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*for Award of
Distinction
in Project*

**SAME SIDE OF THE 38TH:
A COMPARATIVE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

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Abstract

The United States has had armed forces on the Korean peninsula since the conclusion of World War II. The relationship between the U.S. and the Republic of Korea at this time, however, is becoming critical. Anti-Americanism is becoming more popular among many groups, college students in particular, and the American military is taking steps to accommodate new demands from the Korean government and Korean people.

The purpose of this project is to compare nineteen life interviews of Korean citizens and American soldiers stationed in Korea with the little research in print. The project will illustrate a more complete view of USFK(United States Forces Korea)-ROK relations by revealing individual opinions on both sides of the relationship. It will also reveal what must be done to assure cooperation and efficiency in the future if U.S. troops are to remain in South Korea.

*Thanks to all those who helped along the way.
You made the oceans seem smaller and the work
load seem easier.*

*Also special thanks to Jim Hquack for my new Sony recorder
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Introduction

“I think Koreans must try to understand [that American soldiers are not all bad]...But I think Americans should also try to understand Koreans.”¹

It was somewhere between singing in Korean at a *noraebang* and my father trying to order a coffee at a McDonald's in Seoul that I realized how very strange the relationship is between South Korea and the United States. After spending almost a year in Korea, I knew that Koreans lives were touched every day by some American influence. Whether it was American movies and music, or running into American soldiers or the few American students in Korea, Seoul was brimming with changes of globalization.

At the same time, I recognized that most Americans do not know much about Korea. My relatives in East Tennessee warned me to stay away from eating dogs and the notoriously rancid kimchee, while my relatives in Mississippi asked, “Where's Korea again?” I wondered: How can two countries on opposite sides of the globe be so different and still have worked well together for so long?

Before I got off the plane at Incheon I took care to read every book I could find on Korea. Then as a student for two semesters in Seoul, I tried to learn the Korean language. But despite my attention to the many cultural and language differences, I still had many frustrating (and often embarrassing) misunderstandings. I saw that many other Americans were also having issues dealing with this new culture. These Americans were soldiers.

While our men and women were making an effort to live in Korea, Koreans were struggling to accept our forces. In the summer of 2002, two Korean girls were killed

¹ Interview with “Kim,” (2 July 2004) p.22.

during an American training exercise. Although much of America was unaware of the accident, the Korean population was deeply disturbed and angered. I wanted to know: Does this happen every time an American GI does something wrong? How far does this resentment run? How much do our troops affect the average Korean? And how are our troops affected by being in the midst of increasing opposition?

The United States has approximately 1500 military installments outside the continental U.S.² As the world changed at the Cold War, our objectives and foreign policy also changed. The U.S. has already moved many of its military installations and within the next few years, more could follow. Most Americans are not concerned with these extensions of our country and are quite unaware of how the military works. Some people also assume that America is represented abroad only by our diplomats and the President. They probably also believe that American culture is distributed throughout the world only by movies and television. However, other countries, especially those with American military bases, have face-to-face contact with Americans every day. Each person becomes an ambassador of America and every action is seriously scrutinized by the host country. Any “problem” could become a problem in the relations between the two countries.

While important research has been done on changing Korean attitudes in particular, I do not think it is enough. Many books and essays only recite Korean public opinion polls or criticize the American military for its actions. There is little work being done that gets at why individuals are increasingly negative towards the U.S. Forces Korea

² Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases : Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p.66.

(USFK). There is also little in print about how our soldiers perceive Korea and the Korean people and if they enjoy or only suffer through their tour in South Korea.

My goal was to create an oral history project comparing the experiences of Korean citizens with that of American soldiers stationed in Korea. I felt that it was important to examine the attitudes and opinions of both groups toward one another, how these attitudes formed, and how it is dealt with. I also wanted to identify the sources of conflict between Koreans and the American military, not from governmental or intellectual opinions but in the eyes of average men and women living on the Korean peninsula.

I firmly believe many things can be learned from personal accounts. From the Korean perspective, we can gain more information from open-ended questions. I allowed the interviewees to qualify their answers instead of asking, "Do you hate America? Yes or no?" In addition to that, we can compare individual views with the larger public opinion polls to see if the responses are related.

I also think learning the American soldier perspective is essential. When we better understand how they think and feel, the military can start to address these issues. If a soldier is bored and unhappy, his low morale is likely to affect others, whether it is Koreans on the street or other soldiers around him. We should find out what problems our men and women have and how to resolve them so that our soldiers can live in Korean society with greater cooperation and mutual understanding.

Methodology

Preparations

The original plan for this project was to travel to South Korea during the summer of 2004 and interview Korean citizens residing in the vicinity of Seoul and American soldiers stationed at the Yongsan base in Seoul, or in the surrounding area. The goal was to conduct audiotaped life history interviews with 15 to 20 participants. Each interview was to consist of a list of pre-planned questions but also allow for follow-up questions. The purpose of conducting life interviews is to gain insight as to the background of each participant to better understand why they feel and think the things they do. I also knew that the participants would possibly feel more comfortable answering any controversial questions if I gained rapport with them.

Because oral history involves human subjects, I had to obtain permission from the Office of Research's Internal Review Board (IRB). I submitted the Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects and was approved prior to starting the project.³ Before every interview each subject had to sign an Informed Consent form and had the option of signing a Deed of Gift form, which gives permission for possession of the tapes and transcript to myself and the Center for the Study of War and Society, and allows for public access to the interview transcript.⁴

Before leaving for Korea I also identified several potential interviewees, both Korean and American. Many Koreans were interested in participating. Those men and

³ See "Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects."

⁴ See "Informed Consent Form" and "Deed of Gift Form."

women were in their twenties and were acquaintances from my first visit to Korea or were referred to me by those acquaintances. They seemed excited about being involved. I also tried to find American soldiers of the same age but this proved to be more difficult.

Friends put me in contact with soldiers, who in turn introduced me to their friends stationed in Korea. I had three contacts with GIs before leaving.

Importance of Selective Sample Group

For the purpose of this project, I chose to limit the type of person I would interview.

On the Korean side, the focus was more on college age men and women. While it would have been interesting to look at the greater population, the nature of oral history (and qualitative studies in general) leads one to a more focused group with elaborate descriptions, rather than more participants with focused answers. The first reason I chose college-aged students was simplicity. I already had many contacts within this age group and there would be little problem finding enough people that could speak English.⁵

The main reason, however, that I focused on this age group was the significance of their answers. Most reports and polls acknowledge that there is a difference in the way people under thirty view the U.S. military presence and how their parents and grandparents do. This age group is certainly the most vocal with their opposition to the USFK. I wanted to explore personal views from this group to see if they line up with the larger impression of the group in opinion polls. College-age men and women are also

⁵ My Korean skills are not advanced enough to conduct interviews in Korean and translation was possible, it would have caused more problems with logistics and interview accuracy.

becoming increasingly politically active. Their vote helped elect Roh Moo-Hyun to the presidency. Roh was the staunchly liberal candidate that favored Kim Dae-Jung's "Sunshine Policy" towards North Korea and still highly critical of the U.S. military's presence in Korea now that he is in office.⁶

On the American side, I wanted to focus on enlisted men and women that were newcomers to the Korean peninsula. Because the majority of soldiers stationed in Korea are enlisted and serve one year tours, I thought this would be the most representative of how the greater part of our soldiers felt about Korea. I saw these GIs as more exposed, given their lower military status, young age and less world experience. Generally speaking, Koreans mostly criticize the behavior of the enlisted personnel. I wanted to talk to these soldiers about their reactions to the drastic lifestyle change and if they felt threatened by harsh Korean criticism. I also initially wanted to limit my sample group to soldiers stationed in or around Seoul because my Korean interviewees were going to be from Seoul. I felt it would help clarify the differences between these urban college students and the U.S. military to hear both sides of the same story. (I will discuss later how I had to change my sample.)

