Anti-Americanism in South Korea and the Future of the U.S. Presence

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The United States has been intricately involved in the politics of South Korea since the end of the Second World War. Today, more than 37,000 United States troops remain stationed in South Korea. The United States presence has been a topic of contention on both sides of the Pacific in the past. Current international events coupled with political-social changes in South Korea have made the future of the U.S. presence more critical.

This paper presents an analysis of South Korean anti-Americanism. It traces the key current issues affecting anti-Americanism and looks at the sources of these issues. The paper then considers how anti-Americanism will be affected by generally accepted unification scenarios.

Keywords: South Korea, anti-Americanism, Korean unification

1. ANTI-AMERICANISM

Anti-Americanism is neither a new, nor understudied, phenomenon, but rather a fashionable and popular trend that has ebbed and waned with bouts of American interaction and isolation in global affairs. America has passed from being the saviour to the great Satan more than once throughout its short history. Over time anti-Americanism has taken on a multitude of overlapping forms brought together by reactions to perceived threats to culture, economics and national identity.

Commentators have noted the steady rise of anti-Americanism since the end of the Cold War, but it was the outpouring of anti-Americanism post September 11 that surprised most Americans. Hardly before the embers had cooled it seemed as if solidarity had passed to approbation on a near global scale. Succinctly stated in Asia Week magazine: “Chinese reacted with a touch of sympathy, some scepticism – and a large dose of anti-Americanism to the terrorist attacks against the U.S.”1 Similar reactions could be found across the globe from Germany to Brazil and from Canada to Indonesia.

Much of the criticism derives from the rise in American unilaterism. The Bush administration’s detachment from multilateralism has been marked by the failure to sign the Kyoto Protocol, preconditions set for America’s participation in the International Criminal Court, abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty for National Missile Defence (NMD), and more recently, trade measures such as the Farm Bill and steel tariff increases. Every measure has further widened the differences between the United States and the international community at a time when globalisation is bringing the international community closer together. Even in the aftermath of September 11, a majority (55%) of Europeans, ostensibly, America’s closest allies considered United States foreign policy to blame for the attacks (Worldviews 2002 September)2. In the same poll a majority of Europeans considered the Bush administration as ‘fair’ or ‘poor’ in its handling of international issues such as the

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2 Survey conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund of the United States.
Arab-Israeli conflict (74%), the situation in Iraq (71%) and global warming (77%) (Worldviews 2002 September).

The United States, through virtue of its power, has always had unilateralist tendencies. Historical unilateralist tendencies have been either isolationist in nature or camouflaged by Cold War consensus. However, the current strategic situation has placed unilateralism firmly on the United States policy agenda. Unilateralism has been raised to a level in which there is only black and white. George Bush’s September 20, 2001 statement “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” reflects an attitude that has served to polarise public sentiment. Since then Bush has reiterated the sentiment, which is based upon the division of the world into the good (America) and the evil (all that oppose America). In effect unilateralism has become the new focal point in United States foreign policy doctrine. This has caused a large rise in anti-Americanism. In an April poll conducted for the Council on Foreign Relations, an overwhelming majority of those polled viewed American unilateralism negatively, with 85% of Germans, 80% of French, 73% of Britons and 68% of Italians considering the United States to be acting in its own interests in the war on terror. The formulation of a good versus evil battle with all the comic book terms – the ‘Axis of Evil’ being a case in point – has served to strengthen anti-Americanism in many countries already harbouring nascent antipathy to American policy.

2. SOUTH KOREAN ANTI-AMERICANISM: CULTURAL, ECONOMIC, OR JUST THE AXIS OF EVIL?

An American soldier was detained by an angry mob, forced to watch an anti-American demonstration at which he was photographed, videotaped and forced to make a public statement demanding justice from the United States. He was then taken to another location to apologise to the co-chairman of an anti-American organisation…

It is hard not to conjure up images of a poor American GI being bound, blindfolded and dragged, then driven in a beat up old Peugeot along dusty narrow roads, all to the background sound of evening prayer echoing along stucco bullet ridden walls. However the particular event did not occur in Lebanon, Iran, or anywhere in the Middle-East but in affluent uptown Seoul in September 2002.

Anti-Americanism was once viewed in South Korea as unpatriotic and radical. The Cold War formed the South Korean state. Its very existence was the result of political and strategic decisions in Washington to contain communism in North Asia. Its continued existence was the result of a long bitter war in which approximately 36,000 American soldiers died side by side with Korean soldiers: South Korea suffered more than 1 million casualties. In Cold War rhetoric, to be anti-American was to be radical and pro-Soviet, and hence an enemy of the state.

In the early stages of the Republic of Korea anti-Americanism was precisely that radical. It was limited to an extremely small number who risked both arrest and imprisonment under the National Security Law (1948). The National Security Law was used primarily by the Rhee administration to ensure support for his conservative right wing power base. Its use also ensured that anti-Americanism remained the domain of only radicals who were willing to risk arrest. Effectively, it meant anti-Americanism remained closely associated

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with Marxism-Leninism where it remained until the advent of the democratisation movement. The democratisation movement changed South Korean anti-Americanism. It removed anti-Americanism from the confines of Marxism-Leninism and radicalism and placed it within the realms of Korean nationalism and legitimacy. Further, the post-democracy period has allowed a reinterpretation of Korean history and a revaluation of the Korean national identity. The reinterpretation and revaluation changed the understanding of anti-Americanism in the minds of both the elder and younger generation in today’s South Korea.

