The Road to Strategic Alliance: 
Branding of the US-ROK Alliance*

Alex Chang Lee**

Abstract

The US-ROK Alliance was once symbolized as “hyulmeng,” blood alliance, and one of the final frontiers against communism to both the American and South Korean publics. The US-ROK Alliance has endured the last sixty years with cohesive aims and direction. This is no longer the case today, as the Alliance has been tainted by disagreements between the leaderships, generation replacement in public opinion and the depleting threat of D.P.R.K. This paper seeks to construct a framework of branding to revitalize or rebrand the US-ROK Alliance. This paper constructs a marketing brand, “strong and equal alliance,” which is powerful enough to communicate and symbolize the importance of the US-ROK alliance to the American and South Korean publics. The concept of public diplomacy and place branding is explored, but not exclusively, as these concepts have their own critics and limitations. This paper is influenced and motivated by place branding; however, the concept itself is too holistic to be used in this paper. Therefore, this paper explores the concept of branding, which can be utilized in a narrower scope. Under such context, the intentions of this paper are threefold: to introduce the new concept of branding, “strong and equal alliance,” into the field of international relations for the sake of the US-ROK alliance; to construct a branding process model which supports the concept of branding to be smoothly incorporated into the field of international relations; and to provide an alternative scenario based on the concept of branding to enhance the public awareness and support of the US-ROK alliance. Eventually, winning back the hearts and minds of both the American and South Korean publics is the best scenario to strengthen the US-ROK alliance.

Keywords: Branding, Branding Process Model, Place Branding, Public Diplomacy, Strong and Equal Alliance, The US-ROK alliance

* This paper is an abridged version of M.A. Thesis, Feb 2010, at Graduate School of International Studies, Korea University.
** M.A. Candidate, Graduate School of International Studies, Korea University, Anam-dong, Sungbuk-Ku, Seoul, Korea; E-mail: msgmelater82@gmail.com
I. Introduction

The events of 9/11 and the last two liberal administrations in Korea set in motion change in the relationship and structure of the US-ROK alliance. The Bush administration faced tough challenges in persuading the Kim-Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun administrations to act cohesively through the US-ROK alliance with the United States in their approach towards the Democratic People’s of Republic of Korea (hereinafter referred to interchangeably as DPRK and North Korea) and the future roles of the US-ROK alliance and United States Forces in Korea (USFK). Nevertheless, deterioration of the US and Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) relationship did not end at the governmental level, its fears and concerns over the US-ROK alliance quickly spilled over to the public sphere. These fears and concerns exacerbated in late 2002, when anti-American sentiment reached its peak in South Korea. In summary, the relationship at all levels had been strained and deteriorated.

On the other hand, since Lee Myung-bak took the presidency of South Korea, an air of optimism has been brewing between the US and South Korea. The 2008 joint statement between President Bush and President Lee, and President Obama’s reaffirmation of the 2008 joint statement during his recent visit to Korea illustrates strong cohesive action between the two leaderships to strengthen the US-ROK alliance. Recent polling shows that over 70% of the Korean public is very hopeful and favorable of newly elected President Obama (Pew Research Center, 2009). However, public support regarding the US-ROK alliance remained its lowest point, unaffected by Obama’s popularity.

These issues point out that another level of international relationship, state to foreign public, existed in the US-ROK alliance. In recent years, serious discords over how to approach North Korea threatened to deteriorate the foundation of alliance cooperation. Along with the leadership disagreements, public opinion of the United States plummeted into an all time low. Public opinion has been a very important aspect of the foreign policy making in the United States for a very long time, and today public opinion is also becoming more important in the foreign policy making of South Korea. Chicago Council on Foreign Relation’s polling on the “influence of people and groups on foreign policy,” evidently shows that both the Korean and American public perceive that the public opinion of domestic and foreign audiences is having a great level of influence on foreign policy making (Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004). Therefore, public opinions of both nations remain as the challenge for maintaining and strengthening the US-ROK alliance.

Under such context, this paper examines how to reinvigorate the public support of both the American and Korean public regarding the US-ROK alliance. More specifically, the objective of this paper is to discover the way to increase the public awareness and public support of the US-ROK alliance through the concept of public diplomacy and place branding. However, the concept of place branding is too holistic in its approach to be used in this paper; therefore, this paper explores the concept of branding, which can be utilized in a narrower scope. This paper would like to construct a marketing brand, “strong and equal alliance,” which is powerful enough to communicate and symbolize the importance of the US-ROK alliance to American and South Korean publics. Also an in-depth analysis of the American and South Korean publics will provide an understanding
of the current status, which is necessary for developing a scenario to increase the public support regarding the Alliance. Under such context, the intentions of this paper are threefold: to introduce the new concept of branding, “strong and equal alliance,” into the field of international relations for the sake of the US-ROK alliance; to construct a branding process model which supports the concept of branding to be smoothly incorporated into the field of international relations; and to provide an alternative scenario based on the concept of branding to enhance the public awareness and support of the US-ROK alliance.

II. Literature Review

In this section, public diplomacy, place branding will be conceptualized and compared to allow these concepts to be fully incorporated into international relations, specifically to the US-ROK relations. Nevertheless, many scholars have tackled the topic of the US-ROK alliance, but few in terms of public attitude and marketing theory. Place branding is a fairly new concept in the field of international relations which constructs an image of a city, region or nation to make it more attractive to domestic and foreign audiences (Sonya and Jennifer, 2008). However, the concept of place branding is too broad and holistic; therefore, the current paper will only extract the concept of branding to apply to the US-ROK alliance.

1. Concept of Public Diplomacy

Following 9/11, the field of public diplomacy once again found its place in US foreign policy. However, the new public diplomacy differentiated itself from traditional diplomacy by dealing not only with governments but also directly linking itself with a foreign audience. According to the definition of United States Information Agency (USIA),1 “Public diplomacy seeks to promote the national interest and the national security of the United States through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics and broadening dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad” (Public Diplomacy Alumni Association). Simply put, public diplomacy is the two way communication between the policy makers and the foreign public. In recent years, many scholars have studied this communication, but few in terms of the communication with the Korean public.

One of the studies which set the precedent of the US public diplomacy program towards the ROK was researched by RAND’s Center for Asia Pacific Policy (CAPP). This study conducted a qualitative analysis of the historical context of the Korean public’s attitude towards the United States and comes to a conclusion that today the Korean public’s attitude towards the US has become ambivalent. It is deeply concerned that as a new generation of better educated Koreans replaces the current mainstream of the older

---

1 United States Information Agency (USIA) was charged with carrying out American’s public diplomacy, or advancing American foreign policy to foreign audience. After the Cold War, USIA was forced to integrate into the State Department in mid-1990s.
generation of Koreans, the US can expect further erosion in attitudes toward the United States. It is strongly recommended that the US government should develop a public diplomacy strategy for South Korea (RAND, 2004).

Another influential study on the public attitude of both American and Korean publics in terms of the US-ROK alliance was co-conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR) and the East Asia Institute (EAI) in 2004. This study of CCFR/EAI seeks to contribute to resolving the challenges which face the US-ROK alliance by providing in-depth analyses of both American and South Korean public attitudes after 9/11 (Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004). The report illustrates that both the attitudes of American and Korean publics were in favor of international commitment; nevertheless, the American and Korean publics did not agreed upon the attitude towards the DPRK and its nuclear program. This raises concerns about the motivation of the US-ROK alliance which is based on countering the DPRK.

