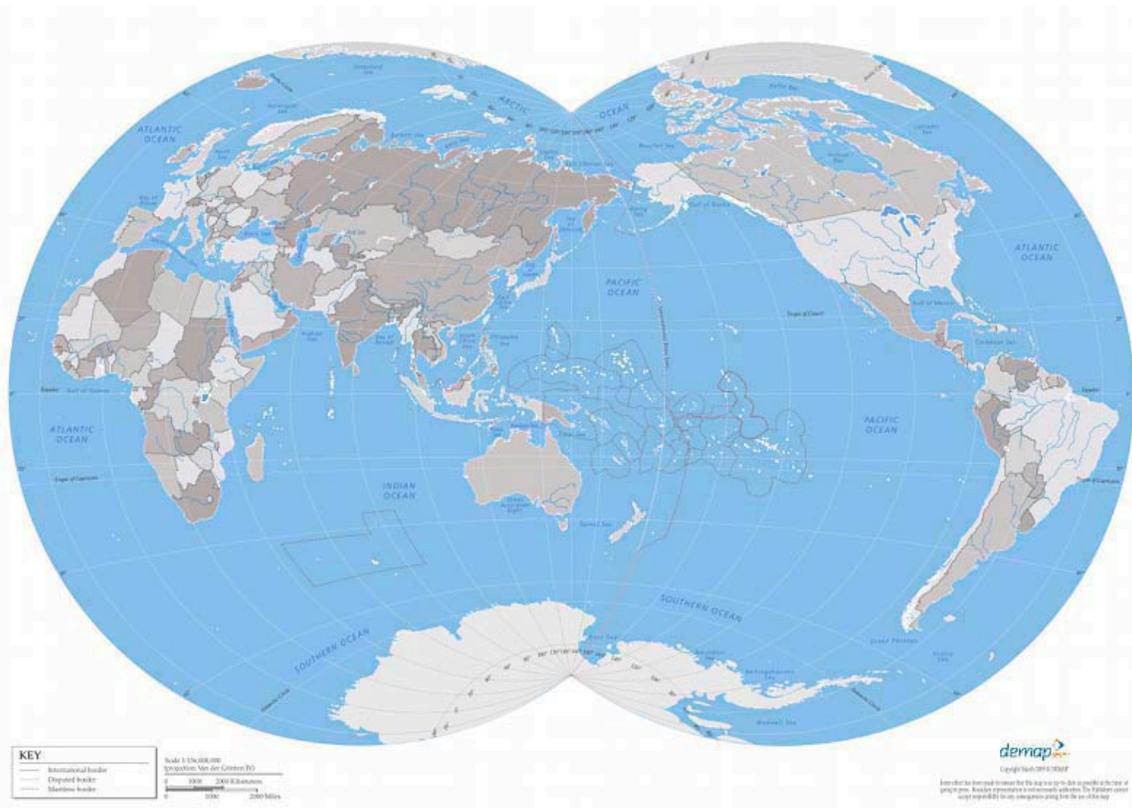


Korean–Australian relations: an evolving partnership

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Introduction

The status of Australia and the Republic of Korea (South Korea, ROK) as middle powers is now well established. Both states belong to a sub-set of trade-oriented liberal democracies in the Asia–Pacific region. The Joint Statement on Enhanced Global and Security Cooperation between Australia and the Republic of Korea (hereafter, Joint Statement) is the most tangible evidence of the emergence of a comprehensive bilateral relationship. Signed on 5 March 2009, the Joint Statement lists ‘substantial trade and investment links’, ‘shared democratic values, commitment to human rights, freedom and the rule of law, and mutual respect, trust and deep friendship’, and ‘the strategic importance of their respective alliance partnerships with the United States’ (DFAT 2009) as bases for bilateral ties.

