

Democratization and the Contested Politics of U.S. Military Bases in Korea: Towards A Comparative Understanding*

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<p>Keywords: U.S.-Korea relations, Anti-Americanism, USFK, U.S. Forces</p>

I. Introduction

Unlike most of the participants at this conference, I cannot claim to be an expert on Korean politics nor am I a seasoned observer of the US-Republic of Korea security relationship.¹⁾ Rather, my current research

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1) My research experience in Korea is so far limited to a 16-day research trip I undertook in June 2004 along with my Barnard colleague Kimberly Marten, who I would like to thank for her ongoing support and helpful feedback on base-related projects. During the trip, Professor Marten and I jointly interviewed experts from both the Korean and U.S. side,

interest lies in understanding the political issues that surround US overseas bases and their use, with an emphasis on the historical evolution of base-related politics in the regions of East Asia and Southern Europe.²⁾ I am particularly interested in how political developments within countries that host U.S. military facilities affect the overall terms of basing agreements, as well as identifying when and why the U.S. military presence becomes a contested and politicized issue domestically.³⁾

In this essay, I will analyze the current contestation and politicization in South Korea regarding the presence of the United States Forces Korea (USFK) in comparative perspective, taking care to highlight the important differences and similarities that distinguish the Korean case from those of other countries that have hosted U.S. military bases. My main argument is that the current high level of politicization of the U.S. bases in Korea is entirely consistent with other historical cases of host countries that have undergone a democratic transition while hosting significant U.S. military facilities. The presence of U.S. military bases in other Asian and European countries was also highly contested as they underwent democratic

and presented our findings to the Korean National Defense University and Korea University Graduate School of International Studies. I am also thankful to the Carnegie Corporation of New York for its generous support of this and other research trips in Asia (Japan, Kyrgyzstan) and the German Marshall Fund of the United States for supporting my Europe-based research. Finally, I would like to thank Professor Kim, Byungki of Korea University who provided excellent advice, consultation and contacts during our time in Korea. The views and arguments expressed in this essay are my own and I accept full responsibility for any errors contained here within.

- 2) My cases studies include mainland Japan, Okinawa, South Korea, Philippines and Thailand, in East Asia, and Greece, Spain, Italy, Turkey and Portugal in Southern Europe. In my final chapter, I am also examining the politics surrounding new U.S. bases in Central Asia, the Black Sea region, Afghanistan and Iraq. An article-length version of the argument will be published in *Foreign Affairs* in Fall 2005.
- 3) By systematically analyzing the role of host country politics in U.S. overseas basing politics, my book project differs significantly from those who examine the basing issue exclusively from the perspective of the United States and its grand strategy. For example, see Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

transitions in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, there is much comparative evidence from these other cases to suggest that — contrary to the prevailing wisdom — the basing issue will recede from the U.S.-ROK political agenda in the medium and longer terms, just as it did in these other cases.

However, the distinctive features of the Korean case, particularly the more comprehensive nature of its democratization and its late timing, do have the potential to keep the basing issue on the political agenda for a while longer. Specifically, the considerable power of activist groups and their use of new information technology to network with each other and the Korean media are features that, aside from their salience in Okinawa, are unique to the Korean case; their short-term importance and political significance should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, I would still expect that the relative power of NGOs on ‘base-related’ issues will decline as certain features within the Korean political system become more deeply institutionalized and routinized.

In making this argument, I do not wish to imply that the U.S. side lacks any responsibility for the current situation, nor am I condoning (or opposing) any particular policies or attitudes that currently prevail on the American side. Nor do I wish to excuse the USFK from the responsibility of being a “good neighbor” and minimizing ‘base-related’ crime and accidents. Rather, I hope to show that there are significant internal dynamics at work in Korean politics, independent of U.S. policy nuances or strategies, that are likely to influence the basing issue for the coming years. U.S. policy makers should bear this in mind before concluding that Korea has become irrecoverably inhospitable for U.S. forces or making harsh judgments regarding the current political climate. Identifying and understanding these internal dynamics should be part of any analytical discussion concerning the future status of United States Forces Korea (USFK).

In presenting this comparative argument I am fully aware that the questions regarding USFK and the U.S. basing presence are usually

discussed within the context of broader studies of the U.S.-Korea security alliance and/or the foreign policy trajectories of these states.⁴⁾ However, I suggest that while basing issues certainly relate to these factors, base politics and their dynamics need to be studied in their own right. Foreign military bases, to quote Professor Byungki Kim, are an “existential matter” in that the very presence of the armed forces of one country on another country’s sovereign soil is a political act. Moreover, a basing relationship is usually an indicator of a broader hierarchical relationship that exists between the “sender” (of troops) and host, and must therefore be subject to both international and domestic influences.⁵⁾ Accordingly, base politics cannot be comprehensively reduced to either the broader security relationship between the host and sending country, nor are they simply a function of the prevailing level of “anti-Americanism” within a host-nation’s public; other factors are at work.

Consequently, I propose that we step back for a while from discussions of the state of the broader U.S.-ROK alliance and focus specifically on base-related issues and politics. In the next section I briefly review the current state of affairs in basing-related issues and place the high degree of politicization that currently characterizes the presence of USFK in Korea in a broader historical and comparative perspective. Next, I introduce my theory of the domestic sources of base politics, taking care to distinguish my focus on the dynamics of democratization from alternative theories that also examine Korea’s democratic processes, and

4) See for example, the theoretically informed analyses offered by Victor Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Japan-Korea Security Triangle* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000); and David Kang, “International Relations Theory and the Second Korean War,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 47 (2003), pp. 301-324. Also see Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic, 2002); and Norman D. Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind? The U.S.-ROK Security Relationship after 9/11* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004).

5) David Lake, “Hierarchy in International Politics,” Paper Presented to the 99th Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. Philadelphia, August 28-31, 2003.

place the Korean case in a comparative framework. I then suggest how this comparative theory might help us to understand the current and future importance of three prominent base-related issues: the forthcoming relocation of Yongsan and the consolidation of USFK facilities, debates about the “inequality” of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), and the likely affects of the current U.S. global defense posture review on Korean base-politics. In the conclusion, I discuss how these comparative and analytical lessons might be practically applied by policymakers interested in improving and strengthening the U.S.-ROK relationship.

