

## **The U.S. - Korea Alliance: Past, Present and Future**

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### **I. Introduction**

Half a century has passed since the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States concluded a mutual defense treaty. Despite occasional disharmonies and even conflicts, cooperation as well as friendship has prevailed in their bilateral relations, and the alliance has proved to be one of the most successful ones in the post World War II period. However, since the advent of the George W. Bush administration in January 2001, the rift between the two allies has become highlighted to the extent that the alliance is seen as being seriously weakened or even irrevocably damaged.

Central to the "troubled alliance" lies the threat perception of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) or North Korea. While the Bush administration regards North Korea as one of three countries comprising "an axis of evil," threatening the peace and security in the Pacific with a nuclear development program, its South Korean counterparts, the Kim Dae-jung administration and the successive Roh Moo-hyun administration, do not necessarily agree. Moreover, some South Korean "progressive" or "left-leaning" activists supporting these two administrations suggest that the South should prefer inter-Korean rapprochement and ultimate unification to an alliance with the United States. In short, the traditional foundation of mutual alliance commitments seems to be eroding with implications that the basic character of the alliance may be changing.

At this critical juncture, what follows is an attempt to review the ROK-U.S. alliance, focusing on their mutual perception of North Korea. First, it reviews the period from October 1953, when the alliance was formally launched, to February 1998, when the Kim Young-sam administration came to an end in South Korea. In these forty-five years, the primacy of the alliance between the two over inter-Korean rapprochement was not questioned. Second, it reviews the period of the Kim Dae-jung administration from February 1998 to February 2003, when the basic assumption

underlying the alliance was challenged. It reviews the process leading to serious deterioration in their mutual relations, symbolized in a series of anti-American candlelit vigils in November-December 2002. Third, it examines the present situation unfolding after the election of Roh Moo-hyun to the South Korean presidency in December 2002 with the support of the New Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) which was initiated by Kim Dae-jung and "progressive" activists. Finally, it discusses the future of the alliance.

## **II. The Primacy of the U.S.-Korea Alliance over Inter-Korean Rapprochement Was Never Questioned (1953-1998)**

### **A. The "Patron-Client Relations"**

At the outset, it should be recalled that the U.S.-Korea alliance was a by-product of the cold war in general and the Korean War in particular. With the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, the Truman administration decided to help the Syngman Rhee administration in South Korea resist North Korean aggression. This was because North Korean aggression was interpreted as the opening shot in Stalin's campaign for the conquest of the world.

However, with the progress of the truce talks after June 1951, South Korea-U.S. relations began to reveal sharp disagreements. It was because, while the Truman administration sought an armistice under the condition of the restoration of the *status quo ante bellum*, the Rhee administration attempted to continue the war until the final military conquest of the North. The dissonance became more vociferous after April 1953, for President Rhee publicly announced that he would never consent to any agreement that did not reunify the peninsula under the ROK. Soon, the Eisenhower administration agreed to conclude a mutual defense pact in exchange for his not obstructing an armistice. Accordingly, the Korean truce agreement was signed on July 27, 1953, and the ROK-U.S. mutual defense treaty was concluded on October 1, 1953.

Notwithstanding, the discord between the two administrations continued. Firstly, starting in early 1954, President Rhee urged the United States to support a massive counter-attack on China, preceded by a blockade of the China coast. His proposal, however, met a negative response from the President, Congress, and the press. It was a time when Washington had decided not to

intervene in the Indochinese conflict out of fear that it might bring about a war against China. Secondly, the Eisenhower administration put pressure on President Rhee to establish diplomatic relations with his erstwhile enemy, thereby forming an anti-Communist alignment supported by the U.S. in the Far East. Rhee, who had fought against Japanese colonialism, was reluctant to do so.

Thirdly, President Rhee's increasing authoritarian rule made the U.S. furious. When his Liberal Party passed, in December 1958, the new National Security Law to allow public security authorities to exercise arbitrary power against anti-government elements, Washington recalled its ambassador, expressing its regret. In a similar vein, in April 1960, when students staged a series of demonstrations against the Rhee government's rigging of the presidential election in March, the Eisenhower administration made public its support of the South Korean demonstrators. Moreover, it declared that if Rhee refused to rectify the irregularities done during the presidential election, the continued supply of American weapons to Korea might be cancelled with the resultant withdrawal of all American forces. Within a few days Rhee resigned, and his government fell. However, those events neither reflected nor caused a change in the fundamental nature of the alliance between the two countries.

Four months after Rhee's resignation, the Chang My on administration was inaugurated as a result of the July 1960 congressional elections. At the outset, it adopted a pro-America policy. A representative and infamous example was its support of the unequal ROK-U.S. Economic and Technical Agreement, which passed Congress in February 1961. The Chang administration's pro-America stance was immediately challenged by the leftists or the "unorthodox opposition forces," which had been suppressed under the strict anti-Communist Rhee government. Sensing the Chang administration's "softness," they organized leftist or socialist parties, heightening their anti-U.S. voices. Soon they intensified their opposition to the stationing of American troops in South Korea and their support for inter-Korean cooperation. Although South Korean voters rejected their proposals for the congressional elections of July 1960, the leftist movement led by the "unorthodox opposition forces" remerged in the 1980s.

Against this backdrop, on May 16, 1961, Major General

Pak Chung-hee staged a coup against the Chang government and established a military government, pledging that it would pursue an anti-Communist policy. Although the military junta openly announced its pro-America stance, the U.S. Embassy in Seoul issued a public statement, condemning the mutiny and stressing its support of the constitutional government. However, three days later, the Kennedy administration recognized, albeit reluctantly, the coup as a *fait accompli*. When President Kennedy received Pak in November 1961 at the White House, the U.S. finally and formally recognized Pak's leadership in South Korea. In return, Kennedy exacted a promise from Pak that he would restore civilian government in South Korea in the foreseeable future.

Dating from that time, the U.S. Embassy in Seoul became preoccupied with two serious issues. The most troublesome was restoring civilian rule. The embassy stressed that to renege on this pledge might entail unfortunate consequences to South Korea, hinting that American military and economic aid to Seoul might be sharply decreased. Pak bowed to Washington and thenceforth announced that the general elections for the President and the National Assembly would be held the ensuing fall. The other issue related to the Communist past of Pak and his entourage. The U.S. Embassy's concern was well summarized in its November 23, 1963, report to Washington, which stated that "there is extensive evidence that the core group of the Korean military government is under the predominant influence of former leftists." It added that "the present [South Korean military] government is, despite protestations of friendship for the United States, [...] more critical of the U.S. than any post World War II government of Korea. [...]" As a result, the report continued, "there is an atmosphere of mutual distrust which has never before permeated Korean-American relations, not even, to the same extent, in the final period of the Rhee regime."

In the presidential election in October 1963, Pak posed as a "nationalist" resisting the pressure from a big power. His "nationalist appeal" helped his campaign, and, despite tacit American support for the conservative, pro-U.S. candidate from the opposition party, Pak won the election. However, the popular support for this nascent administration was not solid. In order to strengthen its power base, President Pak first attempted to cleanse rightist (and American) doubts about his ideological orientation. One example was the enactment of the draconian Anti-Communist

Law under which anybody who termed South Korea "an American colony" or defined the U.S. "an imperialist country" was punishable.

#### **B. South Korea as a Junior Partner in the Alliance**

More important was the Pak administration's accommodation of demands from successive U.S. administrations. For example, despite strong domestic opposition, it concluded the Treaty of Basic Relations with Japan in 1965. Since the treaty provided South Korea with an opportunity to receive an economic loan and aid from Japan, it significantly reduced South Korea's economic dependence on the U.S.

In 1966, the Pak administration went one step further by sending its combat troops to South Vietnam, not as an ally of South Vietnam but as an ally of the U.S. The Johnson administration appreciated Pak's decision. Immediately, it rewarded Seoul with a substantial verbal upgrading of the U.S. military commitment to South Korea and a visit by President Johnson in late 1966. Furthermore, the U.S. did not reduce its troop levels in South Korea until 1971. At the same time, it rewarded Pak's government with the conclusion of the Status of [United States Armed] Forces Agreement (SOFA) in 1966 which gave to South Korea "exclusive jurisdiction" over U.S. forces with respect to criminal offenses "except during hostilities and martial law." Throughout these events, the government-to-government relationship between Seoul and Washington solidified.

