



LESTER
CROWN CENTER
ON US FOREIGN POLICY

While Positive toward US Alliance, South Koreans Want to Counter Trump's Demands on Host-Nation Support

Karl Friedhoff, Fellow, Public Opinion and Asia Policy

December 2019

From December 9 to 11, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs conducted a poll in South Korea on South Korean attitudes toward the United States, the alliance between the two countries, and the ongoing negotiations about host-nation financial support. Below are the primary findings.

- A large majority (92%) of the South Korean public supports their country's alliance with the United States. This is largely unchanged since 2014 when polling by the Asan Institute in South Korea found support for the alliance at 96 percent. Two-thirds (63%) say that the alliance with the United States benefits both countries (26% say the alliance primarily benefits the United States; 8% percent say that South Korea is the primary beneficiary).
- Three-quarters (74%) support the long-term stationing of US soldiers in South Korea and nearly nine in ten (87%) say the presence of US troops in South Korea contributes to South Korea's national security either a great deal (47%) or a fair amount (40%).
- Seven in ten say US extended deterrence contributes either a great deal (27%) or a fair amount (44%) to South Korea's national security. (Note: The question wording in Korean offered a brief explanation of extended deterrence, explaining that if a country allied with the United States was attacked the United States could respond with nuclear weapons.)
- Confidence is high that the United States would defend South Korea if it were attacked by North Korea: 78 percent say they are either very confident (31%) or somewhat confident (47%). A majority (56%) believe South Korea alone could defeat North Korea in an armed conflict.
- Ninety-four percent say that relations with the United States are either very important (66%) or somewhat important (29%) to South Korea's security. Eight in ten (86%) say the same about China, 83 percent for North Korea, and 69 percent say so about Japan.

- Sixty-two percent of South Koreans say that South Korea should strengthen relations with the United States even if this might diminish relations with China; 30 percent favor strengthening relations with China even if this might diminish relations with the United States.
- Despite general affirmation of the alliance, South Koreans do not necessarily see the United States and their own country working in the same direction on key security issues. Fifty-five percent say the two countries are working in different directions on regional security (37% say they are working in the same direction). Fifty-two percent say the United States and South Korea are working in different directions on denuclearizing North Korea (42% same direction).
- Some may sense a disconnect with the United States on US demands to increase host-nation financial support. Nearly seven in ten (68%) South Koreans report having heard or read at least a fair amount about the negotiations with the United States over host-nation support.
- A clear majority (68%) say that South Korea should negotiate a lower cost than the \$4.7 billion request made by the United States. One-quarter (26%) say South Korea should refuse to pay. Among those that want to negotiate a lower cost, 60 percent want the cost to remain below 2 trillion won (\$1.7 billion), and a further 30 percent say the cost should be between 2 and 3 trillion won (\$2.5 billion).
- Three-quarters (74%) say that South Korea should not contribute to the costs of US forces stationed in the Pacific, but outside of South Korea.
- If the two countries fail to reach an agreement on host-nation support, a majority (54%) say that the alliance with the United States should be maintained, but that US forces in South Korea should be reduced. One-third (33%) say the alliance should be maintained and US forces should remain as they are. One in ten (9%) believe the alliance should be maintained, but US forces should be withdrawn. Just 2 percent want to terminate the alliance.
- A majority of the South Korean public (70%) see a failure to reach an agreement as either highly negative (18%) or somewhat negative (52%) for South Korea's national security. Two in ten (22%) said there would be no impact.

Methodology

The survey was conducted from December 9 to 11, 2019 in South Korea by Hankook Research among a representative national sample of 1,000 adults aged 19 and over. The sample was constructed using RDD for mobile and landline phones and the margin of error is $\pm 3.1\%$ at the 95% confidence interval. This survey was funded by a grant from the Korea Foundation.

About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan organization that provides insight on critical global issues, advances policy solutions, and fosters dialogue about what is happening in the world and why it matters to people in Chicago, the United States, and around the globe. As the premier, nonpartisan global affairs organization in America's heartland, we believe an informed, engaged public

with access to fact-based and balanced views on global issues helps to ensure effective US engagement and supports a more inclusive, equitable, and secure world. Learn more at thechicagocouncil.org and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](https://twitter.com/ChicagoCouncil).