

**NEXT GENERATION LEADERS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA:  
Opinion Survey Report and Analysis  
by William Watts  
President, Potomac Associates**

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**PREFACE  
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This project grew out of a research proposal written in February 2000. That proposal focused on the subject of generational change in the Republic of Korea, and its implications for the United States-Korea relationship, in particular the U.S.-ROK alliance. The theme of the proposal extended to a wide range of issues which will confront the generation (age 35-50) now coming into positions of political, economic, and military influence and leadership.

During the Cold War, presidents of the Republic of Korea had emerged from the ranks of the military. Now, for over a decade, the political life of democratic Korea has revolved around the fortunes of the “Three Kims” – Kim Dae Jung, Kim Young Sam, and Kim Jong Pil. This meant that for over four decades the views and political inclinations of the leadership of the Republic of Korea were relatively well known to United States policy makers. Kam Dae Jung’s election not only consolidated democracy but also marked the end of a political generation.

During the term of Korea’s next president, 2003-2008, a new generation will make the transition into power. The next generation will be faced with a number of defining policy challenges. Internally, it will have to deal with the reform, restructuring, and opening of South Korea’s economy. Externally, it will have to deal with North Korea and the post-post-Cold War pattern of international relations evolving in Northeast Asia. It will also be faced with critical decisions affecting the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance, in particular the U.S. force presence in a reconciling or unifying peninsula.

U.S. policy makers and analysts in the West know very little about the next generation in the ROK, and how it thinks about the world, the future of the Republic of Korea, and its challenges and opportunities, both domestic and international. Over the life of the next generation, we should expect the unexpected to take place on the peninsula. This makes it even more important to begin to understand how the next generation might react.

In fact, reality in the form of the historic June 2000 South-North Summit in Pyongyang far outpaced any time line I had considered when I wrote the study proposal in February 2000. While the dynamic from that Summit has stalled out over the past eighteen months, the fact that it happened underscores the need to look ahead, think the unthinkable, and being to understand how such developments will affect the peninsula, the Republic of Korea, and the U.S.-ROK relationship.

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**I. Introduction and Background**

During a three week period in November and December, 2001, Gallup Korea, a leading survey research organization based in Seoul, interviewed 51 Korean citizens, 30-49 years of age, who show promise of assuming positions of leadership in the Republic of Korea in years ahead. The following pages set forth the findings of these survey interviews, accompanied by analysis and interpretation of their meaning. Views expressed are those of the author, and do not reflect positions of the National Defense University or the Department of Defense.

This project was initiated by Dr. James Przystup, senior fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) of the National Defense University (NDU), located at Fort Lesley J. McNair in Washington, DC. Dr. Przystup approached this writer, inquiring as to the feasibility of launching a study project, funded by NDU, seeking the views of a group of younger Koreans who might qualify as “next generation leaders.” Contact was initiated with prospective survey organizations in Korea, and we decided to work with Gallup Korea, with whom the writer had earlier professional contact.

In discussions with Dr. Przystup and his colleague Captain Gerald W. Faber, senior military fellow at INSS, it was recognized that the task of generating the kind of survey sample we wanted would not be easy. It was also clear that the limited size of the sample – limited to about 50, because of budgetary constraints – would preclude rigorous statistical comparisons, and discussions of margins of error. A review of available survey research also uncovered no comparable earlier material: to the best of our knowledge, this is the first effort of its kind, meaning no time line comparisons were possible. Rather, we have looked for broad indicators and patterns of thinking on a range of policy-oriented issues. By drawing out the thinking of potential future leaders, we hope to provide reactions, impressions, and warning signals of use to those who make and/or influence policy.

**II. The Survey Questionnaire: Design and Sample**

In designing the survey instrument, and developing the survey sample, we benefited from the advice of many individuals, both here and in Korea. We were greatly helped by an extended

conference discussion in Washington with: James Delaney, consultant, Institute for Defense Analyses; William Drennan, United States Institute of Peace; Robert F. Grealy, JP Morgan Chase, Inc.; and Joseph Winder and Peter Beck, Korea Economic Institute. In the course of a preparatory trip to Seoul in late September 2001, the author was given excellent cooperation by Scott Snyder, the Asia Foundation's representative in Korea. He was particularly helpful in identifying prospective respondents. Steven Rounds, Minister for Public Affairs at the American Embassy, gave useful advice. Newly-arrived Ambassador Thomas Hubbard lent his warm endorsement to the effort. The author spent a full day at Gallup Korea, meeting with M. I. Park, president, I. K. Kang, director of international studies, and his associate J. H. Hong. The discussions were invaluable in sharpening the survey and putting the questionnaire in a context with which Korean respondents would be most comfortable. Final drafting was greatly assisted by an extended discussion held at the National Defense University with a number of Korean affairs specialists, drawn from several U.S. government agencies.

Interviewing was carried out by Gallup personnel, both in person and by telephone, with follow-up where respondents looked for clarification. The final list of persons interviewed was drawn from several sources: the Asia Foundation; the American Embassy; Korea Stock Exchange listings; National Assembly members; various newspaper and website listings; Gallup Korea's own extensive database; and personal contacts. The final sample consisted of 44 men and 7 women, 30-49 years of age, broken down as follows: political figures (8, evenly divided between members of the ruling New Millennium Democratic Party and the opposition Grand National Party); government and other public officials (8); members of the business community (9); individuals from the academic community (8); media and press figures (8); representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs, 6); and military (4). Interviews were carried out almost entirely in the larger Seoul metropolitan area. Respondents were guaranteed anonymity. Gallup reported a high degree of cooperation, and quick readiness of respondents to be included in the project.

As already noted, the size of the sample means that our findings must be viewed as indicative and impressionistic. In the absence of any comparable previous efforts of this kind, time line analyses are not possible. Nonetheless, we believe that the views expressed by this group of younger Koreans, selected because they have demonstrated promise of future advancement to positions of leadership, warrant serious and respectful consideration.

