

**CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CSIS)**

**CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES ON THE
FUTURE OF THE U.S.-SOUTH KOREA
RELATIONSHIP**

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THURSDAY, MAY 24, 2007

10 A.M. – 11: 30 A.M.

CSIS Basement Conference Center

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Transcript by:

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Court Reports and Transcribers

Washington, D.C.

MS. WORMUTH: Well, we will take our cue from the sort of sudden hush that descended over the room to go ahead and get started.

My name is Christine Wormuth. I am the Acting Director of the International Security Program at CSIS.

And I'd like to welcome you and thank you very much for joining us this morning for a discussion with Jason Forrester, the author on our latest report relating to Asian issues, looking at Congressional attitudes about the U.S.-South Korea relationship.

It is a very interesting topic. As some of you know, it has already received some attention. So I think everyone is looking very much forward to hearing straight from the horse's mouth what the report says.

As you know, CSIS has had a long history and a long record of doing work looking at relationships in Asia. And this is part of that series which we are very gracious for the support of the Korea Foundation to help make the report possible.

Derek Mitchell, who many of you know, I think, who is the Director of our Asia Program inside of ISP, was very involved in this project but is not able to join this morning because he is in China doing work for the Center there. But, again, we do have, most importantly, the author of the report, Jason Forrester, who I am delighted to introduce to you.

Many of you may know Jason. He is a visiting fellow here at ISP. And is currently Director of Policy for Veterans of America, which is a very prominent veterans' rights group with roots going back to the post-Vietnam period.

Jason has extensive experience from many different perspectives, looking at Congressional relationships. He has worked on the Hill, he works with people now as part of an advocacy organization. He works with people on the Hill, members and staff.

He has been part of presidential campaigns so he really has very finely-tuned political antennae and I think was an ideal person to lead the effort to take a look at how folks on Capitol Hill view the health of the relationship.

So with that, I will go ahead and turn it over to Jason who is going to, I think, try and walk you through the report briefly, hit some of the highlights, but then spend most of the time in a Q&A period with you.

So thank you again for coming. We're delighted to have you.

Jason.

MR. FORRESTER: Thank you, Christine.

It's great to be here. When Christine was mentioning the various things I've done, I think it is an indication of someone who can't keep a job. But fortunately CSIS gave me a chance to work on this project. And I'm very grateful for that opportunity.

I really appreciate you all coming today. Friends, colleagues, and others, I do look forward to a lively discussion.

As Christine mentioned, CSIS has been conducting a study of Congressional attitudes regarding the future of the U.S.-South Korea relationship for the past year or so. This study was supported by the Korea Foundation.

And it looked especially at Congressional attitudes regarding the Korean Peninsula, focusing especially on how those attitudes might effect the future of the U.S.-South Korea security relationship.

The report, and I hope that you all have a copy -- those were placed out front -- it identifies trends in Congressional views of South Korea and offers some recommendations for reducing the likelihood that the relations between Congress and South Korea will deteriorate.

The study relied primarily on document research as well as first-person interviews with experts on Capitol Hill, other experts in the community. This included dozens of interviews with both staff, and members, as well as other interested parties.

As Christine mentioned, I am the primary author of the report so any criticism should be directed primarily at me. I am thankful for the help of a number of colleagues at CSIS for their assistance. A number of them are in the room at present. And they are specifically mentioned on page four of the report.

CSIS is quite grateful for the ongoing support of the Korea Foundation for underwriting this study as well as other Korea-related studies at the Center.

As Christine mentioned, the report has already received some attention in the Korean press, in particular a headline which read, A Korea-U.S. Alliance Could End Within Ten Years.

(Laughter.)

MR. FORRESTER: So it is good to have a point/counterpoint so we don't even have to begin with questions. We can -- thanks to Chosunilbo -- we can have point/counterpoint at the start of the presentation.

This is not the primary message of the report. There is a line where a staffer said that that is a possibility if certain trends continue.

As you will see on -- not to be too proscriptive -- but as you will see on page v of the report, specifically the first line of the report states that members of Congress and their staff are generally optimistic regarding the future of the U.S.-South Korea military alliance and the relationship in general.

That said, I don't know -- I don't guess some press is always good press. But at least it is giving us a chance to talk about the elements of the report.

As everyone in this room knows, the U.S.-South Korea relationship has been incredibly successful. A 2003 report by CSIS called the U.S.-ROK relationship one of the most successful relationships forged out of the Cold War. That still is the case today though obviously there are a variety of changes afoot.

Some of the great successes out of this relationship include a shared commitment to liberal democracy, open economic markets, human rights, the free press, and the rule of law.

