

US-Korea Relations - Lovers' Quarrel or Divorce?

**An Article for *Sekai shuho*
February 19, 2003**

By

**Dr. C. Kenneth Quinones
Co-director of Korean Peninsula Programs
International Center
Washington, D.C.
Ckquinones@msn.com**

Introduction

South Korea's fourth democratically elected president Noh Moo-hyun, a 57 year old former lawyer and human rights activist, faces formidable challenges during his five year term which begins on February 25, 2003. He must repair his nation's troubled alliance with the United States while dealing with an increasingly hostile and possibly nuclear armed North Korea. The extent of his success or failure will affect Japan's future dealings with its friends in Washington and Seoul, and most dangerous enemy in Pyongyang.

The half century old US-Korea alliance is under stress. Rising anti-American sentiment sparked massive demonstrations across South Korea this winter. Many believe it was a decisive factor in the election of South Korea's new president Noh Moo-hyun. Some contend anti-American sentiment is a key motivation in his political views. Anti-American sentiment could substantially alter the still sturdy alliance. It has moved discussion of US troop withdrawal among Koreans from the radical fringe to the political main stream. South Korea's once docile and politically conservative urban middle class is becoming increasingly outspoken in its criticism of how President Bush deals with North Korean strongman Kim Jong Il. Some Koreans have gone so far as to fault Bush's assertive stance and pointed rhetoric for the Korean Peninsula's second nuclear crisis and subsequent rising tensions.

Estrangement between Seoul and Washington, something Pyongyang would cherish, is not likely, barring unforeseen circumstances. But if President Bush persists in refusing to engage North Korea in diplomatic negotiations, and an armed confrontation with North Korea ensues, South Koreans might hesitate before joining forces with the United States. Nevertheless, anti-Americanism, the continuing debate in South Korea over the future presence of US troops and the chorus of criticism of U.S. policy toward North Korea have shaken the alliance. Most likely, US-Korea friendship and alliance will endure, but this will require some fundamental changes.

Tokyo cannot ignore the strains in the US-South Korea relationship. Any substantial alteration to it will directly affect the US-Japan alliance. A reduction or withdrawal of US military forces from the Korean Peninsula could mean their repositioning to Okinawa, a move certain to excite anti-American sentiment there. South Koreans' intensifying desire for national reunification and reawakening compassion for their North Korean kinsmen could complicate future negotiations between Tokyo and Pyongyang. While Tokyo strives to assert its demands, rebuffs those of Pyongyang and minimizes any concessions, tensions would escalate. Concerned that the diplomatic dueling could escalate to an armed confrontation, Seoul might be prone to pressure Tokyo to soften its stance. President Kim Dae-jung reacted similarly with Washington following his 2000 summit in Pyongyang.

Northeast Asia's Shifting Balance of Power

No longer is the United States the foremost, unrivaled power in Northeast Asia. Almost unnoticed during the past quarter century, there has been a gradual shift of power. The shift is not necessarily a consequence of declining American power. Instead, it more likely is taking place because of the growing economic prowess of Japan, South Korea and China, and their normalization of relations. Japan and South Korea since 1980 have acquired sufficient economic

might and military muscle to assert their national interests vis a vis the United States.

Long gone is their dependence on US aid and access to America's market for defense and economic growth. The geo-political circumstances that forged the Washington-Seoul and US-Japan alliances during the Korean War of 1950-53 have disappeared. The Cold War's end more than a decade ago sweep their worse common enemy, the Soviet Union, into history. No longer is China feared as being a "red," irrational nuclear power. Instead, Washington and Seoul see Beijing as a friend in their effort to tame Pyongyang. Similarly, Seoul since the early 1980s has come to accept Japan as a political friend in its dealings with Pyongyang, and an economic partner in the world market.

