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**Changing Patterns in American Diplomacy:** **Implications for Korean-American Relations**

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In this Centennial year of American-Korean relations, there will be ample opportunity to explore the many ties which make the relations between our two countries unique in breadth and intensity. When your Society’s President asked me to make a talk as a part of the centennial program, I delayed giving him a title, because I wondered just how I should approach the subject of Korean- American relations in such a way as to make at least a little contribution toward better understanding. When the deadline for supplying a title rolled around, I still had not made up my mind. Finally pressed, I supplied the title: “Some Desultory Notes on Fluctuating Patterns of American International Intercourse, with Occasional Reference to the Korean Spillover Effects in the World Multi-State System,,. I then supplied a somewhat bewildered Dr. Hoyt with the translation: “Changing Patterns in American Diplomacy: Implications for Korean-American Relations”.

I begin by noting that the job of serving as United States Ambassador during this centennial year is an especially demanding one. There will be many visitors, many ceremonial occasions, many parties, and many requests for speeches. I have accepted your invitation because as a scholar I have been grateful for the many publications of the R.A.S. which have helped me toward some understanding of Korea and its culture.

A major part of my assignment here in the Republic of Korea is to help explain the United States, our policies and their formulation. And, of course, to represent American interests, hopefully discreetly. This is known in common parlance defining a diplomat’s job as “bringing home the bacon without spilling the beans”.

It has occurred to me that I might make a small contribution to our discussion this evening by calling attention to the formidable changes which have taken place in the formulation of American foreign policy, the proliferation of agencies now involved in foreign affairs in Washington, and the manifold pressures now being felt from various interest groups, in contrast with the somewhat more direct and unencumbered style of a century ago.

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We seek better understanding between Korea and the United States, so it is important that our Korean allies understand some of the dynamics of American foreign policy. Our conduct of policy reflects a response to great changes in the world. It must also be associated with the fact that change is accelerating.

I do not refer alone to such matters as population growth, though that has been important. When the United States opened its relations with Korea, our population was about 50 million. The population of the Korean peninsula was only about six million. Today the population of the U.S. is four and one-half times as great, more than 225 million, and North and South Korea together have almost 60 million, more than ten times that of a century ago.

Americans have just watched instantaneously via Telstar the visit of their Vice President to Korea, and Koreans can daily watch events from around the whole world on television. With more than a million foreign tourists coming to the Land of Morning Calm each year, and with a formidable portion of its economy geared to foreign trade and overseas activities, Korea is obviously a far different land and a rapidly changing land.

But I advance one caveat: peoples and customs and habits―that is, cultures―change at the speed of glaciers. Many of the comments which Alexis de Tocqueville made about the Americans in the 1830s are as valid today as when they were written. Early descriptions of Korea, published by the R.A.S., read like descriptions of Korean society today. My study of history has convinced me that the factor of national character must be taken into account as a primary determinant in the international behavior of nations.

I stress this point to assure you that in turning to institutional and scientific changes, I am not ignoring the importance of history and culture in foreign policy. It is essential, though, that Koreans understand the changing patterns, processess, and institutions of American foreign policy if we are to continue our close alliance during our second century of diplomatic relations.

As an aside, but not entirely unrelated, it is worth noting that there has been the same cultural persistence in the other nations with which the United States and Korea must deal. The French nobleman, the Marquis de Custine, journeying to Russia in 1839 in search of a justification for enlightened despotism after the anarchy of the revolutionary times which had beset France and Europe since the French Revolution, wrote a journal whose passages have an all too familiar ring. He noted, for example, “The diplomatic corps and Westerners in general have always been considered by this Government, with its Byzantine spirit, and by Russia as a whole, as malevolent and jealous spies.” The implications of such an attitude for today are also aptly described in Custine’s words:

[page 3] If better diplomats are found among the Russians than among highly civilized peoples, it is because our papers warn them of everything that happens and everything that is contemplated in our countries. Instead of disguising our weaknesses with prudence, we reveal them with vehemence every morning; whereas the Russians’ Byzantine policy, working in the shadow, carefully conceals from us all that is thought, done, and feared in their country. We proceed in broad daylight; they advance under cover: the game is one-sided.