South Korea's military involvement in the Vietnam War naturally led to economic and technical activities in South Vietnam with a resultant "special economic Vietnamese boom," which in turn contributed to South Korean economic growth. Based on its military involvement and the subsequent "special economic boom", South Korea increased its assertiveness toward the U.S. One indication of its increased bargaining power was its extraordinary success in obtaining large sums of military aid during the years following the dispatch of combat troops to South Vietnam.

South Korea's assertiveness was again expressed in late January 1968, when North Korea launched an abortive commando raid on the presidential mansion in Seoul and seized the *U.S.S. Pueblo*. The Pak administration insisted to Johnson that the North Korean commando attack on the presidential mansion be regarded as "an external armed attack upon the ROK" as stipulated in the ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty. An acceptance of this insistence

would mean a South Korea-U.S. joint retaliation upon North Korea in accordance with the provisions of the treaty. The South Korean government actually urged the U.S. to retaliate first upon North Korea and then to take preemptive action against one or several of North Korea's staging bases in order to cope with future aggression. President Johnson sent his special assistant, Cyrus Vance, to Seoul to prevent Pak from "invading" North Korea.<sup>1</sup> Vance made it clear that his government refused to meet South Korean demands. When the South Korean government asked that the ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty be revised so that the U.S. would automatically intervene in "an external armed attack upon the ROK," he also refused.

However, Vance agreed to issue a joint statement with the South Korean government, pledging America's immediate cooperation against any future North Korean aggression against South Korea and America's continuous military as well as economic assistance for the modernization of the South Korean military. In April, President Johnson invited President Pak to Honolulu to ensure the American military commitment to South Korea. In the following month, the first Security Consultative Meeting between defense ministers of the two countries was held in Washington D.C. This annual meeting has continued until today. It seemed that South Korea had clearly become a junior partner in the South Korea-U.S. alliance.

With the inauguration of the Republican administration of President Richard Nixon in January 1969 and Nixon's declaration of the Nixon Doctrine at Guam in July 1969, the U.S.-Korea alliance revealed tensions again. The major reason stemmed from the basic character of the new doctrine, which called for a diminished American military role in Asia. Nixon's promise to President Pak in August 1969 at San Francisco that the U.S. would continue its military commitment to South Korea relieved Pak of his anxiety about the security of South Korea. However, in March 1970, the Nixon administration notified the Pak administration of its intention to reduce the number of American troops in South Korea. By June 1971, the U.S. intended to withdraw twenty thousand, or almost one-third, of its forces. The U.S. went on to reduce its economic support to South Korea as well. After 1971, American economic aid to South Korea was switched from grants to loans, the size of which declined to a marginal level after 1974. At the same

time, American grant-type military assistance to South Korea was changed to loan-type aid under the U.S. Foreign Military Sales Program. As one South Korean observer put it, "the United States acted less like a protector, and South Korea less like a dependant."<sup>2</sup>

In the process, South Korea became increasingly distrustful of the U.S., and the South Koreans openly voiced their feeling that the Americans had betrayed them. In particular, the announcement by the Nixon administration of impending troop withdrawals sparked an angry public reaction in South Korea, all the more so because the announcement had been made without prior consultation with Seoul. In response, the American media expressed displeasure at such South Korean reactions. Against this background, President Pak established the Agency for Defense Development and the secret Weapons Exploitation Committee in late 1970. Their primary aims were to develop missile and nuclear weapons for "self-reliant national defense."

South Korea's confidence in the U.S. was further jolted by the announcement in July 1971 that President Nixon was planning to visit the People's Republic of China (PRC). As it turned out, Nixon had held no prior discussions with any allies of the U.S., including South Korea. The announcement was particularly surprising to the South Koreans, who felt that because the PRC had been a belligerent against South Korea in the Korean War, the unilateral American move was an act of betrayal. Furthermore, the shift in American policy toward North Korea greatly embarrassed South Korea, which had pursued a strict "policy of nonrecognition" towards North Korea. The U.S., however, now advised South Korea to change its policy of not recognizing the North Korean regime, to initiate dialogue with North Korea, and to seek simultaneous admittance to the UN for both North and South Korea. The change in American policy toward North Korea was manifested in the Richard Nixon - Chou Enlai joint communique at Shanghai on February 27, 1972. The communique expressed support for "increased communication in the Korean peninsula." It further suggested that a solution to the Korean problem be sought, not through the UN but through inter-Korean talks. This was an utterly, radical change from South Korea's standpoint.

South Korea had reached the stage where it needed to reexamine its foreign policy and especially its anticommunist stance. President Pak considered it desirable to improve relations with the

Soviet Union, one of the world's two nuclear superpowers. At the National Assembly in August 1971, his foreign minister revealed his government's willingness to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. At the same time, South Korea opened a series of talks with North Korea, which in turn culminated in the North-South joint communique announced on July 4, 1972. Through the communique, the two Koreas pledged to pursue unification based on three principles of national independence, peace, and grand national unity.

President Park soon capitalized on this historic event. Claiming that, in the turbulent period of realignment among major powers, South Korea must concentrate its national resources more effectively for "self-reliant national defense" through a Korean way of democracy, he adopted the Yushin ("revitalization") constitution under emergency martial law. The constitution made him a lifelong dictatorial president over three branches of government.

Republican administrations under both Presidents Nixon and Gerald Ford did not denounce the undemocratic Yushin regime openly, thus showing its diplomacy to be realistic. Rather, the U.S. intended to develop South Korea as an American strong point against the Soviet Union in East Asia. Ford's Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger was confident that South Korea, with its own strong military and industrial capacity bolstered by American aid, would be quite capable of playing such a role. However, the Ford administration put heavy pressure upon the Park administration to give up its secret nuclear development project as well as its missile development project. Although Park initially resisted the American pressure, he finally surrendered. In early 1975, he convinced the Ford administration that he would not seek to become a nuclear power any longer as long as the U.S. continued to extend its nuclear umbrella to South Korea. As for the missile project, a compromise was reached to the effect that South Korea would be allowed to develop a missile with an estimated range of one hundred and eighty kilometers. In November 1978, the U.S.-Korea Combined Forces Command was officially activated, enabling top South Korean military officers to participate in operational decision-making. As a result, these new arrangements replaced President Rhee's agreement with the U.S. of July 1950 under which the entire South Korean armed forces had operated under the control of an American commander.



### **C. The Period of "Uncomfortable Relations"**

With the advent of a Democratic administration in the U.S. in January 1977, U.S.-South Korea alliance entered a period of "uncomfortable relations." First of all, upon his inauguration, President Jimmy Carter announced his intention of withdrawing all American ground troops from South Korea by 1982. Although a complete withdrawal plan was subsequently dropped, American ground forces in South Korea were reduced by six thousand men. The troop reduction drew increasingly sharp criticism from South Korea. Along with its troop reduction plan, the Carter administration eased the American hard-line policy toward North Korea by recategorizing it as a nonhostile country and allowing American citizens to visit it. This policy shift aroused the suspicion of the South Korean government that the U.S. was moving toward the establishment of formal relations with North Korea.

Then came the so-called Koreagate incident, *i.e.*, the South Korean lobbying scandal, which exacerbated the discord between South Korea and the U.S. When U.S. investigators attempted to confirm that the lobbying in question had been carried out under the direction of the Pak government, the latter was reluctant to comply with American requests. The Seoul media made frequent and heated criticism of the American attitude toward South Korea, and even officials of the South Korean government denounced the handling of the Korean question by Congress and the American press, calling it an exercise in "big powerism" or "imperialism." The Carter administration's human rights policy which denounced openly the undemocratic character of the Yushin regime also provoked criticism from the South Korean government and pro-government circles. This unprecedented discord between South Korea and the U.S. was finally brought to an end by Carter's visit to Seoul in late June - early July 1979; discussions during this visit led to agreements on a number of major issues, thus officially terminating the "uncomfortable relations."

However, South Korea's domestic situation was worsening, due to President Pak's sharply increasing suppression of human rights. When Kim Young-sam, president of the major opposition New Democratic Party, told the *New York Times* on September 16, 1979, that "the time has come for the U.S. to make a clear choice between a basically dictatorial regime [...] and the majority who

aspire to democracy," the Pak administration ousted him from the National Assembly. The Carter administration demonstrated its opposition by recalling its ambassador. In the wake of subsequent massive demonstrations against the Yushin regime, KCIA Director Kim Jae-kyu killed President Pak on October 26, 1979.