According to one commentator, Australian Prime Minister ‘Kevin Rudd’s most notable bilateral success has been in building an especially close relationship with this other Asia–Pacific middle ranking power’ (Callick 2010a: 8), South Korea. During the ‘1.5-track’ meeting held in Sydney last December to discuss the Australian government’s proposal for an Asia–Pacific community, the strongest support from any Asian delegation came from the ROK. For instance former prime minister and diplomat Han Seong-soo suggested that an eminent persons’ group be tasked to devise a ‘concrete action plan for the eventual creation of an Asia Pacific community’ (Han 2009: 17). In addition President Lee Myung-bak and Prime Minister Rudd have been key players in creating consensus for the need of new international economic architecture, in the form of the G20. That this year’s G20 summit will be held in Seoul is testament to the vigorous role played by Korea. Furthermore, Rudd was in late May one of the first foreign leaders to publicly condemn the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) for sinking the *Cheonan* (Callick 2010b).

It is timely that bilateral relations are strengthening, given the rapid changes underway in the Asia–Pacific region. The growing economic integration of East Asia

since the financial crisis of 1997–98, the emergence of multilateral security institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, and above all the rise of China have transformed the regional order which emerged during the Cold War (Chun 2009). Australia and the ROK seek peace and prosperity in an ever-changing region while maintaining close ties with the United States, thereby explicitly fulfilling some of the goals referred to in the recent Quadrennial Defence Review (DOD 2010: 59, 66; see also Tow 2010). This raises the possibility that a ‘security community’ (Deutsch 1957) may emerge in the Asia–Pacific which to some extent resembles the North Atlantic community. Ajin Choi (2010) proposes ‘democracy, economic prosperity and U.S. leadership’ as prerequisites for membership of a ‘zone of peace’ in the Pacific. For Choi, Australia and the ROK qualify as founding members of such a security community.

This paper assesses the possibility of a security community emerging by tracing the evolution of a comprehensive bilateral relationship between the ROK and Australia. The next section uses the contributions of Australia and Korea in three major military operations which the United States has led since World War II as a means of illustrating the growth of a common view of security concerns in the Asia–Pacific region. It also considers the role of public opinion in complicating decisions which affect alliances. The third section of the paper focuses on trade between Australia and Korea, highlighting its complementary nature and proposals to sign a free trade agreement. The paper also considers the politics of trade agreements more broadly, especially their capacity to enhance movement towards a security community. The fourth section considers mutual perceptions of Australia and Korea. If both political leaders and the general public identify other states as sharing a common political culture and values, we would expect this to act as a force which strengthens a sense of security community. The final section aims to assess the importance of the bilateral relationship to each state’s foreign policy. How important is the ROK to Australia, and how important is Australia to Korea? How does the relationship compare to those shared with other key allies? Moreover, are Korea and Australia indeed progressing towards a security community? The paper concludes with some tentative answers to these questions.

Security relations

A defining feature of alliances which Australia and Korea share with the United States is their asymmetrical nature. As two longstanding ‘spokes’ adjoined to the American ‘hub’ in the Asia–Pacific, the ROK and Australia are denied the ability to formally band with other states against their common ally in a way similar to for instance France within the NATO grouping. Furthermore, neither South Korea nor Australia feature strongly in the US media. For instance ‘the ROK received a level of coverage comparable to the levels of Switzerland, Argentina, Indonesia, Pakistan and even North Korea’ in *The New York Times* from 1992 to 2003 (Shin 2010: 110–11). Australia, meanwhile, received only about half the coverage afforded to South Korea. *The Times* instead focused on great powers such as China, Russia, Germany, Japan and the UK.

For the US, the ROK and (to an even lesser extent) Australia are merely two of many middle-ranking powers in the world. For the smaller partners to these bilateral alliances, the US is generally deemed to be an indispensable ally. The discrepancies in perceptions here create a dilemma in alliance management for the smaller state: the ‘abandonment/entrapment’ problem. On the one hand, the fear of their larger ally abandoning them impels states such as Australia and South Korea to meet the conditions which their security guarantor places on the alliance, such as contributions to military operations. On the other hand, smaller allies also fear being entrapped in a conflict which they deem to be unnecessary or contrary to their interests, at the behest of their larger ally (Smith 2008). It is also possible to analyse alliances as ‘patron–client’ relationships, in which each side accrues certain benefits and is expected to meet certain obligations. Although power asymmetries may exist, insofar as smaller states such as South Korea and Australia are resigned to a trade-off between security and political autonomy (Chun 2009), both parties may deem that maintaining the relationship is still in their interests (Shin 1992).

