

CHALLENGES POSED BY THE DPRK FOR THE ALLIANCE AND THE REGION



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SOUTH KOREA AND THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE

PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT ROK-U.S. RELATIONS

by Lee Nae-Young

The year 2003 was the 50th anniversary of the ROK-U.S. alliance. During the past half century, the ROK-U.S. alliance has been considered a great success. The bilateral alliance was usually deemed a friendship cemented in blood, marked by memories of shared sacrifice.¹ The alliance has served as an effective security framework to deter North Korean aggression. In addition, it has helped to create a stable environment for economic dynamism and democratic consolidation within South Korea. Yet, the alliance now lies at a crossroads. The change in the global and regional strategic environment in Northeast Asia, the widening perception gap between the United States and South Korea about threats from North Korea, and policy divergence between the two governments have produced tension, fissure, and mutual distrust between the two allies. Therefore, there are mounting doubts and pessimism about the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance. At a recent academic conference, Cato Institute researcher Doug Bandow said the United States has no vital interests in Korea that justify huge costs and sacrifice and that the two nations need to prepare for divorce.²

ROK-U.S. Alliance at a Crossroads

There have been many signs of rift in recent ROK-U.S. bilateral relations. In March 2005, President Roh Moo-hyun announced that South Korea needs to play the role of “balancer” in Northeast Asia. Even though the Korean government argues that a regional balancer role is based on a strong Korea-U.S. alliance, critics argue that Roh’s stance is shaking the half-century alliance and that Seoul may be giving the impression it will weaken ties with Washington and maintain a neutral position with Washington or Beijing on regional issues.³ In early April 2005, U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) announced that it plans to eliminate up to 1,000 jobs of South Korean employees at U.S. military bases and might withdraw some combat equipment from the peninsula because of reduced financial support from South Korea.

Moreover, a significant erosion of public support for the alliance is creating further obstacles for the alliance. The recent wave of anti-Americanism in South Korea has produced a rift in the ROK-U.S. alliance.⁴

1. During the Korean War of 1950–53, 37,000 U.S. soldiers were killed and 92,000 were wounded. After the Korean War, in 1954, the Mutual Defense Treaty was signed. By request of the U.S. government, the Korean government deployed three full infantry divisions to the Vietnam War from 1964 to 1973. A total of 300,000 Korean soldiers were deployed to Vietnam, and more than 5,000 were killed.

2. Doug Bandow, “The Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance: Equality, Mutuality, and International Security” (paper prepared for a conference organized by the Korean Association of International Studies, Seoul, 24–25 March 2005), www.icasinc.org/2005/2005I/2005ldxb.html.

3. “Power Balance Policy Faces Criticism,” *Korea Times*, 05 April 2005.

4. On the historical development of anti-Americanism in South Korea, see David Steinberg, ed., *Korean Attitudes toward the United States: Changing Dynamics* (New York: M. E. Sharp, 2005); Lew Young Ick, “Historical Overview of Korean Perceptions of the United States: Five Major Stereotypes,” *Korea Journal* 44, no. 1 (2004): 109–51; Kim Jin-wung, “Recent Anti-Americanism in South Korea,” *Asian Survey* 29, no. 3 (1989): 749–63; Shin Gi-wook, “South Korean Anti-Americanism: A Comparative Perspective” *Asian Survey* 36, no. 1 (1996): 787–903; Lee Sook-jong, “Sources of Anti-Americanism in Korean Society: Implications for Korea-U.S. Relations,” in *Korea-U.S. Relations in Transition*, ed. Baek Jong-chun and Lee Sang-hyun (Sunnam: Sejong Institute, 2002).

Anti-Americanism in Korea has suddenly gained visibility since the candlelight protests of November and December 2002 in Seoul. The surge of anti-Americanism in December 2002 was qualitatively different in size and duration from previous incidents that manifested an anti-American sentiment. The December 2002 gathering was, by far, the largest anti-American demonstration ever to be held in South Korea. As anti-Americanism was on the increase in South Korea, tensions were also rising on the Korean peninsula mainly because North Korea declared it would renew its nuclear weapons program. In the past, there had been a general pattern of increased public support for the ROK-U.S. alliance whenever a threat to national security arose. In December 2002, however, anti-Americanism continued to grow regardless of the nuclear standoff with North Korea. In other words, the past pattern of increased support for the United States in the presence of a security threat from North Korea no longer held true.