#### **D. The Period of "Consolidated Alliance"**

Immediately, Prime Minister Choi Kyu-ha, a pro-U.S. career diplomat, assumed the presidency. However, on December 12, 1979, a "new military junta" led by Major Generals Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo staged a coup and took control of South Korea's military power, making Choi their "stooge." The opposition forces led by Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung demanded the restoration of democracy in general and a holding of a popular presidential election as early as possible. However, on May 18, 1980, the "new military junta" usurped the state power through its bloody suppression of the democratization movement at Kwangju.

Both in the "double twelve mutiny" and the "massacre at Kwangju," the U.S. was seen by most South Koreans as a collaborator of the "new military junta." This was because South Korean troops, mobilized in the two instances, operated ultimately under the U.S. commander of the U.S.-Korea Combined Forces. Moreover, when Chun was elected president by the electoral college in January 1981, the Republican administration of President Ronald Reagan invited him to be the first foreign head of state to visit the White House, thus giving special recognition to him. The U.S. President's move made the existing South Korean perception all the more credible.

Reagan's decision underscored the fact that his administration would put its policy priority on security rather than the democratization of South Korea. In fact, throughout his eight-year tenure (January 1981-January 1989), President Reagan always stressed the primacy of the security relationship between the two countries. Hence came the period of "consolidated alliance" at the government-to-government level.

However, the U.S. policy disappointed and even alienated most South Korean dissidents, including university students. The American pressure for the South to open its markets more extensively, which was usually called the "trade friction," fueled

anti-American sentiment. There emerged a strong trend of anti-Americanism among dissenting youths in South Korea. The first, clear manifestation of anti-Americanism was the burning of the U.S. Cultural Center at Pusan by university students in March 1982. A number of incidents demonstrating increased anti-Americanism among university students and intellectuals followed. Based on a series of anti-American movements, the "unorthodox opposition" forces became stronger. Now it became popular among them to demand publicly the termination of the South Korea-U.S. alliance as well as American troop withdrawal and rapprochement with "our brethren" in the North.

However, after 1987 when South Korea's democratization movement became irreversible, the Reagan administration attempted to cope with anti-Americanism in South Korea. A public speech by Gaston Sigur, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, in February 1987, advocating the restoration of civil rule in South Korea was one undeniable sign. Although it made the Chun administration uncomfortable, it encouraged South Korean resistance against the Chun administration which culminated in the "popular uprising of June" 1987. The result was a June 29 Declaration read by Roh Tae-woo, presidential candidate of Chun's Democratic Justice Party, which promised a direct presidential election. Three months later, President Reagan received Roh at the White House, elevating his image as a new national leader. In December, Roh defeated Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung, veteran opposition leaders who ran separately, thus splitting the opposition forces.

Roh's election made him the first president elected by a popular vote since 1972 when the popular presidential election system had been abolished, thus enhancing his legitimacy. Accordingly, when he was inaugurated in February 1988, thus launching the Sixth Republic, he could be more assertive in dealing with external as well as internal affairs. Successfully hosting the Summer Olympic Games at Seoul in 1988 also boosted his prestige. Therefore, he could pursue energetically his own "northern diplomacy" whose primary aim was to expand South Korea's foreign relations with socialist countries, including the Soviet Union and the PRC, and to achieve reconciliation with North Korea. It was natural that the U.S. would feel uneasy about what it considered South Korea's flirtation with the Eastern bloc countries. To allay

any doubts in the U.S. about South Korean determination to keep the alliance strong, President Roh met President Reagan in Washington, D.C. in October 1988. On this occasion, Roh agreed that, beginning in 1989, South Korea would share the cost of the U.S. forces stationed in South Korea. Four months later, the newly-inaugurated President George Bush of the Republican Party visited South Korea, reaffirming the U.S. security commitment to South Korea. Roh reciprocated in October by conferring with Bush at the White House. Despite a continuous (but diminishing) anti-America movement at some university campuses, relations between the two countries in general and relations between the two governments in particular were restored to full friendliness to the extent that they termed their relationship "partners for progress." "Another honeymoon" in relations between Seoul and Washington thus boosted South Korean confidence in dealing with the U.S. Therefore, when U.S. Defense Secretary Richard Cheney announced in February 1990 a plan to withdraw five thousand more American troops by 1993 and to close several American airbases in South Korea, the Roh administration reacted in an increasingly self-confident and accommodating manner.<sup>3</sup>

The fall of socialist regimes in Europe between 1989 and 1991 also helped President Roh. Taking advantage of such dramatic changes in international relations, he could establish diplomatic relations with all East European countries and the Soviet Union. In 1991, he concluded with the North the Inter-Korean Agreement of Reconciliation, Nonaggression, Exchanges and Cooperation. In the process, the Roh administration kept in close contact with the Bush administration. For example, immediately after Roh's first meeting with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev at San Francisco in June 1990, Bush received Roh at the White House. In the same spirit, the two allies amicably concluded the Wartime Host Nation Support (WHNS) Agreement and agreed to transfer peace-time operational control over the South Korean armed forces to the South Korean president in 1991. When Roh succeeded in establishing diplomatic relations between South Korea and the PRC in 1992, the Bush administration also praised its action publicly.

Presidents Roh and Bush also cooperated in their approach to North Korea's nuclear development project under the mountainous areas at Yongbyon near Pyongyang. In the same vein,

when Bush announced on September 27, 1991, that the U.S. would reduce nuclear weapons throughout the world, Roh responded quickly by announcing a far-reaching initiative calling for a nonnuclear Korean peninsula. In December, Roh specified that South Korea would not manufacture, possess, store, deploy, or use nuclear weapons. He went one step further by declaring that "there do not exist any nuclear weapons whatsoever, anywhere in the Republic of Korea." Immediately, the Bush administration concurred with Roh's statement.

North Korea responded quickly by promising that it would also sign the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards agreement. On December 31, 1991, Pyongyang signed with its southern counterpart the Joint Declaration for the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Then, in early January 1992, Presidents Roh and Bush formally offered to cancel the 1992 South Korea-U.S. joint military exercise against North Korea, called Team Spirit. In response, North Korea initialed the IAEA safeguards accord in Vienna.

#### **E. Friction between President Kim Young-sam's Hard-Line and President Clinton's Soft-Line**

In January 1993, Bill Clinton of the Democratic Party was inaugurated as President of the U.S. A month later, Kim Young-sam was inaugurated as the President of the ROK. Immediately Kim showed a conciliatory gesture towards North Korea by repatriating a North Korean partisan who had served a thirty-four-year imprisonment term in the South. However, when pressured either to accommodate a full inspection of sites suspected to be nuclear facilities or to face measures beyond that by the IAEA, North Korea announced in March its intention to withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), thus becoming the first country in NPT history to make such a declaration.

The full analysis of the subsequent "nuclear crisis" and negotiations among countries concerned is beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it is to note that it occasionally caused tensions between South Korea and the U.S. The major reason was that the Clinton administration engaged in a series of bilateral negotiations with North Korea at the exclusion of South Korea. Nevertheless, a "thorough and broad approach" in solving the nuclear issue once and for all was agreed upon at the Kim-Clinton talks in Washington,

D.C. in November 1993.

Accordingly, the U.S. commenced with a practical approach when it informed North Korea of the nature of discussions between Presidents Clinton and Kim. However, serious disagreements between the U.S. and North Korea and between the IAEA and North Korea continued, thus not only heightening military tensions but also increasing the probability of a second war on the peninsula. At this critical juncture, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter visited Pyongyang as well as Seoul and helped broker on June 18 an agreement to hold the first-ever inter-Korean summit talks at Pyongyang on July 25-27, 1994. However, the unexpected death of Kim Il-song on July 8 aborted the summit. Clinton expressed his immediate condolences, stating that "On behalf of the people of the United States, I extend sincere condolences to the people of North Korea on the death of President Kim Il-song. We appreciate his leadership in resuming the talks between our governments." There was no consultation about this statement with South Korea, a fact that prompted anger in some circles in Seoul.

North Korea under the new leadership of Kim Jong-il, the first child of Kim Il-song, praised Clinton's condolences and resumed the bilateral talks with the U.S. in Geneva. President Kim openly objected to the talks nearing completion, contending that "North Korea faces the danger of imminent political and economic collapse" and that "any compromise [at this point] with North Korea will only help prolong its survival." However, he finally accepted the American explanations. On October 21, 1994, the United States and North Korea concluded the "Agreed Framework" under which North Korea would freeze all nuclear activity and comply with the IAEA in return for an international consortium's offer of light-water reactors by 2003, and the two countries would take steps toward the eventual full normalization of relations.

