

The U.S.- ROK Alliance and its Discontents: Investigating the Effects of the Alliance on Civil-Military Relations in South Korea

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Abstract

Until the late 1980s, the Republic of Korea was under de facto military rule. Accordingly, South Korea's uniformed military had an outsized influence on domestic and foreign policy for much of the nation's history. When the military regime gave way to civilian rule, scholars chronicled the emergence of democratic ideals in South Korea, including the cornerstone: civilian control of the military. As civil-military relations evolved, the uniformed military continued to influence areas of defense policy that are reserved for civilian leaders in other liberal democracies. This paper analyzes the United States-Republic of Korea Alliance's influence on civil-military relations in South Korea using institutional and alliance legitimacy theories of organization. It proposes a triangular relationship between the uniformed military, civilian government, and military alliance with the United States. Institutional biases influence the uniformed military's interactions with the alliance, while public opinion shapes the civilian government's relationship with the alliance. In turn, how military officers and elected civilians view and relate to the alliance affects their relationship with one another. There is a positive correlation between perceptions of the alliance and the modes of civilian control over the military. Additionally, South Korean views of American leadership play a greater role in determining alliance favorability than perceptions of common security threats.

Key Words: United States, Republic of Korea, U.S.-ROK Alliance, civil-military relations, institutional legitimacy, alliance legitimacy, Wartime Operational Control

Introduction

In his 2003 inaugural address, President Roh Moo-hyun outlined his intention to seek greater autonomy within the Republic of Korea-United States (ROKUS) Alliance that had been integral to South Korean security for over 50 years:

“We will foster and develop this cherished alliance. We will see to it that the alliance matures into a more reciprocal and equitable relationship. We will also expand relations with other countries, including traditional friends... I invite you all to join this historic march and make a new take-off towards an age of peace and prosperity.”¹

Fourteen years later, as Roh’s former chief of staff prepared to occupy the Blue House, President Moon Jae-in expressed similar desires at his inauguration:

“Strong national security comes from strong national defense. I will work to strengthen our independent national defense capability...An epic journey to rebuild the nation as a real nation is about to begin.”²

The presidential statements reflect similar concerns about the ROKUS Alliance: achieving reciprocity and independence commensurate with South Korea’s changing global status. Both administrations sought to regain Operational Control (OPCON) of South Korean armed forces during wartime. The fact the Republic of Korea (ROK) government is still seeking fundamental changes to its alliance with the United States (U.S.) nearly a decade and a half after they were first articulated highlights the challenges to balancing the desire for greater autonomy with national security concerns.

South Korea’s uniformed military significantly influences the ROK’s role in its alliance with the U.S. Its roles, missions, capabilities and interests have been closely connected to the American military. These interests are tied to U.S. Forces Korea (USFK), as well as the broader American military establishment. They are not limited to traditional relationships with their uniformed counterparts, but include dealings with the American policy and defense establishments. This presents challenges for traditional civil-military relations theories.

This paper seeks to establish a theoretical explanation for this relationship and explore its consequences. Using principal-agent and institutional legitimacy theories, this paper proposes a civil-military triangle with the uniformed military, the civilian government, and alliance with the U.S. as the three vertices. Institutional biases influence the

uniformed military's interactions with the alliance, while public opinion shapes the civilian government's relationship with the alliance. In turn, military officers and elected civilians view of and relationship with the alliance affects their interactions with one another.

The first section outlines the theoretical foundation for this hypothesis, along with a review of existing literature related to civilian military relations and institutions. The next section presents a brief history of civil-military relations in South Korea, identifying important threads in terms of military linkages to the alliance as well as the establishment of the mechanisms of objective control over the military. The following two sections examines the uniformed military's institutional biases and civilian leadership's response to public opinion related to efforts to regain wartime OPCON during the period 2006 to 2015. The paper concludes with an analysis of the linkages between the two variables of public opinion and mechanisms of civilian control.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Institutions, Interests and Legitimacy

The concept of institutions is an important building block of this research. Zoltan Barany defines an institution as “a set of rules, compliance procedures, and moral and ethical behavioral norms designed to constrain the behavior of individuals in the interest of maximizing the wealth or utility of principals.”³ In short, the rules, norms and beliefs that form institutions endow them with power and legitimacy. Institutional theory states that actors behave in particular ways to maintain or enhance their institutional power.⁴ Deborah Avant places this behavior under the umbrella of institutional bias, which she defines as “the substance of [an] organization's preferences.”⁵ Applied to civil-military relations, institutional biases are a product of long-term patterns of civilian authority and past civilian choices, which incentivize certain patterns of behavior.

The structure of domestic institutions both affects the bias of military organizations and indicates the type of civilian intervention which will be most likely to prompt military change... Military organizations will be responsive to civilian goals when military leaders expect to be rewarded for that responsiveness. Individuals' short-term strategies for retaining their institutional position and power filter substantive policy aims and influence both civilian and

military leaders' interpretation of the international system—and thus their perspectives on national security.⁶

An external threat is thus malleable to institutional interests and biases, and to understand the military's preference for certain policies one would need to understand the content of these biases.

The South Korean armed forces receive a number of material and non-material benefits through the ROKUS alliance. Material benefits include the military aid provided during the first half of the six decade alliance. More recently, South Korean defense companies co-produce some of the world's most advanced weapons systems, including the fifth generation F-35 fighter. During the early years of the republic, South Korean officers studied and trained at American military schools at no cost to the ROK government through the U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. Combined (U.S.-ROK) training exercises began after the Korean War and continue to the present.

Non-material benefits include the annual Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) between the South Korean Minister of National Defense and the American Secretary of Defense, as well as the Military Consultative Meeting (MCM) between the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁷ The SCM and MCM give the South Korean military considerable say in policy decisions.⁸ These benefits of the alliance inform the content of the ROK military's preferences, which has implications for where it stands on alliance issues like the OPCON transfer.

Alliances and Legitimacy

The ROKUS alliance provides the non-material benefit of legitimacy to the South Korean armed forces. M. Tina Dacin, Christine Oliver and Jean-Paul Roy describe strategic alliances between organizations as:

Strategic alliances are commonly defined as short or long-term voluntary relations between organizations concerning one or more areas of activity—such as market entry, skill acquisition, or technological exchange—in which both parties regulate their future conduct *ex ante* by means of mutual forbearance and more or less formally specified contractual mechanisms (e.g., licenses, outsourcing agreements, joint manufacturing agreements).⁹

The behavior of the organizations in an alliance, they say, is based on the type of legitimacy they seek through the alliance.

Table 1: Types of Legitimacy Needs

Legitimacy Need	Definition
Market	Rights and qualifications to operate in a particular market.
Relational	Worthiness of being an alliance partner
Social	Conformity to existing norms, regulations and expectations of customers, public interest groups and other communities.
Investment	Legitimacy of a firm’s activities in the eyes of key market actors, such as shareholders and investors.
Alliance	Endorsement for the concept of the alliance itself.

Source: “The Legitimacy of Strategic Alliances: An Institutional Perspective”¹⁰

In the context of the ROK-U.S. alliance, the South Korean military receives both material benefits (defense spending and military equipment) and non-material benefits (policy influence in diplomatic relations with the U.S.). These benefits can be framed in terms of their legitimating effects: they form the basis for the ROK military’s continued support of the alliance (*alliance legitimacy*), as well as justification for its actions toward the civilian government and general public (*investment legitimacy*). In short, the South Korean military’s interests are linked to the ROK-U.S. alliance and provide the rationale for advocating a delay in the transfer of Wartime OPCON.¹¹ These incentives lead the South Korean military to support the continued existence of the alliance and may lead it to defy, subtly or openly, civilian policies that threaten these interests.

Civil-Military Relations

Samuel Huntington, the father of civil-military relations, established the ‘normal theory’ of civilian control in *Soldier and the State* (1957). His theory rests on three assumptions: first, there is a meaningful distinction between civilian and military roles; second, professionalizing the military leads to civilian control; and third, creating an autonomous sphere for the military results in military professionalism. Based on these assumptions, Huntington distinguished between two pathways to civilian control—subjective and objective—stating that the latter is more durable. Under subjective civilian control, the military is placed under legal and

institutional restrictions and there is no autonomous military sphere. In contrast, under objective control, a separate autonomous sphere for the military is created, allowing them to professionalize by creating their own standards of ‘professional’ and ‘responsible’ behavior.

While the categories of subjective and objective control are useful in understanding modes of civilian control, Huntington’s purely normative lens doesn’t account for the fact that in reality, there are no ‘ideal types;’ i.e., no state employs just one of the two methods of control. Most states use a combination of formal, institutional controls, as well as less formal ones like norms and ideology. This, as the section “Civil-Military Relations in South Korea: Historical Context” demonstrates, is the case in South Korea as well. The framework for subjective civilian control is laid out in the constitution, but the post-military regime governments also sought to solidify objective control by professionalizing and depoliticizing the military.

