



# The Opportunity is There: South Koreans' Views of China and the Future of the US-ROK Alliance

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## **Pacific Forum**

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## ABSTRACT

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Officially, relations between the Republic of Korea and the People’s Republic of China remain cordial. Because of China’s economic heft and South Korea’s reliance on unmolested trade with the former for its continued economic development, South Korea takes great pains to be as neutral as possible between the United States and China despite its formal alliance with the US. As such, many pejoratively refer to South Korea as “the weak link” in America’s Northeast Asia alliance system. However, on a civil society level, an overwhelming majority of the South Korean public has a negative view of China—a view that has steadily gotten worse over time. Being a democracy that reflects voters’ popular will, growing anti-Chinese sentiment among voters means South Korea’s current policy of placating China will not be sustainable indefinitely. Meanwhile, the Trump administration largely neglected the alliance between South Korea and the United States. That neglect notwithstanding, an overwhelming majority of South Koreans either strongly or somewhat support the alliance with the United States. Conditions are perfect for the Biden administration to seek to repair and strengthen relations with South Korea to empower the alliance to serve as a credible bulwark against Chinese expansionism—this paper offers solutions on how to do so.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, much strain has appeared in the alliance between South Korea and the United States. Indeed, considerable evidence suggests that the alliance has seen better days.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Trump administration's insistence on South Korea paying a vastly increased amount of money for shared defense costs was widely perceived as a shakedown by many in South Korea.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most significant example of the alliance being less than ironclad was when certain South Korean officials publicly said that joining the Quad might not be in South Korea's best interests.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the South Korean government is usually hesitant to speak out against the Chinese government. Usually, it maintains its silence—something that the South Korean government rarely ever does regarding slights from Japan, perceived or otherwise.<sup>4</sup> Whether it is Chinese PLA Air Force jets making incursions into South Korea's Air Defense Identification Zone, or China's armada of auxiliary fishing fleets entering into South Korean waters, or China's vocal opposition to the deployment of THAAD anti-missile batteries, South Korea often keeps its silence to ensure that it does not enrage Beijing.<sup>5</sup>

When viewed from South Korea's perspective, the ROK government's deference to Beijing is somewhat understandable: China is South Korea's largest trading partner.<sup>6</sup> As much of South Korea's economic wealth depends on the Chinese Communist Party's good graces, the South Korean government's reluctance to irritate the Chinese government is understandable. South Korean leaders likely felt exonerated after the Chinese government began to severely punish Australian businesses with broad tariffs even though the two countries entered into a bilateral

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<sup>1</sup> Sue Mi Terry, "The Unraveling of the U.S.-South Korean Alliance," *Foreign Affairs*, March 7, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2020-07-03/unraveling-us-south-korean-alliance>.

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Mason, "Trump Says He Rejected Sum South Korea Offered for Defense Costs," *Reuters*, April 21, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-southkorea-trump-idUSKBN22235A>; Lee Haye-ah, "Trump Threatened to Pull Troops If S. Korea Didn't Give \$5 Bln: Bolton Memoir | Yonhap News Agency," *Yonhap News Agency*, June 22, 2020, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20200622004700325>.

<sup>3</sup> Byun Duk-kun, "Seoul's Participation in 'Quad' May Jeopardize Regional Security: S. Korean Adviser," *Yonhap News Agency*, October 28, 2020, sec. Politics, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20201028000200325>.

<sup>4</sup> "The South China Sea Needs South Korea," *The Diplomat*, June 24, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/06/the-south-china-sea-needs-south-korea/>; Sabrina Siddiqui, "Japan's PM Apologises for US War Dead – but Fails to Mention 'Comfort Women,'" *The Guardian*, April 30, 2015, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/29/japans-pm-shinzo-abe-apologises-us-war-dead-congress-comfort-women>; Mari Yamaguchi, "Japan Renews Claim on South Korea-Held Island," *Associated Press*, February 22, 2021, sec. Cabinets, <https://apnews.com/article/cabinets-seoul-world-war-ii-south-korea-sea-of-japan-5b94fb975e1a90262dc7cf0363ee338d>.

<sup>5</sup> "S.Korea Scrambles Jets as Chinese, Russian Aircraft Enter Air Defence Zone," *Reuters*, December 22, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-southkorea-china-russia-idUKKBN28W13G>; "Illegal Chinese Fishing in S. Korea Grows Increasingly Unrestrained: Lawmaker," *Yonhap News Agency*, October 5, 2020, sec. Crime, Disaster, Accident, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20201005007200315>; "China Says Opposes U.S. THAAD Defence System in South Korea," *Reuters*, May 29, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-southkorea-usa-thaad-idUSKBN2350XA>.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Workman, "South Korea's Top Trading Partners," *World's Top Exports*, n.d., <http://www.worldstopexports.com/south-koreas-top-import-partners/>.

free trade agreement in 2015.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it is also accurate to say that improved inter-Korean relations cannot happen without Chinese cooperation or blessing. Because of Beijing's outsized economic relationship with Pyongyang, its cooperation—or lack of cooperation—in sanctions enforcement largely determines the effectiveness of economic pressures applied by Washington.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, China had used its form of maximum pressure on North Korea before when such a policy suited its national interests.<sup>9</sup>

Being an emerging superpower and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council that wields veto power, China also holds the keys to eventual Korean reunification—if that day ever comes. Although the Korean Peninsula has been divided into two distinct polities since 1945, Article 3 of the Republic of Korea Constitution stipulates that “the territory of the Republic of Korea shall consist of the Korean Peninsula and its adjacent islands.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, while it is evident that a growing number of younger South Koreans no longer favor reunification for reasons ranging from economic anxiety to political apathy, it would be sacrilegious—a betrayal of the national ethos and the *minjok* (the Korean race)—for any government official to publicly endorse the permanent division of the Korean Peninsula, a repudiation of the ROK Constitution itself.<sup>11</sup> It would be tantamount to career suicide. Unless a significant shift occurs within the South Korean polity that would compel senior leaders to revisit long-held views of reunification, China will continue to be at the back of their minds.