Soon there occurred the accident that would make the Kim administration nervous. In later December, the United States engaged in a series of negotiations with the North at the exclusion of the South for the release of an American copilot captured by the North. When he was released, President Clinton telephoned President Kim to reassure him that the negotiations had not opened a new U.S. channel or line of policy toward Pyongyang. The telephone call was deemed necessary because President Kim was critical of the negotiations.

What was discernible from this case was a substantial difference in the respective North Korea policies of the two allies: While the Clinton administration sought a "soft landing" policy or "engagement policy," the Kim Young-sam administration took a hard-line with the expectation that it would bring about North Korea's early collapse. Such a difference became more manifest in September 1996, when North Korea's submarine incursion of the East Coast of South Korea was discovered. From the beginning, the Clinton administration stressed the primacy of patience and moderation, proposing that the two antagonists avoid further provocative steps. However, terming the U.S. policy an "appeasement policy," the Kim administration began to study military retaliation against twelve strategic targets in the North in case of further provocation. The Clinton administration was shocked. A series of negotiations between Seoul and Washington as well as Pyongyang and Washington followed. At the summit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Manila on November 24, 1996, Presidents Kim and Clinton agreed on the joint statement that called on the North "to take acceptable steps" to resolve the submarine incident, reduce tension, and avoid provocation in the future. In late December, North Korea issued a statement of "deep regret" for the submarine incursion and a pledge that "such an incident will not recur."

### **III. Inter-Korean Rapprochement Preferred to U.S.-Korea Alliance (1998 - 2003)**

#### **A. President Kim Dae-jung's "Sunshine Policy" in Harmony with President Clinton's "Engagement Policy"**

In December 1997, Kim Dae-jung won the presidential election, defeating Lee Hoi-chang of the Grand National Party (GNP) and Lee In-jae of the New National Party, both from Kim Young-sam's New Korea Party. Like Kim Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung was a senior congressman renowned for anti-dictatorship tendencies since the Pak Chong-hee government. However, between the two Kims, there was a sharp difference. While Kim Young-sam was undeniably anti-Communist and representing the "orthodox opposition forces," Kim Dae-jung took the stance of rapprochement with the North and received the full support from the "unorthodox opposition forces." In this vein, a significant

portion of conservative voters tended to regard him a "pro-North leftist," despite his repeated open pledge that he would value liberal democracy, the principles of a market economy and South Korea's alliance with the United States. His opponents cited his affiliation with the leftist party and organization in his twenties as evidence supporting their suspicions. The alignment with archconservative Kim Jong-pil, who was promised the position of premiership, helped some hesitant conservative voters cast their ballots for him.

In this context, it was natural that in contrast to President Kim Young-sam who had maintained a hard-line stance towards the North, President Kim Dae-jung advocated a policy of reconciliation and cooperation towards the North, one which he termed the "sunshine policy." Quoting Aesop's fables in which the sunshine and not the storm takes off one's clothes, he contended that such a policy of benevolence, or "sunshine," could considerably reduce the North's fears, mistrust and hostility towards the South. On the basis of mutual confidence through phased cooperation, he argued that the two Koreas would move toward replacement of the existing armistice agreement with a permanent peace treaty. His concept was that the two Koreas would conclude a peace treaty, and the U.S. and China would endorse it. By doing so, the Cold War structure on the Korean peninsula would be dissolved. Then, the two Koreas would enter a period of North-South confederation which would lead first to a North-South federation, then ultimately to one unified Korea.<sup>4</sup>

One may immediately sense that President Kim Dae-jung's "sunshine policy" was in harmony with President Clinton's policy of "engagement" with North Korea. However, when President Kim's "sunshine policy" was translated into more concrete programs and actions, some disagreements between the two administrations appeared. The most salient difference was on the North Korean nuclear and missile development projects. While the Clinton administration, based on the new findings by spy satellites, warned the Kim administration that North Korea intended to build a new reactor and reprocessing center under the remote mountainous site at Kumchangri, about twenty-five miles northwest of Yongbyon, South Korean officials played down the finding. The Clinton administration also took the North Korean project of developing and selling missiles abroad very seriously. But the Kim administration argued that the primary objective of the project might be to earn



foreign currencies through their limited sales to Middle East countries. In this vein, Kim proposed to Clinton in June 1998 that the U.S. lift its economic sanctions against North Korea. He argued that U.S. sanctions were counterproductive, driving the fearful North Korean leadership further into isolation and alienation. But Clinton merely replied that easing sanctions would require congressional approval.<sup>5</sup>

The North Korean missile tests, *i.e.*, firing of Taepodong 1 over Japan and into the Pacific Ocean, on August 31, 1998, justified Clinton's reservations. Soon he went one step further by openly comparing North Korea to Iraq, saying that it was "also a major concern" because of its chemical and biological weapons. Despite his hard-line approach to North Korea, Clinton was criticized in the Republican-dominated Congress for letting his policy drift. In response, in late November 1998, he appointed William J. Perry, who had dealt directly with the North Korean nuclear crisis as deputy defense secretary in 1993 and in the Geneva agreements as defense secretary in 1994, to review American policy on North Korea. Soon there spread wild speculation that Perry would recommend a hard line North Korea policy to Clinton and that the Clinton administration might initiate preemptive operations against suspected sites. In such a chilling environment, Perry engaged in four rounds of negotiations with North Korea, starting in mid-March 1999. The result was an agreement under which the U.S. would give an additional 400,000 tons of food aid to North Korea in exchange for America's inspection of the suspected site. In May, American investigators discovered that "an underground site [...] is a huge empty tunnel."<sup>6</sup>

In the meantime, from March to September 1999, Lim Tong-won, national security advisor to President Kim, met Perry six times. President Kim also received Perry on March 9 at his presidential office. The message to Perry was simple: Since the two Koreas were seriously discussing a holding of an inter-Korean summit through a secret channel and the chances for the first-ever summit was comparatively high, don't torpedo the chance. The implication was that Perry should recommend a mild North Korea policy option to the White House and the Congress. According to Seoul sources, Perry became sympathetic to President Kim, thus postponing the submission of his report to Congress until September 1999, allowing South Korea sufficient time enough to continue her

secret negotiations with the North.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, central to the report was a peace agreement: the normalization of U.S.-North Korea relations in return for a freeze on North Korea's programs to develop and export weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear bombs and long-range missiles. This approach was designed to supplement the Agreed Framework concluded in 1994 at Geneva. Immediately, North Korea publicly confirmed that it would extend its suspension of tests of long-range missiles like the Taepodong-1 missile to 2003. Encouraged, President Kim publicly announced on March 9, 2000, at Berlin that he would help North Korea recover its wrecked economy through proposed talks with Kim Jong-il. The result was the inter-Korean joint announcement of April 10, 2000, that "President Kim Dae-jung will visit Pyongyang from 12 to 14 June 2000 and will meet Chairman Kim Jong-il." In actuality, the first-ever inter-Korean summit was held on June 13-15, 2000, at Pyongyang and on the last day, "Kim Dae-jung, President of the ROK, and Kim Jong-il, Chairman of the DPRK National Defense Commission" issued a historic five-point joint declaration.

A detailed analysis of the secret inter-Korean negotiations leading to the April 10 announcement is beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it is to point out that these events incurred some disagreement, friction and even suspicion in South Korea-U.S. relations. Above all, when the South Korean National Intelligence Service (NIS), the successor to the CIA, informed the American CIA that the North-South accord to hold an inter-Korean summit would be publicly announced just thirty-six hours later, it was known that both the White House and the State Department were embarrassed and resented the South's short notice.

More important was the general tone underlying the joint declaration, which was clearly oriented to reconciliation between the two Koreas. From the American viewpoint, central to the declaration was Article 1 which declared that the two Koreas agreed to pursue national unification based on the principle of independence. "Independence" meant "national autonomy" or "self reliance." Given this fact, the Clinton administration worried that this item might stimulate serious controversies on the rationality of the continuous stationing of the American troops in the South. As if to allay worries from the U.S. (as well as from a sizable conservative bloc in South Korea), President Kim publicly stated that Kim Jong-il had assured him that the North would recognize

the stationing of the American troops in the South. However, the North never officially responded to that statement. Then, a week after President Kim's return to Seoul, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Seoul, meeting President Kim to receive full explanations.

Growing anti-American demonstrations following the joint declaration also received serious attention from the Clinton administration. Indeed, as if influenced by the "peaceful unification euphoria," the number of anti-American demonstrations increased. While some protesters demanded that the U.S. revise the SOFA to allow South Korea greater jurisdiction over American soldiers in criminal cases and that numerous massacre cases of South Korean civilians by the U.S. forces during the Korean War be investigated thoroughly, other protesters demanded that the U.S. withdraw its troops from South Korea.

