

Chapter 8: The Future of U.S.-ROK Relations

In the months before North Korea's test of a nuclear weapon on October 9, 2006, there was a groundswell of policy and scholarly discussion of this prospect, amid strident North Korean rhetoric, diplomatic deadback, and especially in the wake of the North's provocative test of seven ballistic missiles in July of that year. While some analysts believed a nuclear test to be Pyongyang's 'last card' which it would only threaten to play, others viewed a test as a likely eventuality, for both technical and political reasons. Analysts worried that the effects of such a test could be catastrophic—a demonstrated North Korean nuclear capability might stoke a new Asian arms race, with Japan, Taiwan, and perhaps South Korea potentially eschewing U.S. extended deterrence in favor of their own nuclear status.¹ Conventional wisdom, especially in American policy circles, held that a North Korean nuclear test was a presumed “red line” that would yield a uniform, punitive response from Washington's partners in six-party talks—a diplomatic construct that, like the U.S.-ROK alliance, had heretofore been plagued by differences in fundamental assumptions about the appropriate combination of pressure and dialogue. Just before President Roh's September 14 visit to Washington, *The Economist* took stock of the “strained” alliance and asserted, as if an article of faith, that if the North did conduct a test, “America and South Korea would no doubt be brought closer together.”² While in Washington, Roh seemed to reinforce this perception, telling a group of Korea experts that a nuclear test would be ‘far more devastating’ than the missiles tests and ‘would certainly cause a major re-evaluation of [inter-Korean] relations,’³ perhaps finally leading Seoul to utilize its purported leverage over the North.

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On the same day President Roh met with President Bush at the White House, I also happened to be in Washington, where my center held a joint seminar with the Brookings Institution entitled “North Korea: 2007 and Beyond,” based on my co-edited book.⁴ During the question-and-answer portion of the seminar, I was asked about the probability of a nuclear test and its potential effects, particularly the impact such a test might have on South Korean views of the North. Could a test snap U.S. and South Korean threat perceptions back into alignment? In response, I said that I would not be surprised if North Korea did conduct a test. Yet even in the face of an event as dramatic as a nuclear test, I would *not* expect any fundamental change in inter-Korean relations, since South Korean perceptions of the North are intimately tied to identity, and identity does not change very quickly or very easily. These thoughts were in line with my larger argument that day, an argument also put forward in this book. That is, while the North is a more narrowly conceived policy matter for Americans, it is central to issues of national identity for South Koreans, and the nationalist identity that underpinned the Roh government’s worldview would not and could not change over night.⁵

Within a month of that seminar, the North indeed surprised the world by testing a nuclear weapon. Though with heavy skepticism, I still harbored some hope that the conventional wisdom was right, that this event would be catastrophic enough to bring the U.S. and the ROK closer together.⁶ In the first few days after the test, events in Seoul seemed to indicate this might be possible. Analysts observed that the ROK government’s reaction was “firmer and quicker” than its response to the missile tests in July.⁷ As discussed in Chapter 3, there was a growing sense within South Korea that its engagement policy—designed in large part to improve North Korean behavior and coax it into the

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international system—had fallen far short of achieving its aims. Roh himself stated that it had become “difficult . . . to stick to our policy of engagement” and “difficult to argue that such a policy is effective.”⁸ The *Financial Times* bluntly argued that with the nuclear test, it had become “patently clear that South Korea has gained next to nothing for its [engagement] efforts.”⁹

However, these early signposts that the ROK might reassess its engagement policy and pursue an approach similar to that of the U.S. proved misleading. A string of resignations, policy disputes, and confusion within the Roh administration demonstrated a lack of accord over how to respond to the nuclear test.¹⁰ By the time U.S. Secretary of State Rice arrived in Seoul in mid-October, the “South Korean power elite [had] yet to build a consensus among them, not to mention reach any common ground with the opposition.” While Roh had initially implied that inter-Korean economic projects might be suspended in the wake of the test, his administration appeared to be quickly “backpedaling.”¹¹ Rice’s request for South Korea to join the Proliferation Security Initiative was flatly denied. While the conservative party had come to blame Roh’s government and the engagement policy, progressives, including former President Kim Dae Jung, heaped blame on the Bush administration and its unwillingness to hold bilateral talks with the North.¹² Ultimately, the Roh administration decided it had no choice but to continue to pursue engagement and shun Washington’s punitive approach. For many, U.S.-ROK disagreement in the wake of the nuclear test seemed especially ominous. If these two seasoned alliance partners could not coordinate tightly in the face of such a dramatic, dangerous event, under what circumstances could robust cooperation be restored? What had happened to this alliance?

Identity versus Policy

In this book, I have argued that there arose incongruence in identities and interests between the U.S. and the ROK in the post-Cold War, post-authoritarian era, and this incongruence was exacerbated under the sunshine policy and in the post-September 11 era. Though the period examined in this study may well represent the height of identity politics in South Korea, the incongruence in identities and interests pervading U.S.-ROK relations is more than a temporary or passing phenomenon. Rather, it presents a major, persistent challenge for the bilateral relationship over the long term, through administrations of any political stripe. During the Cold War years, the ‘anti-Communist’ (even ‘anti-North Korean’) identity of the South was consistent with the U.S. worldview and American interests on the peninsula. However, the end of the Cold War and South Korea’s subsequent engagement with communist countries—first China and Russia, and later the North—transformed South Korean views about its place in emerging global and regional orders. This revitalized thinking about national identity necessarily included reevaluations of South Korea’s two most important relationships, those with ‘significant others’ North Korea and the U.S. Increasingly, the left and center in the ROK began to conceptualize the North not as a staunch enemy but rather as a partner to engage. These constituencies became more concerned about and focused on dangers associated with the weakness of North Korea, and the rationale for the security alliance with the U.S.—including the visible, burdensome American troop presence within the ROK—increasingly came into question. At the same time that South Korean views of the North and the alliance were evolving significantly, the U.S. view of North Korea as a threat continued unmitigated. In the 1990s the U.S. became increasingly concerned over North Korean production and proliferation of ballistic missiles,

and in the post-September 11 era, the North’s fresh pursuit of nuclear capabilities significantly heightened American threat perceptions, especially in light of the Bush administrations concerns over regional nuclear proliferation and potential linkages to global terrorism.