2. Concept of Place Branding

Place branding originated from marketing but is “standing at the intersection of several other well-established fields such as public policy, trade and tourism promotion, economic development, and international relations” (Simon, Editor’s foreword to the first issue, 2004). Peter Van Ham, leading scholar in place branding, defines place branding as “an effort to use strategies developed in the commercial sector to manage, if not necessarily wield, the soft power of a geographical location” (2008: 127). However, being a new concept its definition and its modeling is inconsistent throughout the academia.

One method to define place branding in the field of the international relations is to make a comparison with a corporate brand. Similar to a corporate brand, image and reputation of brand are built on factors such as trust and customer satisfaction (Ham, 2008). Without these two factors, image or reputation will cease to exist in a very short period of time. As creator of place branding, Simon Anholt, expressed that “trust formed by many satisfied customers creates a cloud of trustworthiness which eventually surrounds a product, and this cloud is a fundamental characteristic of strong brands” (2008: 97). In short, brand value performs the vital function of bridging the trust gap faced by customers until they too have direct experience of the product or service. Corporate branding is part of the business identity which assists the audience to clearly identify with a company and encourage them to buy its products and services. Place branding acts in a similar way, branding has become essential to create value in the relationship between territorial entities and individuals (Peter van Ham, 2008: 128). In the field of international relations, the question is whether place branding can attract a foreign audience to buy into the service of brand states, that is, their foreign policy (Ham, 2008: 128).

3. Relationship Between the PD and PB

The concept of public diplomacy and place branding overlaps in many dimensions especially that both concepts work to sell policies, values, and cultures to foreign audiences
to improve the image and reputation of the nation. These two concepts can be differentiated by their conceptual approach towards achieving their objective. Jan Melissen defined public diplomacy as a practice which is initiated by a practitioner, whereas “nation branding is about the mobilization of all of a nation’s forces that can contribute to the promotion of its image abroad” (2005: 19). The idea of this nation branding can be better explained by Simon Anholt’s the national brand hexagon (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: The National Brand Hexagon**

The perception of Simon Anholt on public diplomacy and nation branding was that public diplomacy was the subset of nation branding (2006: 271). Based on this model of the national brand hexagon (Figure 1), government policy to foreign audiences (public diplomacy) is simply one variable of the ‘hexagon’ of nation brand. It is believed that nation branding brands the nation as a whole to present and represent itself to foreign audiences, whereas public diplomacy appears to represent the concentrated area of interest, especially the foreign policy of one’s government to the foreign audiences (Simon, 2005: 118). However, Anholt expressed that this does not signify that the concept of public diplomacy is less significant than nation branding itself. What differentiates public diplomacy with nation branding is that the first concern of public diplomacy is not aimed at the holistic reputation and image building but to promote and maintain smooth international relationships (Jan, 2005).

The holistic approach of nation branding makes credibility and trust building very difficult to achieve in the short term, but also in the long term since nation branding deals with a very large scope of area, while incorporating many variables as illustrated on the national brand hexagon. However, public diplomacy deals with a narrower scope of area, which makes it a lot easier for credibility and trust building with foreign audiences. The strength of public diplomacy is that it recognizes its limitations and it makes positive foreign policy making more achievable than nation branding (Jan, 2005). Therefore it would be much more feasible to build the public support for the US-ROK alliance from the perspective of public diplomacy rather than nation branding. Thus, this

---

2 Source: Anholt Simon, 2005: 118.
paper will only take on the branding concept of nation branding and apply it to the US-ROK alliance under the light of public diplomacy.

III. Theorizing the Framework of Branding

1. Framework of Branding

In recent years, the concept of brand has successfully positioned itself in the field of marketing. Brand or branding is unfamiliar in the field of international relations; the concept of brand originated from utilizing symbols. Based on the leading scholar of branding, a brand is defined as “a distinguished name and/or symbol intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers … A brand thus signals to the customer the source of the product, and protects both the customer and the producer from competitors” (David, 1991: 7). Simply put, brand is a promise, reputation and expectation of satisfaction that resides in each customer’s mind about the product or company. Simon Anholt describes that brand performs the vital function of “bridging the trust gap faced by first-time purchasers until they too have direct experience with the product” (2008: 97).

First time purchasers fall in love with brands such as Apple, Google, and etc. They trust the brand value, develop strong loyalties to a brand, buy them, and believe in their superiority over generics. For example iPhone from Apple which was launched in South Korea in recent weeks sold over 100,000 phones in 10 days (Lee, 2009). This is an incredible number considering the normal total monthly sales of cell phones in Korea are only about 60,000. This is even a more remarkable success given that iPhone never advertised in Korea. This can be clearly seen as the result of brand power. The brand is the most important factor of marketing activities which result in increased awareness and loyalty. The brand power remains elusive and mysterious such that it can trigger recall and arouse emotions in customers.

Due to these effects, it is widely shared knowledge by branding experts (e.g. Aaker, Anholt, Healey), that branding can do several useful things, all of which facilitate to ensure the success of the product, service or policy. As aforementioned, branding results in increased awareness and loyalty. Branding can definitely reinforce a good reputation. During the 2008 presidential election, we saw President Obama branding himself with a motto “Change We Can Believe In,” which greatly reinforced his reputation as young leader seeking for change. Brand also encourages loyalty. For example, you notice many tourists heading for McDonald’s despite all the excellent local eateries (David, 1991). Tourists are naturally responding to the known when surrounded by unknown. Branding reinforces brand loyalty through the consistent and recognizable image everywhere the customer is likely to encounter them. Branding also conveys a perception of greater worth to the customers. It also provides the customers with a sense of affirmation and entry into a community of shared values.3

A fully developed brand is a very powerful tool to communicate with customers. A brand would increase the possibility that advertising campaigns, brochures, and promotional materials could be all done under the brand logo or slogan. This helps to build the awareness of the brand. Although a brand logo and slogan can be created overnight; however, its influence to communicate with customers is meager at best. Brand awareness is the ability of the public to recognize the slogan or policy (David, 1991: 56-77). Brand recognition is the first step in opening the communication channel with the customers, in this case the American and Korean public. For example, NATO uses its blue flag with white star to represent NATO to the audience; however, the US-ROK alliance lacks any symbol or lacks “an anchor,” a marketing term, to which other associations can be attached. David Aaker defined association as anything linked in memory to a brand (1991: 109). For example, Apple could be linked to the products of Macintosh, iPod, or characters such as Steve Jobs, and the logo of Apple. These associations help customers to make decisions to purchase brand items or to stay as loyal customers to a brand. These associations can serve to summarize the facts that otherwise would be very difficult for the customers to process or understand by themselves and also represent the compact information, which the public can easily consume and assist them to increase the awareness or understanding of the brand (David, 1991: 110-115). In other words, brand is like a complete story, too big for an individual to process all at once, but associations are like segments of the complete story which can be processed by an individual without much difficulty. And since associations can influence the interpretation of brand, all of these associations can affect the brand either in positive or a negative manner. Therefore, managing and utilizing the associations attached to the brand is important.