However, the Clinton administration soon officially supported the summit and sought an improvement in U.S. relations with North Korea. As a result, on October 12, 2000, the two countries agreed to turn their hitherto hostile relations into friendly ones and to convert the armistice agreement into a "peace arrangement." While North Korea renounced terrorism and pledged not to launch long-range missiles of any kind while talks continued on the American demands for a permanent freeze on missile tests, Clinton agreed to visit Pyongyang before his term ended. To organize Clinton's trip, Secretary Albright made a historic visit to Pyongyang and met Kim Jong-il on October 23-24. The two exchanged ideas on how to solve the North Korean missile development question. It became more apparent than ever that North Korea was working feverishly to engineer its removal from Washington's terror list, which would help it qualify for financial aid from international organizations like the World Bank.

#### **B. President's Kim and Bush in Substantive Disagreements**

The election of Republican George W. Bush in November 2000 changed the picture. Clinton decided not to visit North Korea and the Clinton team's diplomatic push fell short. With the inauguration of the Republican administration in January 2001, signs of uneasiness multiplied in Seoul concerning a possible change in direction in Washington's policy toward North Korea. This was because many of Bush's senior diplomatic and security

advisers advocated policies toward North Korea that contrasted sharply with the strategy of the Clinton administration. Although Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and his supporters defended Clinton's "engagement policy," hard-liners led by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice urged that North Korea be isolated and, if possible, pushed to the brink of collapse. Bush himself signaled a tough posture by declining to continue Clinton's talks with North Korea, saying negotiations would not resume anytime soon. He added he wanted time to review the past talks and U.S. policy.

At this point, one may discuss a report entitled "A Comprehensive Approach to North Korea" which had been issued in March 1999 by the Institute of National Strategic Studies. This report was based on the findings of a study group on Korea policy led by Richard Armitage and Paul Wolfowitz. Since the former was appointed deputy secretary of state and the latter, deputy defense secretary in the Bush administration, the report merits serious attention.

First, the report argued that the 1994 Agreed Framework had done little to facilitate a "soft landing" in North Korea. Then, it called for accelerating the process for resolving site questions as raised in the Agreed Framework. On missiles, it called for a near-term end to testing and exports, and, over the long term, for the North's acceptance of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). On conventional forces, it recommended the U.S. table confidence-building proposals that would begin a process leading to conventional forces reduction, while at the same time cautioning that any new peace mechanism should be linked to the reduction of the conventional threat. As for economic assistance, efforts were to be aimed at helping North Korean restructuring and support given to actions that opened its economy to market forces. South Korean approval of large-scale investment was to be tied to this process.

South Korean officials expressed alarm that the Bush administration was rushing ahead with plans to develop a missile shield or MD (Missile Defense) system before seriously testing North Korea's willingness to abandon its long- and medium-range missile programs, recalling that North Korea's development of medium- and long-range missiles was commonly cited as the leading justification for the Bush administration's antimissile program. South Korean officials also expressed concern that

Washington would not seek to engage North Korea on other issues, and, moreover, that the new administration would try to discourage South Korea from providing increasing amounts of economic aid to the North.

Then occurred "a diplomatic blunder" which strained the relations between Seoul and Washington. In late February 2001, President Kim held talks with Russian President Vladimir V. Putin at Seoul and publicly suggested that he shared Russia's distaste for President Bush's plans for a missile shield, saying that the 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) was "a cornerstone of strategic stability" around the world. This angered the Bush administration, which was attempting its substantial revision. Its protests to the Kim administration led to a half-hearted retraction of the statement as soon as Putin had left Seoul.

From a sense of urgency that he should coordinate North Korea policies with the U.S., President Kim hurriedly went to Washington on March 6. Senior officials of the Bush administration indicated that they continued to view North Korea as a major threat as well as a "rogue state" and that they were clearly wary that President Kim's peace initiative had moved too fast with too few concessions from the North. The result was a disaster for Kim. In sum, he suffered a setback as President Bush cast doubt on North Korea's trustworthiness.

On the other hand, the advent of the Bush administration encouraged South Korean conservative forces, including the major opposition Grand National Party led by Lee Hoi-chang, who had been narrowly defeated by Kim Dae-jung in the 1997 presidential election. These opponents had great doubts about Kim Dae-jung in general and his North Korea policy in particular. It should be recalled that Lee had openly opposed Clinton's projected visit to Pyongyang, arguing that it would encourage the Stalinist dictator.

Three months after the Kim-Bush summit, President Bush announced on June 6 that his government would restart negotiations with North Korea on a broad range of issues, including that nation's production and export of missiles and its deploying of soldiers on the South Korean border. He also said one of his goals was to allow North Korea to "demonstrate the seriousness of its desire for improved relations." According to a senior American official, this phrase intended to telegraph the fact that he was not interested in rewarding "bad behavior." Soon North Korea responded negatively.

A North Korean foreign ministry spokesman accused Bush of setting the agenda for the talks unilaterally. He said the U.S. must remove its troops from South Korea before any discussions of North Korean troop deployments would be possible, adding that "with the American request to include conventional arms in the talks, we cannot construe this otherwise than an American attempt to disarm the DPRK through negotiations."<sup>8</sup> Soon, the basic position of the Bush administration worked out after an intensive review became concrete and clear. To put it bluntly, it was that "an accord that focuses on missiles is no longer sufficient." Administration officials elaborated: "Only a comprehensive program to limit North Korea's military potential can serve as a foundation for improved relations with the West. So North Korea must make simultaneous concessions on nuclear issues and conventional arms, and any missile agreement must be subject to extensive verification."<sup>9</sup> The Bush administration's proposal to discuss conventional troop deployments in its talks with North Korea marked a significant departure from the policy of the Clinton administration. Previous efforts had focused almost exclusively on eliminating the threat of nuclear weapons production in the North and ending the testing and sale of North Korean ballistic missiles.

Then, on August 4, 2001, in a joint declaration issued at Moscow, Kim Jong-il demanded that American troops be withdrawn from South Korea, saying it would speed reunification talks on the peninsula. President Putin expressed "understanding" of the North Korean position. Since President Kim Dae-jung repeated that at the Pyongyang summit his northern counterpart had promised that he would not object if the American troops stayed on, the joint declaration placed President Kim in an awkward position. Immediately, GNP President Lee commented that the declaration showed that Kim had lied to the people or had been deceived by the North on American troop withdrawal. Notwithstanding, on August 15, 2001, Kim called on the U.S. to make its best efforts to resume talks with North Korea.

### **C. Presidents Kim and Bush after the September 11 Terror Attacks**

The terror attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, by Al Qaeda had an immediate and radical impact upon American relations with the rest of the world,

including the two Koreas. Since the Bush administration intended to warn states or organizations which shielded or encouraged terrorists, many observers naturally looked to North Korea, which was on the American list of state-sponsors of terrorism. At first, North Korea seemed to try not to irritate the United States. A day after the terror attacks, its foreign ministry announced that it opposed terrorism and sponsorship of any kind of organized or official terrorism. Its caution was again expressed two days after the U.S. initiation of attacks against the Taliban regime of Afghanistan, shielding bin Laden and Al Qaeda terrorists, on October 7, 2001. However, such actions did not mollify the Bush administration.

Recognizing this fact, North Korea soon changed its attitude. First, it not only cancelled previously-scheduled reunions of separated families but also refused a South Korean proposal to issue a North-South joint declaration opposing terrorism. Secondly, it sharpened its tone toward the Bush administration. Then, on October 16, President Bush referred to Kim Jong-il as "being so suspicious, so secretive" during a news conference with Asian editors. Immediately, a North Korean foreign ministry spokesman characterized Bush's remarks as not being diplomatic and being beyond common sense. However, he left room for future negotiations between North Korea and the U.S. by saying that "we are not against resuming dialogue with the U.S. and favor improved relations." Bush's response remained negative. At his second meeting with President Kim in Shanghai, the venue of the ninth summit talks among the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) member countries, on October 19, he warned against threats from North Korea, saying that "we will be prepared to defend and stand side by side with our longtime friend, the South Korean people." Five days later, North Korea responded by saying that "our people are determined to make Mr. Bush pay dearly for his remarks." However, it should be pointed out that North Korea expressed its intent to participate in the international anti-terror coalition by signing both the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Financing and the International Convention against the Taking of Hostages on November 12. This action seemed to reflect its expectations for future improvement in its relations with the U.S.