### **III. Executive Summary**

Our survey of 51 Korean men and women 30-49 years of age, representing a variety of professional occupations, presents a snapshot of opinion on a substantial range of key issues. Principal views can be summarized below, with further elaboration in the text that follows.

#### **A. General Regional View**

1. The United States ranks first in expressions of positive, as opposed to negative, personal feelings (although with reservations), followed closely by China. Japan and, especially, Russia lag far behind.

2. Levels of trust in the United States are considerably higher than those expressed for China. Once again, Japan and Russia trail by a large margin.

3. Looking ahead 10 years, a majority sees links with China assuming greater importance than those with the U.S. A larger majority sees Korea-China ties becoming closer in the future than they are now. On the other hand, wide majorities believe Korea's ties with the United States will be more important ten years out than those with either Japan or, more so, with Russia.

### **B. Relations with the United States**

4. A substantial majority believes the United States is the principal beneficiary in the bilateral U.S.-ROK relationship. At the same time, overwhelming majorities cite security ties as the most important benefit to Korea in these ties, followed by economic links.

5. When asked to pinpoint the "biggest problems in relations with the United States," respondents voice a litany of complaints. A random sampling includes: arrogance; unilateralism; *Pax Americana* and "hegemonism;" excessive economic pressure; cultural insensitivity; "flunkeyism" and Korean dependency; impact of U.S. military presence (most wanting U.S. forces reduced gradually, quickly, or altogether, after unification); and aggressive U.S. policies that heighten South-North tensions.

6. A near-majority believes anti-Americanism is growing; a considerably larger majority does not see it as overly threatening to Korea-U.S. ties.

7. A two-to-one majority voices opposition to deployment of U.S. anti-missile defense facilities on Korean soil.

8. Mirroring this reserve, three-in-four favor only limited support to the Bush Administration's war on terrorism, specifically not to include military involvement.

### **C. Relations with Neighbors**

9. Japan is faulted on two particular counts: failure to atone adequately for its past behavior, and its potential reemergence as a military power/threat.

10. China is seen, overwhelmingly, as "primarily a market and economic opportunity," rather than a "potential military threat, with expansionist interests toward Korea." While a majority also sees Russia in this light, a substantial minority registers concern about Russia's threat potential.

### **D. South-North Relations and Korean Domestic Affairs**

11. More than nine in ten support "the 'Sunshine policy' of trying to improve ties with North Korea."

12. Despite that support, most judge the likelihood of unification in the next ten years as "somewhat" or "very unlikely."

13. There is widespread dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in the Republic of Korea. More than nine in ten are either “very” or “somewhat dissatisfied with the way things are going these days.”

14. On the political front, regionalism and boss-oriented politics are the principal causes of concern.

15. In the economic arena, lack of transparency and corruption are seen as the main problems.

16. Looking to the future, widespread hopes are placed with: democratization; national and personal diligence; educated and dynamic human resources; and trust and faith in Korea’s young people

17. A large majority rates the courts and the legal system as “fair and even-handed,” rather than the opposite.

### **E. Overall Assessment**

This is, on balance, a cautious, pragmatic – and sobering – evaluation of the current state of affairs on the Korean peninsula, and of major issues that face policy makers in Seoul and Washington, DC.

Representatives of the emerging generation of Korean leaders we interviewed see a number of things that provide hope and encouragement for the future. They also find a lot lacking both on the home front, and in relations with their key ally, the United States. Attitudes toward Japan remain heavily clouded by the heavy hand of history. Such negativism stands in sharp contrast to the positive and, for the longer term, hopeful look they cast toward their giant neighbor, China.

Overall, one senses a widespread feeling among these Koreans of domestic unease, ameliorated by clear areas of hope for the future. Looking outward, they indicate concerns about being taken for granted, of being relegated to a kind of second-class status where they find themselves subject to the whims of a *Pax Americana*, playing second fiddle to Japan, and exposed to political and economic subordination. This weighs heavily on a proud and intensely nationalistic people, lending itself to a perception of growing anti-Americanism. With such feelings, a “China card” increases in value.

This is not to say that all the criticisms are automatically valid. But in a relationship as important and intense as is the one that exists between the United States and the Republic of Korea, it is certainly in the interests of both partners to give those expressions of concern appropriate attention. While there are many positive building blocks already in place and ready to be expanded upon, there are also a number of anxieties and warning signals that merit thoughtful consideration.

## **IV. The Survey: Responses, Discussion, and Analysis**

Questionnaire responses are clustered into thematic groupings. After a number of questions, we

asked “Why do you feel this way?” or its equivalent. Some of the more revealing statements are noted.

### A. Overview: Comparative Korean Views of Japan, China, Russia, and the U.S.

One segment of our survey sought assessments of attitudes toward Japan, China, Russia, and the United States. Several questions were the same for each of the four countries involved. For purposes of clarity, we address these comparative responses first, and then look at country-specific questions.

#### 1. Positive-Negative Feelings

“At a personal level, how would you describe your feelings about [country]?”

	Japan	China	Russia	United States
Very positive	–	4%	2%	12%
Somewhat positive	25%	49	10	47
Neither positive nor negative	51	43	70	31
Somewhat negative	22	4	18	10
Very negative	2	–	–	–

**a. United States.** Given the extraordinarily close links between the United States and Korea, and the ubiquitous American presence in Seoul and elsewhere around the country, the “warmth” ratings our respondents gave the U.S. come as a bit of a warning. They are not bad – 59% are in the positive column, with the business community strongest in the “very positive” ranking – but these numbers also reflect a considerable degree of reserve. Four respondents in ten are either neutral or “somewhat negative.” That proportion is considerably higher among politicians and NGOs.

This is far from a ringing, across-the-board endorsement. We will return below to some of the specific reasons given for this phenomenon.