In South Korea, democratization provided the domestic context that facilitated the rethinking of national identity. During authoritarian years, the state implicitly advocated the anti-communist conception of identity and suppressed any alternative on nationalist grounds.¹³ In the process of democratization, civil society challenged the authoritarian state’s sanctioned notion of identity, opening debate over the proper form of Korean identity for a self-governed nation entering a new era. The intense debate between conservatives and progressives over the North and U.S.-ROK relations, as documented in this study, offers empirical evidence of substantial and prolonged contention over national identity. During this critical time of contention over national identity, the elections of the Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun governments institutionalized progressive ideas about South Korean identity vis-à-vis the North and the U.S., converting their ideas into state policies, most notably the well-known sunshine policy. The progressive conceptions of national identity and policies of the liberal governments of South Korea were incongruent with a conservative Bush administration that was focused on the war on terror and believed that South Korean and Clinton administration engagement of the North was naïve and had proven to be ineffectual. Thus, in understanding the changing nature of the U.S.-ROK relationship and the disparity in views present during the study years, we are obligated to consider the weight of historical timing and how events in both nations—the end of the

Cold War, Korean democratization, September 11, and the second nuclear crisis—have been internalized and have altered identities and interests.

However, beyond calculating the impact of significant events, this study shows that the U.S. and South Korea use different *frameworks* in approaching their relationship. For South Koreans, U.S.-ROK relations is an issue central to their national identity, whereas for Americans, the alliance relationship is conceived as one of many important relations the U.S. maintains in line with its security interests and obligations. In South Korean society, relations with the nation’s two ‘significant others’ are not only divisive and prone to politicization but are tangled together. As shown in Chapters 3 and 4, for instance, during the study period the Korean media devoted a great deal of news attention to the U.S. and North Korea and was intensely engaged in point-counterpoint debates (through editorials and columns) on a regular basis, with clear polarization along well-defined political and ideological lines. Our results also illustrate that over the course of the study period, especially since the implementation of the sunshine policy, opposing points of view on the North Korea problem and the U.S.-ROK alliance have intensified. This is certainly consistent with the larger trend of a contemporary Korean society that is sharply divided in its views of critical foreign policy issues, in accordance with generational lines and political ideology.¹⁴

Not surprisingly, these in-group debates over the identity of the nation often became bitter and emotional, hindering rational discussions. As experts of Korean affairs have shown, during this period South Korea became caught between two conflicting identities, which political scientist Jae Jung Suh has termed the “conservative identity,” which takes the traditional view of the United States as a key ally and partner in national

security, and the progressive “nationalist identity,” which pits Korean identity against the United States.¹⁵ As presented in Chapters 3 and 4, the gap between these conflicting identities grew in the latter years of this study. Even if the intensity of contention over South Korean national identity does not return to the levels witnessed during the pivotal period examined here, continued disputes over identity are likely, as these kinds of issues are very difficult to resolve. As I have argued,¹⁶ Korean politics of identity can be traced back to a century ago, and have shown themselves to be durable—neither democratization nor globalization has uprooted the politics of identity in more recent times. Instead, democratization makes the processes of contention over identity much messier and more complicated, especially when combined with the rhetoric of ethnic nationalism.¹⁷ While particular administrations in Seoul can impact (i.e., dampen or amplify) how the politics of identity plays out, fundamentally, societal contention over national identity is connected to sociological forces larger than any particular occupant of the Blue House.

Turning to the case of the U.S., it is apparent that American views of North Korea and the U.S.-ROK alliance did not play a major role in defining American identity but rather are matters conceived of within the context of American policy and security interests. U.S. newspapers are not locked in any sort of bitter or emotional debate over the ROK, the bilateral relationship, or the alliance; rather, varied coverage stems from newspapers’ varied interests in particular issue areas, such as finance or diplomacy, not ideology. For the U.S., South Korea is not a ‘significant other’ that informs American notions of its identity in the world. Indeed, a recent report from a group of American and Korean experts stated that, “One of the key characteristics defining ROK-US bilateral relations is an asymmetry of attention”¹⁸ and findings in this study have demonstrated that. While the

national security alliance and U.S.-ROK relations have produced fervent debates in South Korea, in the U.S. the alliance yields relatively little coverage. North Korea is almost wholly conceived as a security matter, and policy toward the Koreas is only part of larger consideration of U.S. policy toward East Asia.

I argue that the different *frameworks* through which the U.S. and the ROK conceive of their relationship and the North (i.e., ‘policy’ for the U.S. and ‘identity’ for South Korea) stem from power imbalance, or asymmetry. Scholars of international relations have debated the salience and importance of various factors shaping international relations in the modern world. Realists have stressed the importance of power and its distribution among states, while institutionalists have emphasized international institutions or “regimes” (explicit and implicit norms, rules, principles, and procedures¹⁹) as key influences on state behavior. Constructivists accord attention to processes associated with identities and values. Yet in large part, these theories tend to treat power and identity as conceptually separate, neglecting how they may interact and be related.²⁰ In arguments that bridge realist and constructivist notions of state behavior, Henry Nau asserts that both power and national identity shape relations between states, and that states’ conceptions of their own national identities are often unacknowledged but vital factors in the making of foreign policy.²¹ Though he argues for greater consideration of national identity in international relations, Nau conceives of national identity in largely static, narrow terms—maintaining that states’ identities either converge or diverge—rather than as an evolving construct influenced over time by state-to-state relations and the changing structure of the international system. It is not hard to imagine that two nations in a relationship or alliance characterized by an asymmetry in power or status may have different perception of the

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other and thus approach and influence each other differently. Depending on the disparity in power, the stronger nation could very well become a ‘significant other’ for the weaker nation, while the converse would seem unlikely to hold. In other words, the more powerful nation, as a ‘significant other,’ could shape the weaker nation’s collective identity, while the stronger nation may conceive of its relationship with the weaker nation in narrower terms.