One might comment that the same applies to North Korea today.

But to get on with my topic: it is rather mundane to observe that patterns of international diplomacy have changed over the past century. There are many more actors on the diplomatic scene; the relations among nations involve much more than the niceties of protocol and simple trade problems; instantaneous visual communication frequently makes the urgent cables already obsolete; the process of diplomatic conduct has become increasingly bureaucratized; international regulatory agencies have multiplied; and public opinion, in the limited number of countries where opinion is actually public, intrudes into the decision-making process.

A century ago when the special United States envoy, Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt, had finally negotiated the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation of May 22nd, life was blessedly simple―blissful, if you will. Could this have been because ignorance is bliss? Neither the United States nor Korea really had much knowledge of each other. Shufeldt labored so hard for the conclusion of the treaty that one account shortly thereafter notes:

The American envoy was so worn out with anxiety and toil by his efforts to have Corea opened . . . that on landing in San Francisco, he retired to the naval hospital at Mare’s Island to recover his exhausted strength.

But Robert W. Shufeldt did not have to deal with skyscrapers of cabled instructions, nor entertain visiting Congressional delegations anxious to have their pet projects included in the treaty, nor conduct protracted negotiations with the Department of Defense, the Department of the Treasury, or with the Office of the Special Trade Representative in Washington. Nor did he need to consult with a Korean Economic Planning Board, a Ministry of National Defense, or a Korea Traders’ Association.

A good friend of missionary background, whose name and those of his relatives are well recognized through the many years of publications of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Shannon McCune, delivered a paper last month to a meeting of the Association of Asian Studies in [page 4] Cincinnati, Ohio. In his very interesting survey, Professor McCune examined just how much Americans might have known about Korea at the time of the Shufeldt Treaty. His research indicated to him that there were really only three books dealing with Korea published by that time and available at a few major libraries in the United States. In addition, there were only a very few articles in popular magazines and journals which could be considered in any way useful for the understanding of Korea. According to McCune,:

These three books available to the American reader were views by outsiders using generally non-Korean source materials. Un-fortunately, no books were written solely from the standpoint of the Koreans and using the extensive Korean source materials which existed in Korea.

He goes on to conclude:

The American image of Korea was a hazy one of a distant, isolated peninsula, caught between China, Japan and Russia, with a quaint people living in an area of considerable geographical diversity under a feeble, autocratic government. This image served America poorly. Inadequate images of Korea continue to persist in the United States even to the present day and hinder a thorough understanding of Korea’s problems and potential.

That is a familiar refrain even today, but I believe he would agree that one hundred years after the Shufeldt treaty both Koreans and Americans do have a somewhat better understanding of each other. There are literally hundreds of valuable books on Korea in English and other Western languages, and thousands of important articles.

There are other contrasts between the ability of both countries to deal with each other in international relations at the time of the Shufeldt Treaty and today. Some examples might help to illustrate problems as well as opportunitites which will confront us during our second century of diplomatic intercourse. Take the size of the American diplomatic establishment, for instance. In 1880 the Department of State in Washington, D. C. had a grand total of only 51 members on its executive and clerical staff, and only 25 ministers and five Charges d’Affaires abroad. Today the Department employs 10,849 in Washington, and in excess of 33,000 work for our missions overseas. Last year we had 281 posts throughout the world—143 embassies, 12 missions, 67 consulates general, 42 consulates, three branch offices, and 14 consular agencies.

A century ago diplomats could conduct correspondence and write out their reports―which, by the way, they did in polished and logical prose without [page 5] resort to acronyms or buzz words―and wait patiently for a couple of months for a reply from Washington to their substantive messages. I hasten to add that despite the resort to jargon occasionally, some of the political and economic reporting coming from our embassy today is every bit as good or even better than that which I have read in the course of my own researches in diplomatic archives.