Both the ROK and Australia became formal allies of the United States in the early 1950s, in related but distinctly different circumstances. The Korean War, during which the US spearheaded a United Nations intervention to reverse North Korea’s incursion in the South, became the first ‘hot war’ in the newly emerging Cold War (Cumings 1984).

In addition to drawing a limit to its tolerance of communist expansion, the US set itself an exceedingly difficult task: the emergence of a modern and stable South Korea which could showcase the benefits of capitalism and democracy. In this sense, the credibility of US leadership has relied in no small part on the political and economic wellbeing of the ROK (Brazinsky 2007), providing an unusual source of leverage for Korean leaders.

For its part, the Korean conflict is significant for Australia, which signed the ANZUS treaty with the US in 1951. For example the Australian military considers the Battle for Kapyoung (Gapyeong) Valley of 1951, during which UN forces repelled a Chinese advance on Seoul, as one of its most important battlefield engagements (Dodd 2010b). The battle concluded on 25 April, the most sacred day in Australian military history, adding even greater poignancy to the event. Some 17,000 Australians served in the war, with 339 fatalities being incurred during the three-year conflict (Bae 2008). Australia's contribution may have been far less than America's, but it was substantial enough for a state with a relatively small population and with few obvious interests in Northeast Asia.

Little more than a decade after the Armistice Agreement was signed and hostilities ceased on the Korean peninsula, both Australia and South Korea joined the Vietnam War on the side of the United States. At a time when its NATO allies chose not to participate in the US-led operation, the ROK and Australia answered the call to provide 'more flags' (Blackburn 1994), and thus a greater degree of legitimacy, to the war effort. These allies justified their involvement in the conflict in terms of loyalty to their American ally and in helping a fellow anti-communist state, South Vietnam, in a time of need. 'To guarantee our national security', Korean president Park Chung Hee said in 1969, 'it is necessary to reinforce our diplomatic activities toward the United States, for it is the United States which plays a pivotal role in maintaining our national security' (Park 1970: 211). Australian prime minister Harold Holt, meanwhile, vowed to go 'all the way' (Pemberton 1987) with America in terms of its objectives in Vietnam, lending rhetorical support for a war which was divisive in the US and Australia.

In keeping with the argument that alliance relations involve more than mere exploitation of the weaker party by the stronger, the Vietnam deployments illustrate the

growing value of the alliance to all parties. South Korea provided about 20 percent of allied troop strength, and suffered over 5,000 combat deaths from 1964 to 1973 (Park 1981). In return, South Korea received valuable economic benefits from the deployment, as well as a commitment to ongoing deployment of American forces on the peninsula. Another important by-product of the deployment was the cover it provided for diplomatic rapprochement between Korea and Japan, which would prove vital to the industrialisation of Korea in subsequent decades (Shin 2002). Australia provided a smaller number of troops than Korea, and consequently suffered fewer casualties—about 450—during the war. There were also economic and technological incentives for Australia: since the 1960s Japan has been Australia's largest trading partner, and any disruption to seaborne trade in East Asia threatens Australia's commercial interests. Australia was also granted privileged access to American military technology during the war, a privilege it retains (Pemberton 1987).

A third instance of Australia and Korean support for the US has been during operations which began with the 'war on terror' in 2001. Australian SAS units took part in the attack on Al Qaeda bases and the Taliban regime, and more than 2,000 regular troops are now stationed in the south of Afghanistan. In contrast, Australia's contribution to Iraq has dwindled markedly. After sending about 2,000 special forces personnel to assist with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, only 80 Australians remain today (Dodd 2010a). Australia has been fortunate to sustain few casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq—11 and 2 lives, respectively—since 2001 (iCasualties 2010a, 2010b).