Many journalists, in both South Korea and the United States, reported that rising anti-Americanism despite increasing security threats from North Korea inflicted major damage on the ROK-U.S. alliance. According to the journalists, the Korean government jumped on the bandwagon of anti-American nationalism for political purposes, worsening the situation and causing a cleavage in U.S.-Korea relations. They argued that anti-Americanism in South Korea reflects a negative image of South Korea to the U.S. public and U.S. government and could lead to negative consequences such as the withdrawal of USFK.⁵

In winter 2002, anti-Americanism in South Korea was expected to remain for a long time as a source of conflict within Korean society as well as pose an obstacle to ROK-U.S. relations. The rise of anti-Americanism in South Korea is closely related to the changing perceptions of the Korean government and public on the subject of North Korea. Owing partly to the Sunshine Policy and partly to recent improvement of inter-Korean relations, the perception of the South

Korean public about the threat posed by North Korea has diminished substantially. Thus, many experts argue that there is a widening gap between the United States and South Korea in the perception of the North Korean threat and that this gap has become a major obstacle for the ROK-U.S. alliance. However, opinion polls from June 2003 to December 2004 show that anti-Americanism in South Korea has substantially waned. Survey results indicate that public opinion on the ROK-U.S. alliance and USFK reversed from negative to positive, and between mid-2003 and late 2004 a favorable perception of the United States and the ROK-U.S. alliance arose among the Korean public.

How can we explain and interpret Korea's fluctuating anti-Americanism since the winter of 2002? This paper examines the changes in public attitude and perception toward the United States over the past two years. Two key questions will be examined: The first is whether the recent decline of anti-Americanism indicates the increasing support of the Korean public for the ROK-U.S. alliance. The second question is whether the threat perception gap between South Korea and the United States about the subject of North Korea is serious enough to undermine the ROK-U.S. alliance and whether waning anti-Americanism has narrowed this perception gap.

Empirical data used for the paper are based on polls conducted jointly by the East Asia Institute and the *JoongAng Ilbo*, *HanKook Ilbo*, Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, and GlobeScan in December 2002, June 2003, February 2004, July 2004, and December 2004. Conducted five times with an approximate six-month interval using a similar questionnaire, the opinion polls are useful for discerning the changes in public attitudes toward ROK-U.S. relations. This paper relies on heavily on *Global Views 2004*, cross-national surveys conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR) in the United States in collaboration with the East Asia Institute (EAI) in South Korea and the Centro de Investigación y Decencia

5. Conservative newspapers such as the *Chosun Daily* in South Korea and renowned columnists such as William Safire and Richard Allen in the United States emphasized the negative impacts of anti-Americanism to the ROK-U.S. alliance.

Económicas (CIDE) in Mexico.⁶ Because the three country surveys include similar questions about international affairs and U.S. leadership, it is easy to analyze and compare South Korean and U.S. views.

Changing Attitude of the Korean Public toward the United States

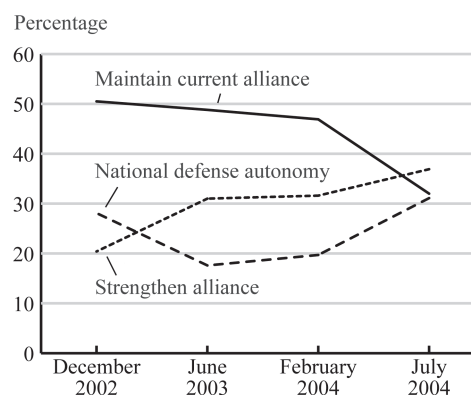
The sudden surge of anti-Americanism in the winter of 2002 was a temporary outburst fueled by mass candlelight demonstrations and political circumstances surrounding the presidential election in Korea. Therefore, it was not clear whether the Korean public's wave of anti-Americanism was serious enough to threaten the legitimacy of the ROK-U.S. alliance. To examine whether the recent rise of anti-Americanism threatened the legitimacy of the ROK-U.S. alliance, we need to examine how the surge of anti-Americanism in December 2002 has changed since that time. To do so, we first look at the public's views on issues closely linked to the alliance between South Korea and the United States and gauge public opinion about the role of USFK, the desired ROK-U.S. relations, and Washington's policy toward North Korea.

Waning Anti-Americanism

First, let us look at changing attitudes on ROK-U.S. relations as shown in **Figure 1**. When asked in the December 2002 survey what a desirable ROK-U.S. alliance would be, 20.4 percent in Korea supported a stronger alliance and 50.5 percent took the middle-of-the-road position of maintaining the current alliance. The remaining 28.1 percent called for national defense autonomy. It is likely that those who called for national defense autonomy tended to be discontented with the ROK-U.S. alliance. In June 2003, however, there was a sharp rise, from 20.4 to 32.0 percent, in support of a stronger alliance with the United States, while the percentage of those polled who called for national defense autonomy dropped from 28.1 to 17.6 percent. This indicates that there has been a significant shift to a favorable attitude toward the United

States. In the July 2004 survey, support for a stronger alliance with the United States reached 36.9 percent; the portion favoring national defense autonomy also grew—to 31.1 percent. These results indicate a trend of polarizing public opinion concerning the ROK-U.S. alliance in South Korea.

