

Political Transition and Promotion Practice: The Case of the South Korean Army*

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From the earlier writings of Samuel P. Huntington and Morris Janowitz to more recent contributions, studies of civilian control of the military in rapidly changing societies form part of an important, long-standing research tradition in military sociology. Of particular interest here is Huntington's perspective which suggests that for civilian control of the military to assert itself in new democracies, its *objective* variety has to be established by maximizing military professionalism. Hans Born, after the Berlin wall fell, elaborated upon this theory by indicating that "*the shift from communism to liberal democracy was accompanied by a shift from subjective to objective democratic control of the armed forces*".¹ This finding does not imply, however, that objective control of the military is equally viable in *all* changing societies. Indeed, cross-national studies do not uniformly help fuel theoretical refinement of the classical theory that objective control of the military is a prerequisite for, or a natural outcome of, sustainable democracy.² South Korea, after the country's democratic transition in the 1990s, seems a case in point: can one safely assume that its new civilian rulers preferred objective to subjective civilian control of the military?

A possible answer to the theoretical question at stake may come from Michael C. Desch who argues that civilian authorities facing high external and low internal threats are more likely to rely on objective civilian control of the military.³ However, this research has also neglected two crucial issues. First, security threats perceived by the civilian authorities and the military are not necessarily in accord with each other. This dissonance can be intensified if a majority of people believe that government policy would put national security at risk. An excellent example of divergent perceptions of security threats between the civilian government and the military is provided by South Korea.⁴ Second, "*culture influences action (...) by shaping a repertoire or 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct 'strategies of action'*".⁵ In the case of South Korea whose party system is based on regional allegiances, eligibility criteria for promotion might become dominated by regionalism rather than professionalism. Huntington's objective civilian control of the military is far off if qualification criteria for promotion and assignment are biased in favour of the political friends of civilian rulers.

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¹ Born, 2003, p.157.

² Born, 2003, p.156.

³ Desch, 2001, pp.13-14.

⁴ This has much to do with the civilian government's engagement policy toward North Korea, which failed to reduce North Korean military provocations. This issue will be discussed at a later point in this article.

⁵ Swidler, 1986, p.273.

The South Korean case serves as a laboratory to observe how radical change in political regime and defence policy is apt to enhance or harm military professionalism. South Korea came under military rule in 1961 after a coup headed by Maj.Gen. Park Chung-hee. The political vacuum resulting from President Park's assassination by Korean Central Intelligence Agency chief Kim Jae-kyu in October 1979 enabled Maj.Gen. Chun Doo-hwan and his military protégés – the Hana faction, which included Maj.Gen. Roh Tae-woo –, to assume political power through another military coup in 1979. Chun Doo-hwan was elected head of State through an indirect presidential election in 1981, and Roh Tae-woo succeeded him in 1987 through a direct election. During the presidential terms of Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo, Hana faction members distinguished themselves from their classmates by having more opportunities for promotion to higher rank and assignment to more influential command positions.⁶

Military rule lasted until 1993 when Kim Young-sam was inaugurated as the first civilian president since the 1961 military coup. This political transition started simultaneously with the first nuclear crisis triggered by North Korea's withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1993. Under Desch's theory, increasing nuclear threats from North Korea, combined with a consolidation of democracy in South Korea, should have produced a condition favourable for objective civilian control of the military. However, the handover of political power to the progressive opposition party leader Kim Dae-jung in 1998 made civil-military relations insecure because his North Korean policy put priority on reconciliatory gestures towards North Korea over military preparedness against the military threats it posed, and could seriously deteriorate the military's ethos or definition of what its roles should be.

The purpose of this article is to examine the extent to which civilian governments' fervent desire to see defence policy produce the right result actually enhances or undermines objective civilian control of the military. To this end, it looks into changes in promotion prospects in the South Korean Army for two reasons. First, although promotion is only one particular aspect of military life, it is one of the primary concerns in studies of civilian control.⁷ Second, qualification criteria for military leadership selection have been used to indicate whether and what type of civilian control is implemented.⁸ This study is divided into four sections. The first part briefly describes the data and research design. The second and the third part use logistic regression models to empirically test variables that have influenced promotion prospects after the handover of power to civilian governments and the coming into office of the progressive opposition party, respectively. The final part of the article discusses how radical change in defence policy could cause harm to military professionalism and objective civilian control of the military under a mature democracy.

⁶ Kim, 2013.

⁷ Croissant, 2011, p.4.

⁸ Huntington, 1957, pp.16-17.