In understanding the nature of and changes in the relationship between the U.S. and the ROK, we need to consider the importance of the power imbalance or asymmetry that exists between the two. Though the degree of imbalance has changed over time in accordance with South Korea’s dramatic economic achievements, the basic fact of the power disparity remains. As discussed in previous chapters, the U.S.-ROK relationship is tied to issues of national identity for Koreans (since the U.S. is seen as a significant other), and thus from the Korean perspective, the evident strain during the latter study years may be perceived as stemming from a new Korean identity that challenges the alliance (*the identity thesis*). On the other hand, Korea is not big or important enough to shape U.S. national identity as a significant other (indeed, at this point, no nation seems to occupy this role), and therefore the strain in relations may be explained by differing policy preferences (*the policy rift thesis*), underpinned by differing perceptions of essential circumstances and effective methods of inducing change. The Korean progressive perspective on U.S.-ROK differences was succinctly captured in remarks Roh Moo Hyun made shortly after his momentous election victory: “Success or failure of a U.S. policy toward North Korea isn’t too big a deal to the American people, but it is a life-or-death matter for South Koreans.”²² This statement simultaneously underlines the precarious, even unjust, position that many

South Koreans believe they are in vis-à-vis the United States and attests to growing discord within the alliance over threat perceptions of North Korea—the very threat that led to the creation of the U.S.-ROK alliance over fifty years ago.

Anti-American and Anti-Alliance Sentiment

This study demonstrates through empirical evidence that there has been an increase in anti-American coverage in both conservative and progressive Korean newspapers after the year 2000. Although the ROK had experienced waves of anti-American sentiment in the past, previous instances had been closely connected with specific issues, such as the Carter administration’s plan to withdraw American troops from the peninsula or alleged American support for authoritarian Korean regimes. More a function of fears of U.S. abandonment of Korea, these waves of anti-American sentiment did not question the rationale of the U.S.-ROK alliance. In this respect, the anti-American and anti-alliance sentiment from 2000 to 2003 examined here may be unique. During this time, increasing numbers of Koreans explicitly questioned the rationale of the alliance and expressed deep resentment toward the U.S., charging that the U.S. and the alliance stood as stumbling blocks to inter-Korean relations and eventual unification. Believing the U.S. to be a greater threat to peace on the peninsula than North Korea,²³ these critics asserted that the alliance actually ran *counter* to Korean interests. As the South Korean electorate installed liberal governments, anti-American themes entered institutional politics and “criticism of United States policy moved into the mainstream,” according to a report by the Congressional Research Service.²⁴ Yet this report’s assessment of anti-American sentiment as “less ideological and more issue-specific” is misleading and fails to appreciate

the depth of identity politics. In my view, Korean anti-Americanism at the time reflected identity politics and was indeed ideologically driven. This ideological underpinning and connection to national identity explains why a variety of policy issues from seemingly different realms—from the Lone Star scandal²⁵ and the KORUS FTA to USFK troop realignment and the Proliferation Security Initiative—are connected to larger progressive and conservative narratives about the U.S. and North Korea, as well as why even complex issues or seemingly straightforward accidents have the potential to be immediately polarizing along predictable lines—a category of phenomena I earlier dubbed *identity invoking events*.

Some experts believe that this most recent tide of anti-Americanism was an expression of South Koreans’ increased level of national pride.²⁶ This thesis focuses on the decreased disparity in the material power gap between the ROK and the U.S. in accordance with South Korea’s impressive economic development since the inception of the alliance. In 1953, ROK per capita income was less than \$100, but today this figure has risen to over \$20,000, and the ROK boasts the thirteenth-largest economy in the world. Having experienced a dramatic change in national status, many Koreans have sought recognition and respect from their longtime patron, the United States. Put another way, Korea’s enhanced economic position, taken together with its status as a democracy, has led to new expectations for how the U.S. should relate to this treaty ally.

This line of argument holds that the U.S. has lagged in appropriately recognizing South Korea’s new status, and this has spurred antipathy toward the ‘unequal’ alliance. Does the United States acknowledge the increased economic importance of the ROK to American interests? In this study, economic and trade issues are by far the most

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represented category in U.S. media coverage of South Korea and the bilateral relationship. But how does coverage of South Korea compare to coverage of other nations? As shown in Chapter 5, though nations such as France, Israel, and India all have lower trade volumes with the U.S. than does the ROK, they receive more coverage in the American media. News coverage is based on a variety of factors, and trade levels constitute only one of many drivers. Given the nature of news, it is difficult to assert that any one nation *should* receive a certain amount of coverage relative to other nations. Yet beyond empirical data on news, it is important to recognize that in the eyes of many Koreans, their nation, especially during this study period, did not receive proper recognition and due respect from the U.S., thus engendering a sense of injustice and resentment against the U.S. Whether such perceptions are valid is difficult to judge and also another matter, but the existence of these strongly felt perceptions helps to explain the growth of anti-American nationalism in South Korea since the late 1990s. As scholars of identity politics show, perception can foment “a reality of [its] own, for it is seldom *what is* that is of political importance, but what people *think is*.”²⁷

In assessing anti-Americanism in Korea, I must stress that we should not conflate anti-U.S. sentiment with anti-alliance sentiment. Chapter 4 clearly demonstrates that the two are not synonymous and do not always trend together. While both the progressive and conservative newspapers have become more critical of the U.S. since the Kim Dae Jung era, *Chosun Ilbo*, for instance, assessed U.S.-ROK relations more positively from year to year over the same period. This is likely due to conservatives’ concerns that a liberal government and the increasingly loud progressive voice in Korean society might undermine the alliance. Motivated to respond in the face of the increasing progressive

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rhetorical volume on the alliance, *Chosun* increased its number of editorials and columns stressing the importance of the alliance, which we have seen were significantly more positive than those published by *Hankyoreh*. This reflects, as Daniel Sneider argues, conservatives’ fear of “strategic abandonment” by the U.S., ostensibly a result of displeasure at liberal criticism of the U.S. and the alliance.²⁸ It is regrettable that most discourse on this topic, including the anti-American thesis presented in the introductory chapter, conflates anti-U.S. and anti-alliance sentiment, obscuring valuable insight into the full composition of Korean sentiment and how, over time, such sentiment has influenced Korean identity. This also implies that Korean conservatives’ return to power does not preclude continued questioning of America’s approach to the world and to Asia. American policymakers and analysts of Korean affairs should not overlook the complexities of Korean sentiments, which can have important policy implications.