## II. THE GROWING RIFT BETWEEN SOUTH KOREA AND CHINA

The last time that Chinese Chairman Xi Jinping visited Seoul was in 2014.<sup>12</sup> Later that same year, South Korea and China formalized their free trade agreement. Back then, South Korea had a different president—the now-disgraced former President Park Geun-hye. A year after Xi's visit to Seoul, Park made an official visit to Beijing to attend a military parade that commemorated China's 70th anniversary of the victory in the “Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression.” Park was an honored guest. She sat to the left of Xi's wife, who was herself seated to the left of Xi. Russian President Vladimir Putin was sitting on Xi's right. At the time, Park Geun-hye termed her policy toward North Korea “Trustpolitik”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kath Sullivan, “China's List of Sanctions and Tariffs on Australian Trade Is Growing. Here's What Has Been Hit so Far,” *ABC News*, December 17, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-17/australian-trade-tension-sanctions-china-growing-commodities/12984218>.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Ernst, “China Eases Economic Pressure on North Korea, Undercutting the Trump Admin,” *NBC News*, September 5, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/north-korea/china-eases-economic-pressure-north-korea-undercutting-trump-admin-n906166>.

<sup>9</sup> “China Applies Its Own Maximum Pressure Policy on Pyongyang,” *CNBC*, April 7, 2018, sec. Politics, <https://www.cnb.com/2018/04/07/china-applies-its-own-maximum-pressure-policy-on-pyongyang.html>.

<sup>10</sup> “Constitution of the Republic of Korea,” Statutes of the Republic of Korea (Korea Law Translation Center, n.d.), [https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng\\_service/lawView.do?hseq=1&lang=ENG](https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/lawView.do?hseq=1&lang=ENG).

<sup>11</sup> John Lee, “Taking a Hard Pass on Korean Reunification,” *North Korea News*, January 29, 2016, sec. Featured Content.

<sup>12</sup> Jane Perlez, “Chinese President's Visit to South Korea Is Seen as Way to Weaken U.S. Alliances,” *The New York Times*, July 2, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/03/world/asia/chinas-president-to-visit-south-korea.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Yun Byung-se, “Park Geun-Hye's Trustpolitik: A New Framework for South Korea's Foreign Policy,” *Global Asia* 8, no. 3 (September 2013), [https://globalasia.org/v8no3/cover/park-geun-hyes-trustpolitik-a-new-framework-for-south-koreas-foreign-policy\\_yun-byung-se](https://globalasia.org/v8no3/cover/park-geun-hyes-trustpolitik-a-new-framework-for-south-koreas-foreign-policy_yun-byung-se).

and touted the reunification of the Korean Peninsula as a “bonanza.”<sup>14</sup> Naturally, to reset relations with North Korea—which had been at an all-time low during her predecessor’s presidency as a direct result of the sinking of the *ROKS Cheonan* and the bombardment of Yeonpyeong-do—and to possibly begin the long process of reunification, Park focused on improving relations with China.<sup>15</sup> Her attempts to charm Xi and the Chinese public were not subtle.<sup>16</sup> While the official US position was that deciding what relations to have with other countries in the region is “a sovereign decision for the Republic of Korea to make,” privately, American officials were likely annoyed.<sup>17</sup>

What was shocking to many was that, at the time, Xi had yet to meet North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The flurry of diplomacy that occurred at the time was head-spinning. Privately and publicly, people wondered if South Korea might have been getting too comfortable with China or whether South Korea might be moving away from its longtime partnership and alliance with the United States and tilting towards China. All of that came to a screeching halt in 2016. After North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test, Park decided that it was time to cash in on the rapport that she had built up with Xi over the years.<sup>18</sup> After all, they had first met in 2005 when Xi was still the governor of Zhejiang and Park was the head of the now-defunct Saenuri Party. In a nationally televised news conference, Park pressed Xi to “play a necessary role”—imposing sanctions—to rein in North Korea. She believed that it was the only way to prevent North Korea from conducting further nuclear tests. Xi answered her call with silence, which killed the brief, but intense, honeymoon period that South Korea and China enjoyed.

Relations between the two countries went from warm to awkward to freezing when in July 2016, Park agreed to deploy THAAD anti-missile batteries in South Korea.<sup>19</sup> China’s retaliation to South Korea’s decision was angry and swift, as its “unofficial” sanctions cost South Korean businesses billions of dollars in losses.<sup>20</sup> In fact, China’s unofficial sanctions on South Korea were the beta version of the policy that China is currently pursuing against Australia today.<sup>21</sup> While South Korea and China have since continued to engage each other diplomatically, today’s

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<sup>14</sup> “Park’s Office Chooses ‘bonanza’ for Korean Word ‘Daebak,’” *Yonhap News Agency*, February 20, 2014, sec. Politics, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20140220008300315>.

<sup>15</sup> John Sudworth, “How South Korean Ship Was Sunk,” *BBC News*, May 20, 2010, <https://www.bbc.com/news/10130909>; “North Korean Artillery Hits South Korean Island,” *BBC News*, November 23, 2010, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11818005>.

<sup>16</sup> “Park Speaks Chinese for 4 Minutes in University Speech - The Korea Herald,” *The Korea Herald*, June 30, 2013, <http://www01.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20130630000194>.

<sup>17</sup> Yi Yong-in, “US Government Not Thrilled with Park’s Attendance at Beijing Military Parade,” *Hankyoreh*, September 5, 2015, [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_international/707572.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/707572.html).