Figure 1: South Korean Public Opinion on ROK-U.S. Alliance, 2002–2004

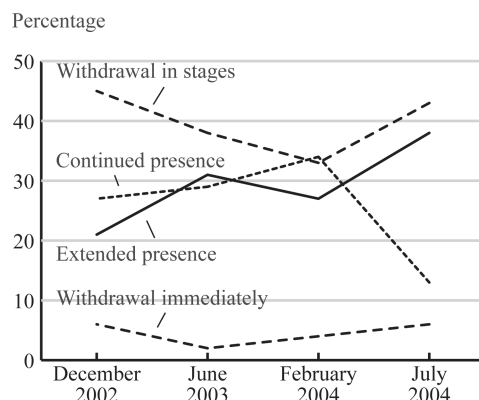


Sources: "Public Opinion Survey on Anti-Americanism and Korea-U.S. Relations," East Asia Institute and *JoongAng Ilbo*, 2003; "Public Opinion Survey on Anti-Americanism and Korea-U.S. Relations, East Asia Institute and *HanKook Ilbo*, February 2004; *Global Views 2004: South Korean Survey* (Seoul: East Asia Institute, 2004).

The increase in favorable attitudes toward the United States is also observed from the changing perception on USFK (**Figure 2**). In the December 2002 poll, combined support for immediate withdrawal (6.3 percent) and withdrawal in stages (44.6 percent) of USFK was higher than combined support for continued presence (27 percent) and extended presence (21 percent). Because the USFK has been the major deterrence to security threats from North Korea during the past half century, this survey result was very alarming and showed an overall discontent with the ROK-U.S. alliance and the possibility that rising anti-American sentiment could undermine the legitimacy of the ROK-U.S. alliance.

6. *Global Views 2004* are cross-national surveys comprising three separate surveys in the United States, South Korea, and Mexico. For the main findings of the three surveys, consult the following reports: *Global Views 2004: American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004); *Global Views 2004: Comparing South Korean and American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004); and *Global Views 2004: Mexican Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004), www.cfr.org/globalviews2004.

Figure 2: South Korean Public Opinion on USFK, 2002–2004



Sources: “Public Opinion Survey on Anti-Americanism and Korea-U.S. Relations,” East Asia Institute and *JoongAng Ilbo*, 2003; “Public Opinion Survey on Anti-Americanism and Korea-U.S. Relations, East Asia Institute and *HanKook Ilbo*, February 2004; *Global Views 2004: South Korean Survey* (Seoul: East Asia Institute, 2004).

In the February 2004 survey, however, support for immediate withdrawal and withdrawal in stages of USFK dropped from 6.3 to 3.8 percent and from 44.6 to 33.1 percent, respectively. In turn, the proportion of those in favor of extended presence and continued presence increased from 21 to 27.1 percent and 27 to 34.3 percent, respectively. This indicates that the level of discontent with USFK sharply decreased and that favorable attitudes toward USFK increased substantially. In the July 2004 survey, support for withdrawal in stages and for extended presence increased, while support for continued presence dropped significantly.

Increasing Support for the ROK-U.S. Alliance

Along with waning anti-American sentiment, the recent trend of South Korean public opinion is one of increasing support for the ROK-U.S. alliance. Survey results of July 2004 clearly indicate the favorable feelings of Koreans toward the United States and the increasing recognition of the strategic importance of the United States by the Korean public. As seen in **Table 1**, the degree of favorable feelings felt by Koreans toward the United States is 58, which is comparable with their feelings for other highly favored nations such as the United Kingdom (58) and China (58).⁷ Noticeable here is that Koreans’ favorable feelings about the United States are not significantly weaker than their feelings toward China.

Moreover, the United States was chosen as the best strategic partner by 51 percent of the Korean public (**Figure 3**). In addition, 79 percent of Korean opinion leaders regarded the United States as Korea’s most crucial partner. It is notable that 24 percent of the general public and 13 percent of opinion leaders regarded China as the best partner. This result indicates that most Koreans recognize the strategic importance of the United States to South Korea. China is far behind the United States as the best partner in the minds of most Koreans. This finding contradicts the claim that South Koreans are thinking of China as an alternative security partner to the United States.

The December 2004 BBC World Service poll compares attitudes toward President George W. Bush’s

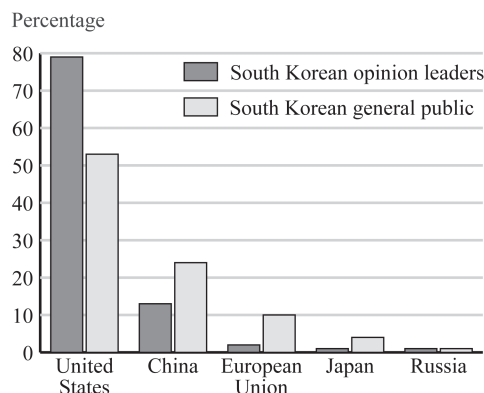
Table 1: Koreans’ Feelings Thermometer toward Selected Countries and International Organizations, 2004, in mean degrees

Respondents	U.S.	Japan	China	North Korea	Iraq	United Kingdom	United Nations	European Union	World Trade Organization
South Korean public	58	45	58	46	33	58	63	57	58
South Korean leaders	65	55	56	46	41	63	67	62	56

Source: *Global Views 2004: South Korean Survey* (Seoul: East Asia Institute, 2004).