A distinct but complementary concept is Peter Feaver’s “principal-agent theory”. In *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight and Civil-Military Relations* (2003), Feaver states that the dynamic between the civilians and the military is one of delegation: the civilian principal delegates tasks to the military agent. The military then chooses to *work* (carry out the tasks assigned to it) or *shirk* (evade the principals wishes in favor of furthering their own interests). To ensure the military doesn’t shirk the civilians set up monitoring mechanisms, and should shirking be detected, the civilian principal punishes the agent through actions like reducing military autonomy, intrusive monitoring, budget cuts and punitive personnel changes.

Domestic Effects of Alliances

Most influential literature on the effects of alliances (Walt 2009, Snyder and Jervis 1991, Kauffman 1992, David 1991, Pressman 2008) focuses on their external balancing benefits, and tends to neglect the possible effects on internal institutional balance.¹²

As differences between the U.S. and ROK have begun to arise, particularly on U.S. basing, there has been some recent research on the importance of domestic constituents in the alliance. The East-West Center published a report in 2006 that mentioned the civil-society backlash to U.S. presence, particularly against the deaths of South Korean civilians at the hands of American soldiers.¹³ Similarly Katharine Moon argued that the growth of civil society following democratization in South Korea led to a

period of decline in the perceptions of institutional legitimacy of the alliance.¹⁴ Moon also points out the very direct historical link between perceptions of the alliance and the military in an aside on the Gwangju massacre of 1980¹⁵:

That one event marred U.S.-Korean relations nearly beyond repair. For one, many Koreans interpreted the tragedy as a reflection of how divergent the interests of the U.S. military and the Korean people are; second many Koreans took the non-intervention of the U.S. military as a form of intervention in Korean politics by siding with the military dictator and his regime.

This linkage is brought up but not explored in detail, and leaves an open question: how has this linkage transferred to modern day perception of the ROK Military?

Civil-Military Relations in the ROK

Most literature on Korean civil-military relations (Bechtol 2006, Kim 2009, Janowitz 1981, Barany 2012) pertain to the transition of power from the military government to the civilian government in the 1980s, and stop at the Roh Moo-hyun administration when civilian control was believed to have been full-established. Within this body of work, there are numerous perspectives on how such a transition occurred.

Using an organizational model, Woo Jong-seok proposed that the factionalism within the military made it difficult for the consolidation of civilian control, and that the removal of such factional competition is the route to civilian supremacy.¹⁶ Moon Chung-in and Rhyou Sang-young take a different view on factionalism, arguing that when a politically-motivated faction comes to power, it creates institutional arrangements to prevent their own regime from being ousted.¹⁷ This, in turn, creates a path-dependent trajectory whereby these measures create institutional conditions favorable to civilian control. Shortly after taking power, Park Chung-hee established the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), whose domestic surveillance extended to the South Korean military.

Another aspect of civil-military relations is literature on militarism and anti-militarism in South Korea. Vladimir Tikhonov argues that America's role in global conflicts in the early 2000s led to a rise in anti-militarism in South Korea and increased resistance to conscription.¹⁸

Stanford University sociology professor Shin Gi-wook identifies the Iraq War, and the deployment of Korean troops to Iraq, as a contributor to the wave of anti-American, anti-military sentiment during the same period.¹⁹ Protests against the war were driven by the belief that South Korea had been dragged into America's war. Kongdan "Katy" Oh summarized Korea's entrapment fears through the metaphor of the 'Water Ghost' that takes its victims to the deep ocean to drown them.²⁰ Katharine Moon highlights the fact South Korean society is beginning to question "whether the military and the democracy it protects are supportive of the same normative order".²¹ The "military" in this context refers primarily to the American military, but also encapsulates the alliance.

The Role of Alliances in Civil-Military Relations

There is a robust body of literature on impacts of U.S. alliances on civil-military relations in other partners and allies. George Perkovich, writing on Pakistan, asserts that since military cooperation was a more pressing concern to the U.S. than the establishment of democracy, the military became the most developed institution in Pakistan at the cost of meaningful civilian control.²² This led to a pattern whereby the U.S. would ignore problems in Pakistan's domestic political system because of pressing regional security needs (Tellis 2008, Haqqani 2005, Hussain 2005). Although South Korea is a healthy democracy, the belief that security is paramount to the U.S. even at the cost of human rights is one that is held by many Koreans of the "386 Generation", who vividly remember the suppression of student protests by the military regime in 1980 and blame the U.S. for its apparent acquiescence to these actions.

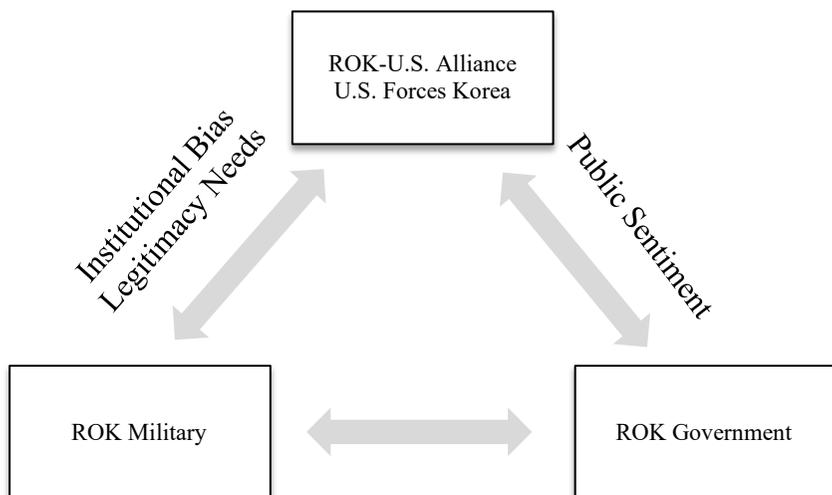
Research on Japan points to alliance effects that are similar to the focus of this research. The U.S. military strongly influenced the creation of the Japanese Self Defense Forces, which in turn influenced how the different service branches related to their American counterparts. Takako Hikotani observes how the close post-war bonds between officers from the U.S. Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy allowed the Maritime Self Defense Forces (MSDF) to quickly rebuild its forces without having to worry about linkages to its predecessor. This was not the case with the Imperial Japanese Army and the Ground Self Defense Forces (GSDF), which was formed with the complete exclusion of former army officers.²³ This also led to initially differing perceptions between the MSDF and GSDF on the reliability of the U.S. as an ally, with the former having a more favorable view than the latter. However, as ties between the GSDF

and the U.S. Army began developing in the 1970s, the SDF as a whole became more pro-U.S. military, and led to a period of conflict between the SDF and the civilian bureaucracy that was less pro-U.S. at the time. Finally, in the late 1980s, the civilian and military sides converged on their view of the alliance with the U.S. and this ushered in stable civil-military relations. In South Korea, as the following section will explain in detail, the formation of the military was influenced by the U.S. model at the time in which the Army was the predominant military branch. This effect was amplified during the military regime and has continued in contemporary South Korea, where the position of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is usually held by an Army general and the Minister of National Defense is dominated by former Army officials.

Methodology

Based on the background laid out in the preceding sections, the hypothetical civil-military dynamic is as follows: The ROK military's relationship with USFK and the alliance arrangement is determined by the content of its institutional biases, which include both tangible benefits such as equipment and training, as well as intangible ones such as legitimacy needs, namely alliance legitimacy, social legitimacy and investment legitimacy. The civilian government's relationship with the alliance, on the other hand, is driven by public sentiment, the effects of which are prominent in liberal democracies.²⁴ How the civil and military sides relate to the alliance in turn affects their relationship with each other.

Figure 1: Civil-Military Dynamic



Source: Developed by the author.

This paper proposes the nature of civilian control over the military will be determined by concordance between the military’s institutional biases and public opinion about the alliance. It is based on two hypothesis:

1. When the military’s institutional biases are in line with public opinion about the alliance, civilian oversight over the military will be characterized by objective control or granting the military an autonomous space to maximize professionalism.
2. When the military’s institutional biases are not in line with public opinion about the alliance, civilian oversight over the military will be characterized by greater attempts at subjective control or attempting to subsume military autonomy and maximizing civilian interference.

This research assumes the military’s institutional bias hasn’t changed in the last decade (2006 to 15), which is the period which I will study. The variables for investigation therefore are public opinion and the nature of civilian oversight, where the former is the independent variable and the latter the dependent variable. The choice of timeframe has been made in keeping with the timeline of the case study that will be employed for the

public opinion portion of this research, the OPCON transfer. The OPCON transfer issue was first raised under Roh Moo-hyun’s administration in 2006.

