Is Enough at Stake? U.S. Civil Society and the U.S.-ROK Alliance*

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“The bonds that underpin our Alliance and our partnership are strengthened and enriched by the close relationships among our citizens. We pledge to continue programs and efforts to build even closer ties between our societies, including cooperation among business, civic, cultural, academic, and other institutions.”


The sinking of the Cheonan and the artillery barrage targeting Yeonpyeong Island in 2010 sharply reminded South Koreans and Americans alike the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance. Rising tension and heightened threat perceptions in the region have shifted much of our attention to the political-military aspects of the alliance. Our natural inclination is to focus on military or diplomatic cooperation, relegating discussion of softer issues such as civil societal cooperation or economic exchange to periods of relative calm. It is worth remembering, however, that the most stable alliances are those which persist even after the crisis passes and threat perceptions subside. Assuming that the long-term preservation of the U.S.-ROK alliance is desirable, it makes sense then to examine the domestic stakeholders of the alliance which act as the bond and ties underpinning the alliance.

Reaffirming the U.S.-South Korea alliance, the opening lines of the 2009 Joint Vision Statement highlight the shared values and mutual respect between open societies committed to democratic and free market principles. Only afterwards does the Vision Statement mention security relations. One might dismiss the early tribute to democratic societies and values as the light appetizer before serving the real meat and bones of the U.S.-ROK alliance: the Mutual Defense Treaty, strategic ties, and security on the Korean Peninsula. While the security alliance may first come to mind when discussing U.S.-ROK relations, the commitment to democratic values and principles within both polities sets the U.S.-ROK alliance apart from most other strategic partnerships. Although the U.S. as of late relies heavily on cooperation from Pakistan, Yemen, Egypt, or Colombia, funneling billions of dollars in foreign aid and military assistance to these strategic partners, the same level of mutual respect and trust found in the U.S.-ROK alliance is absent.

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Central to any open, democratic society is the presence of a strong, vibrant civil society. Thus the Vision Statement’s early emphasis on “close relationships among our citizens” and the “mutual respect that tightly bind the American and Korean people” implies an important role for civil society in U.S.-South Korean relations. This paper examines the influence of civil society and grassroots movements on the U.S.-ROK alliance. Although the analysis is comparative in nature, examining both U.S. and South Korean civil societies, greater attention is given to U.S. civil society. While civil societal groups and grassroots actors in the U.S. have taken action on issues which directly or indirectly affect U.S.-ROK relations, I argue that this impact has been rather limited in scope, especially when compared with the role of South Korean civil society. Moreover, although the participatory nature of democratic polities may generally lead to a positive effect on alliance relations, mobilization from below can at times frustrate relations between Seoul and Washington. In the long run, however, civil society may help improve mutual understanding between the two societies, providing the U.S. and South Korean governments greater flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances in the Northeast Asian region.

This paper is organized into four sections. The first section broadly defines and clarifies the concept of civil society as understood in this paper. Section two provides an overview of U.S. civil societal groups with domestic stakes to U.S.-South Korean relations, making a distinction between ethic-based, issue-based, and special interest and academic groups. Section three provides two examples of grassroots mobilization within U.S. civil society—the National Campaign to End the Korean War and the Remember 727 movement—as a window into different interests, strategies, strengths and weaknesses, and network ties among U.S. civil societal groups. Finally, section four evaluates the direct and indirect impact of grassroots movements and U.S. civil society on the alliance. Here, I compare the role of U.S. civil society with their counterpart in South Korea, examining avenues and challenges to cooperation between U.S. and South Korean civil societal groups. I conclude by evaluating the extent to which civil society matters as a factor sustaining the U.S.-ROK alliance, and the potential benefits of cross-national civil societal cooperation in the context of a values-based alliance.

**Defining Civil Society**

The concept of civil society is open to different interpretations. However, most scholars agree that civil society “consists of sustained, organized, social activity that occurs in groups that are formed outside the state, the market, and the family.” The organization of civil society may take on various forms, including formal institutions, informal associations, or social movements. Moreover, civil societal groups are largely self-organized, operating within the public sphere.

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2 Quantitative studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between democracy and alliance duration. Despite changes in the external threat environment, democracies are more likely to be committed to alliance relations than non-democracies, or allies between democracies and non-democracies. See Kurt Taylor Gaubatz, "Democratic States and Commitment in International Relations." *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (1996): 109-39; Scott D. Bennett, "Testing Alternative Models of Alliance Duration, 1816-1984." *American Journal of Political Science* 41, no. 3 (1997): 846-78.


Rather than directed by states, or organized by parochial needs or narrow private interests, membership and activities are voluntary. As Michael Walzer notes, civil society is the “space of un-coerced human association.”

Civil society also includes a relational dimension. Although civil society is outside and independent of states and markets, civil societal actors engage these other sectors. For instance, civil society may work in opposition to the state or political elites. In other instances, symbiotic ties may develop between the state and locally-rooted organizations and community groups.