The first stage of the democracy movement began during the increasingly repressive regime of South Korea’s first president Rhee Syngman. On April 19, 1960 students took to the streets to demonstrate against the corrupt electoral processes of the March election in which Rhee ‘won’ ninety percent of the vote. Large scale riots began in Masan, to be followed across the nation until martial law was proclaimed. Rhee was forced into exile and in his place was formed South Korea’s first democratic government - the Second Republic. The government created a new bicameral legislature and reduced the powers of the executive. Open and democratic debate flourished, accompanied by a free and independent press. However on May 16, 1961 the Second Republic and its democratic ideals came to an end to be replaced by the military rule of Park Chung Hee.

At the end of the first stage with the exile of Rhee, demonstrators laid a wreath at the statue of Macarthur in the belief that the American government had assisted in the removal of Rhee.

The second stage of the democracy movement (1979–1980) began with demonstrations in Pusan and Masan, in response to regime attempts to clamp down on an already dissatisfied populace. After the assassination of President Park and the partial reforms of interim President Choi, the democracy movement, largely based on student support, grew to include the labour movement and the Catholic Church. In response, martial law was declared across the entire country and future presidents Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung were arrested. In the bloody climax on 18 May, military special forces put down a demonstration in Kwangju causing the deaths of between 230 (official death toll) and 2,000 (Human rights group AsiaWatch death toll). The use of Korean special forces nominally under Combined (United States) Forces Command to quell the uprising has become a cause celebre of the anti-American movement. Democracy had failed a second time and this time America was to blame.

At the end of the second stage public sentiment was expressed by the 1980 arson attack on the US Information Center, Seoul, the 1982 arson attacks on the US Cultural Center in Pusan, demonstrations before the visit of Ronald Reagan in 1983 and the occupation of the US Cultural Center in Seoul, during which protestors demanded an American apology for the Kwangju massacre.

The third and final stage of the democracy movement occurred in 1987 with demonstrators taking to the streets to protest plans of General Chun Doo Hwan to pass power to retired General Roh Tae Woo under an unchanged and undemocratic constitution. However, the universal popularity of the reform movement was overwhelming. On June 29 Roh announced an eight point democratisation package accepting all the reforms sought by the opposition. The June 29 Declaration led to first democratic presidential elections and the presidency of Roh Tae Woo.

The democracy movement had moved progressively from one stage to the next gaining a wider base of support and legitimacy. The radical and largely student supporters of the first stage had transformed to include not just students but labour, the Catholic Church,
Buddhist groups, housewives, and even elements of the military. At the same time the government’s ability to classify dissent as unpatriotic or seditious was weakened. The opposition came to have more respect and legitimacy than the government. Parallel to this was the transformation of anti-Americanism. The ‘hands-off’ attitude of the United States in South Korean politics amounted to tacit support for the unpopular repressive regimes opening the United States to accusations of complicity in the repression of democracy. Anti-Americanism was no longer unpatriotic, seditious or radical but had become, like the democracy movement, both worthy of respect and legitimate.

In the inevitable revaluation of the democracy movement scholars have studied the role of the United States carefully. Revelations of American complicity in the continued repression of the democracy movement led to a growing cynicism about America’s place in Korean history. The permission granted by General Carter Magruder to the Korean Army to dispatch troops in the Masan Riots (1960) during the first stage of the democracy movement and the more controversial decision to release troops from Combined Forces Command to suppress the Kwangju uprising (1980) highlighted American interference.

Other commentators have gone further to note the earlier historical role of the United States in Korean affairs including American disregard for the United States-Korea Treaty of 1882 that was understood to protect Korea from imperialist designs, and the Taft-Katsura agreement of 1905 which exchanged Japan’s agreement to American influence in the Philippines for America’s acquiescence in Japan’s annexation of Korea. A new understanding of American involvement in Korea emerged. Whereas America had previously been viewed as a strong supporter of democracy guided by Wilsonian values, it is now popularly considered hypocritical, calculating and self-driven. This is the same reinterpretation of American values and revelation of their hypocrisy that created greater anti-Americanism in the third world (Rubinstein, Alvin Z. and Smith, Donald E., eds. 1985).

The legitimisation and widening of anti-Americanism has also justified its expression in other areas which mirror complaints across the globe. Anti-Americanism in South Korea now openly reflects public responses to perceived threats to economics, culture, and national identity.

**South Korean economic anti-Americanism** first appeared during the 1980s. Consistent reform of trade policy commencing with the Park regime’s export drive in 1960, the Chemical and Heavy Industry drive, and the export-oriented consumer products drive led the South Korean economy to achieve a trade surplus with the United States for the first time in its history in 1986. Already feeling the strain of a large trade deficit with Japan, the United States reacted with a concerted effort to open South Korean markets to United States exports. United States interests in trade reform with Korea stretched from agriculture to intellectual property rights.

Public reaction to the efforts of the United States to open export markets was strong. To Koreans it seemed as if trade was being forced on them in much the same way as one hundred years earlier when America’s naval gunboats forced markets open. Occurring only a short time after the Kwangju massacre and during a time when speculation and revelations about American complicity were rife, the United States move to increase its exports fuelled further rage. Classes traditionally pro-American, in particular the industrial leadership and agriculture, became vehemently anti-American.