Every brand requires its experience and associations to be communicated to its customers through a story. Customers love a great touching story, and the best storytellers or corporations have an uncanny ability to create an emotional bond with their audience or customers through a brand. “The experience of enjoying a good story is a powerful one that pulls in its audience and immerses,” them so that they feel as if they are actually living the story and become loyal to the characters or products (Matthew, 2008: 28). Branding is focused on the satisfaction which customers experience from using a service or product. This is because that experience is the best way to appreciate a product or service; the experience is usually the most memorable aspect of each thing a customer purchases (Matthew, 2008). This is the way to build the credibility of a brand with its customer. Corporations must satisfy their customers in regards to both product and service to maintain a customer’s loyalty towards the brand. As mentioned before recognition alone won’t succeed; it must be accompanied by enough publicity and advertisement to arouse demand for the brand.

However, a brand requires serious attention in the development process. That is why the brand development process is significantly important to a long lasting brand. The brand development process in this paper is divided into three phases for easier understanding. The first phase of branding requires assiduous research on the present condition of the market, and current products and services. This process involves learning what has gone on before, and why it has or has not succeeded. This process also provides the insights the client was lacking and also provides the feedbacks
regarding the timing of launching a brand or to re-brand. In the first phase of branding or re-branding, the level of brand loyalty is measured to make a decision to either revitalize or to launch a new brand. However, revitalizing or re-branding is much easier to launch since the existing brand loyalty can lower the risk of failing. Under such context, the level of brand loyalty can provide valuable data that deals with the timing of brand launch.

The second phase is about managing the associations, in terms of building the trust and credibility with customers after the launching of the brand. This process involves synthesizing all the information, research, and coming up with a strategy about how the brand can transcend its specific policy. As aforementioned, an anchor is set and provides some kind of recognition to the brand; therefore, the next step is to proceed with providing the brand with a sense of familiarity. David Aaker discovered that “in the absence of motivation to engage in attribute evaluation, familiarity may be enough” to purchase the product (1991: 65). Of course name recognition is not going to be enough to maintain the brand; brand can only reach its full potential whenever it fulfills the satisfaction of its customers through substance and commitment.

Finally, the last phase is to maintain and to expand the credibility and trust which this brand gained through two way communication with the customers. This final process can be seen as customer service to maintain its loyal customers. The branding procedures for effective brand development tend to be circular, due to the ongoing communication between producer and customer. In other words, the first and second phase must be a continuum, since each rotation of phases should result in more brand insights (Matthew, 2008: 16). This will continue to maximize the brand value and fulfills customer expectations more fully.

2. Model Building-Integration of Branding and International Relations

In this next section a generic model is built to explain the current trend of international relations and aid the integration process of branding into the field of international relations and policy making. The branding process model was not created to analyze; however, this model was specifically built to ease the incorporation of the concept of branding into the field of international relations. This model is grounded in the capacities of real-world decision-makers or human actors to make this model more practical in the real world. As a result of model building, this paper learned that communication complexity in current international relations between the policy practitioner, and domestic and foreign audiences can be simplified by building a brand. However, further research regarding this model is needed, especially case studies, to prove the assumption this paper is currently using as its premise. Nevertheless, utilizing this model, this paper is able to recommend the alternative scenario to reinvigorate public support for the US-ROK alliance.

3. Putnam’s Two Level Bargaining Games

Implementing foreign policy has been a battle between two different interests: the interests of domestic politics and the international interests of the state. Robert D.
Putnam’s two-level bargaining games was formulated to explain the aforementioned negotiating conflict which a practitioner of foreign policy must cope with for successful implementation of its policy. According to the scholars (e.g. Holsti, Hagan, Putnam, and Evans), two-level bargaining provides an inclusive overview of the relationship between domestic political dynamics and foreign policy. In Putnam’s model, a practitioner seeks to make agreements on international interests (Level 1) that will then be ratified by domestic constituencies (Level 2). A practitioner must devise win-sets for both level 1 and level 2 interests (Putnam Robert, 1988). Most of the current studies only deal with the two level relationship between the US and ROK. However, the current model is insufficient to do an in-depth analysis on an alliance that is highly affected by the other variables such as foreign public opinion.

Figure 2: Putnam’s Two Level Bargaining Games

4. Putnam’s Two Level Bargaining Games + Level 3 Negotiation

In addition to the Level 1 and Level 2 negotiation of Putnam’s two level bargaining games, current trends of globalization and international environment requires practitioners of foreign policy to be concerned about one more dimension, winning the hearts and minds of foreign audiences. This paper will name this dimension Level 3 or public diplomacy from this point. (Figure 3) can be seen as the international environment of today. In the aftermath of the events of 9/11, numerous ministries of foreign affairs have started to develop their own public diplomacy policy. A much quoted 2002 government report by the German foreign ministry clearly illustrated the significance of public diplomacy in international relations by stating that “in Europe public diplomacy is viewed as the number one priority over the whole spectrum of issues” (Jan, 2005: 8).

In the case of the US-ROK alliance during the Cold War, public diplomacy was dominated by the external threat of DPRK and communism. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the declining threat perception of the DPRK shifted the spotlight

---

5 From this point on, N1 and N2 will be replaced by the US and ROK to apply the Level 1, 2 and 3 relationship between the US and ROK to this generic model.
of public diplomacy towards the more diversely opinionated Korean public. This is the current environment of international order that makes up the level 3 negotiation illustrated in (Figure 3). The mounting associations with public diplomacy can be seen as the effect of the broader process of change in diplomatic practices throughout the world, which calls for transparency and global collaboration.

5. Level 3 Negotiation and Policy Branding

As aforementioned, this public diplomacy or level 3 negotiations became recognized as a part of the changing fabric of international relations strengthening the model for the US-ROK alliance. As shown in (Figure 4), the concept of branding is brought into the level 3 negotiation as a tool to communicate with the public. In the case of the US-ROK alliance, branding will open up various channels that deal with the diverse opinions of the Korean public. At this point, the branding development process is started for the US-ROK alliance within the realm of international relations. This model tries to move away from the complexity of (Figure 3) to a more simplified form of communicating in all fronts of negotiation. Usually public diplomacy does not communicate with the domestic audience, it is commonly shared as a different dimension known as public relations; however, this model assumes that both domestic and foreign audiences can be communicated through a single channel of branding. However, this paper will not advance its research regarding this result, since it’s not directly related to the question this paper is currently addressing.
In the world of commerce, sometimes two corporations merge or draw closer together to create a joint-venture to hedge the risk factors such as the operation cost and customer loyalty. Creating a brand based upon the coherence of level 1 negotiations can be seen in the same light as reducing the risk factors. In case of the level 1 negotiations, reducing the risk factor is like widening the win-set of both nations. This paper is currently taking the stance that the leaderships of both the US and ROK are aligned on the future of the US-ROK alliance. Under such context, this paper assumes that if the two governments have agreed upon branding the US-ROK alliance, an absolute support from both governments, will play a catalyst role in the branding process as shown in (Figure 5). Even though branding is something that can be done by one nation only; it can be followed that branding can become much easier when coherence actually exists between the two nations. This bilateral cooperation makes it apparent that foreign policy practitioners can focus his/her efforts to negotiate with their domestic and foreign audiences.

