



[After Trump Series 2] Prospects for U.S.–South Korea Cooperation in an Era of U.S.–China Strategic Competition

Factors Influencing South Korean Views on Allying with the U.S.: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications¹⁾

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Introduction

Smaller countries tend to seek alliance with a stronger country when their geopolitical environment is unfavorable. South Korea's alliance with the United States is supported by this geopolitical reason and is also rooted historically. By helping to both liberate South Korea from its 35 year-long Japanese colonial rule and defend it against North Korea's invasion during the Korean War (1950-1953), the U.S. has planted historical legacy of the 1953 mutual security agreement, which continues to this date. However, the transition of South Korea (hereafter, Korea or ROK) from an impoverished nation to a developed democracy has made Koreans more conscious of establishing an equal partnership with their security patron. This is considered a natural development provided Korea's progress and democratization.

When the alliance between a great power and a smaller power is asymmetric, the two parties tend to view the alliance from different lens. Shin (2010, 8-10) argues that the alliance is more narrowly defined as a policy issue for the patron while it is viewed under the wider spectrum of national identity for the client. With respect to such observation, Koreans tend to view the alliance from a wider perspective than Americans. Nevertheless, it is difficult to dissociate interest from identity. For example, the U.S. dispatching the third largest number of American soldiers to Korea next to Japan and Germany highlights Korea not only as a regional "lynchpin" in terms of military-security interests,

¹ The statistical analysis of this paper is assisted by Dr. Hwa-yeon Kim of Sungkyunkwan University.

but also with regard to shared values of democracy and free market. These values are ingrained heavily for American strategists in managing 37 alliance partners globally.²

Identity within an alliance also changes depending on the respective geo-political environment and security threats. Korea embarked on its quest for achieving equal relations with the U.S. following its 1987 democratic transition. While the Korean public had resented American G.I. crimes against service women prior to the nation's democratization, anti-American sentiments expanded further since the turn of the century due to issues related to the U.S. military base. Local residents demanded that the *Maehyang-ri* drill camp be closed and reacted strongly to the publicization of poisonous material leaking from the Yongsan Base into the Han River. Public sensitivity to national sovereignty peaked when massive candlelight protests erupted in November 2002 to support the revision the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The protests followed the ruling of the U.S. military court, which stated that the American soldiers accused of killing two Korean schoolgirls with an armed vehicle during the military exercise in June, were not guilty. The series of popular protests alarmed the United States Forces Korea (USFK) to launch proactive outreach programs with local communities. In addition to this democratization-led nationalism, tensions between Korea and the U.S. rose during the early 2000s due to the seemingly unilateral post-9.11 realignment by the U.S. and increased support by the Korean public for rapprochement with the North (Lee 2005).

Have Koreans become more confident in their relations with the U.S.? The trend shows that Koreans' nationalistic anti-American sentiment has diminished since the mid-2000s which in turn, has strengthened overall public support for the ROK-US alliance. The increased level of national confidence from democratization and economic development seems to have contributed to the decline of Korea's defensive nationalism. Koreans have come to view their country as a middle power and a contributing party to G20 and other global governance institutions. In the meantime, its security environment has deteriorated with the rising nuclear threat from North Korea. Kim Jong-un, who came into power following Kim Jong-il's death in December 2011, has pursued a strong military policy and developed long-range missiles accompanied by frequent nuclear tests. Furthermore, the increasingly intensifying U.S.-China strategic competition presents Korea with complexities in its strategic calculation since it is a U.S. ally that also holds strong economic and political ties with China. Such changes in Korea's geo-political environment, which add to the conventional security concerns related to North Korea, altogether influence the ROK-U.S. alliance.

With the U.S. as its security guarantor and China as its major economic partner, the bilateral

² Foreign Affairs. 2020. "Saving America's Alliances: The United States Still Needs the System That Put It on Top" <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-10/saving-americas-alliances>

rivalry has placed Korea—more than any other regional U.S. ally—into a heightened dilemma, pushing the nation to take a side. The Chinese government, for example, strongly opposed Korea’s decision to introduce Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), an American anti-ballistic missile system, in 2015-16. The Korean government placed diplomatic efforts to persuade China with the rationale that THAAD would defend the nation from North Korea’s long-range missile attacks, but ultimately failed to prevent China’s harsh economic retaliation. The U.S. then pushed Seoul to join the welcoming of the Permanent Court of Justice’s South China Sea ruling against China in 2016. Taking note of the arbitration award, however, the Korean foreign ministry limited its involvement by issuing a short statement saying that the disputes should be resolved through peaceful and creative diplomatic efforts.³ With the intensified technological U.S.-China competition since 2019, the U.S. has been pushing its allies including Korea to decouple from Chinese technology such as Huawei 5G. The global outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020 has also added to the existing competition between the U.S. and China. Korea, like any other country in the world, is cautiously watching how the post-pandemic U.S.-China competition will unfold.