<sup>18</sup> Justin McCurry, “North Korea Claims Successful Hydrogen Bomb Test in ‘self-Defence against US’ | North Korea | The Guardian,” *The Guardian*, January 6, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/06/north-korean-nuclear-test-suspected-as-artificial-earthquake-detected>.

<sup>19</sup> “THAAD on the Korean Peninsula,” *Institute for Security and Development Policy*, October 2017, <https://isdpeu/publication/korea-thaad/>.

<sup>20</sup> Jung Min-hee, “Lotte Faces 500 Billion Won Losses in China over THAAD Retaliation,” *Business Korea*, May 8, 2017, sec. News, <http://www.businesskorea.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=18007>.

<sup>21</sup> Tenny Kristiana, “PacNet #43 – First Korea, Now Australia: China’s Carrot-and-Stick Diplomacy Is Not New,” *Pacific Forum*, PacNet #43 (July 29, 2020), <https://pacforum.org/publication/pacnet-43-first-korea-now-australia-chinas-carrot-and-stick-diplomacy-is-not-new>.

South Korean and Chinese leaders have not enjoyed the same level of camaraderie that Park and Xi once had.

It is precisely for this reason that South Korea's current president, Moon Jae-in, has often beseeched Xi to make a formal visit to South Korea. A photo op between the two leaders would signal the resumption of robust commercial activities. Even though Xi would likely demand, or at the very least, insinuate, that South Korea distance itself from Washington, his visit to Seoul—when or if it happens—would signal that South Korean firms would have access to the Chinese domestic market once again.

### III. HISTORY AS CULTURAL IDENTITY

Therefore, for understandable reasons, the South Korean government is reluctant to challenge Beijing. However, that does not mean that the South Korean public is fond of China—or even feels neutral. For about as long as polls have recorded South Koreans' view of China, the South Korean people's perception of China has never been particularly rosy. Aside from 2014, when the free trade agreement between South Korea and China was made official, the South Korean public has generally perceived China in a negative light.<sup>22</sup> Being neighbors, relations between Korea and China—in all of their previous incarnations—go back millennia and, throughout that time, relations between both countries have had their ups and downs. Hence, it is difficult to say with absolute conviction that one particular incident has led to this deterioration of goodwill between the South Korean and Chinese people. However, if there is one point to focus on in the 21st century, it would likely be the Goguryeo controversy.<sup>23</sup>

Goguryeo (37 BC–668 AD) was an ancient Korean kingdom whose geography lay in the northern and central parts of the Korean Peninsula and parts of Manchuria. At its peak, Goguryeo was the largest of the ancient Korean kingdoms, and it ruled over large parts of Manchuria and parts of eastern Inner Mongolia. In the past, China had always considered Goguryeo as an ancient Korean kingdom. Starting in the 20th century, however, that began to change.<sup>24</sup> Much of it was due to how the Chinese government viewed nationalism, race, and ethnicity. China's goal is to validate its control over the many ethnic minorities that reside within China. Accordingly, the Chinese government began to write history in such a way as to use the past to validate the current political order. As with Tibet and Xinjiang, Chinese historians started to claim that Goguryeo was an ancient Chinese kingdom.<sup>25</sup> This earned the ire of the South Korean government and people in the early 2000s when North Korea and China attempted to register their respective Goguryeo remains as UNESCO World Heritage sites. At this time, there was still a great deal of uncertainty about North Korea's continued longevity as

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<sup>22</sup> Kang Yoon-seung, "S. Korea-Central America FTA Set for Full Implementation in March," *Yonhap News Agency*, February 25, 2021, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20210225001200320>.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Hays Gries, "The Koguryo Controversy, National Identity, and Sino-Korean Relations Today," *East Asia* 22, no. 4 (March 17, 2005): 3–17, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-005-0001-y>.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Byington, "The War of Words Between South Korea and China Over An Ancient Kingdom: Why Both Sides Are Misguided," *History News Network*, n.d., <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/7077>.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Cavendish, "The Chinese Invade Tibet | History Today," *History Today* 50, no. 10 (October 10, 2000), <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/chinese-invade-tibet>; Encyclopedia Britannica, "History of Xinjiang," n.d., <https://www.britannica.com/place/Xinjiang>.



it was still struggling to overcome the Arduous March.<sup>26</sup> There was great fear that North Korea's collapse could happen at any moment.

Once this historical context is considered, South Korean concerns about China's claims of Goguryeo being an ancient Chinese kingdom are perfectly understandable. The fear was that China would use that claim to occupy the North Korean state should the regime collapse, instead of allowing South Korea to absorb it. China has long viewed North Korea as a strategic buffer state that keeps the United States and its allies at arm's length, and South Koreans have long feared that China would never let North Korea go.<sup>27</sup> This diplomatic row between Seoul and Beijing reached an agreement in 2004 when China pledged not to put its assertion over Goguryeo in its history textbooks and stop such claims by the central and provincial governments.<sup>28</sup> However, the South Korean population began to have doubts about China's goals and intentions by that point. According to a poll conducted in 2006, 37.7% of South Koreans believed that China would be South Korea's most significant threat in 10 years.<sup>29</sup> According to that same poll, the percentage of respondents who thought that Japan, South Korea's perennial rival, would become South Korea's most significant threat was 23.6%.

Since then, those numbers have not become any more favorable. In 2018, 49.7% of South Koreans saw China as the most significant military threat, surpassing the 48.6% who viewed North Korea as the greatest threat.<sup>30</sup> In 2019, 63% of South Koreans had a negative view of China.<sup>31</sup> By 2020, that figure jumped to 75%—the highest rate of negative views of China in South Korea's history.<sup>32</sup> In fact, South Korea became the only country surveyed by Pew Research in which younger people held more unfavorable views of China than their elders.