Two additional points regarding civil society’s relationship with political and economic actors are worth noting. First, although civil society is separate from market actors in the private sphere, civil society may include the nonmarket activities of economic actors. Thus, business organizations and unions are often part of the civil societal landscape. Second, I assume that civil society is analytically distinct from political society, which includes political parties and organizations aimed at gaining control over state power. Of course, political society may often work in tandem with civil society, acting as the bridge between state and society. However, as Sunhyuk Kim argues, “civil society, unlike political society, does not seek to replace state agents, (but rather) engage and influence the state.” In this paper, civil society is therefore comprised of, but not limited to labor unions, peace groups, women’s movement groups, environmental groups, labor unions, churches, professional societies, business associations, advocacy groups, and educational and cultural organizations.

U.S. Civil Society and Domestic Stakes to the U.S.-ROK Alliance

Examining the relationship between civil society and bilateral alliances is a bit unusual. Civil society is more frequently associated with studies of democratization, democratic governance, civic engagement, or public transparency rather than bilateral security relations. However, with democratization driven by South Korean civil society, and demand for greater information, transparency, and accountability on a wide range of issues affecting U.S.-South Korean relations in both countries, civil society has come to play an increasingly larger role in the U.S.-ROK alliance.

It is worth noting, however, that the impact of U.S. civil society on the alliance has

5 Michael Walzer, "The Idea of Civil Society: A Path to Social Reconstruction." In Community Works: The Revival of Civil Society in America, edited by E. J. Dionne, 123-44. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998, p.128. I use “voluntary” to suggest that membership is consensual with the option to exit without losing public benefits or rights. This should not be interpreted to mean that civil society cannot include paid staff.


7 Civil society scholars are divided in whether to include political society as part of civil society. Those who view political society as an integral part of civil society argue that the former also rely on democratic associations and unconstrained discussion in the public sphere. See Michael Edwards. Civil Society. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004, p.25.


been more indirect than direct compared to South Korean civil society. The numerous domestic and foreign policy agendas confronting U.S. civil societal groups as a whole, coupled with the relatively peripheral status of Korean issues in the U.S., means that the influence of civil society (and their capacity for disruption) on U.S.-South Korean relations is less than that of their South Korean counterpart.

Nevertheless, civil societal groups with more direct stakes and domestic interests to U.S.-South Korean relations exist within the U.S. polity. Rather than examining U.S. civil society as a whole, then, it makes sense to focus more closely on these groups. Among U.S. civil societal groups with domestic stakes to the U.S.-ROK alliance, I make an analytical distinction between Korean ethnic-based groups, special interest groups, academic institutions and think tanks, and issue-oriented movements and coalitions. These categories are by no means mutually exclusive. However, making such distinctions helps facilitate discussion and allows us to conceptualize the historical development, structure, and influence of U.S. civil society on alliance relations.

The Korean diaspora provides the foundation and mobilizing base for U.S. civil societal groups and grassroots movements with stakes to U.S.-ROK relations. This first category includes Korean-American community outreach and advocacy groups, religious groups and churches, professional societies, and cultural and educational groups. Although the converging point is common ethnicity, heritage, and/or culture, membership does not exclude non-Koreans. Although individual members may engage in social or political activism, many of these ethnic-based groups are apolitical and do not necessarily endorse any one particular political view. What these Korean-ethnic based groups do, however, is facilitate networks among a variety of civil societal actors who have more direct stakes to U.S.-South Korean relations. For example, activists promoting North Korean human rights may use Korean-American church congregations as a central point for raising awareness about North Korean issues, or take advantage of existing networks within Korean-American advocacy, cultural, or religious groups to mobilize people.

Second, special interest organizations, which may or may not be ethnic-based but still relevant to U.S.-Korea relations, provide a forum for sharing information and advancing the particular interests of group members. Business or merchant associations, professional societies, or Korean War veterans groups are a few examples. Many special interest organizations are ethnic-based (i.e. Korean-American Merchants Association in Chicago; Korean-American Medical Association), but not all ethnic-based organizations are interest-based. Special-interest groups do provide public services to the broader community, but membership is more inclusive with members linked by specific interests and characteristics (other than Korean ethnicity) such as common professional goals.

The third category, academic institutions and think tanks, is actually a subset of special interest organizations, with members also participating in issue-based movements or coalitions. Several U.S. universities such as Columbia University; Harvard University; University of California, Los Angeles; University of Hawaii; Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies; or the University of Southern California host Korea-related academic institutions or programs. Think tanks which regularly host events relevant to the U.S.-ROK alliance include the Brookings Institution, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Council on Foreign
Academic institutions and think tanks play a critical role in shaping policy ideas and disseminating policy views regarding U.S.-South Korea relations to the broader public. Their important role in educating U.S. civil society and fostering cross-national civil societal ties with South Koreans warrants creating a separate category.

The fourth category of civil societal actors includes movements, coalitions, and organizations mobilized around specific social or political issues with direct implications for U.S.-South Korean relations. While these groups may also be “ethnic-based,” network ties and coalitions are temporal. Mobilization patterns fluctuate, expand, or disappear as political events unfold. In recent years, these “issue-based” groups include coalitions promoting North Korean human rights, business organizations or labor unions supporting or opposing the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA), or peace activists protesting against U.S. military-related issues in South Korea such as the expansion of Camp Humphrey’s in Pyeongtaek or the negative treatment of women in military camptowns.