Data and Research Design

This article relies on career data pertaining to all graduates from the Korea Military Academy (KMA) classes that entered it in 1966 and 1970, respectively. The majority of them experienced the political transition from military to civilian rule in 1993 and the handover of power from the ruling conservative party to the progressive opposition party in 1998. The years in which these two groups of military officers received promotion to colonel and brigadier general can be divided into three periods on the basis of those two political transitions: 1986-1992 (when South Korea was governed by former generals Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo), 1993-1997 (which coincides with Kim Young-sam’s conservative presidency), and 1998-2002 (i.e. Kim Dae-jung’s progressive presidency).

The reason why civilian rule is divided here into two different periods is because Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung (who had fought against military rule and for democracy together) implemented opposite policies towards North Korea. President Kim Young-sam, supported by the conservative anti-communist camp, maintained a containment policy toward North Korea, specifying it as the main enemy of South Korea in the 1994 *Defence White Paper*. On the contrary, drawing support from more progressive quarters, President Kim Dae-jung shifted the focus of North Korean policy to inter-Korean reconciliation, and ordered the military not to use fire in the face of North Korean provocations to make his engagement policy successful. In order to better understand defence and military policy-making in South Korea, this difference in North Korean policy appears crucial.

Table 1: Sequence of Promotions to Colonel and Brigadier General in two KMA Classes

	Military Rule (1986-1992)		Conservative Civilian Rule (1993-1997)	Progressive Civilian Rule (1998-2002)
Class of 1966	Promotions to colonel (1986-1990)		Promotions to brigadier general (1993-1997)	
Class of 1970			Promotions to colonel (1991-1996)	Promotions to brigadier general (1998-2002)

Legend : Shaded cells refer to years in which graduates received promotions to the stated rank.

The two KMA classes analyzed here received promotions to colonel (O6) and brigadier general (O7) at different points in time, as shown in Table 1. First, the class of 1966 began receiving promotions to O6 in 1986, and a total of 95 graduates were promoted to that rank by 1990. Its first graduate made it to O7 in 1993, and out of its 95 colonels 47 were promoted to brigadier general by 1997. Second, of the 161 colonels (O6) from the class of 1970, 86 were promoted to that grade in last two years of military rule (1991-1992), while another 75 later attained it in the four years of conservative civilian rule (1993-1996). Among those 161 colonels, 46 received advancement to brigadier general under the progressive civilian administration that followed (1998-2002).⁹ Since promotions to a

⁹ No more graduates from the class of 1970 were promoted to brigadier general after 2002, except Col. Lee Su-dong shortly before his appointment as Dean of KMA’s academic board in 2004.

higher rank for the classes of 1966 and 1970 were decided at different periods, the data set created for the purpose of this study makes it easier to examine whether the two successive political transitions to conservative, then progressive civilian rule caused changes in the qualification criteria used for promotion to colonel and brigadier general.

Data analysis will proceed in two phases. The goal of the first stage is to examine change in qualification criteria for the rank of colonel. It compares decisive factors for receiving promotion to that grade under military and conservative civilian rule, and assesses the effect of the 1993 political transition to conservative civilian rule on individual promotion prospects. The second stage aims to examine change in qualification criteria for promotion to brigadier general after the political transition to progressive civilian rule. To those ends, logistic regression models were constructed to estimate what change, if any, each of those political transitions brought to qualification criteria for promotion to the two senior ranks considered.

Measurement

This study examines the effect of *private ties to the President* on two measures of the promotion to colonel and brigadier general, controlling for four factors – *experience, education, seniority, and ability*.¹⁰ Such special attention to private ties to presidents recommends itself because regional and school ties connecting ruling or influential politicians and military officers have historically played a critical role in deciding promotions and assignments in the South Korean Army since its establishment in the late 1940s, hampering development of mature military professionalism.¹¹ The dependent variables are dummies – 1 for individuals who received promotion to colonel or brigadier general and zero otherwise. For the class of 1966, 95 of 115 lieutenant colonels were promoted to full colonel (82.6%) and 47 of 95 colonels were promoted to brigadier general (49.4%) over the period under study. For the class of 1970, however, 161 of 211 lieutenant colonels were promoted to full colonel (76.3%) and 45 of 161 colonels were promoted to brigadier general (27.9%). While absolute numbers of graduates who got promoted to brigadier general did not vary from one class to the other, the difference in the proportion of such promotions is appreciable : it can be explained by the fact that the total number of graduates was higher for the class of 1970 than it was for the class of 1966.

The level of experience in internal security forces is measured by the total number of times individual officers took positions in the Capital Defence Command (CDC), the Defence Security Command (DSC), the SWC (Special Warfare Command), and two Army divisions (the 20th and 30th).¹² The reason for such focus is because under military rule South Korean presidents tended to rely on internal security forces to bolster their political power.¹³ Since military officers continue to move from one position to another, data were

¹⁰ These four control variables were chosen on the strength of the more than plausible notion that “*rank inheres in the individual and reflects his professional achievement measured in terms of experience, seniority, education, and ability*” (Huntington, 1957, pp.16-17).