#### IV. COVID-19

From Goguryeo to THAAD anti-missile batteries and the subsequent unofficial economic sanctions that followed, the reasons that many South Koreans give for their growing dislike of

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<sup>26</sup> Erin Blakemore, "North Korea's Devastating Famine," *History*, November 15, 2017, <https://www.history.com/news/north-koreas-devastating-famine>.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Wertz, "China-North Korea Relations," *The National Committee on North Korea*, November 2019, <https://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/china-north-korea-relations>.

<sup>28</sup> Seo Hyun-jin, "Beijing Pledges Not to Stake Claim to Goguryeo in History Textbooks," *The Korea Herald*, August 24, 2004, [http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/SITE/data/html\\_dir/2004/08/25/200408250009.asp](http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/SITE/data/html_dir/2004/08/25/200408250009.asp).

<sup>29</sup> "South Koreans Believe China Likely to Be Biggest Security Threat in 10 Years," *The Associated Press*, March 20, 2006, [https://web.archive.org/web/20071128060009/http://english.ohmynews.com/ArticleView/article\\_view.asp?no=280522&rel\\_no=1](https://web.archive.org/web/20071128060009/http://english.ohmynews.com/ArticleView/article_view.asp?no=280522&rel_no=1).

<sup>30</sup> "49.7% of Koreans 'China, Not North Korea, the Biggest Threat,'" *Hankook Ilbo*, July 5, 2018, sec. 국제, 7, <https://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/201807031894787102?t=20210331081224>.

<sup>31</sup> Ethan Epstein, "Under Xi Jinping's Leadership, China Is Losing Friends, Alienating Allies," *The Washington Times*, November 17, 2019, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/nov/17/under-xi-jinpings-leadership-china-is-losing-frien/>.

<sup>32</sup> Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Huang, "Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries," *Global Attitudes & Trends* (Pew Research Center, October 6, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/>.

the Chinese government are numerous. However, all of that paled when compared to what happened in 2020, when it became evident that the novel coronavirus originated in Wuhan.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the Chinese Communist Party took active steps to suppress information and deny the virus's existence in the early days.<sup>34</sup> On January 26, 2020, three days after China's lockdown on Wuhan, the Korean Medical Association (KMA), South Korea's largest doctors' association, urged the South Korean government to temporarily bar entry to all travelers arriving from mainland China.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the KMA made this recommendation to the South Korean government six times. However, at the urging of the WHO's recommendations against travel and trade restrictions, which the Chinese ambassador to South Korea, Xing Haiming, echoed, President Moon Jae-in chose to ignore the KMA's recommendations.<sup>36</sup>

On February 4, 2020, instead of temporarily barring entry to all travelers arriving from mainland China, Seoul temporarily blocked entry to all non-Korean travelers coming from or through China's Hubei province—the province in which Wuhan is located.<sup>37</sup> Seoul's decision was purely symbolic and had no discernible effect as the Chinese government had already placed Wuhan on lockdown several days prior. Moon reasoned that if the South Korean government imposed the kind of entry restriction that the KMA recommended, then it was altogether possible that other countries could bar entry for South Korean nationals.<sup>38</sup> Around the middle of February 2020, South Korea had its first coronavirus “super spreader” case. A congregant member of Shincheonji, a South Korean cult whose members had held prayer sermons in Wuhan in December 2019, was inadvertently responsible for beginning South Korea's first major COVID-19 cluster.<sup>39</sup> Daegu, the city where the church was located, was South Korea's Ground Zero as the number of cases jumped from dozens to hundreds.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Jason Gale, “Where Did the Covid-19 Coronavirus Come From? Wuhan? Bats? Food Market? - Bloomberg,” *Bloomberg*, March 4, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-04/where-are-we-in-hunting-for-the-coronavirus-s-origin-quicktake>.

<sup>34</sup> Stephanie Hegarty, “The Chinese Doctor Who Tried to Warn Others about Coronavirus,” *BBC News*, February 6, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-51364382>.

<sup>35</sup> “Wuhan Lockdown: A Year of China's Fight against the Covid Pandemic,” *BBC News*, January 22, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55628488>; Suki Kim, “How South Korea Lost Control of Its Coronavirus Outbreak,” *The New Yorker*, March 4, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-south-korea-lost-control-of-its-coronavirus-outbreak>.

<sup>36</sup> “Updated WHO Recommendations for International Traffic in Relation to COVID-19 Outbreak,” *World Health Organization*, February 29, 2020, <https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/updated-who-recommendations-for-international-traffic-in-relation-to-covid-19-outbreak>; Song Sang-ho, “Chinese Ambassador Calls for ‘scientific Decision’ Based on WHO Recommendation to Stem New Coronavirus,” *Yonhap News Agency*, February 4, 2020, sec. Politics, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20200204003500325>.

<sup>37</sup> “Entry Ban on Foreigners Traveling from Hubei Takes Force on Tuesday,” *Yonhap News Agency*, February 3, 2020, sec. Social Affairs, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20200203009351315>.

<sup>38</sup> Chae Yeon Cha, “President Moon ‘If Chinese People Are Banned from Entering the Country, We Could Be Banned.’” *YNA*, February 28, 2020, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20200228170100001>.

<sup>39</sup> Rhea Mahbubani, “Followers of the Doomsday Church That Is Linked to South Korea's Coronavirus Outbreak Were Meeting in Wuhan until December,” *Business Insider Australia*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/church-cult-south-korea-coronavirus-outbreak-meetings-wuhan-december-2020-2>; Park Chan-kyong, “Coronavirus ‘Super Spreader’ at South Korean Church Sparks Infection Fears,” *South China Morning Post*, February 20, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3051629/coronavirus-super-spreader-south-korean-church-cult>.

<sup>40</sup> “Concern in Daegu as Coronavirus Cases Rise,” *BBC News*, February 21, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-51587160>.