Korea's contribution to the WOT has been less straightforward, in large part because of opposition from sections of the public and scepticism from the Kim Dae-jung government about the wisdom of American strategy. The death of two school girls due to an accident involving US troops, which has been labelled an 'identity invoking event' (Shin 2010: 82–83), convinced some Koreans that their interests did not accord with those of America in its anti-terrorism campaign. This was especially the case given the Bush administration's inclusion of North Korea in the 'axis of evil', which ran counter to efforts by the Kim government to improve inter-Korean relations. For instance President Roh Moo-hyun questioned Washington's justification for invading Iraq, and refused to deploy Korean troops in the conventional military phase of the war. Roh eventually

agreed to send 3,600 non-combat troops to Iraq, but the US had expected a stronger display of support from the ROK, underlining the role that alliance partners play in legitimising American policy. Some US troops based in Korea were deployed to Iraq, and when the possibility was raised of further reductions, both public opinion and the stance of the Roh government began to change. Shoring up the American alliance was a core plank of Lee Myung-bak's campaign for the presidency in 2007. Lee was to deliver on his promise to improve ties with the US by meeting his American counterpart three times within six months of assuming the presidency (Hundt 2008: 502–03).

A related measure of Korean commitment to the alliance can be found in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), a combined effort led by the US to 'undertake measures to interdict illicit transfers of WMD-related items, exchange relevant information, and strengthen national legal authorities' (State Department 2009b). Australia was an early signatory to the PSI, which was launched in March 2003 against the backdrop of the Iraq War. The ROK joined the PSI in May 2009 (State Department 2009a), offering a tangible sign of change under Lee. Rather than the fear of being 'entrapped' in the WOT against its will and better judgement, Korean fears instead seemed to concern the possibility of the US paying insufficient attention to the local security conditions of the peninsula ('abandonment'). Polls suggest there is growing support for the handover of peacetime control of South Korean forces, scheduled for 2012, to be delayed indefinitely (Lee and Jeong 2010a: 8–9).

These fluctuations in views about the alliance are a reminder that governments of democratic societies need to be cognisant of public opinion, especially as it relates to foreign policy issues such as managing alliances. In contrast to Korea, for most Australians tangible manifestations of the alliance are news reports of small military deployments to far-off lands such as Afghanistan. Nonetheless, a poll conducted in 2007 detected a strong degree of antipathy towards the leadership style of George W. Bush and his foreign policy. The same poll found that American culture and people were generally viewed in favourable terms (Gyngell 2007: 13). Australians tend to see maintenance of the US alliance as a crucial task: an overwhelming majority (56 percent) said that the alliance was 'very important' and another 30 per cent said it was 'fairly important'; the corresponding figures for 2007 were 36 percent and 27 percent (Hanson 2010: 12).

The common experience of contributing to US-led operations has proven conducive to the emergence of an independent bilateral relationship between the ROK and Australia. As part of the *Joint Statement*, the Korean government agreed to a security framework with its Australian counterpart. This was only such framework which Korea has signed with any state, other than that with the US (Callick 2010b). South Korea requested that Australia—along with the US, the United Kingdom, Canada and Sweden—contribute to an investigation into the sinking of the *Cheonan*, suggests that Australia is a trusted ally of the ROK. The Joint Civilian–Military Investigation Group (2010) concluded that a North Korean torpedo sunk the ROK’s corvette. Within hours of the findings being publicised, Australia condemned the North for its ‘deplorable act’, and promised to continue ‘working closely with South Korea and other partners on how to respond, including action in the UN Security Council’ (PMA 2010).

Economic Relations: towards an FTA?

Korea and Australia enjoy a robust economic relationship, with two-way trade valued at \$27 billion in 2008. Australia exported \$20 billion worth of goods and services to Korea, and imported \$7 billion in return. Some 87 percent of Australian exports consisted of minerals, metals and energy resources (Yu 2010), while Korea’s main exports were motor vehicles and refined petroleum. By 2009 the ROK was Australia’s fifth-largest trade partner, while Australia ranked 14th for Korea (DFAT 2010).