As mentioned above, ethnic-based civil societal organizations, and more political, issue-based groups are not mutually exclusive. For instance, Nodutdol, a grassroots organization based in New York City which focuses on a wide range of peace and social justice issues, is largely defined by Korean ethnicity. Nodutdol identifies itself as a “community of first through fourth generation Koreans living in the U.S… that has families in both the south and north of Korea…bound together by our shared sense of the Korean homeland that continues to suffer under division.” However, Nodutdol is also an organizer, sponsor, and member of several issue-based coalitions such as the movement to formally end the Korean War. Moreover, individual members of ethnic based groups (i.e. a university or local Korean association chapter) may associate themselves with one or more politically active issue-based group. Despite the blurry lines between the two categories, the analytical distinction is important because it highlights the potential, but untapped political resources found within ethnic-based civil societal groups.

Figure 1 below represents the relationship between all four categories.

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10 http://www.nodutdol.org/ [last accessed 1/10/10].
11 This argument corroborates other reports on the role of Korean-Americans on U.S.-South Korean relations. For instance, a CSIS sponsored study concludes that Korean-Americans show significant interest in U.S.-Korea relations, but lack corresponding knowledge; are uncertain whether U.S. foreign policy towards South Korea is “an important enough issue to them to mobilizeand drive an agenda in Washington and Seoul; and remain passive politically. See Bokyoung Choi, Daniel Lim, Jeffrey Mitchell, “The K Factor: Korean-American Attitudes toward and Impact on U.S.-Korea Policy,” CSIS: Washington DC, March 2008.
The impact of ethnic-based and special interest organizations on U.S.-ROK relations are more indirect and long-term (denoted by the dashed-line arrows), whereas issue-based movements and coalitions channel direct pressure on policymakers in an effort to directly influence U.S.-ROK alliance-related policies. Of course, ethnic-based or special interest groups may also mobilize around specific issues to directly influence policy, hence the overlap among the three groups. Academic institutes and think tanks, by disseminating knowledge and policy views have an indirect influence in shaping alliance policy. However, some leading scholars and think tank members maintain close ties with government leaders, and may therefore play a more direct role in influencing the direction of the alliance.\textsuperscript{12}

In Figure 1, I divide issue-based organizations and movements into more conservative and progressive-leaning groups to evaluate their influence on the U.S.-ROK alliance. I offer these categories as ideal types, rather than rigid categories which organizations must fall under. One might be tempted to label conservative and progressive groups as pro or anti-U.S.-ROK alliance. However, this distinction is unclear, and at times, misleading. For instance, conservative groups urging the U.S. government to take a hard-line position on North Korea, and publicly denouncing North Korea for its gross abuse of human rights may not necessarily strengthen U.S.-South Korean relations. This was precisely the case in the early 2000s when South Koreans felt conservatives both inside and outside of the Bush Administration were undermining South Korea’s “sunshine” policy of engagement towards the North. Conversely, demands for greater equality and transparency in the U.S.-ROK alliance from progressive activists may help reduce friction and misunderstanding in the long run between two democratic partners. In the following

\textsuperscript{12}Because think tanks act as a revolving door between the academy and government, their inclusion as a part of civil society is debatable. At the same time, they are difficult to exclude in a discussion about the U.S.-ROK alliance because they provide a forum for civil societal actors to debate issues and coordinate action on alliance related issues.
section, I present a brief historical review of U.S. civil societal groups with interests in U.S.-South Korean relations, focusing on ethnic and issue-based groups.

**The Korean Diaspora and Ethnic-Based Groups**

Approximately 1.5 million Korean-Americans populate the United States. Although the first wave of Korean immigrants to the U.S. arrived around the turn of the twentieth century, the presence of Korean-Americans did not expand until the second and third waves, marked by the end of the Korean War and the Immigration Act of 1965, respectively. Like many other ethnic enclaves, first generation Korean-speaking immigrants established traditional ethnic community organizations with strong ties to their home country. Korean-Americans had “actively established associations and political study groups since their arrival.” However, these groups developed in relative isolation from other community groups and outside mainstream domestic politics. According to sociologist Angie Chung, three types of leaders emerged among Korean-American communities: entrepreneurs, religious leaders from the Christian church, and presidents or board-members of homeland-oriented immigration organizations. With the base of the Korean-American community rooted in strong ties to the South Korean government, Christianity, and the economic wealth of immigrant merchants, the politics of first generation civil societal groups in the 1960s and 70s were relatively conservative.

First generation Korean-Americans, particularly those who experienced the Korean War firsthand and received direct U.S. assistance, generally favored policies supporting the U.S.-ROK alliance. This does not mean, however, that second and third wave Korean-American immigrants avoided more progressive causes. For example, groups such as the Korean Congress for Democracy and Unification and the American Scholars for a Democratic Korea united Korean students studying in the U.S. with Korean-Americans to oppose the rule of Washington-backed Syngman Rhee. The Kwangju Massacre in South Korea in 1980 also loosened the political grip of Korean-American elites in the U.S. by challenging their pro-Seoul, pro-U.S. ideologies.” Koreans, particularly 1.5 generation students studying in the U.S., organized sit-ins and blood-drives in solidarity with student democracy movements in South Korea and in reaction against the Chun Doo-Hwan regime’s brutal crackdown against protestors. These progressive activists expanded their network by establishing several new branches of the Korean Student Association for Democracy in the U.S. Thus, several progressive 1.5 and second generation organizations sprung out of the student activist base established by post-Kwangju politics.