On February 27, despite Ambassador Xing Haiming's insistence that other countries base their national policies on "scientific" decisions to combat the coronavirus and not resort to unnecessary travel restrictions, five Chinese provinces enacted entry restrictions on travelers from South Korea over coronavirus concerns.<sup>41</sup> If the fears and anxieties that South Koreans felt toward China in the past were based on geopolitics, post-COVID, anti-Chinese sentiment has taken on overtly racist tones.<sup>42</sup> Much of the public's discourse grew to be so problematic that South Korean officials often had to publicly speak out against a growing number of South Koreans' lack of subtlety in their expressions of Sinophobia.

## V. POP-CULTURE WAR

Furthermore, many South Koreans' anti-Chinese sentiment finds cause in the perception that both the Chinese government and many ordinary Chinese citizens have begun to overtly treat South Korea as a small country (*xiao guo*)—not merely because of its geographically small size, but more as an unimportant country that does not deserve to be treated with respect.<sup>43</sup> This Chinese attitude became evident when BTS, a popular South Korean K-pop group, accepted the Korea Society's James A. Van Fleet Award. This award recognized the group's role in developing goodwill between South Korea and the US. The band's leader, RM, said, "We need to always remember the history of pain shared by the two nations and sacrifices of many men and women."<sup>44</sup>

It was an entirely uncontroversial statement. However, *Global Times*—a daily tabloid newspaper under the auspices of the Chinese Communist Party's flagship *People's Daily* newspaper—bizarrely interpreted the remark as an insult because there was no mention of Chinese lives lost during the war. The Chinese state media's denunciation of BTS was so swift that Samsung went so far as to remove BTS images from their Chinese sites and advertisements.<sup>45</sup> Xi Jinping further highlighted the Chinese attitude towards the loss of life and treasure that South Koreans sustained during the Korean War when he said China fought against "imperialist invaders" during the Korean War.<sup>46</sup> The distortion of history was so egregious that the South Korean government felt compelled to offer a rare criticism of the Chinese government over what the South Korean government viewed as anti-American rhetoric.<sup>47</sup> Following Xi's speech, a Pew

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<sup>41</sup> "China, 13 More Countries Restrict Travel from S. Korea over Coronavirus Concerns," *Yonhap News Agency*, February 27, 2020, sec. Politics, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20200227008453325>.

<sup>42</sup> Kelly Kasulis, "Coronavirus Brings out Anti-Chinese Sentiment in South Korea," *Al Jazeera*, February 21, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/2/21/coronavirus-brings-out-anti-chinese-sentiment-in-south-korea>.

<sup>43</sup> "China Refers To South Korea As 'Thief Country' After Claiming That Kimchi And Hanbok Were Stolen From Them," *Koreaboo*, February 12, 2021, <https://www.koreaboo.com/news/china-south-korea-thief-country-kimchi-hanbok-stolen/>.

<sup>44</sup> "BTS in Trouble in China over Korean War Comments," *BBC News*, October 13, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54513408>.

<sup>45</sup> Wu Yu, "BTS Hurts Feelings of Chinese Netizens and Fans during Speech on the Korean War - Global Times," *The Global Times*, October 11, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1203151.shtml>.

<sup>46</sup> "China's Xi Jinping Rankles South Korea with War Anniversary Speech," *The Straits Times*, October 26, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/chinas-xi-jinping-rankles-south-korea-with-war-anniversary-speech>.

<sup>47</sup> "Seoul Speaks up against Xi's Korean War Speech," *The Korea Times*, October 23, 2020, sec. National, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2021/03/120\\_298142.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2021/03/120_298142.html).

Research global poll found that 83% of South Korean respondents said that they had no confidence that Xi would do the “right thing in world affairs.”<sup>48</sup> As a result of growing animosity, although the South Korean government prefers to remain silent, average internet users in South Korea and China have taken to engaging in online troll wars.<sup>49</sup> Whether it is arguing about the citizenship of a long-dead poet (who was born outside of Korea because Korea had been colonized by the Japanese Empire at the time of the poet’s birth in a region that today’s Chinese government did not control) or the origins of *hanbok* or kimchi, it is becoming clear that there is not much love lost between the citizens of the two countries.<sup>50</sup>

While it might be tempting to brush aside these kinds of online arguments as childish squabbles, these are, in reality, battles being fought between South Korea and China. While these battles might not lead to a body count, they are being waged by both countries’ citizens to define and defend their respective states’ identities. It is not a coincidence that these battles are becoming more intense as South Korea emerges as a global cultural powerhouse. As South Korean culture, music, television shows, and movies find success in international markets, which subsequently expands South Korea’s soft power, this threatens China’s “Middle Kingdom” image. The fact of the matter is that these online battles are, indeed, a type of arms race.<sup>51</sup>

## VI. REFORGING THE IRONCLAD ALLIANCE

Donald Trump’s presidency, the United States’ mishandling of the coronavirus and its subsequent death toll, and America’s increasingly evident social, economic, and political deficiencies have caused many South Koreans to reassess their views of the United States.<sup>52</sup> It cannot be denied that the high regard that many South Koreans had for the United States has

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<sup>48</sup> “China’s Xi Jinping Rankles South Korea with War Anniversary Speech.”

<sup>49</sup> Troy Stangarone, “At War Online: South Korea and China,” *The Diplomat*, December 24, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/at-war-online-south-korea-and-china/>.

<sup>50</sup> Choi Seong Hyeon, “A Korean Poet Is the Latest Example of China’s ‘Cultural Imperialism,’” *The Diplomat*, February 26, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/a-korean-poet-is-the-latest-example-of-chinas-cultural-imperialism/>; Ji Siqu, “Chinese Hanfu or Korean Hanbok? Actor’s Selfie Sparks War of Words,” *South China Morning Post*, November 6, 2020, sec. Lifestyle, <https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/fashion-beauty/article/3108748/hanfu-vs-hanbok-chinese-koreans-dispute-costumes-origins>; Youmi Kim and Mike Ives, “Is China Laying Claim to Kimchi, Too? Some South Koreans Think So,” *The New York Times*, December 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/01/world/asia/south-korea-china-kimchi-paocai.html>.