Public reaction also increasingly focused on the instruments which America used to open Korean markets. Public perception linked the United States with the international economic system. GATT and later the WTO seemed to be tools in America’s control. This same perception later occurred with the IMF during the 1997 Asian economic crisis.
The Asian economic crisis had a profound effect on South Korea. The IMF period was considered a ‘national shame’ expressed in hyperbolic terms as equivalent to the Japanese occupation. The IMF was attributed to the flawed financial policies of the administration and the failure to control chaebol (conglomerate) borrowing. However blame was also squared at America. The ineffectual policies of the IMF applied in the early stages of the crisis created a devastating social effect in South Korea. These policies were supported by the American government. Popular opinion in South Korea closely associates the Breton Woods system with the country’s failure.

More recently, public reaction to trade disputes has reflected the growing level of anti-American sentiment. Trade tension involving the United States including the imposition of steel tariffs and the WTO decision against the separate beef sales system raised greater public concern than the Chinese ‘garlic dispute’. Indeed the garlic dispute between South Korea and China reflected a distinctly conciliatory approach taken by the South Korean government and popular press as contrasted with the stronger protests against American steel tariff increases.

Cultural anti-Americanism has always existed in South Korea although not in such obvious and characteristic ways as in France or the rest of Europe. It has existed more as a positive projection of Korean nationalism rather than a negative reaction to specifically American culture. Due to the extreme differences in culture, the American way of life has never been able to fully permeate Korean society as it could in Europe.

American mass culture is the face of America across the globe. Its media, music, movies and all their personalities beam across the globe. There are few places on earth (North Korea being one of them) where one can avoid exposure to American mass culture, and even in these places it is only through extreme circumstances that the latest sporting fashion, brand name shoes or rap lyric has not penetrated. Even those espousing hatred of America are prone to be caught on camera burning the United States flag while wearing an National Baseball League (NBL) cap or seeking interviews on CNN to widen their cause. American mass culture and modern technology have combined to make it the first ‘global’ culture in history. This penetrative force of American mass culture is also the destructive antithesis of individual culture.

To certain cultures it is the content of American mass media that ignites repulsion. The seemingly endless infatuation with violence, sex, and drugs as portrayed in pop culture addresses an American audience accustomed to such themes and their endless over-exaggeration. Yet the same words, images, songs or ideas transported to another culture may be sacrilegious at best. The attacks on the Imdad cinema in Quetta, Pakistan which was showing American films after September 11 were a reaction not just against America, but against what was perceived as a religious evil.

Korean reaction to American popular culture is distinct from more radical reactions in Europe and the South Asia. In what can pass as conservatism, there has always been contempt for foreign fashions in Korea by the older generation, but the most potent forms of cultural anti-Americanism have been more based on economic rationales. During the trade wars of the 1980s when the government was forced to allow the importation of foreign (particularly American) goods, consumer movements such as the ‘buy Korean’ campaign created impossible conditions for foreign imports. At first encouraged by the government until control was lost, these movements became so effective they still affect consumer sentiment twenty years later, forcing President Kim Dae Jung to encourage
Korean consumers to buy foreign cars in order to avoid further complaints by foreign manufacturers of social barriers to imports.\(^4\)

Korea has maintained local content laws for media including movies, advertising, print, television, radio and retransmission of foreign satellite broadcasts. Traditionally government concerns to maintain local content have not been focused on America, but rather Japan. Until 1998 Korea maintained a ban on imports of Japanese pop cultural items, including film and music.

The strongest and most pervasive form of anti-Americanism in South Korea is based on national identity. In South Korea the foundations of national identity are weakened by the reliance on an external power. South Korea’s exercise of supreme power within its (theoretical) territorial borders is limited by the claim to power over the whole peninsula and the actual rule over the northern half of the peninsula by an alternative regime. In addition supreme power within its borders is fettered by the existence of an alternative military force structure, the USFK. South Korea has in the past struggled to be recognised internally and externally as being different from other states. North Korea has in the past refused to negotiate with the South, preferring to negotiate directly with the United States. South Korea was not a member of the United Nations until 1991. Finally, South Korea does not have complete control over its resources, armed forces, and population. The Combined Forces Command of the USFK maintains operational control.

Anti-Americanism based on perceived threats to national identity manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Most recently the Winter Olympics ice skating affair in which an American ice skater won a gold medal after the disqualification of a South Korean skater caused an outpouring of emotion in Korea. In a poll conducted by the journal Sisa, 65% of respondents said the ‘unfair’ decision to award the gold medal to the American skater Anton Ohno was a reflection of American self-righteousness.\(^5\) The fact that a Korean skater, Kim Dong-Sung, lost to an American skater through disqualification created such a storm that authorities held grave security fears for the World Cup soccer match between the USA and South Korea. Internet bulletin boards were flooded with notices such as ‘The United States should leave the peninsula at once.’\(^6\).

The ‘Ohno’ affair gained such popularity that a veritable pop-culture emerged around anti-Americanism. The word ‘Ohno’ entered the Korean language as both an expletive and derogative term. More than 16,000 angry e-mail protests caused the shutdown of the US Olympic Committee. Yoon Min-Suk, a composer of several popular anti-American songs, expressed popular sentiment with the words of his song FS$&$#ing USA, sung by Park Sung-Hwan:

\begin{verbatim}
Did you see the short-track [skating] race?
Are you so happy over a gold medal?
A nasty country, FS$&$#ing USA.

