street Journal*.

Sources: Gi-Wook Shin, *One Alliance, Two Lenses: U.S.-Korea Relations in a New Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 85 and 118.

Despite these variations, it is fair to say that citizens from both countries see security and trade/economy as the main pillars of their bilateral relationship.

Although the U.S.-ROK relationship was built upon security and trade, it has become much more complex, including people-to-people ties as diverse groups are increasingly involved. Consequently, the importance of nonsecurity, non-economic issues has increased. Incorporating history and values into the analysis, we can better understand the new relationship that is emerging in an era defined by Korean democratization, the end of the cold war, inter-Korean reconciliation, and the U.S. war against global terrorism. Policy makers in both countries need to pay close attention to these factors in order to manage the alliance successfully in the coming years.

Kwangju: U.S. Complicity with Dictators and Anti-Americanism

South Korea is considered an exemplary nation that has achieved economic modernization and political democracy in a relatively short period of time. Few would dispute the fact that the United States was a key player in both developments. It gave massive economic and military aid, its market access was instrumental to South Korea’s export-oriented

industrialization, and the military alliance shielded the South from the North's threat. At the same time, the United States supported cooperation with a series of authoritarian and military regimes from Syngman Rhee to Park Chung-hee to Chun Doo-hwan. As democratization proceeded, this past record of the U.S. role in the country was brought to the forefront and provoked emotional debates and reactions.

One event that triggered the reevaluation of the U.S. role in the South was its alleged involvement in the Kwangju massacre in May of 1980. Until then, most Koreans held highly favorable attitudes toward the United States. As Gregory Henderson points out, "We [Americans] were more than a friend to Seoul, we were *the* friend; until the late May 1980 Kwangju uprising anti-Americanism was about as common in South Korea as fish in trees."³ Even most Korean activists considered the United States a friendly power, an ally to the democratization movement. This sentiment, however, was shattered when the American commitment to human rights and democracy was tested in Kwangju. Originating as a student demonstration, the movement escalated into a struggle that mobilized hundreds of thousands of citizens against the seizure of power by General Chun Doo-hwan, who responded with brutal suppression.⁴ Many Koreans expected the United States to help to stop the confrontation. Yet to their dismay, the U.S. military command was alleged to have released South Korean troops for redeployment in Kwangju who proceeded to kill hundreds of antigovernment protesters.

The United States denied any involvement, claiming that the Special Forces who first entered Kwangju and caused most of the deaths were not under U.S. operational control. However, many Koreans were suspicious of the U.S. role in the massacre and an invitation to Chun to pay a state visit to Ronald Reagan's White House in early 1981 was seen to confirm these suspicions.⁵ While the United States complained that Korea's government-controlled media painted a distorted picture of its role in the tragedy, many Koreans began believing that the United States was using their country only for its own strategic purposes and that talk about democracy and human rights was no more than placating rhetoric.

Alleged U.S. involvement at Kwangju and support of the autocratic Chun regime shaped the subsequent development of Korea's democratic

³ Gregory Henderson, "Why Koreans Turn against US," *Washington Post*, July 1, 1986.

⁴ See Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang, eds, *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea's Past and Present* (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

⁵ His invitation was part of a deal to keep Chun from executing Kim Dae-jung, but it was not known to the Korean public at the time.

movement. As the leaders reflected on their previous struggles, especially on reasons for the failure to prevent the Kwangju tragedy, they came to realize that they had fought in the absence of a well-articulated strategy and ideology. If past mistakes were to be avoided, they concluded, it would be necessary to specify properly the nature of Korean society and articulate a coherent ideology and strategy based on this analysis. Subsequently, the early to mid-1980s saw a wide range of debates among activists and progressive intellectuals, such as "social formation debates," "debates on Korean capitalism," "debates on modern and contemporary Korea," and "debates on the character of Korean society."⁶ They also sought to reexamine their history, especially the U.S. role in the unfortunate events of peninsula division, military occupation, the Korean War, and political dictatorship.

Based on this reexamination of history, Korean intellectuals and activists questioned their previous appeal for American support and began to argue that democratization could not be obtained without liberation from American dominance. As Tim Shorrock points out, the Korean democratic movement began to change from "a Western-oriented movement based largely on middle-class resentment of Park Chung-hee's military dictatorship" to "a nationalist struggle for independence from foreign intervention and eventual unification" in the 1980s.⁷

Some activists even took direct action against American facilities such as the American Information Center and the American Chamber of Commerce. Mun Pusik, leader of the 1982 arson incident at the Pusan American Information Center, explains in his letter to Cardinal Kim, "We chose the method of setting fire to a building in broad daylight because we felt there was no other way left to chastise the U.S. for acting as the mother-in-law for this [Chun] dictatorship."⁸ While the arson was initially considered "radical activism," even by student activists, the mid-1980s witnessed a series of attacks on American facilities: from May 23 to May 25, 1985, seventy-three students occupied the U.S. Information Center in Seoul demanding a formal U.S. apology for "its role in the Kwangju massacre"; on August 12, five students unsuccessfully sought to

⁶ See Gi-Wook Shin, "Marxism, Anti-Americanism, and Democracy in South Korea: An Examination of Nationalist Intellectual Discourse," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1995), pp. 508-34.

⁷ Tim Shorrock, "The Struggle for Democracy in South Korea in the 1980s and the Rise of Anti-Americanism," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1986), p. 1205.

⁸ Bu-Shik Moon (Mun Pusik), "Why Did I Commit Arson?" UCLA Archival Collection on Democracy and Unification, 1982.