Obstacles

I arrived in Seoul on May 17, 2004 to begin the project. I immediately began to get in touch with those people but I found several problems that caused delays.

⁶ During the election, Roh constantly stoked anti-American sentiment by criticizing the USFK and demanding equal status to the U.S. on many issues in relations between the two countries. Norman D. Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind?: The US-ROK Security Relationship after 9/11*, (Santa Monica: RAND, 2004) p.21-22.

The first problem I ran into was technical. I brought extensive equipment loaned to me by the Center for the Study of War and Society to record the interviews but it had to be plugged in. I had brought a transformer but finding a quiet place with electrical outlets in Seoul was challenging, to say the least. I continued to explore the city and finally found a few reasonable settings. I was also given a smaller, more portable recorder during my trip that allowed me a little more freedom in choosing interview locations.

Next, interviewing Koreans was more difficult than I anticipated. The first problem was that I arrived during the school year. For the first month no one wanted to meet with me. They took their school work very seriously and I had to wait until the end of their exams.

Finally their schedules were open but there was another problem. Living in Korea previously taught me that Koreans are private people but I did not fully understand this until I interviewed them about life experiences and their views on the U.S. It took a lot of persuading to get the interviewees to open up about their life and their true feelings about the States. I had to assure them that I would not be offended by what they said before they would talk. I felt like their answers were open and honest on all questions except on the issue of race.

Finally, it was most exhausting finding American military personnel to talk to because all of my original contacts fell through. It was unfortunate timing that I arrived in Korea when 3500 troops were being redeployed to Iraq within the month. In addition to that, thousands more were being relocated within Korea. When a few contacts did reemerge, I was told I could not interview enlisted men until Legal Affairs approved it. I

made more than twelve phone calls to Legal Affairs and Public Affairs but they continued to refer me to the other offices to no end.

Because of the time constraint, I decided to give up my original plan of interviewing enlisted men. Through other contacts and friends at home, I found five officers and NCOs willing and able to be interviewed. I also originally intended to interview GIs stationed in Seoul, but three of the five men interviewed were stationed in Kunsan, a southern city three and half hours away from Seoul.

Interview Methodology

In preparation for the project, I was able to take Dr. Kurt Piehler's class "Oral Histories of War and Peace" at the University of Tennessee. For that class, I read *The Oral History Manual* by Barbara Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan and got a better understanding of conducting an oral history project.⁷ I also had the opportunity to interview two Korean War veterans with Dr. Piehler for the class and in connection with the Center for the Study of War and Society.

Preparation is an important step in the interview process. As I learned with the Center, a great deal of time is usually spent reviewing the participant's background to ask more informed questions and recognize discrepancies. This was not the case with the interviews conducted in Korea, however. In some cases I had knowledge of part of the person's background but for the most part, the interviews were conducted with little preparation in advance. Not only was I in a country where I did not have access to proper

⁷ Barbara Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan, *The Oral History Manual*, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002).

research materials, I often did not know who was going to be interviewed until the last minute and sometimes had several interviews in one week.

By the end of the summer, I was able to conduct twelve audiotaped interviews with Koreans and five audiotaped interviews with American GIs. I also had two non-recorded interviews with Koreans. The interviews generally lasted between forty-five minutes to two hours. Each interviewee was asked to talk about their family history, their own childhood and education and military service (if applicable). They were also asked, among other things, for their opinions on the state of the US-Korean relationship and related problems, whether the U.S. military should remain in Korea, and how Koreans and GIs perceived each other.

Transcript Production

I know that all transcripts are accurate and true to the interview because I transcribed them myself. In doing so, I followed the current guidelines used by the Center for the Study of War and Society for transcribing and editing.

After transcribing and editing each interview transcript, the respective interviewee was sent a copy. They were able to review the document, correct misspellings of proper names and places, and clarify any questionable statements. Only after the interviewee was satisfied, the final transcript was printed.

Observations and Expectations

Observations and Background

During the time I was studying in Korea from August 2002 to June 2003, many events occurred that upset the relationship between the United States and Korea. I also saw that these events were having an effect on how my Korean friends and a lot of the population thought about the American military and the American government.

The first major incident transpired in June 2002, before I set foot on Korean soil. On June 13, 2002 an American armored vehicle on a training exercise ran over two junior high Korean girls. For the next several months, massive demonstrations took place all around Korea, but mainly in Seoul and around the U.S. military base in Seoul, Yongsan.⁸ Many people were outraged by the accident but they were further incensed by the fact the U.S. military would not turn over the soldiers responsible for the two girls' deaths to the Korean authorities.

Legally speaking, the U.S. was not obliged to release the soldiers to the Korean government. The U.S. has a treaty with eighty-five countries where American soldiers are stationed, including Korea.⁹ This Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) covers everything from entry into the country to base facilities to criminal jurisdiction. According to the agreement, the U.S. military has jurisdiction over its members when the crime committed is "solely against the property or security of the United States," against

⁸ Lee Soo Jeong, "South Korea: U.S. Military Driver Didn't Hear Warning," (July 02, 2002, ArmyTimes.Com).

⁹ Jinwung Kim, "Ambivalent Allies: Recent South Korean Perceptions of the United States Forces Korea (USFK)," (*Asian Affairs: An American Review*, Winter 2004, Vol. 30 Issue 4) p.275.

a U.S. citizen or their property, or if the alleged crime happened while on duty.¹⁰ But while the agreement is clear on the course of action that had to be taken, most of the Korean population did not agree with it.

The emotions from the summer incident had only just begun to calm down when the United States invaded Iraq in the spring of 2003. Again, many people were incensed. Demonstrations began to appear again, flyers and posters covered college campuses, and the news carried nothing but news about the war.

I will also admit that my first impression of American soldiers in Korea was not a good one. Whether it was on the street or in bars and clubs, I found many GIs to be unreserved and somewhat boisterous. While I was studying Korean and trying to fit in, many soldiers spoke none of the language and a few were even contemptuous of Korean culture and customs. Most of the young GIs I met were extremely courteous and friendly to me, but I understood how Korean women could mistake their flirtations for aggressiveness and how Korean men could get easily irritated with their forward nature.

Background Research

Before I even began this project, I wanted to be as prepared as possible and gain enough information to be able to carry it out without any major problems. To do this, I took three classes in the spring of 2004. As I already stated, I took "Oral Histories of War and Peace" and gained valuable information on the importance of oral history, and interview and transcribing methods. "History of U.S. Foreign Relations since WWII"

¹⁰ "US-ROK Status of Forces Agreement," Article XXII, (July 1966, Amended 2001, United States Forces Korea Website). (See "US-ROK Status of Forces Agreement")

allowed me to do more in-depth research into the relations between the U.S. and South Korea since the 1970s. I also took "U.S. Military History" and learned more about the armed forces, including facts I would later need like structure and rank.