As the two nations co-brand the US-ROK alliance, foreign policy practitioners can turn and give their full attentions to convincing the domestic and foreign constituencies about the significance of the US-ROK alliance. However, to make this step even easier, policy practitioners must build credibility and trust with their domestic constituencies through the associations attached to the US-ROK alliance. As shown in (Figure 5) the complexity of the branding process regarding the input of both nations has been reduced through the coherence in level one negotiation.

Figure 5: Coherence in Level 1 Negotiation

NATO is a good example of how coherence in level one negotiation helped to rebrand or brand the strategic policy in the aftermath of the Cold War. In the case of the US-ROK alliance, both governments in recent years felt that restructuring the alliance was necessary to meet the new challenges in the aftermath of the Cold War. The 2008 joint statement has agreed to transform the US-ROK alliance into an equal partnership from the prior client-patron relationship.

Finally, whenever branding becomes complete and reaches its full potential, it would look something like (Figure 6). In this the branding process model reaches its full potential which allows level 2 negotiations to become unnecessary or secondary to the brand since the dialogue with the domestic and foreign constituencies will be done through the brand. Even though the process of branding is difficult, when it is achieved as illustrated in (Figure 6), both domestic and foreign audiences can be communicated to through the single channel of the brand. It makes it easier to communicate with the
both American and Korean publics.

**Figure 6: Complete Version of Branding Process Model**

![Branding Process Model](image)

**IV. Branding the US-ROK Alliance**

For the past sixty years, the US-ROK alliance along with the US-Japan Alliance structured in East Asia has served as the pillar for regional peace and stability. During the Cold War and today, the US-ROK alliance plays an important role as the frontier of defense against the expansion of communism and North Korea, despite changing threat perceptions in both the US and ROK. In recent years, disagreements between the leaders of the US and ROK have died away, and it has been replaced with the coherence of the desire for a strong and equal alliance. However, public support for the US-ROK alliance has been constant or even has decreased based on various negative issues important to the younger Korean public.

As shown throughout the theorizing section and modelling, this paper adopts a marketing concept of branding to ease the communication problems which policy practitioners are currently facing with both American and South Korean publics. Branding the US-ROK alliance actually means to brand a policy which utilizes the brand power to communicate the policy to both American and South Korean publics. Currently, the US and Korean policy practitioners are facing three levels of communication regarding the US-ROK alliance. This paper assumes that with three levels of communication to deal with, a policy practitioner will have a very hard time communicating the transformation and restructuring of the US-ROK alliance to the public effectively and positively. Therefore, this paper explores the alternative scenario to reinvigorate the public support for the alliance through the concept of branding. The concept of branding with the assistance of the branding process model will open up various channels of communication to promote the restructuring of the US-ROK alliance to the American and Korean publics. Branding definitely provides an important instrument for both governments to positively shape these complex dynamics of the South Korean and American publics through improved communication, thus working towards addressing the US-ROK alliance as seen in following sub-chapters.

**1. The Era of the Cold War: Time of Cohesiveness**

Today, the US-ROK alliance along with the US-Japan alliance is considered as
one of the United States’ strategic pillars of East Asia. The US-ROK alliance came in existence after the Korean War in 1950. Though geographically distant from the United States, the outbreak of the war on the Korean peninsula in 1950 represented a test for the United States and its allies to preserve democracy and liberal values against the communist expansion. The signing of the armistice ended the Korean War in a stalemate in 1953. Strategist Thomas C. Schelling concluded: “We lost over 30,000 dead … to save a face … and it was undoubtedly worth it” (1966: 124).

In the aftermath of the Korean War, in 1954, the United States and South Korea signed the U.S. and R.O.K Mutual Security Agreement, in which they agreed to defend each other in the event of external aggression. Comparable to the creation of NATO, the US-ROK alliance was built upon the war to preserve democracy and liberal values of South Korea. Sacrifice made by the US troops in the Korean War lasted as a very grateful image to those who experienced the Korean War. Images of the US-ROK alliance were portrayed as “hyulmeng” or blood alliance, and were embedded into the hearts and minds of the South Korean public for a very long time. Also intended or unintended, the US-ROK alliance, naturally like NATO, created the brand image, representing the conflict against the communist bloc, unconscious.

The brand image against the communist bloc for the US-ROK alliance was strengthened in the 1960s. The US and South Korea fought side by side in the Vietnam War against the expansion of communism. It was not NATO or Japan but ROK that made up the largest single contribution of foreign troops, other than the United States, in the war against the communism in Vietnam. The relationship of the US-ROK alliance demonstrated that it is more reciprocal and mutual, if not equal, than any other US alliance during the Cold War era. In 1978, the US and ROK created the Combined Forces Command (CFC) to defend South Korea and to deter DPRK. In support of commitment to CFC, the United States maintains about 37,000 military service personnel in South Korea (US Department of State, 1997). In result of the shared external threat of communism and DPRK, the US-ROK alliance was strengthened and recognized as the final frontier against the communism.

It was in the 1980s that anti-Americanism began to surface as a social phenomenon in South Korea (William, 2005: 294-97). However, the mainstream of the Korean public, which was exposed to the Korean War, stood firm behind the US-ROK alliance throughout the Cold War. During the 1950s to late 1980s, the United States and South Korea showed a strong sense of cohesiveness as an allied state and enjoyed a strong bilateral alliance. The strong alliance during the Cold War era led to the strong brand power of the US-ROK alliance.

2. The post-Cold War era: Time of Miscommunication and Mistrust

The 1990s to early 2000s was the time of miscommunications and mistrust for the US-ROK alliance. The sudden collapse of the Soviet Union brought many dilemmas to NATO, especially the question of its existence. One of the options was to disband the alliance altogether, which lost its original intention of collective defense against the external threat of the Soviet Union. NATO continued to exist because it was able to
adopt and restructure its raison d’être to appeal to its people that NATO is still needed for the security of Europe (Jolyon, 2009). Today, NATO continues to fly under the flag of the blue field and white star; however, since 9/11, NATO once again restructured its raison d’être to face global crises (Giles, 2009).

The abrupt end of the Cold War, just like NATO, brought many challenges and questions to the existence of the US-ROK alliance. The existential threat for the ROK has diminished as ROK increased military and economic capability and overwhelmed DPRK following the loss of the DPRK’s main sponsor, the Soviet Union. What is disconcerting is that both the American and Korean publics, for different reasons, reduced their threat perception of DPRK. However, unlike NATO, the US-ROK alliance failed to rebrand its alliance to meet the new strategic environment after the collapse of the Soviet Union. And now, in this new strategic environment and declining public support, it is not that clear as to where the US-ROK alliance currently stands. During the Cold War, all of the associations attached to the US-ROK alliance were effortlessly communicated to both the American and Korean publics, under the context of the shared threat of communism and DPRK brand ensuring the strong alliance.