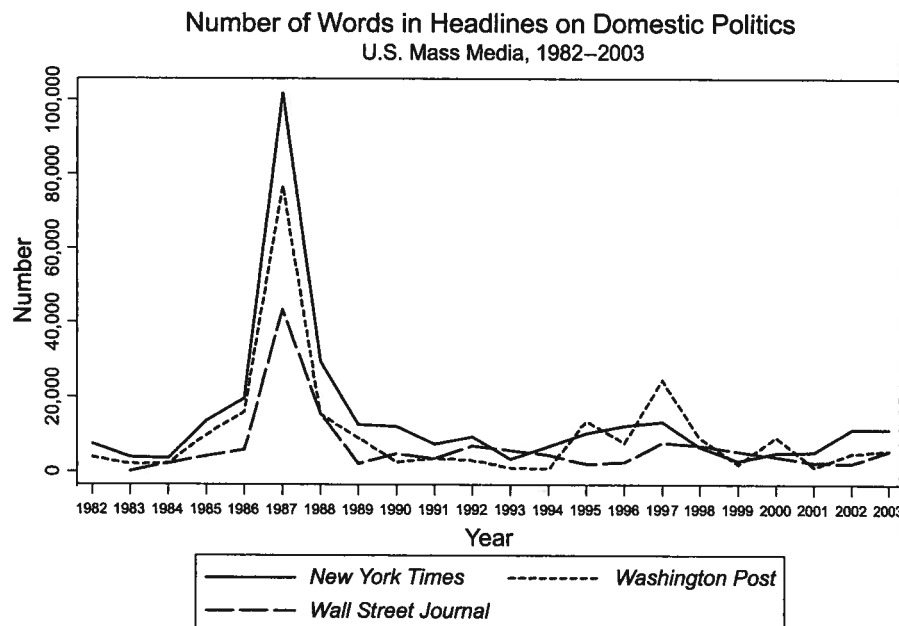


FIGURE 1. U.S. Media Coverage of Korea's Domestic Politics, 1982–2003

invade the U.S. embassy for the same reason; and on November 4, fourteen students occupied the U.S. Chamber of Commerce office in Seoul, protesting reported U.S. pressure to increase agricultural imports into Korea. As Wonmo Dong indicates, "Only a very small fraction of the 1980 student activists shared anti-American sentiments; but by 1985 it was apparent that most student activists subscribed to the view that the U.S. was primarily responsible for the very existence of the military-authoritarian regime."⁹ Furthermore, anti-American sentiments gradually spread throughout the country. A June 1990 survey shows that 37.2 percent of the respondents supported anti-American movements and 72.7 percent agreed that "anti-American sentiments in Korea are serious." Support was most evident among those in their twenties (56.5 percent), college students (63.4 percent), the educated (45.3 percent), the new middle class (42.9 percent), workers (45.1 percent), and people in the Cholla region (46.3 percent), location of the Kwangju uprising.

The rise of anti-American sentiment during Korea's struggle for democracy caught the attention of the U.S. media and government. Figure 1

⁹ Wonmo Dong, "University Students in South Korean Politics: Patterns of Radicalization in the 1980s," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 40 (1987), p. 246.

indicates the number of words in articles on Korea's domestic politics in the three major U.S. newspapers.¹⁰ As expected, media coverage peaked in 1987, reflecting massive democratic demonstrations that culminated in the summer of that year, forcing the Chun government to make concessions for political reform. Perhaps learning a lesson from Kwangju, the United States made a critical intervention, sending Assistant Secretary of State Gaston Sigur to deliver a warning to Chun that it would oppose any attempt to impose emergency rule or resort to military intervention.

With democratization in progress, South Koreans sought to redress past wrongs committed during military and authoritarian rule and the atrocities of Kwangju became a central issue in the process of addressing transitional justice: In 1987, public hearings were held in the National Assembly; the Kwangju Compensation Law was enacted in 1990 for victims and their families; the May 18 Special Act passed in 1995, leading to the trials of Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo. Once labeled a communist-agitated "incident," the uprising was officially named the May 18 Democratization Movement.

While the U.S. government did not take any position or action in this process of redressing historical injustice, the two top U.S. officials in South Korea at the time of the massacre sought to correct what they regarded as misperceptions nearly two decades later after they had retired. In his book *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence*, Ambassador Bill Gleysteen reflects his personal view of the U.S. predicament at the time, lamenting that the U.S. influence on Korean affairs was more limited than widely thought during the times of turmoil in South Korea.¹¹ Additionally, the commander of U.S. Forces in Korea during the massacre, General John Wickham, similarly contends that the U.S. role had been one of "steadfast commitment" that not only helped to evade an all-out civil war, but also was a crucial long-term factor, contributing to the political economic successes and peaceful power transfers of the 1990s.¹²

By the time that Gleysteen and Wickham had written their memoirs, however, as David Straub indicates, "the South Korean generation that had come of age during that period had long since formed a powerful

¹⁰ The figure shows the number of words in the articles on South Korean domestic politics that appeared in the three U.S. papers – the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post* – during the period.

¹¹ William H. Gleysteen, Jr., *Massive Entanglement, Marginal Influence: Carter and Korea in Crisis* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

¹² John A. Wickham, Jr., *Korea on the Brink: A Memoir of Political Intrigue and Military Crisis* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2000), pp. 124, 190–1.

'collective memory' of events. Even though both books were translated into Korean, very few Koreans may have read them. Basically, South Koreans already knew what they needed to know; the memoirs barely made a dent in Korean thinking about the period."¹³ While Kwangju no longer captures Korean attention when they think of the United States, the damage has been done.

Inside Korea, the successful redress of the injustices at Kwangju set a precedent for examining other atrocities that military and authoritarian regimes had committed since 1945. The April 3 massacre on Cheju Island in 1948 and the mass killings of civilians by government troops during the Korean War have both been reinvestigated. Discussing these tragic events had been taboo among Koreans for a long time, because the victims were often portrayed as communists or sympathetic to the North. However, the end of the cold war, along with democratization, loosened the power of anticommunism and opened a new space for public discussion of the unfortunate past. By the 1990s, the state could no longer ignore the histories of those previously marginalized or oppressed. In bringing the issue of transitional justice to the forefront of politics, new scholarship led by progressive social scientists played a crucial role. This new historiography offered an alternative interpretation of modern Korean history by putting ordinary people or *minjung* at the center of historical progress, in contrast to the state-sponsored official history that privileged the elite and the political establishment.

In 2000, the South Korean government established the Presidential Truth Commission on Suspicious Deaths to "promote unity and democracy by uncovering the truth about suspicious deaths which occurred during the democratization movement against past authoritarian regimes." The Commission has received petitions from families of victims to reinvestigate their suspicious deaths during the authoritarian regimes. A year later, the government established the National Human Rights Commission (Kukka ingwon wiwonhoe), with a broad mandate that included the investigation of violations both past and present along with recommendations to improve the condition of human rights. This paved the way for a more thorough investigation of the wrongdoings of the past, including U.S. wartime killings of Korean civilians.

¹³ David Straub, "Public Diplomacy and the Korean Peninsula," in Donald A. L. Macintyre, Daniel C. Sneider, and Gi-Wook Shin, eds., *First Drafts of Korea: The U.S. Media and Perceptions of The Last Cold War Frontier* (Stanford, CA: Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2009), pp. 129–40.