The public opinion is gauged using opinion polls and a content analysis of news coverage related to OPCON transfer. This research uses polls by Gallup, Pew Global and the Asan Institute of Policy, a Seoul-based think-tank founded by Saenuri Party Chairman Chung Mong-joon. Articles are analyzed for tone vis-à-vis the alliance (negative or positive), as well as the tone of military and civilian opinions on OPCON transfer (hasten or delay). The added depth to the analysis, mentions of key terms like “North Korea” and “Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD),” as well as the context of such mentions are noted as well, as North Korea is often presented as a justification for delaying the OPCON transfer.

The newspapers used for the content analysis are the *Korea Times*, an English-language national daily, *Hankyoreh*, a left of center daily, and the *Chosun Ilbo*, a conservative Korean language daily that is the highest circulated paper in Korea; both the latter papers have online English language versions.²⁵

Table 2: Major Korean Newspapers Used in Content Analysis

	<i>Korea Times</i>	<i>Hankyoreh</i>	<i>Chosun Ilbo</i>
Founded	1950	1988	1920
Ownership	<i>Hankook Ilbo</i> , CEO Park Moo-jeong	Hankyoreh Newspaper Corp, CEO Chung Tae-ki	Bang Sang-hoon
Physical Circulation (2010)	22,000 Korean version, <i>Hankook Ilbo</i> : 700,000	600,000	2,450,000
U.S. Bureaus	Washington D.C., Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta, Seattle, Hawaii	Washington D.C.	Washington D.C., New York
Political Affiliation	Center	Progressive	Conservative

Source: *NK News*²⁶

The nature of civilian oversight is determined using Huntington and Feaver’s mechanisms of civilian control.²⁷ Objective control implies a depoliticized military; the instruments of objective control are ideological and less intrusive. In contrast, Subjective control involves the use of

mechanisms such as intrusive monitoring, budget cuts and punitive personnel changes, to include dismissing important military officials or changing the military manpower system.

Analyzing civil-military relations in South Korea presents unique challenges due to compulsory military service and the assignment of retired military officers to positions typically reserved for civilians in other democratic countries. For the purpose of this analysis, civilians are elected officials in the executive and legislative branches of government, as well as non-career officers appointed to key positions within the defense and security services. These civilians may have formerly served as short-term officers, staff noncommissioned officers, or enlisted men.²⁸ However, they differ from career military officers in both the length of service and the benefits received from the alliance during their service.

The military refers to professional and career officers, along with those who continue to serve as senior civilians within the defense establishment. The professional officers are largely graduates of the three service academies, whose 10-year service obligation leads many to serve a career in uniform. Historically, Ministers of National Defense have been drawn from the pool of former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the three service Chiefs and, in one case, the Commandant of the Marine Corps.²⁹ However, the dominance of the Army in particular ensures that the MND continues to represent parochial interests of the branch of the military that has the greatest institutional interests in the alliance.

Table 3: ROK Ministers of National Defense 2005-2015

	Name	Term	Prior Position	Commissioning Source
39	Yoon Kwang-woong	Jul 29, 2004 to Nov 24, 2006	CNO	Naval Academy 26 th Class (1968)
40	Kim Chang-soo	Nov 24, 2006 to Feb 29, 2008	CSA	Military Academy 27 th Class (1971)
41	Lee Sang-hee	Feb 29, 2008 to Sep 22, 2009	CJCS	Military Academy 26 th Class (1970)
42	Kim Tae-young	Sep 22, 2009 to Dec 4, 2010	CJCS	Military Academy 29 th (1973)
43	Kim Kwan-jin	Dec 4, 2010 to Jun 29, 2014	CJCS	Military Academy 28 th Class (1972)
44	Han Min-goo	Jun 29, 2014 to Jul 7, 2017	CJCS CSA	Military Academy 31 st Class (1975)

Source: Developed by the author from multiple sources

The section titled “*Modes of Civilian Control*” analyzes important defense reform events, namely the formation of the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA), the Defense Reform Plan 2020 (DRP) and wartime OPCON transfer. A combination of archival research, as well as interviews with experts on Korean military affairs is used to understand the use of these mechanisms.

Civil-Military Relations in South Korea: Historical Context

When the ROK came into being with the arbitrary establishment of the 38th Parallel by the U.S and U.S.S.R, it was a broken state. It had lost most of its industries to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK)³⁰ and its economy, which was primarily based on supplying Japan, no longer had a market. U.S aid too was halved in 1950, leaving it underdeveloped and bereft.³¹ The following decades saw the rise of authoritarian regimes and decades of military rule as well as the passing of six different constitutions as successive South Korean governments struggled to build up its institutions and its economy. The establishment and consolidation of civilian control in the 1980s to the early 2000s was a result of the gradual strengthening of mechanisms of objective control under Park Chung-hee’s military regime and a shift in public opinion on the military as well as its linkages with the U.S. in the 1980s.

The First Republic (1948 to 1960)

When the First Republic was established in 1948, its military was its most organized institution. The Korean military was established in 1945 by the U.S. Military Government in Korea, led by Major General Archibald V. Arnold.³² Consequently, says David Maxwell, “the Korean military was built on the U.S. model, which at the time was Army-centric”. The civilian government had to contend not only with a population that still refused to acknowledge two Koreas, but also a military that was established by an external power and therefore had little allegiance to the new government. Within months of the U.S military transferring administration to the civilians, Syngman Rhee, the first President of ROK, had to call on the military to suppress anti-government protests in Jeju-do, and was then countering a rebellion by the same forces he had deployed.³³

In the absence of institutional legitimacy of the civilian government, Rhee sought to maintain control over the military through a system of patrimonialism, playing off different factions within the military.³⁴ The Korean War, meanwhile, further strengthened the influence of the military vis-à-vis the Rhee government:

As a result of the war, the size of the military grew to a spectacular extent (from 100,000 in 1950 to 700,000 in 1956, although it was reduced by 100,000 in 1957), but its institutional, technological, and organizational development was even more significant. Assisted by massive U.S. aid, the military developed into the most modernized and Westernized sector in Korea during the 1950s.³⁵

While the military grew more organized, Rhee's continued reliance on a highly individual-centric method of civilian control, coupled with his disregard for the constitution, undermined the legal basis on which civilian authority and legitimacy in a liberal democracy is established.

Military Rule (1961 to 1979)

In this environment of severely lacking civilian institutions that plagued the ROK in 1961, the military came to power under General Park Chung-hee of the ROK Army through a classic bloodless coup d'état. In 1963, under pressure from the U.S and its own citizens, the junta *nominally* transferred control to a civilian government but manned important civilian positions with former military men and Park himself retired and ran for President³⁶. However, Park was paranoid about being ousted himself by a military coup. He sought to consolidate his own control by depoliticizing the military. Furthermore, "Park continued to sever all formal and informal networks between civilian politics and the military. Active or retired military officers were placed under the surveillance of the KCIA and the Army Security Command [ASC]."³⁷ The mechanisms Park set up helped establish a system of checks and balances vis-à-vis the military, which benefited the civilian government that eventually succeeded him.

The Return to Civilian Rule (1980 to present)

The Fifth Republic (1980 to 1987) saw a continued trend of depoliticization and increased third-party oversight over the military.³⁸ Restrictions on the formation of political parties were also removed. Meanwhile, National Defense Security Command (NDSC) was instituted to monitor both military and civil matters.

The 1980s were also marked by growing anti-American sentiment, which were amplified by beliefs about alleged U.S. involvement in the Gwangju Massacre. On May 17, 1980, General Chun Doo-hwan, extended and expanded the martial law decrees that had been in place following the assassination of President Park. This action triggered nationwide demonstrations, originating from the city of Gwangju. On May 27, General Chun sent armored vehicles and helicopters to suppress the protests in Gwangju. Many Koreans believed that the U.S., which had both peacetime and wartime OPCON at the time, was complicit in the Chun regime's actions.³⁹

Under continued pressure from nationwide protests, the Constitution of the Sixth Republic was promulgated. What followed was the first peaceful transfer of power in the history of the ROK and Roh Tae-woo, leader of the newly-formed Democratic Justice Party, was elected as president by popular vote. Kim Yong-sam, who was elected President in 1993, took measures to “discourage military involvement in politics, reduce corruption within the executive branch, and strengthen the legislative system through local autonomy and election reforms.”⁴⁰ The internal security role of the military was eliminated and the NDSC was barred from undertaking surveillance over civil society when its Office of Information, which was charged with collecting information on civilians, was eliminated.⁴¹

The constitution of the Sixth Republic charges the armed forces with the defense of the nation and stipulates that their political neutrality must be maintained. Furthermore, the new Republic established a system of checks and balances both amongst the three civilian branches and the military. The President is both the Commander-in-Chief and the administrative head of the Armed Forces.⁴² To ensure the President can't misuse her/his power, s/he is accountable to the National Assembly. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are supervised by the executive through the Minister of Defense. Fourth, the military is monitored by the National Intelligence Service (NIS), formerly known as KCIA and the Agency for National Security Planning, and the Defense Security Command (DSC, an inter-service agency under the MND). Finally, the National Defense Committee, a special committee under the National Assembly, can check military power through its “(1) power to deliberate and settle defense budget bills; (2) power to enact and amend law related defense and security policies; and (3) power to inspect and investigate the armed forces”⁴³.