A further indication of this shifting balance of power is Seoul's persistent effort to play the leading role regarding how to deal with North Korea. President Roh Moo-hyun's predecessor, Kim Dae-jung, successfully asserted this preference in the form of "sunshine" diplomacy toward North Korea. Despite the Clinton Administration's preference to continue the "Four Party Talks" between Washington, Seoul, Beijing and Pyongyang, Kim Dae-jung rallied international support for his preferred policy. For the first time in history, a South Korean leader succeeded in rallying the support of all four superpowers – Washington, Moscow, Beijing and Tokyo – for his nation's foreign policy. President Noh Moo-hyun has pledged to continue his predecessor's "sunshine diplomacy" despite Washington's reservations about it.

Seoul's New Self Confidence

South Korea's economic prowess better enables it to assert its national preferences vis a vis the United States. Since 1980, South Korea has made impressive economic gains. From 1945 to 1976, Washington gave Seoul an estimated \$6 billion in economic aid. Between 1945 and 2002, Seoul received another \$8.8 billion in U.S. military aid. But Seoul no longer needs this aid. On the contrary, it has its own foreign aid program. Also, it led Asian nations out of the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 and has repaid its \$57 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund.

At the same time, South Korea has diversified the markets for its exports. In the 1980's, the United States was the primary destination for its light industrial exports. Today, South Korea remains the U.S. seventh largest trading partner, but China has become Seoul's foremost market. A steady stream of increasingly sophisticated goods also flows to markets in the Middle East, Russia, Southeast Asia and Latin America. Simultaneously, South Korea has diversified its foreign investments around the world.

South Korea's democratization has also enhanced the nation's self confidence in its dealings with Washington. Prior to democratization in 1992, retired generals ruled from 1960 to 1992 – Park Chung-hee, Chon Doo-hwan and Noh Tae-woo. Their political legitimacy, as well as their nation's economic health and defense capability, were closely tied to Washington. American presidents merely had to call their South Korean counterparts to convince them of the wisdom of conforming to Washington's priorities. South Korea's authoritarian leaders often squirmed and complained because of Washington's arm twisting diplomacy, but eventually each South Korean strong man submitted to Washington's will. Today, this is no longer true. South Korea's democratically elected presidents like Noh Moo-hyun are much less concerned about what the

White House and Pentagon want. Noh, unlike his predecessors, must answer to the South Korea's prosperous, and politically sophisticated and assertive electorate. In the final analysis, South Korea has become increasingly confident and assertive vis a vis the United States. Given Noh's campaign pledges to Korean voters, they will expect, even demand that he sustain and enhance their nation's ability to assert its preferences vis a vis Washington and the Bush Administration.

Shared Goals – Divergent Strategies

No longer can Washington take for granted that Japan and South Korea will accommodate its global priorities and strategy. During the Cold War, this was possible because Washington's global concerns coincided with Tokyo's and Seoul's regional concerns. The Soviet Union posed a direct threat to both nations. For Japan, it was the continuing dispute with Moscow over the Northern Territories, vulnerability of its northern island of Hokkaido to possible Soviet invasion, and growing responsibility to defend its sea lanes of trade. South Korea's concern was for Moscow's substantial economic and military aid to North Korea.

Now that the Soviet global threat has evaporated, the two U.S. allies can afford to be more selective in their defense and foreign policy priorities. They rallied behind the Bush Administration's war on terrorism because it is a shared concern. But Seoul and Tokyo both parted company with Washington when it came to National Missile Defense (NMD). Both nations concluded separately that involvement in the program could erode their national defense by making them potential targets for hostile ballistic missile defense fired more in anger with the United States than themselves. Similarly, Seoul and Tokyo reacted with concern when President Bush declared a global, unilateralist and pre-emptive strategy for dealing with the "axis of evil" and weapons of mass destruction. Tokyo has assumed a less critic stance since North Korea confirmed last October that it has initiated a second nuclear weapons program. But President Noh has publicly distanced his future national defense strategy from that of the Bush Administration.

At the regional level, again shared goals preserve the need for the US-Korea alliance, but the divergence between Washington and Seoul over priorities and strategies is becoming more audible. Both Presidents Noh and Bush want a peaceful, politically stable and economically prosperous East Asia. They also seek a nuclear free Korean Peninsula and avow they will continue their joint effort to deter North Korea from armed confrontation. Here, Tokyo's concerns coincide with those of Washington and Seoul, particularly regarding North Korea. One of the more visible indications of this is the three nations' Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TICOG) meetings to deliberate about policy toward North Korea.

