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James I. Matray's article examines both the historical roots and the immediate causes of the wave of anti-American sentiments that emerged in the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) in the post-1987 decades, peaking during the first term of President George W. Bush (2001-2005). Juxtaposing actual U.S. government policies with the expectations and desires of South Korean public opinion, the author creates a binary model of analysis with realism and idealism as the two opposing poles. Having contrasted the actions and statements of Bush with those of his predecessors, he concludes that while the recent outbursts of anti-Americanism undoubtedly gained inspiration from the grievances of Korean population before and during the Cold War, these structural factors would not have caused an antipathy of such intensity if the Bush administration had adopted a more tactful and less dogmatic attitude toward the complex problems of the Korean Peninsula.

Matray's analysis is based mainly on secondary sources, with a few additional references to South Korean public opinion polls as well as the author's personal experiences in the ROK. His overview of the relevant English-language publications is truly panoramic and impressively unbiased, ranging from the books, articles, and essays of Bruce Cumings, Meredith Woo-Cumings, and Selig S. Harrison to the works of Victor D. Cha and Don Kirk.¹ The polls conducted by the Pew Research Center are cited occasionally and

¹ For instance, Victor D. Cha, "Anti-Americanism and the U.S. Role in Inter-Korean Relations," in David I. Steinberg, ed., *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States: Changing Dynamics* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2005), 125-26; Bruce Cumings, "The Structural Basis of 'Anti-Americanism' in the Republic of Korea," in *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States*, 103-4; Selig Harrison, *Korean Endgame* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Don Kirk, "Hundreds Join in Show of Peace at Korean Railroad Stop," *New York Times*, 15 June 2003, and Meredith Woo-Cumings, "Unilateralism and Its Discontents: The Passing of the Cold

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laconically, rather than analyzed in depth, but this scarcity of primary data is partly alleviated by Matray's references to the surveys cited by Brent Choi, Chung-in Moon, and other authors.²

The article traces the origins of Korean-American conflicts of interest back to the early twentieth century, at which time Washington's unwillingness to confront Japan over the question of Korean independence frustrated the hopes of those Korean nationalists who had expected support from the U.S. government. In general, however, Matray's attention is focused on the post-1945 era, with special respect to the last two decades. He astutely points out that the explosive growth of anti-Americanism in post-1987 South Korea was not only a reaction to contemporary events but also a release of the pent-up frustration that had accumulated in Korean society under the rule of three authoritarian presidents: Syngman Rhee (1948-1960), Park Chung Hee (1961-1979), and Chun Doo Hwan (1980-1987).

Actually, Matray's article tends to investigate the pre-1987 occurrences of U.S.-Korean friction mostly from the perspective of current Korean observers, instead of citing sources that depicted initial Korean reactions to these episodes. To be sure, the author correctly notes that South Korean "dissenters immediately blamed the United States for the killings" (8) that Chun Doo Hwan's troops committed in Kwangju in May 1980. Still, his overall approach is a retrospective one. For instance, Korean dissatisfaction with the policies of Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who served from 1949 to 1953, is described solely in the present tense.

This approach may have led to an underestimation of certain pre-1987 manifestations of anti-American sentiments in South Korea. Among others, he states that Korean animosity toward the U.S. troops stationed in the ROK started to emerge only in the 1980s, because "For more than a generation after the Korean War ended in 1953, South Koreans generally accepted the necessity of retaining U.S. combat forces in Korea" (10). Actually, the very importance that Korean public opinion attributed to the deterrence effect of the U.S. troop presence meant that during the Cold War, the prospect of a partial or complete troop withdrawal was as likely to generate anti-American sentiments as the non-withdrawal of U.S. forces would do later. Katharine H.S. Moon insightfully notes that in 1970-1971, Richard M. Nixon's decision to withdraw the 7th Infantry Division from the ROK made the Korean residents living around the U.S. bases

War Alliance and Changing Public Opinion in the Republic of Korea," in *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States*, 75-76.

² Brent (Won-ki) Choi, "Anti-Americanism or 'Anti-Baseism': U.S.-South Korean Relations through Changing Generations," in *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States*, 310; Chung-in Moon, "Between *Banmi* (Anti-Americanism) and *Sangmi* (Worship of the United States): Dynamics of Changing U.S. Images in South Korea," in *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States*, 143.