II. The Nature of the Issue: “Anti-Americanism” and the Political Contestation of the USFK Presence

By almost all accounts, relations between the United States and South Korea have been deteriorating over the last few years and are now at a postwar low.⁶⁾ For overviews from an American perspective, see Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind? US-ROK Relations after 9/11* and Mark E. Manyon, “South Korean Politics and Rising “Anti-Americanism”: Implications for U.S. Policy Toward North Korea,” Report for Congress (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2003).

For many regional analysts, declining public support for the USFK presence is a symptom of the rise of so-called broader “anti-American” sentiment within Korea society.⁷⁾ Certainly, recent polling data on the

6) For overviews from an American perspective, see Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind? US-ROK Relations after 9/11* and Mark E. Manyon, “South Korean Politics and Rising “Anti-Americanism”: Implications for U.S. Policy Toward North Korea,” Report for Congress (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2003).

7) For different assessments of the sources of this growing anti-Americanism, see Seung-Hwan Kim, “Anti-Americanism in Korea,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Winter 2002/2003), pp. 109-122; Meredith Woo-Cumings, “South Korean Anti-Americanism,” Japan Policy Research Institute (JPRI) *Working Paper*, No. 93 (July

public attitudes is striking, as the percentage of the South Korean public holding negative views towards the United States has recently approached nearly half of respondents.⁸⁾ Recently, the political climate, according to some, has gotten so bad that the U.S. troops should consider withdrawing its troops from the Korean peninsula.⁹⁾ Even U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was reported as saying in 2003 that the U.S. “can withdraw its forces if the South Korean people so desire,” a statement that was subsequently qualified by a Pentagon spokesperson.

But before considering such drastic actions, we need to question the analytical premise regarding the political climate in South Korea. There is a fundamental difference between recognizing the very high politicization and contestation of the basing issue in current Korean politics (that is, the basing issue being placed on the political agenda) and equating such politicization as broad opposition to the presence of the bases.

Interestingly, attitudes on the basing issue show different results than surveys about general attitudes towards the United States. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of public opinion in Korea regarding the presence of U.S. troops is the low level of support for an immediate U.S. withdrawal or large-scale drawdown. In a poll published by the JoongAng Ilbo (Central Daily) in January 2003, 13.8% of those surveyed (1,200 respondents) favored a complete pullout or large-scale reduction in USFK while 42.8 percent favored a small-scale reduction; 41.5 percent favored the maintenance of current force levels.¹⁰⁾ Now, although these percentages

2003); Levin, “Do the Ties Still Bind?” and Howard W. French, “American Policies and Presence are Under Fire in South Korea, Straining an Alliance,” *New York Times* (December 8, 2002).

8) The often-cited Pew survey of December 2002 that surveyed attitudes in 42 countries found that 44% of South Koreans held unfavorable views of the United States.

9) For examples, see Richard V. Allen, “Seoul’s Choice: The U.S. or the North,” *New York Times* (January 16, 2003); and James Dao, “Why Keep U.S. Troops?” *New York Times* (January 8, 2003).

10) Cited in Jinwung Kim, “Ambivalent Allies: Recent South Korean Perceptions of the United States Forces Korea (USFK),” *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2004), p. 273.

may not seem like robust indicators of Korean support for the USFK presence (and they are not), from a comparative perspective they are certainly consistent with public attitudes held in other countries at comparable stages in their political development.

Consider some comparative polling data in countries at their respective periods of democratization or formative democratic transitions (a topic I will address in the next section). In Japan, a national poll of 2,422 in 1958 — 3 years after its reversion of sovereignty — found that only 8% approved of the presence of U.S. bases in Japan, while 58% disapproved.¹¹⁾ In Turkey, domestic surveys during the politically turbulent 1970s and 1980s consistently found that a majority of the Turkish public wanted to see U.S. bases closed.¹²⁾ In Greece, only 25% of the Greek public surveyed from 1982-1984, the three years after the populist PASOK government took office, favored the presence of U.S. military bases in Greece.¹³⁾ In Spain in 1991, three years after the political height of the basing issue and the contentious 1988 base agreement negotiations, surveys found that 48 percent of respondents still wanted to see the U.S. bases eliminated, 21.5 percent wanted to see the presence reduced, and only 18% wanted to see the bases maintained.¹⁴⁾ While polling should always be treated with some caution, the perhaps surprising conclusion to be drawn from even a cursory comparative analysis is that Korean public opinion is certainly not as “anti-base” nor as exceptionally “negative” in relative terms than we are routinely led to believe.

11) Cited in Douglas H. Mendel, Jr. “Japanese Attitudes toward American Military Bases,” *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 28, No. 9 (1959), p. 130.

12) For a discussion, see Kemal Kirisci, “Turkey and the United States: Ambivalent Allies,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1998), pp. 18-27.

13) Cited in Panayote E. Dimitras, “Greece: A New Danger,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 58 (1985), pp. 136-137.

14) Instituto de Cuestiones Internacionalesy Política Exterior (INCIPE), *Spanish Public Opinion and Spanish Foreign Policy* (in Spanish) (Madrid: 2003), p. 107. Tellingly, these numbers steadily changed towards more favorable views of the bases over the next 11 years as the basing issue receded from party politics.

So what explains this relatively high degree of political interest in and contestation of the USFK presence in recent years? The root causes of this new “anti-Americanism” are complex and varied, and analysts have pointed to both international and domestic factors.¹⁵⁾ They would include, on the international level, the US reaction to the East Asian 1997 financial crisis, the Bush administration’s tough position on North Korea, its unilateralism and military campaign in Iraq, as well as a backlash in this new open political climate against American backing of previous non-democratic regimes and practices in South Korea.¹⁶⁾ Social incidents and accidents involving the U.S. military, such as the June 2002 Highway 56 accident that caused the deaths of two Korean schoolgirls, the belated apology issued by the U.S. in response, and the subsequent acquittal of the drivers of the vehicle by a United States court martial, are also frequently listed as important triggering mechanisms of more negative Korean attitudes to the United States and USFK.

