



KOREA DEFENSE VETERANS ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY

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Photo By: Staff Sgt. Kris Bonet





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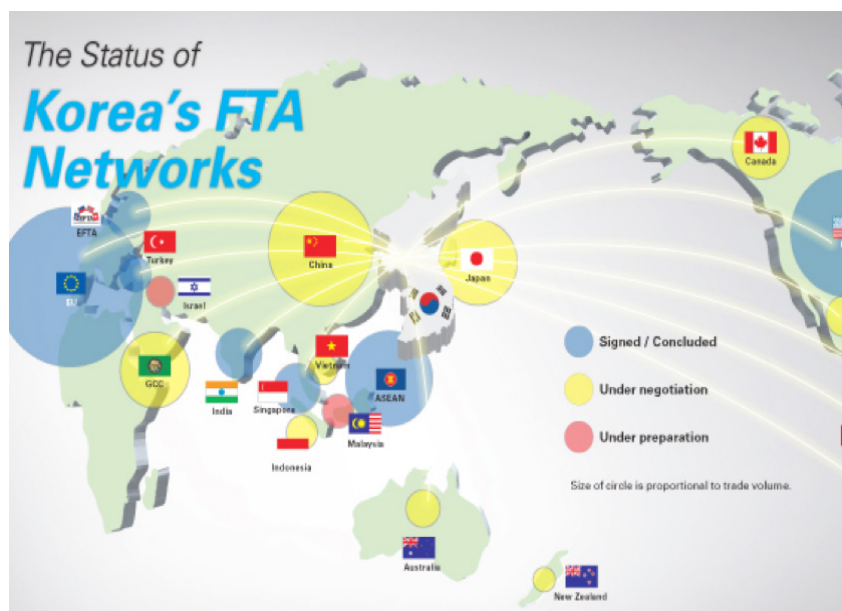
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## INTRODUCTION

### **Members and Friends of the Korea Defense Veterans Association,**

The ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) represents the shared commitment and interest of the Korean and American peoples to the defense of the Republic of Korea. CFC was founded on November 7, 1978 to lead that defense, and KDVA members and supporters are proud to help CFC fulfill that mission and all its efforts for the ROK-U.S. Alliance.

KDVA is pleased to dedicate our 4th Quarter Journal to the members of this combined team – past and present – who served and are serving selflessly to support security in this vital part of the world as well as helping South Korea’s global rise to the 10th largest economy in the world and a global cultural leader and influencer.

As a former CFC Commander, I am especially fond of the spirit of “Katchi Kapshida” or “We Go Together,” because the CFC Team does go together in all aspects of teambuilding, training, and military readiness to continue deterring and defending against the North Korean threat.

In my first year as the KDVA Chairman and President, we have made tremendous progress in growth, outreach, and influence. We added partnerships with eight organizations in four countries, our social media presence and reach have increased over 255%, and our membership increased 36%. I am very proud that so much of the work in KDVA is done by volunteers who care about the Alliance and Veterans. Our volunteers include all the KDVA Board Members, KDVA Council of Advisors, KDVA Language Team, KDVA Interns, KDVA Research Associates, speakers at our events and webinars, and members who provide wonderful and lasting articles about their service in Korea and how their lives were enriched by the experiences of living in one of the safest, most dynamic, and culturally-rich countries in the world – the Republic of Korea.

And, enabling all that KDVA can do for our two countries are our major donors, especially Hanwha, South Korea’s largest defense contractor.

I am so proud and honored to be one part of all this goodwill and effort. We are closing 2021 in a fantastic and meaningful manner with:

- CFC Webinar on November 4
- Celebratory webinar in honor of General Paik, Sun-yup on November 23
- 1st Korea Revisit Program for Korean Defense Veterans in Korea (November 29 to December 4)
- ROK-U.S. Alliance Peace Conference 21-02 in Seoul on November 30
- ROK-U.S. Alliance SCM Gala Dinner on December 1 in Seoul
- ROK-U.S. Alliance Peace Conference 21-03 in Hawaii on December 15, 2021

Thank you for your support as we continue to work “Together for the Alliance.”

Vincent K. Brooks  
General, U.S. Army (Retired)  
Chairman and President

# KDVA MEMBERS



## BENEFITS FOR OUR MEMBERS

- Part of a premier professional organization.
- Help strengthen the important ROK-U.S. Alliance ... that you helped build and continue to serve.
- Honor and remember those who have served in Korea.
- Networking and access to experts and experiences found nowhere else.
- Mentor and mentee opportunities.
- Staying in touch with those who served with you in Korea.
- Opportunities to participate in forums and events.
- Opportunities to volunteer in leadership positions.
- Opportunities for internships.
- Opportunities to be published.
- Opportunities for community service.

### REGULAR MEMBERS:

- Former and current U.S. military & DOD personnel of U.S. Forces Korea ("USFK"), Combined Forces Command ("CFC"), or the U.S. Embassy in Seoul.
- U.S. military & DOD personnel who meet the requirements for the Korea Service Medal ("KSM") or the Korea Defense Service Medal ("KDSM").
- Korean Augmentation to United States Army ("KATUSA") Veterans.
- Retired ROK Military personnel who have served in or been assigned to one of the following for at least three consecutive months.
  - United Nations Command ("UNC").
  - CFC Headquarters and its components.
  - ROK Embassy in the United States.
  - Other ROK-U.S. Combined Commands.
  - MND, JCS, and/or Service HQs.
- Former and current ROK government civilians of CFC and USFK, if ROK law or regulations do not prohibit. ROK and U.S. distinguished personnel who are dedicated to strengthening the ROK-U.S. Alliance.

### ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

- Adult supporters of the ROK-U.S. Alliance.
- College students who are interested in the U.S.-ROK Alliance.

### HONORARY MEMBERS:

- ROK & U.S. distinguished personnel who are dedicated to enhancing ROK-U.S. Alliance.
- Former and current U.S. and ROK government interagency personnel who directly worked or work on ROK-U.S. Alliance topics.

No need to reach for your wallet to pay membership fees ... just click [here](#) for free membership!

[www.kdva.vet/join-kdva](http://www.kdva.vet/join-kdva)

# MISSION OF THE ROK-U.S. COMBINED FORCES COMMAND

<https://www.usfk.mil/About/Combined-Forces-Command/>

More than 46 years of fragile peace have marked the history of "post-war" Korea, where the longest armistice ever remains tenuously in force. For most of these years, the directing headquarters was the United Nations Command (UNC), which had also directed combat operations in the 1950-53 war.

The defense structure in Korea was eventually overtaken by the professional growth and development of the Republic of Korea's (ROK) armed forces. As early as 1965 it was recognized that what worked in the war could be significantly improved by increasing ROK participation in the planning structure.

A combined operational planning staff, developed in 1968 as an adjunct to United Nations Command/United States Forces Korea/Eighth United States Army Headquarters and the U.S.-led I Corps (Group), evolved in 1971 as an integrated field army headquarters. However, it was not until 1978, as a bilateral agreement related to the planned U.S. ground combat force withdrawal of that time (subsequently canceled in 1981), that the senior headquarters in Korea was organized, as a combined staff.

Hostilities today are deterred by this binational defense team that evolved from the multi-national UNC. Established on November 7, 1978, the ROK/U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) is the warfighting headquarters. Its role is to deter, or defeat if necessary, outside aggression against the ROK.

To accomplish that mission, the CFC has operational control over more than 600,000 active-duty military personnel of all services, of both countries. In wartime, augmentation could include some 3.5 million ROK reservists as well as additional U.S. forces deployed from outside the ROK. If North Korea attacked, the CFC would provide a coordinated defense through its Air, Ground, Naval



and Combined Marine Forces Component Commands and the Combined Unconventional Warfare Task Force. In-country and augmentation U.S. forces would be provided to the CFC for employment by the respective combat component.

The CFC is commanded by a four-star U.S. general, with a four-star ROK Army general as deputy commander. Throughout the command structure, binational manning is readily apparent: if the chief of a staff section is Korean, the deputy is American and vice versa. This integrated structure exists within the component commands

as well as the headquarters. All CFC components are tactically integrated through continuous combined and joint planning, training and exercises.

The major field training exercise was the Team Spirit series that began in 1976 and grew to nearly 200,000 ROK and U.S. participants commensurate with increased perceptions of the North Korean threat. U.S. participation in the exercise included augmentation forces of all services tactically deployed to the ROK from other Pacific bases and the continental United States. This exercise was last held in 1993.

Separate ROK and U.S. command post exercises were combined as Ulchi Focus Lens (UFL) in 1976. In December 2006, The CFC CDR ordered the name of UFL be changed. The ROK staff retained the name of the ROK government exercise "Ulchi" and changed the exercise name to "Ulchi Freedom Guardian". UFG is an annual joint and combined simulation-supported command post exercise that trains Combined Forces Command personnel and major component, subordinate and augmenting staffs using state-of-the-art wargaming computer simulations and support infrastructures.

At the unit level, frequent no-notice alerts, musters, and operational





Photo By: Sgt. Lee, Hyeon-ho and Cpl. Yoo Jae-ho

readiness inspections insure combat preparedness for ROK and U.S. forces. Both countries are pursuing ambitious modernization programs to maintain a viable ROK/U.S. military posture that will convince North Korea that any form of aggression or adventurism will fail. The ROK is making strides in equipment improvement through a rapidly expanding domestic defense industry, as well as purchases from foreign sources. U.S. efforts toward modernization include newer, more powerful weapon systems, greater mobility and helicopter lift capability, and vastly increased anti-armor capability.

In summary, the Combined Forces Command reflects the mutual commitment of the Republic of Korea and the United States to maintain peace and security, and the willingness and capability to take that commitment into battle, if the need arises.



**Commanders, ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command**

- GENERAL JOHN W. VESSEY (07-Nov-78 ~ 10-Jul-79)
- GENERAL JOHN A. WICKHAM, Jr. (10-Jul-79 ~ 04-Jun-82)
- GENERAL ROBERT W. SENNEWALD (04-Jun-82 ~ 01-Jun-84)
- GENERAL WILLIAM J. LIVSEY (1-Jun-84 ~ 25-Jun-87)
- GENERAL LOUIS C. MENETREY, Jr. (25-Jun-87 ~ 26-Jun-90)
- GENERAL ROBERT W. RiscASSI (26-Jun-90 ~ 15-Jun-93)
- GENERAL GARY E. LUCK (15-Jun-93 ~ 09-Jul-96)
- GENERAL JOHN H. TILELLI, JR. (09-Jul-96 ~ 09-Dec-99)
- GENERAL THOMAS A. SCHWARTZ (09-Dec-99 ~ 01-May-02)
- GENERAL LEON J. LAPORTE (01-May-02 ~ 03-Feb-06)
- GENERAL B. B. BELL (03-Feb-06 ~ 03-Jun-08)
- GENERAL WALTER "SKIP" SHARP (03-Jun-08 ~ 14-Jul-11)
- GENERAL JAMES D. THURMAN (14-Jul-11 ~ 02-Oct-13)
- GENERAL CURTIS M. SCAPARROTTI (02-Oct-13 ~ 30-Apr-16)
- GENERAL VINCENT K. BROOKS (30-Apr-16 ~ 08-NOV-18)
- GENERAL ROBERT B. ABRAMS (08-Nov-18 ~ 02-Jul-21)
- GENERAL PAUL J. LaCAMERA (02-Jul-21 ~ PRESENT)

# LIEUTENANT COLONEL MAX R. PFANZELTER: *WHERE IS THIS VETERAN'S GRAVESITE?*

By Yunah Cho

"I heard my father passed away from a heart attack in Korea while I was serving in the Army in the U.S.," Mr. Joe Pfanzelter said about his father, Max Ronald Pfanzelter. He was informed faster than other family members because the report had been made through the Army. He said "May 24, 1979" was the date of his father's death, but he has no other information about the location of his father's final resting place. With the help of KDVA, Joe was able to make connections to people and resources that is helping him get closer to finding his father's burial site. It has been an incredible journey of a son's dedication and love for finding his father. Joe is hoping that KDVA readers can help him find his father's burial location in Korea.

Max Ronald Pfanzelter, Mr. Joe Pfanzelter's father, was a Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) who loved the Army, soldiering, and soldiers. He enlisted in the Army in 1944, right after graduating from high school. He became a Master Sergeant within 8 years and attended Officer Candidate School (OCS) in 1953, with recommendations from his superior officers. The table below is the timeline of LTC Max R. Pfanzelter's life.