But given the challenges that the relationship is facing, this report concurs with the 2003 CSIS report which stated that, Aa modern, revitalized strategy is needed to take the alliance into the future. Later on I will cover some of the recommendations of the report and you will see that this is one of the most prominent recommendations is building upon that idea.

East Asia will continue to grow in importance for the United States in the years to come. And it is the position of the report that the U.S.-South Korea relationship can be a key element in protecting U.S. and ROK interests in the region for a long time to come.

Regarding Capitol Hill, the issues that have received the greatest attention in recent years, generally speaking, I would note that the attention is positive but Congressional understanding is narrow. This is somewhat typical of a Congressional focus on a variety of different issues. There is a narrow group that focuses on a number of issues very deeply but in terms of broad coverage, often times the issues do not bring in large numbers of members and staff.

The issues that have received considerable attention include South Korea's

policies regarding North Korea, especially South Korea's approach to dealing with the security threat posed by North Korea, as well as North Korea's human rights abuses.

In addition, the growth of anti-Americanism or, as the report phrases it, the perceived growth of anti-Americanism in South Korea receives considerable attention on Capitol Hill, in particular the comments of Representative Henry Hyde in recent years have focused on this element. And then finally the possibility of a U.S.-South Korea free trade agreement has received considerable attention.

The report takes the position that a number of other key strategic issues have not received as much attention as these. And later in the report, one of the recommendations is for more attention to be paid to issues such as the realignment of U.S. forces on the peninsula, the roles and missions of U.S. and South Korean forces.

Once again, narrow focus by some members of the Hill but not a broader debate. And as the recommendations will state, there is need for a broader consideration of this so that there can be greater buy-in on Capitol Hill.

Also the possibility of South Korea being included on the U.S. Visa Waiver Program has received some attention in Congress but more attention in Seoul. And then finally the question of so-called comfort women or sex slave resolutions has received a lot of attention within Seoul, some attention on the Hill.

But to take a particular example, there is a House version, H.Res. 121, as most in the room know, that condemns the Japanese government for its treatment of South Korean women during the Second World War but, at present, there is no Senate version of this resolution, which, obviously, greatly reduces the likelihood of it becoming a position of the U.S. Congress as a whole.

The report also states that the Korean-American community plays a limited role in influencing the key strategic issues between the U.S. and South Korea though the Korean-American community has been quite influential on topics such as North Korea's human rights abuses as well as the Visa Waiver Program.

In general, members of Congress who have large Korean-American communities are not the most prominent players on key strategic issues. The people who have the greatest influence over these issues are the leading members of the Foreign Affairs committees, the Armed Services committees, the Ways and Means and/or Finance committees. This is, once again, a common dynamic on the Hill. The old adage where you stand depends on where you sit certainly it holds regarding Capital Hill.

In short, there is no single locus for focusing on the U.S.-South Korea relationship on Capital Hill. Unfortunately, the leading members of these

committees pay episodic attention to the U.S.-South Korea relationship rather than sustained attention.

As you will see in the report, there are a number of specific issues that are covered. We can certainly go into those in the Q&A.

If I may, I will move on to the general recommendations of the report regarding how the Congressional channel can be used to strengthen U.S.-South Korea relations. There are six. I'll go through them somewhat quickly so we can get to the Q&A.

The first recommendation is that South Korea should clarify its perspective on the future of the U.S.-South Korea relationship. This is -- the uncertainty that exists on Capital Hill regarding what South Korea thinks about the future of this relationship is one of the main obstacles to greatly strengthening this relationship in the years to come.

I want to be clear in the findings that I am presenting. I have done my best to present the opinions of the members of Congress as well as their staff. We can -- I want to make clear that these are not my personal opinions as much as these are the collective judgments as I have been able to discern from members on the Hill.

So if South Korea can clarify this perspective regarding the future of the U.S.-ROK relationship, then it can be discussed in greater detail and then this can be used to help strengthen the foundation, this great foundation of the long-standing U.S.-ROK relationship.

The second recommendation is that at the macro level, the U.S. and the South Korean governments should involve members of Congress and their staff to a much greater degree in official and semi-official dialogues. There has been a tendency both in the executive branch as well as within the approach of others to Capital Hill, especially at times the South Korean government to seek Congressional involvement more as a nuisance than as a help -- or I should say certain elements of Congressional involvement.

Certainly there have been times where the Hill has been relied upon but in terms of a deep dialogue, this is not occurring at present. And the recommendation of the report is that there should be a change of course.