To be sure, these international factors are important and have certainly contributed to deteriorating public perceptions about the alliance and USFK. But I would argue that none of these factors tell us the full story as to why, in the last 5-10 years ago, the presence of USFK has become such a prominent political issue. After all, US troops have always committed accidents and crimes, both in Korea and elsewhere, yet the political and symbolic significance of such incidents have not had nearly the political importance that they do now. Moreover, the current U.S. administration’s more “unilateralist” approach to security affairs and the recent war in Iraq have been resoundingly publicly criticized by a number of politicians in long-standing allies such as Germany and Spain, yet in these very same countries the presence of U.S. bases and their use for unpopular missions

15) For an instructive synthesis and overview of recent events, see Kimberly Marten, “Bases for Reflection: The History and Politics of U.S. Military Bases in South Korea,” Paper presented to the 100th Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, September 2004.

16) For a discussion see Woo Cummings, “South Korean Anti-Americanism.”

has hardly made a blip in the mainstream media or the national political agenda. For example in Spain, where Prime Minister Zapatero controversially campaigned against the Iraq war and withdrew Spanish troops from Iraq after his election, the use of the Rota and Moron bases for OIF-related missions was of no political significance to either of the major political parties, the mainstream media or most of the Spanish public, despite the fact that anti-American sentiment was ubiquitous at the time.¹⁷⁾ International factors alone cannot account for the recent rise of the basing issue onto the political agenda.

There is an important internal political dimension to the current political contestation of the USFK. One factor is the startling economic development of Korea over the last four decades, which has seen it rise from an impoverished war-torn nation to one of the most advanced industrialized countries in the world.¹⁸⁾ Korean standards of living have risen dramatically, and the economic impact and benefits brought by the bases are no longer significant given the current considerable size and dynamism of the ROK economy. Indeed, what is startling about many U.S. military facilities in Korea today is that they appear, in socioeconomic terms, more run-down and marginal than their rapidly expanding Korean urban surroundings.¹⁹⁾

Many analysts have also pointed to Korea's democracy as a source of

17) On the lack of vocal Spanish opposition to the U.S. use of bases in Spain for the Iraq military campaign, see Alexander Cooley and Jonathan Hopkin, "Party Politics and Base Politics: The Rise and Decline of the U.S. Military Base Issue in Spain," unpublished manuscript, German Marshall Fund Transatlantic Center (Brussels: 2005).

18) For overviews, see Meredith Woo Cumings (ed.), *The Developmental State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Alice Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Robert Wade, *Governing the Market: Economic Theory and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

19) According to a senior U.S. civilian official, such rapid urbanization is also a significant cause of base-related tensions. Author's interview (Seoul, June 2004).

public anti-Americanism and anti-base sentiment.²⁰⁾ Long suppressed by authoritarian rule, the U.S. military presence is associated by many Koreans with supporting previous non-democratic systems of government and their human rights violations in the interests of maintaining political stability. In the Korean case, such accusations were bolstered by the fact that the U.S. military exerted operational command over its South Korean counterpart. Critics and former Korean dissidents point to instances of domestic repression by Korean security services as examples where the U.S. either supported domestic repression or, at the very least, chose not to prevent it. The 1980 government crackdown on demonstrators in Kwangju is perhaps the most widely cited such episode.

In this new climate of political openness and tolerance, such sensitive questions about Korea's democratic past are now publicly being aired and debated. As Bruce Cumings reminds us, even publicly advocating the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the ROK was, in previous decades, sufficient grounds for imprisonment so it is only fair that such issues are now open to discussion.²¹⁾ But other political observers go even further to argue that recent expressions of Korean nationalism and anti-Americanism by activist groups and the Korean public are also evidence of the consolidation and maturity of Korea's democratic institutions.²²⁾

20) See especially Katharine Moon, "Korean Nationalism, Anti-Americanism, and Democratic Consolidation," in Samuel S. Kim (ed.), *Korea's Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

21) Bruce Cumings, "Some thoughts on the Korean-American Relationship," *JPRI Occasional Paper*, No. 31 (May 2003).

22) Moon (2003).

III. The Dynamics of Democratization and Base-Politics

Although I fully concur that the growth of Korea's democracy is of paramount importance to understanding the current politically charged climate that surrounds the presence of USFK, I suggest that its flavors are perhaps a bit more nuanced than we have acknowledged. My main thesis is that current backlash of nationalism, anti-Americanism and "democratic pride" is actually more indicative of an ongoing process of democratic transition or democratization than it is evidence of Korea's completed democratic consolidation.²³⁾

The distinction may seem slight, but historically it has been of considerable significance for tracing the rise and decline of the politicization of the U.S. basing presence in various host countries. Democratizing polities are countries where democratic institutions and procedures are functioning, but are relatively new and have yet to fully institutionalize themselves.²⁴⁾ Moreover, as Jack Snyder has shown, such institutional flux and uncertainty also tend to generate high levels of nationalism and nationalist appeals by new political elites.²⁵⁾

Most theorists of democratic transitions agree that a main indicator of democratic consolidation is the national election of an opposition figure or party and the orderly transfer of power.²⁶⁾ By this comparative measure,

23) This is the opposite view to that of Moon (2003).

24) See Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratization and the Danger of War," *International Security*, Vol. 20 (Summer 1995), pp. 5-38.

25) The best account of how democratization produces nationalism can be found in Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000).

26) For definitions and additional comparative measures, see See Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press); Richard Gunther, P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, and Hans-Jürgen Puhle (eds.), *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation: Southern Europe in Comparative Perspective* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); and Guillermo O' Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

South Korea only consolidated electorally in 1997 after the election of former political dissident Kim Dae Jung, with the election of current President Roh Moo-hyun representing the second such election. Thus, Korea's political system is irreversibly democratic, but it is also quite young.