When smaller countries deal with China, containment strategy is not an option. Instead, most Asian countries tend to adopt a hedging policy in their engagement with both the U.S. and China rather than opting to choose one over the other (Glaser 2012; Goh 2007). They prefer to continue their trade and investment ties with China and invite China to participate in regional institutions and even engage in military cooperation. Unless China becomes overly assertive and aggressive, smaller countries will choose not to take a clear-cut stand within the U.S.-China competition and pursue a balancing strategy (Ikenberry 2016). Johnston and Ross (1999) characterize Korea’s China strategy as maximal engagement since China’s increasing power does not pose a need for military balancing. This aspect is different from Japan’s strategy which shows a transition toward containment with the strengthening of U.S.-Japan military ties. On the other hand, Korea has attempted to narrow its security cooperation with the U.S. to affairs on the Korean Peninsula and other distant areas where China does not hold major security stakes. Korea, like other Asian U.S. allies, has been invited to join the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy that is based on strengthening its regional alliance network and limit the expansion of Chinese influence. So far and to U.S. disappointment, Korea has been passively responding through its non-military diversification strategy (Lee 2019). This reluctance has raised concerns as Korean security experts fear the potential isolation of the nation from the regional alliance

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Republic of Korea. “Statement by the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea on the South China Sea Arbitration Award.” http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=316765

network and a possible reduction of the USFK in the future.

This paper attempts to analyze South Korean public views on the ROK-U.S. alliance (hereafter, the alliance) amid the changing geopolitical and security environments. It analyzes how threat perceptions and domestic political factors consequently influence Korean public attitude toward the alliance. It addresses the gap in empirical studies weighing the different factors that affect Korean views on the alliance by providing a statistical analysis of survey data. The data used is from the four sets of East Asia Institute's National Identity Survey (hereafter, the survey) that were conducted from 2005 to 2020. Statistical analyses focus on the results of the most recent survey from May 2020.

Autonomy vs. Alliance

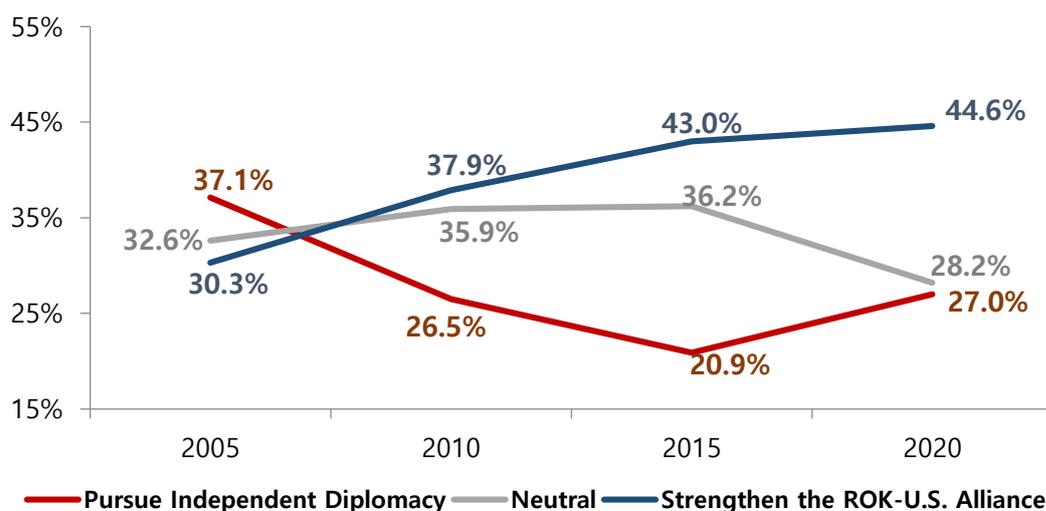
Snyder (2018) identifies geopolitical environment, rising national capacity, and domestic politics as three major factors that affect Korea's strategic choice. Among the possible four strategies based on the autonomy vs. alliance axis and the peninsular focused parochialism vs. internationalism axis, he argues that the Korean strategy has evolved from parochial alliance dependency to alliance enabled internationalism. Since Korea is relatively weak compared to surrounding nations including China, Japan, and Russia, it faces limitations in its strategic choice. As such, it is difficult for Korea to withdraw from its alliance with the U.S. and its domestic politics plays less of a determining factor in its strategic choice when compared to other nations.⁴ This is a valid point considering how the Korean government and political parties remain committed to the alliance regardless of their ideological preferences. In terms of public opinion, however, there has been a notable change. Foreign policies tend to be more determined by technocrats and experts compared to other internally oriented economic and social policies. Nevertheless, they also lie increasingly under the scrutiny of media and advocacy citizen groups. How foreign policy issues are framed in the context of domestic politics is important in determining the level of public support. Accordingly, managing public opinion is important in sustaining public support for the alliance.