To better prepare for this project, I wanted to explore what kind and how much academic material there was on the subject of American military influence on the countries where bases are present, and more particularly the South Korean case. Not surprisingly, it was difficult to find a lot of information about the relationship between U.S. Forces and the Korean population.

The first book I read was Catherine Moon's *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution In U.S.-Korea Relations*.¹¹ Her book is primarily focused on military prostitution but I found her interviews with Korean prostitutes to be invaluable. The account loosely traced the history of the relationship between the two countries and gave a more personal consideration to that history.

I also consulted three monographs by Cynthia Enloe: *The Morning After: Sexual Politics At The End Of The Cold War*; *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*; and *Bananas, Beaches & Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*.¹² Her research in the area of the American military's power over local women was interesting in all three books but there was not much specific information on the Korean peninsula. Most of her research has been done on the

¹¹ Katherine H.S. Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution In U.S.-Korea Relations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹² Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics At The End Of The Cold War*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers : The International Politics Of Militarizing Women's Lives*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Philippines, Great Britain, and Okinawa. Enloe's facts on past crimes committed by servicemen and other general military actions were well documented but her generalizations and conclusions were misleading. Her arguments continually criticized the American military for oppressing women but did not take into fully take into account cooperation from other governments or the military's recent progress in resolving many of the issues.

I found a rather unusual source of information while I was in Korea in the form of a fiction novel. *Fox Girl*, by Nora Okja Keller, is a novel about a young girl driven into prostitution in a military camptown.¹³ Although it was a fictional account, the book represents how a large part of the Korean population feels about the U.S. military and its effects on Korean society. It also gave me an idea of how deep racism ran in Korea in the past.

Outside of these resources focused on military prostitution and rape, there is even less research on the relationship between the U.S. and the U.S. military and South Koreans. Fortunately, the situation in Korea has gained more attention in the last few years and new research has emerged. One essay in *Asian Affairs* explicitly describes South Korean perceptions of the USFK as reported by several major recent polls. Two other books published within the last year spell out further how Korean polls indicate that Koreans are increasingly negative towards the U.S. military. None of these really described the personal effects on Koreans and certainly left out the views of the American soldiers.

Expectations

When starting this project, there were several things that I expected to hear from the interviews. The participants were in no way representative of the entire Korean population or American military personnel in Korea, but there were still opinions I anticipated on hearing from most of the participants.

Because of the recent inflammatory events and the amount of bad press the American military received during my stay, I imagined that my Korean interviewees would not be favorable towards the military. Numerous demonstrations took place during my time in Korea and most of these occurred around college campuses. I had also heard from many sources that the younger generation of Koreans was more likely to be opposed to the U.S. military presence in Korea and dislike the American GIs. I could not help but think that many of my interviewees would feel this way. In addition to that, most of the research available at the time criticized the military's "imperialistic ambitions" abroad and its treatment of women. I thought that this too could have a negative affect on Korean perceptions.

I had also planned to interview college age men and women in the military in Korea. Just from my own observations and conversations with enlisted men in the past, I speculated that about half of the military population would not be happy with their tour in Korea and the other half truly enjoyed their time. I also expected to hear most GIs say that the U.S. military did not need to remain in Korea. As far as NCOs and officers, I had no idea what they would say because I had never had any contact with these groups in Korea prior to completing the interviews.

¹³ Nora Okja Keller, *Fox Girl*, (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc, 2002).

Korean Interviewees

“Korean people really like Americans. And also, Korean people really like soldiers...But Korea people don't really like American soldiers.”

Background on Interviewees

The Korean interviewees range in age from nineteen to twenty-six. I interviewed eight Korean women and six Korean men. Seven of the interviewees have lived and/or studied in the United States for at least one semester and three have studied, interned, or traveled extensively in other countries. Two of the Korean men have done their military service, one serving in the Marines and one in the Air Force, and two other men served in public service as an alternative.¹⁴ At the time of the interviews, three of the women and one man had graduated from college and the other ten were still working on their undergraduate or graduate degrees. (Since then, several have graduated from their respective universities.)

After asking the participants about their own lives, the next question I asked was when they start to learn English in schools and if they are taught American history. Most of the responses indicated that in the past, the English language was introduced in middle school but currently is being instituted as early as elementary school. But as the interviews were conducted in English, each participant was quite fluent in the English language, even if they did not want to admit it. They also said, unsurprisingly, that no specialized teaching on American history takes place unless the student chooses to take it at the college level.

¹⁴ Military service is required of all Korean males. The only exceptions are made for physical disabilities or exceptional skills that can be used in public service. The required length of military service is currently twenty-four months and approximately thirty-six months for public service.

Problems between the U.S. and Korea

One of the next questions I asked each interviewee is if there are problems between the U.S. military and Korea. Although I asked a very open-ended question, I received many of the same responses. One of the problems I heard from five different people is crime committed by GIs in Korea. They said whether it was the accident that killed the two Korean girls or violence towards prostitutes, the soldiers often cause problems. Hyun-Mi Kim said that they have free reign in Korea and don't respect the law.

The most popular answer I received was not about the crime, however. Eight people responded that it was not the crime but the punishment given, as laid out in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), that causes the most problems between the U.S. and Korea. They explained that Korea should have more jurisdiction over American soldiers in Korea. Every time a soldier is tried and acquitted by American courts, more people become outraged and suspicious of the system in place. Even those few GIs who are convicted in Korean courts and serve their sentences in Korean jails are a matter of disagreement.¹⁵ According to Faye Kim, it makes people furious that the U.S. demands from Korea "very good housing and excessive luxury facilities" for its citizens. These "luxury facilities" include air-conditioning and physical activity facilities.¹⁶

Another problem that five people mentioned also had to do with SOFA. These people stated that the agreement is condescending in itself. They said that SOFA allows the U.S. to treat Korea as inferior, almost as a conquered nation. In Yoon Hye Young's

¹⁵ According to *Stars and Stripes*, there are six U.S. servicemen currently in prison in South Korea. Their crimes range from drug dealing to drunken vehicular homicide to first degree murder.

Seth Robson, "For U.S. Inmates In S. Korean Prison, Time Feels Like It's Standing Still," (*Stars and Stripes, Pacific Edition*. 13 March 2005).

opinion, the American military presence symbolizes how Korea is not a free country.¹⁷ Along the same lines, a few people mentioned that the military's move out of Seoul and the DMZ is causing problems. The U.S. is demanding money or not paying for things as the plans progress, they said.

And finally, five people mentioned that some problems are being caused by political and media issues. One interviewee pointed to the war in Iraq and President Bush as causing anti-Americanism. Another four stated that Korean politicians use the United States Forces-Korea (USFK) for their own political gain. The politicians condemn the American military in public, but quietly support U.S. initiatives in the legislature. The Korean public only hears criticisms though, and they begin to formulate opinions based on that. Many people admitted that the Korean media only gives bad press to the U.S. military. Some media outlets reported that the tank incident was not an accident, but done on purpose. As Faye Kim said, the media "encourages the public to be indignant."¹⁸ Jun-chan Yoon also says that though the military demands more land and pollutes the Han River in Seoul, these are only secondary issues.