7. Note that Table 1 shows that feelings toward North Korea and Japan were 46 and 45, respectively, with North Korea ranking slightly higher than Japan..

Figure 3: South Korean Opinion about the Country with which South Korea Should Cooperate the Most, 2004

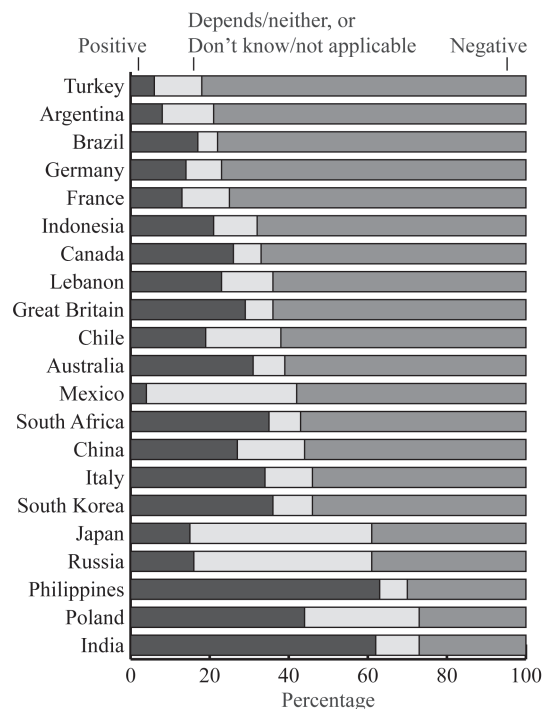


Source: *Global Views 2004: South Korean Survey* (Seoul: East Asia Institute, 2004).

reelection in 21 countries, and it highlights the changing attitude of the South Korean public toward the United States (**Figure 4**).⁸ Although negative attitudes toward the Bush reelection are a worldwide phenomenon, it is clear that, among the 21 countries, the South Korean public had a relatively positive attitude toward his reelection. In fact, public attitudes in South Korea toward the Bush reelection are more positive than attitudes in Great Britain and in most of the European Union (EU) countries. This survey result suggests that the level of anti-American sentiment in South Korea is relatively low and has been exaggerated by mainstream media in both South Korea and the United States.

In short, the majority of the Korean public is very cautious about dismantling the traditional ROK-U.S. alliance. Most Koreans have a sense of hesitation or apprehension toward a fundamental rupture of Korea-U.S. relations. These survey results show that the recent surge of anti-American sentiment in South Korea has not posed any real threat to the alliance

Figure 4: Attitudes toward Reelection of President George W. Bush, 2004



Source: "21 Nation Poll on Bush's Reelection: BBC World Service Poll," www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/BBCworldpoll/Qnnaire01_19_05.pdf; www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/BBCworldpoll/Analysis01_19_05.pdf.

between Seoul and Washington. With more than 70 percent of the population favoring maintenance or strengthening of the alliance, it would be difficult to characterize the anti-Americanism in South Korea as challenging the legitimacy of the alliance.⁹

Divided Public Opinion about the United States

Despite the recent trend of increasing support for the ROK-U.S. alliance, a potentially serious threat to the alliance has been the sharp polarization of public attitudes toward the United States based on age groups,

8. "21 Nation Poll on Bush's Reelection: BBC World Service Poll," www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/BBCworldpoll/Qnnaire01_19_05.pdf; www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/BBCworldpoll/Analysis01_19_05.pdf.

9. For explanations of waning anti-Americanism in South Korea, see Nae-Young Lee and Han Wool Jeong. "Fluctuating Anti-Americanism and the Korea-U.S. Alliance," *International Studies Review* (Graduate School of International Studies, Ewha Womans University) 5(2)(2004), pp. 23–40.

ideological orientation, and support for political parties. **Table 2** shows the results of a cross-tabulation of public views about desirable ROK-U.S. relations by age groups, ideological orientation, and party preference. First, there was a sharp disparity of views on the desirable U.S.-Korea alliance among different age groups. A preference for national defense autonomy was stronger among younger age groups, while those aged 50 and above showed a preference for a stronger ROK-U.S. alliance. In addition, we can discern a significant division of attitudes toward the United States according to ideological orientation and party preference.

This result indicates that there are two conflicting perceptions regarding the United States among the Korean public. While some Koreans perceive the United States as a reliable ally that will guarantee national security, others hold an opposing view that the United States is an impediment to the rapprochement between Seoul and Pyongyang. The divided perceptions about the United States seem to be closely related to the conflicting views toward North Korea.