According to the survey, Korean attitude has transitioned in favor of the alliance between 2005 and 2020. The periods during which the survey was administered correspond to the Roh Moo-hyun, Lee Myung-bak, Park Geun-hye, and Moon Jae-in administrations respectively. On the scale from 0 (autonomous diplomacy) to 10 (strengthening the ROK-US alliance) with the 5-point mark as

⁴ Snyder (2018) maintains that the choice of anchoring on the alliance may be weakened when China appears to guarantee security and seems to be winning against the U.S. in the competition of regional influence. However, Koreans consider it implausible for China to act as a security guarantor not only because the U.S. military power is still stronger than that of China for the foreseeable future but also due to the fact that China is a close neighbor that can exert territorial ambition.

neutral, the proportion of people in favor of the alliance (6-10 point) has increased from 30.3% in 2005 to 44.6% in 2020. On the other hand, people in favor of the pursuit of autonomous diplomacy decreased overall except for in 2020. In 2020, those in favor of the alliance topped those in favor of autonomous diplomacy by 17.6%p. This 15-year trend, however, does not portray conspicuous differences between the various groups and their support for the alliance, as well as the most influential factor for shaping Korean attitude with regards to support for the alliance.

Figure 1: Desirable Relations with the United States (2005-2020)



Factors Affecting the ROK-US Alliance Support

This section compares alliance support across groups that are divided by different features and views. Nine variables are grouped into five categories in addition to two demographic variables. Survey respondents are divided into three groups. The first group consists of people who favor autonomous diplomacy, who selected a score from the 0 to 3 spectrum. The second group is composed of people with a neutral view, who selected from the 4 to 6 spectrum. The third group consists of those in support of the alliance support who selected from the 7 to 10 spectrum. The percentage proportions of these three groups of favoring autonomy, neutrality, and alliance are 19.4%, 47.4%, and 33.3% respectively, of the total number of 1,003 respondents.⁵

⁵ When three groups were divided based on scores ranging from 0-4 as the group favoring autonomy, 5 as neutrality, and 6-10 as the alliance support group, statistical significance could not be observed. Therefore, the three groups favoring autonomy, neutrality, and alliance were based on respondents who selected a score between 0 and 3, 4 and 6, and 7 and 10 respectively.

I. Cross-table Analysis

1. Age and Education

Both age and education are statistically significant in determining the Korean public's attitude towards the ROK-U.S. alliance. Since the Korean War dates back nearly seventy years, most Koreans do not remember the war first-hand. If we do not account for those in support of neutrality, the percentage of alliance supporters is larger than that in support of autonomy across all age groups. This observation is most visible among the oldest group of people aged 60 and more which voted in favor of the alliance by 2.6 times compared to autonomy. Since Korea is a society that is rapidly aging, this oldest group makes up 23% of the total population in 2020. This generation is also often referred to as the "industrialization generation" that has grown up throughout and following Korea's period of high economic growth since the early 1960s and hence was able to reap the benefits of a more modernized society. Considering how this populous generation will diminish in the next decade, it infers that the U.S. will likely lose its most loyal Korean supporters in the coming years. On the other hand, the less educated population that has completed middle school or lower levels of education strongly support the alliance while those who have attended either two- or four-year universities tend to narrowly support alliance over autonomy. This is caused by the lower educational level of the aged who did not have an opportunity to receive higher education. Since the majority of Koreans complete college education these days, more refined educational data is needed to measure the effect of educational achievement on the alliance attitude.