Camptowns

Seeing as how the issue of military camptowns might be sensitive, I tried to get at the participants' opinions without any implications of my own. Almost half of the respondents concluded that prostitution is a problem around bases, but also said that it is widely ignored by the public and the Korean government. One person replied that

¹⁶ Interview with Faye Kim, (21 July 2004) p.15

¹⁷ Interview with Yoon Hye Young, (30 June 2004) p.4

prostitution is not a problem and two others said that the public is not aware of what goes on around U.S. military installations and they do not care. But in almost all of the cases, whether they saw prostitution as a problem or not, the interviewees vehemently stated that it is not solely Korea's issue; prostitution happens everywhere. I was surprised at how defensive some people became at even the implication that prostitution is a Korean problem.

Camptown areas around the bases are sometimes notorious for the bad behavior that goes on there. Sam Lee explained that a lot of guys go to "entertainment clubs" almost every night. He said that they go to drink alcohol and to "hang out" with girls.¹⁹ When prodded further, he would not elaborate on what "hang out" means. I asked Jinhee Shin if she saw GIs off the base and she responded, "Sometimes they are with Korean girls. I don't know if they are prostitute or just girlfriend."²⁰ Five people told me that soldiers could only be found around the base or, if they ventured out, it was only to bars and clubs.

The camptown areas were described to me as being old and unclean. It seemed like they made an automatic connection between military bases and camptowns, saying that when the bases move, new areas will spring up around the new bases, driving down the cost of land and bringing other problems like crime. Jungeui Lee said that Korean police have no control over soldiers in these areas. She also sees camptowns as a symbol of how the U.S. and its military have ruined the innocence of Koreans.²¹

¹⁸ Faye Kim, p.13

¹⁹ Interview with Sam Lee, (15 July 2004) p.16

²⁰ Interview with Jinhee Shin, (26 June 2004) p.18

²¹ Interview with Jungeui Lee, (28 June 2004) p.4

Should the U.S. Stay in Korea?

When asked if the U.S. military should stay in Korea or leave, the overwhelming majority of participants answered that the U.S. should stay. Six unequivocally said that USFK is imperative for the security of South Korea. They said that the U.S. troops make the peninsula safer and more stable because North Korea would not attack the South as long as American troops are present.

“Kim” and Lee Jin-Hyuck stated that the troops should stay, but security is not the only reason. They both said that the U.S. military presence is important for economic reasons and for assuring a strong US-ROK alliance, as well as for the security of South Korea. Because of USFK, the Korean government can spare money on defense spending. “Kim” called the American military a “necessary evil.”²²

Jin-Hyuck also stated, along with four other interviewees, that the U.S. should stay but should alter their behavior in some way. Jin-Hyuck, Jinhee Shin, and Jungeui Lee replied that the U.S. and Korea should renegotiate SOFA. Jin-Hyuck also said, as did Faye Kim and Roy Kim, that the American GIs need to change their behavior and their attitude towards the situation. “I think we need the protection, but while being generous, why not be nice too?”²³ Bumseok Park added that the U.S. military is necessary but that it hinders the development of military technology in Korea.

Faye Kim expressed one thought that many of Koreans may be thinking. She said that Koreans “don’t want to be ignored all the time by the U.S. soldiers. So even though ...it can be dangerous if they leave, we don’t want to be pulling their legs...We will die proud.” At the same time, she also said having American soldiers is like having air.

²² “Kim,” p.21

²³ Interview with Roy Kim, (12 July 2004) p.30.

South Korea needs the American military but it is easy to condemn and complain about the situation.²⁴

Yoon Hye Young was the only person interviewed to say that USFK should leave Korea. She believed that the U.S. military presence made ROK Forces look weak. She also told me that the U.S. was trying to be like “Jesus” saving the world but she felt that it was the destiny of the Koreas to be reunited, even if that meant North Korea defeating South Korea.

Korean View on Soldiers

One thing I wanted to ascertain during this project is how Koreans and American soldiers view each other and how they think the other group views them.

When I asked the Korean interviewees how the Korean population views GIs, their responses did not surprise me.

Two participants said that Korea is split on the issue. These two people maintained that the older generation (their grandparents and perhaps their parents) is far more sympathetic to the GI presence in Korea because they were present during the Korean War. At the same time, they said that their generation is becoming increasingly aggravated by the U.S. military and they generally do not like soldiers.

Another three people also said Korea is split, but not particularly by generation. They mentioned that many people have no particular feelings about soldiers and are quite indifferent towards them. The rest of the population, they claim, hates American soldiers.

²⁴ Faye Kim, p.18.

Interestingly enough, none of these people refer to any part of the population actually liking GIs.

A much greater number of people, however, said that no, Koreans do not like American soldiers (in general). Three of these people did not qualify this answer but four people pointed to crimes committed by soldiers and a lack of punishment as the reason they do not like our military personnel. Although one person said that Koreans are not scared of GIs, three of the women admitted that they are sometimes frightened. One of the male interviewees said, "American soldiers, they are kind of rough, kind of not like normal people ... pretty violent."²⁵ Jungeui Lee says that even though the "educated" officers are personable and trying to fit into Korean society, the enlisted men are far less educated and more likely to cause trouble.

Lee Jin-Hyuck summed it all up in this statement: "Korean people really like Americans. And also, Korean people really like soldiers...But Korea people don't really like American soldiers."²⁶

Soldier View on Korea/Koreans

I next asked the Korean participants how they thought American GIs viewed Korea and Koreans. Most people were reluctant to answer this question and expressed doubts about it but speculated as to what they thought nevertheless.

The majority of people supposed that American soldiers do not really like being stationed in Korea. When asked if GIs like Korea, one person simply said no. Another

²⁵ Interview with BumSeok Park, (4 July 2004) p.21.

²⁶ Lee Jun-Hyuck, p.30.

two people said that soldiers do not like Korea and do not like Koreans. Three more people said that soldiers do not like being in Korea because of bad sentiment against the troops and Koreans' treatment of GIs. Similarly, one person responded that it would be difficult for American military personnel to live or have fun outside of the base.

Two interviewees estimated that part of the military population enjoyed being in Korea and part did not. One person guessed that fifty percent of GIs like their assignment in Korea and the other person estimated that only thirty percent did.

Three other people had different ideas. They thought that soldiers could have a lot of fun during their tour in Korea because soldiers are paid a lot of money and there are many places to party and drink around Korea, especially in Seoul. Two of the women said that Korea is a dangerous assignment but it is still not a bad place to be.

One Korean man and one woman did not directly answer whether or not American GIs like Korea. Rather, they commented on how soldiers acted towards Koreans. They felt like American soldiers were condescending toward Korean people and this probably made their tour uncomfortable or aggravating at times.

When asked if soldiers like Korea, Juhee Kim believed that they probably did. Her last comment of the interview simply added, "I hope."²⁷

Differences of White and Black Soldiers

Another issue I wanted to examine was if Koreans view soldiers differently based on race. This was perhaps one of the most sensitive questions I asked during the interviews. Although I felt some of the responses I received were not completely truthful,

I did not continue to push the issue on tape. In some cases, the conversation continued after the interview officially ended.

The majority of interviewees said that Koreans did not view white and black GIs differently and did not offer anything else on the subject. Lee Jin-Hyuck offered that Koreans often view immigrants as secondary and treat them as such, but that race makes no difference in how they treat soldiers.