Year	Description
1927	Birth
1944	Enlisted in the Army
1951	The first tour to Korea during the Korean War
1953	Entered Officer Candidate School (OCS)
1963-1964	Second tour to Korea as an Army Major
1967-1968	Vietnam Duty
1976-1977	Third tour to Korea as an LTC
1977	Retired from the Army
1978	Moved to Korea
1979	Passed away from a heart attack on May 24th

Mr. Joe Pfanzelter is also a retired Army LTC. He has been looking for his father's gravesite with the help of KDVA. I interviewed Mr. Joe Pfanzelter, and he allowed me to share his journey with the public.

During the interview, Joe stated that the last time he saw his father was after his wedding in 1978. After his father moved to Korea, they had not been in contact with each other. Unfortunately, since he was notified of his father's death, he did not hear about his father's funeral nor did



he have a chance to find the gravesite in Korea in person, because he did not serve in Korea. As a final comment, he said he was proud of his father, saying, "My father was an outstanding infantryman. He successfully commanded an infantry battalion in Vietnam."

KDVA connected him with multiple international organizations to get as much information about LTC Max R. Pfanzelter's gravesite. Among those contacts, LTC (Ret.) Steve Tharp, a KDVA member and very active U.S. Veteran living in Korea, was instrumental in connecting KDVA with other organizations and helpers in Korea. Mr. Gordon Church (in the U.S. Consulate Busan) connected Joe with two offices: the American Citizen Services Office and the United Nations Memorial Cemetery in Korea





LTC Max R. Pfanzelter and LTC Joe Pfanzelter at Joe's wedding

(UNMCK). However, the American Citizen Services Office could not find a record of LTC Max R. Pfanzelter in their system because he passed away before their records were digitized and not all deaths were reported to the embassy. Furthermore, the data on the death of LTC Max R. Pfanzelter was not recorded in documents the State Department maintains nor found at the UNMCK.

LTC Max R. Pfanzelter is also not identified in records at the Yanghwajin Cemetery in Seoul, a cemetery where foreigners are commonly buried,

nor other cemeteries in Korea. About three months ago, Joe received information in the form of a State Department Death Report, that his father was interred at Hannam Park Cemetery in Kyonggi-do, Korea. That was encouraging information; however, it was concluded as incorrect. LTC (Ret.) Steve Tharp, visited the Hannam Park Cemetery and spoke with the caretakers there, who determined that LTC Max R. Pfanzelter was not currently, nor had ever been buried there.

At the end of the interview, Joe added that he appreciated the efforts of the Korean Veterans Association (KVA), their Chairman, Gen. (Ret) Kim, Jin-ho, and the International Cooperation Division, led by the Director General, Brig. Gen. (Ret) Kim, Hyungsoo, with retired Col. Cheon, Jae Ho, and retired Col. Ji, Hong-gi provided liaison with KVA Gwangju City Chapter Chairman, Mr. Jae Kyung Kim, and Director, Kim, Yong Deok. These latter five officers conducted record checks with government offices, made phone calls, and visits to cemeteries and crematoriums in search of LTC Pfanzelter's remains.

Joe is waiting for updates and would like help from you. If you have any resources to find LTC Max R. Pfanzelter's gravesite, we would greatly appreciate your proactive contact (contact@kdva.vet).

LTC Max R. Pfanzelter experienced several major wars, and no one knows his detailed experiences in each. Many soldiers die in war, while many soldiers survive. We do not know the complete story of LTC Max R. Pfanzelter yet, but we hope that his gravesite will be found, and he will be honored with respect.

# SERGEANT ANGELO CASTELLI'S KOREAN ODYSSEY



By James Durand

During the Thanksgiving holiday in 1952, childhood friends Angelo Castelli, Robert Parrillo, and John Zinowicz enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. The three had graduated from Rhode Island's Cranston High School, where the constant news of the Korean War led many classmates to enter the service. Of the three, only Angelo is alive today. His service was an odyssey that took him throughout Korea and other parts of Asia. Decades later, his son would follow his service in the Marine Corps and Korea.

Angelo and his friends went to boot camp at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island. His drill instructor had recently returned from the fighting in Korea. Staff Sergeant Wright passed along the lessons learned in combat as he instilled the Corps' ethos in his recruits. Following graduation on March 30, 1953, Private Castelli attended Electronics School at Great Lakes Naval Air Station for 20 weeks. He completed Advanced Electronics School in San Diego and then reported to Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, California.

In the summer of 1953, Castelli received orders to Marine Aircraft Group 33, which had been deployed to Korea at the outset of the war. He traveled from Long Beach to Yokosuka aboard a cramped liberty ship; a second ship took him to Pusan – which was subsequently renamed Busan – followed by a bus to Daegu and a flight, which stopped in Seoul. The capital still bore the scars of war, with destroyed and pockmarked buildings ringing the airfield. The final leg of his journey was to Kunsan, where he landed on the Air Force base known as K-8, which was also home to the U.S. Air Force and a Royal Australian Air Force squadron. Castelli was assigned to Marine Fighter Squadron 217, located several miles northeast of K-8 in a separate compound where

the Marine Corps manned a radar station surveilling the China coast.

Corporal Castelli was responsible for maintaining the radio equipment providing ground-to-air communication. He served with radar detachment on a bluff overlooking Korea's West Sea. Despite the signing of the Armistice Agreement in July, travel to the site was still dangerous as guerillas and isolated North Korean soldiers occasionally fired on allied troops. The Marines were ordered to lie down in the back of 6x6 cargo trucks to protect them from sniper fire.

As an electronics technician, Corporal Castelli also was responsible for the electronics on Cheju Island, where the radar was located adjacent to a former Prisoner of War camp. The Marines lived in a Quonset hut and took in a five-year old orphan, whom they named Jimmy. He spent nearly a month on the volcanic island. Later, when the Marines departed the island, they left Jimmy with over \$1,000 in military script, "enough to buy the island."

Upon returning to Kunsan, Captain Anderson called Corporals Castelli and Dobson to his office. The mustang officer encouraged the two Marines to apply for the Naval Academy Preparatory School (NAPS). "Dobbie" had completed a year at Ohio State, but left for academic reasons. Both declined the opportunity, preferring to return home to their families.

Castelli returned to Cheju Island to complete the work of removing the military equipment prior to shutting down the station. They took the radars, trucks and jeeps down to the port and loaded them aboard a Tank Landing Ship. The Marines observed Cheju's famed women divers search for mollusks and seaweed.

During this period, the Marines learned that there were Roe Deer on the island. Corporal Castelli and some other Marines took their M-1 rifles and prepared to go hunting by zeroing their weapons on a pile of stones on the top of the hill. After firing several shots, they were surprised to see a white flag appear. When they reached the top of the hill, they discovered a visibly shaken ROK Army soldier, who had been assigned as a lookout. Cheju's volcanic rock protected the soldier. After exchanging smiles and shaking hands, the Marines continued their hunt. They shot two deer, but the camp's cook refused to cook the deer. They ended up selling the deer in town.

After returning to Kunsan, Corporal Castelli traveled to Pusan by train to return some of the equipment from Cheju Island. In Pusan, he met Eddie Votta, who lived two doors down from the Castellis and was now serving in the Army. The two shared stories about home and friends from Cranston who were in the service. Robert Parrillo was stationed at





Camp Lejeune and John Zinowicz was at 29 Palms. Castelli and Zinowicz had traveled to Big Bear when they were both in California.

During his tour in Korea, Corporal Castelli spent two weeks at Johnson Air Force Base on the outskirts of Tokyo to attend advanced electronics school. The chow hall's tablecloths, generous seconds, and chocolate milk contrasted with the spartan Marine Corps life in Korea. While there he took a train to downtown Tokyo and was taken around the Imperial Palace in a rickshaw. Corporal Castelli later went on 10 days of R&R in Hong Kong. He toured the city, bought a tailored cashmere coat, and enjoyed a seafood buffet on a harbor cruise. It was quite an experience for a 19-year old.

Corporal Castelli completed his tour of service in Korea, returning to the U.S. aboard the USS Princeton, which stopped in Hawaii. After offloading the ammunition, the ship continued to Naval Air Station North Island in San Diego, where they unloaded the rest of the equipment and took trucks to Marine Corps Air Station El Toro.

After Korea, duty aboard the air station was very routine. Now a sergeant, Castelli worked for Master Sergeant Barney, a Bataan Death March survivor who was quiet and direct. Assigning Sergeant Castelli to the end of the runway on weekends when reserves were flying into the air station, he issued Castelli a jeep with a trailer containing radio equipment designed to communicate with aircraft. His order was to "ensure the landing gear was down." The slower pace allowed Angelo to visit several Southern California landmarks. Santa Ana was a beautiful city that was very supportive of service members. He attended the Notre Dame-USC Football Game at the Los Angeles Coliseum courtesy of the USO and visited Hollywood where he encountered Jimmy Durante parking his convertible on the street. Angelo was discharged as a Sergeant in 1956.

Angelo returned to Cranston, where his younger brother had taken possession of his custom cashmere coat. He attended the University of Rhode Island, receiving \$125 per month under the G.I. Bill, graduated with a degree in accounting, and joined the General Accounting Office in Washington, D.C., in 1961. He attended law school in the evening, graduating from the Columbus Law School at the Catholic University of America in 1965. He joined the Department of Justice in 1968 and entered the tax division as a trial attorney, prosecuting tax fraud cases and, later, civil cases. Angelo and his wife, Connie, raised four children in Oxon Hill, Maryland. He was a member of the Prince George's County Board of Education, and the Maryland and Virginia Bar Associations. He was elected an Orphans' Court Judge, which had jurisdiction over estates filed on behalf of decedents. Angelo served 16 years as a Judge. Angelo and Connie retired to Easton, Maryland.

Angelo's son Chris continued his father's service in the Marine Corps and Korea. He attended NAPS, played varsity football at the Naval Academy, and was commissioned in the Marine Corps. An artillery officer, Desert Storm veteran, and career Marine, Chris deployed to Korea on two occasions: he supported Exercises Ulchi Focus Lens (UFL) and Bear Hunt during the fall of 1988. He returned to Marine Expeditionary Camp-Pohang in August 1996, when the staff of I Marine Expeditionary Force participated in UFL.

extremely poor condition. Our driver did a great job of navigating. We were all concerned a few times, that we might go off the side of this steep terrain. It was a rough ride.

As I recall, we stayed at the remote mountain top site for several days, and then returned to our regular duties. There were no incidents of direct engagement on our position.

Looking back, we were doing the best we could, with what we had, but we were "winging it." We put together an action plan, and probably could have held our position for a short time. One thing is certain, help would have been a long time coming. We had no U.S. combat units or air support in our area. Sometimes it is better to be lucky than good.

This may have been a trial run for North Korea, as more of these isolated radio sites soon came under attack. Shortages of manpower, equipment, and training made these sites vulnerable. Apparently, it was not uncommon to do what we did, that is, to quickly assemble a task force with whatever manpower was available, to protect these sites. The personnel shortages in Korea were due to the priority given to Vietnam and the NATO efforts in Europe.

The military communications systems of 1967 were primitive by today's standards. They were primarily VHF and Microwave Relay sites. If one site were knocked out, it would severely damage the entire system. To use an analogy, think of a bicycle chain. If one link is removed, the chain is useless, and so is the bicycle.

After the Daegu firefight, things began to change rapidly. General Bonesteel (Commander of all U.S. Forces in Korea) called in a Special Forces Team from Okinawa. Suddenly, we had numerous members of this highly trained group working in Daegu. They were a pleasure to work with and reassuring to have around. They were used to train Korean Soldiers and Police, and to engage the enemy if necessary.

We also began to get additional manpower and other resources. This was a big relief and helped us have better working conditions.

During my 13 month deployment to South Korea (1966-1967), there were 22 American Soldiers killed in action and dozens wounded. An additional 72 soldiers died from non-combat causes. During the entire time, from the end of the Korean War in 1953 up until today, this time period from 1966-1969 was by far the deadliest for U.S. troops. That's why it is referred to by military historians as the Second Korean Conflict.

I often pray that a permanent peace agreement will be reached and that the reunification of Korea will begin. I know it will happen some day, and I would love to see it in my lifetime. Koreans are wonderful people. I went where I was sent by my Uncle Sam, and have always felt honored and proud of my service to the citizens of Korea and America.