Table 1: Public Views on the Autonomy - Alliance Spectrum by Age and Education

		Au ton omou s Diplomac y	Middle	S tre n gth- e n in g the Allian c e		
Age	18-29 (18.1%)	23.6%	49.5%	26.9%	45.778**	8
	30-39 (16.1%)	19.3%	55.9%	24.8%		
	40-49 (18.9%)	23.3%	49.2%	27.5%		
	50-59 (19.7%)	20.7%	49.5%	29.8%		
	60 and over (27.1%)	12.9%	38.0%	49.1%		

Education	Middle school graduate and lower (13.6%)	13%	45.7%	41.3%	23.087**	4
	High school graduates (39.9%)	17.3%	43.7%	38.9%		
	2 or 4 year university graduate and above (46.3%)	23.1%	50.9%	26.1%		
Total 100% (N=1,003)		19.4%	47.3%	33.3%	X	

2. National Identity toward North Korea

Koreans have complex feelings toward North Korea. They perceive it as both an enemy state and an ethnic kin. Without distinguishing the state and the people, the survey has been asking people to choose their first and the second impressions of North Korea. The perceived first impression is scattered with a small difference in number: “neighbor” (24.9%), “brother” (19.5%), “others” (18.3%), “us” (17.2%), “enemy” (11.7%) and “no interest” (8.3%). As seen in the table below, public regard of North Korea as an enemy state does not necessarily increase their likelihood to support the alliance. But among the respondents, those who recognize North Korea as the same ethnic group and “us” tend to prefer autonomy over the alliance more than other groups. Overall, however, the correlation between the perception of North Korea and different views on the alliance is not statistically significant. This finding is echoed in other identity studies related to Korea. Although both North and South Korea share common history and anti-colonialism sentiments, their sense of a collective ethnic nationalism has been diluted due to South Korea's long-held anti-communism and the widening economic gap between the two Koreas (Shin 2005). Kang (2011, 2020) supports this change in empirical data of the Korean identity surveys. Koreans have been consolidated by a sense of nationalism limited to South Korea, leaving North Korea out of both ethnic and political communities to which they belong.

Table 2: Image of North Korea and Views on the Autonomy – Alliance Spectrum

Perception of North Korea	Autonomous Diplomacy	Middle	Strengthening the Alliance		

We (17.2%)	26.2%	44.2%	29.7%	15.098	10
Brother (19.5%)	19.9%	43.4%	36.7%		
Neighbor (24.9%)	17.3%	44.6%	38.2%		
Others (18.3%)	17.9%	50.5%	31.5%		
Enemy (11.7%)	15.4%	57.3%	27.4%		
No interest (8.3)	19.3%	50.6%	30.1%		
Total 100%(N+1,003)	19.4%	47.3%	33.3%		

3. Threat Perceptions

Threat perceptions are primary factors that influence a country's decision in identifying an ally for maintaining its national security. However, different threat perceptions do not reinforce one another. When a smaller country forges an alliance, it is placed into a dilemma that consists of traps of both abandonment and entanglement. Although hosting U.S. military bases risk environmental problems and other issues, the fear of being abandoned by a patron usually dominates such costs, leading the public to support the alliance. At the same time, a smaller country also fears being entangled into a war or trade conflicts that the patron is engaged with against other powers. While President Trump's transactional approach to the alliance heightens the fear of abandonment among the Korean public with the potential reduction or the withdrawal of the USFK, intensified competition between the U.S. and China levies the burden of entanglement for Korea, pushing it more towards the U.S. side regardless of its intention.

As indicated in the table below, the survey data shows that the Korean public considers the three security threats as serious in the following order: North Korea's nuclear threat, the rise of China to a great power, and the U.S.-China hegemonic competition. These three threats are all statistically significant when correlated with public support for the alliance. For instance, those who identify North Korea's nuclear threat as serious tend to desire the strengthening of the alliance with the U.S. On the contrary, people who feel less threatened by North Korea tend to support autonomous diplomacy over the alliance. Second threat perception is the rise of China. If we compare the two groups of respondents who stated that the threat is "very threatening" and "not threatening at all," those who

view China's rise as not threatening at all prefer autonomy while those who view it as very threatening favor strengthening the alliance with the U.S. However, there is no clear pattern for people view the rise of China as "moderately threatening." Due to such weak linear relationship, the importance of the rise of China as a threat variable diminishes when it is weighed with other variables in the later hierarchical regression analysis. The third threat to consider is the hegemonic competition between the U.S. and China. All of the respondents who responded differently to the variable tend to favor a neutral and balanced position when deciding between autonomy and alliance. If we compare the two groups of respondents who selected that the hegemonic competition is either "very threatening" and "no threat," the former group supports the alliance somewhat more while the latter group favors autonomy more by 6.2%p. Otherwise, it is difficult to determine a clear linear relationship between the threat perception of U.S.-China competition and the overall stance with regards to the alliance with the U.S.