Third, South Korea should develop a strategy for cultivating Congressional champions on the Hill. A well placed member or two in one or both chambers can help to drive a lot of policy and thinking on Capital Hill. And the report takes the position that these efforts should focus especially on the next generation of leaders on Capital Hill.

The fourth recommendation is that South Korea should focus its outreach to Congress on major political, economic, and strategic issues. Obviously other issues merit consideration as well. But if the key issues such as how to deal with North Korea's nuclear weapons program, how to deal with their human rights abuses, or how to deal with North Korea in general, if these issues are not dealt with, then this will serve as an ongoing impediment to strengthening U.S.-South Korea relations through Congress.

It will increase -- if these narrow issues are primarily focused on, it will increase the likelihood that South Korea is seen as a group with parochial, narrow interests rather than a key element in the U.S. national security strategy.

Fifth, the U.S.-South Korea inter-parliamentary exchanges should include deep, substantive, and candid discussions. Unfortunately, to date, this has not been the case. Part of operationalizing this would include keeping the idea in mind that members of Congress and their staff appreciate frank, substantive discussions.

Interlocutors from South Korea should focus especially the constituency interests. It certainly will take some time to research what those interests are of these members on the Hill and their staff. But as one of the people in the report noted, since so much attention is focused on the needs of constituents, it would behoove South Korea interlocutors to work their approaches through that prism.

Obviously reciprocity by American interlocutors is necessary as well. I want to make clear that this isn't -- this report is not just putting the onus on South Koreans but is also saying that same would be required of members of the Hill and their staff to strengthen the relationship to the Congressional channel.

And finally, apropos of the point I just made, members of Congress need a better understanding of the nuances of U.S.-ROK affairs. Members of Congress, the report encourages members of Congress to see the value in travel to South Korea, to resist or to make cogent arguments that these trips are not junkets.

Obviously there is a lot of productive work that can be done and nuances that can be better understood through such travel. And members of Congress need to utilize that possibility. If so, the legislative branch in the U.S. can become a key actor in helping to strengthen this relationship.

As I stated earlier, East Asia will continue to grow in importance for the United States in years to come. The great successes of the U.S.-South Korea relationship can be maintained through a strengthened U.S.-ROK relationship, both the U.S. interest protection in the region as well as the continued support for the great gains that have been made in South Korea in the last 50-plus years.

And with that, I would be happy to open to floor to any questions.

Yes?

PARTICIPANT: Thank you. Hi, I'm with the State Department Korea Desk. I was struck by a quick read of your report that I don't know whether you touched on this or not but one of my interests, I think, in terms of Congressional attitudes has been based on the remaining -- and you mentioned Henry Hyde -- the remaining Korean War veterans in Congress.

And how that, I think, in the >60s and >70s certainly influenced a lot of the approach towards South Korea. Now with that era definitely sort of passing, what I get from your remarks and from the report is that Congress is looking at particular aspects of the relationship with South Korea but very few members, if any, have really tried to look at the whole relationship.

And so you have these sort of sporadic interest in the defense area or the economic area or whatever. And I do think that has been a significant difference. Did you examine that? Or in terms of the trends?

MR. FORRESTER: It is covered. If I'm not mistaken, the section is entitled Generational Continuity Versus Generational Change. And certainly people with whom we spoke on Capital Hill made the point that you made repeatedly.

And that is that with the members, the older members whose -- a lot of their world view was shaped with the U.S.-South Korea relationship being at the center of that and the protection of U.S. interests being fostered by the U.S.-ROK relationship that yes, as it relates to the new members, as you -- once again repeating what you said, there is a narrow focus, more episodic focus on a variety of different issues, even to take some of the blue dog members of the -- or conservative members of the Democratic caucus, and this is a point that one of the interviewees made, that they are focused primarily on trade matters.

And as those who followed the U.S.-ROK-FTA Core S (phonetic) possibility know, this is a subject that can easily degenerate into -- I'll editorialize here -- a less than productive U.S.-ROK conversation because we end up dealing with issues that people have very strong visceral feelings about in the United States as well as in South Korea.

And yes, I do believe that the lack of a coterie of supports of the relationship in the younger generation can be and will be an impediment. And that is part of why the report recommends outreach to younger members of Congress to try to rectify this.

Do you want to –

MS. WORMUTH: Sure, I'll call on people. And when you ask your question, could you not only state your institutional affiliation but your name as well?

The gentleman in the back?

MR. CHOI: Thank you. Mike Choi with the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Regarding Congressional views on the FTA, so I realize that this was printed prior to the end of negotiations but as you probably know, there is a deal between Congress and USTR over the four pending FTAs, including Korea.