*\*Some information and verbiage, was taken from various internet sources and articles titled, "The Korean War That Almost Was" by Mike Coppock, and "We Were Soldiers Too, The Second Korean War, The DMZ Conflict" by Bob Kern.*

# What I've Learned about Honor Flights and Korean War Veterans



*Paula Park welcomes Honor Flight Chicago Veterans wearing traditional Korean Hanbok*

## By Paula Park

I am standing outside the Korean War Memorial and Wall of Remembrance in 100-degree heat on a humid August day, dressed in a traditional Korean Hanbok. My sacrifice is small, however, compared to those made by the group I'm waiting to greet – an Honor Flight of thirty Korean War Veterans from Chicago.

These Korean War Veterans will be visiting the memorial dedicated to their service, many of them for their first and only time. The average age of these American heroes is 88 years young. Between 1950 and 1955, 6.8 million American men and women served in the Korean War. In 2020, there were approximately 1 million Korean War Veterans. With





an average of 600 Korean War Veterans dying a day, by 2030 the Korean War Veteran population is projected to fall below 200,000.

As a native-born Korean, I am very grateful to the US veterans who defended Korea's freedom. Without them, I would not be here today. The Korea these veterans fought to keep free has changed vastly since the war. I'm hoping that seeing a Korean American in traditional Korean costume will awaken memories for them of the land they so bravely defended.

The mission of Honor Flight is to transport America's veterans to Washington, D.C. to visit the memorials dedicated to honoring those who have served and sacrificed for our country. The Honor Flight Network is a national network of independent Hubs working together to honor our nation's veterans with an all-expenses paid trip to the memorials in Washington, D.C., a trip many of our veterans may not otherwise be able to take.

Participation in an Honor Flight trip gives veterans the chance to share this momentous trip with other Veterans, to remember friends and comrades lost, and share their stories and experiences with each other.

As President of the Korean American Community Association of Greater Washington (KACAGW), which represents the interests of the more than 200,000 Korean Americans in the metropolitan area, it has been a true privilege for my members and I to greet Honor Flight groups from across the country to Washington D.C. over the past three years. I believe it is especially important to involve our Next Generation youth in Honor Flight, so that the sacrifice and bravery of these Veterans are never forgotten.

It was through our association's active relationship with Korean War Veterans associations that I first heard about Honor Flight. I am especially thankful for Mr. James Fisher, Executive Director of the Korean War Veterans Memorial Foundation, and Ms. Margo Susco, Honor Flight Southern Arizona, for helping develop our association's relations with the Honor Flight Network.

The Honor Flights have started up in August 2021, after a long postponement due to the COVID pandemic. A listing of upcoming Honor Flight can be found here: [www.honorflight.org/current-trip-schedule.html](http://www.honorflight.org/current-trip-schedule.html)

For those in the Washington DC area, I would very much like to encourage everyone who can to come and thank and honor these forgotten heroes when they visit. If you want to make these Veterans remember this special moment in the twilight of their lives, I know your heart will be touched and blessed by this event.

### About Honor Flight

The Honor Flight Network is currently serving Veterans who served from World War II to the Korean War and through to Vietnam. It also serves catastrophically ill and injured Veterans from all service eras.

To participate in an Honor Flight trip, please contact your nearest regional Honor Flight Hub.

A listing of all active Hubs can be found on the Honor Flight Network website: <https://www.honorflight.org>

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## KDVA'S "FROM MY SERVICE IN KOREA, I LEARNED ..." SERIES

KDVA started this series in 2021 to provide a forum for our members to look back on their time in Korea and reflect on what they learned.

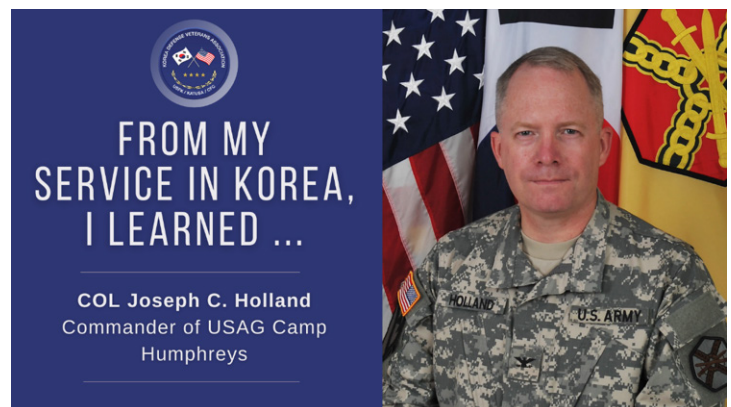
The idea for this new series started in February 2021 when the U.S. Army announced its one-star and two-star reassignments. There were 52 Generals on that list. General Vincent Brooks, the KDVA Chairman and President and former UNC/CFC/USFK Commander in Korea, saw the list and recognized that several of these senior leaders had served in Korea. Just out of curiosity, he started to dig into their bios, and to his surprise, he found that 25(!) of them had served in Korea -- 25 of the 52 Army one and two stars on this reassignment list had served in Korea! Really amazing. So, we contacted each of them, and so far we have 12 flag officers who will share their stories.

Then, we asked all KDVA members to share their stories. We are very thankful for those who have sent their stories to [kdva.myserviceinkorea@gmail.com](mailto:kdva.myserviceinkorea@gmail.com). And we encourage everyone, of all ranks, to share their short stories.

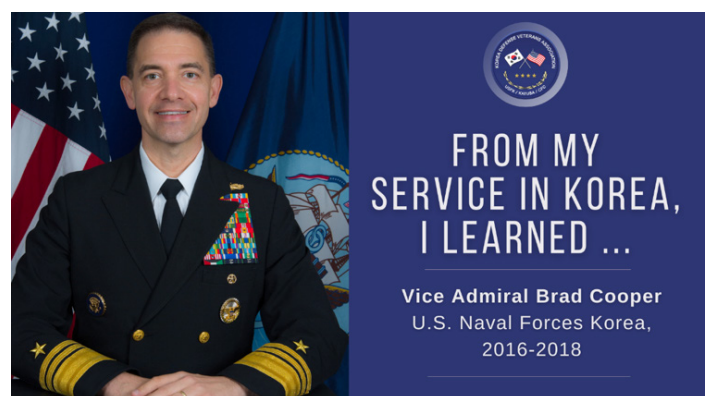
Please submit your 2-3 paragraph story that answers this question: "From my service in Korea, I learned ..." to [kdva.myserviceinkorea@gmail.com](mailto:kdva.myserviceinkorea@gmail.com). We would really appreciate hearing from our enlisted members -- your service and work in Korea stand as the true backbone of the ROK-U.S. Alliance.



<https://kdva.vet/2021/05/24/mg-brian-mennes/>



<https://kdva.vet/2021/09/28/col-joseph-c-holland/>



<https://kdva.vet/2021/05/27/vice-admiral-brad-cooper/>



# Setting the Record Straight on OPCON Transition in the U.S.-ROK Alliance



*South Korea and U.S. Special Forces during a joint military exercise in Gangwon province, South Korea, November 7, 2019, Photo by Capt. David J. Murphy/U.S. Air Force/Reuters*

**By Shawn P. Creamer**

This article was originally published by The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) and is reprinted with permission from NBR. KDVA is thankful for NBR's support. The original article is at <https://www.nbr.org/publication/setting-the-record-straight-on-opcon-transition-in-the-u-s-rok-alliance/>.

The United States and the Republic of Korea have been pursuing a strategic transformation of their security alliance for almost two decades. Shawn P. Creamer argues that the label OPCON transition no longer appropriately describes the transformative venture and discusses the benefits of pursuing strategic transformation under a different name.

The United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK) have been pursuing a strategic transformation of their security alliance for almost two decades. Since inception, the effort has evolved under many different names. One of the most widely used labels for this undertaking has been operational

control (OPCON) transition. However, the use of this term has grown increasingly problematic. Quite simply, OPCON transition no longer appropriately describes the transformative venture being pursued by the two long-standing allies. This commentary will describe the reasons why and discuss the benefits of pursuing strategic transformation under a different name.

### **THE NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT**

OPCON transition is an expression used to convey the ROK's aspiration to assume and exercise unilateral control over its armed forces in wartime. OPCON transition is considered by many within the ROK government as a very big step by the country toward becoming militarily powerful enough to one day assume full responsibility for its own national defense.[1] Some pundits speculate incorrectly that the United States' motive for strategic transformation is to engineer a situation whereby U.S. forces can depart



from the Korean Peninsula and set the conditions for the United States to walk away from the security alliance. The fact of the matter is that the effort to strategically transform the alliance is forward looking, an aggressive move by both allies to adapt their relationship to future realities.

**THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM OF CONNECTING OPCON TRANSITION WITH THE ALLIANCE'S STRATEGIC TRANSFORMATION EFFORT IS THAT THE TERM MISDIRECTS OFFICIALS AND THE PUBLIC FROM WHAT THIS PROCESS IS REALLY ABOUT. THE ALLIANCE'S STRATEGIC TRANSFORMATION INVOLVES A PARADIGM SHIFT FAR BEYOND ADJUSTMENTS TO THE COMBINED DEFENSE STRUCTURE.**

The fundamental problem of connecting OPCON transition with the alliance's strategic transformation effort is that the term misdirects officials and the public from what this process is really about. The alliance's strategic transformation involves a paradigm shift far beyond adjustments to the combined defense structure. It is focused on taking a major leap forward toward ROK national self-defense by measurably improving the quality and scope of the ROK's contributions to the combined defense through a well-balanced program of acquisitions, fielding, organization, and training. The above statements are not intended to minimize in any way just how significant it is for both the ROK and the alliance to have a South Korean general officer in a command role over alliance forces. Yet while the reversal in which nation provides the alliance commander is noteworthy, this aspect of strategic transformation is of secondary importance. The goal of strategic transformation was born out of the mutual recognition that the strategic environment had changed, both in terms of South Korea's place in the world and in how the regional balance of power was evolving in the Indo-Pacific. Washington and Seoul concurred that the bulk of the combined defense of the Korean Peninsula must come from the ROK itself and that the country should maintain robust capabilities in all domains, moving beyond the days when it primarily contributed land forces.

Moreover, the planned acquisition, fielding, organization, and training improvements would empower the ROK to defend itself in all domains, allowing the country to play a middle-power role within the region, both by itself and in conjunction with other partners, including the United States. However, strategic transformation also would provide a much-needed hedge against a most dangerous situation where the United States, as a great power with global obligations, might one day become heavily engaged in simultaneous conflicts. If such a situation were to arise, the United States might be unable to bring the full weight of its military to the combined defense should peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula or in the region be threatened.

**STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR OPCON TRANSITION**

From 2002 through 2007, the ROK and U.S. governments studied numerous combined defense arrangements to achieve the ROK government's political goal of OPCON transition, while at the same time meeting the unique security and defense needs of the alliance.[2] Under both the Strategic Transition Plan (STP) developed during 2007–10 and the Strategic Alliance 2015 (SA2015), the ROK Armed Forces would significantly increase their involvement and roles in the alliance defense.[3] One major aspect of both plans that is often overlooked was the significant improvements

to secure the ROK's capability to lead alliance operations.[4] However, even under STP and the later SA2015 effort, some ROK and U.S. forces would continue combined operations at the component and task-force levels, while the majority of both national forces would fight separately under national unified commands in a parallel command construct. Moreover, both plans retained the existing bilateral consultative and decision-making body, the Military Committee, which would continue serving as the alliance clearing house for strategic guidance and direction to the respective national forces.[5]

OPCON transition became a full-fledged false narrative after 2015 when the ROK and U.S. governments shifted away from the parallel command experiment and returned to the proven integrated Combined Forces Command (CFC) model under the inappropriately named Conditions-based Operational Control Transition Plan (COTP). The COTP effort involves far more than just changing the alliance commander from an American to a Korean-appointed general officer. Rather, COTP is focused on strengthening the alliance's combined defense capabilities through the acquisition of ROK military capabilities to enable the ROK Armed Forces to exercise more leadership and expanded their roles in the alliance defense. While the basic alliance combined defense framework is retained under COTP, the plan does expand on the earlier STP and SA2015 efforts to build in significant force improvements for the ROK Armed Forces, in conjunction with South Korea's own military modernization goals.[6] U.S. military modernization and persistent challenges with implementing ROK military modernization plans resulted in an increased focus on generating improved ROK military capabilities as part of the alliance's transformation plans.[7]

**MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT OPCON TRANSITION**

OPCON transition is no longer appropriate to describe the strategic transformation of the alliance because the term itself is founded on two false premises. The first is that the ROK Armed Forces would be under U.S. OPCON if a war were to occur under the current CFC framework. The second is that under the new arrangement the ROK government would exercise unilateral control over its forces in wartime. These premises overlook the following features of the alliance framework and how OPCON is exercised within alliances.