These figures suggest a relationship skewed in Australia’s favour, but they understate the complementary nature of bilateral trade. On the one hand, Australia’s relatively small population—at 22 million—limits its capacity to import Korea’s products such as electronic goods. Korea—along with Japan—is one of the few states with which Australia records a trade surplus. In the cases of both Korea and Japan, the limited size of the Australian market largely explains the persistent imbalance. On the other hand, surpluses with other states compensate for deficits which the ROK and Japan incur by importing Australia’s natural resources. Minerals are a crucial input to Korea’s heavy and chemical industries, whose foundation in the 1970s was supported by the state precisely because of their potential to contribute to the creation of national wealth (Woo 1991).

Three examples—iron ore, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and uranium—illustrate the mutually beneficial nature of bilateral trade.

POSCO, commonly referred to as the world's leading producer of steel and related products, is by some measures the single-biggest consumer of Australian iron ore. About one third of all Korean mineral imports, chiefly iron ore and coal, are sourced from Australia, and in the case of POSCO the proportion is over half (Bae 2008). Thanks to a reliable stream of imports from Australia and other suppliers of bulk commodities, POSCO has become the world's leading exporter of steel and also a vital cog in the Korean industrial economy. The capacity to produce high quality steel is essential to the profitability of industries such as shipbuilding and automobiles. It also has enhanced the capacity of the ROK to develop an advanced military-industrial sector (Kim 2004).

A second set of synergies surrounds natural gas. Korea is expected to be one of the biggest consumers of LNG sourced from the Gorgon gas field in Western Australia. In 2009 Korean Gas Corporation signed a long-term supply contract with Chevron, which will result in almost 12 percent of Korean gas being supplied by Australia (Callick 2010b). The appeal of LNG is its relatively low cost and environmental impact. Given that—at least early in its term—the Rudd government committed itself to reducing carbon emissions and its counterpart in Seoul seeks to promote a 'green economy' (SERI 2010), efforts to increase the use of LNG are mutually beneficial. Furthermore, Korea's Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering have developed specialised LNG carriers capable of safely transporting gas around the world in large quantities (Ziegler 2008).

Australian exports of uranium oxide ('yellowcake') reached 10,000 tonnes in 2009, valued at \$1 billion. Demand for Australian uranium is predicted to almost double by 2014 (AUA 2009), and Australia may replace Canada as the world's biggest producer. Australia holds about one quarter of the world's uranium resources, and some 40 percent of its low-cost reserves (Harris 2009). Korea imported 214 tonnes, or 7 percent of total demand, from Australia in 2008. This is far below the 1000 tonnes which Australia could send to the ROK (WNA 2010). A diversification policy, and preference for long-term contracts such as those signed with Canada, means that the Korea relies less on Australia

for uranium (OECD Nuclear Energy Agency and International Atomic Energy Agency 2008).

The ROK enjoys the rare distinction of developing an indigenous civilian nuclear energy industry. The civilian industry has benefited from the technological expertise of foreign engineering firms such as America's Westinghouse, especially after the US halted Korea's attempt to acquire nuclear weapons in the 1970s (Park 1998). However in recent years Korean firms have emerged as world-class producers in their own right. The industry supplies energy at competitive prices, giving Korean manufacturers a substantial cost advantage over other states and also reducing energy prices for households (Yang 2009). South Korea is, in turn, emerging as one of the most successful exporters of nuclear reactors. In December the Korean Electric Power Company announced that it had signed contracts to build four nuclear reactors for the United Arab Emirates, at an initial value of \$20 billion. Based on the APR-1000 reactor model, the signing of the contracts signalled Korea's entry into the upper echelon of yet another lucrative industry (Stott 2010).

Given these complementarities, both states seem to recognise the benefits of expanding trade ties. Negotiations began in 2009 on a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA), which would integrate the two economies into a coherent whole by removing barriers such as tariffs, quotas and other restrictions, as well as harmonising standards and rules governing the conduct of trade. To date, five rounds of negotiations have been held; the main points of contention involve market access for Australian agricultural goods and Korean industrial products, trade in services and investment, and topics such as labour, environmental issues, protection for intellectual property, competition policy and government procurement (MOFAT 2010). According to one report (Callick 2010b), negotiations are progressing so well that the FTA may be signed by the middle of 2011. This would be far quicker than Korea's agreements with China and Japan, for which negotiations began as far back in 2003 and which are still far from completion (AFP 2010).