As we have seen, there is no comparable anti-Koreanism or anti-alliance sentiment in the U.S. To be sure, various American policymakers and media outlets have expressed their displeasure with South Korean policy toward the North and Korean attitudes toward the alliance. However, Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate that their expression is related to specific policy issues and is hardly ideological. Ordinary Americans especially may not be well-informed about Korean issues; South Korea may not be consequential enough to be on their mental map (and it is far from the only country or even ally fitting this description). According to Ambassador Michael Armacost, “the domestic politics of our Asian alliances is like the story of the dog that didn’t bark . . . The value of these alliances is rarely contested in our national politics.”²⁹

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The Media, Public Diplomacy, and International Relations

This study has examined U.S.-ROK relations through the prism of the news media. According to American media scholar Stephen Hess, “Until the Vietnam War caused the beginning of a reassessment, scholars generally agreed that the making of the country’s foreign policy was rarely affected by public opinion.” At this time, the notion that foreign policy was exclusively the domain of elites was amended to allow for the idea of popular influence, particularly that “an energized public had the power to narrow policymakers’ range of options.”³⁰ This study confirms the media’s role in that process by way of shaping public discourse and opinion on foreign policy issues. Moreover, our study of the Korean press demonstrates that the media can be an important medium in the process of forging national identity, a finding in line with an increasing body of thought taking root across the social sciences that identity is “something actively and publicly created through discourse.”³¹ Embedded in the concept of state power, national identity affects the course of a nation’s strategy and policy on international issues. As constructivists have pointed out, identity can provide a cognitive framework for shaping interests, preferences, worldviews, and consequently, foreign policy actions.³²

However, how identity develops in a way that affects international relations has been less investigated. Research in other fields has shown the importance of the media in identity formation, and I believe that this can be readily applied to the field of international relations. For instance, scholars of nationalism have argued that ‘print capitalism’ was instrumental to the rise of nation as “imagined community” in the modern era.³³ Likewise, Korean scholarship has pointed to the importance of the mass media in the rise and development of Korean identity in the 1920s under Japanese rule.³⁴ My analysis presented

here suggests that the deep divide and heated debates in the Korean media reflect more than just domestic politics; the division appears to be related to different identities vis-à-vis the North and the U.S., which can be forged and reinforced through intense debates in the national media. This also explains why the public debates in the Korean media have been so emotionally charged and hard to come to consensus, reminiscent of ethnic conflict in multi-ethnic societies.³⁵ In short, it is necessary to pay closer attention to the media's role in identity formation, as national identity is a powerful construct capable of influencing state behavior, strategy, and policy.

The findings of this study also have implications for American and South Korean public diplomacy efforts. In the post-September 11 era, the U.S. government stepped up activities aimed at getting America's "true" message out to the world, placing priority on public diplomacy. Within a month of the terrorist attacks, a former advertising executive with more than forty years of experience, Charlotte Beers, became Under Secretary of State for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy, and Congress injected \$497 million annually into the public diplomacy budget with passage of the *Freedom Promotion Act of 2002*.³⁶ At the working level, the U.S. State Department regularly conducts surveys in foreign countries to assess popular sentiment and gauge perceptions of the U.S. These are all important elements of U.S. public diplomacy efforts designed to win the "hearts and minds" of people in other nations.

Yet in addition to the more general limits of public diplomacy,³⁷ the U.S. has found such efforts to be particularly challenging in recent years in South Korea. According to former diplomat David Straub, in the late 1990s and the year 2000 the Korean media had come to portray "the U.S. government, especially USFK, [as having] disrespected the

Korean people to the extent of not caring about their safety or even their very lives . . . Items that fit into the ugly American storyline were reported; those that did not, weren't; and as popular anger grew, so did the appetite for even more negative stories about the U.S.” While some urged better public diplomacy in response to the situation, American diplomats felt as if they were fighting a losing battle, as the South Korean media had become “so tendentious that U.S. statements and explanations were almost uniformly greeted with disbelief and anger, making the situation even worse. The South Korean media reported, and the public agreed, that the U.S. had no sense of shame. The U.S., they felt, was trying to defend the indefensible.”³⁸ These years track with the rise of identity politics in South Korea and the creation of powerful narratives about the U.S. and U.S.-ROK relations that lumped many seemingly disparate events together. Under such circumstances, it is difficult for official U.S. explication of USFK crime statistics (as Straub cites, crime rates actually went down during this period) to have much of an impact in the face of heightened emotion and the strong momentum of narratives propelled by civic groups and the media.

In fact, analysis of the Korean media presented in this book shows that during the current nuclear standoff, as the conflict between the U.S. and North Korea intensified, the liberal press raised its anti-American editorial tone, blaming the U.S. for the escalation of tension on the peninsula. These patterns in news coverage coincide with similar temporal fluctuations in South Korea public perceptions of the North Korea problem and attitudes toward the U.S. In the short term, the differing approaches of these alliance partners on the nuclear issue represented a policy coordination problem, one that the Roh and Bush administrations worked hard to narrow. The election of Lee Myung Bak may well mean

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greater improvements in U.S.-ROK policy coordination. For the long term, however, the U.S. must recognize that changing South Korean views of the U.S. and North Korea require reflection on a larger trend in South Korean society, the reevaluation of national identity, and that the liberal media, which gained substantial influence in policymaking over the study years, had been a venue for and even led such efforts.³⁹ Even under a conservative Blue House, the liberal media will continue to press its messages, keeping the flame lit under an active opposition. As Ambassador Michael Armacost points out, “one key to America’s public diplomacy problem depends on whether it can persuade elements of the progressive camp in South Korea that Washington is on the right track, without in the process alienating the conservatives. That’ll be a trick.”⁴⁰