First, South Korea has maintained sovereign command authority over its armed forces since its founding on August 15, 1948.[8] The government, or entities within, have exercised command authority over select ROK field forces to perform unsanctioned operational missions while they were ostensibly under the OPCON of the UN Command or the CFC at multiple points over the last 70 years.

Second, since 1994, the alliance's warfighting command—the CFC—has had no forces assigned during peacetime, except for the command's headquarters and component command headquarters staffing.[9] U.S. forces in South Korea have been under U.S. unilateral command and control, while the ROK Armed Forces have been under the unilateral command and control of the ROK government.[10]

Third, since 1978, if the armistice were to fail and hostilities resume





on the Korean Peninsula, U.S. field commands forward-stationed in South Korea, U.S. reinforcement forces from off the peninsula, and the majority of field commands in the ROK Armed Forces would operate under a form of bilateral control under the CFC.[11] Though the term OPCON is used routinely to describe this control arrangement, multinational OPCON arrangements can differ significantly from those exercised unilaterally due to the influences of command authority and national caveats exercised by the providing governments.[12]

Fourth, in accordance with the ROK-U.S. Terms of Reference agreement, the U.S. government appoints the CFC commander, while the ROK government appoints the deputy commander.[13]

Fifth, the Military Committee is the conduit for all strategic guidance and direction to the CFC leadership. Neither the ROK nor the U.S. government has the authority to circumvent the Military Committee.[14] All three evolutions of the strategic transformation (STP, SA2015, and COTP) have retained this proven construct for strategic guidance and direction to alliance forces.[15] Last, COTP is the current bilaterally negotiated program driving the alliance's strategic transformation. It retains the core foundations of the above CFC and Military Committee construct. In addition to reversing the nationality of the commander and deputy commander, COTP also directs the ROK's acquisition of many capabilities prior to the transition that the two countries agreed were critical to increased leadership in the combined defense.[16] Given these considerations, the use of the term OPCON transition is inappropriate because there is no transfer of OPCON occurring or scheduled to occur during wartime other than what is already occurring today under the current CFC and alliance framework. Yet the term continues to be used by both ROK and U.S. officials. Much of the confusion arises due to the misconception that the nationality of the alliance's commander equates to unilateral national control. By this logic, the U.S. government's appointment of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe means that the United States has control over NATO forces in wartime. NATO has similar rules in place as the U.S.-ROK alliance. It is highly doubtful, however, that Germany, Italy, or the Netherlands sees OPCON lines as flowing through the U.S. government. Despite the ROK and U.S. transition to a bilateral security relationship in 1978, the relationship itself remains conceptually locked in the historical legacies of the pre-1978 patron-client framework. Viewed from this perspective, OPCON transition appears to run up against the institutional limits of the U.S.-ROK alliance. On the one side, some ROK officials conceive of the transition as overcoming their country's historical dependence on the United States while also breaking free of U.S. constraints on freedom of action. Those who hold this view perceive the current CFC commanded by a U.S. general as a hindrance rather than as a crucial institution that has preserved and defended the ROK's national security.

On the other side, U.S. officials view the transition with skepticism insofar as historically the United States has maintained a degree of relative control over the security environment in South Korea and has been very cautious about engaging in a major campaign on the peninsula. Put more bluntly, for many U.S. officials the transition to a future-oriented CFC would place control of U.S. forces under a South Korean commander. This is difficult for them to fathom, even if the organizational structure of the CFC and the existing bilateral consultative mechanisms within it would not actually change.

## THE BENEFITS OF STRATEGIC TRANSFORMATION

Both sides thus misconstrue the transition as something that is contrary to rather than consonant with their core interests. Such misunderstandings prevent officials from seeing the benefits of further alliance transformation. Not only would the ROK adopt a more independent defense posture; it also would take on a greater burden in the process, both on the Korean Peninsula and regionally. For the ROK to properly take the lead on the peninsula, the allies would need to deepen consultation regarding third-party contingencies (beyond a potential conflict with North Korea), and the ROK would need to more clearly support U.S. treaty responsibilities to other allies, particularly Japan. This could result in greater trilateral cooperation. Although at times the ROK appears to discount the strategic implications and collective security responsibilities that come with the alliance's strategic transformation, moving forward with the process is the only way for South Korea and the alliance to transform in that direction.

## RESOLVING THE ISSUE OF INACCURATE LABELS AND REDUCING CONFUSION ON WHAT STRATEGIC TRANSFORMATION WILL ACHIEVE MIGHT ALLOW THE TWO ALLIES TO DEDICATE MORE ORGANIZATIONAL ENERGY TO ACCOMPLISHING THE IMPORTANT GOALS CONTAINED WITHIN THE CURRENT PLAN.

Time will tell if the two allies can work through their problems and transform their security relationship to address current and future realities. A good start might be to cease using OPCON transition as a label to describe the effort, followed by the formal renaming of COTP with a more appropriate term. Resolving the issue of inaccurate labels and reducing confusion on what strategic transformation will achieve might allow the two allies to dedicate more organizational energy to accomplishing the important goals contained within the current plan. Strategic transformation, as currently codified, significantly advances the alliance relationship by moving the ROK much closer toward achieving national self-defense, while at the same time realizing U.S. goals for allies and partners to actively contribute militarily to the collective self-defense of the free world.[17] Once this phase of strategic transformation is completed, the two allies should forge ahead toward the mutual goal of an ROK that is self-sufficient militarily, a U.S. ally, and a major contributor to regional peace and stability.

Shawn P. Creamer is an active duty U.S. Army colonel. He was commissioned through the ROTC as an infantry officer in 1995 when he graduated from the Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina. He has served in a wide variety of command and staff assignments over the course of his 26-year career, which includes eleven years assigned to the ROK or working on Korean Peninsula security issues. He was a U.S. Army War College Fellow in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Security Studies Program and is a fellow with the Institute for Korean-American Studies.

The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

## ENDNOTES

- [1] Office of National Security of the Republic of Korea (ROK), ROK National Security Strategy (Seoul, 2018), 32–33; and Ministry of National Defense (ROK), 2014 Defense White Paper (Seoul, 2014), 42. It is important to note that “assuming full responsibility” or “future-oriented and autonomous defense capabilities” does not mean that the ROK is seeking a future without allies. Rather, it means that the ROK is able to defend its sovereignty and national interests without or with limited support by an outside power.
- [2] Ministry of National Defense (ROK), *The History of the ROK-U.S. Alliance* (Seoul, 2014), 298–305.
- [3] Ministry of National Defense (ROK), 2008 Defense White Paper (Seoul, 2008), 84–85; Ministry of National Defense (ROK), 2014 Defense White Paper (Seoul, 2014), 123–27; and Ministry of National Defense (ROK), *The History of the ROK-US Alliance*, 280–89.
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- [6] Ministry of National Defense (ROK), 2018 Defense White Paper (Seoul, 2018), 48–51, 182, 185.
- [7] Bruce W. Bennett, “The Korean Defense Reform 307 Plan,” Asan Institute for Policy Studies, April 18, 2011, <http://en.asaninst.org/contents/issue-brief-no-8-the-korean-defense-reform-307-plan-by-bruce-w-bennett-the-rand-corporation1>.
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- [13] Ministry of National Defense (ROK), *The History of the ROK-U.S. Alliance*, 168; and Creamer, “Theater-Level Command and Alliance Decision-Making,” 49.
- [14] Creamer, “Theater-Level Command and Alliance Decision-Making,” 49–52.
- [15] Ministry of National Defense (ROK), 2008 Defense White Paper, 87–90; Ministry of National Defense, 2014 Defense White Paper, 123–27; Ministry of National Defense (ROK), 2018 Defense White Paper, 184; and Ministry of National Defense (ROK), *The History of the ROK-U.S. Alliance*, 280–89.
- [16] Ministry of National Defense (ROK), 2018 Defense White Paper, 184; “Joint Communique of 50th U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting,” U.S. Forces Korea, Press Release, October 31, 2018, <https://www.usfk.mil/Media/News/Article/1679753/joint-communique-of-50th-us-rok-security-consultative-meeting>; and Clint Work “The Long History of South Korea’s OPCON Debate,” *Diplomat*, November 1, 2017.
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# 2021 Report on American Attitudes Toward the Korean Peninsula

By Korea Economic Institute of America (KEI)

This survey was originally published by Korea Economic Institute of America (KEI) and is reprinted with permission from KEI. KDVA is thankful for our partnership with KEI. The KEI survey is at <https://keia.org/publication/2021-report-on-american-attitudes-toward-the-korean-peninsula/>.

KEI's 2021 Report on American Attitudes Toward the Korean Peninsula summarizes results from a survey commissioned by KEI and conducted by YouGov on August 30th to September 7th, 2021. The report is the second iteration of KEI's annual survey asking Americans their views on relations with South Korea, the challenges presented by North Korea, and how the U.S. should manage its relationship with the peninsula. Most of the questions in this survey were carried over from last year's survey, with a few additional questions and changes relevant to 2021.

The surveyed group of 1,000 respondents was weighted to reflect a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults (18 years and older). An additional oversample of 140 Americans who specifically follow international news is also included, to supplement those in the general population sample. The total number who follow international news across both samples is 509. The margin of error of the survey is +/- 3.25.

## Key insights from the survey include:

### Nearly two thirds of Americans see the military alliance with South Korea as beneficial to the US.

- The number of Americans who want to maintain all US alliances declined significantly from 22% in 2020 to 18% in 2021, while the number of those who want to maintain all alliances, but with reforms, increased (from 22% in 2020 to 27% in 2021).

- For a plurality of Americans (35%), the withdrawal from Afghanistan had no impact on their views about maintaining other US security commitments abroad. 2 in 10 said it made them more likely to support such commitments.

- 50% of Americans would like to see the US maintain the current troop presence in South Korea. This rate is especially high among those who follow international and Asia-Pacific news (60%).

### 9 in 10 Americans believe it is very important/important for North Korea to give up its military nuclear capabilities.

- While nearly half of Americans think their own country should maintain its nuclear capabilities, only 8% think that North Korea should maintain its military nuclear capabilities. Almost half think no countries should have military nuclear capabilities.

- 41% of Americans would like the US to maintain its troop presence in South Korea, if the United States were to reach an agreement with North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons.

- This year, as last, about half of Americans approve of the US sending humanitarian assistance to North Korea.

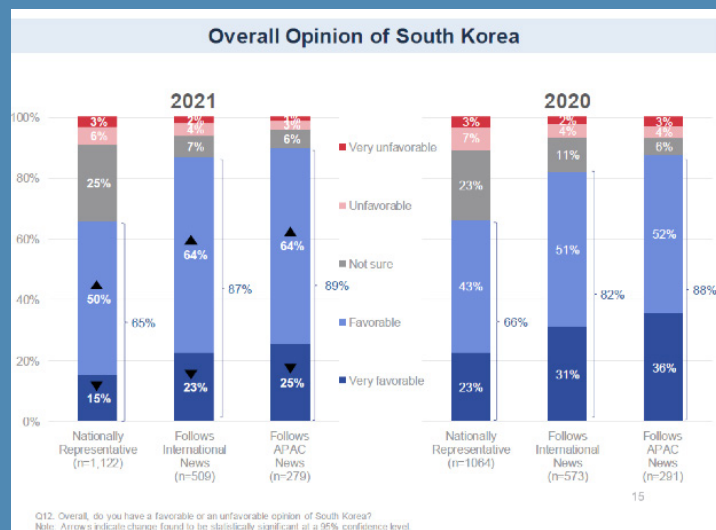
- The proportion of Americans who approve of the US sending humanitarian assistance to North Korean citizens declined from 53% last year to 48% this year. More Democrats approve of sending humanitarian assistance to North Korea compared to Republicans (60% vs. 38%).

- In 2021, more Americans who follow international news approve of the US sending Covid-19 assistance to North Korean citizens than they did in 2020 (63% in 2021 vs. 55% in 2020).

This chart shows the importance of raising awareness about the ROK-U.S. Alliance and Korea. This is one of the main reasons why KDVA is dedicated to bringing important Alliance and Veterans topics to our members, supporters, and audience members through our events, publications, programs, webinars, and social media platforms.