Table 3: Threat Perceptions and Views on the Autonomy – Alliance Spectrum

Threat perception		Autonomous diplomacy	Middle	Strengthening the alliance		
North Korea's nuclear weapons	Very threatening (55.5%)	16.7%	45%	38.3%	19.837**	6
	Somewhat threatening (39.8%)	21.6%	51%	27.4%		
	No threat (4.6%)	32.6%	43.5%	23.9%		
	Don't know/ No answer (0.1%)	-	100%	-		
Rise of China as a great power	Very threatening (41.7%)	19.7%	41.5%	38.8%	21.542**	6
	Somewhat threatening (53.0%)	17.9%	52.9%	29.2%		
	No threat (5.0%)	34.0%	36%	30%		
	Don't know/ No answer (0.3%)	-	66.7%	33.3%		
The U.S.-	Very threatening	26.1%	43.0%	30.9%	26.153**	6

China hegemonic competition	(34.9%)				
	Somewhat threatening (59.8%)	14.5%	50.3%	35.2%	
	No threat (4.9%)	32.7%	40.8%	26.5%	
	Don't know/No answer (0.4%)	0.0%	75.0%	25.0%	
Total 100% (N-1,003)		19.4%	47.3%	33.3%	

4. South Korea's Desirable Position between the U.S. and China, Feelings toward the U.S.

The survey inquires public opinion on Korea's desirable position between the U.S. and China. The majority at 63.9% favors the balanced position without taking a side. 24.9% of the respondents favor taking the U.S. side, which is more than twice of the 11.1% who favor to take China's side. When we compare the groups of respondents, nearly half of those in favor of the U.S. are supportive of strengthening the alliance. Among those who favor neutrality, half of them also opt to take the middle position in the autonomy-alliance spectrum. Interestingly, however, there is no indication that those who prefer to side with China also are in favor of an autonomous position relative to alliance. Only 10.8% of China supporters prefer autonomy, compared to the 55.9% which opt to take a middle position and the third who favor strengthening the alliance with the U.S. Accordingly, it can be stated that the question regarding the desirable position between the U.S. and China takes into account multiple variables. For instance, shared economic interests do not necessary collide with the view of strengthening military alliance with the U.S. In the perspective of the Korean public, the ROK-U.S. alliance is understood primarily as a military alliance that is essential to Korea's national security despite its consequential comprehensive nature beyond military ties.

Among the two countries, however, Koreans tend to display a more favorable sentiment towards the U.S. than China. According to Pew Research Center's survey, Asian countries exhibited a transition in their sentiment towards China from favorable to unfavorable from 2002 to 2019. As of 2019, 63% of South Koreans view China as unfavorable and this negative perception follow that of

Japan, which 85% of the respondents deemed unfavorable.⁶ In the EAI survey, the average percentage of favorability toward the U.S. was 67.6 in 2015 and 62.0 in 2020. China's favorability fell from 56.6 to 45.2 over the past five years. It is interesting to note that the fall of favorability toward China is accompanied with the relative decline of the perceived importance of China to Korea. The EAI survey asks that respondents choose one among the five countries including the U.S., China, Japan, Russia and North Korea that is most likely to influence South Korea in the next decade. The U.S. scored 31.3%, 13.3%, and 30.3% in 2005, 2015, and 2020 respectively while China received 40.7%, 72.1% and 53.6% in each of the surveys. The prospect of China as the most influential country for Korea continues to be greater than that for the U.S., but the relative decline in China's importance correlates to its decline of favorability among the Korean public.

Favorable sentiment toward the U.S. is strongly related to the overall public support for the alliance. Among the favorability spectrum ranging from 0(unfavorable) to 100(favorable), 10.2% selected unfavorable with a score between 0 and 49 (relatively unfavorable). 26.1% of the respondents selected 50 for neutrality and 63.7% chose a score between 51 and 100 (relatively favorable). Since scores were skewed to the 51 to 100 band, three groups were divided based on those who selected from 0 to 39 (antagonistic), 40 to 69 (neither side), and 70 to 100 (very favorable). The "antagonistic" group who favored strengthening the alliance was at 5.9%, the "middle" group at 51.1%, and the "favorable" at 43%. As such, emotions and sentiments are becoming important sources in characterizing today's bilateral relations. Among those who have favorable feelings to the U.S., 46.9% support the alliance while only 10.4% favor autonomy. On the other hand, from those who feel antagonistic towards the U.S., 48.3% support autonomy while only 17.2% favor the alliance.