Why do democratizing climates tend to magnify the question of U.S. bases and the broader security relationship? We can identify three basic categories of political actors that explicitly elevate the basing issue onto the domestic political agenda. First, new politicians, both at the national and local level, tend to find political mileage in the basing issue, especially during election campaigns, by linking the presence of the bases to support of previous non-democratic regimes. Second, new actors in society, especially citizen's groups and non-governmental organizations, use the base issue as way of establishing themselves within the evolving system of democratic politics. Third, new media outlets will tend to bring the basing issue onto the political agenda, making it even central to political debate within the country. These patterns have held for a number of base-hosting countries that have undertone democratic transitions in East Asia, Southern Europe and Latin America. As countries democratized, new politicians, social groups and the media have seized the basing issue and demanded that basing agreements be re-adjusted, equalized or even terminated to reflect the new democratic political realities of the host country. What sets the Korean case apart from others is its relatively deep democratization and the lateness of its timing. Accordingly, NGOs that deal with base-related issues have become significantly more powerful in the Korean political system than anti-base NGOs in other countries. Moreover, the availability of new information technology such as cell phones and the internet have made political networking and campaigning much easier, less costly and effective for both NGOs and media actors.

First, new political elites in democratizing countries can gain considerable support by advocating an anti-base platform. From a

comparative perspective, the 2002 Presidential campaign of President Roh Moo-hyun was a classic example of anti-base electoral politics. The acquittal in Fall 2002 of the driver's of the U.S. personnel involved in the Highway 56 incident, generated public outrage as thousands of Koreans took to the streets to protest the verdict and the bilateral SOFA that has given the U.S. custody. Roh skillfully tapped into these attitudes and throughout the campaign and promised that he would "correct" US-Korean bilateral relations and bring them onto "an equal footing." In particular, Roh managed to link the recent controversial trial with the theme that the ROK was very much the junior partner to the senior leadership of the United States within the alliance and that its sovereign and interests were often sacrificed for American interests. His narrow margin of victory was in large part the product of intense mobilization of NGOs and their support of his more critical platform stance towards the United States and USFK.

There is considerable precedent for such an anti-US and anti-base election campaigns in other democratizing countries. In a range of cases in both Asia and Europe, politicians in national and local campaigns linked the presence of U.S. bases to American support of a previous non-democratic regime. Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Sato skillfully used concessions by the United States on base-related matters, including Okinawan reversion, to secure re-election in 1969, while in Thailand in 1975 and the Philippines in 1986 an anti-base platform helped the leaders of both countries secure wins in these countries' first democratic elections. The United States military was evicted from both countries shortly thereafter.

In a similar fashion, members of the Socialist Party (PSOE) in Spain throughout the 1980s consistently tied the U.S. military presence to the support of General Franco and his dictatorial atrocities, and the secrecy of the 1953 Madrid Pact was severely criticized for infringing national sovereignty. During the first election campaign of five-time Prime Minister Felipe Gonzales, the young socialist candidate emphasized the

need to balance the relationship with the United States and promised to hold a national referendum on the question of Spanish membership in NATO. Similarly, after the devolution of power to regions and local mayors in 1978, local politicians in the base-hosting cities of Seville, Cadiz, Zaragoza and Madrid also became much more vocal about base-related issues and used them as main campaign platforms, especially SOFA matters such as the U.S. exemption from local car taxes, labor issues and base-related pollution problems.

Greece presents perhaps the closest European analogy to Korea, given the close ties that the U.S. security and intelligence services maintained with their Greek counterparts during the 1960s and 1970s. The alleged U.S. support for the Greek colonels during their 1967-73 dictatorship very much framed the terms through which future politicians during the democratic transition spoke about the US-Greece alliance and the presence of U.S. bases. Following the collapse of the military junta in 1974, interim President Karamanlis almost immediately cancelled the agreement reached between the US and the colonels to homeport the 6th Fleet near Athens, declaring the agreement illegitimate. And during the 1980 election campaign, Socialist candidate Andreas Papandreou also rode a wave of anti-American sentiment and promised to get rid of the American bases in Greece and re-examine Greek membership in NATO.

The point is that the issue of US bases and the American military presence is a powerful political platform for campaigning politicians to adopt, especially if the U.S. has established its military presence in the host country prior to a democratic transition. By linking the US to support of previous non-democratic institutions and practices, populist politicians can tap into both democratic and nationalist sentiment for electoral purposes, while incurring few political “costs” by so doing.

These other cases also suggest that the basing issue tends to decline in political importance after a few electoral cycles and the consolidation of the party system. As domestic political systems stabilize and their institutions become more entrenched and secure, issues with the

nationalist appeals tend to lose their significance. In Spain, Greece and Japan, the presence of U.S. bases was not depoliticized until socialist parties, which in opposition had been highly critical of the U.S. military presence, had governed for at least two terms. Given that these governments had all revised basing agreements with the United States, they also claimed that they had “balanced” the relationship, thus completing their work on the issue. Moreover, as the party political systems of these countries became consolidated into traditional two-party political competition, socioeconomic policy became the main basis for party differentiation and political affiliation. As a result, base-politics have played a negligible role in these countries’ national election campaigns since.

A second category of actors that has placed the basing issue on the Korean political agenda is the hundreds of NGOs and activist groups currently active on base-related issues. The rise of NGOs and social movements working on basing issues is part of a much broader recent upsurge in the importance and activities of transnational activists working on a range of social issues.²⁷⁾

On this dimension, the late democratizing Korean case is comparatively distinct, with the possible exception of Okinawa. Since the 1980s, South Korea has witnessed perhaps an unprecedented “activation” of civil society and the rapid growth of citizens’ movements and non-governmental organizations into some of the most significant actors in Korean domestic politics.²⁸⁾ A testimony to the depth of Korea’s

27) On NGOs, activism and transnational networks, see Margaret Keck and Katherine Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). On NGOs as important new normative actors in international politics, see Richard Price, “Transnational Civil Society and Advocacy in World Politics,” *World Politics*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (July 2003), pp. 579-606.