¹¹ Kim, 2008, pp.94-99 ; Jun, 2001, pp.131-132.

¹² Kim, 2008, p.26.

¹³ Jun, 2001, p.129.

collected on two major positions to which individual officers were appointed for every rank, and assigned 1 to each position if associated with internal security forces and zero otherwise. If an individual officer continuously served in internal security forces from captain to colonel, the variable “experience in security forces” is equal to eight (= two major positions x four ranks: captain, major, lieutenant colonel, full colonel). The higher the value of this measure, the greater the individual officer’s professional skills and expertise in fighting insurgents rather than external military threats.

The following three measures concern individual officers’ military education and academic achievement. “KMA” refers to ranking in the order of merit as listed in KMA graduation records: a low value for that variable reflects an officer’s high port-of-entry achievement while at the Academy. “Army College” scores are either 1 for graduates from the prestigious (mid-career) one-year regular course and zero for graduates from the four-month staff course. Further, “NDU” values equal 1 for officers graduating from the National Defence University and zero otherwise. The “Seniority in grade” measure is the year in which individual officers got promoted to lieutenant colonel and full colonel, respectively, and has lower values for those who received promotion to these ranks earlier than others. Then, the total number of official commendations for outstanding service in the military since their graduation from KMA was computed. This measure indicates an individual officer’s professional ability.

Table 2 : Descriptive Data on All Variables

Variable	Class of 1966	Class of 1970
<i>Dependent Variables</i>		
Promotion to colonel (% of lieutenant colonels)	82.6%	76.3%
Promotion to B. Generals (% of colonels)	49.4%	27.9%
<i>Control Variables</i>		
Experience in Internal Security forces		
From captain to lieutenant colonel (mean)	.59(1.16)	.57(1.12)
From captain to colonel (mean)	.68(1.29)	.66(1.32)
Military Education		
KMA	Max: 181, Min: 1	Max: 362, Min: 1
Army College (% of graduates)	38.8%	36.4%
NDU (% of graduates)	20.2%	27.4%
Seniority in grade		
Seniority in lieutenant colonel rank	Max: 83, Min: 81	Max: 86, Min: 85
Seniority in colonel rank	Max: 90, Min: 86	Max: 91, Min: 96
Ability		
Commendations	11.65(8.41)	14.25(8.89)
<i>Independent Variables</i>		
Private ties to president		
Hana faction (% of graduates)	3.7%	2.5%
Regional tie to Kim Young-sam (% of graduates)	17.0%	12.9%
School tie to Kim Young-sam (% of graduate)	5.8%	2.9%
Regional tie to Kim Dae-jung (% of graduates)	20.7%	24.1%

Finally, four measures have been used to operationalize “Private ties to president”: membership in the “Hana faction” (close to ex-generals-turned-presidents Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo) scores 1 (zero otherwise). The same applies to regional ties to civilian presidents (1 for those who come from the president’s birth region: the Pusan-Kyounghnam province for President Kim Young-sam and the Cholla province for President Kim Dae-jung; zero otherwise) and to high school ties (1 for Kyoungbok High School alumni supported by President Kim Young-sam’s son Kim Hyun-chol¹⁴; zero otherwise).

Transition to Civilian Rule: Impact on Military Professionalism

When Kim Young-sam became the first civilian president of South Korea in 1993, establishing civilian supremacy over the military hardly promised to be an easy task, for two reasons. First, Kim Young-sam had emerged as a prominent opposition party leader through his political struggle against military rule and for democracy. In 1992, however, he suddenly merged his Reunification Democratic Party with President Roh Tae-woo’s ruling Democratic Justice Party to become the newly-established Democratic Liberal Party (DLP)’s presidential candidate. Upon winning the presidential election of 1992 with direct and indirect support from President Roh Tae-woo and his predecessor President Chun Doo-hwan, who had been blamed for the 1979 military coup and the 1980 Kwangju massacre, he was not in an advantageous position to implement military reforms. Second, the command positions within internal security forces such as the CDC, the SWC, and the DSC were under the firm control of Hana faction members, who had brought about the coup together with Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo in 1979. It was therefore not difficult to expect that President Kim Young-sam would meet stiff resistance from the military if he intended to pursue military reforms.

Yet, contrary to this negative view, public opinion turned out to support President Kim Young-sam in so doing. For one thing, bearing witness to South Korea’s advance towards democracy in the late 1980s, a constitutional amendment had instituted direct presidential elections, and military involvement in politics began to be perceived as evil practice that should be extirpated. According to a 1990 national survey, no fewer than 46.6% of South Korean people opined that making the military politically neutral was a top reform priority.¹⁵ For another, the South Korean military itself was not cohesive enough to challenge the new civilian government in the early 1990s because the bias in favour of Hana faction members divided it internally.¹⁶ A survey of military officers in 1992 showed that 52.4% of respondents felt promotion and assignment suffered from bias, while only 26.2% thought otherwise. As many as 56.0% of respondents judged that military professionalism was not mature yet.¹⁷ As a result, against all initial odds, President Kim Young-sam had enough resources to eradicate the remaining vestiges of military rule.