Four people disclosed (on tape) that the Korean population may look down on black men and women, soldier or not. Jasmine Lee said that Korean perceptions form about African-Americans because of crime. "I heard ... some of the black soldiers are not well educated in America. So some of them tend to ignore the rules in Korea and they tend to behave badly."²⁸

Jun-chan Yoon, however, had a different opinion on the situation. He described how his friends on the American base felt black soldiers were more amicable. "Black soldiers are more friendly ... because white people are more ... arrogant."²⁹ But at the same time, he said, Koreans are prejudiced against black people and explained why:

Common people think black people are inferior to white because all that they know about America is white people and they saw the movies, the white people movies, and in the movies, black people are bad guys and they make problems in the society.³⁰

Some people have expressed different feelings after the interview was concluded. Some of the girls mentioned that they are more intimidated by black soldiers than white. One said that she crosses the street when she sees a black man. Several of them expressed that they would never date a black GI, even though they might date a white GI.

²⁷ Juhee Kim, p.17.

²⁸ Interview with Jasmine Lee, (17 July 2004) p.13.

²⁹ Interview with Jun-chan Yoon, (19 July 2004) p.20.

In my experience, Koreans find dark skin very unattractive, even within the Korean community. People with darker skin are looked down on and are sometimes called “black.”

³⁰ Jun-chan Yoon, p.21.

American Interviewees

Chamness: "They like you or they just deal with you?"

Gunderson: "Both."

Background on Interviewees

The five American interviewees range in age from twenty-six to forty-four.

Sherman Taylor was a Staff Sergeant in the Finance Corps of the Army in the late 1990s.

D.J. Yi is a Nuclear Submarine Commander in the Navy. Steve White was a Staff

Sergeant in the Air Force at the time of the interview and is now a Technical Sergeant.

Steve LaRue is a Master Sergeant in the Air Force and Ramon Gunderson is a Sergeant in the Air Force.³¹ White, LaRue and Gunderson are all in Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC).

Taylor, Yi and Gunderson spent two tours of duty in Korea at various bases around Korea. LaRue is currently on his third tour and White is serving out his first tour at Kunsan Air Base.

All of the interviewees were born in the United States except D.J. Yi. He was born in Korea but moved to the United States at the age of thirteen.

White and Yi have completed post graduate studies and various levels of military technical training in their respective fields. White, LaRue and Gunderson have high school educations and have completed Air Force technical school in their field.

³¹ See "Military Ranks by Service."

Training/Preparation for Korea

After asking the American interviewees about their youth and early careers, we discussed their first assignment to Korea. I asked them what kind of training or preparation they received from the military for their overseas assignment.

Sherman Taylor said that in the 1990s (when he first went to Korea), the Army gave him almost no preparation for going abroad. The only training he went through was a one hour session on the basics of Korea.

D.J.Yi said that the Navy currently has a more extensive program for sailors stationed abroad. Not only is there an overseas screening process for everyone going overseas, there is also a sponsor program. Men and women are given a sponsor from the base they will be going to and they can get information on the base and the country. Similarly, the Air Force also has a sponsor program where an airman can request a sponsor from their assigned base and the Army now has this option as well.

In Ramon's case, he said that he learned a lot about Korea from his father before leaving. His father was also in the Air Force and had done a one-year tour in South Korea at Osan Air Base. He found out upon arrival though, that the situation had changed dramatically since his father had served.

No one mentioned it, but there is also the USFK website that provides links to the major military organizations present, personnel units and information on SOFA. This website also contains a welcome guide and South Korean fact book. After spending time on this website, I found advice on lifestyle, the history of Korea, and tips and phrases to get started with the Korean language.³²

Best/Worst Thing about Korea

Judging from the way all the men spoke about their time in Korea, all of them have enjoyed their tour(s). I asked them what the best and worst thing about serving in Korea was.

Although they all like Korea, they had different answers of the best thing about it. Sherman Taylor said the best thing for him was meeting his fiancée, who is Korean. He also mentioned his financial freedom due to the low cost of everything in Korea. Steve White mentioned that the best thing was becoming closer with his family during his time away. He said that they talk more now than ever. Steve LaRue greatly appreciates the rich culture of Korea and the long and interesting history of the country. It is much different than what we are used to in the States, he said. And Ramon Gunderson said the best thing about Korea was the people he has met and built relationships with. He also declared that Korea is “a single man’s paradise.”³³

By far, the overwhelming response to the worst thing about Korea was separation from family. Taylor, White and Gunderson said that it is difficult to live so far away from your family, i.e. on the opposite side of the globe. Korea is largely a non-command sponsored tour, also known as a hardship or remote tour. Only three thousand personnel are command sponsored out of the 32,000 currently serving on the Korean peninsula.³⁴

Steve LaRue said that the worst thing about being stationed in Korea is being a soldier and having to abide by so many rules. He has really enjoyed his time in Korea

³² “US Forces Korea” Website.

³³ Interview with Ramon Gunderson, (25 July 2004) p.28.

³⁴ Non-command sponsored means that the military does not pay for family members to relocate to that location and does not offer full benefits to those who choose to relocate anyway. There is also a restriction on the number of family member in country for “security and evacuation purposes.”

“US Forces Korea” Website.

but dislikes many restrictions like where soldiers can and cannot go, curfews, and other limitations. LaRue and White told me that all soldiers must go with someone else whenever they leave the base. In the Air Force they call it the "Wingman program."

Another rule requires a G-7 rank or higher before soldiers are allowed to drive. After the interview, LaRue added more details about more limitations for soldiers. Barbershops, *chimchilbangs* (saunas), *noraebangs* (karaoke), massage parlors, and certain bars and clubs are off-limits to military personnel and in some cases, DOD civilians. Although USFK tells the men and women that these places are restricted because of sanitary conditions, he speculates (and I agree) that this is not the real concern. All of these places can sometimes be a front for brothels and there have probably been problems in the past in these types of establishments, so now they are all off-limits.

Similarly, there was problem with littering after people bought food from food stalls on the street. Now newcomers are told that there are serious health concerns with food stalls like salmonella contamination and they could die if they consumed tainted foods. Evidently, the littering problem has since ceased. Soldiers are also not allowed to be on or in "open bodies of water." Again, sanitary conditions are the excuse GIs are given but I believe there have been problems at lakes or at the beaches, perhaps alcohol-related incidents.

D.J. Yi also told me after his interview about the curfew for all GIs. Currently, the curfew is midnight Sunday through Thursday and one o'clock on Saturday and Sunday nights. Although there have always been restrictions, it is only recently that they are being enforced; military police often go out after curfew and to off-limits areas to round up soldiers breaking the rules. LaRue was in Korea during the accident in the

summer of 2002 and he said that all bases had a curfew of seven o'clock every night for three weeks after the occurrence. During protests and demonstrations, the bases are always locked down and no one can leave the premises.

Problems

As opposed to the Korean interviewees, all of the American interviewees did not come up with a laundry list of problems between the USFK and Korea. The problems that people named were also not the same as the ones Koreans identified.

White, LaRue and Gunderson all stated that there were no major problems between the United States military and Korea or the Korean people. The two Steves mentioned that there were small peaceful demonstrations around the Kunsan base but they never caused any trouble. There have also been violent protests in Seoul, but LaRue said that these were instigated by Koreans and did not involve American soldiers.³⁵

Two people mentioned that there have been problems with soldiers getting out of hand, and this often involves alcohol. Taylor said, "You have youth, inebriated, and lots of women and they have money. So I don't think I would like that living in my town either." When pressed further he added:

It's not necessarily the soldier, it's the type of person...I've never once heard a criticism of a thirty-five year old lieutenant colonel...The only problems you hear are generated by youth.³⁶

³⁵ The protests took place outside Yongsan base, where Korean guards and riot police are in charge of suppressing disturbances. In some cases, Korean policemen were injured by protesters throwing stones and Molotov cocktails.