**b. Japan.** The clouds of history hang heavily over Korean perceptions of Japan, as our survey makes clear. Personal feelings toward Japan followed a classic bell curve, with a bare majority opting for a neutral “neither positive nor negative.” Those on the positive and negative sides split fairly evenly, although nobody expressed “very positive” views. Media representatives were a bit more positive than the norm.

**c. China.** With 53% of our sample viewing China positively, it ranks second only to the United States, trailing by just 6 percentage points. None of the respondents held “very negative” feelings about China, while a substantial segment held a neutral, open-minded position. Depending on the course of future events, the views of that large uncommitted group could move in either direction. As we shall see below, many hope that greater warmth will prevail.

**d. Russia.** Russia draws the largest bloc saying “neither positive nor negative,” perhaps

indicating a sense that Russia isn't all that important in the thinking of most of our respondents. Those taking one side or the other fall a bit more on the negative side. In general terms, politicians are the most favorably inclined toward Russia, while business people and NGO figures are most critical. It is worth noting that the academics were unanimous in their neutrality.

## 2. Levels of Trust

### “And how much do you trust [country]?”

	Japan	China	Russia	United States
Great deal	2%	–	–	9%
Somewhat	31	55%	10%	63
Not too much	65	43	88	26
Not at all	2	–	2	2
No opinion	–	2	–	–

**a. United States.** Levels of trust of the U.S. appear a bit stronger than those accorded to warmth of personal feelings. Academics are the most trusting, with unanimity in the positive column. Politicians, on the other hand, are the least trusting, with a majority on the negative side.

**b. Japan.** This amounts to a two-thirds/one-third negative balance in levels of trust in Japan. The real divide is between those who trust Japan “somewhat” and those who say “not too much.”

The business community and NGO members are slightly more negative. Members of academe register the highest level of trust, quite possibly attributable to growing levels of academic exchange between the two countries.

**c. China.** For China, the picture is considerably brighter; a small majority trusts China “somewhat,” offsetting a minority which says “not too much.” Politicians, academics, and women are a bit more positive, while government and public officials, and the military, are less so.

**d. Russia.** Russia does particularly poorly on this measure. Only politicians trust Russia “somewhat” above the very low norm. A large majority expresses “not too much” trust in Russia, with unanimous negative ratings among the business community, media and the press, the NGO community, military, and women. The younger age group is not far behind.

## B. Korea's Relations with the United States

In addition to these comparative views, we also addressed several key issues in ROK-U.S. ties.

### 1. Assessments of Current Ties with United States

#### “How do you rate the strength of relations between the Republic of Korea

**and the United States?”**

Very strong	16%
Somewhat strong	61
Not too strong	23

The assessment of ties between the United States and the Republic of Korea mirrors quite closely the levels of trust in the United States, with a 77-23% “strong-not too strong” balance here, and 72-28% positive-negative balance on trust. As we will see shortly, this linkage is probably closely tied to what our sample saw as the chief benefits to Korea of bilateral ties – security.

**2. Major Beneficiary in the U.S.-ROK Relationship****“Who do you think benefits most from the relationship, the United States or the Republic of Korea?”**

United States	59%
Republic of Korea	37
‘Hard to measure, but unequal’	2
Don’t know	2

A clear majority was of the view that the United States benefits most from the bilateral ties, a view held unanimously by the military respondents, and more heavily than the norm by media persons. NGOs, women, and – interestingly – politicians felt that Korea was the principal beneficiary.

**3. Principal Benefits to the Republic of Korea**

Respondents were also asked to choose, from among four alternatives, the first and second most important benefits to the Republic of Korea of bilateral ties:

	Security Ties	Economic Ties	Growth of Democratization and Human Rights	Cultural Ties	Other (*)
Most important benefit	70%	22%	6%	–	2%
Second most important	20	68	2	6%	4
[1 <sup>st</sup> & 2 <sup>nd</sup> combined	90	90	8	6	6]

(\*) “Presenting obvious goals and objectives as a leading country,” and “pioneering and scientific-technical mind;” both volunteered.

The picture is crystal clear: security first, economics second, and everything trails far behind. Security was particularly important to members of the media; the third item, democratization and

human rights, drew special notice from academics. The relatively high levels of trust that we noted for the United States, easily surpassing those recorded for China, Japan, and Russia, in that order, surely reflect the primary importance of the bilateral security relationship, a relationship that has endured for over half a century.

#### 4. Major Problems in the Relationship

When respondents were asked to pinpoint, in their own words, what they thought were the most important problems in relations between Korea and the U.S., we found frequent concurrence on a number of telling items (some of which can also be heard from other, non-Korean, quarters):

- \* U.S. “hegemonism”
- \* excessive Korean dependency on the U.S.
- \* impact of the U.S. military presence
- \* American unilateralism, egoism, and attitude of superiority
- \* U.S. interventionism in Korea’s internal affairs
- \* unfair U.S. trade conditions, and unequal economic status
- \* discrimination against Koreans
- \* “flunkeyism” of Korean government toward the U.S.
- \* anti-Americanism
- \* aggressive U.S. policies that heighten South-North tensions
- \* U.S. putting Japan ahead of Korea
- \* Korea just a member of *Pax Americana*
- \* cultural differences
- \* visa problems

This is a powerful list of grievances. For anyone who has been involved in U.S.-Korean affairs over the years, these expressions of concern and thinly-disguised resentment will come as no surprise. The enormous American presence in the Republic of Korea, and the impact that U.S. policy can have in Korean life, are bound to raise concerns among Korean citizenry. Such a catalog of complaints and even indictments represents a warning signal and call for attention that should not be lightly dismissed. The very fact that this catalog has endured over time makes it all the more disturbing.