No-gun Ri: Disputes over a U.S. Wartime Massacre

Many Korean civilians, including women and children, were killed during the Korean War. Most of them were sacrificed by Korean troops, both North and South; yet, American military personnel, primarily aviators, are also guilty of killing. Most of the victims by South Korean troops were considered communists, collaborators, or sympathizers with the North, and it was extremely difficult or even dangerous to discuss the tragic events in a society in which anticommunism was the prescriptive national norm under the firm grasp of an authoritarian government. However, democratization and the demise of the cold war system created a more receptive political environment, offering opportunities to revisit the past. In 1997, for instance, taking advantage of the changed political scene, survivors and families of the victims filed a claim with the Government Compensation Committee, demanding recognition and compensation, only to find it rejected in April 1998 on the grounds that a five-year statute of limitations had expired. South Korea was not yet ready to address its troubled history.

Then on September 29, 1999, the Associated Press (AP) reported a case of mass killings in an article "U.S. Massacre of Civilians in Korean War Described: Ex-Soldiers Confirm Villagers' Accounts." Based on interviews with survivors and ex-GIs, the article asserted: "in late July 1950, in the conflict's first desperate weeks, U.S. troops killed a large number of South Korean refugees, many of them women and children, trapped beneath a bridge at a hamlet called Nogun Ri." The article concluded that it could not determine the precise death toll, only offering estimates ranging from one hundred to two hundred (by ex-GIs) to three hundred (by survivors).

The article received the Pulitzer Prize and ignited controversy on both sides of the Pacific.¹⁴ The Korean media, both progressive and

¹⁴ *U.S. News and World Report* reported documents that would undermine the credibility of three of a dozen soldiers cited by the AP report. Robert Bateman, a retired U.S. Army officer, wrote a book entitled *No Gun Ri: A Military History of the Korean War Incident* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stockpile, 2002), in which he also disputed the credibility of some soldiers. Then years later, on May 30, 2006, AP published a newly declassified letter from U.S. Ambassador John J. Muccio to Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk, saying that "If refugees do appear from north of US lines they will receive warning shots, and if they then persist in advancing they will be shot." The AP article interpreted the letter as "the strongest indication yet that such a policy [plan to shoot refugees] existed for all U.S. forces in Korea, and the first evidence that that policy was known to the upper ranks of the U.S. government." Charles J. Hanley and Martha Mendoza, "Letter

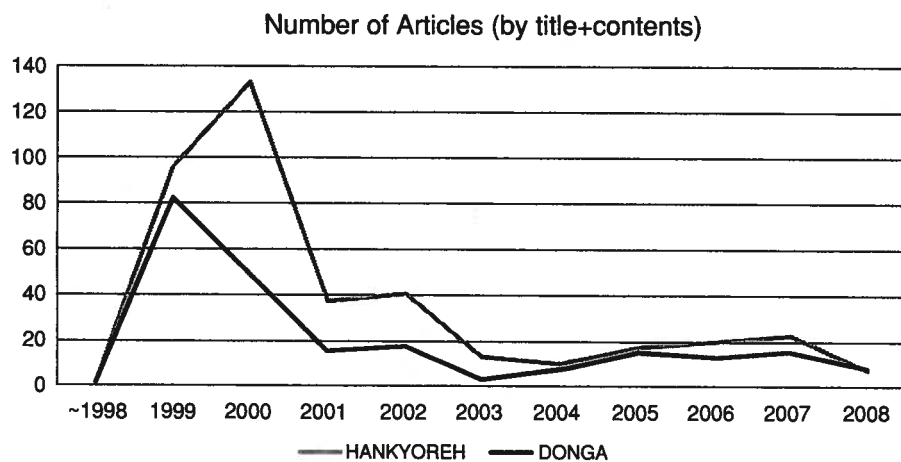


FIGURE 2. Number of Articles on No-gun Ri: Korean Media

conservative, covered the story extensively, as shown in Figure 2. As expected, the progressive *Hankyoreh* published more stories, but even the conservative *Dong-a Ilbo* featured a substantial number of pieces on the topic. South Koreans demanded joint investigations from the U.S. and ROK governments, and the survivors and families of the victims asked for “fact-finding and compensation for the victims.”¹⁵ Major U.S. media also followed the AP lead. The *New York Times* reported “the sentiments of many South Koreans, who sharply criticized the United States for long ignoring the claims of massacre survivors and called on their own Government to conduct an independent investigation.”¹⁶ *Time* described the No-gun Ri massacre as “the century’s second deadliest [bloodbath] committed by U.S. troops, trailing only the 1968 My Lai massacre in Vietnam, where G.I.s killed up to 500 noncombatants.”¹⁷ *Newsweek* quoted Edward Daily, one of the veterans who had spoken to the AP, as saying that “a bunch of untrained soldiers were ordered to gun down

on Korean War Massacre Reveals Plan to Shoot Refugees: Historian Discovers U.S. Envoy’s Writings Relating to No Gun Ri.” On the internal struggle within the AP about publishing the article, see Felicity Barringer, “Reporters and Editors Defend A.P. Story on Korean Massacre,” *New York Times*, May 14, 2000.

¹⁵ See editorial by the liberal *Hankyoreh* newspaper on October 13, 1999, “Nogun-ri haksal kongdong chosa haeya” (Need for Joint Investigations of the Nogun-ri Massacre).

¹⁶ Calvin Sims, “South Koreans Call on U.S. to Apologize for Killings,” *New York Times*, October 12, 1999.

¹⁷ Mark Thompson, “The Bridge at No Gun Ri,” *Time*, October 11, 1999.