I noticed on the press release from Congress, specifically House Ways and Means Committee, that regarding the Korea FTA, not only do they want the specific conditions of the deal, especially environment and labor provisions, added into all pending FTAs but in Korea in particular, they would like discussions on autos, manufactured goods, agriculture, and services, which would be very problematic.

I guess what I'm wondering in terms of Congressional views, especially given the fact that the Trade Subcommittee Chairman, Sandy Levin, represents an auto district, and that the Senate Finance Committee's Chairman, Max Baucus, comes from a beef state, now we seem pretty positive or we have positive outlooks in terms of beef because the OIE just declared beef as a controlled risk, which the Koreans verbally agreed to opening the beef market, if that was the case.

So do you see, as an outlook, and with your experience and your paper's experience working with Congressional members and staff, the beef market opens up and given the fact that the auto deal that we have does not necessarily guarantee certain numbers but definitely goes very, very far in terms of provisions, dispute settlement, snapping back of tariffs, do you see the prospects as brighter now regarding beef and autos? Or are they really, really serious about this?

MR. FORRESTER: Yes, no I think just going back a little bit in history with the -- as the report states, with Democratic control of the House and the Senate being secured late last year, the likelihood of a U.S. FTA, a deep U.S.-ROK FTA, the likelihood of such an agreement being reached declined.

I'm not saying that it is impossible. The report does not take the position that it is impossible.

As you know, members of Congress have complained vocally that the entire agreement has not been publicized yet. There have been statements from both the U.S.

and the ROK administrations that this report -- that the agreement in full will be released maybe sometime later this week, maybe sometime early next week.

I think this has helped to reinforce concerns on Capital Hill that the deal is not going to protect key agricultural interests, key automotive interests. When I met with one of the leading trade staffers in Congress, this person -- and this was before November -- this person stated, and I'll paraphrase, if autos are not included in the deal or somehow effectively not included, using different means of limiting changes in the U.S.-ROK auto trade, then maybe we could have a deal.

But, yes. With Congressman Levin being a key player on the House side, with Senator Baucus and Senator Grassley being key players on the Senate side, the likelihood still is rather low.

One of the points of concern that members of the Hill noted a few times was sort of the back and forth, to take an issue such as beef, as you know, both Senators and Representatives from prominent beef states feel as though the goalpost have been moved from time to time. And they are not quite -- and they haven't expressed a lot of confidence that their sector is going to be treated fairly.

I see a colleague who once worked for one of the beef Senators but I will not ask for this person to give any detailed sort of an on-the-ground reading of how -- of these feelings.

So I think the short story is it is still possible but the atmospheric are not good both in terms of the way that the respective administrations have dealt with Congress as well as with these outstanding issues on autos and ag. As we know, the U.S. auto sector continues to be in considerable difficulty.

So we have the trend of an ailing U.S. auto sector trying to protect its interests against the quite successful Korean auto sector. And so I think you would have to say that the likelihood of an agreement that includes a great opening on ag or autos is rather a longshot.

MS. WORMUTH: The woman in back. And then, sir, you in the front.

MS. YUNG: I'm Mi Hyun Yung (phonetic) of (inaudible) Center. Regarding this Sunshine Policy, you reported that the Congressional attitude towards these policies are very skeptical, particularly towards President Noh Mu-Hyun's forward-leaning attitude approach but in South Korea, public opinion poll reports that the majority of South Korean people are supporting engagement policy (inaudible) or Peace and Prosperity, whatever it is, the majority of -- most of -- more than 70 percent of South Korean people are supporting the engagement -- the need to engage.

I am wondering what kind of a question did you render to the Congressional staff for the Sunshine Policy because sometimes a question constructs the answers. And sometimes -- I don't think that you did that but sometimes that could happen.

I think Congressional people would understand the South Korean people's mind, the need to engage North Korea and the need to keep the peace in the Korean Peninsula. So could you a little bit more articulate about that attitude?

MR. FORRESTER: Sure.

MS. YUNG: Thank you.

MR. FORRESTER: Yes, I tried to frame the question in as balanced a way as possible.

I agree with your analysis that the Sunshine Policy, the Peace and Prosperity Policy has great support within South Korea. This is one of the reasons that in the recommendations that there is a strong recommendation for the South Korean government as well as other South Korean interlocutors to deal head-on with this issue when they are talking with people on Capital Hill.

I'll be frank that some of the indications from member of the South Korean government with whom I spoke or representatives thereof tended to want to avoid talking about these issues, these quite contentious issues regarding how to deal with North Korea, the differences in the vision of how to deal with North Korea.