The South Korean government has likewise sought to improve its national image in the world, including in the U.S. The Korean government has been using “Dynamic Korea” as a slogan to enhance the country’s image overseas, and the Korean Embassy in Washington, D.C., hosts the KORUS House Forum, inviting Korean experts to speak on various issues related to Korea and the alliance. Yet even with such improved efforts, there is still a sense that “a certain degree of continued international obscurity . . . keeps Korea in the realm of the not remembered.”⁴¹ In terms of popular culture, the ‘Korean Wave’ has not reached American audiences in the same way it has those in Asia. According to a group of American and Korea experts, to address the “asymmetry of attention” in U.S.-ROK relations, “South Korea needs to actively promote its national image to U.S. officials and opinion-makers and to a wider American public.” This group goes on to recommend legislative exchanges, diversifying channels of communication to be bipartisan, and hiring a savvy K Street public relations firm. According to the experts

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of this group, “South Korea has a great story to tell . . . but sadly, it has been punching well below its weight in terms of conveying its accomplishments and its importance.” These experts cite the ROK’s troop deployment to Iraq as one of the most glaring examples of the under-publicizing of Korea.⁴² Yet at the same time, the liberal media’s challenging of the alliance has offered it one perhaps counterintuitive advantage. As David Straub notes, the asymmetry of attention combined with the Korean (particularly liberal) perspective yield the loudest voice within U.S.-ROK alliance politics—“the result is that South Korea frames issues and sets the agenda for the bilateral relationship to a significant degree, in spite of the asymmetry in raw power in favor of the U.S.”⁴³

The variation in news tone by issue presented in the previous chapters allows us to discern the relative degree to which each issue area poses challenges to the public image of two Koreas in the United States and the image of the U.S. in Korea, providing an index that might be useful to public diplomacy professionals in both nations. For instance, press coverage in South Korea and US clearly shows that security is persistently one of the most problematic issues for both nations, largely owing to the DPRK’s pursuit of nuclear weapons as well as ballistic missile proliferation. On the other hand, more positive (and less negative) tones on other issues such as economics may imply that the U.S. and the ROK have bases on which to build a more robust, strengthened relationship, even apart from their partnership in countering the threat presented by the DPRK, and it is in this regard that the KORUS FTA has been advocated by the Bush, Roh, and Lee governments. Although public diplomacy is a complex exercise that cannot be considered apart from the substance of policy—fundamentally “public diplomacy cannot be effective unless the foreign policy it supports is farsighted and reasonable”⁴⁴—I believe these findings should

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be taken into account as both Seoul and Washington seek to improve their image in the other country. On the other hand, Pyongyang faces a truly monumental challenge in attempting to counter Americans’ deep-rooted negativity toward the North, as detailed in Chapter 6. In the U.S. press, nations often come to have “preassigned roles,”⁴⁵ and this is largely true in the case of North Korea, a nation that some media critics contend has suffered from a notable lack of unbiased, nuanced, well-researched coverage.⁴⁶ To change such a monolithic coverage of the country, DPRK may need to grant better access to foreign correspondents who visit the country. As Caroline Gluck, a former BBC correspondent based in Seoul, who has made seven reporting trips to the country, noted, Pyongyang “should use the opportunity of foreign media visits to tell the world their viewpoint, to show us a side of the country that rarely gets told, as they often complained about negative reporting by visiting reporters.”⁴⁷

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Though national identity evolves over time, ingrained notions of identity can prove quite durable, changing only slowly. According to Peter Hays Gries, “Because identity conflict can often become existential . . . it is not easily amendable to rational solution or even compromise . . . existential [identity] conflict is passionate and explosive by its very nature.”⁴⁸ We witnessed such dynamics during the years of this study, as identity politics intensified in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a time when Koreans, led by progressives, reevaluated their nation’s role in a post-authoritarian, post-Cold War era. Though this period may very well represent the height of identity politics in recent South Korean history, it is important to emphasize that the question of a new Korean identity has by no

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means been resolved. The election of the Lee Myung Bak government, which is expected to implement policies more closely in line with the ‘alliance’ identity, does not end the identity debate but rather inherits it. The 2007 election came at a time when voters were focused on pocketbook issues and fatigued by ideology. Lee won based not on his conservative credentials but on his promise to shun ideology and pragmatically restore prosperity, and thus it would be incorrect to view this election as a signpost of either notion of national identity gaining ground over the other (Lee’s campaign rhetoric on North Korea and the alliance played a relatively minor role in his election). Yet, Lee’s “pragmatic” policy toward the North and alliance appears to be as ideological as his predecessors’ and identity politics will likely remain salient for the foreseeable future. The U.S. must not overlook the role and importance of Korean identity politics—and its impact on policy—in the bilateral relationship.

It is also crucial for the U.S. to recognize that the election of Lee Myung Bak does not portend the automatic return to any “golden age” of the alliance. His presidency takes place within a transformed context, significantly molded by recent contesting of Korean identity. In this vein, the events of the study period illustrate the complexities of U.S.-ROK relations. Though progressive, or nationalist, notions of identity and policy preferences clearly pose a more fundamental challenge to the alliance, it is important to acknowledge that there is not necessarily a direct relationship between policy preferences associated with the ‘alliance’ identity and those preferable to the U.S. For example, throughout the 2007 presidential campaign, the GNP indicated its desire to renegotiate the agreed date for transfer of wartime operational control from American to Korean military commanders. Yet, the U.S. Department of Defense has repeatedly signaled that this (and

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other issues) had already been resolved to mutual satisfaction through extensive bilateral negotiations and they were not open for renegotiation. In the eyes of U.S. defense professionals, the alliance is moving forward and increased South Korean responsibility is a reflection of the nation's excellent, capable forces. Likewise, policymakers associated with the 'nationalist' identity may pursue initiatives in line with U.S. interests. The Roh administration's support for the KORUS FTA as well as the deployment of ROK troops to Iraq (even if motivated not by shared interests in Iraq but anxiety over potential U.S. military action in North Korea) stand as such cases. Indeed, officials from the Roh administration regarded themselves as having worked hard and in good faith to resolve some of the outstanding issues in the relationship, making it a more “equal” partnership that would remain strong in the future.