At this point, however, the two allies again disagree over strategy. Bush's global strategy accents a unilateral approach, as he has made clear regarding Iraq. He is also focused on pursuing decisive, possibly even pre-emptive military action to rid the world of weapons of mass destruction. Bush has even gone so far as to suggest he would topple those regimes that did not rid themselves on such weapons.

Dealing with North Korea

Regarding North Korea, Bush prefers a vocal, legalistic and enforcement approach. Translated into action, this means Bush believes North Korea's leader Kim Jong Il must be humbled and punished for having failed to keep his promises to fore sake the building a nuclear arsenal. Also, he must be publicly chastised for starving his people while building ballistic missiles and maintaining a huge land army. Pyongyang's misconduct and "nuclear" alleged blackmail, in Bush's view, must not be rewarded with diplomatic negotiations and economic concessions. On the contrary, Bush insists North Korea must first disarm itself of weapons of mass destruction before it can engage in talks and possibly benefit from a bountiful "bold initiative" that would render food, fuel and other economic benefits to North Korea.

Bush's approach is the antithesis of President-elect Noh's professed future policy. Noh intends to continue Kim Dae-jung's "sunshine" diplomacy. The goal is peaceful coexistence with North Korea and the promotion of gradual change there through diplomatic dialogue and economic cooperation. Despite Washington's displeasure with such an approach, Noh can proceed confident that the South Korean people, as well as Beijing and Moscow, support his approach.

Thus far North Korean leader Kim Jong Il has gained substantial material benefits. They include 600,000 tons of food aid, several hundred thousand tons of chemical fertilizer, and, as of November, 2002, \$131,000,000 worth of medicine, clothing and farm and computer equipment. Additionally, Seoul has given Pyongyang more than \$600,000,000 in payments for the Mount Kumgang tourism project and "consideration" money for Kim Jong Il's agreement to convene the first every North-South Korean Summit in Pyongyang in 2000. Seoul has also been the primary source of funds for the estimated \$4,500,000,000 Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization's (KEDO) project to build two nuclear reactors in North Korea. KEDO in 1998 set South Korea's expected contribution at \$3,200,000,000. Although the US-DPRK accord that gave birth to the project, the Agreed Framework, is now defunct, Seoul continues to fund the project. Pyongyang also allows the project to continue without interruption.

Not since the Korean War has there been such a substantial and continuous dialogue and exchange of Koreans between the two halves of the Korean Peninsula. Beginning in 1998, several thousand South Koreans have visited North Korea. Most have gone for a brief and highly restricted visit to the scenic east coast Kumgang Mountains. But the number of businessmen, aid workers and officials continues to increase. Even a trickle has begun of North Korean official study groups and trainees to South Korea. Periodic meetings continue between members of families separated since the Korean War, and before. For example, between January and November 2002, 12,300 south Koreans visited North Korea and 1,000 North Koreans visited the south. At the same time, inter-Korean trade increased from \$403,000,000 in 2001 to \$567,000,000 in the first eleven months of 2002.

After a worrisome hiatus, North-South dialogue resumed at several levels and in various venues. The two Koreas convened thirty four inter-Korean meetings last year. The seventh round of inter-Korean ministerial talks was held in Seoul in August, 2002. The Joint North-South Council on Economic Cooperation has resumed its activities. In 2002, ranking North Korean visitors to the south included the chairman of the State Planning Commission, and Jang Song-taek, first deputy chief of the Korean Workers' Party Central committee and Kim Jong Il's

brother-in-law. Still, however, Kim Jong Il has yet to fulfill his promise to visit Seoul.

The Bush Administration may believe these are not substantial gains, but the people of South Korea disagree. Noh Moo-hyun's election suggests Koreans prefer "sunshine" diplomacy and the pursuit of peaceful coexistence preferable to Washington's desire to compel North Korea to disarm. Sunshine diplomacy is not without a substantial number of critics in South Korea, but given the choice between inducement using economic aid and the enforcement of international nuclear safeguards, the majority of Koreans prefer inducements. Apparently they see Washington's confrontational approach placing South Korea's peace and prosperity at risk. Noh Moo-hyun's approach, on the other hand, preserves peace while holding out the prospect of eventual national reconciliation.

