

DOES IT WORK?
ADDRESSING ANTI-AMERICANISM IN SOUTH KOREA
THROUGH U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Capstone Project

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INTRODUCTION

Soft power, the ability to persuade without using force or coercion, has permeated policymaking since Joseph Nye coined the term in the 1980s. It makes sense that this comfortable conceptualization of power would take flight in a unipolar world. Without two opposing superpowers turning diplomacy into a near zero-sum game of “we versus they”, states could shift their diplomatic efforts to promoting various human values and warmer relations with whomever they choose. Further, with increased movement of people, goods, and ideas across international borders, diplomatic contact no longer solely relies on state-to-state relations—modern diplomacy encompasses entire societies engaging one another. Although not conceptually new¹, this novel branding of society-to-society engagement is public diplomacy. However, like the amiable yet difficult to grasp concept of soft power, public diplomacy suffers from definitional ambiguity. What is public diplomacy? How can it be measured? Most importantly, *does it work?*

This paper attempts to answer these three questions by analyzing U.S. public diplomacy efforts in South Korea. Although successful public diplomacy may be difficult to define or measure, the failure of U.S. public diplomacy is easily identified: significant anti-American sentiment. South Korea is an ideal case to apply this understanding of anti-American sentiment as public diplomacy failure because of the historical relationship between the two countries since the Korean War. This significant relationship, with both highs and lows, provides the quantitative and qualitative depth for meaningful research. There are three specific factors which make South Korea unique in gauging and unpacking U.S. public diplomacy:

¹ The Greek city-states were beseeching each other even before the Hellenistic era “Diplomacy through the Ages”, *Diplomacy in a Globalizing World*, 20.

1. South Korea has had diplomatic relations with the United States that contains instances of significant pro- and anti-American sentiment, which allows analysis of both successful and unsuccessful public diplomacy efforts.
2. The United States has attempted multiple types of public diplomacy to respond to anti-American sentiment and protests, which allows the different U.S. public diplomacy efforts to be assessed and measured.
3. There is an overarching rise of pro-American sentiment since the early-2000s, making South Korea a public diplomacy success. Understanding what contributed to this general upwards trend can inform strategies for U.S. public diplomacy writ large.

Ultimately, this paper posits that informational diplomacy is most effective in the long-term to build credibility, cultural diplomacy is underutilized in the short-term, and the current model of educational diplomacy has no measurable effect in preventing or mitigating anti-Americanism in South Korea. However, these conclusions all merit further research and should be refined and adapted into country-specific settings to best inform U.S. public diplomacy strategies in engaging anti-Americanism across the world.

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The quantitative data for this study includes the work of both U.S. and South Korean pollsters. Most of the U.S. data comes from the Pew Research Center. In their yearly U.S. global image survey, Pew asks the question: *Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable,*

*somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of the United States.*² The South Korean polling data is pulled from the Asan Institute, a South Korean think tank.³

The qualitative insights come from a variety of sources including South Korean scholars, Korean-American scholars, and multiple U.S. Foreign Service Officers, including several ambassadors who served in South Korea. Combined with the media reporting of the day, these qualitative sources provide a critical lens to gauge the different types of U.S. public diplomacy efforts and their effectiveness in the South Korean setting.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN SOUTH KOREA

According to the American scholar Paul Sharp's work on diplomatic understanding, there is a sociological assumption that the world is pluralistic and people desire at least some levels of separation. The purpose of diplomacy, therefore, is to allow these separate groups to interact.⁴ For the majority of nation-state history, these separate groups were guided by a sovereign or representatives thereof, revealing a top-down approach to the interaction between different communities. However, with the rise of democratic societies and global communications, the number of stakeholders in the international diplomatic forum has increased significantly. In addition to government-to-government relations, states are now increasingly prioritizing engagement of foreign audiences to pursue their interests. This institutionalizes the process of public diplomacy—the diplomatic relationship is no longer exclusively state-to-state, but also state-to-society.

² Kohut, *Opinion of the United States*. Pew Global 2013.

³ Kim, Lee, and Kang. *Measuring a Giant: South Korean Perceptions of the United States*, 2015.

⁴ Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*, 2009.

To tame this concept, Edmund A. Gullion, Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy coined and defined the term public diplomacy in 1966 as:

... the means by which governments, private groups and individuals influence the attitudes and opinions of other peoples and governments in such a way as to exercise influence on their foreign policy decisions.⁵

In 2013, Belgian and American public diplomacy scholars Jan Melissen and Bruce Gregory defined public diplomacy as:

An instrument used by states, associations of states, and some sub-state and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships; and influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values.⁶

This modern conception quickly spread outside of the United States and Western Europe as governments all across the world started their own public diplomacy programs in order to increase their soft power and keep up with the rapid global exchange of people, goods, and ideas. In South Korea, Kisuk Cho, a current professor at the Public Diplomacy Center at Ewha University, defined public diplomacy as:

A government's concerted diplomatic efforts with foreign publics through two way communications in order to enhance their soft power and pursue mutual interests between host and home countries.⁷

Although there are subtle differences in conceptualizing public diplomacy, the clear thread that binds them is state engagement of foreign populations to influence their opinions and attitudes for

⁵ "Definitions of Public Diplomacy", *The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy*.

⁶ "Public Diplomacy", *Diplomacy in a Globalizing World*, 193.