The two conflicting attitudes toward North Korea are enthusiasm toward North Korea as a partner for rapprochement and reunification, and lingering mistrust of North Korea as an enemy.¹⁰

The polarization of public opinion on security issues, such as the policy toward North Korea and ROK-U.S. relations, has been the key cause of ideological conflict in South Korea and a major obstacle in gaining the national consensus required for promoting the ROK government's policy on North Korea and the ROK-U.S. relations. The conflict is likely to continue to plague South Korea for a long time.¹¹

Divided public attitudes on security issues are most salient among different age groups. A number of explanations can be suggested for the reasons for the anti-American sentiment among the younger generation. First, because the younger generation did not experience the Korean War and, thus, has only a weak sense of threat from North Korea, members of that generation tend to downplay the role of the ROK-U.S. alliance as a deterrent against a North Korean

Table 2: South Korean Opinions on Desirable ROK-U.S. Relations, 2004, percentage

Group within South Korea's population		Desirable ROK-U.S. relations			
		National defense autonomy	Status quo	Strengthened alliance	Total
By age (N=120)	20s	28.7	51.3	20.0	100.0
	30s	26.5	53.4	20.1	100.0
	40s	25.3	52.9	21.8	100.0
	Older than 50	13.2	56.8	30.1	100.1
By ideology (N=1,008)	Liberal	34.0	43.8	22.2	100.0
	Neutral	23.9	56.9	19.1	99.9
	Conservative	13.7	52.7	33.6	100.0
By party preference (N=723)	Uri Party	24.1	56.7	19.2	100.0
	Grand National Party	15.0	56.3	28.7	100.0
	Democratic Party	36.4	41.5	22.0	99.9

Source: *Global Views 2004: South Korean Survey* (Seoul: East Asia Institute, 2004).

10. This does not mean that the South Korean perception of North Korea has completely turned from hostility to friendship. According to Kim Tae-hyun in "South Korean Perceptions and Policies on North Korea," *Foreign Policies and National Integration* (Sungnam: Sejong Institute, 1998), perceptions in South Korea include dualism, with both hostility and amiability coexisting.

11. On the generational politics and ideological conflicts of South Korea, see Lee Nae-young, "Generation and Political Ideology," *Sasang* (Fall 2002).

threat. Second, because the younger generation constitutes the largest proportion of Korea's Internet users and because Korea's Internet media tend to have a progressive orientation, the younger generation tends to harbor relatively strong anti-American sentiments. Finally, President Roh Moo-hyun, who called for an equal partnership in Korea-U.S. relations during his dramatic presidential campaign and who received dominant support from young people, may have fueled anti-American sentiments among the younger generation.¹²

Differing Views

A key element of maintaining strong alliance is that allies should have a similar level of threat perceptions regarding their common enemies.¹³ Some experts argue that perceptions of North Korea in the United States and in South Korea have drifted apart substantially during the past few years and that this drift has become a greater challenge to the U.S.-ROK alliance.¹⁴

Perception of North Korean Threat

The gap between the United States and South Korea in the perceptions of threats can be analyzed at two levels: the government level and the public level. At the government level, the perceptions of the president and high-ranking officials in charge of security policymaking are critical. There is no doubt that the perception of the two governments—South Korea and the United States—about North Korea has been divergent in recent years, and this perception gap has been the main source of tension and rift in the U.S.-ROK alliance. In fact, different approaches from Seoul and Washington concerning the North Korean nuclear

arms program seem to result from their sharply differing perceptions about North Korea. President Roh regards North Korea as a partner in negotiations rather than an adversary. His view is in sharp contrast with that of President George W. Bush, who has branded North Korea as part of an “axis of evil.”

The South Korean public's perception of the threat posed by North Korea has changed significantly during the past decade. It is argued that the Sunshine Policy pursued by the Kim Dae-jung administration diminished the South Korean fear of North Korea. With the implementation of the Sunshine Policy, the public lost its earlier perspective on security issues with North Korea and, as a result, public support for the ROK-U.S. alliance as a deterrent against North Korea has weakened. Moreover, the inter-Korean summit held on 15 June 2000 clearly had a deep emotional and psychological impact on South Korean views of North Korea. There has been public euphoria over a thawing of the inter-Korean relationship since the summit.¹⁵

Changing perceptions of the threat posed by the North combined with increasing national self-confidence in South Korea has therefore created a nationalistic and optimistic expectation about rapprochement and co-operation between the two Koreas. As a result, some South Koreans have a naive view that North Korea would never use nuclear weapons against its South Korean compatriot and, thus, the United States is a bigger threat to South Korea than is North Korea.

Recently, however, critical views of the Sunshine Policy have increased among many Koreans. Not much progress has been observed in inter-Korean

12. Because of the rapprochement between Seoul and Pyongyang, many South Koreans, especially among the younger generation, no longer perceive the United States as the patron of security; they now perceive the United States as an impediment to the rapprochement between Seoul and Pyongyang.