Korean-American social and political activism reached a major turning point following the April 1992 Los Angeles riots. The riots left Koreatown in shambles with Korean businesses and

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17 Chung 2007, p.79.
19 Chung 2007., p.81.
residences looted, burned, or destroyed. The lack of voice among Korean-Americans in the immediate aftermath of the riots spurred first and second generation Koreans to mobilize different social and political organizations which would help empower Korean-American communities. However, these groups were “overwhelmingly domestic in their agenda.” Activities focused on local initiatives such as youth leadership programs, voter registration drives, community outreach, and immigration and naturalization services.

Since the priority and interests of many Korean-American civil societal groups are domestic in nature, their impact on U.S.-South Korean relations is often indirect. A 2008 CSIS study on the Korean-American impact on U.S.-Korea policy concluded that Korean-Americans as a whole played only a limited role in influencing U.S.-Korea policy, and did not play an influential role in promoting U.S.-Korea relations. The authors attribute this lack of influence to several factors. These include (1) a general gap in knowledge on issues relevant to U.S.-ROK relations; (2) disagreement within Korean-American advocacy and political groups regarding the degree of importance in mobilizing Korean-Americans on foreign policy as opposed to domestic issues; (3) barriers to large-scale mobilization stemming from cultural differences between older and younger generation Korean-Americans, which in turn lead to different attitudes towards civic organization and activism; or (4) general political apathy among Korean-Americans.

Thus large Korean-American civil societal and community groups such as the National Association of Korean Americans (NAKA), Korean American League for Civic Action, the Young Korean American Network, or Korean American Voters’ Council (KAVC) tend to focus their resources on issues such as civil liberties, immigrant rights, community service, or leadership development. For the most part, professional societies such as the Korean-American Medical Association or the Korean-American Scientists and Engineers Association, or cultural, educational, or student groups such as the Korean Cultural Center Los Angeles or the Sejong Cultural Society, or the numerous Korean student associations and clubs in American universities remain apolitical on U.S.-South Korea-related issues. Korean-American churches also tend to avoid discussing or taking an active position on political and social issues relevant to U.S.-South Korean relations. As the CSIS report comments, “With the exception of a few groups … most Korean-American organizations seem to emphasize domestic issues out of necessity or choice, and largely ignore international issues.” U.S.-Korea policy is either irrelevant to these groups, or if they are important, are under-addressed due to a lack of resources or political maturity to consistently address national issues.

This is not to argue that ethnic-based Korean-American groups have no impact on the U.S.-South Korea alliance, or have not attempted to influence U.S.-ROK policy more directly. As the overlapping intersections in Figure 1 indicate, several Korean-ethnic based groups also engage in areas relevant to U.S.-Korea policy and mobilize their members on issues directly related to the alliance. For instance, although NAKA’s primary purpose is to protect the civil rights of Korean-

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20 Chung 2007, Ch. 5.
23 Of course, exceptions within the Korean church community do exist. Several faith-based organizations such as the Korean Churches for Community Development and the Korean Church Coalition for North Korea Freedom have taken a more active political stance on both domestic and international issues. See Choi et al. 2008, p.27.
24 Ibid. p.20.
Americans and promote cooperation and understanding between Korean-Americans and other racial/ethnic communities, NAKA periodically engages in North Korea-related issues in an effort “to contribute to the peaceful, independent reunification of Korea.” Hence, ethnic-based groups help facilitate resource mobilization for larger social movements targeting issues directly relevant to the U.S.-ROK alliance. Indirectly then, existing networks within large Korean-American community groups help enhance mobilization capacity on U.S.-South Korea related issues.

While not “ethnic-based” in the literal sense, the explicit mission of some non-profit organizations such as the Korea Society based in New York City, or the Sejong Society in Washington D.C. is to “promote understanding, cooperation, and cultural exchange between private citizens, businesses, and organizations in the U.S. and South Korea.” In pursuit of this mission, the Korea Society “arranges programs that facilitate discussion, exchanges, and research on topics of vital interest to both countries in the areas of public policy, business, education, intercultural relations and the arts.” Much like academic institutes and think tanks, these societies provide a platform for members of civil society to interact with current and former policy-makers, intellectuals, and other Korean experts. These organizations may not necessarily have a direct impact on U.S.-ROK relations. However, the exchange of ideas and the expansion of knowledge regarding U.S.-South Korean affairs through various outreach programs to non-Koreans in the United States may help foster positive U.S.-South Korean relations in the longer term.

**Issue-Based Groups**

While issue-based civil societal groups may also be largely ethnic-based, the distinction between these two groups lies in their mobilizing structure and network rather than the characteristics of individual members (i.e., whether members are of Korean or non-Korean descent). Issue-based civil societal groups with interests to U.S.-South Korean relations tend to move beyond the interests of local Korean-American communities. Therefore, these groups cast a wider net by forming broader coalitions within the United States with non-ethnic Korean groups, and with other civil societal organizations in South Korea. These broad-based coalition networks tend to fall under progressive or conservative lines, creating factions among civil societal actors with different interests and domestic stakes to U.S.-ROK related policies.