⁶ Laura Silver et al. "People around the globe are divided in their opinions of China," Pew research Center, September 30, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/30/people-around-the-globe-are-divided>

Table 4: Position in the U.S.-China Competition/ Favorability toward the U.S. and Views on the Autonomy – Alliance Spectrum

		Autonomous diplomacy	Middle	Strengthening the alliance		
Desirable position between the U.S. and China	Relations with the U.S. is more important (24.9%)	15.2%	37.2%	47.6%	.169**	6
	Balanced position is important (63.9%)	22.5%	49.8%	27.7%		
	Relations with China is more important (11.1%)	10.8%	55.9%	33.3%		
	Don't know/ No answer (0.1%)	-	100%	-		
Feelings toward the U.S.	Antagonistic (5.9%)	48.3%	34.5%	17.2%	97.404**	4
	Neutral (51.1%)	23.6%	52.7%	23.6%		
	Favorable (43.0%)	10.4%	42.7%	46.9%		
Total 100% (N=1,003)		19.4%	47.3%	33.3%	X	

5. Democracy Support, Ideological Orientation, Party Support

Domestic politics has been regarded as a significant factor affecting Korean public's attitude on the alliance. Given that Korean politics has been polarized according to ideological orientation and party support, public attitude on the alliance can be politicized by existing political cleavages. However, data analysis shows that neither subjective ideological orientation nor party support influence public support for the ROK-U.S. alliance. For both groups of people—those who consider themselves as progressives and others who are conservative—slightly less than one fifth of the respondents favor autonomy while one third support the alliance. There is also lack of statistical significance when it comes to comparing supporters of the progressive Democratic Party and those of the conservative United Future Party. Such lack of partisanship in public views of the alliance supports Snyder's argument that domestic politics is less of an important variable compared to Korea's geopolitical environment and rising capacity in determining the country's strategic choice. Nevertheless, the observation does not completely dismiss the saliency of issue-driven alliance politics that primarily dictates

the level of support for the incumbent President and the government. For instance, popular protests such as those for the SOFA amendment in 2002 and those for the import ban of the U.S. beef due to the suspicion of the mad cow disease in 2007 can quickly develop the antagonistic sentiments toward the alliance despite the lack of partisanship.

Political leaders of both Korea and the U.S. often argue that democracy, the shared political system for the two countries, serves as the base for maintaining the bilateral alliance. Surely, Korea is one of the countries in Asia with a comparatively strong democratic consolidation and popular commitment to democracy. However, people who uphold democratic values tend to be more critical of the U.S., especially in considering equal relations between the two allies and the sense of national pride. The survey includes three questions that measure the Korean public's commitment to democracy. Among those who agreed to the idea that "democracy is always better than any other form of government," one third supports the alliance while 44.8% take the middle position. What requires attention is that from the same group of respondents, 22% still support autonomy, which is a higher percentage compared to the two groups of people who are less committed to democracy. Among the people who agree that "Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be better to a democratic one," 53.3% favor neutrality, which is higher than the overall average of 47.4%. For the respondents who selected the option, "For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic government or not," 37% favor the alliance and 52.8% favor neutrality within the autonomy-alliance spectrum.

In a nutshell, both ideological orientation and supporting party do not influence the public's orientation towards the alliance while the degree of democracy support negatively correlates with alliance support level.

Table 5: Democracy/Ideological/Partisan Support and the Views on the Autonomy – Alliance Spectrum

		Autonomous diplomacy	Middle	Strengthening the Alliance		
Democracy support*	High① (69.6%)	22%	44.8%	33.2%	12.629**	4
	Middle② (19.6%)	15.2%	53.3%	31.5%		
	Low③ (10.8%)	10.2%	52.8%	37%		
Ideological	Progressive	18.6%	47.9%	33.6%	1.270	6

orientation	(30.7%)					
	Middle (42.9%)	20.3%	46.4%	33.3%		
	Conservative (26.1%)	19.1%	48.1%	32.8%		
	Don't know/No answer (0.3%)	-	66.7%	33.3%		
Supporting party	Democratic Party (47.8%)	19.0%	47.3%	33.7%	3,271	10
	United Future Party (20.0%)	17.4%	47.8%	34.8%		
	Minsaeng Party (0.3%)	33.3%	66.7%	-		
	Justice Party (2.3%)	17.4%	52.2%	30.4%		
	Other parties (3.1%)	19.4%	45.2%	35.5%		
No party to sup- port/ Don't know/ No answer (26.5%)	21.5%	46.8%	31.7%			
Total 100% (N=1,003)		19.4%	47.3%	33.3%		

* ① Democracy is always better than other form of government. ② Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be better to a democratic one. ③ For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or not.