Still the Bush administration did not show any change in its

stance towards North Korea. Rather, it went one step further by publicly announcing that "North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Libya and Syria are developing germ weapons." The Bush administration's public accusation against North Korea immediately incurred wild speculations that Pyongyang might become a target for the U.S. military after the Taliban. Although "there is no link to Al Qaeda and no evidence of active proliferation of weapons since September 11," one senior administration said, "you can't say you are serious about neutralizing weapons of mass destruction and ignore Kim Jong-il."<sup>10</sup>

As implied above, the Afghan War naturally placed President Kim Dae-jung in an awkward position between his policy of reconciliation with North Korea and Bush's policy of confrontation with North Korea. At first, he attempted to pursue both goals simultaneously: to demonstrate South Korean support of the U.S. war against terrorism, on the one hand, and to reactivate inter-Korean relations. Accordingly, he said in his special address to the nation on October 8, 2001, that he fully supported the U.S. military campaign against the Taliban government of Afghanistan. Immediately, he met GNP President Lee and announced in a joint statement with Lee that the two parties would support the U.S.-led war against terrorism. As a result, the Kim Dae-jung administration could send four hundred fifty noncombat troops without igniting any serious controversy within South Korea. At the same time, he reiterated his proposals to the North for an expansion of inter-Korean cooperation. However, when North Korea declared that war in Afghanistan could not be justified under any circumstances, it seemed that President Kim's effort to satisfy both the United States and North Korea was destined to fail.

This point became clearer when the Afghan War deepened the differences between the United States and North Korea. The former underscored the need to verify North Korean missile production as well as the research and development of nuclear warheads. North Korea responded that it "had done what she was obliged to do to combat terrorism." Some South Korean analysts defended North Korea by arguing that its intent to develop missiles was not to use them for attacks upon other countries but to earn foreign currencies through their sales. The unification minister also defended North Korea by publicly stating that its leaders might be under "a sense of crisis" as a result of the seemingly hard-line



American position. In the new year news conference on January 14, 2002, President Kim called for "a face-saving formula for North Korea," hinting that he hoped President Bush would not exacerbate tensions with North Korea by publicly criticizing it.

#### **D. President Bush's Union Message on North Korea and Talks with President Kim**

Relations between South Korea and the United States as well as North Korea and the United States entered a new phase on January 29, 2002, when President Bush included North Korea along with Iran and Iraq as belonging to "an axis of evil," arming to threaten the peace of the world, in his state of the union message. As for North Korea, he termed it "a regime aiming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens." He continued: "The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons." Two days later American Ambassador to Seoul Thomas Hubbard said that President Bush discounted President Kim's desire "to find a way to save face for North Korea." "Saving one's face is not the American way of thinking at least when it comes to North Korea. It is the American style to engage in dialogue in a pragmatic and straightforward manner," he stressed.

North Korea's reaction was immediate. On February 1, its foreign ministry spokesman stated that "there has been no precedent in the modern history of DPRK-U.S. relations for the U.S. president's policy speech in which he made undisguised threats of aggression against the DPRK, an independent and sovereign state. This is, in fact, little short of a declaration of war against the DPRK." The Kim Dae-jung administration seemed to be embarrassed, since President Bush's remarks questioned the validity of President Kim's policy of lenience with North Korea. Accordingly, the Kim administration expressed its concerns that Bush's remarks could destabilize the Korean peninsula. Its unification minister even argued openly that the North Korean weapons pointed out by Bush "are not for the purpose of attacking the South, but to serve as a bargaining chip when negotiating with powerful countries." He added "even if the North does possess nuclear weapons, she would be reluctant to make use of them in the small Korean peninsula."

As the Bush administration's policy of toughness towards

the North became crystal clear, the opposition forces representing a sizable conservative bloc heightened their criticism against the Kim Dae-jung administration. They criticized the administration for its "easygoing judgment" on the "grave situation" with regards to the North Korean missile development project as well as nuclear, biological and chemical warfare programs. They also worried that "President Kim's unrealistic approach to North Korea disregarding her offensive intent armed with weapons of mass destruction results in conflict with President Bush's policy." In conclusion, they warned that President Kim's policy might weaken the South Korea-U.S. alliance. Then, some "progressive" civic organizations or supporters of President Kim's "sunshine policy" branded them "anti-nation, anti-peace forces." It became clear that Bush's remarks on North Korea had ignited serious controversies within the South Korean society, making for "partisan political warfare".

Now it became evident that very real differences or substantive disagreements existed between the Kim and Bush administrations on North Korea. According to some critics, President Bush's warning that North Korea was part of an "axis of evil," prior to the February 20 South Korea-U.S. summit, served as a warning to President Kim's policy of lenience with the North as well. They argued that Seoul's differences with Washington would only get worse if the Bush administration chose to eliminate weapons of mass destruction as the second stage of its war on terrorism. At this juncture, President Kim replaced his foreign minister on February 4 with Choi Sung-hong, deputy foreign minister and former ambassador to United Kingdom, who had little diplomatic experience with the U.S. Some local analysts interpreted this move as a demonstration of Kim's displeasure with Bush. At the same time, his MDP openly criticized Bush on the rationale that his "tough policy, which has made us recall the anachronistic cold war period," might endanger the peace and security on the Korean peninsula. Several "progressive" congressmen visited the U.S. Embassy at Seoul to deliver their protests against Bush's remarks.

The situation became more complex when the dismissed foreign minister, Han, said publicly that he could cite reasons for Bush's remarks. He elaborated that U.S. foreign policy in general and North Korea policy in particular had changed sharply since the September 11 episode. However, some ruling party congressmen and "progressive" activists argued that Bush's remarks were

calculated to induce South Korea to purchase from the U.S. F-15K jets from the Boeing Company for South Korea's next-generation fighter program, code-named "F-X." (Some opposition GNP congressmen also agreed on this point.) Boeing was one of four foreign bidders for South Korea's multi billion-dollar arms procurement program. From this assumption, they insisted that since Bush's remarks had emanated from a conspiracy within the U.S. military-industrial complex, the Kim Dae-jung administration should not surrender to the Bush administration's pressure." "At the crossroad between U.S. policy of war against North Korea and inter-Korean rapprochement policy," they recommended that the Kim administration should choose the latter. The North Korean official media praised anti-U.S. activities in the South.

Recognizing the seriousness of the issue, President Kim Dae-jung began to show his hope of moderating policy differences between Seoul and Washington. Admitting for the first time that there was a gap between the two administrations over dealing with the North, the president stressed on February 7 that "the U.S.-South Korea security alliance that has existed since the Korean War is the most important thing for us now." While ordering action by officials to narrow policy differences with the Bush administration over North Korea before meeting Bush on February 20, he warned against "excessive criticism in our society against the U.S. due to its attitude toward North Korea."

Against this backdrop, the two Presidents had their third summit talks on February 20 at the Blue House, the South Korean version of the American White House. At the joint press conference after a fifty-nine-minute meeting, both presidents described the summit as "frank and open," indicating that differences remained over North Korea. Bush addressed South Korean anxiety over his "axis of evil," remarks, saying that "I made the remark because I love freedom. I am troubled by a regime that starves its people, that is closed and untransparent; and I am deeply concerned about the people of North Korea." On the other hand, his assurance that the U.S. had no intention of invading North Korea and that the U.S. would observe its commitment to a firm South Korea-U.S. alliance as well as his agreement to address diplomatically WMD seemed to have allayed South Korean worries over the political instability on the peninsula that had been heightened by Bush's labeling of North Korea as part of an "axis of

evil." However, when the White House published *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, on September 17, 2002, a policy which advocated a preemptive strike against North Korea, the Kim administration and its supporters denounced it, arguing that it might ignite a second Korean War.

#### **IV. Bilateral Readjustment in the Alliance? (2003 - present)**

##### **A. The Changed Domestic Structure in South Korea's Foreign Policy and the Election of Roh Moo-hyun to be President**

What has been written thus far has indicated that the domestic structure in South Korea's foreign policy has substantially changed. Anti-Americanism expanded rapidly after the early 1980s and took root in the traditionally conservative South Korean society. In a poll conducted by the Seoul-based *Naeilsinmun* [Tomorrow Newspaper] in August 2000, 58.3% of the respondents showed negative attitudes towards the U.S. troops in the South. While 42.6% agreed that they were stationed in the South for the sake of their country's own interest, only 26.5% agreed that they were stationed for South Korea's security. In a poll conducted by *Wolkan Chosun* [Monthly Korea] which was published in its January 2002 issue, the United States was ranked as the second most disliked country, just after Japan, by the South Korean people.

