

**David Straub. *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea*. Stanford, CA: Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford University, 2015. 246 pages.**

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When thousands of South Korean protesters gathered in front of the U.S. Embassy in Seoul ahead of Donald Trump's visit to the country on November 7, 2017, it reminded people of the same resentment towards George W. Bush's visit in early 2002, during which demonstrators condemned him as "the sole evil on Earth." Such negative reactions toward visits by the Presidents of the United States of America by South Korean public worried many of the possibility of the eruption of anti-American sentiment and anger widely felt here. Questions were raised up amidst these demonstrations. Did the protests represent anti-American sentiment, or did they simply reflect anti-Trump and anti-Bush feelings? When, where and how was hatred toward the United States rooted in the Republic of Korea (ROK), a symbol of the success and effectiveness of U.S. policies? Moreover, in both of the mass demonstrations, a small number of South Koreans rallied nearby in support for the two presidents' visits. Such mixed feelings among the Korean populations confused observers and raised even more questions, especially on how to predict the trajectories of future U.S.-ROK relations.

In *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea*, David Straub, a career

diplomat who spent the tumultuous years 1999-2002 as director of political section at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, tries to explain the tangled question of Korean anti-Americanism. Covering the three years of increasing Korean media criticism of the United States to the boiling point when hundreds of thousands took to the Seoul streets in demonstrating against the United States and especially United States Forces Korea (USFK), the retired foreign-service officer thoroughly examines what really happened and provides his own answers to a South Korean phenomenon. With a thoughtful and even-handed manner, this is an honest and comprehensive narrative of a series of events and incidents that culminated in a tragedy which fatigued and upset both governments, as well as hurting the feelings of the people from both countries.

In Chapter 1, the longest and most important chapter, the author tracks down historical origins of South Korean anti-Americanism and the circumstances that set stage for the eruption of anti-American sentiment beginning in 1999. Straub opens by clarifying that Koreans have complex and contradictory feelings about the United States, and in many ways, Korean anti-Americanism is associated with Koreans' own self-image. National identity resulted in the Koreans to think ethnically in incidents that involved the United States and it was also Korean nationalism that created the so-called "national shame" and victimhood culture, leading Americans in the period 1999-2002 to present "all of Korea's historical victimizers" (p. 9). Of much important is South Korean deep partisan and ideological divide, especially ideological differences over North Korea, seeing Pyongyang whether as a threat to the outside world (conservatives) or as being threatened by the outsiders (progressives).

Straub also points out significant differences between the United States and the ROK, which resulted in their different lenses on the world. Historically, the United States enjoyed a measure of goodwill among many Koreans before 1945. However, liberation and the first U.S. major military involvement in Korea changed everything in U.S.-Korean relations. The Korean War, which ended with an armistice that remains in effect to this day, had countervailing effects that further divided South Koreans ideologically. Korean progressives opposing rule by American backing- conservatives took a complex and hostile view of U.S. actions,

and the two groups, out of their assumption that Korea was now strategically vital for the United States, contradicted each other on how to react to U.S. special interest in Korea: to value it or to concern it (pp. 21-22). While most Koreans appreciated U.S. role in their country's postwar economic and political development, the Gwangju incident in 1979 set rise for serious anti-Americanism in Korea. Korean narrative that the Americans-knew-it-all led them to blame the United States for the killings in Gwangju and even General Chun Doo-hwan's rise to power. The Chun government's brutal suppression of the press and intellectuals and outright lies of American support for the regime severely hurt the image of the United States among South Koreans, especially young people who later on were considered as the "386 Generation."

The author sees Korean progressives strongly empowered following the 1997 financial crisis and 1998 inauguration of Kim Dae-jung as president – the first time a leader of the left took control of South Korea's powerful presidency (pp. 40-41). With progressives as his political base and the famous "Sunshine Policy" under which all resources were put into seeking reconciliation with Pyongyang, Kim Dae-jung funded non-governmental organizations (NGO) activist groups with anti-American agendas and harshly criticized George W. Bush's North Korea policy. To make the problem worse, left and right wing Korean news media whose reporters or editors were members of the 386 Generation competed in reporting critically of the United States and the alleged wrongdoings of USFK (pp. 45-46). Unwilling to separate fact from fiction or from "popular sentiment" when reporting incidents and events involving the United States, mass-circulation newspapers in Korea created tabloid journalism that further angered NGO activists and fuelled nationalism. Such narrative that the United States and its representatives had long acted in ways that were arrogant, insensitive, and disrespectful of the Korean people, their culture and sovereignty dominated mainstream Korean news at that time.