⁷ Cho, Kisuk "Public Diplomacy", 2014.

a specific goal or purpose. Therefore, anti-Americanism, the opinion and attitude that America is bad and should be opposed, in foreign populations is emblematic of public diplomacy failure. Conversely, higher favorability of the United States in foreign populations represents the first half of successful public diplomacy. The second half is influencing opinions and attitudes to achieve the specific goals as defined by the state. With this understanding of pro- and anti-American sentiment as an indicator for U.S. public diplomacy, success and failure can be measured through opinion polls and public demonstrations/protests. Pew and the Asan Institute combine to provide sufficient polling data to draw educated conclusions on the effectiveness of U.S. public diplomacy in South Korea. Although the Pew and Asan researchers used different methodologies to determine U.S. favorability ratings, both corroborate general trends of highs and lows. For convenience, Pew data takes precedence in this paper and is used unless otherwise noted.

For the practical assessment of public diplomacy, this paper uses the framework put forth by John Brown, a veteran of the U.S. Foreign Service and current professor at Georgetown University. He categorizes U.S. public diplomacy into three distinct categories: information, education, and culture.⁸ Brown asserts the purpose of informational diplomacy is to correct misinformation and add truth; the purpose of educational diplomacy is to foster educational exchanges to create mutual understanding; and the purpose of cultural diplomacy is the promotion of U.S. culture through programs like the arts. This paper uses Brown's pillars, but expands their definitions to create a more robust view of U.S. public diplomacy efforts in South Korea. Furthermore, this paper adjusts for the element of time: short- or long-term. Short-term public diplomacy will refer to the reactive engagement to specific shocks, while long-term public diplomacy refers to the gradual

⁸ Brown, *The Purposes and Cross-Purposes of American Diplomacy*, 2002.

engendering of positive relationships to create reservoirs of goodwill between the two nations.

Refer to the representation of this framework below:

| Short-Term Public Diplomacy (Crisis Management) | Long-Term Public Diplomacy (Consistent Gardening) |
|--|--|
| Informational Diplomacy | Informational Diplomacy |
| Educational Diplomacy | Educational Diplomacy |
| Cultural Diplomacy | Cultural Diplomacy |

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

South Korea provides the ideal case study for analyzing and evaluating U.S. public diplomacy because of its history. South Korea has had good reason to both trust and distrust the United States, starting with the Taft-Katsura Memorandum of 1905. U.S. Secretary of War William Howard Taft and Japanese Prime Minister Katsura Taro agreed that South Korea would be under Japan's sphere of influence, while the Philippines fell under the United States' sphere of influence. Dennis Halpin, a former American Consul in Busan (1989-1993) and now scholar at the US-Korea Institute, notes:

...the words "Taft-Katsura" will almost invariably invoke a long discourse from Korean professors and students on America's betrayal of Korea in exchange for Japanese recognition of U.S. interests in the Philippines.⁹

This tacit approval of Japanese colonization implanted doubt into the Korean consciousness about U.S. intentions in East Asia. This doubt was further exacerbated with the blunders associated with

⁹ Halpin, "Teddy Roosevelt and the Taft-Katsura Agreement", 2013.

the 1943 Cairo Declaration in which the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Republic of China acknowledged the enslavement of the Korean people and that Korea would be free and independent in due course.¹⁰ However, the Korean peninsula was not given freedom or independence after World War II, rather it was partitioned into two separate entities under the influence of the United States and the Soviet Union that would soon clash in civil war. Again, the United States is seen to be going back on its promises. The lesson learned for many Koreans was that the United States cannot be fully trusted. And yet, South Korea, wading through this doubt and distrust, came to depend on the United States for its security for the majority of its modern history.

These historical grievances help explain the 100,000 South Korean citizens who mobilized in anti-American protests in 2002 and the 46% favorability rating of the United States, one of the lowest outside of the Middle East, in 2003.¹¹ Yet in 2014, South Korea boasted an 82% favorability rating of the United States, higher than traditional allies like France and the United Kingdom.¹² This variance in favorability combined with heightened sensitivity to the United States and its initiatives provides an apt historical case to analyze U.S. public diplomacy and measure its effectiveness.

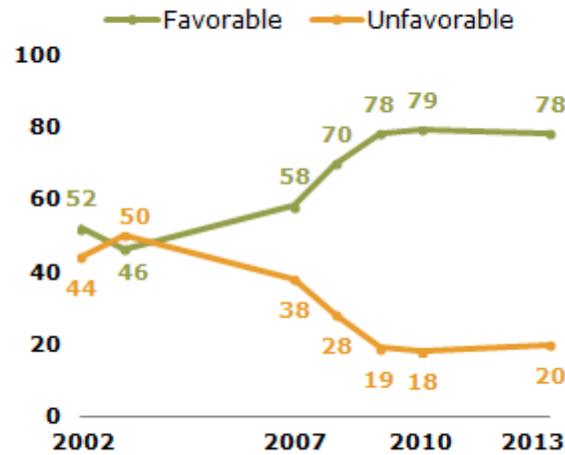
UNDERSTANDING ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT IN SOUTH KOREA

¹⁰ Early, "Cairo Communiqué." Accessed from the National Diet Library of Japan, 2003.

¹¹ Fisher, "Anti-American Countries Can Become Pro-American. Here's How South Korea Did It." *The Washington Post*, May 7, 2013.

¹² Kohut, *Opinion of the United States*. Pew Global 2013.

U.S. Favorability in South Korea



PEW RESEARCH CENTER.