Anti-Americanism was easily linked to support for inter-Korean rapprochement, thanks to South Korea's rising nationalistic sentiment, which had been ignited by the June 2000 inter-Korean summitry and fanned by the superb performance of the national soccer team in the 2002 World Cup.<sup>12</sup> It was also matched with a changed South Korean perception of the North Korean military threat. In the 2002 Gallup-Korea poll published in July 28, 2003 *Chosun Ibo* [Korea Daily], only 33% of the respondents agreed that there existed danger from North Korean aggression. It was a sharp decline from the 1992 Gallup-Korea poll in which 69% of the respondents had shared the same view. Hence spread the simplified slogan, "inter-Korean cooperation rather than Korean-American cooperation," among a significant sector of the youth and left-leaning intellectuals.

In such a changed socio-psychological milieu, a tragedy ignited a massive anti-American campaign. On June 13, 2002, two middle-school girls, Sin Hyo-soon and Sim Mi-sun, were crushed to

death by an armored vehicle operated by two American soldiers at Uijongbu, a city belonging to the Province of Kyonggi. When a U.S. military jury cleared the soldiers of negligent homicide charges on November 21 and 22, it touched off a public outcry for an amendment to the SOFA, which dictates the legal status of 37,000 American soldiers stationed in South Korea. Beginning November 30, a growing number of South Koreans took part in a daily candlelit vigil in Kwanghwamun, the heart of central Seoul, to mourn the two girls. Soon the candlelit vigils were expanded to other major cities, culminating in the middle of December when about 70,000 demonstrators took the streets in and around sixty cities and localities across the nation. The participants were not always anti-America. However, a series of candlelit vigils, organized by "unorthodox opposition" leaders were seen as anti-America, when some protesters tore apart several American flags.

The incident and subsequent events influenced the presidential election held on December 19, 2002. They clearly solidified "unorthodox opposition forces" that tended to favor Roh Moo-hyun from the MDP, who proudly confessed that "I have never visited the United States." He added, "If elected, I will deal with the Bush administration with national assertiveness. I will not *kowtow* to Washington. The ROK-U.S. alliance should be transformed into horizontal relations," *i.e.*, "equal partnership." He also criticized the Bush administration's policy towards the North, arguing that the U.S. should not corner the North and proposing that the South should continue its economic assistance to the North. On the issue of the North's nuclear development project, he made it clear that the North should give it up immediately and totally. However, he left the strong impression that he was skeptical of what the Bush administration's high-ranking officials said on this issue. For example, James Kelly, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, had notified the Kim Dae-jung administration on October 5, 2002, after returning from a three-day visit to Pyongyang, that there was suspicion that North Korea was developing nuclear weapons through the highly enriched uranium (HEU) program. To such important remarks, Kim did not comment at all. He even suggested that South Korea should play the role of mediator between North Korea and the United States, arguing that the North Korean nuclear issue should be solved only by peaceful means through dialogues between North Korea and the United

States. This position was in accordance with the North Korean position. It was no surprise that the Bush administration showed displeasure, since it advocated that the issue should be solved within the framework of multilateral talks including at least China and South Korea, while not precluding the use of military force on North Korea, mainly through preemptive strikes.

Lee Hoi-chang, the GNP candidate, criticized Roh. But Roh's campaign managers attempted to portray Lee as an "anti-national, archconservative politician representing outdated cold war forces." By a slim margin, Roh won the election. Political analysts attributed the margin to the solid and concentrated voting for Roh from young Koreans in their twenties and thirties. In the *Dong-A Ibo* poll published in its April 1, 2003 edition, 47.3% of the respondents in their twenties and 33.5% of the respondents in their thirties expressed their dislike of the United States, while 20.1% in their twenties and 14.8% in their thirties expressed their dislike of North Korea.

### **B. President Roh's Attempts at Readjustment**

Roh's views did not change after the election. Rather, he openly raised the possibility of a U.S. troop withdrawal from South Korea. Soon his envoy to the Bush administration was reported to have said that many of South Korean youths would rather see North Korea develop nuclear weapons than collapse. Indeed, some South Koreans tended to believe that the North would aim its nuclear weapons, assuming it had any, at Americans or Japanese, not its southern "brethren."

Roh's views on the North and his disagreement with Bush were well expressed in his interview with *Newsweek* on February 19, 2003, six days before his inauguration. He said: "I want to stress that North Korea was opening up and that it is already changing. If we give them what they desperately want - regime security, normal treatment and economic assistance - they will be willing to give up their nuclear ambitions. We should not, therefore, treat them as criminals but as counterparts for dialogue." Against this backdrop, the interviewers of *Newsweek* wrote that "Factoring in Roh's reputation as a left-leaning social activist, commentators in Washington have begun to question Seoul's loyalty as an ally, and to wonder whether America's best option on the Korean Peninsula isn't to beat a hasty retreat."<sup>13</sup> Such American mistrust was

partially revealed in an article contributed by William Safire, a leading conservative columnist, to the *New York Times* on March 10, 2003. Safire regarded South Korea not as an American ally but one of the "neutrals" like Indonesia, proposing that "America's strategic interest in this [...] era is to let the strong South defend its territory."

President Roh's soft views on the North were reiterated in his interview with *The Times* published on March 3, 2003, two days after an incident in which "four North Korean MIG fighters tailed and [...] came within 50 feet of an unarmed American RC-135 surveillance plane over international waters" in the East Sea. Far from condemning the North, he advised the United States "not to go too far" in its dealings with the North. He continued: "It was a very predictable chain of events. . . . [because] the United States had increased its aerial surveillance of North Korea's reopened nuclear facilities." Repeating his often-expressed view that only direct talks between the United States and North Korea could resolve their nuclear standoff, he said: "When I meet President Bush, I will convince him by saying that although North Korea does not meet the values of the United States and may not be likeable from their standpoint, there is a possibility to improve their relationship."

A week later, President Roh reiterated the idea that his administration should take an "independent and autonomous line" in dealing with North Korea. In as much as the positions of his administration and the Bush administration differed on the North Korean nuclear issue, he said, we must choose between glossing over our differences and making them public. "I have concluded that the latter option is better from the standpoint of appealing to world public opinion," he added.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, President Roh also began to show "change" in his views. In his inaugural speech on February 25, 2003, although he proposed that the South Korea-U.S. alliance "mature into a more reciprocal and equitable relationship," he stressed that the alliance "has made a significant contribution in guaranteeing our security and economic development. The Korean people are deeply grateful for this. We will foster and develop this cherished alliance." Two weeks later he repeated his statement on the alliance's value: "The staunch Korea-U.S. combined defense arrangement is greatly contributing to our national security. The solid alliance should be maintained even more so. There can be no

change whatsoever in that principle." Soon, he agreed with the Bush administration that talks between Washington and Pyongyang needed to occur within a multilateral framework. Foreign Minister Yoon Young-kwan indicated that it would be in the North's interest to accept a multilateral framework.<sup>15</sup>

Then, the issue of redeployment or even withdrawal of U.S. troops to areas south of the Han River became increasingly salient, with the strong implication that the U.S. would not be responsible for immediate and direct deterrence in case of the North's provocation against the South. President Roh responded with remarks, stressing the importance of the alliance between the two countries. In his speech at the 59<sup>th</sup> commencement ceremony of the Korea Military Academy delivered on March 11, he pledged that his administration would "discuss all matters related to the U.S. forces under principles laid out by the firm alliance between the two countries." Next day, he assured Bush by telephone that his foreign and North Korean policies would be in full accordance with those of the United States and that he would value the ROK-U.S. alliance more than anything else. Moreover, despite strong opposition from his "left-leaning" supporters during the presidential election, in early April he finally decided to support the U.S.-led war against Iraq, by sending troops, albeit non-combat ones.