Mobilization around the U.S.-South Korea FTA highlights the differences between ethnic-based and issue-based groups. From 2006-2007, Korean-American progressive community groups aggressively spearheaded a coalition to oppose the FTA. Focusing their energies in stopping the FTA, politically active, grassroots-oriented Korean-American groups such as Nodutdol helped organize Korean Americans Against War and Neoliberalism (KAWAN), a national coalition of progressive U.S.-based Korean organizations. Working in conjunction with both U.S and

25 http://www.naka.org/ [last accessed 1/13/09].
26 Organizations such as Korea Society or Sejong Society fall ambiguously between “ethnic-based” and special interest/academic groups. While membership is not based on Korean ethnicity, the organizations exist to promote Korea’s culture, heritage, politics, and business.
27 http://www.koreasociety.org/ [last accessed 1/13/09].
28 http://nodutdol.org/index.php/campaigns/
South Korean civil societal groups, KAWAN mobilized protests, led forums, and organized acts of civil disobedience. For example, on June 4, 2009, KAWAN and other progressive organizations in the U.S. welcomed a large delegation of South Korean activists and union members in a campaign against the U.S.-South Korea FTA. Other anti-FTA coalitions such as Korean-Americans for Free Trade (KAFT) emerged as leaders in major Korean-American community organizations such as the National Association of Korean-Americans (NAKA) reached out to other groups and activists within and outside the Korean-American network. Working with farmers, labor unions, activists, and civil society organizations in the U.S. and South Korea, KAFT raised concerns “with the non-transparent negotiations process and dangerous provisions proposed in the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement.” Additionally, KAFT demanded a fair trade model supporting respect for democratic rights and participation, progress towards equality, and strengthened labor and environmental standards. Citing problems with other FTAs including NAFTA, KAFT declared, “We are not convinced that the KorUS FTA will be beneficial to ordinary American workers and farmers.”

The network built by Korean-American community groups extends outward towards larger, U.S. and South Korea-based social justice organizations. In the U.S., active support from anti-war groups, such as the Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER) Coalition, and American labor unions, including AFL-CIO, Change to Win, and Blue Diamond Growers brought additional stakeholders to U.S.-ROK alliance policy. Additionally, activists linked opposition to the U.S.-Korea FTA with other bilateral FTAs. For instance, anti-KORUS FTA activists collaborated with grassroots Colombian and Peruvian organizations, as well as the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and Change to Win, thus shifting the target and scope of mobilization against neoliberal globalization.

At the same time, pro-FTA coalitions have mobilized to promote ratification of the KORUS FTA. Korean-Americans again have taken the lead by forming the Korean American KORUS FTA Support Coalition, a member-driven coalition mainly comprised of Korean-American individuals, companies, businesses, organizations and community groups. According to the group’s website, the mission and goals of the coalition are to 1) foster awareness about the KORUS FTA and its benefits in the U.S; 2) coordinate the support of Korean-Americans for the KORUS FTA and assist with promotional efforts in the mainstream American Society; 3) educate U.S. policymakers in government and Congress on the benefits of the KORUS FTA; and 4) garner support from Congress and the Administration for congressional ratification of the KORUS FTA. Similarly, the U.S.-Korea FTA Business Coalition, headed by the U.S.-Korea Business Council and supported by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, has pooled together U.S. businesses, industry organizations, trade associations, and state and local chambers of commerce to promote the passage of the KORUS FTA in Congress. Contrary to statements by progressive groups, these organizations highlight new access for U.S. goods and services in South Korea, bringing economic benefits and opportunities to U.S. businesses, farmers, and workers. Moreover, the U.S.-Korea FTA Business Coalition directly links FTA ratification and the strengthening of the U.S.-ROK alliance, stating, ‘By deepening our two countries' economic links, the agreement will

30 http://www.supportkorusfta.com/index.asp
31 Ibid.
bring new energy and vitality to the overall U.S.-Korea partnership—an alliance critical to regional and global security. And by giving U.S. businesses an advantage over global competitors in Korea's market, the FTA will ensure that the United States not only remains competitive in Korea but is a critical part of Asia's rapid market integration.

**Strategies, Structure, and Networks**

To understand the strategies, network structure, and links among civil societal groups and actors (including their relationship with counterparts in South Korea), in this section, I highlight two coalition movements: the National Campaign to End the Korean War and the Remember 727 Coalition. Although the two groups have different political orientations and agendas, they are fairly representative of other issue-based grassroots movements and civil societal groups in the United States.