13. H. Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

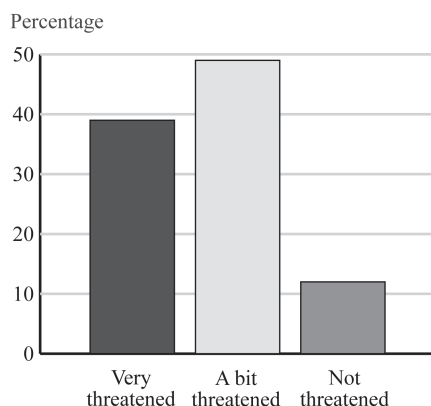
14. Michael H. Armacost, “The Future of America's Alliances in Northeast Asia,” in *The Future of America's Alliances in Northeast Asia*, ed. Michael H. Armacost and Daniel I. Okimoto (Washington D.C.: Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2004), 11–24; Scott Snyder, “Alliance and Alienation: Managing Diminished Expectations for U.S.-ROK Relations,” *Comparative Connections* (Honolulu: Pacific Forum CSIS, August 2004), www.csis.org/pacfor/annual/2004annual.html.

15. Kim Byung-kook, “The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Anti-American Challenge,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 3, no. 2 (2003): 240–41.

relations despite economic and humanitarian aid to the North by the South Korean government and various nongovernmental organizations. Moreover, the renewal of the nuclear arms program by North Korea since 2002 has created a sense of betrayal against the North among South Koreans. As anti-Americanism has fluctuated substantially in the last three years, we can expect that the South Korean public's perception of North Korea may also change significantly.

The July 2004 survey results show the current perception of the South Korean public about North Korea. To the question, "Do you think North Korea has nuclear weapons?" 75 percent of the South Korean public answered yes, and the remaining 25 percent answered no. In addition, as shown in **Figure 5**, 88 percent of the South Korean public would feel threatened to some degree if North Korea had nuclear weapons. This survey result indicates that the South Korean public feels a high level of threat about the North Korean nuclear program.

Figure 5: South Korean Public Opinion on North Korea's Possession of Nuclear Weapons, 2004



Source: *Global Views 2004: South Korean Survey* (Seoul: East Asia Institute, 2004).

Figure 6 shows that both the South Korean and the U.S. publics share common threat perceptions. International terrorism and the North Korean nuclear program are selected as two major critical threats to the national interests of both countries in the next 10 years.¹⁶ Although the level of threat perceptions about terrorism and the North Korean nuclear program is higher among the U.S. public than among Koreans, there is no question that South Koreans and Americans share threat perceptions about terrorism and the North Korean nuclear program. It is interesting, however, that 50 percent of the Korean public regards U.S. unilateralism as a critical threat to the national interest of South Korea. This result indicates that many Koreans are concerned that U.S. unilateral military action against North Korea might lead to a major military conflict on the Korean peninsula. It is also notable that the percentage of South Koreans viewing the development of China as a world power as a critical threat is higher (46 percent) than the percentage among the public in the United States (33 percent). This result is interesting in light of the recent South Korean consideration of China as a future strategic partner.¹⁷

In sum, it is obvious that Korea and the United States share a common perception concerning international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and nuclear issues critical for national security although they have some differences over other, less immediate issues such as global warming, the rise of China, and the increasing world population.

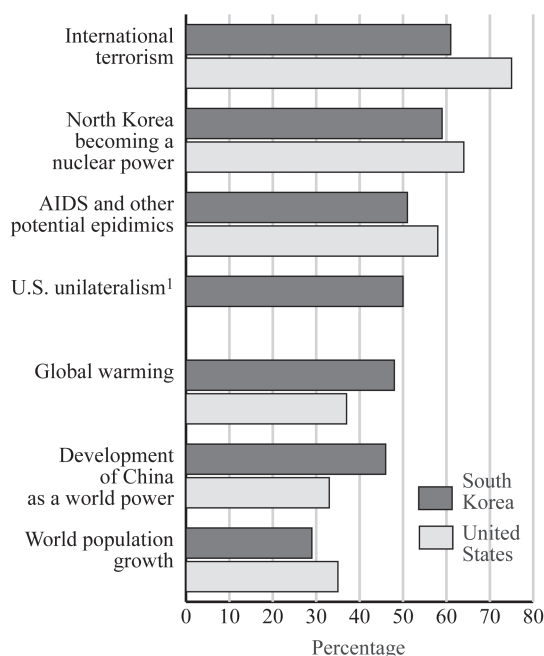
Continued U.S. Commitment to Korean Security

The claim that intense anti-Americanism would lead to a waning Korea-U.S. alliance is predicated on the assumption that anti-Americanism in South Korea will bring about the weakening of Washington's defense commitment to South Korea, inevitably leading to a security vacuum on the Korean peninsula. This assertion was strengthened when U.S. Secretary of

16. Because the joint survey conducted by Chicago Council on Foreign Relations in the United States and East Asia Institute in South Korea in July 2004 used the same questionnaire, it is appropriate to measure and compare public perceptions about North Korea and mutual perceptions of South Korea and the United States.