Neither Korea nor Australia is a stranger to FTA negotiations. By one estimate, the ROK has been the world's most active negotiator of FTAs; more than 40 agreements

are at various stages of completion (Lie and Kim 2008: 122). Since 2004 the ROK has ratified FTAs with Chile, Singapore, the European Free Trade Area and ASEAN (ROK 2008), and is negotiating with Canada, India, Mexico, New Zealand and the Gulf Cooperation Council. An agreement signed in 2009 with the European Union represents an opportunity to secure access to what is collectively Korea's second biggest market (AFP 2010). Australia, meanwhile, has ratified FTAs with New Zealand, Thailand, Singapore and the United States, and is negotiating with states such as China, Malaysia and Indonesia (Ravenhill 2009: 232–33). Furthermore, the Closer Economic Relations agreement which unites Australia and New Zealand was formally linked to the ASEAN FTA in 2010 (Walters 2009: 2).

A commonality to both Australia and Korea is that they have mainly sought agreements with economies of similar scale and with complementarity. However, when FTAs link economies of different scale and complexity, there are implications for the sovereignty of smaller states. Consequently, FTAs have great symbolic meaning in international politics. One on the one hand, FTAs may evolve within a security alliance (Snyder 2009: 1), as in the case of the Australia–United States FTA (AUS FTA). On the other hand, FTAs may evolve between states whose political and security relations are divergent but which enjoy economic interdependence, as in the case of Korea's proposed FTA with China. Given that Australia and Korea are at varying stages of completing FTAs with the US and China, the remainder of this section examines each set of negotiations and their implications for the emergence of an Asia–Pacific security community.

In the context of the war on terror, 'security-embedded' or 'securitized' FTAs became preferred policy tool for the Bush administration. That is, the US sought to finalise FTAs with its most loyal allies, viewing such agreements as a reward in the form of preferential access to the US market and technology. Intensified economic interdependence was seen as a way of reinforcing America's military alliances—and perhaps even the economic equivalent to a security treaty: a bailout in the case of economic or financial crisis (Koo 2009). Some scholars have questioned the argument that increasing economic integration, whether in the form of an FTA or not, has a spill-over effect in the security realm. For instance the longstanding security treaty between

the US and Japan did not prevent serious trade frictions from emerging in the 1980s, and economic exchanges between North and South Korea have not removed animosity between the rival governments (Lee and Kim 2010; Yu 2010).

In the case of the US and Australia, however, political leaders on both sides were predisposed to the norm of free trade, reducing the difficulties in negotiating the FTA. Critics argued that the agreement would damage Australian interests. For instance Australia would have to accept delayed access to American agricultural markets; it would need to weaken the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, whereby an independent public assessment was made of the value of new drugs; and the capacity of the Foreign Investment Review Board to scrutinise the impact of foreign investments on the national interest would be circumscribed (Weiss et al. 2004). Nonetheless the agreement was ratified and came into effect in 2005. The value of the agreement from Australia's perspective appeared to lie in the intensified linkage of Australia to the US, and the security benefits which that implies.

Korea was another target for America's securitised FTA strategy, despite any tensions between the Bush and Roh governments. Indeed, President Roh seemed to view an FTA as a way of overcoming the difficulties which the two allies had experienced during the early years of his term. Subsequently, negotiations for the South Korea-US (KORUS) FTA proceeded quickly, and an agreement was signed in 2007. In early 2008 the Lee government announced that it would lift restrictions on the importation of American beef, the final impediment to the ratification of the FTA. Imports had been halted in 2003 after the detection of 'mad cow disease' in the US. American officials argued that the problem was addressed sufficiently, and that US beef was safe to consume. Ratification thus hinged on the lifting of the ban. The announcement that beef imports would resume, with some limits on the types of meat which would be allowed, sparked a wave of protests during 2008. This damaged the popularity of President Lee only months into his term (Hundt 2008: 508–09). The Korean government thus wore the political cost of the stalled negotiations. Two years on, the deal has yet to be ratified by the US Senate, and the FTA is unlikely to pass as long as the US economy remains mired in recession.