**National Campaign to End the Korean War**

The National Campaign to End the Korean War is a collaboration of “several leading Korean-American, veterans, and human rights organizations working to promote a U.S.-Korea policy that will bring about a lasting peace on the Korean peninsula.” A grassroots campaign, the organization’s primary agenda is to bring reconciliation and reunification on the Peninsula by ending the Korean War with a peace treaty signed between the United States and North Korea. Like other progressive, grassroots campaigns, the coalition is headed by several civil societal organizations, and joined by scholars and activists. Leading member organizations are primarily ethnic-based including the National Association of Korean Americans National Committee for Peace in Korea, National Lawyers Guild Korean Peace Project, North American Network for Peace in Korea, and the Korea Peace Campaign. However, the coalition is able to network with larger activists groups with a national and international presence such as Code Pink, Veterans for Peace, the American Friends Service Committee, and the Asia Pacific Freeze Campaign. Issue-based movements and campaigns, therefore, have greater potential in building a broad-based national coalition extending beyond the Korean-American network base. Thus in March 2009, Korean-Americans, joined by peace activists from across the country, converged in Washington D.C. to participate in “Korea Peace Day” and met with Congressional officials to begin their renewed effort to end the Korean War. The coalition later coordinated simultaneous candlelight vigils in Honolulu, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Seoul, and Washington D.C. in July 2009 to commemorate the 56th anniversary of the signing of the Korean War armistice and to call for a permanent Peace Treaty.

Additionally, the Campaign to End the Korean War partnered with South Korean civic groups such as the Citizens Coalition for Economic Justice, Peace Network, People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, and Solidarity for Peace and Reunification of Korea. Although interaction between U.S. and South Korean groups are often sporadic, existing network ties

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among activists facilitate cooperation in future campaigns. For instance, in the past, the National Lawyers Guild organized trips for lawyers, legal workers and law students to South Korea to “increase understanding and dispel the myths that often dictate our national policies” through the Korean Peace Project. These delegates met with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and government officials, and returned to the U.S. to engage in educational lectures and community outreach.\footnote{National Lawyer’s Guild, “Tobin Report on NLG Peace Project Meetings with NGO’s in Seoul.” October 7, 2005. http://www.ubuntuworks.com/ubuntuworks/DELEGATIONS/Entries/2005/10/7_Tobin_Report_on_NLG_Peace_Project_Meetings_with_NGOs_in_Seoul.html [last accessed 1/13/10].}

Needless to say, the progressive goals of National Campaign to End the Korean War (NCEKW) and other peace groups working to formally end the Korean War have direct implications for the U.S.-ROK alliance. Progressive organizations are critical of recent shifts in U.S. military posture in South Korea. This includes the relocation and expansion of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) headquarters to Pyeongtaek, and the policy of “strategic flexibility” permitting USFK to deploy troops from South Korea to other potential conflict zones in the region. These groups claim that the “change in the military posture of the United States and its relation with South Korea, along with even greater changes in the U.S.-Japan defense relationship, presents new dangers in the region.” These “dangers” include a large concentration of troops and weapons in Northeast Asia with the potential of triggering an arms race, and increasing military tensions between Taiwan, China, North Korea, South Korea, and Japan.\footnote{National Campaign to End the Korean War. Tool-Kit and Resource Guide, p.37.}

Additionally, NCEKW educates the public and pressures policy-makers to rethink Washington’s current policies regarding North Korea. Critical of the Bush Administration’s position towards North Korea, the Campaign noted signs of a new thaw between the two countries in 2008 with the Bush Administration holding lower-level talks with North Korea and removing Pyongyang from its state-sponsored terrorism list. Activists thus perceived the election of President Obama in late 2008 as a political opportunity to take action in securing peace on the Korean Peninsula. The campaign stated, “With the election of President Obama, who has committed his administration to diplomacy and a dialogue with countries without preconditions,’ we believe that a new approach towards the Korean peninsula – one that promotes peace, dialogue and reconciliation and reduces the dangers of conflict between North Korea and the U.S. is truly possible.”\footnote{Campaign Statement of the National Campaign to End the Korean War.<http://www.endthekoreanwar.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=8> [last accessed 1/13/10].}

Whether the campaign projects any influence on U.S. policy towards the U.S.-ROK alliance or North Korea remains to be seen. The role of progressive-leaning civil societal actors with domestic stakes to the U.S.-ROK alliance is unclear, particularly under the current security climate. Peace activists in the U.S. and South Korea gamble that a treaty between the United States and North Korea, and a reduction of U.S. military presence in South Korea will pave the path for peace on the Peninsula and Northeast Asia. Without a formal treaty, the Coalition argues that the continued threat of war provides North Korea justification to continue developing nuclear weapons as a means of national survival. Bringing a formal end to the Korean War, however, would provide the North incentives for denuclearization. Additionally, the Coalition
assumes a peace treaty will help bring about formal diplomatic relations with Pyongyang while improving inter-Korean relations in hopes of future reunification. However, the goals promoted by U.S. civil societal groups are currently not a viable option for the Obama or Lee Myung-Bak administrations. Criticism against ongoing USFK realignment, and the demand for Washington to sign a peace treaty with the North are sure to damage alliance relations with South Korea. In particular, any bilateral peace treaty between the United States and North Korea would certainly appear as a direct snub to Washington’s security commitment to South Korea. Thus, while NCEKW helps raise alternative security discourses for policymakers, and sheds light on U.S.-Korea related issues to informed political activists and to a lesser extent the general public, they carry little direct impact on the U.S.-ROK alliance.