<sup>51</sup> “Exports of Korean Culture Products Soar 22.4 Pct Last Year,” *Yonhap News Agency*, April 14, 2020, sec. Culture, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20200414009800315>; Aja Romano, “How K-Pop Became a Global Phenomenon,” *Vox*, February 26, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2018/2/16/16915672/what-is-kpop-history-explained>; Rafael Motamayor, “Ditch the Other Zombie Shows and Watch ‘Kingdom’ on Netflix Now,” *Observer*, June 3, 2020, <https://observer.com/2020/03/ditch-the-other-zombie-shows-and-watch-kingdom-on-netflix-now/>; Hannah Giorgis, “‘Parasite’ Won So Much More Than the Best Picture Oscar,” *The Atlantic*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/02/parasite-oscar/606310/>; Jenna Gibson, “How South Korean Pop Culture Can Be a Source of Soft Power - The Case for South Korean Soft Power” (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 15, 2020), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/12/15/how-south-korean-pop-culture-can-be-source-of-soft-power-pub-83411>.

<sup>52</sup> “United States Coronavirus,” *Worldometer*, n.d., <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/us/>; Lee Jong-won, “Pax Americana Loses Its Moral Basis,” *Asia Times*, June 8, 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/06/pax-americana-loses-its-moral-basis/>.

taken a non-insignificant tumble.<sup>53</sup> However, although many of today's South Koreans are no longer as enamored with the United States as past generations have been, a recent poll has found that 90% of South Koreans still either strongly or somewhat support the alliance with the United States.<sup>54</sup>

In 2021, South Koreans find themselves in a unique position. On the one hand, South Koreans appreciate the importance of maintaining good trade relations with China while recognizing that China might become a long-term threat. At the same time, South Koreans value the alliance with the United States, even as they become more disillusioned with America. As such, there is no better time for the Biden administration to seriously focus on improving America's relation with South Korea to cement its position as a pacific power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The question is how. In March, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken declared that the relationship between the United States and China is the world's "biggest geopolitical test of the century," and that the Biden administration would manage ties with China "from a position of strength."<sup>55</sup>

However, the geopolitical landscape of the 21st century looks vastly different from that of the 20th century, when the United States' adversaries were Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union. Back then, even when America's victory was still uncertain, there was no doubt that the American economy was supreme and that it could absorb the necessary costs to fight the wars that it needed to fight—whatever form those wars would take. That economic supremacy that once favored the United States has already shifted in many ways. While the US still boasts the world's largest economy, and the US dollar still serves as the world's reserve currency, projections show that the Chinese economy will overtake America's economy in just a few short years.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, no one can deny that a nation's economic prowess is a significant determinant of its military power.

Already from 2015 to 2019, China outbuilt the US in warships by more than 50%.<sup>57</sup> Based on these trends, the US Navy's numerical superiority over the PLA Navy will be eliminated in a few years. Furthermore, the US Navy grows more vulnerable to China's burgeoning arsenal of missiles—particularly its "carrier killer" ballistic missiles designed specifically to neutralize the carrier advantage that the US enjoys.<sup>58</sup> More than ever, the United States needs to foster its alliances to properly compete against increasing Chinese aggression in the South China Sea.

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<sup>53</sup> Catherine Kim, "Koreans Believed America Was Exceptional. Then Covid Happened.," *POLITICO*, February 12, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/12/02/the-us-is-no-longer-a-more-developed-country-than-us-442407>.

<sup>54</sup> Lee Haye-ah, "Most S. Koreans Support Alliance with U.S. despite Tensions: Poll," *Yonhap News Agency*, March 31, 2021, sec. Politics, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20200804000200325>.

<sup>55</sup> "China Is World's 'Greatest Geopolitical Test', Blinken Says | Voice of America - English," *VOA News*, March 3, 2021, sec. USA, US Politics, VOA News on China, <https://www.voanews.com/usa/china-worlds-greatest-geopolitical-test-blinken-says>.

<sup>56</sup> "Chinese Economy to Overtake US 'by 2028' Due to Covid - BBC News," *BBC News*, December 26, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55454146>.

<sup>57</sup> Josh Rogin, "Trump Promised a 350-Ship Navy. China Actually Built It.," *The Washington Post*, September 3, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/09/02/trump-promised-350-ship-navy-china-actually-built-it/>.

<sup>58</sup> Kristin Huang, "China's 'Aircraft-Carrier Killer' Missiles Hit Target Ship, Insider Reveals," *South China Morning Post*, November 14, 2020, sec. News, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3109809/chinas-aircraft-carrier-killer-missiles-successfully-hit-target>.