When visiting Washington in April 2010, President Lee again urged the US to ratify the agreement, saying that the FTA would: ‘help to boost economic ties between Seoul and Washington’. He also emphasised the strategic importance of the agreement, arguing: ‘The United States should always keep in mind China, which is growing fast, militarily and economically. The ratification of the KORUS FTA has a *much more important meaning* than simple economic cooperation between two allies’ (cited in Stangarone 2010, emphasis added).

In doing so, Lee reminded the US that part of the appeal of the FTA lies in its enmeshment of the interests of the alliance partners. This suggests that, like Australia, the ROK is willing to compromise on political autonomy in order to maximise security. As the president hinted in Washington, a key motivation for Korea’s FTA strategy is to mitigate any adverse effects of economic integration with China, which has taken on the guise of interdependence and also a growing ‘relative dependence’. Korea’s dependence on China for overall trade rose from a mere 2 percent in 1985 to 19 percent in 2006 (Chung 2008; 2009: 471). Despite the ROK being a beneficiary of the China boom, some concern has emerged about the ability of Korean firms to compete with a rising China. In this view, South Korea is a ‘sandwich’ between its two large neighbours, at risk of being crushed by low-cost China on one side and technologically advanced Japan on the other (Seong et al. 2005). The Roh and Lee governments envisaged the KORUS FTA as a means for Korean firms to benefit from the economies of scale which access to the US market would ensure. In what has been dubbed a new version of ‘industrial policy’, Korean firms could thus compete with their Chinese counterparts (Woo 2007: 126–27).

Australia and Korea: mutual perceptions

This section of the paper considers a final criterion for a security community: a shared sense of political values, which further strengthens ties between the peoples of different states. According to the logic of the ‘democratic peace’ theory (Goldsmith et al. 2008), we should expect the shared experience of liberal democracy to enhance bilateral ties between the US and its Asia–Pacific allies, and also between Australia and Korea. There

is, however, relatively little data available on mutual perceptions of Australia and Korea, and the data presented here should be treated with caution.

The Lowy Institute conducts annual surveys of Australian public opinion in respect to foreign policy. One set of questions gauges feelings toward other states, ‘with one hundred meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavourable feeling, and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold’ (Hanson 2008: 16). The states which have attracted the most ‘warmth’ are fellow members of the British Commonwealth (New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom), with ratings in the 70s and 80s. Feeling towards the United States is also relatively warm—between 60 and 70—in the five surveys since 2006, with an upward trend evident in recent years. At the other end of the scale, states such as North Korea and Iran have consistently attracted cool or cold feelings from Australia (Hanson 2009: 17).

Table 1 summarises the findings of the surveys for six Asia–Pacific states. On the data available, Australians feel closest to the US and Japan. Feelings towards China and India have cooled somewhat since the surveys began, slipping from the low 60s to the mid 50s. The surveys suggest that the warmth of feeling towards the ROK is about on a par with Indonesia. Australia’s feelings towards Korea have actually cooled since 2006, when the ‘temperature’ was moderately warm 56 degrees. With a rating of 53 in the 2009 survey, feeling towards Korea was the same level as China (Hanson 2009: 3). One reading of these results is that Australians do indeed feel greater kinship towards the peoples of democratic states, but draw a distinction between older and newer democracies. But this would not explain why feeling towards China—an autocracy—is warmer than that towards democratic Indonesia and Korea. Another anomaly is that India—a consolidated democracy and a former Commonwealth member—fails to attract greater levels of warmth.

Table 1: Australian views of various states, 2006–2010					
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010

United States	62	60	64	67	68
Japan	64	63	64	66	64
India	62	55	57	56	55
China	61	56	56	53	54
South Korea	56	–	50	53	–
Indonesia	50	47	50	49	54
<u>Source:</u> Lowy polls, 2006–2010 (Hanson 2009: 17; 2010: 4).					