There was more of a -- sort of the attitude seemed to be here are some things that we think we can make headway on. And these things include the Visa Waiver Program inclusion, comfort women, the FTA. Here are some things that we think we can make headway on. But maybe more of an unwillingness to deal directly with members and their staff regarding the skepticism that exists on Capital Hill regarding the Sunshine Policy.

I think it behooves the South Korean government to seriously engage with members of Congress and their staff on why the South Korean people are so strongly supportive of the Sunshine Policy. Unfortunately, the attitude on the Hill and the information on the Hill often is quite critical of the Sunshine Policy.

When I was speaking with people on the Hill, they would mention things to me such as paying off the North Koreans to engage in talks. This would be one of the first things that people would mention to me on the Hill.

They would not mention to me the sophisticated way that the South Korean government talks about an engagement policy. They had impressions of a less than --

well maybe somewhat naive -- that Sunshine is somewhat naive. This is the impression that people on Capital Hill generally have of the Sunshine Policy.

As the report notes, even with the Democratic takeover, the prediction of the report is that the likelihood that Democratic members and staff, it is more likely that they will tend toward the Republican position regarding the Sunshine Policy than they will towards the ROK government's position on the Sunshine Policy.

So the report takes the position that the best way to try to rectify this is through frank and candid discussions.

MS. WORMUTH: Okay. The gentleman in the front. And then right behind him.

MR. ALSOF: Hello, I'm Andrew Alsof (phonetic) from the State Department.

And during the course of your research, did you get any sense of Congress's attitudes towards our relations with Korea, vis-_-vis relations with Japan and China?

And if so, in particular, if you sense any more kind of directed and more intensive attention towards our relations with these countries? Can you give us your hypotheses and why that could be?

MR. FORRESTER: Yes. This is covered in the report a bit. First, regarding Japan, the report states that members of Congress and their staff generally have stronger positive feelings regarding the U.S.-Japan alliance than they do regarding the U.S.-South Korea alliance.

Once again, I did not go into these meetings trying to -- assuming that this would be such an important topic. But for those who do concentrate on the region, this is something -- they end up drawing an explicit comparison between the U.S.-ROK relationship versus the U.S.-Japan relationship.

And the fact that -- well, I should say the impression on the Hill is that the Japanese government is much more in line with the policies of the U.S. government and, therefore, is a more reliable partner. This is stated in the report. Whereas the relationship with the South Korean government is more difficult for people on the Hill to have that level of confidence.

So, I mean, and certainly some could say that it is unfair to have the two in the same comparison because they are different relationships in a number of ways. But this is a fact of life on the Hill is that the two are often compared.

Regarding China, China's rise has had the effect of making people think more seriously -- or, I should say, in a more sustained way about the U.S.-South Korea relationship. Once again, I will give you what sort of the consensus that I discern on the Hill and that is a general concern regarding China's rise.

Certainly a number of people pointed out the opportunities but the concerns of the military rise of China were pointed out by a number of people with whom I spoke. So the possibility of strengthening the U.S.-South Korea relationship as a means of protecting U.S. interests in the region in the face of a rising China was something that people were willing to consider, something that was maybe a step or two away.

But as the report states, this is -- well, I'll say it in a different way. It is a two-way street. It is going to require the South Korean government working closely with Capital Hill to help explain the South Korean approach to China.

We know that there are certain -- there are some people within Capital Hill who are also a little bit concerned about which way South Korea is leaning regarding the U.S. and China. So once again, I'm quite confident that there can be found consonant interest between the U.S. and South Korea in the decades to come but this will require people from South Korea and interlocutors from the United States talking about these matters rather than trying to keep them quiet.

MS. WORMUTH: Okay, sir, you in the second row. And then Bob. And then we'll just go down that row.

MR. SUBCHIN: Mr. Forrester, thank you for writing this report. It is long overdue. I'm glad you have zeroed in on what I think is an extremely important paper.

I'm a long-time North Korea watcher. My name is Rehl Subchin (phonetic). You never heard of me. But I've been doing it for 45 years. I'm a retiree from the Congressional Research Service.

I wrote the political section of the North Korea Advisory Group that you cite in page three. And I also wrote the 1999 report on CR support on Sunshine Policy.

MR. FORRESTER: Okay.

MR. SUBCHIN: Looking around, I think there is only one person I think who read that report. That's Bill Taylor (phonetic). Other than that, my question is in interviewing -- in talking to your Democratic staff member, you talk about ten years' deadline sort of, how, if you did get into the subject, how did he see the South Korean political, economic, and strategic profile in ten years vis-_-vis North Korea? And also South Korean profile in a unified Korea?