Such as you are, can you claim that the USA is a nation of justice?
Why on earth don’t we say what we have to?
Are we slaves of a colonial [imperialist] nation?
Now we will shout: No to the USA...
\end{verbatim}

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\(^6\) “Soccer focuses passions against US,” Joongang Ilbo, 10 June, 2002.
Despite the blatant anti-Americanism of the ‘Ohno’ ice skating affair, the real reasons lay below the surface. The ‘Ohno’ affair proved to be symbolic of the perceived overwhelming attack on South Korean national identity. This was evidenced by the propensity of web pages and chat rooms covering the event to make mention of issues other than the ‘Ohno’ affair, most prominently USFK.

The greatest source of tension contributing to anti-Americanism based on national identity is of course the American military presence. The United States Forces Korea (USFK) is the subject of an abundance of complaints. Amongst many others, these complaints include the involvement in the deaths of two teenage girls during a training exercise, the existence of the Yongsan military base in downtown Seoul, environmental standards on US bases, and the inadequate revision of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).

On June 16 2002 two teenage girls were killed in a road accident in Yangju, north of Seoul involving a USFK tank on the way to training exercises in the area. The tragic accident grew into a major issue centring upon the presence of American forces in South Korea. The extremely emotional nature of the accident galvanised growing anti-American sentiment to such an extent that fears were expressed by both governments of the rise in anti-American sentiment. At the centre of the issue was the refusal of USFK to release the two soldiers to be tried under South Korean jurisdiction, after a request by the South Korean Justice Ministry. Under the SOFA, the USFK is not required to cede jurisdiction in incidents which occur during training.

USFK bases and training facilities are also the object of much criticism. South Korean national identity is weakened by the inability to control the use of territory within the nation’s borders. The US base of Yongsan, which covers 630 acres in downtown Seoul is an obvious reminder to South Koreans of this inability. The irony of the base’s location on the old Imperial Japanese headquarters is lost on few. Calls for the base’s relocation have been denied due to the inability to find an appropriate alternative location.

The base also gained notoriety over the dumping of formaldehyde in the waste water system which environmental groups claim would pollute the Han River. During the investigation it was determined a civilian employee was ordered to pour the toxic chemical down the drain by a commanding officer. Anti-American sentiment, which was expressed in street demonstrations, was based both on the actions involved and on the inability of the Ministry of Justice to prosecute the matter under the SOFA.

The SOFA remains at the centre of many civic group protests. In particular, the protection afforded to the USFK for crimes committed while on duty is a matter of contention. The last revision, which occurred in 2001, widened South Korean jurisdiction for crimes committed off duty, made provisions for the protection of Koreans working on US bases, and also set out environmental protection provisions to be followed by the USFK. Despite the changes, there remains a large movement opposed to the current agreement.

3. THE AXIS OF EVIL

The State of the Union Address by George W Bush on 29 January, 2002 that labelled North Korea, Iraq, and Iran the three points of an axis of evil received about as much support in South Korea as in North Korea. The speech caused vitriolic anti-American statements in internet chat-rooms, street protests in Seoul and Pusan, and even a scuffle in parliament. South Korean popular sentiment could be summed up by the statement of
parliamentarian Song Sok-Chan, ‘Mr Bush is an evil incarnate who wants to make the division of Korea permanent by branding North Korea part of the ‘axis of evil’’.  

The recent unilateralist policy of the Bush administration has particularly affected anti-American sentiment South Korea. The state of North-South relations reached a pinnacle during the Leaders Summit of June 2000. The ultimate goal of all Koreans, a peaceful reunification, seemed possible. An evolutionary change of thinking occurred with Kim Dae Jung’s Sunshine Policy. The idea that North Korea was the ‘enemy’ dissipated, to be replaced by the ideals of ‘friendship’ and ‘brotherhood’. The new way of thinking spread widely despite policy failures that occurred as soon as three months later. In November 2000 a Dong-a Ilbo poll showed 59% believed ‘the possibility of war had almost disappeared following the North-South Summit’ (Referenced in Nicholas Eberstadt 2002: 110(9)). The continuing revolution in thinking is evidenced by the cancellation of the Defence Ministry’s 2002 White Paper due to the inability to find an alternative expression and the unwillingness to designate North Korea as ‘primary enemy’ (Yonhap News Agency 4 March, 2001).

During the Clinton administration, US rapprochement with North Korea was based upon engagement. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Pyongyang October 23, 2000 and it was suggested that a plan for a Presidential visit was in the works. South Korean commentators were aware of the change in policy that would occur under a republican administration led by George W Bush. Korean academics noted the problems facing future North-South relations in an article aptly subtitled ‘The Workload Has Increased’. Interviews conducted with academics from major universities concluded, ‘the emergence of the Bush administration will considerably influence North-U.S., South-North and South-U.S. ties’.

Anti-Americanism has increased since the inauguration of Bush. The administration first isolated South Korea diplomatically with the National Missile Defence (NMD) plans. The NMD targeted North Korea as a primary reason for the scheme and was opposed by China and Russia, South Korea’s powerful neighbours. If ever the Korean saying ‘a shrimp between whales gets it back burst’ applied, it was in this circumstance. Polls showed that by January 2001 a significant difference in popular views on the future of the Korean peninsula existed between the United States and South Korea. In South Korea 73% of people polled considered the unification of the two Koreas likely in the near future, compared to only 28% in the USA (The Harris Poll 3 January, 2001). Public opinion was sharply against both the NMD scheme and increasingly against America and its unilateralism.