**While the percent who have a favorable or very favorable opinion of South Korea remained unchanged at 65%, there was a significant decrease in the percent who have a very favorable opinion.**

Among those who follow international news as well as among APAC news followers, nearly 9 in 10 have a favorable or very favorable view of South Korea.



# The Indo-Pacific Region Should be the Priority for Korea in the U.S.-China Competition



**By: Kyung Jun Moon**

South Korea is caught in the midst of the US-China rivalry. While its ally US is calling for Korea to be part of the Indo-Pacific strategy to counter China, South Korea is hesitant because of its dependence on China for trade and Sino-influence over North Korea. Strategic ambiguity has been working for South Korea, which finds itself in a complex fabric of relations among its neighbors. But it seems those days of strategic ambiguity are coming to end soon, as growing Sino-American strategic rivalry doesn't have room for non-commitment.

Impacts of this rivalry are felt not just in security but in trade, technology, and beyond. Its regional scope has also expanded beyond Northeast Asia into the Indo-Pacific region to compete for hegemony. In July this year, China held a grand ceremony in commemoration of the Chinese Communist Party's 100th anniversary. At the ceremony, President Xi emphasized that China is confident in its "Chinese socialist system" and China-Taiwan unification. This rhetoric serves two purposes. The first purpose is domestic. Xi Jinping's nationalist encouragement is a call for internal unity. The second one is for outsiders; China is confident about winning its rivalry with the U.S.

A decade ago, the US was not much concerned about the rise of China. After the Trump Administration, the US changed its stance and has since launched a full-scale trade war. The Biden administration has adopted the "decoupling from China" strategy in technology and its supply chain of strategic materials such as semiconductors and batteries.

The US is now focusing all its security efforts on countering China in the Indo-Pacific region through its "selective engagement" policy. President Biden is committed to strengthening ties with US allies and its strategic partners. This commitment is evident in a series of summits held after his inauguration - the US-Japan summit, US-South Korea summit, NATO summit, and G7 summit.

As a result, NATO declared China "systemic challenge to alliance security" for the first time at its 2021 summit. Furthermore, South Korea and the QUAD members included in the joint statement issues of Xinjiang, Taiwan, and the South China Sea at the G7 summit this year.

The most interesting element of all this is that most of US allies and partners





have strong economic ties with China. This is evident in some EU members' participation in Chinese initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative or the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI). These countries are now, however, joining the U.S. in efforts to counter China on grounds of protecting universal values (constitutionalism, freedom, human rights, democracy, rules-based order, etc.). The European Parliament has now suspended the ratification of the investment agreement with China.

What about South Korea? South Korea also finds itself in a dilemma due to its relationship with China on diplomacy, trade, and inter-Korean relations. It is evident that the US will demand increased role and cooperation from South Korea as an ally in its pursuit of the Indo-Pacific strategy. It is difficult for South Korea to refuse such a request from the US. On the other hand, South Korea relies 25% of its trade on China. It also remembers the political sting and Chinese economic retaliations after it decided to harbor the US-initiated THAAD anti-missile defense system in 2016. The economic loss from the retaliation is estimated to be millions of dollars with the tourism industry hardest hit.

South Korea doesn't seem to have many options. The first option is South Korea chooses one side. The second option is to find the third way while continuing its strategic ambiguity between the US and China. The first option will hit hard South Korea regardless of which side it picks, and the second option won't be viable long as the US will demand a clear stance from Korea soon. Then the only option left for us is to find the third way fast.

South Korea should now turn its attention to the Indo-Pacific region. South Korea should closely watch how other countries in the same dilemma act and strengthen cooperation as a way of middle-power diplomacy.

Other US allies such as Germany, Japan, and Australia have their own diplomatic approach in recognizing the Indo-Pacific region, such as the policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific, Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region, Diplomatic White Paper, etc. and each of them is clearly exhibiting the path to take in the US-China strategic competition. They have prescribed what their strategic security benefits within the region are, and also announced their overall blueprints throughout various fields aside from security including economy, technology, and environment based on the universal values of the rule-based order, freedom, human rights, etc. Even India, a traditionally non-aligned nation and a QUAD member, has been focusing on cooperation with the US and Indo-Pacific nations to counter Chinese aggression over its borders.

The Indo-Pacific region has garnered new recognition as a "region" in 2017 when Japan began to increase counter against China. This was well received by the US and other major powers. This now has become the most important issue in world politics today. Beyond security and geopolitics, the Indo-Pacific region has risen as a key agenda for world superpowers due to the acknowledgment of its scale of GDP, maritime trade, population, economic dynamics, and digitalization.

What about South Korea? Even as its geopolitical value continues to rise as Korea receives love calls from the US, Europe, Australia, and other allies and partner nations for its geostrategic importance in the Indo-Pacific region. Furthermore, South Korea has the ROK-US Korea alliance, which it can use as leverage when navigating an intricate fabric of geopolitical tensions.

Unfortunately, South Korea's awareness about this region of critical importance is lacking. South Korea seems to focus its diplomatic and security efforts only on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia, and not beyond. Admittedly,

there is the North Korean security threat. Still, relative to its economic and diplomatic power, the scope of South Korea's engagement with international politics is so limited that it often gets criticized for its lack of engagement beyond the Korean Peninsula.

The next South Korean administration must establish comprehensive diplomatic and security frameworks about the Indo-Pacific region. One way to achieve this is to establish the Indo-Pacific Strategy Committee (tentative) under direct presidential authority. South Korea should also redefine what national interests there are in the Indo-Pacific region in accordance with its partners engaged in this region. Only after this is achieved will South Korea be able to paint a blueprint for its security, which is closely tied to advanced technology, maritime trade, environment, and beyond. These frameworks will enable South Korea to lead the way when it engages in middle power diplomacy with other middle powers.

Admittedly, South Korea has something close to the Indo-Pacific strategy - the New Southern Policy. The Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy, a policy planning body, concentrates on economic cooperation with ASEAN and Southeast Asian countries with the Secretary to the President for Economic Policy serving as the chairman.

This governance structure, however, is insufficient in addressing geopolitical challenges arising from the US-China rivalry and international politics. What's needed is a comprehensive strategic framework about the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, rather than pursuing economic benefits only in Northeast Asia. If established, Korea's Indo-Pacific strategic framework will enable South Korea to effectively respond to challenges in areas of security, economy, and technology.

Therefore, the Korean government should elevate the chairman of the Indo-Pacific Strategy Committee to the minister or vice minister level and organize the committee comprising of officials and scholars well-versed in international politics and economy about countries like Germany, Australia, India, Japan, China, the U.S., etc. South Korea needs an engaging discussion platform to provide quality information to the president and the government and to establish counterstrategies which can quickly suggest countermeasures.

The US, Europe, Asia, and the rest of the world are actively engaging in the Indo-Pacific. South Korea must also engage before it is too late. When policy decision makers finally see the full extent of urgency in the current security environment and start to address complex economic and geopolitical issues, South Korea will solidify its security and secure its national interests.

#### **About the Author**

Kyung Jun Moon served as a KATUSA in the 35th Air Defense Artillery Brigade. He is currently employed as a project manager in diplomacy, security, and national defense at the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation in Germany.

# *South Korea's Role in the Vietnam War: Part I*



Schuyler C. Webb, PhD

The idea that the Cold War was a conflict primarily fought without traditional military means can be summarily dismissed when considering the costs of the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War,<sup>1</sup> also known as an Indochina War, was an armed conflict in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from November 1, 1955, to the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. It was the second of the Indochina Wars (the Korean War aka 6.25 War was the first) and was officially prosecuted between North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

The backdrop of the relationship between the U.S. and South Korea is beyond the scope of this article series since the pretext of the war are exceedingly complicated, detailed, and escalated geopolitical crises and national politico-military exigencies and upheavals that reach back to the 1950s. However, readership is invited to conduct additional readings that explicate and analyze the Vietnam War with expert enumeration.

Considered America's longest war until recent times, the profound societal impacts of the conflict continue to shape decisions made by the U.S. and South Korea even today. History shows that the Vietnam War was a protracted, costly and divisive conflict that pitted the communist government of North Vietnam against South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States. The conflict was intensified by the ongoing Cold War between the U.S. and Soviet Union. Although North Vietnamese

and Viet Cong casualty counts vary wildly, it is generally accepted that they suffered several times the number of American casualties. More than 3 million people were killed in the war, and more than half of the dead were Vietnamese civilians. Over 58,000 Americans were killed, more than 300,000 wounded, and almost 14,000 completely disabled. Opposition to the war in the U.S. bitterly divided Americans, even after former President Richard Nixon ordered the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 1973. The Paris Peace Accords, officially titled, Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Viet Nam, was a peace treaty signed on January 27, 1973, to establish peace in Vietnam and end the Vietnam War between the U.S., North and South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong (i.e., National Liberation Front). With the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, the agonizing American involvement in Vietnam ended. In 1975, communist forces ended the war by seizing control of South Vietnam. Subsequently, the country was unified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam the following year.

## **South Korea: Vital Role in the Vietnam War**

Specifically, it also marked the end of South Korea's first foreign military venture, as nearly 40,000 troops returned home within the following 60 days. On March 23, 1973, the last of the Korean forces returned home, carrying with them the physical and psychological pains and memories of over 5,000 comrades killed in action during South Korea's nearly ten years of direct involvement in the war. The South Korean government, led by President Park Chung-hee, assumed an active role in the Vietnam War. Consequently, South Korea sent about 350,000 troops to South Vietnam.





At the height of its involvement in 1969, South Korea deployed over 50,000 soldiers and 15,000 civilian laborers and technicians to the Republic of Vietnam.

Despite the concerns of some of his advisers about this escalation and the war effort amid a growing anti-war movement, President Johnson authorized the dispatch of 100,000 troops in 1965 and 1966.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the US, South Korea also committed troops to fight in South Vietnam.

South Korea was drawn into Vietnam and became an integral part of former President Johnson's efforts to internationalize the war. Korea had become an essential part of the military plans drawn up by the U.S. command for intervention in Vietnam. In October 1965, the deployment of a Korean division (specifically, two-thirds of an Army division and one Marine brigade) meant that over 20% of the US-Allied combat power in Vietnam was Korean (nine of 44 battalions; one was Australian). However, in absolute numbers, the U.S. force was nearly nine times as large due to the substantial logistical command established in Vietnam.

As the war developed from the mid-1960s, the fighting intensified, the troop levels increased, the investment in equipment and munitions increased until much of Vietnam was involved in a surreal cataclysm. South Korea judged the Vietnam situation to be critical enough to begin systematic coordination and planning efforts as preparation for a contingency deployment to Vietnam. In contrast, the US would not ask South Korea to send troops until 1964. It is essential to understand that coordination with the U.S. and South Korea was established by mid-1962. When combat troop deployments were contemplated again in 1964 and 1965, the U.S. leadership assumed that at least a division of South Korean troops would be available. However, the legalities under Korean law would necessitate a legislative process to approve the deployments after the reversion to a civilian government in December 1963. President Park never doubted that he would deploy troops to Vietnam once the need was imminent. Once South Korea became a source of troops for Vietnam, South Korea deployed troops to South Vietnam from September 1964 to March 1973.

The first troops sent to Vietnam fulfilled non-combat missions. South Korea's deployments started with Tae Kwon Do instructors and a Mobile Ambulatory Surgery Hospital (MASH) in 1964. However, its first significant commitment came in the form of a vital element known as the Dove Unit that arrived in 1965. This element, composed primarily of construction, engineer, and medical units, focused on reconstruction efforts throughout the country.

The middle months of 1965 marked a dramatic escalation of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam. Historians interpreted the decisions in Washington in July 1965, which approved the deployment of over 100,000 additional combat troops as the most critical step for full-scale and massive intervention and one that finally committed the U.S. to Americanizing the war.

Pentagon seemed to confirm a new phase in the war where the North Vietnamese and the Vietnam forces were willing to accept a conventional

battlefield. The consequences for Westmoreland was that it would require the implementation of Phase 1 (i.e., Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MAC-V)). Phase 1, in which the 44-battalion plan was designed for stabilizing the military situation. Phase 2 involved taking the offensive, especially if the enemy seemed willing to accept conventional battling, making them vulnerable to the overwhelming American firepower. However, Phase 2 also meant additional combat forces, which the planning in July had identified as 27 battalions. However, the surprising speed and volume of the North Vietnamese infiltration in 1965 forced a reevaluation.