During Donald Trump's presidency, the alliance between the US and South Korea was neglected and treated as a mere financial transaction.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, as deteriorating relations between Seoul and Tokyo did nothing to directly harm America's bottom line, Trump did not concern himself with America's two most important Asian allies beginning to view and treat each other as something just short of enemies.<sup>60</sup>

The recent visit to South Korea by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin was a step in the right direction.<sup>61</sup> With the Special Measures Agreement newly signed, the last of the contentious feelings left over by the Trump administration has been swept aside.<sup>62</sup> However, that is only the beginning of the repairs that need to be done. Today's South Korea is no longer the Korea that desperately needed to be rescued by America in 1950. It's not even the same South Korea that it was in 2012. Circumstances have changed, and South Korea is now in a stronger position to bargain. South Korea has the sixth-largest military in the world, and its economy is expected to rank 10<sup>th</sup> as a result of mitigated economic fallout from the pandemic.<sup>63</sup> Even so, South Korea remains dwarfed by China. Stuck between China and the United States, South Korea has tried its best to remain as neutral as possible. However, that neutrality is untenable. As much as South Korean leaders might wish to kick that can down the road so that someone else will have to deal with it in the future, there will come a day, most likely sooner rather than later, when South Korea will have to choose sides. Although the South Korean public is wary of China's growth and the South Korean government is altogether aware of Beijing's enormous heft, South Korea has been reluctant to openly side with the United States, because, from South Korea's perspective, there are severe downsides and not-altogether-clear upsides by siding with the United States over China—particularly in the form of joining the “Quad-Plus.”<sup>64</sup>

South Korea already felt those serious downsides immediately following its decision to host THAAD anti-missile batteries when China imposed “unofficial” sanctions on South Korea. From tourism to gaming to agriculture, those unofficial sanctions cost South Korea billions of dollars in losses. While South Korea suffered the brunt of China's wrath, the United States was largely silent. That experience informs South Korea's decisions today.<sup>65</sup> The deployment of

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<sup>59</sup> Haye-ah, “Trump Threatened to Pull Troops If S. Korea Didn't Give \$5 Bln: Bolton Memoir | Yonhap News Agency.”

<sup>60</sup> “Record 40.4% in Japan See Ties with South Korea as ‘not Important’ | The Japan Times,” *Japan Times*, February 20, 2021, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/02/20/national/south-korea-japan-survey/>.

<sup>61</sup> Lara Seligman, “Austin, Blinken Head to South Korea amid Fresh Warnings from Pyongyang,” *POLITICO*, March 16, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/03/16/austin-blinken-north-korea-threats-476229>.

<sup>62</sup> Mitch Shin, “South Korea and US Reach Agreement on Defense Cost Sharing,” *The Diplomat*, March 8, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/south-korea-and-us-reach-agreement-on-defense-cost-sharing/>.

<sup>63</sup> “S. Korea Ranks 6th in Military Strength,” *KBS World*, January 16, 2021, [http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news\\_view.htm?lang=e&Seq\\_Code=158951](http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news_view.htm?lang=e&Seq_Code=158951); Sam Kim, “South Korea Eyes Rich Nation Status as Economy Holds Up Amid Pandemic - Bloomberg,” *Bloomberg*, January 25, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-25/korea-eyes-rich-nation-status-as-economy-holds-up-amid-pandemic>.

<sup>64</sup> Gaurie Dwivedi, “Is US’ ‘Quad Plus’ Vision Enough to Contain China in Indo-Pacific?,” *Times of India*, September 14, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/beyond-the-obvious/is-us-quad-plus-vision-enough-to-contain-china-in-indo-pacific/.de>

<sup>65</sup> Rachel Premack, “Row With China Over Missiles Devastates South Korean Tourism,” *Time*, April 11, 2017, <https://time.com/4734066/south-korea-tourism-china-thaad/>; Josh Ye, “South Korea Asks China to

29,000 American service members in South Korea guarantees that South Korea's sovereignty remains protected from North Korean aggression. However, the ROK-US alliance needs to evolve beyond that. South Korea does not only require a military alliance. It also requires a more robust and economically dependable in the United States. The Biden administration appears to have learned from the Obama and Trump administrations' mistakes and has begun to stand up for America's allies. Recently, the Biden administration announced that it would not grant China any improvement in relations until Beijing stops its economic coercion of Australia—that the United States “would not leave Australia alone on the field.”<sup>66</sup> While such a statement must have come as a relief to Canberra, for many in South Korea, it was a bitter reminder that their country was left alone on the field by Washington.

The United States government has to admit to itself that it failed to do right by South Korea. Although belated, it has to show the same level of commitment to defending South Korea from Chinese bullying as it has shown to Australia. Though no formal invitation has been made to South Korea to join Quad-Plus, and even though Blinken said that the United States would not force any NATO ally to choose sides between Washington and Beijing, many in South Korea expect that it is only a matter of time before American pressure for Seoul to join Quad Plus begins in earnest.<sup>67</sup> However, it would be a mistake to compel South Korea to join Quad Plus without first addressing underlying concerns.

The values shared between Seoul and Washington are undoubtedly vital. However, they are not a sufficient condition to convince South Korea to join Quad-Plus. Suppose that the United States tries to persuade South Korea into joining Quad-Plus without guaranteeing that the diplomatic and economic benefits of doing so would be equal to or greater than the costs that it will have to bear from Chinese retaliation. That could irreparably damage the relationship between both countries. More importantly, the United States needs to recalibrate its foreign policy objectives toward South Korea and the Indo-Pacific in general. Fairly or unfairly, it is widely perceived in Asia that the United States focuses far too much on guns and far too little on butter. A robust military alliance is merely one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is a more robust economic alliance. An unintended consequence of China's bullying was that it led to South Korea pursuing its New Southern Policy (NSP).<sup>68</sup> Out of sheer necessity, South Korea sought to diversify its economic and strategic options. In late 2017, long after Donald Trump scuttled the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the South Korean government launched the NSP to boost its economic ties with ASEAN's 10 member states and India.<sup>69</sup> South Korea's goal is simple. By strengthening economic relations with other nations beyond the Northeast

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Stop Banning Its Games,” *South China Morning Post*, June 14, 2019, sec. Abacus, <https://www.scmp.com/abacus/games/article/3029420/south-korea-asks-china-stop-banning-its-games>; “S. Korea's Agricultural Exports to China Plunge amid THAAD Row,” *Yonhap News Agency*, August 4, 2017, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20170804002600320>.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Hartcher, “‘Just Not Going to Happen’: US Warns China over Australian Trade Stoush,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 16, 2021, sec. North America, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/north-america/just-not-going-to-happen-us-warns-china-over-australian-trade-stoush-20210316-p57b4l.html>.