The relationship between South Korea and the United States is mired between two fears: the U.S. fear of entanglement abroad and the South Korean fear of security abandonment. However, because of common threats, like a belligerent and nuclear North Korea, and common values, like open and free markets, the two distant countries have shared a strong, committed, and pragmatic relationship since the end of the Korean War. A pillar of this security alliance has been the constant presence of U.S. troops in South Korea. Even today, much to the chagrin of North Korea, there are over 28,000 U.S. military personnel in South Korea that participate in regular drills with their South Korean counterparts. This very visible relationship, including a U.S. military base in the heart of metropolitan Seoul and a societal obsession with English, has invited anti-American sentiment ranging from benign indifference to thousands of protesters shutting down parts of Seoul.

Korean scholars have identified two distinct types of anti-Americanism: *ban-mi* and *hyom-mi*.¹³ *Ban-mi* literally means oppose America and *hyom-mi* literally means loath America. *Ban-mi* is

¹³ “Between Banmi (Anti-Americanism) and Sungmi (Worship of the United States)”, *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States: Changing Dynamics*, 139.

cited as a general sentiment that the United States does not work with South Korea, whereas *hyom-mi* carries over into the United States actively acting against South Korea. *Hyom-mi* has called for and justified attacks on Americans and American compounds because the United States constrains Korean nationalism and attacks Korean identity. For this paper, understanding that *ban-mi* can lead to *hyom-mi* is important; widespread *hyom-mi* is not only public diplomacy failure, but could lead to a complete breakdown of diplomatic relations. Kim Ki-jong, the man responsible for the knife attack on U.S. Ambassador Mark Lippert on May 5, 2015, represents a type of *hyom-mi* activism.¹⁴

Current scholarship raises two distinct, but perhaps not exclusive, root causes of anti-American sentiment: nationalism and democratization. This paper also puts forth a third variable in the anti-American calculus: North Korea.

Defensive nationalism against hegemonic power

Korean scholar Gi Wook Shin asserts that Korean nationalism is inherently antagonistic to hegemonic forces including, but not limited to, the United States.¹⁵ Hegemonic powers force Korea to take a skewed view of Sharp's diplomatic understanding—instead of finding ways to be separate and communicate, the desire to be separate intensifies which exacerbates ethnic or cultural cleavages. This narrative explains anti-Americanism as fighting against the newest form of hegemony. Prior to the United States was Japan, which had its own lasting anti-Japanese sentiment since the early 20th Century. This theory also supports the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment, perhaps

¹⁴ He also was a participant in burning American flags outside of the U.S. Embassy in Seoul in the 1980s. "South Korea Jails Man for Stabbing US Ambassador Mark Lippert", *BBC News*, Sep 11, 2015.

¹⁵ Shin, Gi Wook. *Ethnic Nationalism in South Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 2006.

indicating that South Koreans are starting to perceive China as the new hegemon threatening Korean national identity. In this view, there is nothing unique about the United States that has fueled anti-American sentiment; rather the United States is merely the latest iteration of the oppressive imperial archetype. American sociologist Doug McAdam agrees with this understanding, stating that “at the heart of the current antipathy to the United States is deep nationalist resentment at what is perceived to be the unequal nature of U.S.-South Korea Relations.”¹⁶ However, this theory also implies that anti-Americanism will always be present so long as the United States remains a hegemon-level player in global affairs. This severely constricts what the United States can do to eliminate anti-American sentiment in South Korea without sacrificing its current advantages.

Democratic and civil society growth

Korean-American scholar Katharine Moon believes anti-American sentiment flourished because of the democratization of South Korea and the rise of civil society. She emphasizes that as South Korea democratized, power was diffused from the military dictatorships to a national democratic government, then even further to local democratic institutions. These civil society organizations (CSOs), regardless of whether they were directly involved in governance, provided conduits of safe expression. She argues that anti-Americanism is not a monolith of anti-American sentiment, but rather a combination of localized issues within South Korea, such as environmental protection and women’s rights, that mobilized in Seoul under the umbrella of anti-American protests. This explains why major spikes of anti-American demonstrations are not led by government parties, but rather by CSOs: religious organizations, environmental groups, and human rights groups. It

¹⁶ Moon, *Protesting America: Democracy and the U.S.-Korea Alliance*, 2012

remains to be seen if anti-Americanism will continue to be the safest and lowest common denominator for these CSOs in the future.

The role of North Korea in anti-American sentiment

North Korea is a glaring omission in the current scholarship of understanding anti-American sentiment in South Korea. The original justification for the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea is to deter attacks and aggression from a more militarized North Korea. This existential threat has morphed into a nuclear threat, which keeps the United States continually involved in the Korean peninsula. Furthermore, perceptions of North Korea serve as a foil to perceptions of the United States. During the peak of South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's rapprochement campaign with North Korea, the United States suffered from its highest bouts of anti-Americanism. Likewise, the North Korean sinking of the *Cheonan* and shelling of Yeonpyeong island in 2010, coincided with a 79% favorability rating of the United States. This suggests that U.S. favorability is at least partly a function of North Korean belligerence. The more South Koreans perceive North Korea as a threat, the more likely South Koreans are to have a favorable opinion of the United States. However, this is not a clear binary, as the attacks on Ambassador Lippert occurred when favorability of the United States in South Korea was near record highs.

For the sake of this paper, there is no competition between these three root causes of anti-American sentiment in South Korea. Effective U.S. public diplomacy must address all hypothesized roots of anti-American sentiment as any one can sour the relationship between South Korea and the United States.