According to some military historians, South Korean forces were politicized armed forces that served South Korean national, political, and economic interests. Thus, they pursued "maximum efforts with minimum costs" to reduce casualties yet save face as a significant ally of the U.S. and South Vietnam. Korean forces conducted war as separate entities exercising their operational control based on the allied forces' parallel command structure. Most of all, South Korean forces proved their capability to be recognized as a well-trained, up-to-date armed force delivering a significant contribution to the allied war efforts in Vietnam. Their conduct of war focused more on pacification by using small-scale tactics that differed from the American way of fighting but proved effective in Vietnam. After Vietnamization started in 1969, combined with the rift between the U.S. and South Korea, the South Koreans' cause and motivation for its participation faded. Because of the different interests existing in each country and its corresponding armed forces, the conflict among the Americans, South Vietnamese, and South Koreans accelerated during this period and thus harmed all unified war efforts. Since the South Korean forces were not succeeding in realizing their war goals, the remaining economic benefits became a primary motivation for the country and its troops. As the end of the war neared in the Vietnamization phase without a decisive victory, Korean troops' morale and discipline were compromised. It was unfortunate that after returning to South Korea, many nearly forgot their efforts as the Vietnam War waned from history despite being cited as the Vietnam War was the Korean War with jungles. The fact is that over 50 years ago, South Korea deployed more troops than any country other than the United States to Vietnam to fight communist aggression.

Part II of this article series explores the evaluation of South Korean forces as well as the perceptions of Koreans regarding the war and a summative conclusion of Parts I and II.

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### Endnotes

- 1 The term "Vietnam Conflict" is primarily a U.S. designation that acknowledges the U.S. Congress for not declaring war on North Vietnam.
- 2 The official U.S. Government start date for the Vietnam conflict is 1 November 1955 when the first U.S. military advisers arrived in Vietnam; however, the first combat troops were deployed in 1965 that is considered the actual start date.

# *South Korea's Role in the Vietnam War: Part II*

**Schuyler C. Webb, PhD**

If the Korean War is the “forgotten war” in the United States, the Vietnam War (1964–1973) is Korea’s own forgotten war. Although ROK forces made up the second-largest foreign military contingent after the United States, lost more than 5,000 lives, and played a significant role in averting communist dominance of the central coastal area, their experience hardly seems to have left a mark in contemporary Korean society. The lack of remembrance may be attributable to a simple fact—South Vietnam, the recipient of Korea’s sacrifice, disappeared from the map following the communist victory in 1975. Another possible factor include previous state censorship of historical research about the war and general disinterest among today’s mass media and popular culture.

Part I of this series summarized the wide-ranging involvement of South Korean forces in the Vietnam War. This part extends and augments South Korean forces’ historical and political summary, perceptions of the Korean populace regarding the war, and a little known fact about North Korea’s involvement.

### **Antecedents of the Vietnam War**

It is interesting that the Koreans had been offering troops to Vietnam since 1954, prior to American requests. Moreover, Korea’s involvement in Vietnam was about more than “boots on the ground.” On the contrary, Korean forces were highly motivated, having survived a brutal war against communism, had no tolerance for it and were dedicated to eradicating it.

Viewed within the context of domestic instability, impoverishment, and Cold War confrontation of the early 1960s, the South Korean government’s decision to dispatch hundreds of thousands of men to a foreign war was an improbable undertaking. Korea was embroiled in political turmoil after the successive mass uprising and the military coup that toppled the previous government. It ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world with a gross national income (GNI) per capita of \$93 in 1961. Moreover, the nation’s armed forces of 600,000 men were entirely dependent on American military aid to stay solvent.

Irrespective of these conditions at home, Korean troops proved effective in their area of operations, providing protection to the South Vietnamese in the central coastal region and preventing North Vietnamese and Viet Cong domination there. As a result, American war planners leaned heavily on South Korean forces, given their ability to execute missions with considerable success.

### **Military Assessment of South Korea Forces**

Besides respect from the enemy, the Korean troops earned the respect of many U.S. service members in Vietnam. South Korean forces

received generally favorable evaluations from the American military. Korean troops were alleged to have proven effective in their area of operations, providing protection to the South Vietnamese in the central coastal region and preventing North Vietnamese and Viet Cong infiltration in those areas. Another researcher claimed that the widespread success of South Korean operations against the Viet Cong guerrillas caused the Viet Cong to avoid engagements with South Korean forces.

American war planners are alleged to have leaned heavily on ROK forces, given their ability to execute missions with considerable success. Allegedly, in the minds of some U.S. peers, Koreans outperformed other allied forces in Vietnam in lethality, organization, and professionalism. Other commanders who interacted with them were more critical and stated, “Koreans made excessive demands for choppers and artillery support and that they stood down for too long after an operation. He equated the total two Korean divisions to “what one can expect from one good US Brigade.” SECDEF Melvin Laird publicly and openly questioned their usefulness in the conflict and had a notable conflict with Korean leaders during the U.S. withdrawal period, questioning their use in the war and threatening to withdraw funding for them.

As a component of the joint-service MACV, the South Korean Marines had a great deal of interaction with American Marines. While the Vietnam War constituted the first military action on foreign soil for the South Korean Marines since their formation, they claimed to have proven themselves highly skilled and capable warriors. The U.S. Marine Corps trained all Blue Dragon Brigade officers in Quantico, Virginia, or San Diego, California. During the war, South Korean Marines lacked organic aviation assets. American Marines were typically embedded within every South Korean company to coordinate engagement, close air support, medevac, and resupply.

Overall, assessments of the South Korean military vary significantly over time. The tactics of the South Korean military changed from defensive and passive tactics, including the establishment of siege-like bases, unlike aggressive tactics before the Tet Offensive. This tactic became more pronounced when the U.S. 7th Division withdrew from South Korea. Since one reason for participation was a concern of the U.S. withdrawing from South Korea when the U.S. was planning to reduce the number of troops on the Korean Peninsula, public opinion and government opinion declined, and they became less willing to participate. However, other U.S. data generally positively assess the military activities of the Korean military.

### **North Korea and the Vietnam War**

North Vietnam and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) were close allies during the Cold War era, sharing common socialist ideologies and exchanging military and political support during the Vietnam War. During the war, DPRK’s relatively large amounts of assistance to the Vietnamese





communists were relatively secret. The idea that DPRK supported North Vietnamese forces was accepted for decades. However, there is a dearth of information on North Korea's involvement, though more details have emerged in recent years. In 2000, both Vietnam and DPRK acknowledged the participation of DPRK pilots in combat missions against American aircraft. Though the exact numbers are unknown, one Vietnamese newspaper article stated that up to 100 DPRK pilots served in the war. Archival documents suggest that DPRK provided a limited amount of non-military aid to North Vietnam and sent personnel to observe South Korean military operations in South Vietnam. These examples support one of two notions. The first is that much research remains in clearly understanding the extent of DPRK participation in the Vietnam War. The second notion is that this lack of understanding may be because the country simply did not have a significant role in the war.

### South Korea Poll: Perception of the Vietnam War

A survey of Korean public opinion suggests the majority is keenly aware of their country's involvement in Vietnam and maintain nuanced views of the war. According to a 2012 survey by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, most Koreans (80%) know of their country's military's role in Vietnam. More than half (57%) believed the country's decision to participate in the war was the right choice. Contrary to the Park government's stated rationale for fighting in Vietnam—to deter communist aggression in Southeast Asia—a slight majority (54%) thought that Korean forces were deployed to gain economic benefits for Korea. One in four (27%) agreed the troops were sent as compensation to the U.S. for saving the Republic of Korea during the Korean War. Among those who equate troop deployment with economic reasons, most (58%) thought Korea achieved this goal, while others disagree or remain ambivalent. When queried about whether Korea's military involvement strengthened U.S.-ROK relations overall, more than two-thirds (68%) said the experience had either a "strong" (20%) or "somewhat" (48%) positive impact on the alliance.

### Final Thoughts

While few Korean scholars have written about this topic, the popularized work tends to perpetuate the biases of those critical of President Park, the Korean leader responsible for sending troops to Vietnam. Thus, the soldiers were perceived as puppets of U.S. imperial aggression in Southeast Asia or as Park's "mercenaries" sent to a war zone for profit. To counter such views, several Korean Vietnam War veterans penned memories of their war experiences. However, there has been minimal interest in their work outside veterans associations. Moreover, the veterans' groups themselves are generally ignored by the public, save for their occasional protests against the government's neglect of their welfare, especially those affected by Agent Orange, a tactical defoliant used by the U.S. military during the war.

Although a debatable topic, some scholars argue that South Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War facilitated its economic success in the 1960s and 1970s. Aside from the economic and political legacies of South Korea's experience in Vietnam, the transition of South Korea's overseas military deployment appears robust -- albeit with different aspirations and circumstances. In the context of South Korea's increasing role on the international stage, the time has come for a proper appreciation and

reflection on South Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War.

Korea's contribution to the war enabled the Korean government to secure the necessary capital to jump-start President Park's ambitious economic development plan in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is not a coincidence that Korea's GDP grew rapidly during the years Korean troops were deployed in Vietnam. Militarily, the government took full advantage of concessions from the Americans and used them to initiate the modernization of Korean armed forces, which now ranks sixth in global military firepower. The Vietnam experience taught an important lesson in managing Korea's relationship with the U.S. that —despite the alliance that binds them— each is motivated by national interests.

These conditions provide enough motivation to usher new life to the Korean armed forces' history of the Vietnam War. This summative historical analysis of South Korea's significant deployment of troops not only provides a fresh perspective beyond a competing political evaluation of the Koreans in Vietnam but also offers lessons to the current and future readership. By adding a Korean perspective to the Vietnam War's vast historiography, this article provides another data point and insight into the Vietnam War. Moreover, this article intends to sustain the dialogue on the Vietnam War and the allied forces.

Whether examining the political, diplomatic, economic, or societal impacts of the Vietnam War on both countries, more questions remain than answers. Nevertheless, the war was arguably one of the most significant global events from the 1950s to the 1970s. Moreover, it strongly shaped how both Koreas perceive each other and the U.S. in contemporary times.

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## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION WITH GENERAL (RET.) VINCENT BROOKS AND KDVA INTERNS



**By Sarah (Bo Young) Jeong**

In a roundtable discussion on September 13, 2021 conducted over Zoom, General (Ret.) Vincent Brooks, KDVA Chairman and President, answered questions from KDVA interns regarding various issues about the ROK-U.S. Alliance, the United States' global commitment, and tips on how young adults can lead fulfilling lives as they enter society as adults.

The first question was from Se Young Hwang, who is a student at Korea University, majoring in Political Science and International Relations. His fields of interests are inter-Korean relations, ROK-U.S. Alliance, and the Korean reunification. He has written several articles for KDVA about these topics.

**Se Young's question: South Korea's presidential election is coming up next year. What do you expect from the incoming administration in terms of the ROK-US alliance?**

**General Brooks:**

There will be a heated contest between the two main political parties, the liberal and the conservatives. There will be an affirmation of

the importance of the Korea-US alliance by all candidates and a recognition of the need to make progress with North Korea. But the debate will center around how to make that progress. The question of South Korea's position in Northeast Asia and in the broader Indo-Pacific region will also be a dividing point among the party positions. Most importantly, South Korean domestic issues like affordable housing, trust and confidence, the strong economy, and modernizing the strength of the South Korean military will be the domestic issues that will also be in play. But South Korea will see democracy in action, as a very stable and strong democratic state.

The next question came from Sarah Jeong, who is working on her master's degree in Asian Studies at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

**Sarah's question: Do you think the United States can take a different approach with North Korea other than continuing sanctions, and if so, what is that approach?**

**General Brooks:**

The ROK-U.S. Alliance should approach the North Korea problem together, as an alliance. There is a need for the alliance to reconcile





the enemy, which is North Korea. The ROK-U.S. Alliance needs to take a different approach from the current policy. First of all, the road to peace on the Korean Peninsula will only come from a declaration of an end to hostilities between North Korea and the alliance. This doesn't mean that the U.S. Forces Korea will dismantle, and it doesn't mean an end to sanctions. It doesn't mean that UN Command stands down the next day. It is the first step in transitioning from an armistice relationship to a normal international relationship. So, in order for there to be a step toward and progress thereafter toward actual peace on the Korean Peninsula, I do believe a different approach has to be taken like the approaches mentioned above.

Yunah Cho graduated from the University of Utah this August and currently works for the Center for Medical Innovation Asia, or CMI Asia, as an Administrative Coordinator in Incheon, Korea.