However, over the two liberal administrations of Korea, Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun, the relationship between Washington and Seoul quickly deteriorated as South Korea favored “sunshine policy” towards North Korea (Lee, 2005). The Bush administration was very skeptical about “sunshine policy,” which it felt was appeasing North Korea (Morton and James, 2003: 15). During these two liberal administrations in South Korea, the public opinion was that the US-ROK alliance was no longer the cornerstone of South Korean security, but was, rather, an obstacle to inter-Korean reconciliation.

In the aftermath of two liberal administrations and the replacement of traditional public opinions by the younger generation, who did not directly experience the Korean War, new diverse opinions brought serious obstacles to the US-ROK alliance (Mitchell, 2009). The more opinionated South Korean public started to protest against the United States for diverse reasons. Various reasons are the inequity of the Status of Force Agreement (SOFA), camp town politics near the U.S. military bases in Korea, the U.S. troops alleged Nogeun-ri massacre during the Korean War, Maehyang-ri bombing range, USFK environmental issues, President Bush’s “axis of evil” speech, the deaths of Misun and Hyosun by a US armored vehicle, and most recently the importation of US beef inspired and fueled anti-American sentiment in Korea. As shown above, anti-American sentiments in South Korea are very complex to be simplified down to one problem but driven by many different issues (Kim, 2007: 47). Some of the issues portrayed above are directly related to damaging the image and reputation of the US-ROK alliance.

The fear of abandonment was also an issue in South Korea. During the last two administrations of South Korea, there has been an ever-present fear that Washington will sacrifice Seoul’s interests for its own (Kim, 2007: 45). A statement written by the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice did not help to ease the fears of many South Koreans. In Foreign Affairs June/July 2008, the US Secretary of State Condoleezza

---

6 For clarification, public can be refer to individual, mass of people, NGOs, and any other groups other than government.
Rice called South Korea a “global partner” while calling Japan, Australia, and even key states in Southeast Asia “allies” of the United States in the East Asia region (Condoleezza, 2008). Chosun-ilbo, a South Korean newspaper, suggested that while Rice views Japan and Australia as allies, she regards South Korea as “merely” a partner in U.S. national security matters. Chosun-ilbo also reported that the shift is partly attributable to the decline of U.S. trust in South Korea under the Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun administrations. “The U.S. believes that Japan and Australia will maintain alliance with the U.S. without taking advantage of anti-U.S. public sentiment, no matter which regime takes power,” says a source in Washington (Chosun-ilbo, 2008).

On the other hand, in the US, those who experienced Korea through the Korean War and the Vietnam War are also diminishing in the mainstream of the American public. Younger generations of Americans are just ignorant about the US-ROK alliance, what is even more disconcerting are that many Americans do not recognize the relevancy of maintaining the US troops in the Republic of Korea. According to pew research, most Americans believe that North Korea is not a great threat to the United States anymore. North Korea, which constantly held two digit percentages on countries representing the “greatest danger” to the US, plummeted to 6% (The Pew Research Center For The People and The Press, 2008).

This era was a time of turmoil for the US-ROK alliance without clear aims or directions. During the Cold War, all of the associations attached to the US-ROK alliance were effortlessly communicated to both American and South Korean public anchored by the shared brand of the threat of communism. However, during the post-Cold War era the US-ROK alliance failed to create a similar coherency that once existed under the shared external threat and branding. In the end, we can evaluate that miscommunication and mistrust between the two countries occurred because the alliance failed to share a coherent goal, aim, direction and brand image. The US-ROK alliance needs to rebrand its alliance to be more suitable and compatible with the current strategic environment and secure its existence in the future.

3. Beyond Korean Peninsula: Failure of top-down Transformation Approach

Since the beginning of the Lee Myung-bak administration, the mood of the US and ROK relationship had a turnaround towards optimism. The US-ROK alliance, once focused primarily on security issues, now seeks to transform into a more comprehensive and future-oriented relationship by expanding its cooperation. Over the last sixty years, the two nations have developed a close security collaboration based on the shared values of liberal democracy and market economy. The restructuring or re-branding the US-ROK alliance has been long overdue, as aforementioned in the subchapter of the post Cold War era. In the 2008 Korea-US summit, President Bush and President Lee under the joint statement agreed to move beyond the current alliance structure.

They agree to move forward with developing the alliance into a strategic and future-oriented structure to better addressed the changes in the security environment and future needs in the 21st Century. They also agreed that the US-ROK alliance
needs to be broadened and deepened to cover not only security cooperation, but move towards the comprehensive alliance which includes the political, economic, social, and cultural cooperation. They further agreed to develop the alliance in a way that will also contribute to peace and prosperity at the regional and global level (Office of Press Secretary, 2008).

Circumstances of the Korean Peninsula have changed greatly since the end of the Korean War. The scope of mutual interests portrayed by the US-ROK alliance has greatly expanded as South Korea increased its capabilities to contribute beyond the Korean Peninsula. President Obama, during his recent visit to Korea, re-affirms the joint statement signed by President Lee and President Bush in 2008. President Obama and President Lee will definitely have the opportunity over the next few years to broaden the foundation of the US-ROK alliance beyond the Korean Peninsula security. Restructuring the US-ROK alliance has already begun and it is currently in progress.

However, unlike NATO’s drastic re-structuring or re-branding of its original intentions, the US-ROK alliance re-structuring is still based on its original intentions of protecting the Korean Peninsula. According to the 2009 CSIS report on “pursuing a comprehensive vision for the US-ROK alliance,” however, as shown below, the objectives based on mutual needs does not change much other than South Korea playing a more active role in international affairs through the US-ROK alliance. The major objectives of the US-ROK alliance after the full restructuring looks like those shown below (Snyder Scott, 2009):

1. Safeguard regional stability, economic prosperity and energy security through deterring regional aggression through mutual defense commitment
2. Provide a basis for US engagement in NE Asian affairs, which reinforces the regional stability
3. Provide means and enhance the US ability to pursue US regional and global interests
4. Enhance security in the Korean Peninsula and enhance South Korea’s position internationally
5. Hedge against the possibility that China’s rise is not peaceful

Restructuring the alliance is already occurring at a fast pace, during the 2008 41st US-ROK Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) the transition date of wartime operational control (OPCON) was reconfirmed (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense 2009). The US-ROK alliance is making progress also on the US Forces Korea (USFK) relocating its base from Yongsan, and the upgrade of the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) status to assist R.O.K. to prepare for the 2012 warfare OPCON transition. The Lee administration also voluntarily promised the US government more support in Afghanistan in coming months.

With both governments working closely together in a cohesive manner; however, the problem is that this coherency regarding the future orientation of the US-ROK alliance is not being communicated efficiently to the public of both nations. At the government level, the US-ROK alliance has agreed to re-structure to make this alliance more suitable for the 21st Century. However, policy makers are struggling to increase
the awareness and understanding of the re-structuring of the US-ROK alliance to the American and Korean publics. The usefulness of this alliance can cease to exist if it loses the support of both American and Korean publics. Current communication channels from the policy makers to the public cannot withstand the rapid transformation of the US-ROK alliance (Lee, 2009).