However, in spite of these mechanisms of objective control, military dominance in key civilian positions makes civilian oversight difficult. For instance, civilian intervention in initiating reform and innovation in the military is made complicated because the leader of the civilian institution that would oversee the change is from the military. ROK's Ministry of National Defense is still largely led by retired high-ranking military officials, particularly from the Army.⁴⁴ There is body of civilian defense expertise in South Korea, which the Roh administration sought to draw on. The dominance of the Army in particular ensures that the MND continues to represent parochial interests of the branch of the military that has the greatest institutional interests in the alliance. The Ministers of National Defense in the newly democratic South Korea usually follow the same career path; service chiefs, who frequently are appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, retire and are subsequently appointed Minister of National Defense.⁴⁵

The MND is in charge of developing plans to implement military reforms, therefore if such reforms are seen by the military as harming its parochial interests, either in the form of costly force restructuring or material disincentives, the military's hold over the MND may enable it to subvert reforms. In the case of the OPCON transfer, there has been speculation in the news media that continued delays in the transfer have led to the MND being lax on its investment in developing independent military capabilities required for a successful transfer, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of OPCON transfer delays.⁴⁶

Civilian Linkages to the Alliance: Public Opinion

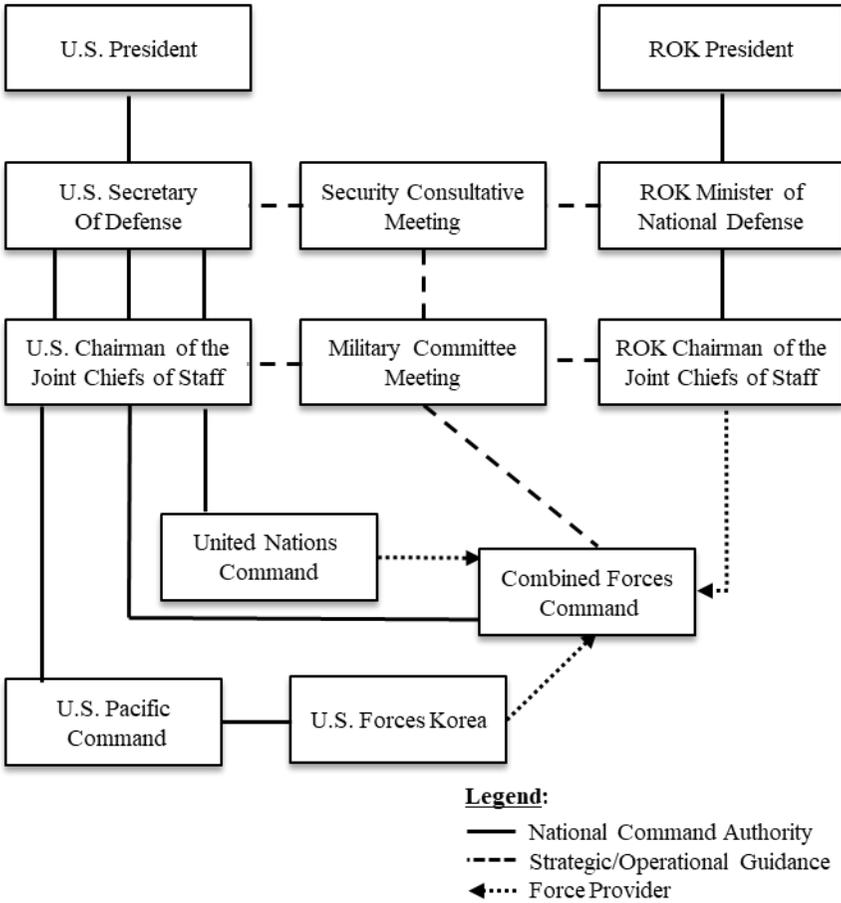
Setting the context: The Sin Wave of Anti-Americanism in South Korea

The Korean peninsula is one of the most militarized parts of the world. Approximately 28,500 U.S. troops are stationed in an area that is one-seventh the size of the state of Texas. The American presence in South Korea has led to protests since the first soldiers arrived to accept the surrender of Japanese troops south of the 38th Parallel. In the 1980s, the belief that all of South Korea's problems stemmed from the division of the peninsula by the U.S. formed the ideological basis for radical leftist student movements.⁴⁷ The Gwangju Massacre (1980) in particular was (and continues to be) a wellspring of anti-Americanism due to the alleged involvement of the U.S. in the brutal suppression of protests, which may have resulted in over 2,000 casualties.⁴⁸ Furthermore, scholars have noted the rise in anti-Americanism in the early post-military regime period in the

1990s, linking it to a “new nationalism” that was based on the confidence borne of South Korea’s economic growth, and increased self-reliance.⁴⁹ Protests erupted again in 2002 after a U.S. armored vehicle struck and killed two Korean schoolgirls in Yangju.⁵⁰ This incident, coupled with the alarm generated in South Korea by the Bush administration’s rhetoric on regime change as a general policy and the “axis of evil”, led to a sharp dip in the tone of public opinion on the U.S..⁵¹ The same year, Roh Moo-hyun who ran for election on an anti-U.S. platform, won and promised sweeping reforms that would end Korean reliance on the U.S..⁵² Roh’s party, the Uri Party, became the first liberal party in the democratic ROK to win a majority.⁵³ The most prominent among the Roh Administration’s reforms, and the case study for this public opinion research is the OPCON transfer.

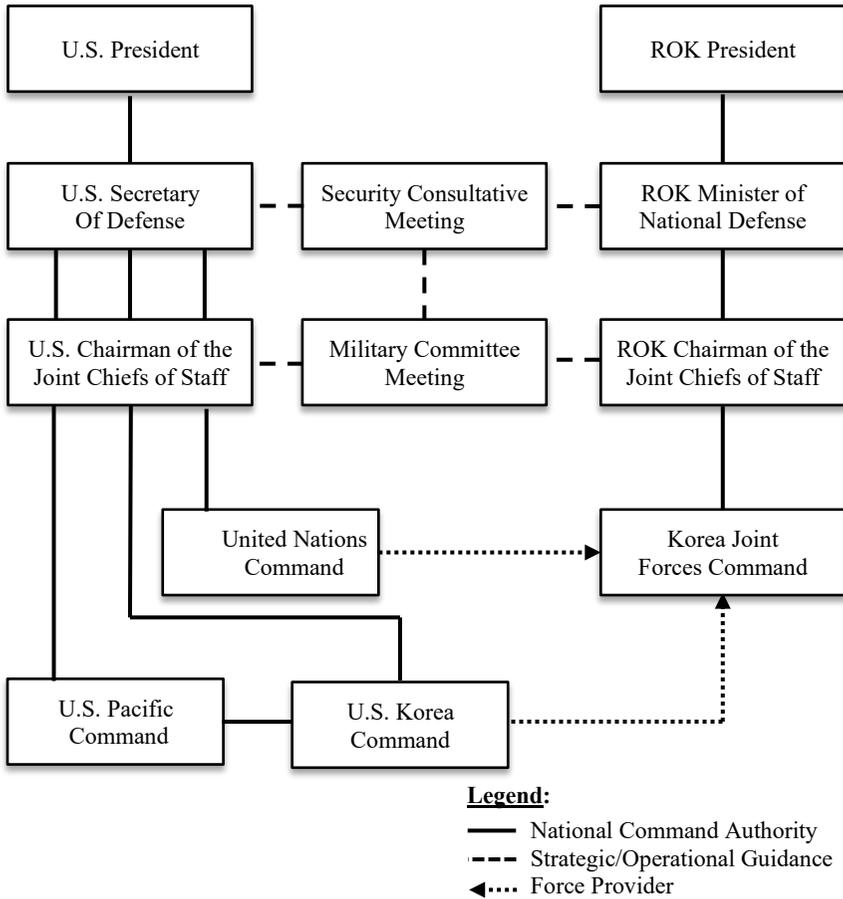
The OPCON transfer refers to the proposed change in the U.S.- ROK alliance command structure that will abolish the Combined Forces Command (CFC). The structure proposed by the Roh administration reduced the U.S. role in military operations to ‘force provider’. However, this proposal was revised in 2013 when Presidents Obama and Park Geun-hye agreed to a “conditions-based transfer” so that the CFC will be replaced by a “combined theater command” that will mediate between the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) and the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).⁵⁴ Simply put, the USFK and ROK forces will have two separate commands that will coordinate through centers, bureaus and other mechanisms.