Korean civilians,” and that “I’ve made my confession to God and have tried to repent.”¹⁸

Soon after the publication of the AP article, the U.S. and ROK governments launched investigations of the No-gun Ri massacre in close collaboration with each other. After fifteen months, the two governments issued a “Statement of Mutual Understanding between the United States and the Republic of Korea on the No Gun Ri Investigations” on January 11, 2001. The statement recognized that “At some time between July 26th and 29th, 1950, some U.S. soldiers fired toward the refugees . . . [and] as a result, an unknown number of refugees were killed or injured.” However, it left undecided whether U.S. soldiers had received orders to fire or not, due to conflicting testimonies of the veterans interviewed. In terms of the number of casualties, the statement merely mentioned “an unverified number of 248 Korean civilians killed” given by the Korean side, noting “the testimony of U.S. veterans supports lower numbers.”¹⁹

On the same day, right before the release of this statement, the White House issued a statement from President Clinton addressing the No-gun Ri case: “On behalf of the United States of America, I deeply regret that Korean civilians lost their lives at No Gun Ri in late July 1950. The intensive, yearlong investigation into this incident has served as a painful reminder of the tragedies of war and the scars they leave behind on people and nations.” He added that the United States would construct a memorial to Korean victims to “bring a measure of solace and closure” and establish a commemorative scholarship fund that will serve as “a living tribute to their memory.”²⁰

It is unusual for a U.S. president to issue an official statement of regret for an incident that had occurred more than half a century earlier in wartime. Although it was not an official apology, as some survivors and families of the victims demanded, and no compensation was given to the victims, Clinton’s statement was well received in South Korea. Even the progressive *Hankyoreh* appreciated the inclusion of many Korean

¹⁸ Gregory Vistica, “‘I’ve Tried to Repent’: An American GI Recalls How a Bunch of Untrained Soldiers Were Ordered to Gun Down Korean Civilians,” *Newsweek*, October 11, 1999, p. 58. Daily’s testimony was later discredited; documentary evidence proved he was not serving in Korea at the time the incident occurred.

¹⁹ Citation. See also Department of the Army Inspector General, “No Gun Ri Review,” January 2001.

²⁰ Office of the Press Secretary, the White House, “Statement of the President.” Also at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/media/media-watch/jan-june01/clinton_1-11.html (accessed October 1, 2009).

views in the statement as well as Clinton's expression of regret.²¹ He and President Kim Dae-jung enjoyed a cordial relationship, making it easier to calm emotions; nonetheless, many survivors and family members refused to accept the scholarship fund, filing lawsuits instead for compensation from the U.S. government.²²

Moreover, after the AP story, the Korean media reported one highly negative story after another about the United States, especially regarding the U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK). In particular, the progressive media, including *Hankyoreh*, published many editorials and op-eds on U.S. troops in South Korea: Before 1999, the average number was below ten per year but it jumped to forty in 2000.²³ The main topics included controversy over the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the dumping by USFK personnel of formaldehyde in the Han River, an accident at the U.S. Air Force's practice bombing range near Maehyang-ri, Agent Orange exposure of South Korean veterans during the Vietnam War, and a South Korean short track speed skater's loss of a gold medal at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Utah due to an Australian referee's call.²⁴

All these stories critical of the United States appeared in the midst of inter-Korean reconciliation, leading many Koreans to rethink the rationale for the military alliance as their sense of the North Korean threat diminished. As the alliance was built on the threat from the North, views of the two were inevitably related. American troops became less valued as a deterrent, and the social and political consequences of U.S. military deployment in South Korea, especially in increasingly urban areas, seemed less tolerable. Then, in the summer of 2002, U.S. soldiers who took a road too narrow for their vehicle tragically crushed to death two middle-school girls walking on the pedestrian shoulder of the road. Because the accident happened while they were on duty, under the terms of the SOFA, both the driver and the commander were tried in a U.S. military court instead of a Korean civilian court. They were found not guilty and immediately transferred out of the country. The Korean public was furious.²⁵ Protests erupted, demanding justice for the "murders" of the girls, as photos of the

²¹ "'No Gun Ri' palpy'o naeyong, üimi," *Hankyoreh*, January 13, 2001.

²² Elizabeth Becker, "Army Confirms G.I.'s in Korea Killed Civilians," *New York Times*, January 12, 2001, p. A1.

²³ See Shin, *One Alliance, Two Lenses*, chapter 4.

²⁴ Straub, "Public Diplomacy and the Korean Peninsula," p. 132.

²⁵ The incident was reported when it occurred, but did not become a major story until the end of the World Cup tournament then under way. The progressive online news service *OhMyNews* led the reporting.

bodies spread across the Internet inflamed emotions.²⁶ Bush's statement of "regret" was dismissed as insufficient and insincere since it came late and was read not by him but by the U.S. ambassador. Memory of other tragic events, especially No-gun Ri and Kwangju, became the interpretative framework. As David Straub, head of the political section in the U.S. embassy at the time, explains, "millions of South Koreans interpreted the accident through a prism of attitudes significantly shaped by their understanding of the U.S. role. . . . Their feelings were a product of their history and their culture."²⁷

Americans had their own, significantly different, memory of Korea's past, and thus could not understand the extent and furor of protests. Straub recollects:

. . . for most Americans . . . whose own collective memory tells them only that the U.S. saved the Republic of Korea from a military invasion from the communist North in 1950 and then nurtured the South's near-miraculous economic and political development, the massive protests came out of the blue. What could possibly explain daily protests involving tens and even hundreds of thousands of people over an unintended traffic accident?²⁸

The public mood in South Korea influenced the presidential election, as Roh Moo-hyun, a human rights lawyer who represented labor activists and student dissidents, was openly critical of the subservient relationship of his country to the United States and of Korean politicians for their traditional pilgrimage to the United States for "a political blessing." Condemning Bush's hard-line policy toward the North, Roh hit a popular chord with his strong stance. Even his conservative opponent, Lee Hoi-chang, was forced by the public mood to criticize the American government for its handling of the death of the two girls. Once again, Americans could not fully understand the public mood. As Doug Struck, *Washington Post* correspondent at the time, reflects:

. . . most U.S. news stories . . . focused on the military accident as the cause of the anti-American demonstrations as though it was a discrete event. We wrote the North Korean story as though it was isolated from the other issues. In fact, these issues were all intertwined, and all reverberated on the others . . . we did not weave a broad enough portrait for the events of the

²⁶ Doug Struck, "Democracy, Anti-Americanism, and Korean Nationalism," in Macintyre, Sneider, and Shin, eds., *First Drafts of Korea*, pp. 61-8.

²⁷ Straub, "Public Diplomacy and the Korean Peninsula," p. 130.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

time... The reporting wasn't wrong. It just did not encompass enough of the emotional mix of the time.²⁹

Riding this public mood, Roh was elected Korea's new president.