<sup>67</sup> “US Won't Force NATO Allies into ‘us or Them’ Choice on China: Blinken - CNA,” *CNA News*, March 25, 2021, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/us-won-t-force-nato-allies-into-us-or-them-choice-on-china-14482296>.

<sup>68</sup> “History: New Southern Policy,” Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy, n.d., <http://www.nsp.go.kr/eng/policy/policy03Page.do>.

<sup>69</sup> Peter Baker, “Trump Abandons Trans-Pacific Partnership, Obama's Signature Trade Deal,” *The New York Times*, January 23, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/us/politics/tpp-trump-trade-nafta.html>.

Asia corridor, South Korea hopes to mitigate potential vulnerabilities from Chinese coercion. To improve relations with South Korea (and the Indo-Pacific in general), the United States has to help augment South Korea's NSP by providing it with the chance to join a renewed and revamped Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), of which the United States is an official and ratified member state.<sup>70</sup>

## VII. THE MIRACLE ON THE DAEDONG RIVER

Finally, the surest way for the United States to improve relations with South Korea is to help South Korea coax North Korea back into diplomatic talks. However, North Korea's nuclear arsenal has grown over the years, which also puts it in a stronger bargaining position—as such, persuading North Korea to return to talks will not be painless.<sup>71</sup> That is because, to help to significantly improve inter-Korean relations (and significantly reduce the chances of war), the United States will need to do two things that it will find most unpalatable. The United States will need to admit that the complete denuclearization of North Korea will most likely never happen and that it will need to lift economic sanctions regardless of the fact. This will cost the Biden administration dearly. In fact, the complete absence of any short-term political gain would incentivize any US presidential administration to dismiss such an idea out of hand. However, if Biden has the courage of his conviction, such a decision will permanently alter the geopolitical landscape in Northeast Asia to America's favor.

South Korea has grand ambitions for North Korea should economic sanctions be lifted. For all intents and purposes, South Korea has geographically and culturally existed as an island nation. So, for years, South Korean leaders have long dreamed of connecting South Korea to China, Russia, and Europe by rail.<sup>72</sup> However, the technically ongoing Korean War and the economic sanctions imposed on North Korea have continuously stymied that dream.<sup>73</sup> That inter-Korean railway that would eventually connect the Korean Peninsula to Europe would lead to an economic boom. As huge as that project may be, it is merely one part of South Korea's grand ambitions. South Korea's success story, often called the Miracle on the Han River, has catapulted South Korea from one of the world's poorest nations to one of the wealthiest in just a few short decades.<sup>74</sup> However, an aging and shrinking population threaten to turn back the clock.<sup>75</sup> To ensure South Korea's continued prosperity and future baby boom,

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<sup>70</sup> Hayley Channer and Jeffrey Wilson, "Expanding the CPTPP: A Form Guide to Prospective Members," *The Interpreter*, February 22, 2021, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/expanding-cptpp-form-guide-prospective-members>.

<sup>71</sup> Victor Cha, "Preventing a Crisis with North Korea," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, December 17, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/preventing-crisis-north-korea>.

<sup>72</sup> Lee Je-hun, "S. Korea to Resume Inter-Korean Railroad Project with N. Korea," *Hankyoreh*, April 21, 2020, [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_northkorea/941401.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/941401.html).

<sup>73</sup> "The US War That Never Officially Ended," *BBC News*, September 19, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-45566094>; "North Korea Sanctions," U.S. Department of the Treasury, n.d., <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/financial-sanctions/sanctions-programs-and-country-information/north-korea-sanctions>.

<sup>74</sup> Park Hyung-ki, "Korean Miracle 70 Years in the Making," *The Korea Herald*, August 16, 2015, sec. Culture, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150816000246>.

<sup>75</sup> Justin McCurry, "South Korea's Population Falls for First Time in Its History," *The Guardian*, January 4, 2021, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/04/south-korea-population-falls-for-first-time-in-history>.



even some conservative South Korean economists have proposed that the same model used to propel South Korea into the industrial powerhouse that it is today be repeated in North Korea—the Miracle on the Daedong River.<sup>76</sup>

Of course, the lifting of sanctions does not guarantee that North Korea will follow South Korea's footsteps to becoming a stable and wealthy democracy. It does not even ensure that North Korea will become less belligerent. The fact of the matter is that South Korea's Sunshine Policy 2.0 is based more on hope than anything concrete.<sup>77</sup> The formula for creating a wealthy and peace-loving nation is both elusive and difficult to replicate. It is altogether possible, perhaps even likely, that, even if greenlit, all of South Korea's grand ambitions vis-a-vis North Korea would result in frustration and heartache. However, the lifting of sanctions would guarantee that it will reduce China's leverage over North Korea and, thus, over the Korean Peninsula in general. It would dramatically alter the status quo and put an end to the narrative that China is indispensable.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The United States faces the gargantuan task of engaging in a new Cold War, which will look vastly different and more complex than the last one. The United States needs its allies more than ever, and there are very few allies as important as South Korea. South Korea is not the pygmy that it was in the middle of the 20th century. As such, the United States has to adjust to a changing world. To foster the alliances and partnerships that it requires to deter Chinese aggression and expansionism, the United States will need to make short-term sacrifices that will not be painless. The opportunity is there. The question is whether the United States has the will to do what it takes; Pax Americana depends on it.

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<sup>76</sup> "US Won't Force NATO Allies into 'us or Them' Choice on China: Blinken - CNA."

<sup>77</sup> Aidan Foster-Carter, "Sunshine 2.0: Good Start-But How Far Can It Go?," *Pacific Forum, Comparative Connections*, 20, no. 2 (September 2018): 71–82.

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