All of those restructuring related issues are the association of the US-ROK alliance which can ease the communication channel between the policy makers and public. At this moment, all of the associations of the US-ROK alliance, at the government level, are anchored by the new direction agreed upon by both the US and ROK. It was expected, more accurately to say hoped, that the agreement of the two governments regarding the future direction of the US-ROK alliance could have trickled down to the public sphere. However, the public support of the US-ROK alliance has been constant so far or has even declined. The top-down transformation approach by the US and Korean governments failed to reach its public because policy makers wanted to communicate too much information in a very short period of time. Another reason based on the concept of branding is that policy makers failed to notice that the coherent aim negotiated in level 1 would not spillover into the sphere of the public with only a limited channel of communication which lacks a brand which anchors the associations attached to the US-ROK alliance. Under such a context, creating a brand will definitely assist to open up more fronts to communicate with the public of both nations. It will certainly increase the awareness of the public to stay alert with the fast transforming alliance. The critics of the US-ROK alliance see the deterioration of the US-ROK alliance as the result of the in-coherency between the leaderships of the US and ROK; however, this section illustrated that in spite of coherence between the US and R.O.K in level one negotiations, without a anchoring brand the governmental goals do not trickle down to the American and South Korean publics.

4. Branding the “Strong and Equal Alliance”

There is no doubt about the importance of the US-ROK alliance to both the US and Korean leaders. As aforementioned, restructuring the US-ROK alliance is already under progress but greatly lacking in communicating its reasoning and its status to both the American and South Korean publics. Thus, branding the US-ROK alliance will definitely ease the communication problems this alliance is currently facing.

The beginning process is to create brand recognition, which is the first step in opening the communication channel with the customers, in this case, the American and South Korean publics. NATO uses its blue flag with white star to represent and symbolize NATO; however, the US-ROK alliance lacks any symbol or anchor to which its associations can be attached. Thus the first thing is to create an anchor, to combine all of the issues regarding the US-ROK alliance, which led to creating a policy, and slogan or motto, “strong and equal alliance.” This brand identity can be easily agreed upon since it is based on the perspective of the United States and ROK which was agreed upon in the 2008 joint statement.

The perspective of the United States is that it would like ROK to play a more equal role within the US-ROK alliance such as equalizing the burden sharing of USFK.
and to play a heavier role in maintaining the regional stability. President Lee’s vision of a “global Korea” definitely opens new possibilities for alliance cooperation. President Lee emphasizes on the prospect of a more active Korean participation in peacekeeping, disaster relief, crisis management and overseas development assistance (Balbina, 2009). As both nations seek to strengthen the alliance and move towards equal partnership; therefore, this paper creates a policy and slogan or motto: “strong and equal alliance.”

The “strong and equal alliance” will play the brand anchor role as shown in (Figure 7) of the US-ROK alliance to which other associations can be attached. These associations can serve to summarize the facts and information that otherwise would be difficult for the public to process and create compact information of the US-ROK alliance and their issues, which the public can easily consume (David, 1991: 110-115). These associations assist the public to increase the awareness or understanding of the “strong and equal alliance.” A link to the “strong and equal alliance” will be stronger when it is based on many experiences or exposures to communications with the public (David, 1991). And since associations can influence the interpretation of brand, all of these associations can either affect the “strong and equal alliance” in a positive or negative manner.

Since, an anchor is set and provides recognition to the “strong and equal alliance,” we must then proceed with providing the brand with a sense of familiarity. David Aaker discovered that “in the absence of motivation to engage in attribute evaluation, familiarity may be enough” to purchase the product (1991: 65). Of course slogan and motto recognition is not going to be enough for maintaining or strengthening the US-ROK alliance; “strong and equal alliance” can only reach its full potential whenever it fulfills the satisfaction of its public through substance and commitment. “Strong and equal alliance” must satisfy the public in regards to its policy to maintain the public’s loyalty toward the US-ROK alliance.

Figure 7: Strong and Equal Alliance’s Association

7 This association drawing of strong and equal alliance gained its motif from “The McDonald’s Association,” of David Aaker. The original drawing can be found: Aaker, David A. Managing Brand Equity New York: The Free Press, 1991: 64.
This relates to the aforementioned “Every brand needs to tell a story.” In the case of the “strong and equal alliance,” how policy makers resolve the associations, problems and challenges of the US-ROK alliance, will be either positive or negative story telling. Also the “strong and equal alliance” is focused on the satisfaction from public experience regarding the associations. This is because experience is the best way to appreciate something; the experience is usually the most memorable aspect of each thing the public buys into (Matthew, 2008). You must satisfy your public in regards to their interests to maintain the public’s loyalty toward the US-ROK alliance.

The concept of branding will restore the credibility of the US-ROK alliance which the public has lost since the end of the Cold War. Branding not only reinforces a good reputation through emotion and trust, but it also encourages public loyalty towards the alliance. Branding also assures quality while conveying a perception of greater worth to both the American and South Korean publics. It also provides the public with a sense of affirmation and entry into the community of shared values.

V. Three Phases of Branding

The complete brand is a very influential tool to communicate with the public; however, a complete brand is something that cannot be shaped overnight. That is why a brand development process is significant to ‘timeless’ brands. The brand development process in this paper is divided into three phases for easier understanding. This paper only fully incorporates the analysis of the first phase of branding into the US-ROK alliance. The second and third phases are more like implication sections to recommend how to successfully proceed with the next two phases of branding the US-ROK alliance. Under such a context, this section lays out the foundation to successfully brand the US-ROK alliance.

The first phase of branding the US-ROK alliance requires attentive research on the present conditions of the US-ROK alliance and an in-depth analysis of the American and South Korean publics. This process involves learning what has happened before, and why it has or has not succeeded. In other words, to resolve the problems or make associations more attractable to the public, we must understand the perception which resides in the minds of the American and South Korean publics. Therefore, in-depth analysis of American and South Korean publics’ attitude is provided to successfully share the insight which was lacking in regards to the launch of the “strong and equal alliance.” Under such a context, the level of brand loyalty can provide valuable data that deals with the timing of branding the US-ROK alliance.

The second phase is about building the trust and credibility with the American and Korean publics after launching the “strong and equal alliance.” This process involves synthesizing all the information, research, and coming up with a strategy about how the “strong and equal alliance” can transcend its specific policy. The second phase assists the “strong and equal alliance” to increase the awareness of the public through the satisfaction which the public receives from its experiences of the US-ROK alliance.

Finally, the last phase is to maintain and to expand the credibility and trust which
the ‘strong and equal alliance’ gained through the communication with the public. This final process can be seen as customer service to maintain its public support. The branding procedures must be in continuum (Matthew, 2008: 16). This will continue to maximize the brand’s value and fulfills the public’s expectations more fully.

1. First Phase: Branding is all about timing

Branding the “strong and equal alliance” requires the right timing to launch or re-vitalize the brand. As the foundation of brand loyalty depleted away, it will be harder to launch a brand or re-brand the policy. Brand loyalty makes it possible for the US-ROK alliance to launch a brand with a lower risk of failing. Therefore, brand loyalty must be considered before launching the brand, “strong and equal alliance.” The first subchapter will discuss the importance of brand loyalty incase of branding or rebranding. The second subchapter of this section illustrates the background of the American and Korean publics in recent years and changing mood of both the American and Korean publics towards the optimism. The third subchapter discusses about the external variables which affect the US-ROK alliance.