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more resentful of the misdeeds committed by the American soldiers than they had been before.³

In general, however, Matray's article shows both a remarkable awareness of the causes of anti-American sentiments and a perceptible empathy for the feelings of the Korean side. The author specifies four principal sources of Korean anti-Americanism: (1) American disregard for Korean nationalist aspirations (independence from Japanese rule and national unification on Seoul's terms); (2) U.S. support for South Korean dictatorships; (3) the American military presence in the ROK; and (4) various – actual or perceived – manifestations of American racism, unfairness, and discrimination. In contrast with some authors who depict South Korea as an ungrateful “security free rider,”⁴ Matray considers each of these main grievances to be largely justified. Nevertheless, he does exclude a few individual cases in which Korean complaints seem to have been unwarranted. For example, he persuasively argues that Acheson's (in)famous speech at the National Press Club (12 January 1950), in which he did not mention the ROK among the areas within America's ‘defense perimeter,’ did not trigger the North Korean invasion in any way, widely held South Korean assumptions notwithstanding. The significance of this conclusion can be gauged from the fact that to date, only a handful of American scholars (most notably Bruce Cumings) have expressly refuted the view that the Press Club speech strongly influenced the strategic calculations of Soviet ruler Joseph Stalin and North Korean leader Kim Il Sung.⁵

Notably, the scope of Matray's analysis is not confined to conflicts of a strictly bilateral nature but also encompasses situations when U.S.-South Korean friction was caused by the two states' different attitudes toward a third country. For one thing, post-1947 American policies in East Asia, focused as they were on the economic reconstruction and remilitarization of Japan, were prone to subordinate South Korean interests to those of the Japanese. As Matray put it, “Washington ... pressed Seoul relentlessly to reconcile with Tokyo to contain Communist expansion.” (5). Preoccupied with that aim, U.S. policy-makers watched South Korea's critical attitude toward Japan more with

³ Katharine H.S. Moon, *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S./Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 64-65.

⁴ Ted Galen Carpenter and Doug Bandow, *The Korean Conundrum: America's Troubled Relations with North and South Korea* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 101-109.

⁵ Bruce Cumings, *The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950: The Origins of the Korean War*. Vol. 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 408-438.

irritation than with empathy, which in turn fueled anti-American sentiments in the ROK.⁶

Second, Matray skillfully places the ebb and flow of South Korean anti-Americanism in the context of inter-Korean relations. He correctly points out that the growing or declining intensity of such sentiments was not stimulated solely by America's own actions but also by the steps taken by the North Korean leadership. In 2000-2004, Pyongyang's "charm offensive" (25) temporarily alleviated South Korean fears of the 'northern threat,' and hence contributed to the rise of anti-Americanism in the ROK. In subsequent years, however, North Korea's confrontational measures reversed this trend: "the intensity of anti-Americanism in South Korea would evaporate suddenly in October 2006, not because of a change in U.S. policy, but because North Korea exploded its first nuclear device" (25-26). Matray's epigrammatic comment on U.S.-Korean relations – "As always, [America's] Korea policy was not about Korea" (3) – thus seems to be applicable to Korean attitudes, too. To paraphrase his *bon mot*, South Korean anti-Americanism was not always, or at least not solely, about America.

Still, in certain respects Matray's analysis is somewhat inadequately contextualized. "Elsewhere in the world, U.S. leaders at times promoted democracy and national self-determination, but never on the Korean peninsula when doing so conflicted with advancing its political, economic, and security interests" (2), the author claims. In fact, open or tacit U.S. support to 'friendly' authoritarian regimes has been a notoriously widespread phenomenon throughout the Cold War, not only in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America but even in such European countries as Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal, and military-ruled Greece.⁷ At the same time, American approval of South Korean authoritarianism may have been less consistent than Matray suggests. His reference to the pressure to which the administration of Jimmy Carter (1977-1980) subjected the South Korean government in the wake of Park Chung Hee's assassination – and which Matray describes as a "brief, aberrant period in U.S. policy" (7) – could have been complemented with further information about the Kennedy administration's efforts to force Park's junta to return to civilian rule, Carter's sharp criticism of the human rights abuses committed by the Park regime, and the role the United States played in facilitating South Korea's democratic transition in February-June 1987.⁸

⁶ On the anti-American sentiments that Washington's perceived pro-Japanese attitude evoked in South Korea, see also J. Mark Mobius, "The Japan-Korea Normalization Process and Korean Anti-Americanism," in *Asian Survey* 6:4 (April 1966): 241-248.

⁷ For an overview, see David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸ On Park's relations with the Kennedy and Carter administrations, see Taehyun Kim and Chang Jae Baik, "Taming and Tamed by the United States," in Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel, eds., *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 58-84; and Yong-Jick Ki, "The Security, Political, and Human Rights Conundrum, 1974-1979," in *The Park Chung Hee Era*, pp. 457-482. On America's ambivalent role in South Korea's democratic transition, see James

This is not to say that the negative effect that U.S. collusion with South Korean authoritarianism produced on Korean public opinion was less serious than Matray suggests. On the contrary, the correctness of his critical opinion about Washington's security-centered approach to Korean politics is fully confirmed by the observations of James V. Young, an assistant military attaché at the U.S. embassy in Seoul in 1977-1990.⁹ Nonetheless, the emphasis that Matray places on this collusion somewhat obscures the diverse nature of anti-Americanism in the ROK, which in turn reflected the sharp polarization prevalent in South Korean politics. Korean anti-Americanism encompassed both 'leftist-progressive' and 'rightist-conservative' strains, of which Matray covers the former in far greater detail than the latter.