CASES OF ANTI-AMERICANISM IN SOUTH KOREA

Anti-American sentiment in South Korea can be divided into two periods: pre-democratic South Korea (up to 1988) and democratic South Korea (which begins in 1988). This paper focuses on democratic South Korea on the assumption that a military dictatorship heavily dependent on U.S. aid did not allow for nor accept visible levels of anti-American sentiment. This makes the noticeable exceptions all the more powerful: the unorganized anti-American protests in the mid-1980s sparked by the Gwangju (alternatively, Kwangju) Massacre in 1980. This incident is the foundation of a public anti-American consciousness in South Korea and therefore merits expounding.

President Park Chung-hee, a military dictator, was assassinated in the fall of 1979 after ruling for eighteen consecutive years. His death caused a brief power vacuum which loosened the controls on free speech and democratic activism. However, this vacuum was quickly filled by another military dictator, Chun Doo-hwan, in December of 1979. In order to consolidate power and clamp down on these democratic movements, President Chun imposed martial law in various parts of the country. Democratic yearning and state control came to a head in the city of Gwangju in March of 1980, which led to clashes between the military and protestors causing the deaths of hundreds of civilians. This planted the modern seeds of anti-Americanism in South Korea, as many accused the United States of being complicit in the assassination of President Park Chung-hee, the quick legitimization of Chun Doo-hwan, and the authorization to use force against protestors in Gwangju. These accusations picked up enough momentum to cause the U.S. embassy in Seoul to conduct an official investigation and release a public response to address the U.S. role during this transition

period.¹⁷ However, the accusations had already made their way into the mindset of the South Koreans, affirming the strong pre-existing notion that Americans cannot be trusted. This legacy of Gwangju would continue to haunt the United States through the 386-Generation (people born in the 1960s, became politically conscious in the 1980s, and were in their 30s by the 1990s) who led many of the liberal and counter-establishment ideas like anti-Americanism that flourished in the early 1990s.

The table below provides a brief summary of the remaining major anti-American protests in South Korea. Although minor protests have occurred on a regular basis, these twelve necessitated the greatest official responses by the U.S. Embassy and/or the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK). The cases in bold, the Highway 56 Incident and the 2008 U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA)/U.S. beef protests, will be the focus for the remainder of this paper.

| Date | Event | Reason | U.S Favorability rating |
|-------------|------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 1980 | Gwangju Massacre | The U.S. is suspected of having approved South Korean Dictator Chun Doo-hwan's brutal oppression of student activists in the city of Gwangju. | n/a |
| 1984-86 | Seoul Protests | The damaging and/or takeovers of U.S. information centers by <i>hyom-mi</i> inspired students; regular flag burnings in front of the U.S. Embassy. | n/a |
| 1988 | Seoul Olympics | The U.S. Olympic team caught inebriated in public spaces; negative U.S. press coverage of South Korea. | n/a |

¹⁷ <http://seoul.usembassy.gov/backgrounder.html>

| | | | |
|-------------|------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 1999 | No Gun Ri Incident | Korean and U.S. press media exposé about the possible indiscriminate shooting of Korean civilians at the onset of the Korean War. | 58% |
| 2000 | Agent Orange | Korean press coverage about the South Korean veterans of the Vietnam War exposed to Agent Orange sprayed by the United States. | 58% |
| 2000 | Formaldehyde Dumping | Korean environmental group's exposé about the dumping of Formaldehyde by a USFK mortician into a civilian water source in Seoul. | 58% |
| 2000 | Koon-ni Bombing incident | The accidental discharge of missiles from a USFK plane in the countryside which alarmed local residents. | 58% |
| 2002 | Winter Olympics | The disqualification of a Korean speed-skater with fault attributed to U.S. speed-skater Apollo Ohno. | 52% |
| 2002 | Highway 56 Incident | The accidental deaths of two South Korean middle school girls by a U.S. tank leading to extensive protests, over 100,000 gather in Seoul. | 52% (46% in 2003) |
| 2005 | MacArthur Statue incident | 4,000 protesters led by trade and teacher unions attempt to take down a statue of Gen. Douglas MacArthur in Incheon. ¹⁸ | n/a |
| 2008 | KORUS FTA / U.S. Beef | Over 100,000 gather to protest the import of U.S. beef products in fear of mad cow disease.¹⁹ | 70% |

¹⁸ Demick, "MacArthur back in the Heat of Battle", *Los Angeles Times*, Sept 15, 2005.

¹⁹ "South Korean Protests over U.S. Beef", *Boston Globe*, June 2, 2008.

| | | | |
|------|--------------|---|-----|
| 2011 | Agent Orange | Accusations of USFK dumping barrels of Agent Orange in South Korea. | n/a |
|------|--------------|---|-----|

** Catalogued in David Straub's: *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea*.

Those not mentioned in his book are given separate footnote citations.

ANTI-AMERICANISM IN SOUTH KOREA

REVEALING FAILURE IN LONG-TERM U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The United States has enjoyed a longstanding diplomatic presence in South Korea since the 1950s with opportunities to build, learn, and apply lessons from Vietnam and the Cold War. The fact that anti-Americanism came mostly as a surprise to U.S. Foreign Service Officers and quickly gathered widespread support among the South Korean people reveals the failure of long-term public diplomacy. Simply put, the United States was not engaged with the Korean people and fell victim to massive protests and demonstrations.