International relations theorist Stephen Walt specifies certain conditions under which alliances become less likely to endure. They include cases in which the state posing the original threat becomes weaker, an alliance member becomes “convinced that their adversaries are not as bellicose as they once feared,” “shared historical experiences” become less relevant with the passage of time, and elites seek to improve their domestic political position through attacks on an alliance, especially when sovereignty issues are at stake.⁴⁹ Despite that reasonable arguments can be made that *all* these conditions have come to fruition during our study period, the U.S.-ROK alliance has endured. According to a June 2006 World Gallup Poll, although less than half (43%) of Koreans feel seriously threatened by North Korean nuclear weapons, two-thirds (66%) of Koreans believe a U.S. withdrawal from their country would greatly impact the stability of Northeast Asia. Indeed, over 70% of Koreans state a preference for retaining the U.S. presence. These seemingly

contradictory views suggest the mutually acknowledged imperative for Washington and Seoul to work together to develop a broader rationale for the alliance that reflects new realities. Beyond the defense of South Korea and Japan, U.S. alliances with these nations have contributed significantly to regional stability in East Asia. Indeed, the Mutual Defense Treaty commits the two nations to work together to “strengthen the fabric of peace in the Pacific area.”⁵⁰ Shifting greater focus toward this long-enshrined imperative would necessarily involve political will from Seoul, given that the U.S. would likely emphasize increased ROK-Japan cooperation and multilateral initiatives such as the PSI in pursuit of this goal. Stressing regional—or even global—peace and stability as an organizing principle would also stand as meaningful U.S. recognition of Korea’s economic and diplomatic stature and identity.

Victor Cha has suggested that the broadening of the alliance’s rationale could be fortified by efforts to bolster a shared identity within the alliance—that is, to emphasize “commonly held norms, values, beliefs, and conceptions of how security is best achieved.” Cha argues that “A key determinant of alliance resiliency is the degree to which shared identities underpin interaction,” as this type of commitment allows alliances to outlive and stretch beyond their original rationales.⁵¹ In their first meeting, at Camp David in April 2008, Presidents Bush and Lee Myung Bak stressed the allies’ common values and shared challenges in the 21st century, calling for a broad-based “strategic alliance” that on the basis of “freedom, democracy, human rights and the principle of market economy . . . will contribute to global peace and security.”⁵² Many noted analysts, including those belonging to the Korea Society-Shorenstein APARC *New Beginnings* group, believe that this is a very positive development,⁵³ commiserate with South Korea’s standing in the world,

though they stress the importance of early bilateral agreement on the substance and details of such a proposal.⁵⁴

There are high expectations on both sides of the Pacific that the new Lee administration represents an opportunity to improve U.S.-ROK relations. This seems especially true in light of the last five years featuring the overlap of President Roh and the 386ers with President Bush and the neoconservatives, which was—at least in early years—possibly the least workable combination of leadership for the alliance. New hope is justified and both sides have reason to be optimistic. President Lee has vowed to stress the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance and will also attempt to restore trilateral collaboration among South Korea, the U.S., and Japan. President Lee has also promised that unlike his predecessor, he will take a “pragmatic,” interests-based approach to foreign affairs and national security issues,⁵⁵ and this message was very well-received in both Washington and Tokyo on Lee’s first presidential trip abroad.⁵⁶

Still, the U.S. should be wary of creating expectations for a dramatic change in South Korea as a result of this power shift. As shown in this book, the Korean political landscape has evolved significantly since democratization, with the development of a vibrant—even institutionalized—left and civil society. These groups and their ideas, particularly about the North and the U.S., persist, and identity politics could reemerge quite quickly in line with events, as in the cases of China’s claim on Koguryo⁵⁷ and the 2002 USFK accident. Indeed, the agreement to begin reimportation of U.S. beef to Korea may be the first such case under the new Lee administration—the president has viewed the spread of public anxiety over U.S. beef as politically motivated,⁵⁸ and *Chosun Ilbo* has compared the outpouring of emotion and candlelight vigils to the sweeping anti-American

reaction to the 2002 schoolgirl incident.⁵⁹ Although overall the intensity of identity politics seems to have decreased over the past few years, the divided political landscape is not likely to change in the near term, and this dynamic can hinder the ability of ROK governments to think and act strategically. In fact, as clearly displayed during his first visit to Washington in April 2008, Lee’s ostensibly “pragmatic” policy is firmly grounded in the ‘alliance’ identity, provoking strong reactions from progressive forces that have promoted the nationalist identity. The new Korean administration will have to work within this transformed political context, and the U.S. and other actors should understand that Lee’s policies do not represent any wholesale return to past fondly remembered times. The social and political dynamics built up during these study years signal that even though a conservative administration has assumed power, this is new political terrain. The U.S.-ROK alliance must evolve in a new era.

To better secure long-term interests and continued cooperation, the U.S. must consider the interests associated with both identities and engage both sides constructively, while being careful not to alienate conservatives in the process of reaching out to progressives. Additionally, the U.S. must acknowledge the constraints that a polity divided on national identity imposes on a Korean government of any ideological orientation. Although the voice of Korean progressives was weakened by defeat in recent elections, they still remain important in Korean society and the U.S. should not overlook these forces or their ideas. This is particularly the case in light of the possibility that the establishment of a conservative administration in South Korea may galvanize the opposition in challenging the government’s policy agenda, including—and perhaps foremost—its approach to the North (especially if the Lee administration’s attempts to

enforce greater conditionality only produce worse North Korean behavior and/or inter-Korean cooperation bogs down). In a sense, progressives were co-opted by the liberal governments of Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun, as they reluctantly agreed on certain policies like sending troops to Iraq. In the face of a conservative administration, however, they could become more aggressive in advancing their agenda. This could mean intensification of identity politics, and the U.S. could easily be caught between a conservative Blue House and progressive activists. To avoid this pitfall, the United States must treat the Republic of Korea as it is, not as it was, or as we might wish it to be.