³⁶ Interview with Sherman Taylor, (15 June 2004) p.29.

Gunderson also felt like some individuals cause problems for everyone. “Just typical American—or any country—get drunk, get stupid. They make bad images of everybody.” But in these times, he said, the military makes “a pretty good example of you.” LaRue added, “They’ll fry you. For real.”³⁷

Taylor and Yi also see more political issues between the two countries. Taylor pointed out that there are problems between the Korean government and people that stir up resentment for the American military. The Korean government’s negotiating position is weak, he said. Yi said something similar and included that Korea needs more educated and capable negotiators in the international arena.

Yi went more in depth about the Korean political situation as well. One problem he said is the increasing nationalism in Korea and that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the labor movements are increasingly powerful in setting the national agenda. He also suggested that the media is too critical of the American soldiers’ behavior:

The media is unfair and I think American troops...are doing their jobs here. Are they going to be crime free? I say no. Are they going to do stuff in town? But overall, I think they are well behaved.³⁸

Yi went on to say that SOFA is always an issue, but his view was different from that of the Korean participants. He stated that Koreans do not know what SOFA is or what it is for. In addition to that, they don’t appreciate the military’s situation:

Korea says that SOFA is unfair and the Korean government is providing for a large chunk of presence here. But U.S. is not getting much out of Korea by having our troops here...We are helping Korea. I don’t think the Koreans understand that.³⁹

³⁷ Ramon Gunderson, p.26-27.

³⁸ Interview with D.J. Yi, (18 July 2004) p.34.

³⁹ D.J. Yi, p.39

Yi pointed out that there are also cultural differences on the definition of justice. In the U.S., a person who kills someone in a vehicular accident, for example, usually does not serve time in prison but in Korea, such a person would be convicted and would serve many years in prison. The two countries also view prison sentences and benefits differently.

After his interview, LaRue also mentioned a few smaller problems that have since been dealt with. In one situation a DOD civilian was caught dumping illegal chemicals down the drain at Yongsan base, where the drainage system connects to the Han River. The military was fined and the man was sent home; he could not be arrested at the time because of his civilian status. There has also been an issue of personnel dependants and underage drinking. Though he did not specify how, LaRue stated that the problem has been resolved.

U.S. Stay in Korea?

Of the five American participants, only two of them said that USFK should remain in Korea. Steve White said that the U.S. presence is really important, although remaining on the demilitarized zone (DMZ) is probably not necessary. Steve LaRue stated that the U.S. should stay “until the armistice actually becomes a peace treaty.”⁴⁰

The other three interviewees did not feel that the U.S. military should still be in Korea. Sherman Taylor thought it was more important that Korea is supported by more U.N. troops, not mainly U.S. troops. D.J. Yi felt like the U.S. has no real interest in Korea and the involvement is more of a symbolic gesture. He also said that the USFK

should not stay if Koreans continue to complain about our presence. And finally, Ramon Gunderson said, "Obviously we are here to protect our own {economic} interests and not Korea's." He emphatically added, "I'm sorry, we're not the world's police force."⁴¹

Soldier View on Korea/Koreans

As I stated before, each one of the men I interviewed truly enjoyed their tour(s) in Korea but they speculated about how the general military population felt about Korea.

Each one of them expressed that they were apprehensive about going to Korea in the first place. It was also difficult getting off the base at first. For a few of them, it took months before they were ready to travel and interact with the Korean population. D.J. told me after his interview that his men did not have a lot of time to get off the base and when there was time, they sometimes did not want to go anywhere. Many of the soldiers have not been away from home and are intimidated by the language and cultural differences, not to mention the "stories they have heard about guys who go out." Yi explained that there are some groups whose purpose is to make the military look bad. These groups try to start fights with soldiers and are waiting with cameras in the event of a soldier striking back.⁴²

Even with the language difference and disturbing tales, Yi explained that once soldiers get away from the base more, they find that they really like Korea. White told me that no one really dislikes Korea and most people are pretty happy during their tour.

⁴⁰ Interview with Steve LaRue, (25 July 2005) p.29.

⁴¹ Ramon Gunderson, p.28.

⁴² D.J. Yi, p.29.

Similarly, Gunderson made it clear that he loved Korea and that Americans do like the country and the people.

The Morale, Welfare and Recreation Office (MWR) organizes trips within Korea and these tours are always full, Gunderson said. White and LaRue have taken advantage of a language exchange class on base and there are also other classes, including Korean cooking, on all the bases.

Taylor said that immediately following 9/11 soldiers liked assignments in Korea because it meant they would not be deployed to Afghanistan but the situation has now changed. Soldiers in Korea can now be directly re-deployed to Iraq so it is no longer “safe.” Deployments and curfews are two reasons why GIs may no longer like a tour in Korea. LaRue mentioned the restricting rules as well and said that separation from family causes many people to want to do their time and leave. But he also said that many soldiers like Korea by the end of their assignment and want to return in the future.

Korean View on Soldier

When asked how Koreans feel about American soldiers, most of the responses I received indicated that they thought Koreans did like GIs for the most part. Although several of them have had a confrontational Korean approach them, they felt like the general population still wanted the American military to remain in South Korea. After Gunderson responded that Koreans want the American military, I asked, “They like you or they just deal with you?” He responded, “I think both.”⁴³ The Americans stationed at

⁴³ Ramon Gunderson, p.29.

Kunsan indicated that the local population is extremely friendly to them. When LaRue was in Pyeongtaek, the community sponsored an "American Soldier Appreciation Day."

Sherman Taylor said that Koreans do not get along with younger, enlisted soldiers but older NCOs and officers are less problematic.⁴⁴ D.J. Yi indicated that the older generation is more appreciative of the American forces because they lived through the Korean War and fully understand the North Korean threat and importance of USFK in keeping peace. He said that the younger generation generally has bad impressions of soldiers until they meet them and their feelings become more positive. He did not say this, but it seemed like he was saying that interactions with Koreans make a soldier more of an individual in the Korean's eyes, not just a part of a greater military.

Yi has also heard complaints from KATUSA members about U.S. soldiers.⁴⁵ Because KATUSAs are usually older and more educated than the American GIs, they sometimes find it difficult to live and work together.

⁴⁴ Though many people think this, two of the soldiers serving time in Korean prison are actually officers. Robson, "For U.S. Inmates In S. Korean Prison, Time Feels Like It's Standing Still."

⁴⁵ KATUSA is a program set up by the Korean and American governments for Korean males of military service age. If men pass a physical and have a certain score on the TOEIC, then they may apply for KATUSA. A drawing is held to pick those who can join. Members become members of the American military for two years—they work, eat and live side by side with U.S. service members.