17. There is no question that economic relations with China have become increasingly important for South Korea. In addition, China is viewed as an important mediator in solving international tensions stemming from North Korea's nuclear weapons program. However, South Korean people are more cautious about China than are people in the United States.

Figure 6: U.S. and South Korean Public Concern about Vital Interests for the Coming Decade, 2004



Source: *Global Views 2004: Comparing South Korean and American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004), 11.

1. The U.S. survey did not have a question about U.S. unilateralism.

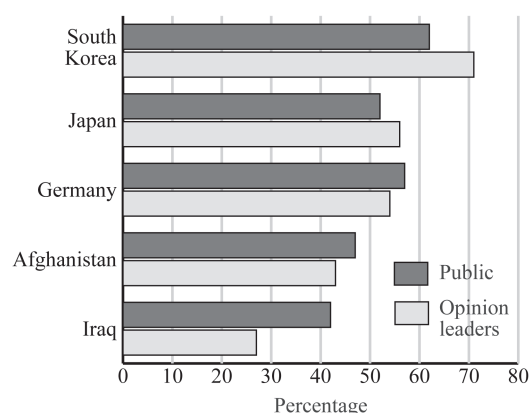
Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced in 2003 that U.S. forces would be pulled back from the demilitarized zone and that the overall size of USFK would be reduced in the near future. Such an announcement triggered suspicion and recriminations among the Korean public, dividing Korean society and leading some conservative analysts to conclude that the United States was moving toward withdrawal of its defense commitment to South Korea.¹⁸ This conservative group believes the United States no longer takes Korean security seriously and that U.S. forces can leave at will, which would have a devastating impact on South Korea.

18. In the United States, conservative opinion leaders have contributed to this viewpoint by claiming that U.S. troops need not remain in Korea if they are unwanted; see William Safire, "N. Korea: China's Child," *New York Times*, 26 December 2004; Doug Bandow, "Bring the Troops Home: Ending the Obsolete Korean Commitment," Policy Analysis no. 474 (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, May 2003), www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa474.pdf; Robert Novak, "Perhaps It's Time South Korea Tried Its Wings," *Washington Post*, 6 January 2003.

Recent survey results indicate that, even though there has been a sign of decreasing commitment of Washington to South Korea, this policy stance is not supported by public opinion in the United States. **Figure 7** shows that both opinion leaders (71 percent) and the public (62 percent) in the United States regard South Korea as the most consistently important place to deploy U.S. forces, with Germany and Japan behind. In fact, Americans evaluate Korea as having more strategic value and importance to long-term national interests than Afghanistan and Iraq. These survey results indicate that most Americans support the U.S. defense commitment to South Korea and military intervention to cope with North Korea's nuclear program. According to the same survey, a majority of Koreans (89 percent) expect immediate and substantial U.S. military intervention in the event of an attack from the North; this reflects how confident the Korean people are in the U.S. commitment to South Korean security.

In short, assumptions rooted in the so-called crisis in the ROK-U.S. alliance are not compelling because

Figure 7: U.S. Opinion about Strategically Important Countries for Deployment of U.S. Forces, 2004



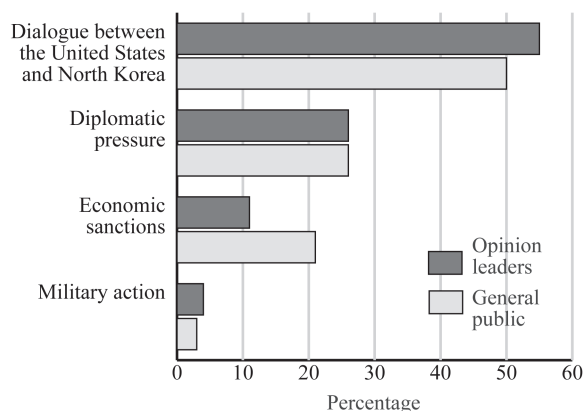
Sources: *Global Views 2004: American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004), 18.

survey results indicate that anti-American sentiments have not caused a severe anti-Korean backlash. Furthermore, the Korean public and Korean opinion leaders regard the United States as the most valuable nation with which to maintain cooperative ties.

Differing Views of Deterrence Strategy

Although both the Korean public and the U.S. public share common threat perceptions of North Korea, they exhibit clear differences in how to resolve the North Korean nuclear program. As shown in **Figure 8**, the majority of the Korean public as well as Korean opinion leaders favor the strategy of dialogue and negotiation between the United States and North Korea. Preference for diplomatic pressure is 26 percent and support for economic sanctions is 11 percent among opinion leaders and 21 percent among the public. Only a tiny portion of opinion leaders (4 percent) and the general public (3 percent) advocate military action against North Korea to resolve the nuclear crisis, which indicates that Koreans prefer diplomatic methods to military means for dealing with North Korea's nuclear development program.