#### 5. Anti-Americanism: Levels and Danger

**“In recent times, do think anti-Americanism has been:”**

Growing	49%
Staying about the same	43
Declining	8

Half of our respondents see anti-Americanism as a growing phenomenon, with higher proportions among politicians and the military holding this opinion. At the same time, only one in four see such hostile views as dangerous to the bilateral relationship, with government and public officials among the least concerned:.

### “How dangerous is anti-Americanism to ROK-U.S. relations?”

Reasons volunteered by respondents for the growth of anti-American feelings frequently parallel factors mentioned above as problems in the U.S.-Korean relationship:

- \* U.S. superpower attitude
- \* U.S. hegemonism
- \* arrogance in Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) negotiations
- \* self-centered, arrogant American attitudes; egoism
- \* unequal relationship
- \* “More and more Korean people feel uncomfortable with the arrogant behavior of the U.S. Army in Korea. To be a real ally with us, the U.S. should try to keep more equal and fair relations with Korea.”
- \* hard-line Bush policy on North Korea

It is worth noting that events that have occurred since our interviewing took place have added to anti-American attitudes in the Republic of Korea. In particular, elements of the Korean mass media, as well as Internet-users, have been outspoken in their criticism of three developments:

- \* President Bush’s use of the term “axis of evil,” to include North Korea. Critics fault that phraseology, as damaging prospects for South-North dialogue;
- \* disqualification of the victorious Korean short-track speed skater at the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, with his gold medal awarded to the American runner-up; and,
- \* talk-show host Jay Leno’s unfortunate attempt at humor, saying that the Korean skater was so angered by his disqualification that, when he got home, he kicked his dog – and then ate it.

Overall, the range of negative views that we recorded is worrisome. It reflects a panorama of critical attitudes and perceptions that is clearly corrosive to the best interests of both sides. However benign the assessments may be of the potential danger that anti-Americanism poses to the relationship, the breadth of the spectrum of harsh judgments is worrisome. This is a subject that deserves close scrutiny, one that calls for continuing, as well as new and innovative, efforts to bridge some serious differences.

At the same time, one can ask whether it might be equally accurate to characterize current trends not so much in terms of “anti-Americanism,” but rather as a decline in “pro-Americanism.” As we will see below, Koreans find much that is positive in ties with the United States, and some of the complaints registered in our survey reflect natural differences in points of view. (Going to institutions of higher learning in the U.S. remains the dream of many young Koreans, just as it does for Chinese and Japanese.) As the relationship has matured, and as Korean self-confidence has grown, it has become increasingly acceptable – almost a matter of national pride – to speak up, and back, to the former “big brother.” That can be healthy.

## 6. Security Issues

Against this backdrop, the primacy of security ties, noted earlier, appears to have its limits. Indeed, considerable caution and/or reluctance were expressed on several security-related matters, providing difficult challenges to the achievement of relevant U.S. policy objectives.

#### **a. U.S. Missile Defense Program**

**“How do you feel about the U.S. missile defense program? Do you favor having the ROK participate in this, with missile defense facilities deployed on Korean soil, or are you opposed?”**

Favor missile defense program	33%
Oppose missile defense program	65
Don't know	2

This is a two-to-one majority in principal against Korean participation in the U.S. missile defense initiative. Even the military representatives were evenly divided. Responses from NGO representatives and women were unanimous in opposition. Excluding the “don't know” category, so too were the politicians.

We cannot tell from these responses how firm the opposition is to placing missile defense facilities in the Republic of Korea. But the clearly negative balance points to an uphill battle for the Bush Administration, as it seeks to deploy a missile defense shield. A great deal of convincing will be required to overcome such widespread skepticism about this program. On one hand, that skepticism could be sharply reduced if North Korea resumes its own missile testing program. On the other hand, as already noted, reports from Korea suggest that opposition has been exacerbated by displeasure with President Bush's inclusion of North Korea in the “axis of evil.”

There is a difference in interpretation of the nature of the threat that North Korea presents. For policy makers in Seoul, the danger of Kim Jong-il is primarily regional, with his nascent missile delivery capability carrying the potential of turning Seoul into “a sea of fire.” (Japan also is more inclined to view the problem in this light.) For Washington, on the other hand, the issue is global, confronting the reclusive North Korean leader involved in the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and looking at possible ties with international terrorism. How Korean views will ultimately sort themselves out on positioning of an anti-missile defense shield on Korea soil will be shaped by events yet to unfold.

#### **b. Post-Unification U.S. Force Levels in Korea**

**“When Korea is unified, do you think the level of U.S. military forces should:”**

Remain the same	12%
Be reduced gradually	63
Be reduced quickly	11
Be eliminated altogether quickly	14

Not unexpectedly, military respondents were the least supportive of rapid reductions in U.S.

forces, joined by members of the media: both were unanimous in wanting the U.S. presence either to remain the same, or be reduced gradually. Politicians and NGO officials, on the other hand, favored quick or total reduction of U.S. military forces. The majority support for gradual reduction reflects the pragmatic caution we have noted elsewhere, permitting time for any necessary reevaluation.

Any discussion of the U.S. force presence is complicated by the contentious problem of the location of those forces, especially the huge 8<sup>th</sup> Army complex in the Yongsan compound in Seoul. What used to be an establishment on the edge of the city limits now occupies a prize piece of downtown real estate in the nation's capitol. Its market value is enormous; so are the costs of relocation. Proposed new housing construction heightens the already testy mood over this prime piece of land.

**c. Korean Support for War on Terrorism.** Respondents were asked to choose between three levels of possible support the Republic of Korea might provide “in what President Bush calls a war on terrorism:”

Give full support, including military involvement, sharing of intelligence, and blocking bank accounts associated with the terrorists	15%
Give limited support, but do not include military involvement	76
Give no support	9

As might be expected, the first alternative, “full support,” found most favor among the military. Academics were unanimous in favor of “limited support,” which excluded military action. And one NGO member in three, joined by one politician in four, favored “no support.”