Analysis

“The United States has never and should never promise to go to war on someone else’s terms. If South Korea wants America’s aid, it must accept the conditions under which such assistance is offered. Real equality is simply impossible.”⁴⁶

The Korean Side

It is clear to anyone who has recently been to South Korea that tensions are again developing between the two countries. Since the Korean War, the United States and South Korea have had the same goals for the Korean peninsula: defense of South Korea, deterrence of another North Korean attack and a stable economy for Seoul. Throughout the Cold War, Washington and Seoul were able to overcome difficult issues because of both countries’ defense priorities. Diplomatic concerns like Koreagate developed but were eventually pardoned.⁴⁷ Other problems in Korea like the Kwanju Massacre were largely overlooked.⁴⁸

For decades the Korean people lived under oppressive authoritarian governments and were unable to express any dissenting views they might have had. National security was used as an excuse to silence individuals.⁴⁹ The North Korean threat was of immediate concern to everyone and there was no question that USFK were there to protect South Korea, even if they did not (or could not) protect Koreans from their own government. But now the Cold War is over and South Korea has become an increasingly liberal society.

⁴⁶ Ted Carpenter and Doug Bandow, *The Korean Conundrum: America’s Troubled Relations with North and South Korea*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004) p.135.

⁴⁷ In the 1980s, several Korean dignitaries tried to bribe many U.S. congressmen to push issues in the legislature favoring South Korea. This became known as Koreagate.

⁴⁸ The U.S. military (and government) has long been criticized for “allowing” authoritarian regimes to take control of the Korean government. They have also been blamed for the violent crackdown on various group of protestors, like at the Kwanju Uprising.

South Korea's development of democracy and liberal ideas has created several of the factors leading to growing anti-Americanism. One of these factors is the growth of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In his *Asian Affairs* article, Jinwung Kim comes to the same conclusion that D.J. Yi did in his interview that NGO activists continue to push for complete withdrawal of troops and gain public support by focusing "on issues that reduce the political credibility of the alliance."⁵⁰

Other factors that may contribute to the increase in anti-American feelings are also a direct result of the democratization of South Korea. There has always been some degree of resentment towards American troops but now citizens are allowed to express their discontent publicly. In addition to that, the democracy movement has advocated equality and sought to "dismantle the privileged few," including USFK. No longer are people, especially in the younger generations, willing to tolerate giving American troops a free ride, regardless of their role in the defense of South Korea.⁵¹

The Koreans that I interviewed were all born after the Korean War and largely began their educations at the end or after the Cold War. They have also matured through an increasingly liberal education, especially at the college level, and listened to increasingly liberal media outlets. This college-age group is the section of Korean society that polls have shown as the most anti-American.

The most publicized issues that have caused problems between the two countries in the last decade are almost always individual soldiers breaking laws. To be sure, there have been American soldiers that have broken Korean laws. One of the most famous incidents happened in 1992 when a soldier murdered and dismembered a prostitute. In

⁴⁹ Moon, 159.

⁵⁰ Kim, p.270.

1995, a fight broke out in the subway between four GIs and several Koreans. In 2000, another soldier killed a bar maid for refusing to have sex. These are not the only crimes that military personnel have committed but they were the most publicized at the time.

Having said that though, there has been very little crime overall with Americans in the military. Although NGOs often cite large numbers of crimes by soldiers, the majority of these are traffic crimes and other misdemeanors.⁵² As I stated, many of the Korean interviewees commented on the issue of American soldiers committing crimes and often pointed to the murder of prostitutes or the vehicle accident that killed two schoolgirls.

Public opinion polls generally show that anti-American sentiment is growing within the younger generations of Koreans. Two polls produced by Korean newspapers in 1996 and 1999 indicated this. In 1996, twenty-eight percent of the population wanted to decrease the number of American troops and four percent wanted a complete withdrawal. By 1999, these numbers had increased to thirty-five and half percent and five and half percent, respectively. The same poll also asked which country was the most “threatening country” for South Korea’s security. Six percent of respondents said the United States in 1996 and in 1999, nineteen percent said the U.S.⁵³ The poll was conducted again in July 2003 and reported that one-third of the general Korean population and one-half of college students saw the U.S. as the greatest threat.⁵⁴

Similarly, a poll conducted by Yonsei University found that forty-one percent of the participants considered themselves “anti-American” and twenty-one percent were

⁵¹ Kim, p.270.

⁵² Carpenter and Bandow, p.13-14.

⁵³ Norman D. Levin, *The Shape of Korea's Future: South Korean Attitudes Toward Unification and Long-Term Security*, (Santa Monica: RAND, 1999) p.18, 25.

⁵⁴ Carpenter and Bandow, p.17.

“pro-American.” At the same time, half the students felt the U.S. military is necessary while thirty-one percent were against the USFK presence.⁵⁵

Polls have also stressed that Koreans feel that they are not treated equally by Americans and this is most obvious in SOFA. In the late 1990s, polls showed that sixty-seven percent of the population thought Americans looked down on them and eighty-six percent believed that Korea has become secondary to the dominant U.S. role in relations between the two. Another survey in 2000 indicated that seventy-six percent of the respondents thought SOFA “is unequal.”⁵⁶

Judging from the published polls and from the interviews conducted for this project, it is clear that Koreans want to feel like they are being treated as equals. Many have also expressed that the U.S. government and military should be more sensitive to Korean culture and societal norms. The challenge then lies in improving Korean impressions of their standing the relationship and accommodating the rise in nationalism and Korean “self-confidence” by creating a larger role for Seoul to play.⁵⁷

Despite the harsh criticisms and popularity of anti-Americanism, the majority of Koreans still want USFK to remain in South Korea. Although the sample group for this project was not representative of the general population, the fact that thirteen out of fourteen people want the U.S. military to stay still says a lot. These participants are from the group that are supposedly the most critical and several of them studied at Yonsei University, which is one of the most liberal campuses in the country. Still they felt the troops should remain.

⁵⁵ Kim, p.271.

⁵⁶ Levin, *The Shape of Korea's Future*, p.27.

Kim, p.274.

⁵⁷ Levin, *The Shape of Korea's Future*, p.xvii.

The reasons given for their opinions are the same things researchers point out. First, Korea has neither the manpower nor the technology to defend itself from a North Korean attack. Bumseok Park recalled that one newspaper reported that Seoul would be conquered within hours if USFK left the peninsula. Others also mentioned that Korea needs the U.S. military for economic reasons. It is estimated that if the U.S. withdraws its troops, Korean defense spending would go from 2.7 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) to six percent of the GDP.⁵⁸ The required military service of South Korean men would also undoubtedly be longer than two years without U.S. soldiers on the peninsula.

The American Side

While Koreans are beginning to question the presence of American troops in Korea, Americans are also reevaluating the situation. After the fall of communist Russia, some started to wonder if it was in the United States interests to remain on the frontlines of the "Bamboo Curtain." Diplomatic relations with China have also strengthened within the past decade as China turns toward a more capitalist society.

In 2002, it cost the United States three billion dollars to keep troops in South Korea. Seoul's financial contribution amounted to less than \$490 million.⁵⁹ But the costs of U.S. involvement on the Korean peninsula are not only economical. The Korea Defense Veterans of America estimate that since the end of the Korea War, more than fifteen hundred Americans have died on duty in Korea.

⁵⁸ Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind?*, p.13.

⁵⁹ Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind?*, p.12.