Press reports increasingly remarked on the rising tension between South Korean and US foreign policy goals. This continued up to and even increased after September 11. After Bush’s Axil of Evil address more than 56% considered Bush’s statement as inappropriate and 48% agreed the speech catered to domestic concerns, neglecting South Korean interests. The unilateralism of the Bush administration affected South Korean perceptions of America and its position in Korean affairs. In February 2002 a poll in the Sisa journal revealed over 56% considered their opinion of America had recently changed for the worse.

and more alarmingly, 41% considered China a closer ally of South Korea than the United States compared to 30% who considered the United States as the prime ally.11

More recently, the emergence of the American ‘pre-emptive’ strike policy has threatened to drive an even wider wedge between the foreign policies of Washington and Seoul. The National Security Strategy 2002 submitted to the United States Congress in September, solidified the policy of pre-emptive action that has emerged with the new security environment following the terrorist attacks one year previous:

‘The United States has long maintained the option of pre-emptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction – and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves...’12

The use of anticipatory action to avert imminent threats is not new. Such action was used during the Reagan administration in Grenada (1983) and by the Bush Senior administration in Panama (1989). However the current utilisation is different in two key aspects. Firstly, the use of anticipatory action is not confined to the American ‘backyard’, but stretches globally. Secondly, the use of anticipatory action has transformed into policy rather than operational alternative. Logically extending this new policy to the Bush ‘Axis of Evil’ speech bodes ominously for South Korean-U.S. relations. Scholars have noted that the American policy may be more based, not on forestalling an impending attack, but rather on taking advantage of currently favourable conditions (Daniel Moran 2002). Given the threat posed by North Korea to American security as opposed to security interests reiterates this point. Fears that an American ‘hard line’ approach to North Korea may eventually transform into pre-emptive action which would destabilise the region has already caused concern in Asian politics.

Both President Kim Dae-Jung and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi have felt the need to urge the United States to open dialogue with North Korea.13 After the revelation of North Korea’s nuclear program, President Kim again felt the need to call on the United States to take a softer stance on North Korea.14 The divergent views on North Korea policy between the United States and South Korea has been intensified by the fear that the pre-emptive strike policy may extend to North Korea, particularly in the wake of the nuclear revelation. Inevitably the South Korean public views recent United States policy in North Asia from NMD to ‘hard line’ approaches with North Korea as divergent from their interests.

The division of the world into the two camps of good and evil backed by a first strike policy has placed South Korean society in the difficult situation of choosing between support for Bush’s vision of the world or Kim Dae Jung’s vision of a united Korea. The continuing rise in anti-Americanism is the result of this choice.

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This study utilises scenarios from the report *Preparing for Unification: Scenarios and Implications* produced by the Rand organisation (Jonathan Pollack and Chung Min Lee 1999). The Rand report summarises and integrates findings of a research project *Korean Unification: Implications for the US Army* sponsored by the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, US Army. The report utilises scenarios which were generally accepted at the time of writing in 1999. It provides a good summary of the implications for the US Army. The Rand study puts forward four scenarios. Scenario 1. integration and peaceful unification; Scenario 2. collapse and absorption; Scenario 3. unification through conflict; and Scenario 4. disequilibrium and potential external intervention.

The first scenario, integration and peaceful unification, is the classic ‘soft landing’ approach. It implies the gradual unification of the two Koreas through a steady process of increasing confidence building measures (CBM), cultural and economic exchanges, and social and political reconciliation.

The second scenario, collapse and absorption, is the classic ‘hard landing’ approach. Despite the many variations that exist, the central features of all are the inability to maintain effective political control, failure in military command, and subsequent loss of social and economic control. Unification thus entails momentous change in the North and a substantial cost to the South. Unification under such scenarios is rapid but costly and dangerous.

The third scenario, unification through conflict, implies the commencement of hostilities leading to the final capitulation of the North and unification. This scenario again contains many varieties with the most common being the initiation of a limited war by North Korea to obtain a stronger position in the final unification agreements in anticipation of losing economic, military, political, or social control. For this reason it is a highly unpredictable and dangerous scenario, but remains possible due to the military build up on the peninsula.

The current study furthers this scenario in light of the National Security Strategy 2002. Specifically, the study takes into account the initiation of conflict by the United States to achieve strategic advantage through a pre-emptive strike.

The final scenario, disequilibrium and potential external intervention, is the only one that does not eventuate in unification, but rather ensures a continued stalemate. This scenario implies the intervention of a foreign power at the request (or not) of North Korea in anticipation of losing economic, military, political or social control. Again the scenario is highly unpredictable, but has a reduced threat of conflict.

Since the completion of the Rand report in 1999, major changes have occurred in inter-Korean relations. Of these major developments, the North-South Summit meeting and the integration of North Korea into the international community, represented by the commencement of normalisation talks with Japan, have necessitated a reinterpretation of the four scenarios.