1.1 Importance of Brand Loyalty

A good brand never changes, and changes continuously or a good brand is ‘timeless.’ The core of what appeals to both the American and Korean publics, a brand’s meaning and values, its promises, and the satisfaction it gives should be constant, providing both the American and Korean publics something to believe in and remain loyal to, over the long term.

Brand loyalty which existed in the US-ROK alliance during the Cold War has been almost depleted in the US and South Korea. However, the US-ROK alliance is standing on better position to brand itself than NATO was positioned in the early 1990s, since the original intention of this alliance still exist, even though it has been deteriorated. Unlike NATO, it is a lot easier for the US-ROK alliance since the current alliance can just re-brand based on its original intentions, while NATO had to re-structure the whole raison d’être. Another reason is that the US-ROK alliance maintains strong support from the age group which experienced both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Many US and Korean veterans of the Vietnam War bonded to each other through the strong comradeship.

South Korea supported the US with the second largest contingent of foreign troops in the Vietnam War with just over 300,000 personnel. Veterans of both America and Korea have good memories of each other during the Vietnam War. Dr. Ned Stroll, who served three tours in Vietnam, was in awe of how disciplined Korean troops were in Vietnam (Rowland Ashley, 2008). This support is a significant boost to the branding of the US-ROK alliance; however, we are running out of time. In twenty to thirty years, these veterans and all those who experienced the Korean and Vietnam Wars will be removed from the mainstream of the public opinion. In the near future, when this foundation of brand loyalty disappears, it will be harder to convince or communicate the importance of the alliance to the American and South Korean publics.
1.2 Background of the US Public in Recent Years

As Americans showed indifference towards international affairs, many domestic polls showed that the American public focuses on domestic affairs and only pays little or no attention to the international affairs. Many TV executives discovered that “young adults cared more about the Zone diet than the subtleties of Middle East diplomacy” (Jim, 2001).

And many of those who did pay attention to foreign policy became overconfident about the United States’ power, arguing that we do not need to listen to other nations. Traditionally the United States’ foreign policy put forth the safety of American security over moral consciousness. Neo-conservatives like Krauthammer hold the position that “moral suasion is a farce and that American freedom action and pursuit of national interests of other nations and subject only to the America’s own will and its own definition of morality” (Anatol and John, 2006: 71). In other words, America can do no wrong mentality in terms of spreading democracy and freedom.

This kind of mentality of the Bush administration has badly damaged America’s reputation and credentials. In future foreign policy, the US needs to be more prudent about its actions toward other countries. A greater understanding of global affairs would stimulate debate in the US and improve the quality of foreign policy decisions (Loch, 2007: xv). In January 2005, Condoleezza Rice said during her confirmation hearing as Secretary of State that “Our interaction with rest of the world must be a conversation, not a monologue” (Loch, 2007: 181).

1.3 Ambivalent background of South Korean Public

Conditions of the South Korean public are more complex and vary in comparison to the American public over the US-ROK alliance. The Korean public holds various negative sentiments against the United States. As aforementioned, anti-American sentiments in South Korea are too complex to be simplified down to one problem but driven by many different issues (Kim, 2007: 47).

On the other hand, the South Korean public has the highest regards for US education, and culture. In 2007, South Korea sent 62,392 students to American Universities and ranked number three as the leading place of origin for international students in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2007). We see more and more South Koreans flocking to the United States to be educated and learn American values. In other words it is like Koreans shouting “Yankee go home but take me with you!” We can easily see the hate and love perception of Koreans towards the United States. Like and dislike, respect and disrespect, love and hate, and worship and contempt coexist in South Korean’s perception of the United States (Moon, 2005: 144). From here, we can conceptualize that the Korean people’s attitudes towards the United States or the nature of anti-American sentiment is very multidimensional or ambivalent.8

1.4 Changing Mood of Both American and Korean Publics: Why Timing is just Tight for Branding the “Strong and Equal Alliance”

The whole world openly welcomed newly elected President Obama. The image

---

8 For In-depth analysis of South Korean attitude toward the US, this paper refers the study conducted by CCFR/EAI in 2004.
of the United States has greatly increased all around the globe, reflecting the global confidence in President Obama. The Korean public also gave President Obama strong confidence by showing over 78 percent in a US favorability rating poll (Pew Research Center, 2009). South Korea had the highest favorable rating towards the United States among the US allies. In the same research done by the Pew Research Center, confidence of the Korean public that the US will do the right thing in world affairs jumped from 31%, during the President Bush years, to 81% in 2009. This clearly shows the optimism about President Obama is extensive in the Korean public.

Just a year ago, American public was seriously concerned about America’s standing in the world. In 2008 a polling done by the Chicago Council on global affairs, 83 percent of Americans believed that improving America’s standing in the world should be a most important foreign policy goal of the United States (The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2008). However, today American people are also joining the optimistic mood of President Obama, 88% of Americans believe that the US image is getting better all around the world. Pew Research 2009 shows that the image of the United States in most of the countries climbed back to positive as they were at the beginning of the George W. Bush administration (Pew Research Center, 2009). Despite the economic hardships, Americans support President Obama in taking an active part in world affairs and maintaining a global military presence.

1.5 External Factors: Political Environment in Northeast Asia

Recent shifts in the political spectrum in Northeast Asia present an encouraging environment and great opportunity to strengthen the US-ROK alliance. The most noticeable shift is the movement of DPRK in recent months. In past years, DPRK intensified the tensions in the Korean Peninsula in retaliation against the sanctions or hard line policy. However, in recent months, D.P.R.K is showing signs to reconcile with the international community to loosen the hard line policy which is currently placed on DPRK. The Nodong Shinmun, major state media outlet, of North Korea said “to establish a lasting peace system on the Korean Peninsula and make it nuclear-free through dialogue and negotiations.” The Nodong Shinmun also added that “the fundamental task for ensuring peace and stability” was “to put an end to the hostile relationship” with the United States (Choe, 2010). In terms of this paper, this is a good opportunity to launch a “strong and equal alliance,” since the current actions of DPRK demonstrate that coherency between the US and ROK governments to uphold the hard-line policy is actually working. This could be another great associated story for both the American and South Korean publics in regards to the brand of the US-ROK alliance.

Another shift of the Northeast Asian political spectrum is the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) becoming the ruling party of Japan. The relationship between the US and Japan has become moribund with this recent shift. Prime Minister Hatoyama in his recent submission to the Christian Science Monitor, August, 2009, wrote that “Japan must shake off US-style globalization.” He announced that Japan should be moving away from the US and move closer to its Asian neighbors as member states of East Asia (Yukio, 2009). Since there is distrust fuming around the US-Japan Alliance (Eric, 2009), the US-ROK alliance must be strengthened to hedge the possible weakening of the US-Japan Alliance.
2. Second Phase: Building Credibility and Trust with American and Korean Publics

It is definitely difficult to build credibility and trust with the American public because the problem of the American public does not lie on the issues, but on lack of motivation. However, maybe David Aaker is right in a sense that in the absence of motivation, familiarity may be enough (1991: 65). Therefore, if we cannot motivate the American public then it might be a good idea to at least increase the familiarity level of the US-ROK alliance to the American public. The main concern for convincing the US public is the relevancy of the US-ROK alliance in the era of the post Cold war. Another problem is the burden sharing arrangement for the US forward-deployed base in Korea; however this is easier to resolve since this is more an issue based problem.