I raise this question because in ten years maybe more than likely South Korea will be more likely 50 percent North Korean and perhaps somewhat less South Korean. And U.S. relationship in terms of the future, they will depend on how U.S. Congress and public see that profile situation. And I'd like to see that aspect given a little more emphasis and strength in a future report coming. Thank you.

MR. FORRESTER: Okay. Yes, the comment that has received considerable attention of the staffer -- we did not -- he did not take the point to the extent that you just did, to that extent. He made the general point of the trend.

And I don't want to go too far beyond what the person said. If I can, I'll go back to what this person said. This person was asked if they could envision an end to the U.S.-South Korea relationship. Obviously a leading question.

And his response was that if he saw certain trends being reinforced, as this person described it, Sunshine on steroids, that this could lead to the U.S. and the South Korean vision of how to deal with North Korea, that there being so much space, so much space between those two visions that it would be hard to reconcile those two competing visions within a deep U.S.-ROK alliance and relationship. That was the bottom line.

You have made a more sophisticated -- or you have posed a more sophisticated set of questions. And he did not. He did not address that.

MR. SUBCHIN: I might add he is an optimist. I see less than ten years.

MS. WORMUTH: Okay, follow that up, Bob.

MR. SHERE: Bob Shere (phonetic). I will endeavor to not ask a leading question but you raised -- going back to the point about Korea and Japan and the impression on the Hill of the alliances. How much of this could be improved by more effective -- following the recommendations that you have set out, presentations by the ROK government, how much of it is not -- you know, that no matter how well this stuff is done, is it a representation of the present presidency?

And how much of -- conversely, if you could take a guess, it is not about Japan, but is part of the effectiveness or the view of the alliance from Congress's perspective of Japan due to policies or due to effective representation or, you know, on the Hill? How much is lobbying help?

MR. FORRESTER: Yes. So the first question is basically is it the no administration?

MR. SHERE: Right. Or what combination?

MR. FORRESTER: I'll answer the second one first. One can read in the popular press the lobbyist that Japan has versus the lobbyist that South Korea has. And Japan has within its coterie of lobbyists some former high-ranking or people holding very high positions on Capital Hill. The South Korean approach, as I would describe it, is a bit different from the way that the Japanese government has gone about representing their interest on Capital Hill.

Yes, there is always the question of the chicken and the egg. You know is it only policies? Or is it representation that reinforces these policies?

The impression from speaking with people on the Hill was that both in terms of the substance of relationships -- or the two relationships, U.S. and Japan, U.S. and the ROK was that things were running more smoothly in the U.S.-Japan relationship. And that this was magnified by the level of representation that Japan was bringing to bear in supporting its interests.

Back to the first question of what role does the current administration in South Korea play and the people -- I'll rephrase it if you don't mind -- do people believe that if there is a change in the administration that this would greatly change U.S.-ROK relations? There were some people who stated that they believe that if there is a change to GMP government, for instance, that they might see some things improve in the U.S.-ROK relationship.

These people were not -- I should say some things. These people did not make the case that they thought it would be like night and day. They could name some examples of some changes that they would like to see and that they thought may come out of a GMP government.

For instance, one staffer stated that if control changed at the GMP, that, for instance, this question of the transfer of wartime operational control by 2012, this person said that that may be the kind of topic -- or that may be a topic that this person's boss would like to revisit with South Korea, especially if the South Korean government came back with a proposal to extend that or to re-discuss the question of the transfer of wartime operational control.

This was one person's opinion but it is one person who is quite involved in the questions of the nuts and bolts of the U.S.-ROK military relationship.

MS. WORMUTH: Okay, sir, you. And then if there are questions on this side of the room, I'm happy to come back over here.

MR. SMITH: My name is Kevin Smith. I'm representing the Mansfield Foundation today. In your recommendation section here -- and you mention this as

well in your presentation -- about the parliamentary exchanges, saying that they should be deeper, more substantive.

I'm uninitiated. I don't know what our current status is with parliamentary exchanges. And you have given us a good idea of what it is not.

MR. FORRESTER: Yes.

MR. SMITH: What is the current status and how do you see these deeper substantial sort of negotiations -- or not negotiations but discussions taking place?

MR. FORRESTER: Yes, it is discussed a little bit in the body of the report. One of the problems has been that within -- on the House side, the inter-parliamentary exchange was headed by -- it did not have bipartisan leadership which, with the change in control of the chamber, when I was speaking with people, they were in the process of figuring out who was going to head the U.S.-ROK inter-parliamentary exchange now that the Republicans no longer controlled the chamber.