The next six chapters of the book present the major incidents of alleged American misbehaviours that the author argues to accumulate anti-American sentiment in South Korea. Chapter 2 deals with the 1999 Associated Press (AP) investigation that documented panicked U.S. Army soldiers' mass killings of

suspected North Korean infiltrators in civilian clothing – who turned out to be innocent South Korean civilian refugees – in the early weeks of the Korean War. Calling it the Nogun-ri “massacres,” the Korean media neglected President Clinton’s regret statement and his administration’s efforts that followed in building a memorial park to throw a firestorm at the U.S. military and ignite a national grievance against the United States (p.60-62). In Chapter 3, Straub retells how Americans were accused of poisoning South Korean allied troops sent to help them in Vietnam in the 1960s and other Korean soldiers serving back home on the Demilitarized Zone with the chemical defoliant Agent Orange. Another charge covered by the author was in 2000 when USFK staff dumped “fatal” toxins into the Han River, poisoning the drinking water of the people of Seoul (pp.81-82). To Straub, these chemical controversies, though trivial in themselves, became huge story in Korea and fed on the on-going anti-American mood. Chapter 4 reveals that the Koon-ni Range incident in which Korean villagers of the nearby Maehyang-ri village were severely damaged by the bombing practices of USFK was in fact a non-event made up by activists and sensationalist media reporting. Yet Korean public’s question of the “fairness and equality” in their alliance with the United States resulted in strong pressure to revise the U.S.-ROK Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)—a document that Koreans mistakenly perceived as “a mechanism that was both the source of, and the potential concrete solution to, all that was wrong with the alliance” (p.102). To critical Korean public who do not know much of the agreement, the “unfair” SOFA with the United States allows American military personnel to escape from crimes committed on Korean land. Not only clearly shows that U.S.-ROK SOFA is of no difference with the SOFAs the United States has with other countries, Straub also notes on the similar SOFAs that South Korea is having with other nations.

Next in the analysis is U.S.-ROK split over North Korea throughout the years of the Sunshine Policy in South Korea under the progressive governments of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, yet a security crisis in the United States followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks and as a result, President George W. Bush’s inclusion of North Korea in the “axis of evils” (Chapter 5). Although did not involve USFK or bilateral security concerns, the loss of a gold medal by a South Korean

short-track racer to an American at the 2002 Utah Winter Olympics led to the lowest popular favourability for the United States in Korea (Chapter 6). The death threats against American athlete Apolo Ohno and massive cyber-attacks against the United States, from Straub's point of view, "said little about the United States but a great deal about some Koreans" (p. 182). When everything came to the climax in 2002 during the Highway 56 tragedy where two U.S. soldiers fatally ran over two Korean schoolgirls, USFK and the U.S.-ROK alliance itself was called into question again among the Koreans. Massive anti-American protests grew as a U.S. military court let off the two American soldiers. All over the country, Koreans shredded American flags, demanding the two to be turned over for trial in a Korean court. As soon as U.S. media started to pay attention to what was happening in Korea, the situation suddenly reversed after the victory of Roh Moo-hyun in the December 2002 presidential election, which, to the author, decisively out of anti-American mood (Chapter 7).