Cognizant of South Koreans' concerns, the Bush Administration has sought to project a softened image of its assertive approach toward Pyongyang. President Bush continues to proclaim that he is pursuing a "peaceful, diplomatic" solution in close consultation with concerned allies. But in recent weeks he has restrained his previously pointed rhetoric and wrapped his "no negotiation" hard-line stance in a new multilateral package. Bush now claims he is willing to pursue talks with Pyongyang in a multilateral roundtable centered on the permanent five members of the United Nations Security Council.

Bush's modified position, however, still clashes with Seoul's and Pyongyang's preferences. To begin with, the proposal is a non-starter since it is well known Pyongyang has no intention of engaging the United States in multilateral forum. Bush's new multilateral forum, after all, appears to be a modified and expanded version of former South Korean President Kim Yong-sam and President Clinton's joint offer to engage North Korea in "Four Party Talks" that included Beijing, but that also excluded Japan. Pyongyang participated only so long as it received substantial amounts of food aid from the United States. Ultimately, the talks yielded nothing enduring after Kim Dae-jung launched his "sunshine" diplomacy.

An equally significant shortcoming is the timing of this most recent U.S. proposal. Announced just as Seoul is undergoing a presidential transition, it preempts President Roh's ability to establish his new administration and to initiate his own policy regarding North Korea. In the eyes of all Koreans, North Korea is half of the Korean nation. Through Korean eyes, they should be allowed the initiative in formulating solutions to their national problems, not Washington. Bush's new "package" most likely will excite a negative reaction both in Pyongyang and Seoul.

Global Deterrence verse National Security

America remains the preeminent military power in Northeast Asia, primarily because of its strategic triad of long range ballistic missiles, bombers and submarines capable of delivering nuclear weapons anywhere in the world. But this military muscle no longer translates into an ability to shape South Korea's foreign and defense priorities and strategies. In addition to the reasons discussed earlier, Washington's ability to maintain its military forces in East Asia has become increasingly dependent on Seoul's and Japan's goodwill and "host nation support." Today, South Korea contributes \$490 million toward the \$2 billion price tag for US Forces Korea, and the

amount continues to rise.

Last fall's outburst of anti-American sentiment is only a symptom of the ailing US-South Korean security alliance. A U.S. Army court's not guilty verdict sparked the unprecedented venting of wrath at the U.S. military presence in South Korea. On June 13, 2002, a huge U.S. Army vehicle crushed to death two high school girls as it rolled along a narrow street north of Seoul. Under the US-South Korea Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), U.S. soldiers while performing their official duties are subject only to U.S. military law, not to Korean law. Korean authorities sought to retain authority over the two soldiers responsible for the vehicle's operation, but eventually released them to the U.S. Army per the SOFA. Subsequently they were charged with negligent homicide, but found not guilty.

But behind this spectacle one finds several long pending, yet to be resolved issues concerning the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea. For years Koreans have been displeased with the misconduct of some of the 37,000 American military personnel stationed in their homeland. But most Koreans, grateful for the United States intervention during the Korean War, deemed the offenses an unpleasant but necessary price for the United States highly desired military presence. But public displeasure with such incidents has increased as Seoul's suburbs expanded northward and encroached upon areas previously reserved for military exercises. The end of authoritarian rule and control of the press freed journalists to give increasing coverage to American military personnel's misconduct.

By the mid-1990s, public concern compelled bilateral negotiations to move the US Eight Army headquarters out of the center of Seoul to a location well south. Also, renegotiation of the SOFA agreement began. Public concern subsided when the US Army headquarters relinquished its golf course in exchange for being able to retain its huge compound in the heart of Seoul. Despite amendment in 1991, the SOFA negotiations dragged on for six years. The outcome left both sides uncomfortable. President Noh has promised to restart the SOFA negotiations. Already some in the U.S. military establishment in Seoul and at the Pentagon are asserting it would be impossible to match Korean's demands with the U.S. Army's needs. Eventually, they argue, U.S. military authorities would rather see U.S. forces withdrawn from the Korean Peninsula than submit to Korean legal authority.