While Matray does mention that America's decision to sign an armistice in 1953 aroused the wrath of Syngman Rhee and other conservative nationalists who wanted to continue the war for national unification in spite of its international risks, he pays less attention to the repeated occurrence of friction between the U.S. government and Park Chung Hee's administration. Notably, the threat perceptions which Nixon's China policy and the withdrawal of the 7th Infantry Division generated in South Korea seem to have played a major role in Park's decision to impose the so-called Yushin system, an even harsher form of authoritarianism than he had earlier enacted.¹⁰ In fact, Park tried to justify his authoritarian rule by juxtaposing 'Korean democracy' with 'Western democracy.' As he put it, "the United States should realize that Western-style democracy is not fit for the [South] Korean reality."¹¹ Since the mainstream of Park's democratic opposition sought to counter this thesis by highlighting its own commitment to Western liberal values, anti-authoritarianism was not always intertwined with anti-American sentiments.

This asymmetrical depiction of the various strains of Korean anti-Americanism seems to have resulted from the fact that Matray's analysis is more focused on American

Fowler, "The United States and South Korean Democratization," in *Political Science Quarterly* 114:2 (Summer 1999): 280-287.

⁹ James V. Young, *Eye on Korea: An Insider Account of Korean-American Relations* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), p. 112.

¹⁰ Shin Jongdae, "Yushinchejae suripwoeninae kwanhan jaechomyeong: bukhanyoineui younghyangkwa dongwoeneri joongshimeuro" (A Review of the Causes Contributing to the Establishment of the Yushin System: Influence and Mobilization of the North Korean factor), *Sahyae Kwahak Yeonku* (Social Science Studies) 13:1 (February 2005), pp.128-162.

¹¹ Chung-in Moon and Byung-joon Jun, "Modernization Strategy: Ideas and Influences," in *The Park Chung Hee Era*, pp. 129-133.

actions than on the Korean political and intellectual environment.¹² Another kind of asymmetry prevalent in the article is that the described contrast between U.S. ‘realism’ and Korean ‘idealism’ is based on the juxtaposition of American government policies with South Korean public opinion. For instance, the author repeatedly illustrates the Korean standpoint on one or another specific issue by citing comments made by ordinary citizens, whereas American views are usually – though not invariably – represented by the statements of government officials. Since attitudes of political idealism are presumably more common among the general public than among career diplomats, Matray’s stress on “Korean idealism” (8) may be a sort of simplified extrapolation.

Despite these limitations, Matray does provide a convincing explanation for the dramatic increase of Korean anti-Americanism during the administration of George W. Bush. By contrasting Bush’s policies with the tactfulness displayed by Bill Clinton (1993-2001), he persuasively argues that this shift in Korean public opinion was neither predetermined nor inevitable. While Matray pays due attention to such long-term factors as the emergence of the “3-8-6 generation” (6), he points out that substantial fluctuation in the intensity of anti-American sentiments could (and did) repeatedly occur within a short period such as 1997-2006, in response to the steps taken by Washington and Pyongyang.¹³ Matray argues that the Bush administration’s unilateralist attitude constituted a case of idealistic extremism that “abandoned a realist approach that had dominated U.S. Korea policy for more than a century” (3). This evaluation may be somewhat subjective, since certain elements of Clinton’s foreign policy (a ‘double containment’ strategy vis-à-vis Iran and Iraq; a more cautious attitude toward North Korea than toward the Middle Eastern ‘rogue states’; and the use of military force against Iraq without UN authorization) seem to have foreshadowed the events of 2002-2007. Nevertheless, the peculiar ideological disposition of the Bush administration must have added a lot of fuel to the fire of anti-Americanism in a country as polarized between left and right as South Korea has been since the 1990s.

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¹² For studies which distinguish between the various types of anti-Americanism by examining the political and intellectual spectrum of a given country, see, among others, Tony Judt and Denis Lacorne, eds., *With US or Against US: Studies in Global Anti-Americanism* (New York, N.Y., and Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); and Christoph Hendrik Müller, *West Germans Against The West: Anti-Americanism in Media and Public Opinion in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1949-1968* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹³ The term „3-8-6 generation” refers to those South Korean citizens who, having been born in the 1960s and attended college in the 1980s, were in their 30s in the 1990s and 2000s.

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history, he has done archival research on the modern history of North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Mongolia, India, the USSR, and Eastern Europe. His publications include *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era: Soviet-DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism, 1953-1964* (Stanford University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005), as well as peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on North Korean and Southeast Asian history. His current research projects are focused on the Korean War, Indochinese-ASEAN relations, the Vietnamese-Cambodian conflict, nuclear proliferation, and DPRK-Middle Eastern relations.

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