28) For discussions see Samuel S. Kim, *Korea’s Democratization*; and Su-Hoon Lee, “Transitional Politics of Korea, 1987-1992: Activation of Civil Society,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (1993), pp. 351-367.

democratization, NGOs now are important actors in Korean politics and, on base-related matters, campaign regularly to raise awareness of issues such as corruption, women's sexual labor in U.S. base districts, crimes committed by U.S. military personnel, land usage, environmental issues, and revising the Status of Forces Agreement.²⁹⁾ Many of the most prominent organizations are networked via the umbrella organization People's Action for Reform of the Unjust SOFA (or PAR-SOFA). Although NGOs did play important parts in organizing anti-base campaigns in other countries, such as the Philippines and Spain in the 1980s, these tended to be local or community-based organizations that rarely managed to place their activities onto the national stage or attract mainstream media attention.

In Korea, the nationalization of NGO politics has been made possible by the informational revolution that has coincided with Korea's democratization. The proliferation of new information technologies such as cell phones, the internet and email has allowed these various groups to network with each other and Koreans are among the global leaders in their use of these technologies. These technologies also allow anti-base NGOs to get out their messages and news coverage more quickly and effectively than previous anti-base movements.

While Korean NGOs are passionate advocates for their causes, it is also true that working on these basing issues has elevated them to an unprecedented position of social power and political influence in ROK politics. The campaign of President Roh and the NGOs' support of his close win was a testament to their organizational skill, networking and collective action. Accordingly, although NGOs may be normatively committed to their causes, the basing issue also offers an ongoing platform with which they can remain in the political spotlight and continue to develop their organizations during this period of democratization.³⁰⁾ The

29) For background see Katharine H. S. Moon, "South Korean Movements against Militarized Sexual Labor," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (1999), pp. 310-327.

presence of USFK actually aids in these organizational goals.

The third actor within a democratizing society that can bring basing politics onto the political agenda is the media. Media outlets that have experienced significant control or censorship during a non-democratic regime will often attempt to revisit forbidden or taboo subjects. Given the secretive nature and details of many basing arrangements, the topic of foreign military bases often becomes an ideal issue for the emerging media to use in order to demand greater openness and information from its government. Just as democratizing politicians explicitly link the presence of the bases to support of previous non-democratic regimes, democratizing media outlets link the presence of the bases to a previous climate of secrecy and state control of the press.³¹⁾

Moreover, in their comparative study of media systems and politics, Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini find that the media systems of late democratizers are characterized by “polarized pluralism,” where the media outlets are segmented by political affiliation and retain strong ties to

30) I realize that this distinction between the normative motivation and strategies of NGOs may not be to everyone's agreement. However, I would respectfully ask those who disagree with this characterization to ask the following counterfactual question: Would the NGOs currently working on base-related issues publicly support the government and cease their campaigning if their major demands (such as renegotiating the SOFA, reducing the US presence, or cleaning-up adverse environmental impact) were met? On the need to distinguish between the ideas and strategies of NGOs, see Susanne K. Sell and Aseem Prakash, “Using Ideas Strategically: The Contest Between Business and NGO Networks and Intellectual Property Rights,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2004), pp. 143-175. On how NGO normative motivations can clash with their organizational needs, see Alexander Cooley and James Ron, “The NGO Scramble: Organizational Survival and Transnational Action,” *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Summer 2002), pp. 5-39.

31) On the dynamics of democratization and the media, see Andrew K. Milton, “Bound but Not Gagged: Media Reform in Democratic Transitions,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 5 (June 2001), pp. 493-526. This was certainly the case in Spain and Greece as new newspapers demanded greater openness and accountability from the government on basing questions during their democratic transition.

political parties. Importantly, they observe that in these cases, “professionalization of journalism is not as strongly developed as in the other models; journalism is not as strongly differentiated from political activism and the autonomy of journalism is often limited.”³²⁾

Perhaps the most striking example of how a press politicizes base issues can be found on Okinawa. There, the editorial boards of the largest two circulating dailies — Ryukyu Shimpo and Okinawa Times — are openly “anti-base” in their stance and actively seek to cover negative stories about the U.S. military such as U.S. personnel crimes and misdemeanors, base-related accidents, environmental damage, and labor disputes.³³⁾ As with Okinawa’s NGOs, however, these local stories are usually ignored by the mainland newspapers, which tend to cover U.S. base-related stories they consider to be of exceptional newsworthiness, such as the 1995 rape of a 12-year old Okinawan schoolgirl by three U.S. military personnel.

The Korean media displays many of the trends and political divisions that characterize late democratizers. During the country’s non-democratic rule, the Korean media was heavily controlled by the state and was prevented from reporting on stories involving security matters or the country’s large chaebol conglomerates. As a result, media politics has become an important issue in its own right and both Kim Dae Jung and President Roh complained frequently about “conservative” press bias, making media reform a central issue of their governments.³⁴⁾ U.S. officials also complain about press bias in its coverage of basing issues, noting that newspapers often intentionally distort stories and press releases.³⁵⁾

32) Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 73.

33) Author’s interview conducted with editorial board members of Okinawan newspapers (Naha, Okinawa, May 2003).

34) Many, “South Korean Politics and Rising ‘Anti-Americanism’,” p. 8. Also see “South Korea’s Press: A Question of Distortion,” *The Economist 2003 Survey of South Korea* (April 17, 2003).

Particularly damaging is much of the progressive media's fixation on covering crimes committed by USFK personnel.