Correlation Analysis

This section examines the correlation among considered variables. The purpose of correlation analysis is to examine the direction and degree of interaction among all variables. Several variables show high degrees of correlation with each other. For instance, the level of support for the alliance positively correlates with the following variables: 1) threat perception of North Korea's nuclear weapons, 2) favorability of the U.S. over China within the U.S.-China hegemonic competition, 3) favorable sentiment towards the U.S., and 4) weaker commitment to democracy.⁷

⁷ Due to the coding direction, negative (-) sign between North Korea's threat perception and alliance support means that when people feel less threatened, they are less likely to support the alliance. Again, the negative (-) sign between Korea's desirable position within the U.S.-China competition and alliance support refers to how those in support of China side are less likely to support the alliance with the U.S. Positive (+) sign of democracy commitment with alliance support means that people with less commitment to democracy correlates with increased support for the alliance.

Positive correlation is also observed among three kinds of threat perceptions. People who see the rise of China as a threat to Korea's national interest tend to view the North Korean nuclear threat as a significant variable. In addition, those who view the U.S.-China hegemonic competition as a threat to Korea's national interest also they tend to identify the rise of China and also the North Korea's threat as more serious threats than those who do not see the competition threatening.

Table 6: Correlation between Factors Affecting the Views on the Autonomy - Alliance Spectrum

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Image of North Korea)	1								
Threat perception	North Korea's nuclear weapons	.018	1						
	Rise of China as a great power	-.033	.321**	1					
	The U.S.-China hegemonic competition	-.017	.289**	.442**	1				
Desirable position between the U.S. and China	.040	-.002	.075*	-.005	1				
Feelings toward the U.S.	.012	-.142**	-.017	.019	-.125**	1			
Democracy support	-.029	.085**	-.017	.050	.028	.000	1		
Ideological orientation	.116**	-.046	.002	-.032	.033	-.021	-.024	1	
Support of the ROK-U.S. alliance	.016	-.120**	-.054	.048	-.088**	.292**	.068*	.001	1

*: $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

This section examines the level of influence amongst different variables. Model 1 examines three demographical variables: greater age and lower educational levels were seen to increase support for the ROK-U.S. alliance. Model 2 then takes into account all of the discussed variables in a cross table to perform simple correlation analyses. Among the threat perceptions, North Korea's nuclear threat

and the U.S.-China competition threat remain most significant in determining the different attitudes within the autonomy-alliance spectrum. The rise of China threat loses its statistical significance when correlated with alliance attitude in this hierarchical regression analysis. As seen in the simple correlation analysis, threat perception of North Korea's nuclear program is positively correlated with the level of support of the alliance. It is also notable that the threat perception coming from the U.S.-China competition is significantly significant in determining the alliance attitude in this model unlike the previous simple correlation analysis. In particular, those who see the hegemonic competition between the U.S. and China as a threat to Korea's national interest are less supportive of the alliance with the U.S. This finding suggests that the Korean public is likely to see the burden of alliance ties with the U.S. as being increasingly costly along with rising bilateral competition between two great powers. The fear of entanglement with regards to the U.S.-led conflict will also increase although the majority still favors the U.S. as a more dependable security guarantor. It is notable that the desirable position in the U.S.-China competition loses its direct influence upon the alliance attitude although there was a statistically significant correlation between two variables in the previous model. On the other hand, favorability remains strong in influencing people's support for the ROK-U.S. In addition, the relationship between higher commitment to democracy and lower level of support for the alliance remains statistically significant in this model.

Table 7: Weighted Factors Affecting the Views on the Autonomy – Alliance Spectrum

Support of the ROK-U.S. Alliance		Model1			Model2		
		β	t	VIF	β	t	VIF
Gender		-.041	-.921	1.018	-.019	-.446	1.027
Age		.056***	3.076	1.427	.051***	2.916	1.450
Education		-.082**	-2.160	1.447	-.087**	-2.411	1.465
Image of North Korea					.008	.553	1.021
Threat perceptions	North Korea's nuclear weapons				-.109***	-2.961	1.195
	Rise of China as a great power				-.048	-1.370	1.336
	The U.S.-China hegemonic competition				.080**	2.400	1.293
Desirable position between the U.S. and China					-.051	-1.392	1.035

Feelings toward the U.S.				.329***	8.998	1.050
Democracy support				.077**	2.422	1.023
Ideological orientation				.006	.221	1.020
F	10.166***			14.028***		
R^2	.030			.135		
Adjusted R^2	.027			.126		