¹ For a brief description of such commentary from Korea analysts and Secretary Rumsfeld, see “North Korea nuke test fans fears of East Asian nuclear arms race,” Associated Press, October 8, 2006.

² “Awkward bedfellows; South Korea and America,” *The Economist*, September 9, 2006.

³ “North Korean nuclear test ‘far more devastating’ than missile test – Roh,” Yonhap, September 15, 2006 (as supplied by BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific – Political, September 16, 2006).

⁴ This seminar was based on my co-edited book: Philip Yun and Gi-Wook Shin, eds, *North Korea: 2005 and Beyond*. Stanford, CA: The Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (Distributed by the Brookings Institution Press).

⁵ <http://iis-db.stanford.edu/evnts/4585/CNAPSTrans.pdf> (assessed on November 22, 2007)

⁶ Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel Sneider, “U.S. and allies must stand up to North Korea's threat,” opinion-editorial, *San Jose Mercury News*, October 8, 2006.

⁷ Norimitsu Onishi, “Tough Talk from Seoul, If Little Will For a Fight,” *New York Times*, October 10, 2006.

⁸ Choe Sang-Hun, “Seoul joins Tokyo in bid to get tough with North,” *International Herald Tribune*, October 10, 2006.

⁹ Anna Fifield, “Clouds over Seoul’s ‘sunshine policy’,” *Financial Times*, October 11, 2006.

¹⁰ Khang Hyun-sung, “Political fallout still hangs over Seoul; Confusion over engagement policy follows nuclear test,” *South China Morning Post*, October 26, 2006.

¹¹ “Rice’s Seoul visit,” Editorial, *The Korea Herald*, October 19, 2006.

¹² Kim Rahn, “Conservatives Blame Roh, Progressives Blame Bush,” *Korea Times*, October 11, 2006.

¹³ See Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Sook-Jong Lee, “Generational Change in South Korea: Implications for the US-ROK Alliance,” pp. 43-49 in *Strategy and Sentiment: South Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.-ROK Alliance* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004).

¹⁵ See J.J. Suh, “Bound to Last? The U.S.-Korea Alliance and Analytical Eclecticism,” in *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power, and Efficiency*, J.J. Suh, Peter J. Katzenstein, and Allen Carlson, eds. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 169.

¹⁶ Gi Wook Shin, “The Paradox of Korean Globalization,” APARC Working Paper, January 2003. <http://iis-db.stanford.edu/pubs/20125/Shin.pdf>

¹⁷ See Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism*.

¹⁸ “The Search for a Common Strategic Vision: Charting the future of the U.S.-ROK Security Partnership,” U.S.-ROK Strategic Forum, Co-directed by G. John Ikenberry, Chung-in Moon, and Mitchell Reiss, February 18, 2008, <http://www.wm.edu/news/?id=8681>.

¹⁹ See ed. Stephen D. Krasner, *International Regimes*, Cornell University Press, 1983, p.2.

²⁰ See Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, “Power in International Politics,” *International Organization* 59, Winter 2005, pp. 39-75; John Gerald Ruggie, “What Makes the World Hang Together: Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge,” *International Organization* 52, Autumn 1998, pp. 855-885.

²¹ Henry Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002, 336 pages.

²² James Brooke, “South Opposes Pressuring North Korea, Which Hints It Will Scrap Nuclear Pact,” *New York Times*, January 1, 2003.

²³ “U.S. More Dangerous Than North Korea,” *Chosun Ilbo*, January 12, 2004.

²⁴ Mark E. Manyin, “South Korean Politics and Rising ‘Anti-Americanism’: Implications for U.S. Policy toward North Korea,” Congressional Research Service, May 6, 2003.

²⁵ *New York Times* journalist Martin Fackler has written, “For example, in covering the opponents of Lone Star and other American funds, I visited offices of activists and social groups festooned with posters showing torn American flags and large fists on the head President Bush. In their writings and speeches, they describe Lone Star as a symbol of American economic domination, and a form of cultural imperialism as the United States tries to impose its brand of capitalism upon smaller South Korea. Resistance to Lone Star is cast in terms of heroic defense of South Korean identity and autonomy.” Martin Fackler, Conference Paper, “Experiences of a Business Journalist,” First Drafts of Korea: The U.S. Media and Perceptions of the Last Cold War Frontier conference, Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford, CA, July 13, 2007.

²⁶ See, for example Sook Jong Lee, “Allying with the United States: Changing South Korean Attitudes,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, Spring 2005; Sang-mee Bak, “South Korean Self-Identity and Evolving Views of the United States,” pp. 36-42 in *Strategy and Sentiment: South Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.-ROK Alliance* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004); and Robert Marquand, “How S. Korea’s View of the North Flipped,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 22, 2003.

²⁷ Connor 1994, p. 140; emphasis in original.

²⁸ Daniel Sneider, “Strategic Abandonment: Alliance Relations in Northeast Asia in the Post-Iraq Era,” *Toward Sustainable Economic & Security Relations in East Asia: U.S. and ROK Policy Options*, Volume 18, Korea Economic Institute, February 28, 2008, http://www.keia.org/joint_studies.php.

²⁹ Michael Armacost, “Asian Alliances and American Politics,” APARC Working Paper, February 1999, pp. 5, 12.

³⁰ Stephen Hess, *International News & Foreign Correspondents*, The Brookings Institution: Washington, D.C., 1996, p.1.

³¹ See Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe, *Discourse and Identity*, Edinburgh University Press, April 30, 2006, 328 pages.

³² See Bloom 1990; Krause and Renwick 1996; Lapid and Kratochwil 1996; Rozman 2004; Suh et al. 2004.