There are many more ways to build credibility and trust with the South Korean public in comparison to the American public. More associates are attached to the US-ROK alliance from the side of South Korea since South Korea is the host of the forward-deployed base. In the big three category, problems with the Korean public can be divided into concerns for anti-American sentiment, fear of entrapment and fear of abandonment. Issues currently being dealt with under the transformation of the US-ROK alliance are as follow: transition of wartime OPCON, upgrade status of FMS, USFK base relocation. These are some of the associations of the “strong and equal alliance” that must be resolved or promoted to reinforce the brand value:

1. Relevancy of the US-ROK alliance: The majority of Americans are just ignorant about the US-ROK alliance, and many more just do not understand the importance or relevancy of maintaining the US troops in the Republic of Korea. The decline of threat perception of North Korea in the US brings out the relevancy question of the US-ROK alliance. And this is directly linked to reducing the oversea military commitment in times of economic crisis. According to the 2003 polling, over 80% of Americans think that the US is playing the role of world policeman more than it should be (Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004). Lack of motivation to learn the importance of the US-ROK alliance can be overcome by the familiarity of brand.

2. Future Burden sharing Arrangement: The rate of burden sharing for the US military presence in the Korean Peninsula has been decreasing as South Korea’s capability increased in both military and economics. Currently, burden sharing of the US presence is standing at 60: 40 ratios with the US covering 60% of its expenses (Jung, 2008). Even though the American public supports the Obama administration for international engagement in the fight against terrorism, they would like to reduce their commitments especially the military commitments in Asia. The burden sharing of ROK is always being compared to the burden sharing of Japan, which covers more than 75% of total expenses (Kent, 2003). Until the ROK government can at least match the 50: 50 ratio, it is believed that this concern will continue in the minds of American public

3. Concern for Anti-American sentiment: Over the years, the Korean view of the United
States has been very favorable; however, with population of the war generation declining, the public opinion is unpredictable nowadays. As shown above, there are huge generation gap differences in public opinion polls towards the United States based on the issues. The U.S. government needs to develop a public diplomacy strategy for South Korea that focuses on the issue based and legitimate objection of those who criticize the U.S., before these anti-American sentiments become deeply embedded within younger generations of South Korea (RAND, 2004). Every issue is an association to the “strong and equal alliance,” therefore must be dealt with assiduous care.

4. **Fear of abandonment**: Unilateral actions and relocation of USFK to south of the Han River gave many scholars in Korea fears that priority shifts might be a sign of abandonment of the Korean Peninsula by the U.S., since vital interests of South Korea is the security concern over the Korean Peninsula. This fear of abandonment must be quickly dealt with. The US-ROK alliance must promote the commitment of the US troops in the Korean Peninsula. The United States showed its commitment to the Korean Peninsula recently by announcing that the Eighth U.S. Army will remain in South Korea even after ROK commanders take over the wartime operational control (OPCON) in 2012 (Jung, 2009). Public statements can greatly affect the brand in a negative or positive manner. The 2008 joint statements helped to alleviate the concerns over the abandonment.

5. **Fear of entrapment**: A new alliance based on this new strategy are two folded, it increases flexibility of USFK to respond to the crises outside of Korea and also creates a more comprehensive regional security relationship between the U.S. and South Korea. In short, it means under the bilateral alliance, South Korea has mutual obligations to support the United States militarily outside of the Korean peninsula and within the Northeast Asia region. Both governments need to do more to persuade the public about the importance of moving the alliance forward. It is imperative that both the American and South Korean publics consider the role of the US-ROK alliance in the region following the collapse of DPRK or reunification.

6. **OPCON Transfer, upgrade status of FMS**: The US-ROK alliance also needs to promote how the upgraded status of FMS and OPCON transfer will strengthen the ROK Military. This is a step forward to develop autonomous national defense and to play an important role in fostering regional stability.

7. **Relocation of USFK base from Yongsan to Pyeongtaek**: Moving to Pyeongtaek, allows US troops to extend its tour from one year to three years, which stabilizes the life and increases the quality of life for US soldiers by bringing his/her family to Korea. Stabilization of moral of USFK will play a positive role in strengthening the US-ROK alliance. Not only that, the relocation of the US base from Yongsan carries a great significance as ROK regains the full control of its capital city. ROK was the only ally state which allowed a U.S. military base to be stationed in one’s capital city.
3. Third Phase: Maintaining the Brand Value of the US-ROK alliance

The last phase of branding is to maintain the brand value of the US-ROK alliance. This section is also an implication section, since this paper assumes that branding of the US-ROK alliance has reached its full potential. For this brand to work, South Korea’s role in this alliance has to be stepped up to the next level, playing a more active role in and out of the Korean Peninsula. This paper briefly recommends some of the activities to maintain the brand value of the “strong and equal alliance.”

1. Korea’s must be faithful to the 2012 transition of wartime OPCON commitment. ROK must either upgrade or modernize its conventional forces. As capacity of ROK increases, R.O.K needs to take more initiative in developing autonomous national defense.
2. The US also must be faithful to its commitment to the Korean Peninsula after the 2012 OPCON transfer. Continue to conduct joint exercises for the maintenance of a strong defense readiness posture. Work closely with ROK to develop a new operational plan based on the post-OPCON transition in 2012.
3. ROK should initiate nontraditional regional stability missions such as maritime watch, disaster relief and humanitarian missions. The US should play a rear-support role to ROK in regards to nontraditional security issues. This is a win-win situation for both Korea and the United States.

VI. Conclusion

The prospects for the US-ROK alliance are brewing with optimism. The restructuring of the alliance at the governmental level is currently in progress; however, if public support does not go hand in hand with current restructuring then this alliance will fail to move beyond its original intentions. The objective of this paper was to reinvigorate the public support for the US-ROK alliance. Unlike previous research on the US-ROK alliance, this paper steps aside from the mainstream of international relations to seek out the answer from a different field of study such as place branding and public diplomacy. As a result, the concept of branding was explored and was applied to increase the public awareness of the US-ROK alliance.

Branding is an unfamiliar concept in the field of International relations; therefore, this paper had many limitations in the research process. This paper set the foundation between the concept of branding and the field of international relations by creating a branding process model. Branding process model helped to launch a successful US-ROK alliance brand, “strong and equal alliance,” as an alternative scenario to strengthen the US-ROK alliance. As shown above it is important to combine the bottom-up approach with top-down approach to help endure the US-ROK strategic alliance since the factor of public awareness and support is critical to this alliance. This paper has effectively shown the benefits of what brand can do for the alliance by maintaining the original intentions and enabling future roles of the US-ROK alliance to be expanded through increased awareness and public support.
It is too early to determine how this scenario will turn out in the near future. There have been limitations in this research, but as the US-ROK alliance moves beyond its original intentions, it is believed that further research into the second and third phases of branding will become possible, especially to analyze each association that is attached to the US-ROK alliance. Therefore, a more thorough research is required to prove the assumption which this paper uses as a premise. However, the author is very optimistic about the possibilities for the brand, “strong and equal alliance,” of the US-ROK alliance.

References