This is, on balance, a substantial vote for restrained engagement in the Bush anti-terrorism campaign. As noted above in the case of majority opposition to stationing missile defense facilities on Korea soil, one can speculate that this reluctance will be strengthened by President Bush's lumping North Korea, Iran, and Iraq into an “axis of terror” in his State of the Union speech. Continuing reaction in the South Korean media to those remarks has been outspoken, with most of it vehemently critical.

### C. Regional Views

Another portion of the survey looked at relations between the Republic of Korea and some of its immediate neighbors. (The United States was also included in some cases.)

#### 1. Assessments of Current Ties with Japan, China, and Russia

	“How would you rate ties between the ROK and [country]?”		
	Japan	China	Russia
Too close	8%	–	2%
About right	59	49%	51
Too weak	33	51	47

**a. Japan.** No members of the business community, academia, and the media consider ties to be “too close.” Indeed, among the latter two, the number who thinks ties are “too weak” is a bit above the norm. The more positive academic view mirrors the levels of trust, just noted.

**b. China.** None of the respondents believes ties with China are “too close.” Rather, there is a virtual split between “about right” (especially among the military) and “too weak” (with government and public officials, women, and the younger age cohort a bit more inclined than the norm to favor closer links). The implicit majority desire for closer links reappears below.

**c. Russia.** On balance, the status of current links with Russia is viewed in a fashion very similar to those with China. Representatives of the media and, especially, government and political figures, favor closer ties.

## 2. Assessments of Level of Future Ties with Japan, China, Russia, and the United States

### “How do you think ties between the ROK and [country] will be in the future?”

	Japan	China	Russia	United States
Closer	39%	86%	45%	14%
Unchanged	55	14	47	78
Weaker	6	–	8	8

**a. United States.** Compared with the other guesstimates about the direction of future ties, there appears to be a strong majority sense that relations with the U.S. may have reached a plateau, and will remain unchanged. Since they are already so close (too close for some, as we shall see shortly), this is not automatically a worrisome finding.

What would have been disconcerting would be substantial expectations of weakened ties. But, as was the case vis-à-vis the other countries in our test, few respondents expect ties with the U.S. to deteriorate in the years ahead: only NGO members and, to a lesser extent, women exceeded the low norm that held this view. Among media representatives, a proportion above the norm expected closer future ties. Politicians, business people, and the military were unanimous in seeing no change ahead.

**b. Japan.** This can be seen as another cautious finding, but with a significant proportion anticipating close ties ahead. Media representatives are the most positive on this score.

**c. China.** Our respondents clearly look to future ties with China with considerable optimism. None foresee a weakening of bilateral ties, and a very substantial majority looks to closer relations – with government and public figures, along with women, unanimous on this count. Military respondents were evenly split between “closer” and “unchanged.”

This set of responses, combined with estimates of comparative importance of future relations, which we turn to below, represents one of the most significant aspects of this survey project. For

many Koreans, China represents a policy choice that does not apply to either Japan or Russia.

**d. Russia.** As with Japan, this virtual split between “closer” and “unchanged” probably reflects both caution and uncertainty. Government and public officials and, to a lesser degree, members of the media and press were more inclined than the norm to think that current ties are “too weak.”

### 3. Assessments of Importance of Future Ties

**“Looking ahead 10 years or so, which do you think will be more important? Korea’s ties with [country] or Korea’s ties with the U.S.?”**

	Japan	China	Russia
Korea’s ties more important with	24%	53%	8%
Korea’s ties more important with U.S.	75	41	92

**a. U.S. vis-à-vis China.** In one of the most significant findings in this survey, majorities of almost all survey categories ranked future ties with China as more important than those the United States, with highest numbers among NGO representatives and women. Two groups stood out as putting the U.S. first: members of academia, many of whom have exceptionally close ties with their counterparts in the United States; and the military, with unique bonds with American colleagues.

Reasons give by those who gave China preeminence over the United States frequently parallel those given for Japan, as we will note below:

- \* geographic propinquity
- \* China’s rising economic strength; potential superpower
- \* China potentially a larger market
- \* stronger cultural links
- \* development of a Northeast Asia Bloc
- \* China potentially easier to deal with than the United States; possible bargaining chip
- \* greater potential to play a role in China’s development
- \* potential long-term decline of U.S. influence in Far East, matched by rise of China

Implicit in some of these comments is a sense that, for many Koreans, China is increasingly a country with which Korea feels comfortable. Travel to China is now possible, and visitors often feel a sense of kinship. China is also a country that can, and does, say “no” to the United States. That ability, and strength, can appeal to the widespread sense of annoyance in dealings with the U.S., already noted. Frustration with U.S. policy toward North Korea, for example, seen by many South Koreans as heightening South-North tensions, can also play into China’s hand.

For those who looked to the U.S. as the key partner, there were also parallels with Japan:

- \* existence of *Pax Americana*

- \* importance of ROK-U.S. military alliance
- \* overriding national interest to maintain close ties with U.S.
- \* U.S. has been, and will continue to be, closest ally
- \* China a potentially threatening neighbor
- \* China has uncertain future; inherent unstableness of national system

These are powerful reasons for endorsing a continuing, close relationship between the Republic of Korea and the United States. While the growing fascination with China should not be underestimated, neither should it be too quickly interpreted as indicating some kind of basic new future realignment. Indeed, links between Korea and China, on one hand, and Korea and the U.S., on the other, do not have to be seen as some kind of zero-sum game. Stability in Northeast Asia would be enhanced, not weakened, by solid ties both ways.

While ties between China and the Republic of Korea have changed dramatically, a long march lies ahead before that relationship will challenge, never mind truly jeopardize, links now in place between Korea and the United States. For the foreseeable future, Korea may have the luxury of not having to choose between China and the U.S., all the more so if China continues to be seen by Washington policy makers as playing a constructive and supportive role in the “war of terrorism.”