Once in office, Roh paid keen attention to redressing the nation's unfortunate past. In December 2005, he established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Chinsil hwahae wiwonhoe). Modeled after the South African group, the Commission was set up for a nationwide investigation to uncover the history of atrocities by each Korea, including "past incidents, such as the anti-Japanese independence movement and the history of Koreans residing abroad during the Japanese occupation, mass victimization of civilians before and during the Korean War, human rights violations and politically fabricated trials from August 15, 1945 to the end of authoritarian rule." Its establishment, however, provoked controversy within South Korea as conservatives were suspicious of the underlying political motivation.³⁰

With fifteen commissioners, three subcommittees, and one reconciliation committee, the TRC aimed to finish its investigation by April 2010.³¹ Its leaders were historians and social scientists who had led the effort to challenge the elite-centered conventional view of Korean history in favor of a view that puts the marginalized and oppressed people at the center of their inquiry. The Subcommittee on the Investigation of Mass Civilian Sacrifice headed by Kim Tong-choon, a noted sociologist, had as its main task to investigate "cases during the Korean War period," which comprised almost three-quarters of the TRC's petition cases. Unlike mass killings of civilians by the North Korean Army, those by South Korean or U.S. troops were not well-known during the cold war era.³² According to Kim, "without addressing the deep trauma suffered by some members of Korean society, we cannot go forward to the bright future, and in order to approach the peaceful unification of the country, we have to verify the truth in such tragic events of our history."³³

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 62–3, 68.

³⁰ See, for instance, Pak Dusik, "Yö mörit soken 'kwakö' ibron 'mirae,'" *Chosun Ilbo*, August 1, 2004.

³¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Korea, "The Just Settlement of the Past Wrongs Promises an Integrated Society and a Bright Future," February 2008.

³² There were reports in the United States at the time of such killings, including in the *New York Times*, but the ROK government and the U.S. public basically ignored them and focused on what the "bad guys" were doing.

³³ Subcommittee of Investigation on Mass Civilian Sacrifice, "The Just Settlement of the Past Wrongs Promises an Integrated Society and a Bright Future," March 2008. TRC, p. 7.

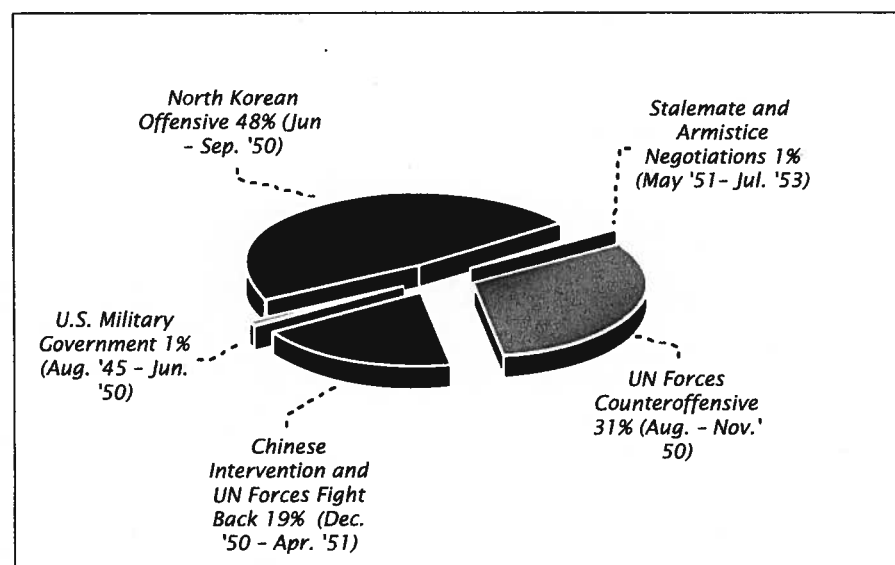


FIGURE 3. Petitions by Period

Team 5 under the subcommittee was in charge of investigating "civilian killings by American bombings, strafing and shootings during [the] Korean War period." It considered 509 petitions, most referring to events at the early stage of the war, that is, during the North Korean offensive and UN forces' counteroffensive in the latter part of 1950 (see Figure 3).

In early August 2008, there were reports on the main findings by the TRC on the three cases concerning the mass killings of Korean civilians on the part of U.S. military personnel. According to declassified U.S. military documents that the TRC reviewed, on September 10, 1950, five days before the Inchon landing, forty-three American warplanes swarmed over Wolmi Island, dropping ninety-three napalm canisters to "burn out" its eastern slope in an attempt to clear the way for American troops. The TRC report suggests that "it was quite possible that the U.S. Forces were aware that numerous civilians were living in Wolmi-do, but no actions were taken to reduce the casualties such as warning or avoiding civilians. On the contrary, U.S. forces napalmed numerous small buildings, strafing children, women, and old people in the open from early morning. The weather was clear and one of the firing altitudes was only 100 feet." The report said that at least ten of the victims were verified by the TRC, but "many more residents were believed to have been killed." It concluded

"the devastation of Wolmi-do cannot be justified under the principle of discrimination nor the principle of proportionality."³⁴

The other two cases that the TRC investigated occurred as communist forces barreled down the peninsula. As the allies fell back, they were attacked by guerrillas that could not be easily distinguished from refugees. On January 19, 1951, the U.S. Air Force conducted three bombing raids, dropping napalm in the Sansong-dong area, which killed at least fifty-one residents, the TRC report said. Using declassified U.S. documents, the report ruled that the bombing was "not necessary" because North Korean soldiers were not present in the area, so that only "innocent civilians," including women and children, were killed. The attack on Tanyang followed on the next day when American planes dropped napalm near the entrance of a cave where refugees had sought shelter. According to the TRC, at least 167 villagers, more than half of them women, were burned to death or asphyxiated.³⁵ The TRC has urged the ROK government to seek U.S. compensation for victims, but the government has not disclosed how it plans to follow up.

The TRC also charged that the United States did not stop mass executions by its ally. In the early days of the war, the South Korean government is believed to have killed a large number of leftists and supposed sympathizers, usually without charge or trial. For instance, as war broke out, South Korean authorities rounded up members of the three hundred thousand-strong National Guidance Alliance, a "reeducation" body to which they had assigned leftist sympathizers and whose membership quotas were filled by illiterate peasants lured by promises of jobs and other benefits. Extrapolating from initial evidence and interviews with family survivors, the TRC reported that most alliance members had been killed in the wave of executions. It also asserted "they [Americans] were at the crime scene, and took pictures and wrote reports," but "did not stop the executions."³⁶

Right before its dissolution, the Commission recommended that the Korean government enact a special law to compensate those wartime victims and establish a state-sponsored foundation to commemorate the

³⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁵ Choe Sang-Hun, "South Korea Says U.S. Killed Hundreds of Civilians," *New York Times*, August 3, 2008. See also Charles Hanley and Jae-Soon Chang, "Korean Commission Finds Indiscriminate Killings of Civilians by US Military," *AP Impact*, August 4, 2008.