Today, there is an expectation that an instantaneous “Flash” message will have evoked a cabled reply back to the Department within a matter of hours. One scholar, writing fifteen years ago, noted that the Department of State’s cable office handled 4,000 messages a day, a total of 15 million words a month, and 19 million pieces of mail each year. Diplomatic pouches numbered 43,000 and in excess of two million pounds. It should be noted that since then the annual rate of increase in State Department “traffic” has been in excess of fifteen percent.

Meanwhile, we have had to absorb all sorts of strange language into the official vocabulary: LOU is not a young lady’s name; it means “Limited Official Use”. “Traffic” is not a condition of downtown Seoul; it means incoming and outgoing cables. Come to think of it, maybe it could be the condition in downtown Seoul. “AMPART” is used by the United States International Communications Agency to refer to an “American participant” in our cultural and information exchange program. Sometimes I am tempted to refer to those who have repeatedly performed well in the United States interest abroad as Reliable American Participants, or “RAMPARTS”.

Perhaps more significant in the changes of American conduct of diplomacy has been the proliferation of United States government agencies and departments whose personnel function within the framework of our embassies abroad. These representatives are in a better position to work with their counterpart agencies in the government to which they are assigned, but their presence sometimes relegates the tie of the State Department personnel to administrative tasks. It is worth noting that in excess of 78 percent of the people assigned to American missions overseas are not State Department personnel. This results in large measure from the number of items, ranging from atomic energy, natural resources, drug and narcotics problems, military and economic assistance, and commercial matters which have become such an integral part of the relations among nations. In London, for example, there are more than forty agencies or offices with personnel separately assigned to the United States Embassy—ranging from the Smithsonian Institution to the Social Security Administration, from the Atomic Energy Commission to the Internal Revenue Service, and from the Department of Agriculture to the Library of Congress. From the point of view of State Department professionals this is not entirely [page 6] good, because many who have been trained as professional diplomats and political and economic reporters find themselves involved in providing admin-istrative support for other agencies. One study published in the mid-1970s estimates that as much as 50 percent of the Department of State’s personnel was engaged in supporting other agencies.

I should note that our Embassy in Seoul in 1982 is not quite so burdened with these people whom one of my predecessors as Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, that great antibureaucrat, Ellis O. Briggs, has described as “Peripheral Performers”. We have only ten non-State Department agencies assigned to the Embassy.

The shorthand for what I have been pointing out so far is, of course, that Koreans have a much more complex Embassy and group of specialists to deal with than a century ago, and all too frequently more than one section of the United States Embassy is involved in even the most simple negotiation with the government in Seoul.

But that is only the beginning of the tale of how the pattern of American diplomacy has changed, because it is in Washington that the greatest changes have taken place.

In 1882, it was quite clear that the American President had full charge of foreign policy, and although U.S. Senate ratification of the Treaty took a year, the pace merely reflected the limited interest which that august body took in matters of foreign affairs. Today such could hardly be said to be the case. The House and Senate have fourteen committees, each with oversight interest in aspects of our foreign affairs, and the proliferation of Congressional committee and subcommittee staffs with foreign affairs specialists whose talents match those within the Department of State has been one of the most remarkable features of bureaucratic development in the United States within the past two decades. For instance, Congressional staffs grew by more than 40 percent between 1972 and 1979.

One of the key questions which missions abroad ask about the govern-ments to which they are assigned is where the individual decision affecting some issue between them is being made. The answer in the United States may perhaps be more difficult than for any government in the world. It is true that as President Harry S. Truman observed, the “buck stops” at the President’s desk, but the threads that lead to the presidential desk are interwoven and intertwined in such a complex manner as seemingly to defy unravelling.

To begin with, there is the Office of the President and the National Security Council and its staff. By our Constitution the President is preeminent in foreign affairs. In addition to the NSC, another White House office has [page 7] acquired increasing power over decisions in the foreign policy field, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) with its roughly 600 staff members.

Beyond the office of the President itself, it might be useful to list some of the key Washington organizations where the decision buttons might be pushed: Department of State; Agency for International Development; International Communications Agency; Arms Control and Disarmament Agency; Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, Treasury, Interior, Energy. In addition, NASA, National Science Foundation, Export Import Bank, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and many more. The Embassy of the Republic of Korea in the United States must, perforce, follow the lines of thinking and the power patterns in all of the executive agencies.