So this is a level of things -- of there not being a strong foundation in these sets of exchanges. I think this is probably somewhat of an indication that a number of members don't treat these exchanges as seriously as the report thinks they should.

That said, members know how to use their time wisely. And if they think that the U.S.-ROK inter-parliamentary exchange is not the wisest use of their time, then they are going to spend their time focused on other dialogues.

So I think we have two problems -- we have had two problems with the U.S.-ROK inter-parliamentary exchange. One, the foundation has not been strong enough. And two, as the recommendations allude, the discussions haven't been deep enough.

I'm sure you could find some people who would defend the substance of those discussions. And maybe they have been good within narrow confines. But the breadth of those discussions or the number of members or staff who have been included have not been what they could be or what they should be for a relationship of this importance.

MS. WORMUTH: Okay. Bill?

MR. TAYLOR: Bill Taylor, CSIS.

Jason, did you find any perception on Capital Hill of changes in the diplomacy of the Bush administration toward North Korea, the kinds -- I mean six-party talks were the Bush administration. There is no more talk of loathing Kim

Jong Il, call him a pygmy, no more calling North Korea an outpost of tyranny. Has that been picked up and sensed? And if so, any reaction to it?

MR. FORRESTER: Yes, sir. No, I think people on the Hill were heartened by the shift in the Bush administration's approach to North Korea, their greater commitment to the six-party talks. And I found this on a bipartisan basis, which was heartening.

Since this study was not conducted in the first Bush administration, I do not have a snapshot into precisely what the attitudes were then. I will be somewhat wild and speculate that there was probably considerable concern. And Senator Lugar, among others, made this point during the first Bush administration, that they thought that engagement -- the absence of engagement was a mistake.

So yes, sir, I think that people -- it is cautious optimism regarding the fruits or the possible fruits of the agreement reached last year. Obviously now there are different questions that are being raised. And since the report was conducted after some of the more recent concerns and whether North Korea is living up to terms of that agreement, I won't speculate on that.

But yes, sir, there was generally greater optimism given the Bush administration's stronger commitment to the six-party talks on the part of members of Capital Hill.

I don't want to go too much back into this question of the Sunshine Policy and the skepticism but yes, still tinged with -- we trust the Bush administration's approach to North Korea -- this is pretty much on a bipartisan basis -- their outreach, as it stood earlier this year, not before, we trust that more than we trust more engagement, a more forward-leaning engagement approach of the South Korean government.

MS. WORMUTH: Yes, you right in the front row.

MR. HO: Yung Ho (phonetic) with Radio Free Asia.

In your first recommendation, you said South Korea should clarify its perspective of future U.S.-ROK relationship. Recently South Korea finished this negotiation on FTA with United States which probably surprises some conservative people because of Noh Mu-Hyun's commitment to this.

I wonder if you see any members of Congress taking this issue as -- I mean the FTA issue as South Korea's, you know, strategic perspective of U.S.-ROK relationship?

MR. FORRESTER: Basically if people see that -- if people thought that that was a serious move by the South Korean government, is that basically your question? If people were heartened by the South Korean willingness to engage in the negotiations? I would say that people on the Hill -- one of the interlocutors stated that a topic such as the Free Trade Agreement or the possible Free Trade Agreement should not be a substitute for a robust discussion on key strategic issues.

So I think that is a commonly-held opinion on the Hill is that the FTA could be very important. It could important to the long-term strengthening one element of the U.S.-ROK relationship. But that it pales in comparison to making sure that the security relationship is sound.

So that is the first point of -- it doesn't directly address your question of what people thought of the South Korea government's commitment to the FTA negotiations but it does help to show sort of in the pecking order of important issues, people still put the U.S.-ROK military alliance on a much higher plane than they do the FTA.

Obviously the counter argument would be that FTA has not been negotiated yet. And if it is negotiated, then maybe it can have a quite beneficial long-term effect.

I think that as the report states, there is some skepticism regarding the commitment of the Noh government to all the elements of the relationship. There, I think, people have been somewhat confused by -- or people on the Hill expressed that they have been somewhat confused by then-candidate Noh's discussion of anti-American topics in the run up to his election.

And then his agreeing to send troops -- or, I should say, the South Korean government's agreeing to send troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, I think for some people -- and this is also noted in the report -- the contribution of those troops does not receive as much credit as it might because it is discounted by those who think that President Noh might have been doing it to try to make up for some statements that were made during the run up to his election.