Figure 2: Current Command Relationships



Source: Lieutenant General Stephen G. Wood, USAF and Major Christopher A. Johnson, DM, USAF, “The Transformation of Air Forces on the Korean Peninsula.”⁵⁵

Figure 3: Projected Wartime Command Relationships Originally Slated for Post-2012



Source: Wood and Johnson, “The Transformation of Air Forces on the Korean Peninsula.”⁵⁶

The OPCON transfer is a microcosm of many of the core issues that drive South Korean sentiments vis-à-vis the U.S. As sociologist Shin Gi-wook points out, “South Korea is caught between two conflicting identities: the alliance identity that sees the United States as a friendly provider and the nationalist identity that pits Korean identity against the United States”.⁵⁷ The transfer similarly reflects competing desires. One is the

desire for self-sufficiency in a region where South Korea is a “shrimp among whales”: a smaller power in the middle of great power competition.⁵⁸ Despite nearly 72 years of U.S.-Korean ties, many South Koreans are still wary of being pulled into a conflict triggered by an action taken by the U.S. unilaterally. At the same time, many South Koreans also see the value of having U.S. boots on the ground. U.S. presence signals its commitment to the security of its ally, and at no small expense. The 28,500 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea in 2012 cost the U.S. a total of \$3.1 billion in personnel and non-personnel expenses.⁵⁹ The strength of these competing sentiments have waxed and waned over the past decade, and periodic calls to delay or hasten the OPCON transfer are reflective of that.

One Alliance, Two Lenses

The issue of the OPCON transfer elicits a spectrum of responses ranging from those who believe that as a sovereign nation, South Korea should have complete wartime OPCON to those who say that the transfer will irreparably damage the U.S.-ROK alliance and leave South Korea vulnerable to North Korea. In most cases, these arguments line up clearly along ideological lines with left-leaning groups arguing for, and right-leaning ones against, the transfer. However, as the content analysis demonstrates, there are shifts in the tone of coverage even within these ideological camps as the context and contents of the alliance change. Notably, the choice of statements of military experts both from the ROK and the U.S., mentions of North Korea’s nuclear capability, and competing portrayals of the U.S. a valuable partner or an exploitative power, fluctuate over time.

The study of opinion polls and news coverage is divided into inclusive intervals by administration, that is, the Roh administration (2007 to 2008), the Lee administration (2009 to 2012) and the Park administration (2013 to 2015).⁶⁰

Figure 4: Opinion Polls and News Coverage Studied by Period



Source: Developed by the author.

There was a total of 887 articles in *Hankyoreh*, *Korea Times* and *Chosun Ilbo* that mentioned OPCON during this entire period, however only 202 of these covered the issue extensively enough to make them viable for analysis. The search terms used were “OPCON” and “전시작전통제권” (*Jeonsi jagjeon tongjegweon*, literally “wartime operational control”).

Lines are Drawn and Blurred (2007-08)

The OPCON transfer was a divisive issue in South Korea at its very outset. Brought to the forefront of foreign policy during the upward spike in anti-American sentiment in 2002-03, the U.S. and ROK reached an agreement on February 23, 2007 whereby the transfer was set for April 17, 2012. Opinions in this period were divided clearly along ideological lines.

The liberal-leftist *Hankyoreh*'s reportage in 2007 favored the transfer and expressed support for the Roh administration's decision, deploying the “sovereignty” argument. However, the tone of coverage in 2008 shows a shift from portraying the U.S. as a hindrance to Korean sovereignty, to depicting it as a willing party to the transfer. The conservative *Chosun Ilbo*'s and center-right *Korea Times*' reportage questioned the necessity of the transfer in 2006-07, and their tone in 2008 in particular vis-à-vis the issue was one of pacification. The two newspapers focused primarily on attempts by the MND to restore faith in the alliance and reassurances given by the USFK. One article in the *Chosun Ilbo* compared the CFC to NATO, stating that the exercise of operational control over one's forces by another power is not uncommon and therefore not a major threat to sovereignty.⁶¹

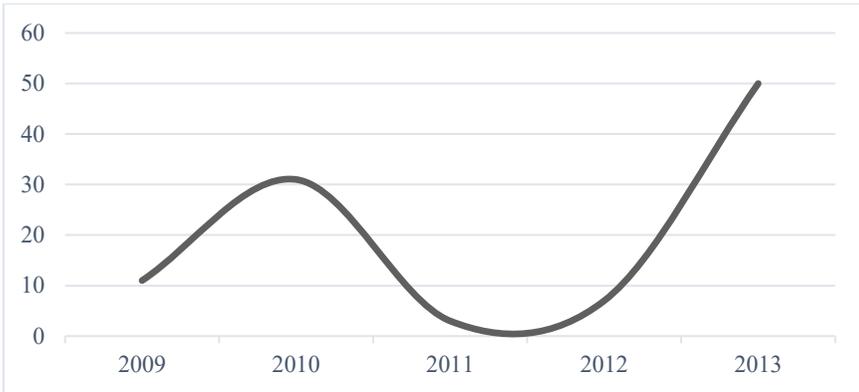
Concurrently, perceptions of the U.S. in South Korea underwent a steep improvement. A 2008 Pew Survey found that overall U.S. image improved dramatically in 2008 over 2007: where U.S. favorability was only 58 percent in 2007 this number rose to 70 percent in 2008.⁶² The change in U.S. leadership from the hawkish Bush administration to the more cautious Obama administration may account for this shift. A 2008 Gallup poll on perceptions of U.S. leadership amongst the U.S.'s partners in developed Asia (Japan, South Korea, Australia, Singapore) found that South Korea placed the most importance on leadership in determining the tone of relations, with 79 percent viewing the U.S. elections results as important to South Korea.⁶³ Thus this period is marked by an upswing in perceptions of the U.S., due in part to the change in leadership.

Threats and Uncertainty (2009-2012)

In May 2009, North Korea conducted its second nuclear test, and in March 2010, it sank the *ROKS Cheonan*, a South Korean warship. An analysis of news coverage of the OPCON transfer in this period shows that the frequency of mentions of North Korea is 66.67 percent higher in 2009-10 over 2007-08 numbers. Concurrently, the tone of coverage shifted. *Hankyoreh's* coverage in this period is more cautious on the OPCON transfer, even discussing the necessity of U.S. presence and extended deterrence. Meanwhile the trend of greater coverage of opposing viewpoints in *Korea Times* in 2009 went through a reversal: in 2009, about a third of non-military opinion covered in the newspaper discussed ways of going through with the transfer with a few adjustments, but in 2010 this number dropped to 10 percent. A perceived riskier threat environment therefore empowered arguments against the OPCON transfer.

In June 2010, citing lack of preparation and the threat posed by an aggressive North Korea, the Lee Myung-bak administration requested a delay in OPCON transfer to 2015. Reportage in *Korea Times* and *Chosun Ilbo* supported the Lee administration's decision, primarily citing the Cheonan incident. *Hankyoreh* however questioned the delay on the allegations that the Lee administration had made concessions on the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORU.S. FTA) to get U.S. approval for the delay.⁶⁴ The tone of its coverage was not anti-delay as much as it was critical of the Lee administration's methods, which it criticized for its lack of transparency. The sovereignty issue remains at the forefront of *Hankyoreh's* coverage, however there is notable ambivalence in the tone of the limited statements from U.S. officials that received coverage.

Figure 5: Articles Focusing on OPCON in *Hankyoreh*, *The Korea Times*, and *The Chosun Ilbo*



Source: Developed by the author from multiple sources.

There is a lull in coverage in 2011-12, during which all three newspapers did not report on the transfer aside from commentary on the lack of a concrete plan on the OPCON transfer. Interestingly, *Chosun Ilbo* took on a critical tone about the delay, with articles expressing concern over how South Korea will be perceived by the international community after renegeing on its commitment to the transfer.⁶⁵

2012 is perhaps best characterized as a period of uncertainty. North Korea and the U.S. announced an agreement on the possible resumption of Six Party Talks which had broken down in 2009. However, this agreement fell apart in April after North Korea attempted to launch a satellite into orbit.⁶⁶ Additionally, elections were underway in both South Korea and the U.S., which may have contributed to ambiguity on the OPCON transfer. For instance, Asan Institute's 2012 International Trend survey reported that 51 percent of respondents described the state of U.S.-ROK relations as "mixed".⁶⁷ The uncertainty surrounding the conditions of the revised transfer coupled with the uncertainty of foreign policy in an election year played a role in the comparatively lower coverage of the issue.