**b. U.S. vis-à-vis Japan.** By a three-to-one margin, respondents believe that future ties with the United States will be more important to Korea than those with Japan. That was the unanimous view of the military, a view also held well above the norm by government and public officials, and the older age cohort. NGO officials and women were the only groups that put Korea’s future ties with Japan ahead of those with the United States.

Those who stressed ties with Japan cited a number of factors:

- \* geography (mentioned frequently)
- \* development of a Northeast Asian and/or Asian bloc (also mentioned frequently)
- \* growing emergence of China (again, frequently)
- \* cultural links

Primary importance given to ties with the United States rested on a differing set of perceptions:

- \* U.S. will continue to be the sole superpower
- \* *Pax Americana*; U.S. the leader of international order
- \* Strong ties with U.S. helpful for national security, confronted with strong neighboring countries (e.g., China)
- \* history limits Japan’s future role
- \* U.S. has been a blood ally

**c. U.S. vis-à-vis Russia.** Given the small proportion (mostly NGO figures) that chose Russia over the U.S., the Russia-first factors were minimal:

- \* geography

- \* overall economic developments in Asia
- \* potential for cooperation with Russia, China, and Japan

Reasons for giving Russia second billing were plentiful:

- \* Russia's domestic economic and political difficulties
- \* U.S. has been a traditionally friendly nation
- \* *Pax Americana*
- \* Russia and Korea are not complementary to each other
- \* Russia lacks economic potential
- \* Russia's influence will be on the decrease
- \* U.S. is closest ally, and sole superpower
- \* "U.S. is our old friend and democratic country"

#### 4. Korea and Japan: Some Specifics

The feeling among some that Japan's past behavior in and toward Korea continues to cause present anxieties was apparent in responses to two questions in our survey.

**a. Past behavior.** Every professional group in our study registered overwhelming majority support for the proposition that Japan has "not expressed adequate remorse for its past behavior" toward Korea, and "needs to do more." More than nine respondents in 10 were of this view, and unanimously so among politicians, government and public officials, academia, NGOs, and the military. One slight exception was among the media, where one in four thought Japan had done enough.

**b. Potential future military threat.** Worries about the possibility that Japan might become a major military power or military threat in Asia ran high with our respondents. Three in four said they were either "very worried" or "somewhat worried." The remaining one-quarter said only that they were "not too worried." None said they were "not at all worried."

Most concerned were members of the media; all were at least "somewhat worried" about a Japanese military resurgence. Least concerned, on the other hand, were members of academia, with a clear majority in the "not too worried" column. This is in line with more positive views registered this group noted earlier.

Such negatives in views about Japan continue to be driven by the content of Korean textbooks, and reporting in the Korean mass media. The recent heated controversy in both Korea and China, and the explosion of public and official opinion, over what was seen as Japan's whitewashing of its colonial past in new textbooks adopted for use in Japanese high schools, is a striking example of how deeply felt some anti-Japanese feelings remain. While there is much interest in Japan, especially among younger Koreans who are fascinated by Japanese pop culture, historical memories linger on.

#### 5. China and Russia: Opportunity or Threat?

The emergence of China as a major global player is one of the signal developments of our era. So too has been the collapse of the Soviet Union, and efforts by Russia to reestablish its global presence. With these factors in mind, we put a pair of questions to our respondents:

**“Do you think of [China/Russia] as primarily a market and economic opportunity, or primarily a potential military threat, with expansionist interests toward Korea?”**

	China	Russia
Primarily a market and economic opportunity	90%	61%
Primarily a potential military threat, with expansionist interests toward Korea	10	37

China is seen – overwhelmingly – as an economic opportunity. That view was unanimous among respondents from politics, government and public life, academia, and media and the press. Only the military did not share this view so broadly, split between “opportunity” and “threat.”

This helps to explain the high hopes concerning China, reported earlier on two key factors:

- \* an optimistic prediction of the direction of future Korea-China ties (with an 86-14% balance expecting them to be “closer” rather than “unchanged”), and;
- \* the comparative importance of future ties between Korea and China, on one hand, and Korea and the United States, on the other (with a significant 53-41% majority balance putting ties with China first).

Overall, our survey underscores the high level of interest and anticipation that many place in the potential for future ROK-China ties. That reassessed potential carries distinct implications for ties between Seoul and Washington. The tectonic plates appear to be shifting, a factor that must be calibrated into assessments of the shape of Korean policy, and the course of U.S.-Korean ties. U.S. policies that Koreans find objectionable (tariffs on steel imports, to cite a recent example) will serve to enhance the attractiveness of China and the Chinese market. With Russia, a more ambivalent assessment emerges. While a majority also saw commercial opportunity, a larger minority worried about military threat. This is in keeping with tempered views about Russia noted earlier:

- \* more restrained assessments of future Korea-Russia ties (with 47-45% balance expecting them to be “unchanged” rather than “closer”), and;
- \* the comparative importance of future ties between Korea and Russia, on one hand, and Korea and the United States, on the other (with an 8-92% balance, unequivocally putting ties with the United States first).

**D. South-North Relations and Korean Domestic Affairs**

**1. “Sunshine Policy.”** Our questioning found broad support for efforts to try to improve ties with North Korea. We deliberately did not link the issue to President Kim Dae Jung by name, to avoid personalizing and/or polarizing the thinking of respondents. Rather, we asked:

**“Let’s look at South-North relations. Do you support or oppose the “Sunshine Policy” of trying to improve ties with North Korea?”**

Strongly support	31%
Somewhat support	63
Somewhat oppose	4
Strongly oppose	2

By keeping President Kim’s name out of the equation, it may have been easier to support the policy in general terms: better than nine in 10 said they either “strongly support” (roughly three in 10, and half of government and public officials, and representatives of NGOs) or “somewhat support” (six in 10, and all in the business world) the “Sunshine Policy.”