Once again, these are impressions of people on the Hill. So we can take them for what they are worth. But that is their impressions of the current South Korean government's approach to a few different issues.

And I would put the FTA in that category as well where people were heartened by the Noh government's commitment or their stated commitment to negotiating the Free Trade Agreement but, as I stated earlier, given the thorny economic issues at stake, until those issues are dealt with, the FTA will be basically an empty agreement.

But if those issues are dealt with, then obviously it could be a long-term

pillar in the relationship.

MS. WORMUTH: Okay. Any other questions? There have been a lot of great questions. Oh, you in the back again. I'm sorry. I've forgotten your name. But please.

Thank you for giving me another chance. I have two questions. Basically the first question is about those who said the U.S.-ROK alliance would end in ten years. And the second thing is practically how could we promote the candid and frank discussion with the Congress?

First the question is those who said the U.S.-ROK relation alliance will end in ten years, then if the alliance is just broke down, whose interest will it be? Is it good for U.S.? Or is it good for ROK?

And ROK is not going for just their own interest and plus the U.S. does not have any interest in just inventing one alliance. Nobody is interested in the breaking down of that alliance.

On what basis or under what intention they are predicting that? I'm really curious about that.

And the second question is that frankly speaking, South Korean Parliamentarian's famous younger generation and I'm South Korea if some Parliamentarian elected consecutively to other terms, he will be automatically elected to the Chairmanship because in South Korea the Parliamentarians are so often changed. And to be elected twice is very hard. So they are very young and rather inexperienced.

The biggest barrier for them to discuss with the U.S. Parliament is language. And sometimes South Korean Parliamentarians are interpreted but discussion with interpretation is rather tedious and not very clear.

So what do you recommend for the South Korean people to tentatively discuss with the U.S. Congress, it is practically -- it is very difficult for the South Korean people.

MR. FORRESTER: Okay. When -- for those of you who are looking for some bedtime reading and when you do read the report in full, regarding your first question about the ending of the alliance or the statement that one person made, earlier in the report, it is clearly stated that everyone with whom I spoke said that they thought that it would be a detriment to U.S. interest if the U.S.-ROK relationship ended. So everyone hopes to see -- everyone with whom I spoke hopes to see the relationship maintained.

The prediction that this person made was -- I would interpret that as more out of concern, trying to sound a warning, a warning note, rather than an absolute prediction that it will end. This person's comments feed into the larger comments in the report and into your second question of the need for candid discussion of key security issues as well as related issues.

So I will repeat again, everyone with whom we spoke -- I spoke and the rest of the team spoke -- everyone said that they thought it would harm U.S. interests if the relationship ended.

Regarding your question -- I mean you have put your finger on some of the impediments, in your second question, some of the impediments to a more candid, frank discussion. You had mentioned the word tedious as one of the reactions that people have in these situations.

My response would be that given the importance of this relationship, that since there are so many capable people in the United States as well as in South Korea who are concerned about this, I'm confident that they can come up with the modalities of making sure that such tedious elements are overcome.

When we spoke -- when I spoke and others spoke with people on the Hill about this, their concerns were that when they meet with ROK Parliamentarians or with some ROK Parliamentarians that often the discussions are rather superficial.

And maybe these are cultural differences. But the people with whom I spoke on the Hill, they were hungry for -- they desired greater open discussions. So the recommendation of the report applied would be for when ROK Parliamentarians interact with their counterparts in the United States, as well as when people from the United States interact with Parliamentarian's in the ROK is that they be as frank as possible, obviously, still, you know, maintaining decorum.

But to take it beyond the pleasantries as quickly as possible is the basic recommendation -- is one of the strongest recommendations of the report.

MS. WORMUTH: All right. I think we have had a lot of great questions. Thank you again for coming.

Before we say goodbye, I just wanted to see, Jason, if there were any other points you wanted to bring out or anything that you felt was not addressed in the Q&A that you wanted to highlight.

MR. FORRESTER: I think we've had a full discussion. I really do appreciate everyone coming. And feel free to stay in touch.

I would be happy to continue the dialogue. I will be in Seoul over this weekend and will be presenting the report on Monday at the National Assembly, Monday, the 28th of May. So if you know people in Seoul who might wish to attend, feel free -- I'll volunteer Lee Ridley -- feel free to contact my colleague Lee Ridley who will be in Seoul with me. Lee works here at the Center. And we'd be happy to make sure that they get an invitation.

But again, thanks a lot of coming. And please send your feedback. We know it will improve our work going forward.

MS. WORMUTH: Thank you everyone.

(Applause.)

(Whereupon, the above-entitled conversation was concluded.)