Further Delays and Rise in Ambiguity (2013 to 2015)

Coverage of the issue of the OPCON transfer returned in full force in during the period 2013 to 2014, and coverage in all three newspapers leaned toward favoring the transfer. In this period, both *Chosun Ilbo* and *Korea Times* dedicated an average of only 26 percent of coverage on the OPCON transfer to arguments opposing the transfer.

Debate leading up to South Korea's participation in the American-led THAAD system figured in this change. THAAD, like the OPCON transfer, was a deeply divisive issue. *Korea Times* was ambivalent on the utility of a U.S. ballistic missile defense (BMD) system given South Korea's planned Korean Air Missile Defense system, and *Hankyoreh* is openly critical about THAAD and even states that the U.S. was leveraging another request for OPCON delay as a means of "pushing" THAAD onto South Korea. The rhetoric of South Korea being an unwilling party to the deployment of THAAD is used repeatedly in coverage of OPCON in all three newspapers in 2014, the year Park signed an agreement on a "conditions-based transfer" with the U.S. which delayed OPCON transfer indefinitely.

In the same timeframe, Asan Institute and Pew reported a less steep but still positive spike in perceptions of the U.S.-ROK alliance with 78 percent of respondents to Pew's poll and 82 percent of respondents to the Asan poll having positive perceptions of the alliance.⁶⁸ Again, leadership appears to be a decisive factor: as Pew's Jacob Poushter says, "President Obama himself also enjoys high ratings from South Koreans. In the most recent survey, 77 percent express confidence in the American president's ability to handle world affairs... Assessments of former President Bush were much harsher. When he left office in 2008, only three-in-ten South Koreans had confidence in Bush, while 64 percent had little or no confidence." Thus, although OPCON transfer delay and THAAD system were divisive issues, this criticism did not translate into a harsher view of the U.S. itself.

Modes of Civilian Control in South Korea

Introduction

The civil-military dynamic in South Korea is a product of both objective and subjective controls. As stated in the third section, objective controls include the National Intelligence Services (NIS) and the Defense Security Command (DSC), which have authority to monitor the military. The former reports directly to the President, while the latter falls under the MND.

In terms of subjective controls, the Constitution of the Sixth Republic of Korea mandates that the armed forces be an apolitical body. The implementation of this control, however, remains patchy, in part due the sometimes-undue policy influence the military has through alliance arrangements like the Military Committee Meeting (MCM) and the Security Consultative Meeting (SCM). The SCM is a meeting of civilian defense leaders; i.e. the Secretary of Defense and the Minister of National Defense. However, as noted, the Minister of National Defense is invariably a former service chief or former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

From the mid-2000s onward, the civilian government began implementing changes in the defense sector, including defense procurement and force structure. This chapter will trace some of these important developments and attempt to evaluate and place them into the categories of subjective and objective civilian control.

Defense Acquisition

Before the large-scale defense reforms implemented in 2006, defense acquisition fell under the Defense Acquisition Office (DAO), a bureau under the MND. The DAO had responsibility over managing foreign procurement, investment plans and budgets for R&D. The head of the DAO was the Deputy Minister for Defense Acquisition. In addition to the DAO, the Defense Procurement Agency (DPA) handled contracting services and domestic procurement and the Agency for Defense Development (ADD) was in-charge of R&D efforts, and the Defense Quality Assurance Agency (DQAA) handled quality control in domestic defense equipment production.⁶⁹

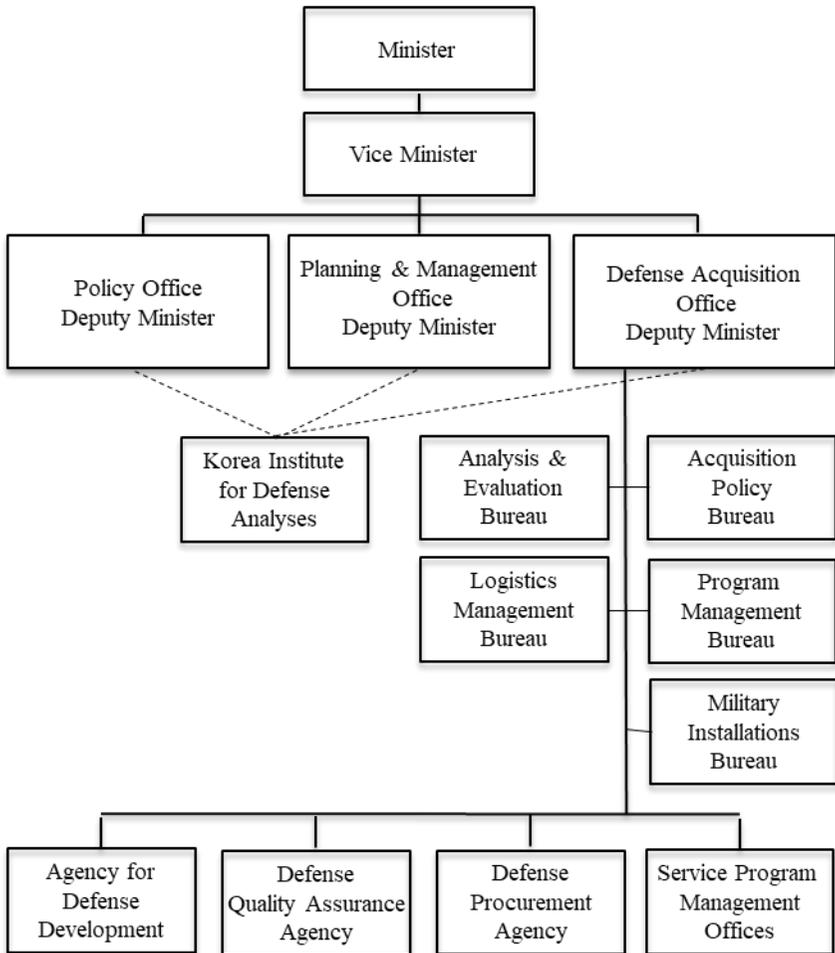
Table 3: Ministry of National Defense Acquisition Process

Phase	Document	Office of Primary Responsibility	Purpose
Planning	Force Requirement Proposal (FRP) Long-Range FRP Medium-Range FRP Medium-Long Range FRP Joint Strategic Objective Plan	Services	Defense Goals Threat Assessment Defense Policy
Programming	Defense Acquisition and Development Plan Mid-Term Defense Plan	DAO/APB PMO/(O&S) DAO/APB (Investment)	Define systems & equipment to implement defense goals
Budgeting	Defense Budget Document	DAO/APB (Investment) PMO (O&S)	Define money needed to implement
Executing	Defense Budget Allocation Plan	DAO/APB	Money authorized by National Assembly for Fiscal Year
Evaluation			Analyze completed project & improve system

Source: B.A. Kausal, *A Comparison of the Defense Acquisition Systems of Australia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and the United States*

Thus, there were two pathways to acquisition: the military services identify a need, the R&D agencies initiate research, and MND either meets the need through domestic production, purchases from overseas – usually the U.S. – or a combination of the two.

Figure 6: Organization of Defense Acquisition (February 2000)

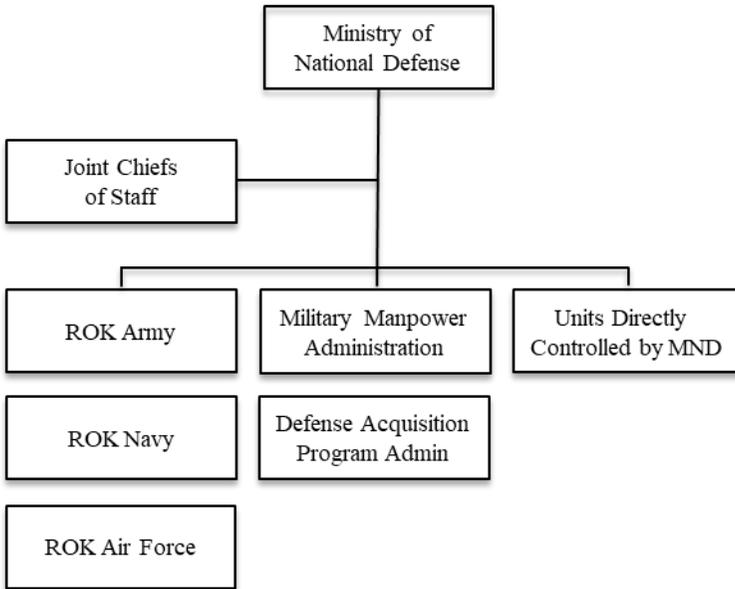


Source: B.A. Kausal, *A Comparison of the Defense Acquisition Systems of Australia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and the United States*⁷⁰

During the 2005 to 2006 period, defense acquisition was moved to the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA), an external bureau which, although technically still under the MND, has greater autonomy in its budget.⁷¹ The DAPA took over all of DAO's tasks, as well as the

functions of the DQAA and DPA. The DAPA also has a supervisory role vis-à-vis the ADD and the newly-established Defense Agency for Technology and Quality (DTAQ).⁷² Furthermore, the individual in-charge is a full minister, as opposed to a deputy minister. The consequence of this organizational reshuffle is that the defense procurement was elevated to a status at par with the MND. Simply put, in 2006, the military-dominated MND had less control over procurement and the reorganization can be categorized as a form of *subjective control*- a formal, institutionalized measure to reduce military influence over this sector.