Yonghoi Song's comprehensive analysis of the South Korean media's coverage of the 2002 Highway 56 incident lends considerable empirical support to these complaints. Song finds that progressive media outlets fundamentally focused on anti-US themes and cautions that the "[Korean] news plays a crucial role of shaping the public perception of the [USFK] crimes because news is virtually the only window through which most people can make sense of the crimes of U.S. military personnel ... the way the news media constructs the crimes or misdeeds of the U.S. military personnel have the significant implications for the future of the Korea-US relationship."³⁶⁾

But the most negative stories about base-related issues tend to come from various NGO-maintained website, blogs, and on-line news sites which are increasingly the main information source of the younger generation. Internet sites managed by activist groups and NGOs such as usacrime.org.kr or koreatruth.org post discussions and stories about the adverse affect of the USFK on Korean politics and society; they also link to other websites and anti-base campaigns. In June 2002, usacrime.or.kr also posted several photographs of the dead bodies of the two schoolgirls from the Highway 56 incident, several of which flooded hundreds of thousands of inboxes just hours after the photographs were taken.³⁷⁾ On-line news sites such as *OhMyNews* (which commanded more than 2.5 million page hits a day in 2002) and *PRESSian* were far more reliant on unnamed "guerilla sources" during the major phases of the incident than the major conservative newspapers, with non-official Korean sources accounting for more than three times the combined use of Korean

35) Interviews with U.S. Public Affairs representatives (Seoul, June 2004).

36) Yonghoi Song, "News Realities on Crime of the U.S. Military Personnel in Korea: A Constructionist Approach to the Media Coverage of the Death Cases in 1992 and 2002," Ph.D. Dissertation Thesis (University of Missouri-Columbia, July 2004), p. 5.

37) See the discussion by Marten, "Bases for Reflection."

government and US official sources.³⁸⁾ In turn, these progressive online outlets focused overwhelmingly on covering the anti-base protests precipitated by the various aspects of the case and portrayed them as “legitimate public anger at the injustice inflicted by the United States.”³⁹⁾ The considerable readership of on-line media makes them an effective vehicle for keeping base-related issues on the political agenda and is a key and unique feature of the Korean case.

Let me be clear about my analytical purpose. My purpose in distinguishing between democratizing and consolidated states is not that all mature democracies necessarily must “do Washington’s bidding.” Rather, it is that the new political actors unleashed by democratization — campaigning elites, NGOs and the media — all have self-interested reasons to politicize the basing issue and use it for their domestic political purposes. South Korea is a vibrant democracy and many of its institutions are in a relative state flux and redefinition. What do political parties stand for? What should be the influence of NGOs in the policy process? How much turnover should there be in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense after an election? What should be the role of local governments in the policy process? Until such questions are resolved and relations among these different political actors and institutions stabilize, the issue of the U.S. bases will continue to be on the political agenda because the political opportunities offered by anti-base and anti-American stances are too great to be ignored by politicians and activist groups wanting to explore the limits of their institutional power.

38) Song, “News Realities on Crime of the U.S. Military Personnel in Korea,” p. 139, Table 6.4.

39) *Ibid.*, p. 123.

IV. Implications for Understanding Prevailing Base-Related Issues

I have suggested that Korea's democratizing political climate is a major source of the recent politicization of the USFK presence. From a comparative perspective, the current political climate surrounding the U.S. bases is consistent with the experiences of other democratizing countries, but Korea's distinctive deep and late democratization may prolong these political dynamics. Before concluding, I want to apply the comparative analytical framework developed in this essay to three specific base-related issues currently on the US-ROK agenda — the Yongsan relocation, debates about the fairness of the SOFA, and the political consequences of the global strategic posture review.

1. The Yongsan Relocation

Almost everyone now acknowledges that the location of the Yongsan complex — host to USFK, United Nations Command (UNC), and ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) — is significantly contributing to negative attitudes in the Korean public, but few probably appreciate how relatively unusual it is. Yongsan has long been the commanding center for a foreign military presence in Korea, serving as the headquarters for the Japanese imperial army from 1910-45 and then the United States armed forces from 1945 onwards. Initially located on the periphery of the capital city, the post-Korean War expansion of Seoul and urban development soon encircled the 699-acre camp and now Yongsan lies in the very center of the Korean capital. As such, it remains a dramatic symbol of the U.S. military presence and is often linked referred to as a site of continued military occupation.

Previous initiatives to remove the camp from Seoul always remained incomplete. The 1991 agreement lost momentum after the 1994 North

Korea nuclear crisis, while the financial crisis of 1997 diverted public and government attention from security-related matters.⁴⁰⁾ The 2001 announcement by USFK that it planned to build a new apartment complex in Yongsan once again thrust the camp's future into the political spotlight and in 2003 the United States announced that it would relocate the base to an equivalent site in Osan, near the Seventh U.S. Airforce base. On July 24, 2003, the governments agreed to complete the relocation by 2006, but subsequent delays over the funding and relocation site have pushed the timetable for the relocation back to 2008.

In comparative terms, it is hard to overestimate the political significance of Yongsan and, in truth, the issue previously was not given the priority it merited. The good news for both governments is that in other countries where the U.S. relocated or reduced its visible presence in a capital city, the political and symbolic resonance of the basing issue subsequently diminished, often quite quickly and dramatically. The presence of US military forces in Ankara in the 1950s and 1960s was a constant source of resentment before U.S. forces were sequestered to more remote sites. The removal of major military installations near the capital cities of both Spain (Torrejon airbase) and Greece (Hellenikon airbase) in the early 1990s also played a significant part in diffusing public anger over the bases, effectively transforming the U.S. bases from being a national issue to more of a local issue. My guess is that once the relocation to Osan finally happens and most of Yongsan reintegrates with the rest of Seoul, the politics of the basing issue in Korea will also defuse considerably.

2. The “Unfair SOFA” Debate

Perhaps the most emotionally-laden base-related issue for the Korean public in current US-ROK relations is the bilateral Status of Forces

40) For this chronology, I rely on Jinwung Kim, “Ambivalent Allies,” p. 274.

Agreement (SOFA), and the particular article that relates to the criminal jurisdiction procedures for U.S. personnel accused of committing crimes in South Korea. Debates about the SOFA reached national prominence in 2002 the aftermath of the Highway 56 incident when the U.S. asserted jurisdiction over its personnel and acquitted the two involved servicemen of criminal charges. Since that time, the ROK and US officials have denied NGO and activist accusations that the current SOFA is “unfair.”