The event that has caused the greatest change was the North-South Summit of June 13–15, 2000. The historic summit which saw the leaders of both North and South shake hands and hug changed public perceptions of future unification. The summit also produced the June 15 South-North Joint Declaration. The declaration provides a framework for the future unification under institutionalised peaceful coexistence. It includes five main points. Firstly, it was agreed that both North and South would pursue unification independently and through the joint efforts of the Korean people. Secondly, agreement was made to work towards the common elements of both nations’ unification plans. Thirdly, both nations
agreed to promptly resolve the most pressing issue - the unification of separated families. Reference was also made to repatriation of prisoners of war, abducted persons and political prisoners. Fourthly, agreement was made to ensure the balanced development of the national economy and cooperation in all other areas. Finally, both sides agreed to meetings of the relevant authorities to implement the declaration expeditiously.

Other major events that have affected the scenarios are the attempts by North Korea to engage with the region and the world community. Beginning with the opening of diplomatic relations with Italy in January 2000, North Korea has steadily increased its diplomatic activity across the globe. North Korea has also maintained close dialogues with key regional partners China and Russia. However, the most significant step towards the acceptance of North Korea into the international community was the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi to Pyongyang. As a result of the visit the leaders agreed to the Pyongyang Declaration. The declaration provided for the expeditious establishment of diplomatic relations; the recognition of and apology for harm inflicted upon Koreans during the Japanese colonial occupation and a reciprocal acknowledgment and apology for the abduction of Japanese civilians; and a reaffirmation to observe and adhere to all existing international agreements. Japan also gained North Korea’s agreement on an extension of its moratorium on missile testing. In return North Korea gained an assurance by Japan to render economic assistance including aid grants, low-interest long term loans and humanitarian assistance.

These significant events have firmly entrenched South Korean policy and current international thinking in the pursuit of integration and peaceful unification – scenario one. The three basic principles of the South’s unification policy under the Kim Dae-Jung administration are no tolerance of armed provocation that would destroy peace on the Korean Peninsula, elimination of aims based on achieving unification through unilateral takeover or absorption, and active promotion of reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas. Effectively the South’s unification policy aims at a long term ‘soft landing’.

The South Korean Ministry of Unification White Paper even refers to the negative consequences of German reunification to justify the maintenance of a ‘soft landing’ approach.

“...in the German case. East and West Germany had enjoyed a long period of expanded exchange and cooperation and preserved national homogeneity between them prior to unification. Nonetheless, the unified Germany has suffered from serious conflicts and negative side effects following national integration.

For this reason, the Kim Dae-Jung Administration wants to take a gradual approach in unifying the country.”

The desirability of the ‘soft landing’ approach emerged as a result of both lessons learned from the German experience and also recognition of the vulnerability of the South Korean economy during the Asian economic crisis of 1997. Estimates of the expense of economic unification range into the hundreds of billions of dollars (Noland, Robinson and Liu 1998: 801). Needless to say, this is a cost which would seriously interrupt the economic vigor and strong growth prospects now being enjoyed by South Korea. A gradual narrowing of the gap between the economies of North and South will reduce the financial burden.

From this it can be considered that the path of integration and peaceful unification will continue. The other three scenarios may be considered deviations from the current progress towards the first scenario of integration and peaceful unification.

4.1. Scenario 1. Integration and Peaceful Unification

Under this scenario anti-Americanism can be expected to rise steadily until unification is achieved or resolution of a new status for United States forces on the peninsula is negotiated. This can be attributed to the decrease in likelihood of conflict, increased public affinity with the North, and an increased consciousness of national identity.

Any rise and/or fall in anti-Americanism will be more reactive to United States policy, rather than minor digressions from the unification framework by North Korea, due to the fact that the North is perceived as a partner in the process whereas the United States is perceived as external to it. This has already been viewed through public reaction to the Yangju tank incident in which two schoolgirls were killed by the US military on the way to a training exercise. The incident created a flurry of anti-American sentiment and continues to elicit support from a wide base of the population. In comparison, the July 2002 naval battle, in which 5 sailors lost their lives and 19 were wounded, caused only minor short-lived demonstrations supported by a small section of the community.

All types of anti-American activity can be expected under this scenario ranging from concentrated ‘issues’ based movements by civic groups to random hostility. Increasingly, the issues will tend to focus on perceived threats to national identity, rather than cultural or economic aspects. For this reason the USFK will increasingly come under closer scrutiny. The steady increase and the gradual nature of the changes to occur under this scenario will make appeasement difficult due to the slow nature of changes to forces, structure, and policy. This has already been viewed in the context of recent changes to the SOFA. The negotiations on the revision of the SOFA took five years and were finally concluded in 2001. Less than two years later, the SOFA is once again being branded a major issue by civic groups.

Continuing the current wave of anti-Americanism, the base of support under this scenario will be very wide, stretching across diverse demographic and social groups. The major groups that have already appeared such as the National Federation of Student Associations and Federation of Korean Trade Unions can be expected to play a large role. This base will widen to include less radical but just as influential groups such as the National Federation of Churches and National Federation of Farmers. A strong base of popular support can also be expected to from among the general population (as opposed from those connected to the NGOs above).

As public support widens, the government reaction will also reflect growing anti-Americanism. This has already been noted by the USFK Command protest to the South Korean government over the handling of the September 15 alleged abduction of an American soldier during which Korean National Police failed to act in order to prevent the incident. It can be expected that politicians seeking to gain greater support will also begin to reflect greater anti-American views publicly. This has already been viewed with both Presidential candidates reflecting public demands for a revision of the current SOFA.