Figure 3: Defense Acquisition within MND after 2006



Source: Ministry of National Defense, 2010 Defense White Paper⁷³

Hence began a long tussle with the MND and the ROK military, both of which sought to expand their roles in acquisition.⁷⁴ Notably, in 2009, the DAPA and the ROK Army clashed on the issue of acquisition of attack helicopters. The DAPA proposed the development of a domestically-produced Korea Attack Helicopter (KAH), while the Army favored the

U.S.-made Apaches (AH-64).⁷⁵ The ROK Army proceeded to contact the USFK directly, requesting AH-64s. The tussle culminated in the National Assembly's National Defense Committee pushing for the KAH, and a provision for their construction was included in the 2010 budget.⁷⁶

The DAPA's free reign came under public scrutiny in March 2014, when senior officials with the DAPA were detained on suspicion of involvement in corruption related to the purchase of training systems from the Turkish company Havelsan.⁷⁷ The timing of the DAPA scandal is notable. Perhaps in response to public outcry, the civilian government passed a revision to the DAPA Act in May and June 2014, as well as three additional revisions in 2015, which granted the MND greater oversight over the DAPA.⁷⁸ The MND had repeatedly raised concerns since the DAPA's inception over the lack of transparency in its functioning, but 2014 marked a shift in terms of reduced reliance by the civilian government on this method of subjective control.

Defense Reform Plans 2020 and 2030

The National Defense Reform Act (2006) stipulated a reorganization of the ROK Armed Forces into a more streamlined, technologized force. Its basic doctrine mandates the following tasks:⁷⁹

1. Expansion of the civilian base in national defense policy making;
2. Reinforcing the functions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the balanced development of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, taking into account future war environment;
3. Improvement of the military structure in a technology-intensive manner;
4. Shift to a low-cost high-efficiency national defense management system;
5. Establishment of a new military culture that is in touch with social changes

Evaluating the form of control the Defense Reform Plan (DRP) 2020 presents is challenging, in part because it combines incentives and disincentives. In terms of benefits, the DRP 2020 provided for the expansion in the ROK military arsenal (specifically air force and naval assets), to support the goal of a technology-intensive self-sufficient force.⁸⁰ Accordingly, MND estimated in 2006 that the DRP would expand the defense budget 9.9 percent annually between 2006 and 2010 and then 7.8 percent annually between 2011 and 2015.⁸¹

On the other hand, the Act also called for an increase in the proportion of civilians, as well as force restructuring and a 25 percent decrease in military manpower – which are both costly and/or time-consuming efforts that go against the parochial interests of the military. The ROK Army would face the bulk of these cuts, including a 190,000 reduction (560,000 in 2004 to 370,000 in 2020) in the number of active-duty personnel.⁸² The problem with this section of the Act, however, was the absence of a definition of “civilian”. The MND may interpret “civilianizing” the MND in a way that still maintains military dominance. For instance, if the MND defines “civilians” to include retired military officials, this will run counter to the goal of meaningful civilianization of the MND.

The DRP 2020, however, became a casualty of budget shortfalls and administration change. The average increase in the first phase was only 7.2 percent, as opposed to the required 9.9 percent.⁸³ Furthermore, on the request of the Lee Myung-bak administration, the DRP was revised in 2009 to delay completion to 2025 and changing some of the force restructuring goals and in 2011 President Lee replaced the 2006 Plan with the DRP 2030.⁸⁴

The revised DRP is more focused on effective ways to work within the alliance framework to counter the North Korean threat rather than self-reliance. The key tenets of the new National Defense Policy are:⁸⁵

1. Establishing a comprehensive defense posture
2. Strengthening military capability
3. Developing the ROK-U.S. military alliance and expanding defense diplomacy and cooperation
4. Providing military support for furtherance of the inter-Korea relationship;
5. Enhance management efficiency
6. Creating a rewarding environment for military service
7. Nurturing qualified military personnel and improving military training and education
8. Become a defense force that serves the people

There are numerous key changes in the DRP 2030 over the DRP 2020. The goal of civilianization of the MND is notably absent in the new DRP. There are lower cuts in army manpower: 522,000 in 2022, only a 110,000 reduction over 2012 numbers as opposed to the more drastic cut proposed in DRP 2020.⁸⁶ Finally, the new DRP proposes an act-first, report-later

approach to North Korean provocations.⁸⁷ This last provision is perhaps most significant for civil-military dynamics as it undercuts any control the civilian government may have had to intervene in the case of escalation with DPRK. Exacerbating the problem of civilian intervention is the highly secretive OPLAN 5015, which replaced the OPLAN 5027 in 2015. The new OPLAN allegedly provides for limited strikes into North Korean territory and an attack on North Korean leadership in the event of an imminent ballistic missile strike.⁸⁸ Interestingly, although the original discussions for the new OPLAN in 2007 were in preparation for the OPON transfer, the design was modified for the Combined Forces Command (CFC) leading operations.⁸⁹ Taken together, all these changes expanded military autonomy in defense policy and removed force restructuring disincentives that were a part of DRP 2020.

The first plan imposed harsher cuts on the ROK army, and sought to increase civilian participation in the defense decision-making process, all hallmarks of subjective control. The revised DRP de-emphasizes civilian control in favor of a narrower focus on the North Korean threat and gives the military greater latitude in managing provocations.

Concluding Observations

The transition from DRP 2020 and DRP 2030 reflects a shift in the mode of civilian control similar to the one in defense acquisition, whereby harsher terms and disincentives have gradually been removed. Both case studies also show that the ROK Army has been able to leverage its dominance in the MND and in relations with the USFK to further its interests. For instance, in the defense acquisition study, the army circumvented bureaucratic channels and went to the USFK directly to carry-forward its planned acquisition of AH-64s, openly defying the DAPA. Subsequently, the MND, openly critical of the DAPA since its inception, established greater oversight over defense acquisition.

Alliance Perceptions and Civilian Control: Analyzing Linkages

The last two sections demonstrated that the decade from 2006 to 2015 was a turbulent time for South Korea, marked by North Korean aggression, heated debates on the OPCON transfer and dramatic shifts in the U.S.-ROK relationship. The transition from 2006, when favorability of the alliance was at historic lows and the military was facing the prospect of lowered autonomy and massive force restructuring, to 2015, when perceptions of the U.S. were overwhelmingly positive and military interests had been firmly protected, is significant for both the U.S.-ROK

alliance and its implications for the nature of civil-military relations in South Korea.

There have been three important junctures in civil-military relations in South Korea during the period under study. The first is 2006, when the Roh administration sought to implement sweeping defense reforms in furtherance of its goal of civilianizing defense policy and planning, and putting an end to reliance on the U.S. The second is 2010, when the military was becoming increasingly vocal in its opposition to the OPCON transfer in the aftermath of the uncertainty and threat environment of the *Cheonan* incident. Finally, in 2014 the military secured its interests vis-à-vis the civilian government in the form of greater autonomy in defense planning and acquisition.

Subjective Control (2006 to 2007)

There is a clear linkage between anti-American sentiment in the early 2000s, the demand for the transfer of wartime OPCON and the implementation of sweeping military reforms. This period has been characterized by Bruce Bechtol as one of “emotion-driven politics”.⁹⁰ Anti-American sentiment, driven in part by the 2002 Yangju Highway incident and partly by the Bush administration’s harsh North Korea policy, was still going strong. Also at play was the “386 generation”, the politically-active generation born in the 1960s, who were young adults in the 1980s, and who therefore harbored considerable antipathy toward the U.S., having witnessed the Gwangju massacre.