Apart from the above-mentioned sources of Korean anti-American eruption between 1999-2002, the author particularly stresses of the problem of "one alliance, two lenses" in U.S.-ROK relations. Whereas the United States is Korea's "significant other," the converse is not the case. Throughout the book, readers feel frustrated by this asymmetry of attention between the two allies, as Straub puts it: the American public was "uninterested, uninformed, and uninvolved in the management of U.S.-Korean relations" (p. 3). In the last chapter, he further analyses the consequences of this unevenly mutual interest, that South Koreans, due to the lack of American voice in bilateral issues, keep insisting on their own views of U.S.-Korean relations, while at the same time are able to influence American views of the bilateral relationship (p. 195). The book concludes by discussing the prospects for a resurgence of anti-Americanism in South Korea, including disagreements over China's rise, Japan's assertiveness and the North Korean threat. While suggesting the United States be flexible on North Korea if progressives come to power in Seoul again, Straub recommends a cautious expansion of U.S.-ROK military cooperation not to trouble China, and "quiet diplomacy" toward South Korea and Japan.

The biggest value of the book can be found in its rich overview of the historical

background of U.S.-ROK relations, especially the four years that are covered. It is the first well-documented and heavily footnoted account of the many threats posed to the U.S.-Korean alliance by the circumstances of 1999-2002. The author's experience on Korea started long before the years he focuses on and continues as he directed the Korea Program at Stanford University's Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, and now serves as a Sejong-LS Fellow at Seoul-based Sejong Institute. Such experience spans the diplomatic and academic worlds, which gives him a broad perspective on U.S.-Korean relations in all their many dimensions.

Another compliment is on the case study approach that the author employs, through which numerous and varied incidents and policy issues were minutely dissected. Straub is meticulous, objective, and fair in his examination of each one, drawing additional perspectives from not only his own experience but also extensive research. His approach, therefore, is both scholarly and conversational, making the book an excellent introduction for both serious students as well as casual readers. Also, the case study approach is a good reminder for the United States in managing relations with other countries where it has major shared interests in not just defense but trade, that differences in national perspective can cause serious misunderstanding and damage to bilateral relations. In this sense, anyone interested in anti-Americanism elsewhere in the world will find Straub's book useful as a basis for further research.

On the other hand, focusing much on the incidents during the dark period in the relations deprives readers from capturing a broader picture. The author fails to take notes of the surprising contradiction in political tendencies between the United States and South Korea after the Cold War:

USA	Bill Clinton								George W. Bush								Barack Obama				Donald Trump								
Yr	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09												
ROK	Kim Young-sam				Kim Dae-jung				Roh Moo-hyun				Lee Myung-bak		Park Geun-hye	Moon Jae-in													

As the table shows, the left and right in Seoul and Washington almost never

took power coincidentally, resulted in the two sides' conflicts over issues regarding North Korea, USFK and U.S.-ROK SOFA. Depicting throughout the book that Korean progressives are more critical of the United States than conservatives, Straub ultimately predicts that "the risk to the alliance would be greater if progressives were in power in Seoul" (p. 218). However, who the counterparts in Washington are also counts. In addition, some later cases suggest that even conservative leaders may not ease public anti-American feelings. One clear example is the deployment of THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) system in Korea. Even under the conservative government of Park Geun-hye and in the context of the sinking of ROKS Cheonan allegedly caused by North Korean torpedo, ordinary South Koreans took to the streets with banners such as "No THAAD, No Trump." That is to say, citizens of a democracy will raise their voices in various circumstances, if they feel their own or national interests under threat. This is not to mention the vicious attack on U.S. Ambassador Mark Lippert in March 2015 by a Korean activist. Anti-American feelings are there and at times will rear its ugly head, no matter who controls the Blue House. If Straub groups these points into the overall analysis, the prediction value of his book would surely be increased.

Despite this minor shortage, *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea* is a must-read for anyone interested in U.S.-Korean relations, U.S. foreign policy, and security alliance. The book is an unvarnished look at anti-Americanism in Korea and a cautionary tale about how near the surface it constantly lurks in Korean society. Believing in the importance of U.S.-Korean relationship for both countries, David Straub provides a basis for much better understanding of the enormous challenges the U.S. faces in maintaining this vital security alliance. Thus, while the book may seem at first sight to be for Korea specialists, it deserves a wider and more general readership in both countries and is essential for both Koreans and Americans. Important, compelling, and timely, it is the evidence of how complex bilateral relationship may turn and how an alliance of peoples is much harder to sustain than an alliance of militaries, giving its readers many deep thoughts.