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The implications for the United States in this scenario will include facing a greater number of protests and street demonstrations calling for the cessation of the United States presence. Threats and/or danger to American citizens may increase, making the domestic voter aware of the situation. If the presence is scaled down at an appropriate rate and major grievances avoided, then the US may be able to continue its presence on the peninsula after reunification.

In post-unification Korea, anti-Americanism would remain serious under this scenario. The likelihood of an American presence being tolerated would be very small. The gradual process of peaceful unification would call for the removal of a significant portion of USFK as part of the ongoing CBMs. Final removal of all USFK would be highly likely if agreement of a scaled down presence is not arranged at an early stage.

4.2. Scenario 2. Collapse and Absorption

Under this scenario anti-Americanism can be expected to go through a sharp increase as North-South dialogue stalls. The increase would be attributed to the role of the United States in contributing to the collapse of the dialogue. The anti-Americanism at this stage may be heightened by American ‘hard line’ approaches to North Korea. This would be followed by a sharp decrease during the early warning stages of potential collapse. Warning signs could include the further breakdown of the economy, divisions in the party leadership and sporadic uprisings. Any movement towards a military coup in the North would reiterate the necessity of USFK security umbrella. As the role of the USFK becomes indispensable in handling sporadic border incursions, refugee flows, and cross-humanitarian relief, anti-Americanism would cease to exist.

The types of issues that would dominate the early rise in anti-Americanism would concentrate on United States policy which could be viewed as precipitating the failure of the dialogue. Activities would be directed against standard targets such as consulates and USFK bases, but would be particularly strong against targets deemed as responsible for policy such as visiting political figures. If United States policy is seen as precipitating a pre-emptive strike, then much wider demonstrations aimed at the USFK would be expected. Opportunistic demonstrations targeted at trade and economic issues would also be prominent at the height of this stage.

The main support would come from student and NGO groups with widespread popular support in the early stages. This would include opportunistic demonstrations by traders associations, anti-globalisation movements and trade unions. Widespread popular support would drop dramatically after the commencement of signals warning of an imminent collapse. However, action by students and more radical NGO groups would likely become more frequent and vocal in their activities. During the period of uncertainty immediately before a collapse or during a military/leadership coup in the North, radical elements within both the student and NGO areas could be expected to take more extreme action aimed directly at the USFK.

South Korean government reactions to the initial rise in anti-Americanism would be reserved. The political reaction would not follow public sentiment but would be cautious. Political moves to repress anti-Americanism would be stronger and could even bring about the emergence of conservative pro-American movements.

Implications for the United States in this scenario depend upon how strong the initial anti-American sentiment is. If the initial anti-American sentiment is very strong and is covered by the American domestic press it will be hard to convince the US public of the
need for an extended military and economic commitment that would be required during the collapse and unification period. Fears of a Vietnam type scenario may emerge if anti-Americanism is not controlled.

In the post-unification situation anti-Americanism will remain low given strong United States military, economic and humanitarian assistance during the collapse stage. A strategic presence may be maintained after unification. Longer term relations may prove to be stronger than in other scenarios attributable to the ability of America to act in goodwill ‘non-combatant’ military operations.

4.3. Scenario 3. Unification through Conflict

Anti-Americanism under this scenario can be expected to fall dramatically during the early warning stages and remain at a low level throughout the entire unification process. Due to the perceived strength of the North Korean leadership and early bellicose warning signs such as unilateral withdrawal from North-South talks, increasing militarisation of leadership structure, and increasingly vocal diplomatic demarches alleging South Korean offensive actions, there will be no early stage anti-Americanism. This reflects the historical fluctuations in anti-American sentiment during periods of North-South tension.

Despite the low level of anti-Americanism there will be high intensity anti-American activity. As a possible consequence of North Korean psychological operations high intensity activity such as violent demonstrations or even terrorist attacks could be expected. Increasingly attacks would not centre upon anti-Americanism but on inflicting terror with the aim of creating war hysteria, thus enabling a better bargaining situation in the inevitable cease-fire talks after a short but intense conflict.

Demonstrations would be confined to radical elements within groups such as the National Federation of Student Associations or National Federation of Trade Union Organisations. There will be very little popular support for such groups as tactics become more extreme. Popular support would in fact turn against such activities as the threat of war increased. Pro-American activities would increase rapidly as the threat of war became imminent.

Government reaction under this scenario would be strongly in support of pro-American activists. Stronger enforcement of the National Security law would be directed at anti-American activities and groups. Conservative elements within the government would enforce stricter control on all anti-American activity.

Implications for America under this scenario would be negligible, dependent upon strong enforcement of National Security Laws by the South Korean government. Increased commitments in ensuring the security of South Korea would be balanced by the weight of pro-American sentiment evident in the nation.

In the post-unification situation an American presence would be required to ensure security, therefore anti-Americanism would remain low. The requirement of ongoing economic aid and security assurance in the new North East Asian security situation would ensure strong support for a continued USFK presence.

The possibility of an American initiated ‘unification through conflict’ scenario also exists. The moral justification of averting North Korean nuclear action or WMD proliferation could be used to engineer the reunification of the peninsula through conflict. The preliminary stages would involve isolating the North Korean regime politically and economically, thereby forcing more desperate regime survival measures by the North. This could initially involve statements confirming recommencement of nuclear arms production,
and the export of missiles and/or technology for hard currency, while later it would include
direct threats, increased skirmishes in maritime zones and along the DMZ, and an eventual
mobilisation along the DMZ. This would precipitate a conflict with the moral justification
for pre-emptive American action.