Low approval of the alliance up to 2007 corresponds with two important elements of President Roh’s defense policy: acquisition reform and DRP 2020, both of which included substantial measures of subjective control that reduced military autonomy. Although some retired generals did coalesce and rally against the government’s new policies, there was little public military resistance to Roh’s reforms in these early stages⁹¹

The Uncertainty Dividend (2009 to 2010)

A sharp improvement in public perceptions of the U.S. in 2008 corresponded with gradual shifts in defense planning that removed some objective controls in 2009-11. Following the election of President Obama in 2008, public opinion on the U.S. improved drastically, corresponding with a slight increase in military opposition to the OPCON transfer. The timing of the DRP 2030 is often cited as proof that the North Korean threat resulted in these policy shifts as the reform plan was introduced shortly after the sinking of the *ROKS Cheonan* and the bombing of Yeonpyeong

Island by North Korea in 2010.⁹² However, while agencies develop multiple plans and courses of action, planning for the changes introduced under the new DRP started *before* these incidents, implying that these North Korean provocations were not the key drivers of this defense policy shift, and that a re-evaluation of defense priorities was underway as part of a wider shift in perceptions of the alliances.⁹³

Yet, although there are signs of a shift from Roh's subjective control, civilian control over the military is not predominantly objective in this period. As the study of the DAPA showed, the ROK Army and MND were denied their acquisition requests, despite support from the USFK. Additionally, although the *Cheonan* incident was covered extensively in news coverage about the OPCON transfer in the context of a delay, public military statements about the transfer were principally ambivalent. The interpretation of this phenomenon, that is backed by the data in this paper, is that the Lee Myung-bak administration's negotiations on the KORUS-FTA and the corresponding mixed public perceptions of the U.S. in 2010-11 were a temporary stumbling block in the military's bid to regain their autonomy.

Objective Control (2013 to 2014)

The final major shift in civil-military relations in South Korea began in 2013, amid fresh North Korean nuclear and missile tests and sustained improvements in perceptions of the U.S.-ROK alliance. Civilian control over the military in this period is predominantly objective in nature, granting it much of the autonomy it lost under Roh.

Interestingly, objective control is not linked in this case to a depoliticized military. Public military opposition to the OPCON transfer is highest in these years in comparison to the rest of the period under study, including notably from the Minister of National Defense himself, Kim Kwan-jin. Kim, formerly a four-star general in the ROK Army, publicly advocated against the OPCON transfer.⁹⁴ "The military," says Shin Gi-wook, "had strong influence during the Park Geun-hye administration." David Maxwell, a Korea scholar who served in USFK, cites Kim's opposition to the transfer as a crucial juncture in the military's history with the issue.⁹⁵ Concurrently, the MND was gradually able to re-establish its control over key defense activities, including greater oversight over the DAPA.

Conclusion

Civil-military relations in South Korea continue to be fertile grounds for investigation as they have linkages to both the U.S.-ROK alliance and on the civilian government's ability to implement defense reforms for developing self-sufficiency. The research presented in this paper has found a correlation between the military's institutional biases, public opinion on the alliance and the mode of civilian oversight over the military. Low alliance approval ratings in 2006-07 coincided with civilian leaders' attempts to reduce military autonomy and increase civilian control. The period beginning 2008 saw a gradual shift toward greater public opposition by the military to civilian policies it saw as inimical to its interests, along with an upward trend in alliance approval. Finally, in 2013-14, this trend culminated in the establishment of objective civilian controls and relative non-interference.

Therefore, the Moon administration will likely look to implement subjective controls on the ROK military. Revising the decision to indefinitely-delay wartime OPCON transfer is a critical element of this effort. This will, in turn, result in civil-military conflict at a time when Washington needs Seoul's support of its North Korean strategy. The Trump administration cannot take the tides of Korea public opinion lightly, must ensure that it establishes itself as a reliable regional partner.

Notes:

¹ "Roh Moo-hyun's inauguration speech," *BBC News*, February 25, 2003, <http://news/bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2797053.stm>

² "Moon Jae-in's inauguration speech," *The Korea Times*, May 11, 2017, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/05/356_229150.html

³ Zoltan Barany, "Civil-Military Relations and Institutional Decay: Explaining Russian Military Politics," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, Number 4 (June 2008), pp. 581-604.

⁴ Deborah Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral Wars*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 130

⁷ The SCM is ostensibly a mechanism for civilian-to-civilian dialog between the U.S. and ROK, however since the Ministry of National Defense is led by retired generals, they serve as another means through which the military's interests are woven into the alliance. http://www.dscamilitary.com/sites/default/files/fiscal_year_series_30_september_2014_web.pdf and Norman Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind? The U.S.-ROK Security Relationship Post-9/11*, (Washington, DC: RAND Project Air Force, 2004), p. 16.

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- ⁸ Norman Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind: The U.S.-ROK Security Relationship Post-9/11*, p. 19.
- ⁹ Tina M. Dacin and Christine Oliver, et. al., "The Legitimacy of Strategic Alliances: An Institutional Perspective," *Strategic Management Journal*, Volume 28, (2007), p. 170.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ See section "Civilian Linkages to the Alliance, Public Opinion," pp. 20-29.
- ¹² This focus is likely a result of the "state as a unitary actor" assumption that dominates the field security studies.
- ¹³ Sheila Smith, "Shifting Terrain: The Domestic Politics of the U.S. Military Presence in Asia," *East West Center Special Reports*, Number 8, (March 2006). <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/fileadmin/stored/misc/SR00807LookingAhead.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Katharine H.S. Moon, *Protesting America: Democracy and the U.S.-Korea Alliance* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2012).
- ¹⁵ Ibid, p. 209.
- ¹⁶ Jongseok Woo, "Crafting democratic control of the military in South Korea and the Philippines: the problem of military factions," *Contemporary Politics*, Volume 16, Number 4, (December 2010).
- ¹⁷ Chung-in Moon and Sang-young Rhyu, "Democratic Transition, Persistent Civilian Control over the Military, and the South Korean Anomaly," *Asian Journal of Political Science*, Volume 19, Number 3, (December 2011), pp. 250-269
- ¹⁸ Vladimir Tikhonov, "Militarism and Anti-militarism in South Korea: Militarized Masculinity and the Conscientious Objector Movement," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Volume 7, Issue 12, (March 2009).
- ¹⁹ Gi-wook Shin, *One Alliance, Two Lenses* (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press: 2010), p. 45 and 88.
- ²⁰ Kongdan Oh quoted in James F. Durand, "Japan's Contributions to Korean Security: An Analysis using the Quasi-Alliance Model," *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Volume XX, Number 1, (Spring/Summer 2016), p. 138.
- ²¹ Katharine Moon, *Protesting America*, p. 224.
- ²² George Perkovich, "Stop Enabling Pakistan's Dangerous Dysfunction," *CEIP Policy Outlook*, September 2011.
- ²³ Takako Hitokani, "The Paradox of Antimilitarism: Civil-Military Relations in Post World War II Japan," Dissertation, Columbia University Academic Commons, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.7916/D8P849HZ>
- ²⁴ See chapter: "Theoretical Background and Literature Review," pp. 7-8.
- ²⁵ The choice of these newspaper is based on the availability of a searchable online archive.
- ²⁶ NKNews, <https://www.nknews.org/wpcontent/uploads/2010/10/Media-Sources.docx>
- ²⁷ Refer: Chapter "Literature Review."
- ²⁸ The rationale for this distinction is partly based on ROK's universal male conscription system. Thus 'civilian' is taken to mean all civilian personnel with the exception of career officers and staff noncommissioned officers.
- ²⁹ Han Min-goo, Kim Kwang-jin, Kim Taeyoung, Lee Sang-hee all followed this pattern.
- ³⁰ Michael J. Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), pp. 25-26.
- ³¹ Ibid.

- ³² Zoltan Barany, *The Soldier and the Changing State*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 179.
- ³³ Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, p. 97.
- ³⁴ Jongseok Woo, "Crafting democratic control of the military in South Korea and the Philippines: the problem of military factions," *Contemporary Politics*, Volume. 16, Number 4 (Routledge, December 2010), p. 373 and Zoltan Barany, *The Soldier and the Changing State*, p. 180
- ³⁵ Jongseok Woo, "Crafting democratic control of the military in South Korea and the Philippines," 5
- ³⁶ Chung-in Moon and Sang-young Rhyu, "Democratic Transition, Persistent Civilian Control over the Military, and the South Korean Anomaly," *Asian Journal of Political Science*, Volume 19, Number 3 (Routledge, December 2011), p. 252.
- ³⁷ Chung-in Moon and Sang-young Rhyu, p. 261.
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