The largest of these protests was the Highway 56 Incident (alternatively, the Yangju Highway Incident), which resulted in the unintentional deaths of two South Korean middle school girls. During a military operation, two U.S. soldiers in a tank hit the girls who were on a closed-off South Korean highway. The soldiers were exempt from a South Korean trial (as per the U.S.-ROK Status of Forces Agreement), which caused massive protests all throughout South Korea. This incident led to over 100,000 protestors coming to Seoul, members of religious CSOs going on very public hunger strikes, attacks on U.S. uniformed personnel, all of which led then-U.S. Ambassador Thomas Hubbard to state in *Ambassadors' Memoir* that he “spent much of my tour in Seoul dealing with the palpable downturn in public support for U.S. policies.”²⁰

²⁰ Hubbard, 181.

Stepping away from U.S. military issues were the string of protests against U.S. beef and the KORUS FTA. Due to erroneous media reporting and mobilization from various labor unions, South Koreans were led to believe that the KORUS FTA was an unfair agreement between the United States and South Korea, and the beef that would be imported from the United States was of inferior quality and contaminated with mad cow disease. Over the course of three months, more than 100,000 people took to the streets in protest which were not always without violence.²¹ This issue blindsided the U.S. embassy in Seoul and forced the embassy to put out a fact sheet attempting to dispel the widespread rumors circulating among the South Korean public which answered questions such as, “Do Americans eat U.S. beef?”²²

These two examples provide both security-related and economic targets of anti-Americanism in South Korea. To fully understand these two protests as long-term public diplomacy failure, the causes and build-up that led to this outburst of anti-Americanism must first be identified.

Nationalist causes

The austerity measures imposed by the IMF in response to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis threatened the national identity of South Korea. Having seen double digit economic growth until that point, the South Korean public felt their country’s economic meltdown was due mainly to the U.S. unwillingness to help (bail out) its ally in order to save its own money.²³ Adding to this imperialist narrative was the policy divergence between Kim Dae-jung and George W. Bush vis-

²¹ Choe, "Beef Protest Turns Violent in South Korea." *The New York Times*, June 29, 2008.

²² "Beef & BSE Issues." *Seoul, Korea - Embassy of the United States*, June 12, 2008.

²³ “Unilateralism and Its Discontents”, *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States: Changing Dynamics*, 74.

à-vis North Korea. Kim was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 2000 for his rapprochement with North Korea through his Sunshine Policy, while then-President Bush added North Korea to his axis of evil list in 2002. These policy cleavages complicated possible response options against the North Korean Regime and slowed down the progress of negotiations. The Rand Corporation's 2005 technical report on U.S.-South Korea relations notes:

Many [Koreans] saw the emphases on verifiability of new agreements and improved implementation of existing ones as implicit criticism of South Korea's own approach and suspected that slowing down North-South progress was the real U.S. intention.²⁴

Although anecdotal, a good example of this growing anti-American sentiment is evidenced in a 2001 South Korean children's poll that identified North Korea ahead of the United States as the friendliest country to South Korea.²⁵

This national identity was threatened again with the negotiation and ratification of the KORUS FTA agreement in 2008. South Koreans felt this agreement advantaged the United States and South Korea was not treated as an equal partner. This sense of disenfranchisement brought the historical doubt and distrust back to the fore which facilitated the propagation of rumors in South Korean society. Combined with lifting the ban of U.S. beef, which was still believed to cause mad cow disease, South Koreans felt threatened and bullied by a powerful hegemon to accept an inferior product. U.S. public diplomacy efforts in South Korea were not able to exorcise these notions that the United States is a dishonest and self-interested broker that does not care for South Korea.

Democratization/CSO causes

²⁴ Larsen, *Ambivalent Allies? A Study of South Korean Attitudes Toward the U.S.*, 32.

²⁵ Moon, 45.

In the 2002 Winter Olympics, South Korea was disqualified from a men's skating event due to a controversial call by the referee. Although this event was politically unrelated, it affirmed the victimization mentality of South Korea. This permeated throughout the South Korean social consciousness, spreading to schools, workplaces, and the internet. Ambassador Hubbard recounts an episode in which he is reprimanded by students from South Korea's National Defense University for suggesting to these students that talking about sports was not substantive.²⁶ Furthermore, the concerns about Agent Orange and formaldehyde dumping in 2000 were championed by environmental groups, which allowed CSOs to get experience in organizing mass protests against the United States. This explains why the protests were more effective the second time around.

2008 represented the power of labor and trade unions in South Korea to mobilize not only against the United States, but also the Lee Myung-bak administration. Groups that were relatively unaffected by the KORUS FTA and U.S. beef imports, like the Korean Metal Workers' Union and the Catholic Priests' Association for Justice took part in these protests. This was another opportunity for these CSOs to grow, expand their reach, and demonstrate their influence. This not only suggests anti-American sentiment is the lowest common denominator between these groups, but also an understanding among CSOs that this is a safe opportunity to stage a protest. For example, CSOs have not yet actively participated in protests against China. In 2011, a little more than 100 South Koreans protested the murder of a South Korean coast guard officer by a Chinese fisherman.²⁷ This suggests the spaces between two democratic countries should be monitored more carefully as they are more prone to civil society engagement for negative outcomes. It is the

²⁶ Hubbard, 184.

²⁷ "China 'Regrets' S. Korean Coast Guard Death." *VOA*, December 12, 2011.

responsibility of U.S. public diplomacy to keep the public pulse and steer democratic spaces and civil society engagement towards more positive opportunities.

North Korea causes

North Korea was not directly involved in either of these situations, but both 2002 and 2008 are calm periods of inter-Korean relations. The 2002 protests occurred during President Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy and the 2008 protests occurred while North Korea and the United States were actively working towards an agreement of denuclearization. In both cases, North Korea was not a chief security concern for the South Korea people, which created fertile grounds for anti-American protests.