Anti-Americanism under this scenario would rise strongly during the preliminary stages
of North Korean isolation in a reflection of the current high level of anti-American
sentiment. The failure of the Sunshine Policy would be blamed directly on American
foreign policy rather than North Korea. This sentiment would continue to increase until
more desperate North Korean regime survival measures were undertaken. Given strong
public reactions to North Korean threats and/or actions, anti-American sentiment would
decrease proportionally as the threat of conflict increases. Anti-American sentiment would
cease with the threat of an imminent North Korean attack, clearing the path for a morally
justified pre-emptive strike.

The types of activity would be similar to that of scenario 1, consisting of a wide variety
of issues. Instruments of United States policy, such as politicians and envoys, would again
gain greater attention. As public support for anti-Americanism decreases with the threat of
imminent conflict, protests and demonstrations will pass to more radical elements of
society, particularly student and labour union groups.

The reaction of the South Korean government would echo the initial rise in anti-
American sentiment. This would continue as United States government warnings reduce
tourism, investment and commerce flows to South Korea. As more conservative forces gain
power in the South with the increased likelihood of conflict, a stricter application of the
National Security Law will curb anti-American sentiment.

The implications for the American government in this scenario would be significant.
The actions would result not just in ruptured relations with less conservative elements in
South Korea but also Japan and China. The high risk of Chinese intervention is also
possible. Regional economies significantly affected by the outbreak of hostilities would
include Australia, Japan, and Taiwan, creating further regional anti-American sentiment.

The post-unification scenario would likely be strongly anti-American. The hard-line
approach that is required to create the moral justification for a first strike would not be
adequately balanced by American assistance in the conflict. The post-unification
government would be more inclined to nationalism than pro-Americanism in the changed
North East Asian strategic situation.

4.4. Scenario 4. Disequilibrium and Potential External Intervention

Anti-Americanism under this scenario would maintain a steady rise as outlined under
the integration and peaceful unification scenario, but would plateau as external intervention
takes place. The plateau reached may be a high level, dependent upon the perceptions of
what caused the external intervention. If American policy is seen to be the central factor in
North Korea’s request for Chinese ‘assistance’ such as through economic and diplomatic
pressure on Japan, Russia and the EU to isolate North Korea, anti-Americanism will plateau
at a high level. The maintenance of the high level can be attributed to the decreasing
likelihood of conflict and the stalemate situation.

The types of activity expected under this scenario will be low intensity – wide support
activities such as mass demonstrations and social movements. The issues of major concern
will be policy based, particularly strong against targets deemed as responsible for policies
such as visiting political figures. The USFK will not be the main focus of activities. The
entrance of a Chinese intervention force in North Korea would balance what could be cynically perceived as American interests on the peninsula.

The main groups to support anti-Americanism in this scenario would be similar to those under Scenario 1. Student and radical NGO groups would lead the cause followed less enthusiastically by more conservative NGOs. Popular support would be widespread but not vocal.

The South Korean government reaction would be minimal. While conservatives would likely gain power due to the perceived impossibility of unification, a crackdown on anti-American action is unlikely. Conservative nationalism and disappointment at the American acceptance of Chinese intervention would allow anti-American activity to continue.

The implications for American policy would be the negative effects of a possible sustained high level of anti-Americanism during a period in which a real danger of losing influence on the peninsula exists. Dependent upon the state of Sino-South Korean relations at the time of intervention there is a possibility that the high level of anti-Americanism could precipitate the emergence of China as the key arbiter of unification on the Korean peninsula. If China is viewed as holding the key to unification, the removal of the USFK would definitely be included in negotiations. A continued high level of anti-Americanism would make any such political decision easier.

In the post-unification situation anti-Americanism can be expected to remain at a constant level. Anti-Americanism may possibly increase in long term relations as unification increasingly relies upon Chinese reform of the North Korean economy and eventual peaceful unification on Chinese terms.

5. CONCLUSION

Anti-Americanism is based upon public reactions to perceived threats against culture, economics and ultimately national identity. Anti-Americanism has increased across the globe due to the decreased threat perceived by nations with the end of the Cold War. The emergence of America as the only superpower has also increased scrutiny of its actions. American unilateralism has exacerbated these trends.

In South Korea anti-Americanism has blossomed with the emergence of democracy. Since the passage to democratic government, anti-Americanism has passed from the radical to the normal. South Korean anti-Americanism has recently increased dramatically due to the decreased likelihood of conflict on the Korean peninsula brought about by the Sunshine Policy.

South Korea under Kim Dae-Jung has already embarked upon a path that is aimed at achieving unification through integration and peaceful unification. This policy has widespread popular support. Already the signs of anti-Americanism that can be expected to result from this policy are emerging. Anti-Americanism will continue to increase steadily until unification is achieved or a resolution is negotiated for the status of the USFK.

The policy implications of rising anti-Americanism are critical for a continued United States strategic presence on the Korean peninsula. The scenarios show that, given the path already being followed by the Kim administration, American policy will increasingly come under closer scrutiny. In all scenarios American policy towards North Korea will be an influential determinant for the levels of anti-Americanism. To ensure a continued United States strategic presence on the peninsula in post-reunification Korea, current issues facing the South Korea-U.S. relationship need to be addressed. This would necessarily include a
redefinition of the alliance to reflect both South Korean national identity concerns and the more fluid international security environment.

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