Of special importance, of course, is the Department of Defense. Given the formidable nature of the American defense commitment in Korea, and the crucial importance of our maintaining credibility in this part of the world. practically every issue in Korean-American relations has security overtones, whether the activities of dissidents and their connections with American correspondents or American investment in certain Korean industries. Given the lead time for bringing on line new weapons systems and the rocketing cost of effective defense, State-Defense coordination is of special concern for the Korean Government.

But that is just the start! I have already mentioned Congress and Con-gressional staffers. A century ago members of the House and Senate were primarily interested in domestic issues. Now, when American foreign trade is almost 18 percent of our GNP, Congress is not only involved but has the necessary specialists. Much of the contest between the Executive and Legis-lative branches on some foreign policy issues, such as, for example, War Powers Act or Intelligence Oversight, is a result of larger Congressional staffs being able to provide expertise on major international questions, and to question positions of the Executive Board.

Congress has now reinvigorated its traditional role in foreign policy through treaty ratification, appointment confirmation, budgetary control, war powers, and grand investigation. Not surprisingly, therefore, we have witnessed a proliferation of lobbies and political action committees who attempt and sometimes do interject themselves into the foreign policy process as individual issues are addressed by the United States Government. Members of Congress can at times become single issue advocates, if, for instance, they represent a single crop area like the corn belt or a major industrial product area such as Detroit. Registered Political Action Committees in[page 8] Washington increased from 600 in 1974 to nearly 1,700 in 1978.

I do not have to tell an audience interested in Korean-American relations what this means. For many of us, including the American Embassy in Seoul as well as the Korean Embassy in Washington, it means a constant attention to the activities and publications of special interest groups. Many prove to be helpful, some worrisome. The range is wide: the Association of the United States Army, the American Legion, the National Council of Churches, the AFL-CIO, the American Friends Service Committee, or the Moral Majority.

It is probably not necessary to mention here a final factor in the equation: the mass media. The major American dailies and the television networks have a profound influence in setting the tone of American approaches to the various areas of the globe. Vietnam demonstrated this only too clearly.

What are the implications of these changes in quantity, actors, style, determination, tempo, and scope of American diplomacy as we enter our second century of relations with Korea? I believe many of the implications have been well understood by the government in Seoul, and that its adjust-ments to change have shown flexibility and imagination. In some respects, it should be noted, we Americans are also having to adjust to a matching complexity in the Government of Korea as it accommodates to the world of the computer, the transistor, and the jet aircraft.

A first obvious implication is that major far-reaching decisions in foreign policy will take much more time to gain the necessary consensus to sustain them. Patience becomes an even more highly valued commodity in diplomacy by both our nations.

Second, it is important for any government dealing with the United States to realize the value of gaining support from a broad spectrum of the American public. I should note that the Korean Embassy in Washington is increasingly aware of this. The days of what was ineptly called “Koreagate” are behind us, and the Korean Mission in the United States has understood the importance of building understanding and support through activities in the private sector. We are cheered that plans are progressing for the creation of a Korea Society in the United States which will have the backing of the many American scholars and businessmen interested in giving a more balanced understanding of the dynamics of this nation in the United States.

Thirdly, in understanding Washington’s approach to individual foreign policy problems such as, say, weapons sales or non-tariff trade barriers, other governments must face dealing with a larger array of influence centers, and there is unlikely to be any single person or organization which can push the decision button.

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Finally, because there does seem to be one factor of stability in this era of accelerating change—national character—it behooves us more than ever to build on our past century of growth in understanding between our two nations, with an accent on empathy and respect for each other and what we can, even though adhering to our own traditional values, contribute to each other’s future. Both the United States and Korea have had basic isolationist impulses in the past. We know that isolation is the refuge of fools in a compressed and interdependent world. In the years ahead, let us demonstrate for the world the great advantages which can come to two disparate cultures by keeping our doors fully open for unfettered interchange of ideas, commerce, art, music, and above all, the friendship which emerges from faith and trust.