Given these causes for conflict, to what degree was the U.S. public diplomacy response effective in addressing or mitigating this anti-American sentiment? Brown's three pillars of public diplomacy can provide a framework for some answers.

Informational diplomacy: The anti-American protests revealed a lack of transparency between the United States and Korean society. Specifically, the Korean public did not know how the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) was negotiated or signed, nor did they know the intricacies of the KORUS FTA. The relationship between the local media in South Korea and the U.S. embassy was also weak, allowing the media to create misleading narratives with impunity. Although the U.S. embassy distributed information to dispel baseless rumors, the facts of the stories did not matter as the U.S. embassy lacked the credibility to fight this misinformation effectively. Moreover, there was no regular engagement between South Korean CSOs and the U.S. embassy, nor did the United

States actively seek to decouple itself from its negative historical reputation gleaned from the 1997 IMF Crisis and 2003 case of mad cow disease. The lack of a consistent dialogue prevented the United States from maintaining a positive reputation, allowing suspicion to simmer and eventually boil over. Constant communication would have assisted in diagnosing problems sooner and preparing policy responses while the issues were still at manageable sizes. The credibility of the United States would also increase if issues were faced head-on as they arose, instead of being backed into a corner and asked to account for a wholesale list of grievances by the Korean public.

Educational diplomacy: Aside from the fact that 49,046 South Korean students were studying in the United States in 2002²⁸, there is not enough data analyzing the effects of educational exchanges and its effect on curbing anti-Americanism. If anything, the president-elect in 2003, Roh Moo-hyun, was proud of having never visited the United States. Even in 2008, when the number of South Koreans studying in the United states rose to 75,065 students²⁹, there was no discernable effect that education in the United States had prevented anti-American protests in South Korea. This could indicate that the United States was targeting the wrong populations in South Korea with educational diplomacy, or there was no measurable long-term effect. The Rand report mentions the Fulbright exchange program, but falls short of linking the Fulbright Program and the advancement U.S. goals in South Korea.³⁰ This is a great opportunity for rigorous econometric research studying the relationship between pro-U.S. sentiment and whether or not one has studied in the United States to better visualize the causal relationship between studying in the United States and supporting the United States.

²⁸ "Anti-Americanism, Korean Style", *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States: Changing Dynamics*, 221.

²⁹ "International Students in the United States." *Institute of International Education*, 2015.

³⁰ Larsen, 123.

Cultural diplomacy: Although U.S. cultural capital (value of western education, liberal values, and Christianity) enjoyed high levels of popularity in South Korea, there was no specific purpose for which it was used. South Korean scholar Hahm Chaibong also wonders, “What are the factors that lead South Koreans to become Anti-American despite the overwhelming ‘pro-American’ direction in which their society seems to be heading?”³¹ Cultural public diplomacy seems to be working, but it is unclear what the purpose of it is.

Overall diagnosis: There was a critical lack of substance in informational diplomacy, while educational and cultural diplomacy lacked direction and purpose. The informational diplomacy hints to a greater concern of U.S. public diplomacy efforts: not penetrating into the South Korean societal, nationalist narrative. Because there was no two-way dialogue between the U.S. embassy and South Korean society, it was difficult to predict the scale of anti-American demonstrations, and even more difficult to gain footing in the already spinning anti-American narrative. Diplomacy scholar G.R. Berridge astutely notes that “making sure that foreign correspondents see things from the ‘correct perspective’ is particularly important.”³² This much is noted by a Congressional Research Service Report in 2003, which notes the need for “U.S. public diplomacy to focus on reaching out to Korean interest groups and new online news sources.”³³ These initiatives all hinge on building U.S. credibility, which should be the main goal of long-term U.S. public diplomacy in South Korea.

³¹ “Anti-Americanism, Korean Style”, 224.

³² Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, 2015, 203.

³³ Manyin, *South Korean Politics and Rising “Anti-Americanism”: Implications for U.S. Policy Toward North Korea*, 2003, 13.

REVEALING FAILURE IN SHORT-TERM U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Crisis management is the ideal time to observe short-term public diplomacy because a crisis often requires immediate action. Therefore, public engagement by the U.S. embassy in the immediate aftermath of anti-American protests reveals which public diplomacy initiatives the United States chose to enact. This paper reveals the United States was woefully underprepared; although there were many reactive measures to these anti-American protests in 2002 and 2008, there was no coherent response structure or strategy.

The following list represents the collection of official responses from the U.S. Embassy and USFK immediately after the Highway 56 Incident. These responses are divided into 2 sections: World Cup and post-World Cup. South Korean society did not drum up massive protests until after the World Cup ended, but that did not preclude U.S. reactions from happening immediately after the incident occurred. All actions are taken from the point of view of the U.S. public diplomacy, regardless of moral or legal judgments.