South Koreans of all ages, for the first time since the beginning of the Korean War in 1950, are questioning the need, composition and deployment of U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula. This is a consequence of much more substantial and continuing trends that pre-date the death of the two school girls and reconsideration of the SOFA. In South Korea, respect for military officials has been in decline since South Korean generals sent combat troops to the southwest city of Kwangju in May 1980 to restore law and order. Unknown hundreds of civilians were brutally killed. South Korean youths blamed not only the then South Korean military ruler, and later president Chun Doo-hwan and his military colleagues, but also the commander of US Forces in Korea. That generation of angry young people over the past two decades educated their peers and younger colleagues to distrust and to challenge military authority, propelling Korea toward civilian rule and democratic government. Today many of these previously angry young people have assumed positions of political power and prestige in contemporary Korean society. They have refocused their distrust of military authority to U.S. military authorities.

President Kim Dae-jung was both a victim of Korea's previous military rulers and a beneficiary of the politically active youths who led Korea's democratization. In 1980, former South Korean military strong man Chun Doo-hwan imprisoned Kim and had him sentenced to death for allegedly inciting insurrection. Like his military predecessor, Chun claimed political dissent was traitorous because it weakened South Korea's ability to entice another North Korean invasion. Later, once saved by a political deal worked out with the Reagan Administration, Kim eventually resumed his quest for the presidency and he rallied around him the generation of young Koreans who harbored disdain for military authority and distrust of the United States.

President Noh Moo-hyun has benefited similarly. He has tempered his public criticism of the U.S. military and ceased calling for its withdrawal from the Korean Peninsula. But Noh has also told his supporters will renegotiate the SOFA, press for the relocation of U.S. military forces south of Seoul, and work to create conditions conducive to their eventual withdrawal from the Korean Peninsula.

President Noh can pursue these previously taboo and politically dangerous options because of the continuing, substantial shift in Koreans perceptions of North Korea and the United States. Sunshine diplomacy's hesitant progress toward reconciliation with South Korea and President Bush's "American first" approach to foreign policy has convinced many Koreans that the time is ripe to redefine the US-Korea alliance. Koreans fear Bush's confrontational approach to North Korea is compelling it to consider military action to defend itself. They fear the Korean Peninsula will become a battleground for Bush's militant posture and refusal to negotiate. Koreans fear nuclear warfare, but for most the possibility of a clash conventional weapons is even more likely, and equally if not more frightening. South Koreans appear to have concluded that Bush could become the "aggressor" and all Koreans, both North and South, the victims, in a second Korean War.

Further fostering this conviction is the sagging credibility of the US military command in Seoul. Last year the command of U.S. forces claimed in testimony to the U.S. Congress that North Korea's military might continued to grow, making its posture vis a vis Seoul increasingly threatening. South Koreans, given their increasing access to information via the internet and direct access to North Korea, promptly disagreed. They recalled that former Secretary Perry during the final years of the Clinton Administration had concluded that North Korea's war making capabilities were in decline. Its economy had collapsed, the shortage of food was a pervasive and continuing problem, and a critical shortage of fuel prevented the military from conducting substantial training exercises. Consequently, when the Bush Administration claimed last October that North Korea had launched a second clandestine nuclear weapons development program, Koreans reacted with skepticism.

Personalities and Policies

The personalities and personal preferences of George Bush and Noh Moo-hyun will significantly affect the US-South Korea relationship. The other considerations discussed above will naturally come into play, but the two president's relationship is certain to set the tone for their two nation's relationship.