Remember 727

As progressive U.S. civil societal groups push for reductions in U.S. military presence or a formal peace treaty between the United States and North Korea, both positions with significant implications for the U.S.-ROK alliance, a very different type of grassroots movement exists in support of stronger ties between U.S. and South Koreans: I spotlight the Remember 727 movement—not because of the size or network capacity of the movement—but because of the potential its young followers (whether in this campaign or another) have in promoting improved ties between the U.S. and South Korea.

The Remember 727 campaign is essentially a one-woman movement led by a Korean-American student, but one which tapped into Korean War Veterans groups and the broader network of Korean-American ethnic-based organizations to promote a cause directly relevant to the U.S.-South Korean alliance. According to Hannah Kim, founder of Remember 727, the movement’s immediate goal was to commemorate Armistice Day (July 27, 1953) in honor of Korean War veterans, and to remember that the Korean War had not officially ended. As with many other civil societal groups headed by young second generation Korean-Americans, Kim’s identity and ties to Korea as a study abroad student helped sustain her interest in U.S.-Korea related issues. In fact, the majority of U.S. activists working on Korea-related issues have some personal connection with South Korea. This includes ties through family members, study abroad and cultural exchange experiences, military or volunteer service, or business and employment opportunities.

Kim’s own initiative to honor veterans and raise awareness about 727 was motivated by the lack of knowledge of young Americans, and more alarmingly, young Korean-Americans about the Korean War. Noting that the blood ties between the U.S. and ROK stem from the Korean War, Hannah believed that remembrance of the War would help achieve four broader aspirations: (1) strengthening ties between U.S.-South Korean relations; (2) strengthening ties between Koreans and Americans; (3) strengthening ties between Korean-Americans and Americans; and (4)

37 Ibid.
strengthening ties between younger and older generation Koreans by a shared sense of history, and fostering dialogue between different immigrant experiences. Kim’s experience in mobilizing grassroots support for Remember 727 sheds light on different factions and networks operating within civil society and among domestic stakeholders of U.S.-South Korea relations. As mentioned earlier, the actual planning and coordinating of Remember 727 were largely directed by Kim. However, she relied heavily on existing organizational networks, individually contacting and mass-e-mailing hundreds of groups. Kim encountered a range of reactions to her efforts to organize an Armistice Day rally on the National Mall, and pass a bill in Congress honoring Korean War veterans. Many groups were unresponsive. Others commented that her cause was noble, but were largely indifferent or skeptical about its impact. Kim stated that several “ethnic-based” groups were initially wary about organizational support for her movement. Wanting to remain apolitical, these groups assumed that the Remember 727 was another campaign with a political agenda to end the Korean War and demand a peace treaty between the United States and North Korea.

On the contrary, more progressive, issue-oriented organizations such as NAKA, which in the past had sponsored peace treaty events, immediately embraced her movement. According to Kim, however, the agenda of peace groups and Remember 727 differed. As Kim argued, “All I wanted to do was to bring to the surface that the war hadn’t ended, and that we need to thank the veterans.” Ironically, to distance herself from any overt political agenda, Kim and Remember 727 eventually parted ways with NAKA. The groups which did provide institutional and moral support for Remember 727 included Korean War veterans and former Peace Corps volunteers to South Korea. With an interest in promoting relations between the two countries, both groups provided invaluable support in promoting the eventual passage of the Korean War Veterans Recognition Act in Congress in July 2009.

**Network Structures**

The National Campaign to End the Korean War and Remember 727 have enough similarities to find room for overlap. What both campaigns suggest, however, are different cleavages along ideological or generational lines, even within the narrow band of U.S. civil societal groups with interests to U.S.-South Korea relations. Groups such as Nodotdol or NAKA are able to rely on existing networks within the Korean-American community, and reach out to activists and peace groups to create an issue-based grassroots movement. However, their specific political agenda makes it difficult to attract special interest or Korean ethnic-based civil societal groups which are conservative-leaning or prefer to stay politically neutral. This unfortunately limits a network to its usual base of supporters. The same can be said for conservative-leaning groups who run into obstacles in attracting apolitical or progressive-leaning organizations. Special-interest or professional societies, meanwhile, are reluctant to promote causes or advertise events which tend to fall at one end of the political spectrum or other.

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Impact and Implications of U.S. Civil Society for the U.S.-ROK Alliance

Direct Impact

What impact does U.S. civil society and cooperation with their South Korean counterpart have on the U.S.-ROK alliance? The direct impact of U.S. civil society is relatively weak, especially in comparison to the degree of influence South Korean NGO and civic groups have on alliance relations. I suggest three possible reasons for this. First, the key role played by civil society in South Korea’s democratization process has given South Korean civil society greater visibility and presence, if not more leverage, in democratic politics compared to U.S. civil societal groups. Even with the continued decline of key civil societal sectors, particularly student groups and labor unions, civil society is still strong enough to sway public and pressure politicians. Examples include protests in 2002 after the acquittal of two USFK soldiers charged with involuntary manslaughter in the death of two schoolgirls, and more recently, the public uproar in May 2008 against U.S. beef imports. Second, the asymmetric nature of influence and power between the two countries means that shifts in the direction of the alliance will be perceived more acutely by the South Korean polity as a whole.41 Put bluntly, the overall stakes in the U.S.-ROK alliance are higher for South Korean civil society than U.S. civil society. Moreover, outside of Korean-American groups, there is a general lack of interest or awareness on U.S.-ROK related policies among U.S. civil society, save for a few specific bilateral issues which have led to broader-based coalitions extending beyond the Korean-American network. Third, even on contemporary bilateral issues such as the FTA or North Korea, U.S. civil societal actors with stakes to the alliance remain fragmented. A diverse range of political goals and aspirations pulls civil society in several directions, sending different signals to policymakers and political figures. The diverse representation of political views on U.S.-ROK relations among civil society is a healthy sign of democracy. But paradoxically, it also dampens the impact of a relatively small number of actors actively engaging the public and government on alliance-related issues.