Australians’ lukewarm assessment of Korea was confirmed in the BBC’s 2010 Global Poll, which involved almost 30,000 respondents in 28 states. The BBC poll found that Korea’s ‘soft power’—the attractiveness of its culture and global reputation (Nye 2004) was relatively weak. When asked whether South Korea played a positive role in the world, 32 percent of respondents agreed; in contrast, 29 percent said that the ROK played a negative role. The ROK was ranked 12th in terms of its capacity to project positive influence in the world, below the G7 states, China, Brazil, India and South Africa, and ahead of Russia, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and Iran. The most negative assessments of Korean soft power emanated from Europe, while respondents in Asia and North America were the most positive. Australian assessments were somewhere in between: 35 percent said South Korea projected a positive influence in the world, slightly more than the global mean of 32 percent (Lee and Jeong 2010b: 4, 11–12).

Whereas Australian assessments of Korea were rather lukewarm, the reverse was far from true. A multinational poll—using the same methodology as the Lowy Poll discussed above—found that Koreans gave Australia the warmest rating of any of 16 nations surveyed: 65 degrees. This was on a par with the rating of Chinese respondents, and not far below the warmth felt by American (69) and British (71) respondents (CCGA 2006: 49). Part of this positive assessment is likely to result from Australia’s being one of the main destinations for South Koreans seeking to study abroad; in fact, Australia is the

second biggest destination for Korean students, after China. What is more, about 100,000 Koreans have become permanent residents of Australia (Bae 2008). Some 250,000 Koreans visited Australia in 2009, while about 80,000 Australians visited Korea (DFAT 2010).

Given the discrepancies in visits between the two states, it seems fair to assume that many Koreans have attained a relatively sound understanding of Australian people and society by dint of their study visits and holidays, whereas Australians have relatively little direct knowledge of Korea (Moon 2010). A reduction in funding for Asian Studies in general and Korean Studies in particular during the past decade has only exacerbated the paucity of 'Asia literacy' in Australia, a belated attempt by the Rudd government to address the shortfall notwithstanding. Denied direct experience of Korean society, replete with its dynamic economy, bustling urban life and never-ending political intrigue, Australians may be forgiven for viewing Korea as a foreign and distant land constantly on the brink of confrontation with its neighbour to the north.

Conclusions: typifying the bilateral relationship

This paper has reviewed three spheres of bilateral relations in order to gauge the relative importance of Australia–Korea relations, and to assess the potential for a security community to emerge in the Asia–Pacific region. In the process of contributing to military operations alongside the United States, an independent relationship, formalised by the security framework included in the *Joint Statement*, has evolved between Australia and Korea. This relationship does not amount to a formal defence treaty and it would be premature to describe the framework as a shift towards a security community, but Australia and Korea now seem to count each other among their most valued allies. The degree of coordination between these two allies is at least approaching the degree of coordination with states such as the Indonesia, Canada and the United Kingdom.

A similar convergence of views has emerged in terms of the promotion of regional trade. Neo-liberalism informs the FTA strategies of South Korea and Australia. Closer ties with the US serve to counter-balance the increasing interdependence of Korea and Australia with China. This approach stands in contrast to the strategic trade policies

adopted by Japan and China, which have instead endeavoured to create comprehensive economic and strategic partnerships which maximise national autonomy (Wade 1993). South Korea's transition away from a strategic approach to trade policy illustrates that the maintenance of the US alliance features prominently in the foreign policies of the Asia-Pacific's middle powers.

Of the three spheres considered, the greatest divergence appears to lie in terms of mutual perceptions. This may well be the most important obstacle to progress towards shared sense of community. History shows that the passage of time can overcome an initial lack of mutual understanding, as Australia's relations with Japan and Germany illustrate. If Australians can develop warm feelings towards wartime adversaries such as Japan, they can surely come to appreciate the significance of sharing a democratic heritage with Korea.

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