Rather surprisingly, they have much in common. One might think that their shared traits might make for a constructive working relationship. Actually, the opposite could prove to be the case given the nature of their common traits. Both men are confident, assertive, strong willed individuals known for their candor. Their outspokenness has endeared them to their domestic audiences, but could be a continuing source of friction. Neither is an internationalist in outlook. Their experience prior to election to the presidency focused their attention on provincial, domestic issues, not foreign affairs. Bush, before his razor thin election to the presidency, was a businessman, baseball team owner and governor – all in the state of Texas. Granted, these experiences forged managerial skills, but they did little to prepare him to play a leading role in world affairs. Similarly, Noh will assume South Korea's presidency with no substantive experience, and limited knowledge, in international affairs. He spent almost his entire life in South Korea. He has never visited the United States and made only one trip to Japan. Instead, both are “populists” who prefer to put domestic concerns before international issues. They are motivated more by a keen sense of nationalism than sensitivity for global peace and harmony.

Given their nationalism and populism, both men can be expected to assert their respective preferences and priorities. Such tendencies are not conducive to compromise and a harmonious relationship, particularly when national interests are at stake.

Anti-American Sentiment

Further complicating President Noh's effort to repair relations with the Bush Administration was anti-Americanism. As press reports have suggested in recent weeks, South Korea's anti-American sentiment today appears to differ with that of previous decades. Last fall's rallies were peaceful, candle light vigils, a far cry from the violent demonstrations that filled the streets of Seoul, Pusan and other cities between 1981 and 1987. Radical students dominated the 1980's demonstrations, but the overwhelming majority of today's demonstrators belong to Korea's white collar and financially secure middle class.

But anti-Americanism is not new in Korea, and it has deep historical and emotional roots I experienced it up close and personally as an American diplomat in Korea during the democratization movement from 1981 to 1987. My duties required that I walk between pro and anti-government forces. I traveled to every corner of Korea to observe and report on campus demonstrations, labor and human rights rallies, political conventions and National Assembly debates. Tear gas blinded me, burned my face and made my stomach sick. Student demonstrators and ruling party politicians called me a spy, and the police labeled me *persona non grata*. I was at the airport when Kim Dae-jung returned to Seoul and spent the afternoon at his home. I was in the US Information Service library in Seoul on May 21, 1985 when seventy some students violently occupied the facility for three days. I was the American Consul in Pusan when one year later a smaller, but similarly violent group of radical students took over the consulate and held five Korean staff members hostage. When tens of thousands of demonstrators began to fill Pusan's streets on May 21, 1987, I met nightly with both radical student leaders and representatives of the mayor. Each year since I have made numerous trips to South Korea, and I lived there from the summer of 1998 to the summer of 1999.

Mistrust

From these harsh lessons I learned that most Koreans do not trust the United States government. Given the chance, they recite a litany of American outrages that dates from 1904. That year, President Teddy Roosevelt discarded the US-Korea Treaty of Friendship in favor of ending the Russo-Japanese War by sanctioning Japan's establishment of a protectorate over Korea. Roosevelt received the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts while Korea's king became a puppet of Japan's resident military governor. Two years later, Koreans are quick to recall, the future President Taft promised the United States would not block Japan's colonization of Korea if Tokyo did not venture into Washington's sphere of influence, the Philippines. In short, most Koreans, both in the northern and southern halves of the peninsula, point to the United States as having betrayed Korea and allowed Japanese colonization to end two thousand years of political independence.

The litany leaps to World War II and the Korean War. Korea's division is traced to another President Roosevelt. In Korea, he is seen as having betrayed Koreans' nearly half century quest for independence by agreeing to divide the country into two halves, a Russian occupied north and an American occupied south. The specifics are unimportant, at least to Koreans. Then the United States is said to be at least partially responsible for the Korean War. After all, they argue, the Truman Administration in 1949 enticed North Korea to invade the South by not including South Korea in Washington's defense perimeter.

South Koreans concede a deep debt of gratitude to the United States since 1950. They recall with sincere appreciation the death of 50,000 Americans during the Korean War. They also recognize the enduring benefit of nearly \$15,000,000,000 in economic and military aid the United States provided South Korea between 1953 and 1980 to rebuild and to defend their new found independence and freedom.