Indirect Impact

The influence and role of U.S. civil society on the U.S.-ROK alliance is more likely to have greater indirect effects. First, just as the U.S.-ROK alliance acts as a “support beam” promoting the growth of civil societal ties between the U.S. and South Korea, conversely, the growing number of exchanges between civil societal actors in both countries helps generate new stakes and interests in maintaining positive ties between Seoul and Washington.42 Private and government sponsored programs such as Korea Foundation or the Fulbright Program, public and non-profit groups such as the Korea Society, or the countless cultural and educational programs (including campus Korean student organizations), foster exchanges between South Koreans and Americans. Perhaps the civil societal groups which have the most potential impact on the future of the U.S.-South Korea alliance are those which cater to the younger generation. One concrete example is the Sejong Society in Washington D.C., a non-partisan, all volunteer organization

41 This does not mean that U.S.-ROK related policies are not acutely perceived by particular industries or companies in the U.S., such as the U.S. auto-industry on FTA issues, or by the defense industry on military related policies.
with the specific mission of preparing “the next generation of American specialists on Korean affairs to think critically about U.S. foreign policy towards North and South Korea.” Founded by young American professionals, Sejong Society educates future specialists on Korean politics, history, culture, and society by hosting lectures, films, panel debates, and social networking events. By targeting future leaders of U.S.-Korea or U.S.-Asia relations in the government, non-profit, and academic sectors, Sejong Society is indirectly training, socializing, and mobilizing the next generation of policymakers and leaders who will work to strengthen cooperation between the two countries.

While Sejong Society broadly targets Americans of both non-Korean and Korean descent, some Korean-American activists note the specific role of young Korean-Americans in building stakes to the U.S.-ROK alliance. In her efforts to mobilize Korean-Americans, Remember 727’s Hannah Kim noted that many older first and 1.5 generation Korean-Americans were busy with their career and families. However, in her movement, it was the younger second and third generation—less attached to ideological persuasion shaped by traumatic events such as the Korean War or student democracy movements—who exhibited energy and passion on U.S.-Korea related issues.

Cross-national ties to South Korean civil societal groups also indirectly influence and build support for U.S.-ROK relations. Ethnic, issue, and special-interest based organizations in the U.S. with stakes to the alliance often interact with their counterparts in South Korea, whether in a loose coalition movement, or through informal, personal networks. Conferences hosted by academics and think tanks inviting members from the academic, policy, and NGO community also function as a bridge and open opportunities to expand network ties between civil societal groups in the U.S. and South Korea. Ironically, progressive groups opposed to current U.S.-ROK alliance policies also help build cross-national networks which in the long run may facilitate U.S.-South Korean cooperation.

**Conclusion**

Although the direct impact of U.S. civil society on the U.S.-ROK alliance is limited in scope, how well Washington and Seoul manage to steer the future course of the alliance will rest on support from their respective civil societies. With the power to persuade netizens and public opinion, support from South Korean civil society is particularly important to avoid major bumps on a range of alliance-related issues, including North Korea, free trade, and USFK initiatives. In the U.S., where the effects of civil society are more indirect, civil societal actors, whether organized around a common Korean ethnicity, special interests, or political or social issues, are perhaps the best advocates in promoting long-term U.S.-South Korean relations.

44 Currently, members include young professionals working in agencies such as the U.S. State, Defense, Energy, and Treasury Departments, intelligence analysts, Congressional staffers, NGO workers, and government contractors. Interview with Christopher Hale, Chairman of Sejong Society. Arlington, VA. February 11, 2010.
As the U.S.-ROK alliance evolves, Seoul and Washington will need to increasingly rely on and evoke common values and identity. Although common threats still form the basis of the alliance today, common values may become equally if not more important than strategic interests in sustaining the alliance, especially in a post-Korean unification scenario. If so, then civil society, and in particular cross-national civil societal cooperation, will also play a larger role in sustaining the U.S.-ROK alliance. A values-based alliance rests on mutual understanding and cooperation not only among policy elites, but the larger polity as well. With Korean-Americans, or Americans with personal connections to South Korea serving as the bridge between the two polities, deep network ties already exist in areas such as education, religion, and business. More recently, civil societal groups and activists have formed transnational partnerships in pursuit of social and political issues relevant to U.S.-ROK relations, such as North Korean human rights, justice for Korean “comfort women,” or free trade. If the “bonds that underpin our Alliance and our partnership are strengthened and enriched by the close relationships among our citizens,” we should continue to see and promote cooperation within and between U.S. and South Korean civil societal sectors.