Figure 8: South Korean Opinion on Proper Strategy for Resolving Issues of North Korean Nuclear Arms Program, 2004

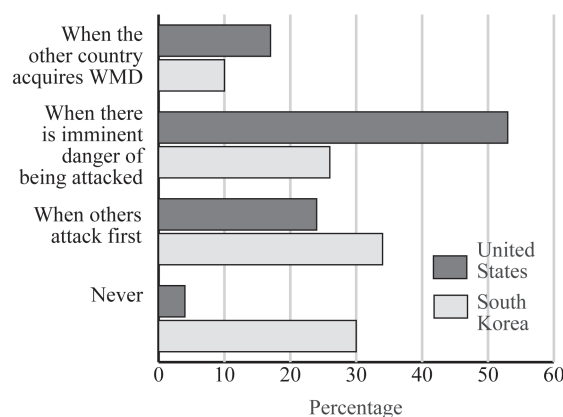


Source: *Global Views 2004: South Korean Survey* (Seoul: East Asia Institute, 2004).

The U.S. public, in contrast, is ready to support military action as a strategy to deter the North Korean nuclear program. **Figure 9** indicates differing attitudes

of the Korean and the U.S. publics regarding when countries can go to war. More than half (53 percent) of Americans think that countries can go to war when there is an imminent danger of being attacked by the other country, while only 26 percent of Koreans support going war in the same situation. If an enemy country is acquiring WMD, 17 percent of Americans support going to war, but only 10 percent of Koreans support war in the same situation. Moreover, 30 percent of Koreans think that war should be avoided in any situation, but only 4 percent of Americans think so.

Figure 9: U.S. and South Korean Opinion on When Countries Can Go to War, 2004



Source: *Global Views 2004: Comparing South Korean and American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004), 12.

In short, the U.S. public is more fearful of international terrorism and the North Korean nuclear program than is the Korean public. In addition, the U.S. public favors a more active and aggressive response to international terrorism and North Korean development of WMD than does South Korea. The main reason why the Korean public favors negotiation and dialogue as a resolution strategy vis-à-vis North Korea and its nuclear program is that military action against North Korea might lead to widespread military conflict or war on the Korean peninsula and would be disastrous to South Korea. Hence, the South Korean government believes it is best to avoid provoking the North Korean regime.

Concluding Remarks

The recent wave of anti-Americanism in South Korea has been regarded as creating cleavage and tension in the ROK-U.S. alliance. Especially among conservative mass media in both South Korea and the United States, there have been claims that rising anti-Americanism would bring about an anti-American backlash among U.S. decision makers as well as the public.

During the past three years, however, the public attitude in South Korea toward the United States has shifted rapidly toward recognizing the legitimacy of the ROK-U.S. alliance. In addition, the gap between the Korean public and the U.S. public in their perceptions of the threats of international terrorism and the North Korean nuclear arms program is not as wide as previously thought. Like the public in the United States, the South Koreans feel threatened by the possibility that North Korea might possess nuclear weapons.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the crisis in the alliance has been resolved completely. Fragmented public opinion among the South Korean public toward the United States and North Korea should be taken into account seriously. If polarization on security issues is left unresolved, generational and ideological conflict around these security issues is likely to plague South Korea and may even impede efforts toward an effective North Korean policy and ROK-U.S. alliance.¹⁹

The recent trend of public opinion indicates that the main source of fissures and rifts in the ROK-U.S. alliance is the diverging perceptions and policy stances of the two governments toward North Korea. Although the South Korean public shows its support for the U.S.-ROK alliance to deter North Korean threats, the policy stance of the current Korean government does not seem to adequately represent this policy preference of the Korean public. There is a clear gap between the policy direction of the South Korean government and the trend of public opinion. A similar gap between the government and public opin-

ion can be observed in the United States. According to the 2004 survey by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, both the U.S. public and opinion leaders favor a multilateral approach in dealing with international terrorism and the Iraq issue; therefore, there is a clear gap between the Bush administration's policy stance and the policy preference of the U.S. public.²⁰

Currently, the peace and security of the Korean peninsula seems to be in great danger. Even though North Korea has returned to the six-party talks, it is still uncertain that the North will eventually agree to dismantle its nuclear weapons program. If Pyongyang continues to play its dangerous nuclear card, using brinkmanship as a strategy for regime survival, the Bush administration should consider other policy measures to deter the North Korean nuclear weapons program. To resolve the North Korean nuclear threat, Seoul and Washington must overcome the current state of the strained alliance and solidify their ties of the past 50 years. To do so, Washington and Seoul should cooperate closely in order to create a new common vision and prepare a road map to revitalize the U.S.-ROK alliance.

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19. Signs of such conflict have already appeared in Korean society. Both conservatives and progressives frequently hold demonstrations to show off their political prowess.

20. *Global Views 2004: American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, 7–10.



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