When the two “support” categories are combined, they include all politicians, government and public officials, business community, NGOs, the military, and women. Few respondents said they were “somewhat” or “strongly opposed.” The single standout category was in academia, among whom one-quarter expressed opposition.

This suggests that, no matter how inflamed national feelings get over President Kim’s handling of his “Sunshine Policy,” there is broad support for pursuing the basic goal of South-North reconciliation. That support carries a cautionary note: a majority was only “somewhat” aligned with the policy. Overall, however, such support represents a platform that will be welcomed by any future leader.

**2. Conditionality.** On a related theme, we found opinion split down the middle between whether Seoul “should insist on stricter conditions in its negotiations with North Korea (49%),” or whether “negotiations are being handled in about the right manner (51%).” A slightly larger proportion of those in the business community, military, and academia favored “stricter conditions,” roughly matched by larger numbers of NGOs and women who found the current situation about right.

Among those respondents who favored added conditions, a few themes attracted attention:

- \* setting up a permanent meeting place for separated families;
- \* reciprocity (a theme mentioned frequently);
- \* separation of economics and politics;
- \* transparency in North Korea (also mentioned by several);
- \* humanitarian aid linked to nuclear and biological weapons transparency;
- \* human rights in North Korea; and,
- \* North Korea must fulfill its promises (presumably, another shade of reciprocity).

**3. Prospects for Unification.** When we asked, “Looking ahead, how do you rate prospects for unification in the next ten years?,” we did not find widespread optimism, broad support for the “sunshine policy” notwithstanding:

Very likely	5.9%
Somewhat likely	23.5
Somewhat unlikely	60.8
Very unlikely	5.9
Don't know	3.9
[Very/somewhat likely	29.4%]
[Very/somewhat unlikely	66.7]

Only about three in 10 saw unification as “very” or “somewhat likely,” and most of them were in the latter category. When both “likely” choices were combined, roughly half of the NGOs, women, and the younger age cohort chose one of those options.

The military was the most pessimistic among the two-thirds of our sample who thought unification to be either “very” or “somewhat unlikely:” all the military respondents opted for one alternative or the other. And with the exception of female respondents, at least half of every professional category was of the view that unification was, at best, “somewhat unlikely.”

Given the roller-coaster ride that has characterized past South-North discussions, this overall pessimism does not seem out of line. And as the campaign against terrorism being waged by the Bush administration moves ahead – with North Korea labeled, along with Iran and Iraq, as an “axis of evil” supporting terrorism – prospects look ever dimmer.

#### 4. Levels of personal satisfaction. We asked our sample:

**“Overall, how satisfied are you with the way things are going in Korea these days?”**

Very satisfied	–
Somewhat satisfied	8%
Somewhat dissatisfied	70
Very dissatisfied	22

The responses were remarkable in the extent of their negativity: not one person put him/herself in the “very satisfied” column, and; less than one in ten was even ready to say even “somewhat satisfied.”

**a. Positives.** Among the very few who did say “somewhat satisfied,” slightly better readings (but still only one in four) were recorded by government and public officials (some of whom pointed to economic recovery, and a rooted democratic system), and military personnel (who cited Korea’s ability to ride out financial turmoil).

**b. Negatives.** On the down side, better than nine in ten felt “somewhat” or “very dissatisfied.” In the “somewhat” section were all politicians, and almost all business people. Among problems cited: “political backwardness,” “lack of leadership,” “widespread corruption,” “erosion of the nation’s authority and dignity,” and “arbitrary policy-making.” “Very dissatisfied” included half of those from academe and nongovernmental organizations, who

pointed to “lack of policy vision,” “corruption,” “absence of leadership,” “wasteful partisan confrontation,” and “lost national identity.” One NGO representative lamented, “There is no bright future anywhere, so I am disappointed and feel hopeless.”

It is worth noting that all respondents from politics, business, media and the press, NGOs, and women were in the negative column; none said they were even “somewhat satisfied.” Other problem themes mentioned included: “laxity of social discipline,” “intensified regionalism,” “failure of reformation,” “President Kim Dae Jung’s lame duck syndrome,” “growing gap between rich and poor,” “no common goals,” “moral corruption and laxity of official discipline,” and “disproportionate distribution of important social posts.”

**5. Politics.** When respondents were asked to single out, voluntarily and without any cuing from the interviewer, current domestic political problems, two areas stood out: politics are too regional, and they are too personalized and boss-oriented. Most observers would agree that these factors dominate the political scene.

**“Thinking about domestic political conditions in Korea, which of the following do you think is the most important problem?”**

(listed in order of importance)

Politics are too regional	41.2%
Politics are too personal/boss-oriented	31.4
There is too much corruption	15.7
The political system is too authoritarian	7.7%
Egoism	2.0
Absence of just authority; disorder	2.0

“And what is the second most important problem?”

Politics are too personal	31.4%
Politics are too regional	31.4
The political system is too authoritarian	19.6
There is too much corruption	13.6
Distrust of politics; ignorance	2.0
Lack of consistency in policy	2.0

[First and second most important problems, combined]

Politics are too regional	72.6%
Politics are too personal/boss-oriented	62.8
There is too much corruption	29.3
The political system is too authoritarian	27.3
Egoism	2.0
Absence of just authority; disorder	2.0
Distrust of politics; ignorance	2.0
Lack of consistency in policy	2.0

On the issue of regionalism, some analysts speculate that television may, over time, dampen its influence. But as of this writing, it remains a powerful – even overriding – factor, engendering the sense of hopelessness expressed above by the NGO representative.