By their very nature, however, all SOFAs — like the international principle of diplomatic immunity — violate the territorial and legal principles of international sovereignty by preventing the host country from exercising complete legal jurisdiction over all persons and events contained within its boundaries.⁴¹⁾ Typically, SOFAs cover the legal issues involving the stationing of U.S. troops including their freedom of movement within the host country, taxation, criminal jurisdiction, import and export rights and duties, driver’s licenses, registration fees, entitlements and any other areas where the presence of U.S. forces must be reconciled with the laws of a host country.⁴²⁾ The very attempt to merge the legal codes of two sovereign entities (a host country and an external military presence) necessitates that the host country must abrogate part of its sovereign jurisdiction. Thus, by their very nature SOFAs can never be fair, although they can, of course, range from being extremely one-sided (like the SOFA that U.S. and Korean coalition forces had with Kyrgyzstan) to more genuine arrangements of joint-sovereignty or “concurrent jurisdiction,” as is the case with the NATO SOFA or the

41) See Jost Delbruck, “International Law and Military Forces Abroad: U.S. Military Presence in Europe, 1945-65,” in Simon Duke and Wolfgang Krieger (eds.), *U.S. Military Forces in Europe: The Early Years, 1945-1970* (Boulder: Westview, 1993). Analytically, SOFAs would make an ideal addition to Stephen Krasner’s catalog of institutions that have regularly violated international sovereign principles. See Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

42) For explanations of “concurrent jurisdiction” and other legal and practical aspects of criminal jurisdiction in SOFAs, see Frank T. Moore, “Criminal Jurisdiction in Overseas Areas,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1959), pp. 276-302.

bilateral U.S. SOFAs with Japan and Korea.

In comparative terms, is the US-Korea SOFA any worse than other similar agreements with long-standing base-hosts? The irony of the SOFA debate is that when the US-ROK SOFA was effectively a one-sided agreement before its revision in 1966, there was neither the public awareness nor the political opportunity to critically examine and debate it. However, the 1991 and revised 2001 criminal jurisdiction articles adhere to the basic principle of “concurrent jurisdiction” that is embodied in its NATO counterpart. Concurrent jurisdiction awards legal jurisdiction over a member of a foreign military to either the sending or receiving country based on a number of categories, definitions and procedures. The sending state retains jurisdiction when the offenses “arise out of an act or omission done in the performance of official duty,” and/or whether the offenses were committed against the property and security of the sending state or its troops, civilians and dependents.⁴³⁾ Contrary to popular views, the host country retains jurisdiction for almost all other situations, which constitute the majority of criminal cases. Indeed, the provision within the 2001 agreement that grants the ROK authority to retain pre-trial custody for U.S. personnel charged with 12 serious crimes goes well beyond the provisions of the NATO SOFA.

So why is the SOFA so widely debated and criticized in Korea, but not in NATO countries? For one, the multilateral framework of the NATO SOFA has given it important legitimacy over the last 50 years that bilateral agreements lack. Since no country gets a “better” deal than the other,⁴⁴⁾ countries wishing to negotiate an exemption or special status would have to undermine the very institutionalization of the agreement. As a result, when controversies have surfaced among NATO countries, they have been resolved and then effectively integrated into its informal case law.⁴⁵⁾

43) NATO SOFA, Article VII, paragraph XX.

44) The major exception to this was Germany that actually was governed by special additional arrangements until 1991.

Second, a less appreciated element of the SOFA regime are the norms of cooperation between the sending and hosting state, especially the norm of “waiving” the right to exercise jurisdiction to begin with. Although for the vast majority of criminal cases the host country has the right to exercise jurisdiction, it will usually waive that right for all but the most serious of cases. On this point, the ROK waivers rate for US requests for jurisdiction have declined considerably from 1992 to 2002, going from a 98-99% waiver rate per year to a 93-95% rate.⁴⁶⁾ That is, since the start of the democratization period, the ROK has exercised its right of jurisdiction three to four times more than in the past. Indeed, from 1999-2003, a period of the most intense politicization of the SOFA, total SOFA crimes and incidents actually declined by over 40% from 893 to 535. These waiver rates stand in marked contrast to NATO cases with waiver rates of about 98-99%. Thus, from a comparative perspective, Korean waiver rates are actually quite low.

My point is not that the Korean side is not legally entitled to exercise its right of jurisdiction. It is given that right by the SOFA and it is entitled to demand jurisdiction in those cases that it feels strongly about. But it is also the case that the ROK is choosing to exercise this right in an increasing number of cases, especially compared to other base hosts that have comparable agreements. Officials on both sides should consider making this fact more public. Accordingly, this analysis suggests that yet another revision of the SOFA would do very little to dampen the calls of its “unfairness.” In legal terms, the Korean SOFA is no less or no more unfair than other comparable agreements. What is different is the political climate surrounding it.

45) On criminal jurisdiction issues under the NATO SOFA, see Delbruck, “International Law and Military Forces Abroad; and R.R. Baxter, “Criminal Jurisdiction in the NATO Status of Forces Agreement,” *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1958), pp. 72-81.

46) Data obtained from table provided by the USFK Legal Affairs office at Yongsan, Seoul (June 2004).

3. Implications for the Global Strategic Defense Posture Review

Finally, it is worth assessing these lessons for understanding the likely political consequences of the Pentagon's current Global Defense Posture (GDP) review. The GDP is the most significant change in overseas basing policy and reflects the Pentagon's desire to move from large U.S. deployments from the Cold War era to a more global network of smaller bases that could serve as jumping-off points or "lily pads" for crisis situations and stability operations.⁴⁷⁾ The GDP is itself part of the broader attempt to introduce more flexibility and agility in the military management. In Korea, the GDP has led to recent to a transform and relocate USFK forces. Facilities and troops will be reduced, consolidated and withdrawn from the DMZ in favor of more southern positions. Under the new strategy, U.S. forces will not only serve their long-standing purpose of deterring North Korea, but will also focus on promoting stability in the greater northeast Asia region.

On the one hand, many aspects of the strategic shift should have positive effects on the political climate. The reduction of troops to 25,000 by 2008, the consolidation of various scattered facilities and their relocation should reduce somewhat the national presence and social footprint of USFK. At the same time, the introduction of more modern technology and hardware should maintain capabilities as well as allow ROK to play a greater role in providing for its own defense. The new doctrine also gives Seoul and Washington the chance to redefine and reinvigorate the alliance and partnership.