³⁶ Charles Hanley and Jae-Soon Chang, "US Wavered over S. Korean Executions," *AP Impact*, July 6, 2008.

unfortunate past. However, the conservative Lee government has not accepted such proposals from the Commission. Instead, it closed the Commission when its term expired in April 2010. In addition, President Lee, unlike his predecessor, is not likely to make this a major issue with the United States, which so far has largely remained silent on the Commission's work. Given that Clinton already issued a statement of regret in 2001, it is unlikely that there will be another in the near future.³⁷

DPRK: Clashes of Identity and Interests

In the recent past, the U.S.-ROK alliance has shown visible strains attributed to divergent perceptions of the North Korean threat.³⁸ No alliance can survive unless it is anchored on a congruence of strategic interests (such as a common threat) and a willingness to share risk. While the end of the cold war loosened alliances in general, the U.S.-South Korean alliance remained robust through most of the 1990s, when both nations still shared a similar view of the threat, as illustrated by their common approach to the first North Korean nuclear stand-off. Yet, various developments of the late 1990s and early 2000s, such as the South's prolonged engagement policy and the U.S. war against terrorism, have eroded the congruence of interests between the two nations. The two parties no longer shared the same perception of the North Korea problem.³⁹ In contrast to the U.S. global approach to the nuclear issue, South Korea has paid most attention to peninsula stability. The idea of a nuclear North Korea has raised U.S. fears that the North would sell fissile material or transfer nuclear technology to terrorist groups. On the other hand, many (especially progressives) in the South believe that the threat has been exaggerated and fear U.S. military action against the North would most likely lead to a full-blown military confrontation on the peninsula.

³⁷ The fact that the United States conducted one study on such an issue, ironically, has probably made it *less* likely it will do another. Relevant is the fact that the U.S. military continues to be charged with mass killings of innocent civilians even today in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Of course, the U.S. archives are open to everyone and the ROK government and scholars can and will continue to do research in them.

³⁸ See Eric Larson, Norman D. Levin, Seonhae Baik, and Bogdan Savych, *Ambivalent Allies? A Study of South Korean Attitudes toward the U.S.* (San Diego, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004); Derek 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).

³⁹ This theme is more systematically addressed in my book, *One Alliance, Two Lenses*.

In particular, the progressive governments of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, concerned with the costs of regime collapse in the North, sought to keep the failed regime in Pyongyang alive to engineer an eventual "soft landing." In contrast, the Bush administration initially advocated "regime change" in the North and Bush himself was known to "loathe" Kim Jong-il.⁴⁰ While Seoul tried to engage Pyongyang to thaw relations, Washington sought to isolate and press it into submission until the North's nuclear testing led to a change in U.S. strategy. Moreover, this difference was not simply a matter of policy discord between the allies. Its roots were deeper. While U.S. officials approached the DPRK as a matter of security policy, North Korea and inter-Korean relations have been central to the evolution of South Korean *national identity*. Led by progressives, South Koreans have sought to redefine their national identity in the newly evolving regional and global order of the post-cold war era.

A turning point in South Korea's politics of national identity vis-à-vis the North and the United States occurred with the implementation of Kim Dae-jung's "sunshine policy." The election of this long-time opposition leader to the presidency not only signaled a maturing democracy in the South but also marked a new policy orientation toward the North. Kim forcefully promoted his vision for bringing reconciliation, peace, and eventual reunification to the Korean peninsula. Two key assumptions underpinned the policy: First, the two Koreas should not continue their cold war animosity and confrontation; and second, the northern regime is reasonable enough to accept changes to improve the quality of life for its people and appreciate its common ethnicity with the South. Kim's policy set business and political relations on separate tracks and advocated economic aid to the North to foster and support DPRK efforts at reform.

The sunshine policy led to a series of diplomatic achievements as well as concrete projects, including South Korean tourism to Mount Kumgang in the North. Most notably, the June 2000 Pyongyang summit between Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il marked the first meeting between the top leaders of the two Koreas since the peninsula's 1945 partition. Unprecedented high-level military talks between North and South Korean delegations followed. These achievements led to a change in the tenor of the

⁴⁰ Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice also called the North Korean regime an "outpost of tyranny" at her Senate confirmation hearing in January 2005.

relationship, and the North came to be viewed less as a threat and more as a "compatriot."⁴¹

This shifting view of the North triggered a corresponding change in views of the U.S.-ROK alliance. The North's economic decline led many to perceive their neighbor as weak while new contact decreased the sense of threat South Koreans felt – long-held notions of the North as a strong, threatening "other" were shattered. Therefore, the need for a U.S. security guarantee was no longer as sharply felt.⁴² Under these new circumstances, American forces appeared to some as an unnecessary inconvenience, or even worse as an infringement on sovereignty, a source of interference in Korean politics, and a symbol of national stigma. Some even came to portray the United States and the alliance as obstacles to improved inter-Korean relations and eventual unification.

The Roh administration went further in seeking to reorient Korean identity away from the nation's close ties with the United States. While continuing his predecessor's policy of engagement with the North, Roh also pressed for a more region-centered foreign policy. Proclaiming an "era of Northeast Asia" (*tongpuka sidae*), he asserted that the ROK must actively participate by becoming a hub in the region, going so far as to make the case that it could serve as a "balancer" in Northeast Asia. This initiative was widely interpreted as a veiled strategy to weaken the U.S.-ROK alliance and move closer to China, and it proved controversial both within and outside South Korea.⁴³

This regionalist outlook reflected Korea's new politics of identity. As Gilbert Rozman points out, "national identity is the foundation of state power and foreign policy. To accept regionalism means to redefine one's

⁴¹ For example, see Do-Yeong Kim, "After the South and North Korea Summit: Malleability of Explicit and Implicit National Attitudes of South Koreans," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (June 2003), pp. 159–70.

⁴² See, for example, Kurt Achin, "South Korea-US Alliance in Difficult Transition," *Voice of America*, May 2, 2005; Balbina Y. Hwang, "Minding the Gap: Improving U.S.-ROK Relations," *Heritage Backgrounder* # 1814, Heritage Foundation, December 21, 2004; Robert Marquand, "How S. Korea's View of the North Flipped," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 22, 2003.