At this time, more military personnel and even scholars are beginning to question the necessity of U.S. troops in Korea. Two researchers conclude that it is not in the interest of the United States to protect South Korea anymore. Carpenter and Bandow accuse Seoul of "defense free-riding" and say that the relationship is based on a "one-sided guarantee."⁶⁰

Another report (that was originally prepared for the Air Force) acknowledges that many American officials feel like the ROK "can afford to do more, and pay more, for their own defense." This same report found that several other issues are causing long-term problems. One factor was inadequate housing and poor conditions for military personnel in Korea. Another issue was South Korea's insistence on changing SOFA.⁶¹

While none of my interviewees mentioned housing as a problem, they did mention the strict rules they have to abide by and random words and acts of hostility from Koreans. One person stated that though Koreans complain about SOFA, it can never change because it is there to protect our troops. He made the same point as the quote I used to begin this section. It cannot be clearer. When it comes to treaties and agreements like SOFA, "Real equality is simply impossible."⁶²

Even though the U.S. has not changed the basic principles of SOFA since its creation in 1966, the military has made many efforts to improve and secure its relationship with Korea and the Korean people. One such effort was the Camptown Clean-up Campaign from 1971 to 1976. This campaign was initiated by the Joint SOFA Committee for the purposes of lowering venereal disease rates among prostitutes and

⁶⁰ Carpenter and Bandow, p.123.

⁶¹ Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind?*, p.61-62.

⁶² Carpenter and Bandow, p.135.

soldiers, environmental clean-ups around military installations, and ending racial segregation and tensions in the many camptowns' clubs and bars.⁶³

Another larger and more recent effort began in 2002 with the Land Partnership Plan (LPP). The LPP was designed to minimize the number of U.S. bases on Korean soil and reduce the total amount of American land by forty-three percent. In June 2003, the "Future of the Alliance Policy Initiative" furthered the plan by transferring more defense responsibilities to ROK Forces and beginning to relocate troops away from the Yongsan base in Seoul.⁶⁴

The USFK has also taken other steps to try to develop friendly relations with the local populations. Though these measures are not as publicized as bad press, I feel that they are still important. As I have already mentioned, soldiers are severely restricted by curfew and many off-limits areas to reduce the chances of problems arising. USFK also created the Good Neighbor Program that sponsors numerous events and community outreach programs every month involving hundreds of soldiers. The Good Neighbor Program also recognizes Korean individuals or organizations that have made "exceptional contributions" for Good Neighbor Awards every year.⁶⁵

⁶³ Moon, p.57-72.

⁶⁴ Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind?*, p.32.

⁶⁵ For more information on the types of Good Neighbor Programs, see the USFK website at:
<<http://www.usfk.or.kr/en/good/efforts.php>>

Conclusion

“같이 갑시다!”

The USFK website exclaims “Katchi Kapshida! We Go Together!”⁶⁶ This is only one of symbols that the U.S. military has tried to be a more courteous (and friendly) neighbor to Korea in the past few decades. These actions on behalf on the military are often not widely known and anti-American sentiment continues to increase among the Korean population, and the college-age group in particular. So the question is: What does all of this mean for the USFK and for Korea?

Many things can be taken from the information in these interviews and other studies. First, we can look at what both sides can do to foster more understanding and a better relationship. And finally, we can determine if the relationship will ever be the same as it was in the past and what needs to happen in the future.

There are several things the U.S. military and Korea can do (and must do) to reverse the anti-American trend in South Korea. The primary goal should be to increase sympathy and better understanding between the two groups. Koreans obviously feel like they are treated as inferiors while Americans sometimes say they feel used and unappreciated, but more commonly are just anxious about being in a country that is so entirely foreign to them.

First of all, the American armed forces have done a much better job of screening and preparing our troops for tours abroad in recent years. This, however, is not enough. It regularly takes a soldier months before he feels comfortable enough to get away from the base. This says that he is not equipped with enough knowledge of Korean society and

culture to feel at ease. The U.S. military needs to provide more information to its men and women about the foreign culture they are going to, give more cultural or language training if possible and have more open discussions for those with foreign deployments.

When I went to Korea, I read books like *Culture Shock: Korea* and *Lonely Planet*

Korea.⁶⁷ Whether the military makes books like these required reading or can produce its own updated and more practical versions for military personnel, every soldier that steps onto Korean soil should have basic knowledge about Korea and its people.

In addition to improving the quality of life for its own personnel, I cannot stress enough the need for better public relations with the Korean community. Two people said this during their interview, one Korean and one American. D.J. Yi indicated that USFK need to work on its PR skills. Even more telling was this from Jun-chan Yoon:

I want to advise the American troops' headquarters...They have to communicate with Korean common people because we don't know many things about American troops. Even if they cannot communicate and talk very well with Korean people, they have to share activities and they have to appear to Korean people...because we have to be favorable about American troops if we have to be together in Korea.⁶⁸

The USFK Good Neighbor Program is a step in the right direction. It serves as the model for what Korean people want to see change in the military. Whether it is through a language exchange session or volunteer work, many people are trying to break down the stereotype of the inconsiderate American soldier. But the Korean community does not know about these programs. The U.S. military has to do more information sharing, sponsor community discussion groups, do more community service and appeal

⁶⁶ "USFK, 주한미군" Website. United States Forces Korea, 2005.

⁶⁷ Sonja Vegdahl Hur and Ben Seunghwa Hur, *Culture Shock: Korea*, (Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company, 1992).

Robert Storey and Alex English, *Lonely Planet Korea*, 5th Edition. (Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications Ltd., 2001).

to the Korean media so that a wider audience can see that the American military does not intend to play the role of conqueror in South Korea.

At the same time, the responsibility of the Korean people is to get informed on the issues surrounding the U.S. military presence on the Korean peninsula. Those that claim to be anti-American need to look at the situation on more than just a personal level and try to understand it. If people want to criticize SOFA, they should research the facts about it and find out about American soldiers and crimes. The population only hears negative news but like most other countries (including the U.S.) few actually make an effort to find out more information on critical points.

Youngha Woo noticed that the situation is quite ironic. "They always say, 'I have some bad feeling for America,' but I know they want to go there and study...and they always watch Hollywood movies."⁶⁹ In general, Koreans really do enjoy American culture and respect American people, it is just the U.S. military that they have problems with. They also see soldiers differently than other Americans and have a difficult time separating them from the greater military entity. Instead of generalizing and assuming the bad things they hear about soldiers are true, they should try to withhold judgment until they meet a several GIs. Then they can decide if soldiers are the rough, violent and scary young men that so many Koreans think they are.

Even if the USFK implemented extreme measures for the sake of strengthening relations with the local population and the Korean people became more informed on the issues, the relationship still could become what it has been in the past. But this is not to say that that is a bad thing. In the past, the ties were entirely dominated by the needs of

⁶⁸ Jun-chan Yoon, p.22.

⁶⁹ Youngha Woo, p.15.

the United States, which also carried the entire economic burden. Severe racism and segregation, sexism and military prostitution were also issues that plagued many years of the relationship. It would not benefit anyone to return to any of these things and because of the democratization developments in South Korea, it never will return to this condition.

At the same time, the situation is deteriorating and anti-Americanism continues to increase among not just college students, but the population as a whole. If U.S. troops are going to remain in Korea, then certain issues need to be addressed so that the two populations can coexist peacefully. In peace and compromise, both sides can leave satisfied. Koreans can feel like full-partners of the U.S. and be assured that their culture and norms are respected and the U.S. military can be more efficient if military personnel are content and the local population is accepting of the bases.

At the beginning of the introduction, I started with a quote from my interview with "Kim." What he said was extremely significant because it makes so clear the answer to many of the problems facing US-ROK relations. There are some issues that will probably never be resolved but many such problems begin with understanding each other's cultures and respecting differences. It is my hope that this project will let more people see the importance of tolerance and cooperation and can change at least one mind and heart.

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