**6. Economics.** Lack of transparency and corruption were volunteered as the principal culprits on the economic scene, in proportions quite similar as those for regionalism and boss-orientation in the political arena:

**“And what about the Korean economy? Which of the following do you think is the biggest problem?”**  
(listed in order of importance)

There is not enough transparency	51.0%
As with politics, there is too much corruption	27.5
The <i>chaebols</i> are too strong	11.8
Banks and financial institutions need more regulation	3.9
Ineffective policy	2.0
Lack of changes to value-added industry	2.0
Absence of high technology	2.0

**“And what is the second biggest problem?”**

As with politics, there is too much corruption	31.4%
There is not enough transparency	25.5%
Banks and financial institutions need more regulation	21.6
The <i>chaebols</i> are too strong	15.7
Economy is too centralized	2.0
Excessive dependency on single country	2.0
Closed economic structure	2.0

[First and second most important problems, combined]

There is not enough transparency	76.5%
As with politics, there is too much corruption	58.8
The <i>chaebols</i> are too strong	27.5
Banks and financial institutions need more regulation	25.5
Economy is too centralized	2.0
Ineffective policy	2.0
Lack of changes to value-added industry	2.0
Absence of high technology	2.0
Excessive dependency on single country	2.0
Closed economic structure	2.0

A sense that the *chaebols* (the hugely powerful economic conglomerates that have dominated the Korean economic scene for decades) are too strong, and that banks and financial institutions need more regulation, drew the attention as first- or second-ranked problems by about one in four. Some of the other problem areas we were looking for – the economy is too centralized, closed economic structure, and the like – attracted little notice.

**7. Courts and the legal system.** In what may come as a surprise to some readers, we found ratings given to courts and the legal system were relatively high.

**“Thinking about courts and the legal system, do you think they are:”**

Very fair and even-handed	2.0%
Somewhat fair and even-handed	60.8
Somewhat unfair and not too even-handed	33.3%

Very unfair and not at all even-handed	3.9
[Very/somewhat fair and even-handed	62.8%]
[Very/somewhat unfair and not even-handed	37.2]

By about a two-thirds to one-third split, respondents said courts and the legal system were either “very fair and even-handed” or “somewhat fair and even-handed,” as opposed to “very” or “somewhat unfair” and “not at all even-handed.” The most positive views were held by government and public officials, all of whom were in the positive column. Least favorable marks were recorded by members of the press and media, and by those in the younger cohort, 30-39 years of age.

**8. Hope for the future.** By any reckoning, a good deal of what we found represents a disheartening reading of the mood and feelings of our particular sample of opinion. But that sense of unease is at least partially offset by positive expressions about sources of strength for the nation’s future:

**“Overall, what do you think is the most positive or hopeful aspect of our country?”**

Themes cited include:

- \* Politicians: “domestic desires for reform,” “well-educated population,” “nation’s diligence,” and “Koreans are hard-working and energetic.”
- \* Government: “democratization,” “rising international stature,” “resolve to overcome crises,” and “excellent human resources.”
- \* Business: “highly-educated labor force,” “growth of middle class,” “national creativity,” and “high intelligence.”
- \* Academia: “enthusiasm for education,” “energetic young people,” and “human resources.”
- \* Media: “human resources,” “conscientious youth,” “hard-working, intelligent people,” and “vitality of Korean society.”
- \* NGOs: “spontaneous initiative,” “youth’s cultural originality,” and “growth of participatory democracy.”
- \* Military: “educational fever is hope for the future,” “united people,” and “maintenance of cultural tradition.”

These are strong expressions of hope – and confidence – for the future. It is a rich mixture, combining elements of respect for education, national and personal diligence, intelligence and creativity, strong human resources, and weighty trust and faith in Korea’s young people. All this represents a broad and sturdy base on which to build.

### **G. Summary Comments**

This is, on balance, a cautious, pragmatic – and sobering – evaluation of the current state of affairs on the Korean peninsula, and of key issues that face policy makers in Seoul and Washington, DC. It contains a bill of particulars that presents difficult challenges to all who are concerned with those bilateral links. Quite clearly, the “mini-elite” group of younger Koreans we interviewed sees a number of things that provide hope and encouragement for the future. They

also find a lot lacking both on the home front, and in relations with their key ally, the United States. They remain deeply ambivalent about Japan. And they are taking an increasingly admiring look at their neighboring giant, China.

One senses a widespread feeling among these Koreans of being taken for granted. There is a perception of being relegated to a second-class citizen status, where they find themselves subject to the whims of a *Pax Americana*, forced to play second fiddle to Japan, and exposed to political and economic subordination to an unsympathetic “hegemon.” This weighs heavily on a proud, sensitive, and intensely nationalistic people. It promotes a widespread perception of growing anti-Americanism, or at least declining pro-Americanism.

In this context, a “China card” assumes increasing value. The increasing interest we found in China, and hopes for the future of China-ROK relations, make it plausible that some Korean policy makers will be increasingly tempted to play that card. U.S. policy toward both countries will influence such feelings, even as economics, and economic decisions, also enter into the equation.

Looking ahead, our findings raise important questions and uncertainties. While the younger Koreans we interviewed were not overly optimistic about the prospects of unification, and also generally favored U.S. troop reductions should that dream come true, what would be the Korean response to an implosion in the North? What role would they want the U.S. to play? Should the 1994 Agreed Framework, seeking to control and end the North Korean nuclear threat, break down, what then would be the views about some kind of anti-missile defense shield? If the United States decides to take unilateral military action against North Korea, what would be the response in Seoul?

On a more optimistic note, what happens if the threat menace should abate considerably and “peace breaks out?” How would that affect the U.S. regional role? What would Korea want from its long-time partner? How do Korea and the United States, working in consort with Japan and seeking constructive engagement with China, manage Northeast Asian security, and foster the economic and political development of the region? These are big and important questions that a survey such as this cannot answer. But our findings do relate to issues such as these, and underline the need for careful deliberations about how to approach them.

Not all the criticisms we uncovered of the United States, and ties between the U.S. and the Republic of Korea, are automatically valid. Bilateral ties are, after all, a two-way street. But in a relationship as important and intense as the one that exists between the two friends and allies, it is in the interests of both parties to give such concerns the appropriate attention they deserve.

[End]