Nevertheless, Koreans resent constantly having Americans claim they have secured South Korea's defense and nurtured its "economic miracle." Such claims, while accurate, humiliate Koreans and ignore their considerable contributions. Korea's Korean War generation did not take issue with such claims. After all, many of these Koreans survived the war, pervasive hunger and disease because of Americans' generosity. But these same Koreans served in their nation's armed forces, and endured long, lonely years studying abroad to acquire new knowledge and skills needed to rebuild their society. They also submitted to harsh political repression at the hands of autocratic military rulers for the sake of national solidarity so as not to entice another North Korean invasion. This generation of Koreans eventually linked arms with their less patient children to demand Korea's democratization.

Frustrated Expectations

Koreans tend to idealized America. Like many people around the world, most Koreans first encounter America in school textbooks, movies and other forms of popular culture. They begin by learning about America's lofty political ideals, awesome wealth, sophisticated technology, glamorous fashion and entertaining songs and other visual images. Eventually they realize all of this is a fiction. Such an America does not exist.

Beyond the sheltered life of a high school student in Korea, in college and at work, Korea's youth learn the truth. Their teachers in college and business training programs are more than likely professionally successful Koreans who have experienced life in America. Also, tens of thousands of Koreans have also lived in America. Many migrated there hoping to find peace, prosperity and a better life for their children. Instead, they encountered a bewildering culture and language, prejudice, and long hours of menial labor for minimum pay. Many have retreated to their homeland.

These Koreans' encounter with the reality of America exposed them to the huge gap between the America's egalitarian ideals and harsh reality. The truth shocked them. They quickly realize their ideal America does not exist. Instead, it is a land of contrast, some extreme. They discovered that America's military might exists not to defend their homeland but to promote America's national interests, which its political ideals daily are sacrificed for political expediency and the dream of equality requires a constant struggle with the powerful and wealthy. It is a complex land of contrast where freedom and oppression, wealthy and poverty, political sacrifice and corruption, compassion and ruthlessness co-exist. Between America's ideals and its reality there is a huge gap. Realization of this truth breeds frustration with America and its government's policies, and ultimately feeds into anti-American sentiment.

Given this backdrop, it should not surprise anyone that President Bush's previous disregard for President Kim Dae-jung and continuing refusal to engage North Korea in diplomatic negotiations to resolve the intensifying second nuclear crisis is further fueling anti-American sentiment. South Koreans see Bush's assertive unilateralism as being insensitive to their concerns. Through their eyes, he is risking another Korean War to pursue his goal of disarming the so-called "axis of evil" of its weapons of mass destruction. Having lived for half a century in the shadow of Pyongyang's million-plus man army, thousands of tanks and long range artillery, plus ballistic missiles, the twenty million people living near Seoul do not see North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons as a greater threat. On the contrary, in their view, Bush's assertiveness and intransigence is the source of mounting tensions. More than Kim Jong Il, many South Koreans considered Bush the greater threat to peace.

Conclusion

President Noh must deal promptly and decisively with substantial challenges. Some see his lack of experience in international affairs to be a serious handicap. Others counter that this could prove to be an asset as he strives to formulate new solutions to half century old problems dictated by Korean's division. Working in his favor are his intelligence, sensitivity to the Korean people's desire for peace and commitment to national unification. Pyongyang, if in fact its leaders seek peace and national reconciliation, should respond constructively to Noh's efforts to promote progress toward these shared goals. Washington likewise would do well to assist South Korea's new president by allowing him time to assemble his new cabinet and acquire a broader understanding of international affairs. After all, President Bush entered the White House with similarly unimpressive credentials regarding world affairs. Tokyo and Beijing can help. While Beijing counsels Pyongyang to reverse its provocative lunge toward nuclear weapons, Tokyo can urge patience and caution on the part of the Bush Administration.

Furthermore, President Noh is not alone. He can call upon an impressive cadre of highly intelligent, well educated and widely traveled educators, politicians, technocrats and businessmen who fill the upper echelons of South Korean society. Finally, the people of South Korea owe their allegiance to their new president. For the sake of peace, continued prosperity and eventual national reconciliation, they must temper their expectations of their new president and demonstrate compassion and patience as he leads them, hopefully, away from the brink of a second Korean War.