³³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

³⁴ Michael Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-25* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988).

³⁵ See Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism*.

³⁶ See House International Relations Committee for summary of the bill, <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/archives/107/fpa0617.htm>.

³⁷ David Straub articulates three impediments to effective U.S. public diplomacy. First, “embassy officials usually have a limited understanding of the foreign country and culture in which they are working.” Second, “our own cultural and nationalistic biases, of which we are often only dimly aware . . . result in emotional responses that can severely distort our analysis of events.” Third, “[we] should have become much more modest about our ability to understand foreign countries and about our capacity to influence them.” In fact, the Bush administration’s bid to improve America’s image abroad led to a string of resignations and appointments to the Undersecretary post. From Beers through the president’s trusted advisor Karen Hughes, many capable appointees have found it difficult to succeed in this mission, which is disproportionately focused—and heavily so—on the Middle East. See David Straub, conference Paper, Session IV: Public Diplomacy and the Korean Peninsula, First Drafts of Korea: The U.S. Media and Perceptions of the Last Cold War Frontier conference, Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford, CA, July 13, 2007, pp. 8-9. Also, for an example of the intense criticism levied against Karen Hughes and the administration’s years of public diplomacy efforts, see editorial by AEI scholar David Frum, “Losing the battle against anti-Americanism,” *National Post*, November 3, 2007; and Robert Satloff, “How to Win the War of Ideas,” Editorial copy, *Washington Post*, November 10, 2007.

³⁸ David Straub, Conference Paper, pp. 4-5.

³⁹ On-line papers like OhMyNews or portals such as naver.com have also played key roles in mobilizing young people on key policy issues.

⁴⁰ Personal comments to the author on May 12, 2008.

⁴¹ Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park, “Remember Me, Remember Us, Remember Korea: *Hallyu*, Flashbacks, and the Transformation of South Korea Into an Unforgettable Nation,” *Toward Sustainable Economic & Security Relations in East Asia: U.S. and ROK Policy Options*, Volume 18, Korea Economic Institute, February 28, 2008, http://www.keia.org/joint_studies.php.

⁴² “The Search for a Common Strategic Vision: Charting the future of the U.S.-ROK Security Partnership,” U.S.-ROK Strategic Forum, Co-directed by G. John Ikenberry,

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<http://www.wm.edu/news/?id=8681>.

⁴³ David Straub, Conference Paper, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁴ David Straub, Conference Paper, p. 9.

⁴⁵ Stephen Hess, *International News & Foreign Correspondents*, The Brookings Institution: Washington, D.C., 1996, p.32.

⁴⁶ See Hugh Gusterson, “Paranoid, Potbellied Stalinist Gets Nuclear Weapons: How the U.S. Print Media Cover North Korea,” *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol.15, No. 1, March 2008, pp. 21-42.

⁴⁷ Caroline Gluck, “Reporting North Korea,” as presented at First Drafts of Korea: The U.S. Media and Perceptions of the Last Cold War Frontier conference, Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford, CA, 13 July 2007.

⁴⁸ Peter Hays Gries, “The Koguryo Controversy, National Identity, and Sino-Korean Relations Today,” *EAST ASIA*, Winter 2005, Vol. 22, No.4, pp. 13-14.

⁴⁹ Stephen M. Walt, “Why Alliances Endure or Collapse,” *Survival*, Vol. 39, No. 1, Spring 1997, pp. 156-179.

⁵⁰ Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of Korea and the United States of America, signed October 1, 1953. <http://www.usfk.mil/org/fkdc-sa/sofa/mutdef.htm> Many Americans do not appreciate that from the beginning of the alliance, its goals extended beyond the peninsula. Indeed, the Mutual Defense Treaty specifies a regional purview and does not mention North Korea by name.

⁵¹ Victor D. Cha, “Shaping Change and Cultivating Ideas in the US-ROK Alliance,” *The Future of America’s Alliances in Northeast Asia*, eds. Michael H. Armacost and Daniel I. Okimoto, Brookings Institution Press: Washington, D.C., 2004, p. 129. For further discussion of alliances abilities to extend beyond their original rationales, see Jae Jung Suh, *Power, Interest, and Identity in Military Alliances*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York, NY, 2007, 304 pp.

⁵² White House Press Release, “President Bush Participates in Joint Press Availability with President Lee Myung-Bak of the Republic of Korea,” Camp David, April 19, 2008.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/04/20080419-1.html>

⁵³ “*New Beginnings*” in the U.S.-ROK Alliance: Recommendation to U.S. Policymakers, The Korea Society and The Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center of Stanford University, April 2008, pp. 9-11.

⁵⁴ Remarks of Richard Lawless, “Transforming the U.S. - South Korean Alliance,” The Heritage Foundation, April 24, 2008.

<http://www.heritage.org/Press/Events/ev042408a.cfm>

⁵⁵ Though I do not suggest that the current American and perhaps global economic downturn may be of the same magnitude as the financial crisis of the mid and late 1990s, it is worth noting that during this time, as seen in Chapter 4, articles related to the U.S. and East Asia security decreased and tone temporarily improved.

⁵⁶ For example, see Michael Armacost, “New Hope for U.S.-South Korea ties,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 17, 2008; Foster Klug, “Bush welcomes like-minded South Korean president Friday,” Associated Press, April 18, 2008; ‘Fukuda-Lee meeting marks dawn of new era,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 22, 2008.

⁵⁷ See Peter Hays Gries, “The Koguryo Controversy, National Identity, and Sino-Korean Relations Today,” *EAST ASIA*, Winter 2005, Vol. 22, No.4, pp. 13-14. Though China and Japan have served as ‘significant others’ against which Korean identity was defined in the past, for the purposes of this volume, I focus on the key roles the U.S. and North Korea play in Korean identity in the present.

⁵⁸ “President Lee links public anxiety on U.S. beef to political motivations,” *Hankyoreh*, May 13, 2008.

⁵⁹ “U.S. Beef Imports Fuel Online Scaremongering,” *Chosun Ilbo*, May 5, 2008.