However, the very flexibility that lies at the heart of this doctrine will provide some additional opportunities for political criticism in Korea's democratizing climate. As with other long-standing allies (Turkey is

47) For an overview, see Kurt M. Campbell and Celeste Johnson Ward, "New Battle Stations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 5 (September/October 2003), pp. 95-103.

perhaps the most analogous) where the U.S. presence was established with a clear joint security purpose, the move towards a more flexible and multi-purpose doctrine also threatens to undermine the very political rationale of the presence of USFK forces. By demanding “strategic flexibility” over its operations, U.S. and ROK officials will probably face considerable domestic criticism in the future after a major “out-of-area” operation is conducted, especially if it involves mainland China or Taiwan. Comparatively speaking, the use of European U.S. bases for out-of-area operations such as the 1958 Lebanon Crisis, the airlift for the 1973 Yom-Kippur War and the 1986 bombing of Libya, attracted harsh domestic criticism within even strong allies and drew public attention to the political dimensions of the basing presence and issues of sovereignty.⁴⁸⁾ And while President Roh Moo-Hyun has signaled his support for increased “strategic flexibility,” progressive parties, NGOs and the media have criticized his stance as undermining Korean sovereignty.⁴⁹⁾

V. Conclusions

Overall, this is a time of considerable political uncertainty regarding the future presence and purpose of U.S. forces in Korea. What I have argued in this paper is that much of the current political contestation of USFK is a natural product of Korea’s democratization and that these trends are consistent with the experiences of other countries that have hosted major U.S. military facilities. Their experiences suggest that after a period of initial turmoil, the basing issue lost much of its political

48) For discussions of the political problems raised by out-of-area operations in the Southern European states, see Richard Grimmett, *U.S. Military Installations in NATO’s Southern Region*, Report prepared for the U.S. Congress (Washington D.C., 1986).

49) For example, see Seo Dong-Shin, “Labor Party Calls for Stricter Measures for Changing USFK Role,” *The Korea Times* (March 3, 2005). Such criticism is likely to persist.

resonance and receded into the political background. Of course, the main difference between Korea and these other cases is the significant involvement of NGOs in domestic politics as well as the important influence of information technology.

Will the same depoliticization happen in Korea as it did elsewhere? My tentative answer is “yes.” Perhaps the most important thing that can be done to facilitate this depoliticization is to make as many actors as possible on the Korean side “stakeholders” in these forthcoming security arrangements. On its side, the U.S. should be prepared to make some concessions on GDP-related issues, especially if it locks in the support of some of the more progressive or critical political actors on the Korean side. The political contestation of the U.S. military only significantly receded in other countries when opposition parties had renegotiated and signed new agreements governing the use of bases with the U.S. and thus no longer had it as a mobilizing issue. I believe that the current GDP offers that same opportunity to Washington and Seoul, provided that both sides make concessions for a skeptical public.

There are, of course, a whole host of areas where U.S.-ROK cooperation could be enhanced and bilateral ties improved, and that is a matter for the distinguished experts at this conference to discuss. But my internal analysis of Korean politics and the basing issue also suggests that U.S. policymakers must readjust their expectations of what a favorable political climate constitutes. The U.S. presence abroad has always attracted domestic criticism and opposition, although perhaps U.S. officials were not accustomed to it in Korea and were caught off-guard by the events of the last few years. Expressions of Korean nationalism, criticism of the USFK and the questioning of U.S. strategy are all to be expected in the current political climate, but they do not necessarily have to harm the overall alliance.

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[초록]

민주화와 주한 미군기지 정책에 대한 논쟁: 비교이해를 위한 분석

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한국 내 주한미군부대에 대한 논쟁은 한미동맹의 큰 틀 속에서 이루어져 왔다. 그러나 타국 영토 내 미군부대 존재가 가지는 정치적 의미와 미군의 주둔이 sender와 host 간의 위계적 질서를 반영한다는 점이 중요하기 때문에 미군 부대 정치화 문제를 자체적으로 연구할 필요가 있다. 역사적, 비교적 관점에서 보았을 때 현재 한국 내에서의 미군부대 정치화 문제는 1960, 1970년대에 민주주의로 이행 과정에 있었던 국가들 내에서 공통적으로 나타난다. 이는 미국의 일방주의적 외교정책노선과 같은 국제적 요인뿐 아니라 민주주의로의 이행이라는 국내적 요인이 한국 내 미군부대 정치화에 중요하게 작용한다는 것을 의미한다.

민주주의로의 이행단계에 있는 국가 내부에서 정치인과 비정부단체, 그리고 미디어는 미군부대 문제를 정치적 사안으로 발전시켜 자신들의 입지를 더욱 공고히해 왔다. 정치인들은 미국의 과거 비민주정권 지지 내용을 선거 운동과정에서 부각시키고 시민단체나 비정부기구는 자신들의 민주정치 내에서 자신들의 정치적 기반을 마련하며, 미디어는 미군부대 문제를 주요 정치 이슈로 부각시켜 국내 논쟁을 유도한다. 한국의 경우, 특히 시민단체와 그들의 네트워킹을 촉진하는 새로운 정보기술 활용 능력이 다른 국

가와 구별되기 때문에 단기적으로는 이들의 정치적 중요성을 과소평가해서는 안 된다. 그러나 한국 내 용산미군기지 이전문제나 한-미 주둔군 지위협정(SOFA) 개정 문제, 해외주둔 미군 재배치 문제 내의 정치적 논쟁을 살펴보았을 때, 각각의 경우에서 고조되었던 민족주의, 미군에 대한 비판과 미군의 전략에 대한 불신은 자국 내 미군부대를 주둔시켰던 다른 국가들과 다르지 않다. 따라서 주한미군부대의 정치화 문제는 한국 내 민주주의가 더욱 공고화되는 과정에서 그 심각성이 해소될 것으로 보인다.