⁴³ David C. Kang, "Rising Powers, Offshore Balancers, and Why the US-Korea Alliance Is Undergoing Strain," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2005), pp. 115–40; Scott Snyder, "The China-Japan Rivalry: Korea's Pivotal Position?" in Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel Snider, eds., *Cross-Currents: Regionalism and Nationalism in Northeast Asia* (Stanford, CA: Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2007), pp. 241–58.

country's identity."⁴⁴ South Koreans, led by progressives, have been actively seeking to (re)define their position vis-à-vis the United States and China, in addition to the DPRK. Former activists who had fought for democracy in the streets with anti-American slogans in the 1980s became influential in the Roh government and this progressive orientation reflected their memory of and experience in their activism. Yet, not all Koreans' views have shifted in this way. Progressive ideas of the kind of relations South Korea should have with the North and the United States provoked strong dissent from conservatives in the South. Though not necessarily opposed per se to engagement with the North, they remained skeptical that the North would change and demanded greater reciprocity in inter-Korean relations.⁴⁵ In their view, its nuclear activities were a clear violation of bilateral North-South agreements and the northern threat has not diminished. Pursuit of rapprochement under these conditions seemed disconcerting at best. South Korean conservatives have come to underline the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance. The bitter contention between progressives and conservatives has been described as the "South-South conflict" or "a house divided."⁴⁶

Spurred by intense debate over how to approach North Korea and the alliance, the politics of identity reemerged in the South in earnest. As J. J. Suh asserts, South Korea has been "caught between two conflicting identities: the alliance identity that sees the United States as a friendly provider and the nationalist identity that pits Korean identity against the United States."⁴⁷ The former is an established viewpoint that conservatives have maintained, while the latter is a new framework promoted by progressives as well as a reaction against the past. The nationalist identity of progressive administrations clashed with the Bush administration's tough line on the DPRK, engendering tension in relations. Policy incongruity was

⁴⁴ Gilbert Rozman, *Northeast Asia's Stunted Regionalism: Bilateral Distrust in the Shadow of Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 364.

⁴⁵ Conservatives were enraged when they found that the Kim Dae-jung government had paid cash to Pyongyang to facilitate the breakthrough with the North, and the under-the-table payoffs became a big issue in debates over engagement.

⁴⁶ Byung-Hoon Suh, "Kim Dae Jung's Engagement Policy and the South-South Conflict in South Korea: Implications for U.S. Policy," *Asian Update* (Summer 2001), at <http://www.asiasociety.org/publications/update.southkorea.html> (accessed October 1, 2009); Hahm Chaibong, "The Two South Koreas: A House Divided," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Summer 2005), pp. 57-72.

⁴⁷ J. J. Suh, Peter J. Katzenstein, and Allen Carlson, *Rethinking Security in East Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 169.

only part of the larger "identity" story that explains strains in U.S.-ROK relations.

In the United States, Clinton's North Korea policy came under heavy fire from conservative critics. In 1999, for instance, a House Republican advisory group on North Korea issued a report that questioned the merits of engagement and claimed that "the comprehensive threat posed by North Korea to our national security has increased since 1994 . . . [as there are] a number of serious weaknesses concerning current U.S. policy toward North Korea."⁴⁸ Another 1999 report by Asia specialists and more moderate Republicans (who would assume key positions under Bush) called Clinton's approach "politically unsustainable" and urged a more comprehensive approach that conceptualized the Agreed Framework⁴⁹ as the *beginning* of formulating a coherent, disciplined North Korea policy rather than as any kind of resolution.⁵⁰ President Bush pursued an ABC (anything but Clinton) approach toward the DPRK. When Kim Dae-jung visited the White House in March 2001, Bush lent rhetorical support to Kim's sunshine policy but unequivocally expressed his lack of trust of North Korea and asserted that there must be a better verification mechanism for nuclear compliance. Although Bush had not yet formulated a specific North Korean policy, it became quite clear that it would come into conflict with Kim's position.⁵¹

The terrorist attacks of September 11 further transformed U.S. strategic thinking. The greatest threat came to be perceived as the nexus of "rogue states" with WMD capabilities and terrorist intent to strike the U.S. homeland or its interests abroad. Thus, when the second North Korean nuclear crisis broke out in October 2002, it was immediately couched

⁴⁸ North Korea Advisory Group, "Report to the Speaker U.S. House of Representatives," November 1999. <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/dprk/nkag-report.htm> (accessed October 1, 2009).

⁴⁹ The Agreed Framework was a 1994 agreement between the United States and North Korea for gradual denuclearization and normalization of relations between the two countries. The agreement broke down with North Korea's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in early 2003.

⁵⁰ Richard L. Armitage, "A Comprehensive Approach to North Korea," Institute for National Strategic Studies, Strategic Forum, No. 159, National Defense University, March 1999, at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/dprk/1999/forum159.html> (accessed October 1, 2009).

⁵¹ Sebastian Harnisch, "U.S.-North Korean Relations under the Bush Administration: From 'Slow Go' to 'No Go,'" *Asian Survey*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (November/December 2002), pp. 856-82; Andrew Moens, *The Foreign Policy of George W. Bush: Values, Strategy and Loyalty* (Ashgate, 2004), pp. 109-11.

in terms of nonproliferation. Though the administration would eventually engage in multilateral diplomacy, for months Washington pursued a policy of isolation by refusing to talk to North Korea until it abandoned its nuclear weapons programs. At the same time, South Korea vowed to continue inter-Korean engagement, despite the nuclear crisis. The two governments were out of sync – while Washington viewed the North as part of an “axis of evil” and sought a policy to contain this threat, Seoul had no intention of suspending or even toughening its engagement policy. As Victor Cha points out, “at the heart of this gap are parallel paradigm shifts in foreign policy that have taken place in Washington and Seoul” in the post-September 11, post-sunshine era, respectively.⁵² The DPRK was a clear case in which the allies’ interests, as defined by these foreign policy paradigm shifts, came into direct conflict.⁵³

With the change of power in both countries, there are optimistic expectations on both sides of the Pacific that the four-year period of the Lee and Obama administrations represents an opportunity to strengthen the U.S.-ROK relationship. This seems especially true, considering that the last five years featured the overlap of President Roh and his progressive advisers with President Bush and the neoconservatives, which was possibly the least workable combination of leadership for the alliance. Indeed, in the first meeting of presidents Bush and Lee Myung-bak, at Camp David in April 2008, the leaders stressed the allies’ common values and shared challenges in the twenty-first century, calling for a broad-based “strategic alliance” that on the basis of “freedom, democracy, human rights and the principle of market economy . . . will contribute to global peace and security.”⁵⁴ President Obama has similarly stressed the importance of consulting with key U.S. allies in pursuing a foreign policy agenda, and so far the two administrations have worked very closely in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue.