**Yunah's question: As a recent college graduate, what would you like to advise the younger generation who are moving forward into a professional society?**

**General Brooks:**

For a young person like yourself, my advice would be to have an income that can sustain you, but also look for something that gives you a sense of fulfillment. You should seek something that gives you a sense of fulfillment, a sense of contribution to something bigger than yourself. You and the interns did not have to volunteer at the Korea Defense Veterans Association, but did it anyways. Life is too short to go through it unfulfilled, just making time. And if you can find a way to impact the lives of others, I don't think you'll ever be unfulfilled.

Kyungdon Kim is a proud former KATUSA (Korean Augmentee to the US Army) soldier who served with the U.S. Army in Korea. He powerlifts as a hobby and plans on joining powerlifting competitions next year.

**Kyungdon's question: After the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, some South Korean civilians think that the Alliance should consider nuclear armament. Can South Korea's nuclear armament be regarded as a realistic option for deterrence? What actions are needed to be taken from the Alliance in the current situation?**

**General Brooks:**

The situation in Afghanistan and South Korea are quite different. First of all, South Korea has stood by the United States during other conflicts outside of the Korean War. The reason why the ROK-U.S. Alliance is strong is because there is a connection and a high level of trust between the South Korea government, people, and the military. Also, the U.S. presence has helped South Korea transform into the 10th largest economy in the world. The U.S. Forces Korea and the UN Sending States are a part of what led to South Korea's success. With that said, the ROK-U.S. Alliance has a military advantage over North Korea, and adding nuclear weapons to the Republic of Korea doesn't help. Having nuclear weapons seems like an easy solution, but there are negative sides to possessing nuclear weapons such as social unrest and the threat of domestic terrorism. Lastly, there is no reason for South Korea to feel like it has to possess nuclear weapons to equalize North Korea. The Republic of Korea already has military superiority.

The final question was from Celine Mahne. Celine graduated with a BA in International Relations from George Washington University and studied at Yonsei University in Seoul. She previously interned at the Wilson Center and East West Center.

**Celine's question: After retirement, you became heavily involved in the world of academics. What are some things that academics often get wrong or misunderstand about Korea, and/or what are some things that the military often gets wrong or misunderstands about Korea?**

**General Brooks:**

The biggest mistake that the Korean military, U.S. military, Korean academics, and U.S. academics make is to translate the situation as it is into something that's understandable from personal, individual perspective and experience. It's a mistake to Americanize the situation on the Korean Peninsula, or to Koreanize the situation on the Peninsula or what's happening in the U.S. Some Americans think that Koreans can protect themselves with the ROK military. Some Koreans think that the Korean issue is not prioritized by the U.S. But the truth is, the Alliance is like multiple arrows being held together. One arrow is easily broken, but two, three arrows joined together are very difficult to break. The most important thing is to begin by understanding what is not common, what is not naturally understood.

**This question came from an audience member on Zoom: Has the U.S. grand strategy in the Middle East has fundamentally changed? Is the U.S. interest moving from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific?**

**General Brooks:**

The U.S. presence has always had one foot on the Middle East and the other on the Indo-Pacific. I wouldn't really say that the U.S. is turning its back on the Middle East, but there is a stronger emphasis on the Indo-Pacific recently.

The second part of the Zoom webinar was a discussion about the KDVA Internship Program (KIP) and included a Q & A with the Zoom audience.

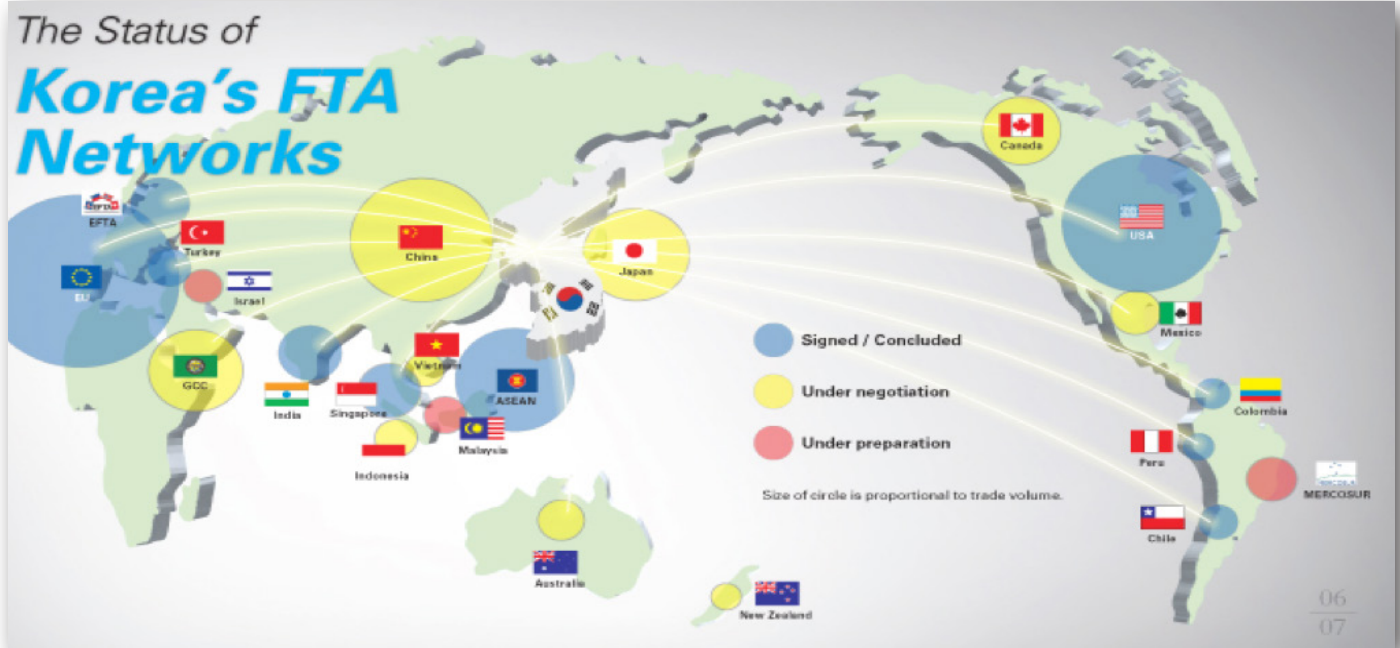
**Question 1: How do we best inform and educate the younger generation who may be unfamiliar with the Alliance?**

Sarah Jeong: I think, a great way to learn about the ROK-U.S. Alliance, especially for my generation, would be to check out the KDVA "Korea 101" or "ROK-U.S. Alliance 101" social media pages. Because we have made those posts to be accessible to our age group, or people who are in high school or middle school, so I would really encourage everyone to do that.

**Question 2: What is your assessment of the ROK-U.S. Alliance?**

Se Young: South Korean domestic politics tend to politicize the Alliance, like the controversy surrounding the combined military exercises between Seoul and Washington. It's worrisome that South Korea tends to be inconsistent when it comes to Alliance issues. On the other hand, the U.S. has more consistency when it comes to the Alliance.

## SOUTH KOREA AND FTA



By Se Young Hwang

Free Trade Agreement, FTA in short, is an agreement under which the countries that have signed it, will provide each other with exclusive trade benefits by abolishing tariffs and other barriers to trade in goods and services between the countries. FTAs are designed to reduce the barriers to trade between two or more countries, which are in place to help local markets and industries. Trade barriers usually come in the form of tariffs and trade quotas. For example, Japan's tariff on Australian beef, which under the new trade deal, will be cut from 38.5% to 19.5% over 18 years. In addition, FTAs also cover areas such as government procurement, intellectual property rights, and competition policy. Additionally, lowering trade barriers help industries access new markets, boosting their reach and the number of people they can sell their products to. At the same time, FTAs are designed to benefit consumers. In theory, increased competition means more products in the market and lower prices. Exporters from Country A will see Country B tariffs lowered on electronics, cars, etc.... so that Country B consumers will see prices lowered as a result.

What are the benefits and costs of having FTAs? In terms of benefits, FTAs can contribute to increase economic growth, considering that FTAs are designed to increase trade between countries by lowering the trade barriers. More dynamic business environments may be created between the two (or more) countries. Usually, businesses are protected by government regulations before the agreement is reached. Local industries may become vulnerable to stagnancy and competitiveness in the global market after the FTA is implemented.

But with the protection of the government removed, this may give motivation to local industries to become true global competitors. FTAs could lower government spending as well. Many governments subsidize local industry segments. Once the trade agreement is made, the government could remove subsidies and those funds can be put to better use. With trade barriers removed, there is a higher chance of inviting foreign direct investments. Investors will definitely fly to countries for their business expansion. This would add capital to expand local industries and boost domestic businesses. It will also bring U.S. dollars to many formerly isolated countries.

Another thing is expertise. Global companies have more expertise than domestic companies to develop local resources. This is especially true in mining, oil drilling, and manufacturing. Free Trade Agreements will allow global firms access to these business opportunities. When multinational companies make partnerships with local firms to develop resources, they train the locals to ensure they can utilize them to their best. On a positive note, this gives local firms access to novel and creative methods. One last possible benefit is technology transfer. Local companies can also have access to the latest technologies after forming partnerships with multinational companies. When local economies start to grow, so do job opportunities. And of course, multinational companies would provide job training to local employees.

Having listed the benefits of the Free Trade Agreement, it sounds so attractive that one may believe making trade deals with other countries is a must. However, when there are benefits, there are also costs following the deal. One disadvantage is that there could be





increased job outsourcing. Why so? Reducing tariffs on imports allows companies to expand to other countries. Without tariffs, imports from countries with a low cost of living, cost less. This makes it difficult for companies in those same industries to compete and so they may reduce their workforce. Many U.S. manufacturing industries actually did lay off workers as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). One of the criticisms of NAFTA is that it sent jobs to Mexico, and not to the locals in the U.S.

Next is the theft of intellectual property. Many developing countries do not have laws to protect their patents, inventions, and new processes. The laws they do have are not always strictly enforced. Therefore, companies often misuse such situations and steal ideas. They must then compete with both lower priced and lower quality products. Many emerging markets are traditional economies that rely on farming. Such small family farms cannot really compete with subsidized agri-businesses in the developed countries. As a result, they lose their farms and must look for work in the cities. This aggravates unemployment, crime, and poverty.

Another cost of having Free Trade Agreements is poor working conditions. Multinational companies may outsource jobs to emerging market countries without adequate labor protections. As a result, women and children are often subjected to factory jobs with poor working conditions. Emerging markets often do not have many environmental protections. Free trade could lead to depletion of timber, minerals, and other natural resources. In other words, degradation of natural resources might occur. Such environmental problems could ultimately turn their jungle fields to wastelands. Destruction of native cultures is another matter. As development moves into isolated areas, indigenous cultures can be destroyed. Local people are uprooted. Many suffer disease and death when their resources are polluted. Lastly, especially with smaller countries, they tend to struggle replacing revenue lost from import tariffs and fees. All in all, it is evident that free trade agreements have a huge impact on society as a whole, both economically and socially.

To solve the problems stated above, what is the solution? Trade protectionism is not really the best answer. High tariffs only protect domestic industries in the short term. On the other hand, in the long term, multinational companies will hire the cheapest workers possible so that they can continue to make higher profits, as they always do. Perhaps, the best solution is to create regulations within the agreements that protect against the disadvantages.

The real question is, should South Korea keep pursuing FTAs with other countries? My answer to this question is yes. Regardless of the benefits and costs of the Free Trade Agreements, realistically speaking, I think it is impossible to stop the South Korean government from pursuing more FTAs with other countries. This is because having FTAs with other countries has become a trend among countries, and it is relatively hard for governments to resist them. Here are some of the reasons why more and more countries start to sign FTAs, and why South Korea eventually took part in this trend.

Previously, the world economy had not really established the free trade system and this created room for more and more FTAs to be signed among countries. The first reason is that FTAs act as a counter-measure

to huge regional integration. Ever since the World Trade Organization (WTO) launched, regionalism has continued to escalate and now the world is faced with numerous regional economic integration entities. As the European Union (EU), Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) started to show deep interest in intensifying regional economic integration, some of the countries in East Asia, like South Korea, felt anxious about being seemingly excluded from such movement. This anxiety worsened when South Korea started to learn that trade deals had been signed between regions like EU with Mexico and South Africa, EU and the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), and so on. In other words, if many other countries are participating in FTAs, you should as well to make sure you don't fall behind the trend, and to get the benefits derived from the trade deals.