*: $p < .1$, **: $p < .05$, ***: $p < .01$

Conclusion

This paper aimed to measure the potential factors that can influence Koreans' view on the ROK-U.S. alliance. The level of support for the alliance is measured according to a numerical spectrum ranging from 0 (autonomy) to 10 (alliance). Three statistical methods were employed to identify significant relations between these factors and the support towards the alliance. First, a cross-table analysis was conducted to compare group differences on alliance views. Second, a correlation analysis was conducted to check the degree of proximity between the different factors and whether they exerted a positive or negative influence upon alliance perception. Third, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to measure the weight of influence of each factor in comparison with others.

In the first cross-table analysis, age and education, threat perceptions, desirable position of Korea between the U.S. and China, sentiment towards the U.S., and democracy support were found to be statistically significant in determining the public's views on the alliance. Political orientation—whether conservative or progressive—and support for the ruling or the oppositional party were not statistically significant. As such, ideological orientation and identification with a political party were not directly related to the views on the alliance. However, this does not mean that they are irrelevant in determining public actions in the case of emerging issues between Korea and the U.S. including the withdrawal or the reduction of the USFK. Considering the polarized political atmosphere in Korea, people's opposition to the incumbent government can in turn, lead to their opposition of the government's U.S. policy. The division and tension between pro-U.S. and anti-U.S. groups actively operate within the domestic political discourse and are often instrumentally utilized despite the lack of concrete policy content. The image of North Korea as the same ethnic Korea or the enemy was also found to be irrelevant in determining public preference between autonomy and alliance. This reflects on

how for South Koreans, North Korea is increasingly being disregarded from their sense of ethnic nationalism and solidarity, which has become more delineated to fit South Korea alone.

The correlation analysis showed that the support for the alliance with the U.S. positively correlates with the following variables: 1) threat perception of North Korea's nuclear weapons, 2) U.S. support within the U.S.-China hegemonic competition, 3) favorable sentiment towards the U.S., and 4) weaker commitment to democracy. When measuring the importance of each factor in comparison with other considered factors, threat perception of the rise of China and the desirable position of Korea within the U.S.-China competition lost their significance. From the series of statistical analyses, the paper defined significant factors as follows:

Both age and education were statistically significant for determining the respective views on the alliance. Those who are older, and in particular aged 60 and over, were more supportive of the alliance while other age groups did not show much of a difference in their level of support. Education is inversely related with support for the alliance. College graduates tend to be less supportive of the alliance compared to those who are less educated. This reflects on how education helps people to become more conscious of the need to achieve an equal partnership within the alliance rather than being subjected to the alliance as a mere client. Among the different threat perceptions, North Korea's nuclear threat perception increased the level of support for the alliance. On the other hand, the threat perception of the U.S.-China hegemonic competition decreased alliance support. This infers heightened U.S.-China hegemonic competition increases fear among Koreans of potentially being wrapped up in conflicts between the two great powers. Koreans were found to have the most favorable feelings toward the U.S. than any other surrounding nations. These sentiments also strongly influenced their support for the alliance. Lastly, democracy support was observed to be negatively correlated with alliance support as Koreans who selected democracy as the best possible form of government supported the alliance less.

These findings suggest that Korean support for the ROK-U.S. alliance will be sustained as long as the security threat from North Korea persists. Koreans have favorable sentiment towards the U.S., which is a good indicator for the sustainability of the alliance. Therefore, both Korean and U.S. governments and private sectors need to continue to cultivate this favorability with diverse activities if they wish to keep the alliance intact. However, since Koreans with higher education and commitment to democracy tend to be less supportive of the alliance, the alliance narratives should be developed for Koreans to see the strong alliance support democracy home and abroad. The democratization-led demand for equal partnership needs to transition from a narrow issue dealing with Korea's

claim for sovereignty in managing problems related to hosting the USFK, to a broader one that addresses shared responsibilities of protecting democracy overseas. Koreans are increasingly upholding values of human rights and individual freedom. These are universal values but also distinctly American ones. In this respect, the U.S. needs to strengthen localized public diplomacy based on normative soft power. While Koreans are concerned with the rise of China, they also have fear of entanglement with regards to U.S. conflicts in cases where the competition between the two great powers intensifies. More Koreans favor to take a neutral position between the two countries although they favor the U.S. over China, if obligated to choose. This finding suggests that the U.S. needs to incorporate a more nuanced framework when persuading Korea to join its Indo-Pacific strategy.

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