2002 World Cup:

- Expressions of regret by U.S. Ambassador and Commander of USFK
- Initial solatium (initial compensation) by the U.S. government to compensate victims' families
- Candlelit vigil by USFK
- Responses to Korean media inquiry
- Private funds raised by USFK for families
- Monument for accident planned by the U.S. government

2002 post-World Cup:

- United States rejects calls to renegotiate the SOFA
- USFK detains 2 South Korean reporters, fined \$10,000 by a human rights committee
- White House does not respond to calls for an apology from South Korean CSOs
- Full compensation paid by the U.S. government to the victims' families
- USFK refuses to waive jurisdiction for U.S. soldiers (as per U.S.-ROK SOFA)

During the 2008 KORUS FTA/U.S. beef protests, the United States mounted an information campaign emphasizing the scientific evidence for the safety of U.S. beef. Ultimately, this was not enough to assuage the South Korean public. The United States Trade Representative placated South Korean concerns by agreeing to voluntarily restrict U.S. beef exports into South Korea.³⁴ Again, there was no clear protocol or strategy to deal with this rising anti-American sentiment—the damage to U.S. agricultural products have been done. Even as of 2012, U.S. beef imports into South Korea are subject to intense yet haphazard scrutiny.³⁵

In evaluating U.S. actions and their failure to effectively remedy the anti-American narrative, more insight can be gleaned from the three theoretical pillars of public diplomacy.

Informational diplomacy: There was an immediate reaction to begin correcting malicious rumors that were spreading about the United States through both traditional media (e.g. press) and new media (e.g. internet, social media). For example, to fight misinformation that the United States was bullying South Korea through the SOFA, the U.S. embassy released a questions guide on their

³⁴ Choe, "South Korea and U.S. Reach Deal on Beef Imports." *The New York Times*, June 21, 2008.

³⁵ "South Korea Won't Halt U.S. Beef Imports." *United Press International*, April 29, 2012.

website that explained the SOFA agreement.³⁶ However, the United States lacked the relationships and institutional credibility for this information to make a difference.

In regards to the 2008 KORUS FTA/U.S. beef protests, then-Ambassador Alexander Vershbow recalls:

My efforts to convince people to look at ‘the facts and science of U.S. beef’ fell on deaf ears, with some twisted media accounts even claiming that I had insulted the scientifically well-educated Korean people.³⁷

In crisis management, the lack of long-term credibility hurt U.S. efforts for short-term informational diplomacy and rendered them almost ineffectual.

Educational diplomacy: With no major changes in reacting to the 2002 anti-American protests or the 2008 KORUS FTA/U.S. beef protests, educational diplomacy did not make a short-term response. This does not mean to suggest that nothing could be done in the realm of educational diplomacy. More scholarships could have been offered to for agricultural science programs or culinary arts programs for South Korean students or the alumni of U.S. exchange programs like the Fulbright Program could have been mobilized to counter misinformation. However, none of these initiatives were implemented.

Cultural diplomacy: In crisis management, cultural diplomacy must be expanded to include the adoption of local practices by the United States and its embassies in creating or framing a public response. If public diplomacy is to be a two-way channel, cultural exchange must reflect both sides:

³⁶ “The June 13 Accident – Q’s and A’s”, *Embassy of the United States – Seoul, Korea*.

³⁷ Vershbow, 212.

the host country must also see their culture taking effect in the foreign presence. This symbolizes the parity and respect between the two nations. The most successful strategies in mitigating anti-Americanism took South Korean culture into account in formulating a response. The initial U.S. reactions included apologies and the payment of a solatium are in accordance with Korean judicial culture. These wise reactions undoubtedly contributed to the calming of tensions during the World Cup period. For the 2008 anti-American protests against KORUS FTA/U.S. beef, the embassy could have hosted a Korean banquet featuring U.S. beef. The framing of objectives and the optics of a response are critical to effective cultural diplomacy. Therefore, aside from having cultural exchanges like art and music, simple elements of cultural respect and adherence makes a big difference, even if the actual substantive response remains the same.

Overall diagnosis and recommendations: In short-term public diplomacy, the United States failed to use culturally appropriate ways to couch their policy responses. Being more accepting of South Korean culture and their cultural methods (a native protocol, if you will) is critical to smart public diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy goes hand-in-hand with establishing credible informational diplomacy, making the truth easier to trust and accept. The defensive and abrasive stance of the United States regarding the Highway 56 Incident and the cold scientific responses to concerns about U.S. beef undoubtedly fanned the flames of anti-American sentiment. There was no attempt to package the truth in a more digestible form, which is necessary to engage vast foreign publics.

MACRO-LEVEL TRENDS IN ANTI-AMERICANISM IN SOUTH KOREA

Although there was mismanagement of U.S. public diplomacy efforts in South Korea, there is a clear rebound of pro-American sentiment since 2002, indicating improvement over time. This

could be a general trend of changing perceptions of America, but more likely reflects concerns about the increased volatility of the North Korean regime. As North Korea acts in an increasingly aggressive and belligerent manner, U.S. favorability in South Korea should continue to rise and remain quite high. Furthermore, even during the height of anti-American sentiment, the effects of anti-American sentiment were negligible on the political relationship between the two countries. Listed below are the approval rates of the United States next to major accomplishments of the U.S.-South Korea partnership.

| Years | U.S. favorability rate | Major joint accomplishments |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| 2000 – 2002 | 52% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of SOFA to keep U.S. troops in South Korea |
| 2003 – 2005 | 46% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major Korean support for U.S. in Iraq, a commitment of 30,000 Korean troops. • 6-Party Talks on North Korea Nuclear Issues • South Korea and the U.S. renew the Special Measures Agreement which revised the U.S.-ROK Alliance cost sharing measures |
| 2006 – 2008 | 70% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visa Waiver Travel Program between the U.S. and South Korea • South Korea ratifies Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. |
| 2008 – 2010 | 79% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President Obama and President Lee react to North Korean provocations through joint military exercises • South Korea and the U.S. renew the Special Measures Agreement which revised the U.S.-ROK Alliance cost sharing measures |
| 2011 – 2013 | 78% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Korea hosts 2012 Nuclear Security Summit at U.S. behest |