President Roh's readjustment became even clearer during his visit to the United States from May 13 to 17, 2003. He attempted to strike a conciliatory note toward the United States, which was seen by most news media as a marked change from his past reputation. For example, he said, "I have envied the values of freedom and human rights that the United States pursues. My own civic activity and politics were aimed at such American values." He went one step further by saying, "although the United States and its people are still skeptical about South Korea and its president, the summit will completely resolve such doubts." Such a dramatic turnaround bewildered both his supporters and critics. On May 14, he held a summit conference with President Bush. The following "Korea-U.S. Joint Statement" showed that Roh agreed with Bush on the North Korean issue. Although they agreed to pursue a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear crisis, they did not exclude using economic pressure or military forces as final options. Moreover, they declared that they would "not tolerate" atomic weapons in North Korea and would consider "further steps" in case



North Korea increased its threats to peace and stability on the peninsula. They also vowed to work with international allies, including Japan, China and Russia to eliminate its nuclear arms "completely, verifiably and irreversibly." Particularly, President Roh pledged that "future inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation will be conducted in light of developments on the North Korean nuclear issue."<sup>16</sup> In late July, he decided that the ROK troops should join the Stabilization Force to be stationed in Iraq under the leadership of the United States.

What motivated President Roh to readjust his stance? One factor was the sharply-increasing criticism of the "sunshine policy" in South Korea. About this time, a series of investigations led by special prosecutors under the newly-enacted law passed by the GNP-led National Assembly revealed evidence that Kim Dae-jung had "bought" a summit with Kim Jong-il, giving the North Korean leader a huge sum of U.S. dollars in advance. Revelations of the "cash-for-summit scandal" weakened the summit's historic stature and caused damage to Roh's administration, which pledged to continue Kim Dae-jung's generous policies towards the North. Moreover, if the money had been spent on weapons, it could have shaken the engagement policy to its base. He also came to understand that continuous conflict with the Bush administration might severely hurt his leadership in light of the fact that a conservative backlash was increasingly evident in South Korea.

The final factor was his realistic reassessment of a time when the U.S.-centered world order would be strengthened by the U.S. victory in Iraq. Moreover, if the United States were to withdraw its military forces, South Korea would be forced to increase its defense expenditures astronomically.

President Roh was partially rewarded for his turnabout. At the third round of the "Future of the ROK-U.S. Alliance Policy Initiative" talks held in Honolulu on July 22-23, 2003, the two sides pledged to strengthen the alliance further, to improve its combined defense capabilities, and to provide a stable long-term stationing environment for the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK). The United States also reaffirmed its commitment to the maintenance of security on the peninsula. On the other hand, the ROK had to acquiesce to the U.S. schedule for the accelerated transfer of some military missions. This included Seoul's sole responsibility for guarding the Joint Security Area (JSA) within the DMZ, from the USFK to the ROK

as early as 2004, as well as an early redeployment plan for the Yongsan Garrison and the U.S. Second Infantry Division to the south of the Han River. This would now take place in a two-phased process by the target year of 2006, instead of 2009 as initially desired by Seoul. At the same time, the two sides decided to paper over the extremely sensitive issue of the ROK-U.S. combined command relationship and postponed its substantive deliberations until 2005.<sup>17</sup>

## **V. Conclusion**

As shown above, the South Korea-U.S. alliance has experienced three distinctive periods. In the first, the two allies regarded North Korea as their common enemy and the *raison d'être* of the alliance was to deter aggression from the North. In other words, the alliance in general and the stationing of the American troops in particular were regarded as essential for the security and national survival of the ROK. In this regard, there was a broad national consensus in South Korea, although after the 1980s the anti-American sentiment grew steadily.

In reviewing the alliance in this first period, one may differentiate three sub-periods, although the periodization is not always clear-cut. Since its inception in the mid-1960s when it concluded a basic treaty with Japan and sent its troops to South Vietnam, South Korea was a client of the American patron, who played the role of paternalistic protector. Politically, diplomatically, economically, and militarily, South Korea depended heavily upon the United States. In this context, one termed the relations between the two countries "an unequal alliance," "a protectorate alliance," "an asymmetrical alliance," or "a one-sided alliance."

The period between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s (or the late 1970s) was transitory. In this period, two important events deeply affected the alliance between the two countries and formed a basis of a new relationship. One was South Korea's diplomatic "normalization" with Japan (1965), and the other was its involvement in the Vietnam War (1965-1973). The two events played major roles in South Korea's economic growth which was defined in 1976 by the World Bank as "one of the outstanding success stories of international development." Because of its economic growth, the South Korean economy, termed one of "Newly Industrialized Economies (NIEs)," could become less

dependent on aid from the U.S. Accordingly, the South could play the role of a junior partner in the alliance.

Dating from the mid-1970s (or the late 1970s), South Korea-U.S. relations began to turn to "transpacific alliance with regard to the 'alliance of reciprocity'" or "partners." This point was particularly true in economic relations. It should be remembered that South Korea, whose GDP ranks between the eleventh (in 1997) and the thirteenth (in 2000) among one hundred seventy-six countries, was the sixth trade partner to the U.S., while the U.S. was the first trade partner for South Korea. This made relations between the two countries interdependent. However, it should be remembered that the basic characteristics of the military relationship between the two countries did not change.

The advent of the Kim Dae-jung administration, in accordance with a shift in the domestic structure of South Korea's foreign policy, changed the whole picture. Seoul now tended to regard North Korea not as an enemy which threatened the ROK's security but as a partner entitled to pursue national cooperation and ultimate unification with the South. North Korea was seen as defensive when facing the South Korea-U.S. alliance. Even the North Korean nuclear development project was seen as a bargaining chip in its dealings with the United States. As long as the Clinton administration adopted the engagement policy towards North Korea, there appeared no substantial conflict between the two. However, upon the inauguration of the Bush administration, sharp disagreements on North Korea marked the relations between the two administrations.

It is important to note that conflict between the two allies is unique in the history of their alliance. In the past, there had occurred disputes whenever the United States attempted to improve its relations with North Korea, since South Korea did not want such a change. In this sense, a keen Korea observer wrote that "The U.S. and South Korea have always been a bit like spouses as well as allies, and Seoul's basic demand of Washington has been for diplomatic fidelity: thou shalt not commit adultery with North Korea."<sup>18</sup> But the case became, in fact, just the opposite. South Korea wanted to pursue rapprochement with the North, and the United States opposed that policy.

What will be the future of the alliance? A few activists have advocated a unified Korean peninsula through neutralization at

the exclusion of an alliance with any foreign countries, including the United States. Other analysts foresee that the alliance will become a much looser arrangement than in the past. For example, Professor Hong Hyun-ik has suggested that "Over the long term, the ROK-U.S. alliance could gradually evolve into a limited military alliance primarily for joint military exercises, and finally move towards a political alliance rather than towards a regional bilateral security alliance, because the latter will cost much more than the former and could give rise to distrust from China." He believes that "this transformation should coincide with the birth of a multilateral cooperative security system."<sup>19</sup>

In the similar context, Professor Kim Sung-han has proposed that "After the threats from North Korea disappear, the existing military alliance between South Korea and the United States should be expanded into a regional alliance." Its aim would be to head off the regional rivalry between China and Japan, and to safeguard the sea lines linking Northeast Asia and the Middle East, the source of energy for Korea, China and Japan." He continues: Korea, which has historically been perceived as a recipient of U.S. security policies, would become a provider of regional stability by hosting a U.S. regional force based in Korea. The United States will likely seek a new form of alliance in Northeast Asia, moving from the current bilateral alliance with South Korea aimed at checking the North Korean threat toward a more regional focus for ensuing stability in Northeast Asia. Under the assumption that both countries will want to maintain their bilateral alliance, they should adjust the basic thrust of the current alliance while reworking priorities to promote a broader regional security network.<sup>20</sup>

In sum, the alliance between the two countries has developed "complex interdependence" or "multi-dimensional interdependence." Therefore, although one may foresee ups and downs in the alliance, one may also conclude with caution that the alliance will not be easily eroded or even dismantled. Despite the continuation of anti-American sentiment, there still remains a strong hope that the alliance will contribute to peace, stability and prosperity, not only on the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia but also in the Asia-Pacific region. In this context, one may expect that a "comprehensive and dynamic ROK-U.S. alliance" as expressed in the Roh-Bush Joint Statement will materialize. However, the two allies should pay more attention to the trends of South Korean

public opinion in particular. The most recent Gallup-Korea poll published in the July 28, 2003, Chosun Ibo showed that 44% of the respondents in their twenties and 49% of the respondents who are college students regard the United States as "the most threatening country" to ROK security. The poll showed that 32% of all respondents shared the same view. Without considering domestic public sentiment, it would become harder for any South Korean administration to handle the issue of alliance with the United States in a rational and satisfactory way.

## Notes

The views expressed in this paper are the writer's own and do not represent those of the *Dong-A Ilbo* ("East Asia Daily Newspaper"), Seoul. Most information and data related to speeches, talks and events quoted in this paper are from the *Dong-A Ilbo*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *International Herald Tribune*.

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