The second reason is the vulnerability of multilateralism in the WTO system. FTAs continue to expand across countries as there are increasing demands from companies that wish to make deals directly with countries of their interests. Other than the two reasons just mentioned previously, it is also important to find the reason in a South Korean context. This traces back to the Roh Moo Hyun administration, when the FTA issue was first discussed. This is because Roh administration's Northeast Asian cooperation initiative was closely related to FTAs. Basically, the administration had this idea that there could be parallel development of security cooperation and economic cooperation in Northeast Asia. The administration believed that FTAs could be the most realistic approach in terms of establishing Northeast Asian economic cooperation. By signing FTAs with Japan, China, and ASEAN, the administration thought this series of movements could lead to an East Asian FTA (EAFTA). Additionally, the Roh administration had this expectation that security cooperation could be reinforced in the region based on such economic interdependence after having FTAs signed.

Currently in South Korea, there are about 15 FTAs in effect with countries like Chile, Singapore, New Zealand, Vietnam, and so forth. At the same time, there are also several FTAs that are in the process of negotiation with countries like Israel, Ecuador, MERCOSUR, etc. Considering this trend in FTAs worldwide, it is unlikely that the current and next administrations would retreat from FTAs in the hopes of securing stable global markets and strengthening South Korean economy's competitiveness. Therefore, to ensure all FTAs are being signed on the right track, the government must clearly figure out some of the problems with existing FTAs and take proper measures accordingly.

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## KDVA'S "U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE DAY" INITIATIVE, OCTOBER 1ST

General (Ret.) Vincent Brooks announced a KDVA initiative for marking October 1st of each year as "U.S.-ROK Alliance Day" on the occasion of the signing of the ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty on October 1, 1953.

In a KDVA announcement about the Alliance Day, General Brooks stated:

"Let me tell you about a new national day of remembrance, "U.S.-ROK Alliance Day." This day of remembrance is intended to bring attention to the Alliance and the Veterans who served it and to draw together Americans and Koreans based on our shared values and experiences.

'U.S.-ROK Alliance Day' will be observed on October 1st, each year, which marks the annual anniversary of the signing of the Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and Republic of Korea on October 1, 1953, which sought a lasting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. The Mutual Defense Treaty

has become far more than a treaty document between two governments; rather it is the bridge that has enabled significant people-to-people connections, economic connections, and cultural overlaps between generations of Americans and South Koreans.

KDVA is honored to have sponsored the registering of "U.S.-ROK Alliance Day" with the National Day Archives. And we at KDVA would ask that Americans and Koreans alike, especially our association members, our donors, partner organizations, social media followers, and supporters to commemorate this important date each year by holding events, sending supportive messages about the Alliance, supporting and honoring the Veterans of the Alliance, and sharing stories about this day of recognition to your families and friends.

Please join us in remembering the U.S.-ROK Alliance."



# CULTURE AND TRADITIONAL VALUES: THE FOUNDATION OF SUCCESS



*Yeouido in the spring of 2020*

### By Norm Spivey

"Katchi Kapshida," a Korean phrase translated as "we go together" in English is often used by U.S. and Korean military leaders during remarks to signify the strong military alliance between the two nations. More than just a clichéd phrase symbolizing a military partnership, "we go together" could just as easily describe the perseverance of Korean people. Korea's rise from utter destruction to a highly developed nation and economic power house is called by some, "the miracle on the Han River." The Republic of Korea's legendary economic and societal rebirth is not an accidental success story, but rather a prime example of the indomitable power of culture and traditional values.

Within the past few decades not only Korea, but several Asian nations enjoyed unparalleled economic success. The term "Asian Tiger" is used to describe Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan's remarkable economic transformation from developing to industrialized nation over the past 30 years. These four "Asian Tigers" account for nearly 4% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Similarly, China and Japan have grown to become the second and third largest economies in the world by GDP respectively. Although previously isolated from the West for centuries and relatively homogeneous demographically, many Asian nations reached past geographic and cultural boundaries to become a global standard for free market economies.

Despite periods of conflict and hardship that engulfed Korea during the 20th century, the nation not only recovered but thrived. Over the

last few decades, Korea increased tremendously in key measures including average life expectancy, education, and income per capita resulting in Human Development Index scores surpassing most nations.

How did Korea establish this legacy of success? Some argue it is due to business acumen, competitive spirit, or perhaps diligent work ethic. Others contend that millennial old Confucian philosophies and values of stability, hard work, loyalty, and respect still play a central role in Korean society. Regardless of the origins, it is Korea's unique characteristic of a strong cultural identity and traditional values that undoubtedly contributed to the nation's many accomplishments. In order to gain a full appreciation of the central role culture and traditional values play in everyday Korean life, one only needs to spend some time observing a Korean family.

It is my honor to call South Korea a second home. I was honored to serve in Korea during different periods of my military career for a total of four years. More importantly, it is the birth place of my wife and home of my extended family. Many Americans who visit Korea quickly gain a respect for the food, dress, and customs of Korean culture. The "Hanbok" which literally means Korean clothing, is perhaps the most familiar and iconic symbol of Korean culture. Our family has donned Hanbok numerous times over the years for a variety of family celebrations.

But beyond keeping the traditional clothing, foods, and customs, it's the Korean traditional values that I am so proud are a part of our family. Over the years, I've marveled and at times envied my extended families' deep rooted values. My in-laws certainly embody stability, hard work, loyalty, and respect. They raised my wife and her two brothers with meager means in



the early 1970s to achieve exceptional academic and professional success today. Their story is not the only "miracle on the Han," and it certainly wasn't an accident. My family and the Korean people benefit greatly because of timeless traditional family values.

Culture and traditional values are the foundation upon which Korea built legendary economic and societal successes. I am very proud

of my children's Korean heritage and hope they will continue to embrace the culture and traditional values demonstrated by our family. More importantly, I hope the United States which prides itself as a melting pot, will continue to welcome and embrace Korea's rich culture and values. There is much to be learned by observing the example set by the Korean people. Stability, hard work, loyalty, and respect are just a few values that enabled Korea's resurgence and are values we should all espouse today.



## WHAT I LEARNED FROM THE KDVA INTERNSHIP PROGRAM (KIP)

By Celine Mahne

One of the best things about the KDVA Internship Program is that it can be whatever you want it to be. If you want to network with well known, senior level individuals within the ROK-U.S. Alliance, write articles to be published, or take on a project that you are passionate about, you can do that. Or if you treat the internship as a fun side project to learn about the ROK-U.S. Alliance, that is also OK. While at KDVA, my schedule fluctuated from having a lot of time, to having close to no free time at all. Throughout my year-long internship, KIP was more than able to accommodate my schedule.

During our Roundtable Discussion Webinar with General (Ret.) Vincent Brooks and the KDVA Interns, the flexibility of KIP was a common thread. In addition, a few of the interns really enjoyed meeting and interviewing diverse people such as Korea Defense Veterans, former UN Ambassador for the Republic of Korea, and others who have contributed to the ROK-U.S. Alliance. For the interns, the internship was very important for them to protect Veterans' legacies and pass them down to the next generation, as their stories helped shape the foundations of their respective nations.

Since the internship has many different ways to be involved with writing articles – both personal and research, short term projects, long term projects, and public speaking opportunities -- it is a great way to gain a wide variety of experiences to boost your resume while allowing you to focus on your academic and/or professional life. It allows you to build skills and take risks in a controlled, supported, and more casual environment so they can be applied to future situations.

In writing articles for KIP, I realized that I preferred not to write on personal topics as I felt they were less important and less valuable than research topics. In my mind, why would someone want to learn about my study abroad experience in South Korea when they could learn about the ROK's complex relationships with China and the United States? But the personal and everyday experiences are important as they show the realities of political, economic, and cultural changes or continuities and how they impact general society.

While studying international affairs in college, my academic life was almost entirely engulfed by big picture ideas: great power politics, regime changes, and economic collapses (to name a few). However, international affairs are more than these picture ideas. Under systemic changes lies decisions made by both powerful and ordinary individuals, particularly when it comes to topics such as cooperation, conflict, and global integration. While my studies did greatly acknowledge global officials throughout time, almost no attention was paid to how the general population can influence global affairs.

Personal stories tend to be more relatable and in effect more emotionally triggering than research topics. One example of the impact of everyday individuals on international affairs can be seen in American military presence overseas. While senior decision-makers can choose for the United States to station in a foreign country, it is the service members who make lasting impressions on locals that can determine future relationships with that country.

Another example is when news outlets report on almost any topic, there is a more formal recount of events from the news anchor, coupled with interviews of personal recount of events from individuals who were most impacted by the issue. News organizations add interviews with the general population to promote more emotional responses from audiences. If audiences are more emotionally attached to the story, they will be more likely to be passionate about the subject, act on its behalf, and be invested in later developments.

With KIP, I realized that my personal stories do matter and in writing both personal and research articles, I felt I was able to inform and influence my audience members.

## KDVA INTERNSHIP



**By Suji Hong**

It is hard for me to believe that my one-year internship with KDVA is already coming to an end. At first, I was worried and wondered if I could handle this internship since I had a part-time job and a lot of schoolwork. But KDVA was always very understanding and flexible. Thanks to KDVA, I was able to finish my schoolwork successfully and learn many lessons through this internship program.

It is undeniable that this internship is one of the best choices that I have made in my life. The COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on my lifestyle, as it became our responsibility to keep our social distancing with each other in order to prevent the virus from spreading. We started to handle everything through Zoom, and I started getting used to being alone. However, this internship again changed my lifestyle, giving opportunities to meet and work with new people. I was able to learn how to communicate thoroughly with people with different backgrounds. Although we were not able to meet often because of the pandemic, the time I had online with the other interns is something that I will never forget.

Before the internship, I thought that not many people were interested in

the ROK-U.S. Alliance. However, I realized that quite many are interested but they lack courage to get involved in the Alliance. When I told my friends about KDVA's Instagram that we are running, they were very excited about the information on the account, but they were hesitant to follow. I asked them why, and they told me that they feel like they would not be able to get involved unless they spoke English fluently. I personally think that Instagram is playing a huge role in getting young generations involved. However, it is true that we need more time to make people think that we are all one regardless of the language that we use. If we keep this fantastic work up, I have faith that we will be able to completely break down the language barrier one day. I strongly believe that the KDVA internship will play a vital role in helping push the boundaries.

Since I still have a lot of things to learn about the ROK-U.S. Alliance, I will never lose interest in the Alliance and will continue to follow KDVA's activities. Thank you for a great year!



## MEET THE KDVA INTERNS - KDVA Internship Program (KIP) Class of 2021-2022

**Korea Defense Veterans Association**  
**2021-2022 Interns**

 <b>Sintayehu Asfaw</b> Yemyung Graduate University - Seoul, ROK	 <b>Sea Choi</b> University of California - San Diego (UCSD)	 <b>Yujin Kang</b> University of Utah Asia Campus - Seoul, ROK	 <b>Gi Deok Kim</b> Sung Kyun Kwan University Seoul, ROK	 <b>Hanson Kim</b> University of California, San Diego (UCSD)
 <b>Keebum "Kevin" Kim</b> University of California, Berkeley - Seoul, ROK	 <b>Ko, Cheolhyuk (Steve)</b> Chung-ang University Seoul, ROK	 <b>June Young Lee</b> University of Toronto - Toronto, Canada	 <b>Kaylie Welch</b> University of Wisconsin - Wisconsin	 <b>Subin Youn</b> University of Utah, Asia Campus - Seoul, ROK

The KDVA Interns have opportunities to learn more about the ROK-U.S. Alliance and its diverse topics, gain invaluable professional experience, develop skills, make professional contacts, and make contributions to the ROK-U.S. Alliance.

They will be involved in diverse research and activity projects to include:

- Researching ROK-U.S. Alliance topics.
- Writing Alliance articles for the KDVA quarterly journal, webpage, newsletter, Facebook, and Twitter.
- Serving as Research Assistants to team with a senior KDVA leader and write articles for KDVA platforms, news articles, and think tank publications.
- Collaborating with academic institutions and young professional organizations to research joint projects.
- Supporting events in Seoul and DC.
- Supporting social media efforts.

We look forward to their efforts "Together for the ROK-U.S. Alliance."

# KDVA THANKS OUR SPONSORS AND DONORS!



Wish to be a donor? Please go to <https://kdva.vet/donations/>.

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