- U.S. ratifies FTA with South Korea
- President Obama and President Park announce a global partnership for the U.S. and South Korea

Therefore, this begs the question, does anti-Americanism matter? Although anti-Americanism is ostensibly a failure of public diplomacy, if there is no measurable adverse effect, does the government need to respond? Analysis from the Center for Strategic and International Studies states: yes, anti-Americanism matters.³⁸ One only needs to point to the 2015 knife attack on Ambassador Lippert as a case in which anti-Americanism had dangerous implications. Further, as the U.S.-South Korea relationship continues to grow into a global partnership, the two countries will increasingly become intertwined and dependent on each other for support. Any cleavages between the two will only hamper this partnership

Another trend informed by these anti-American experiences is the adoption of social media at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul. South Korean researcher Hochang Shin praised Ambassador Kathleen Stephens' (2009-2011) ability use new media platforms like blogs, internet cafes, and other social networking sites to humanize herself and engage different areas of Korean society. Moreover, she made an effort to interact with Koreans in different localities, reaching out beyond the traditional power centers in Seoul.³⁹ Because of her success, every U.S. ambassador since 2011 has maintained an extensive social media presence and focused on appealing to and establishing connections with the entirety of Korean society, not just the metropolitan power brokers.

³⁸ Mitchell, *Strategy and Sentiment: South Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.-ROK Alliance*, 2004.

³⁹ Shin, *The US Embassy's Public Diplomacy Activities in Korea and the Image of the U.S. in Korea's News Media*, 2014.

The most recent and notable humanization of U.S. public diplomacy is Ambassador Lippert's blog that detailed the birth of his son in South Korea. In a masterful move of personal diplomacy, Ambassador Lippert outlines the reasons as to why elected to give his son a Korean name.⁴⁰ The comments in the blog reveal the positive engagement and sentiment it stirred in online communities of South Korean. These types of consistent and frequent engagement show a marked improvement in seeking to understand South Korean society as a whole.

All these trends contributed to the growth of U.S. favorability in South Korea, currently almost double what it was in 2002. However, there are still calls for "greater attention on formalizing and upgrading public affairs training and on embassy and USFK outreach to South Korean society."⁴¹ Simply put, smart public diplomacy works and has benefits that go beyond preventing anti-American protests. Therefore, public diplomacy should always be scrutinized and improved.

IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY WRIT LARGE

There are still a few issues within the U.S.-South Korea relationship that have the potential to reignite anti-American protests. The first is the continued U.S. military presence on the peninsula, which has proven to be fertile grounds for anti-Americanism, especially for environmental and human rights groups. Secondly, South Koreans see the danger of getting caught between a great power struggle between the United States and China. If forced to choose a side, some may choose China. Given that China is less tolerant of public protests, more groups may opt to protest where it is safe: in front of the U.S. embassy. Lastly, there is the issue of South Korea-Japan relations,

⁴⁰ The full entry can be found at: <http://lippertsinkorea.blogspot.com/2015/01/sejuns-arrival.html>

⁴¹ Mitchell, *Strategy and Sentiment: South Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.-ROK Alliance*, 2004, 115.

which has been trending down while the South Korea-United States relationship has been trending up.⁴² U.S. pushes for better relations between the two may stir up the nationalist root of anti-American by conflating anti-America with anti-Japan. It should be noted that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been polled at times to have lower favorability than Kim Jong-un.⁴³ Ultimately, South Korea will most likely remain a critical partner for the United States in the world and therefore merits constant public diplomacy engagement, one that can address the multiple roots of anti-Americanism and mitigate them before they become unwieldy.

An immediate regional policy implication for this understanding of U.S. public diplomacy is Japan. Japan also hosts U.S. forces and had had a recent anti-American awakening in Okinawa protesting against the U.S. military bases. Using this framework of public diplomacy – establishing credibility, couching responses in culturally appropriate ways, and engaging localities away from traditional centers of power could stem anti-Americanism in Japan before it comes to a boil.

Lastly, educational diplomacy did not seem to have a measurable effect in U.S. public diplomacy. This merits further study on the purpose of educational diplomacy and a more rigorous analysis on whether or not there are net positive effects that can be measured. Although positive sentiments may be created, public diplomacy is not effective if these sentiments cannot be used to meet a stated end or goal. As raised by the Roh Moo-hyun case, perhaps educational diplomacy is targeting the wrong people within foreign populations. These questions all merit further study.

CONCLUSION

⁴² “South Koreans and Their Neighbors”, *Asan Poll*, 2015

⁴³ Gale, “In Seoul, Kim Jong Un Preferred to Shinzo Abe.” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 4, 2014.

This paper seeks to provide the first step to harden the soft power of U.S. public diplomacy. Going back to the original question posed in this paper, does public diplomacy work? The answer is yes. Although this study risks being only applicable to South Korea, public diplomacy efforts have worked to quell anti-American demonstrations and raised the overall U.S. favorability rate beyond what it is even within the United States. However, U.S. public diplomacy initiatives can be further honed and refined to be more effective so that the United States can avoid large-scale anti-American protests in the first place. Effective long-term public diplomacy requires establishing and maintaining U.S. credibility through two-way informational and cultural diplomacy; and effective short-term public diplomacy requires applying the host-country's cultural contexts to U.S. decisions and actions. Through these improvements, the United States can pursue a smarter public diplomacy strategy no matter where it finds itself.

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