Nonetheless, the United States should be wary of raising expectations for a dramatic change in South Korea as a result of this power shift to a conservative government. As shown in this chapter, the Korean

⁵² Victor D. Cha, “Korea: A Peninsula in Crisis and Flux,” *Strategic Asia* (2004–05), p. 151.

⁵³ The Bush administration shifted from a confrontational to a more diplomatic approach after the midterm elections and hawks such as Donald Rumsfeld and John Bolton left.

⁵⁴ White House press release, “President Bush Participates in Joint Press Availability with President Lee Myung-Bak of the Republic of Korea,” Camp David, April 19, 2008, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/04/20080419-1.html> (accessed January 8, 2009).

political landscape has evolved significantly since democratization, with the development of a vibrant and institutionalized left and civil society. These groups and their ideas (particularly about the North and the United States) persist, and identity politics could reemerge quite quickly in line with events such as the 2002 USFK accident. Indeed, the controversy over the agreement to begin re-importation of U.S. beef to Korea represented the first such case under the new Lee administration. The president has viewed the spread of public anxiety over U.S. beef as politically motivated,⁵⁵ and *Chosun Ilbo* has compared the outpouring of emotion and the holding of candlelight vigils to the sweeping anti-American reaction to the 2002 schoolgirl incident.⁵⁶

There exists a good possibility that the establishment of a conservative administration in South Korea may galvanize the progressive opposition in challenging the government’s policy agenda, including – and perhaps foremost – its approach to the North. Although the voice of South Korean progressives was weakened by defeat in recent elections, this constituency still remains a significant force in South Korean society, and the United States should not underestimate it or its ideas. In a sense, progressive forces were coopted by the governments of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, as they reluctantly agreed on policies such as sending troops to Iraq. In the face of a conservative administration, however, the progressives could become more aggressive in advancing their agenda. This may mean intensification of identity politics in South Korea, and the United States could easily be caught between a conservative presidential administration and progressive activists.

Conclusion

Most discussions about strengthening U.S.-ROK relations focus on military alliance and economic cooperation. In recent years, the two allies have worked together on various issues, including relocation of the USFK headquarters from Yongsan to Pyongtaek, transfer of wartime operational control from the United States to the ROK, and free trade agreements. South Korea dispatched its troops to Iraq and Afghanistan in support of the U.S. war against terrorism, and policy coordination toward the DPRK has improved. These developments are all matters crucial to

⁵⁵ “President Lee Links Public Anxiety on U.S. Beef to Political Motivations,” *Hankyoreh*, May 13, 2008.

⁵⁶ “U.S. Beef Imports Fuel Online Scaremongering,” *Chosun Ilbo*, May 5, 2008.

the alliance and give hope for a brighter future. However, we should recognize that the bilateral relationship has become much more complex and multidimensional, transcending the initial state-to-state interactions and engaging civil society. Korean democratization, the end of the cold war, and inter-Korean reconciliation have brought issues of history, values, and identity to the forefront, and they hold the latent power to affect the bilateral relationship.

The Kwangju massacre and alleged U.S. involvement first provoked reexamination of the U.S. role in Korean history, leading to massive anti-American demonstrations during the democratic struggle of the 1980s. Denying any involvement in the massacre, the United States intervened to support Korean democracy in the summer of 1987. Kwangju became a key issue later when addressing historical (in)justice, as the South Korean government responded with a number of measures, including compensation for the victims. If the issue no longer is a focus for critics of the alliance, it has left an important legacy in South Korean politics and in relations with the United States. Kwangju became the model for addressing historical injustice and reconciliation, as seen in the handling of the mass killings of Korean civilians by American troops. The activists who fought for democracy with anti-American slogans became the policy elite of the progressive governments, and the scholars who led the reexamination of the U.S. role in Korean history have played a key role in state-sponsored institutions that address historical issues such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Thus, the memory of Kwangju and experience with anti-Americanism in the democratic movement led to the development of a progressive perspective and identity that gained important currency under Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. Although conservatives returned to power in 2008, the voice of progressives remains salient in Korean society.

Revelations of the No-gun Ri massacre fueled another wave of anti-Americanism in South Korea from the late 1990s, and motivated the Clinton administration to recognize the occurrence of this tragic event by his unprecedented statement of "regret." Recently the TRC has found more cases of mass killings during the Korean War, urging the ROK government to demand an apology and compensation from the United States. While it is unlikely that there will be any repeat of the emotional reaction to No-gun Ri, U.S. leaders must not underestimate Korean perceptions and the power of collective memory. Another unexpected "identity-evoking event" echoing the backlash after the 2002 death of two schoolgirls could ignite a new wave of anti-American sentiments,

damaging the bilateral relationship. Although it would be a hard sell for officials in the U.S. government, collaboration in "fact-finding" about the unfortunate past may increase mutual trust. As the "Statement of Mutual Understanding" for the No-gun Ri case pointed out, fact-finding and reconciliation of the unfortunate past can strengthen the ROK-U.S. alliance by "provid[ing] closure for the past and bring[ing] hope for the future."

As emotions over Kwangju and No-gun Ri fade, the DPRK still remains a challenging issue. Although policy coordination has improved and the Lee government promotes a policy toward the North that is much closer to that of the United States, South Korean society is deeply divided about its approach toward the North Korea and the politics of identity pose a challenge for the United States. The divided political landscape is not likely to change in the near future and this dynamic may hinder the overall capability of the South Korean government to think and act strategically. In fact, as clearly displayed during Lee's first visit to Washington, D.C., in the spring of 2008, his ostensibly pragmatic policy is firmly grounded in the alliance identity, provoking strong reaction from progressive forces that remain critical of the alliance. There is a potential danger that the United States might be caught between a conservative government and progressive activists.

All said, history, values, memory, and identity are significant elements that can influence the "soft power" of an alliance built on "hard power," and policy makers of both nations should not overlook their importance. In the past, these issues have occupied only a marginal place in the policy-making process or tended to be relegated to the area of public diplomacy. However, as a former senior U.S. official reflects from his own experiences working in Korea and Japan, "public diplomacy cannot be effective unless the foreign policy it supports is farsighted and reasonable."⁵⁷ Accordingly, these "unconventional" aspects of the U.S.-ROK alliance should not be seen as secondary but need to be taken as central to formulating policies regarding the bilateral relationship.

⁵⁷ Straub, "Public Diplomacy and the Korean Peninsula," p. 9.