¹⁴ Jun, 2001, p.131.

¹⁵ National Defense University, 1990, p.81 ; National Defense University, 1991, p.61.

¹⁶ Kim, 2013.

¹⁷ Korean Institute of Defense Analysis, 1992, p.107.

Soon after his inauguration in 1993, he began to purge influential military leaders associated with the Hana faction by discharging more than twenty generals from their posts. Unsurprisingly, a majority of military officers approved of such a move and his military reforms more generally,¹⁸ as this success meant serious change in their promotion prospects, and paved the way for enhanced military professionalism, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 : Logit Regression Analysis on Promotion to Colonel

Variable	Model 1 (S.E.)	Model 2 (S.E.)
<i>Experience</i>		
Internal security forces (ISF)	1.025 (.178)	3.286 (1.42)***
ISF*Period (1993-1997)		.135 (.066)***
<i>Seniority in grade</i>		
Year of promotion to Lt. Colonel	.897 (.083)	1.026 (.110)
<i>Education</i>		
KMA	.992 (.001)***	.991 (.002)***
NDU	11.894 (6.04)***	12.853 (7.03)***
<i>Ability</i>		
Official commendations	1.115 (.028)***	1.123 (.031)***
<i>Private ties to president</i>		
Hana faction ¹⁹		
Regional tie to Kim Young-sam (1993-1997)		1.335 (.998)
School tie to Kim Young-sam(1993-1997)		1.189 (1.51)
Pseudo R-square	.231	.318
Log-likelihood	-128.41	-112.68
AIC (2k-2log-likelihood)	266.82	241.36
Cases	321	319

Note : *** p<.01; ** p<.05; * P<.1

The coefficients in Table 3 present odds ratios that indicate the extent to which the chance of getting promoted to colonel changes according to a one-unit increase or decrease in the independent variables. Model 2 which has lower AIC value is significantly better than Model 1.

The findings from Model 2 can be interpreted as supporting the argument of this study, to wit that President Kim Young-sam’s military reforms were successful and positively contributed to improving the functionality of the military for three reasons. First, experience in internal security forces has a time-variant effect on promotion to colonel. A one-time increase in experience in internal security forces increased the odds of promotion by 3.286 times that of others under military rule. In contrast, a one-time increase in

¹⁸ 80.4% of respondents consisting of military officers responded that military reforms produced a positive effect on the military. National Defense University, 1994, p.104.

¹⁹ The Hana faction measure was dropped from analysis because all Hana faction members from the class of 1966 and the class of 1970 were promoted to colonel under military rule (1986-1992). The effect of the political transition to civilian rule on Hana faction members will be examined later in a following section.

experience in internal security decreased the odds of promotion by 55.7% after the political transition to civilian rule ($3.286 \cdot .135 = .443$). Since it soon became clear after the political transition that experience in internal security forces would no longer be conducive to better promotion prospects, individual officers from the class of 1970 became far less enthusiastic about assuming positions in ISFs. For the class of 1966, those who spent most of their career in ISFs before their promotion to lieutenant colonel were more likely to get promoted to colonel and take positions in ISFs again (correlation coefficient between experience in internal security forces from captain to lieutenant colonel and that from captain to colonel = .511, sig. = .000). For the class of 1970, however, those who spent most of their career in internal security forces were less likely to get promoted to colonel under conservative civilian rule (1993-1997) and take positions in ISFs again (correlation coefficient between experience in internal security forces from captain to lieutenant colonel and that from captain to colonel = .264, sig. = .000).

Second, military officers coming from the Pusan-Kyungnam province or who graduated from the Kyungbok High School did not enjoy specific advantages for promotion to colonel under Kim Young-sam's presidency (1993-1997). This finding is in conflict with previous research concluding that "*a new faction – framed around the Pusan-Kyungnam regional tie and the Kyungbok High School tie – emerged as the dominant element*".²⁰ This disparity can be explained in two ways. On the one hand, President Kim Young-sam did not need to encourage military officers to organize themselves into a faction paying personal allegiance to him within the military. Lacking reliable protégés among career officers, he actually stood to gain more by seeking support from the majority of military officers who saw military rule as the cause of their professional marginalization. On the other hand, according to Silverman, "*strategic choices made by those holding political power in environments of greater or lesser uncertainty leads to rational bureaucratization*".²¹ Since South Korea's introduction of direct presidential elections increased uncertainty regarding the next presidency, the old practice of putting priority on regional and school ties to the president became obsolete.

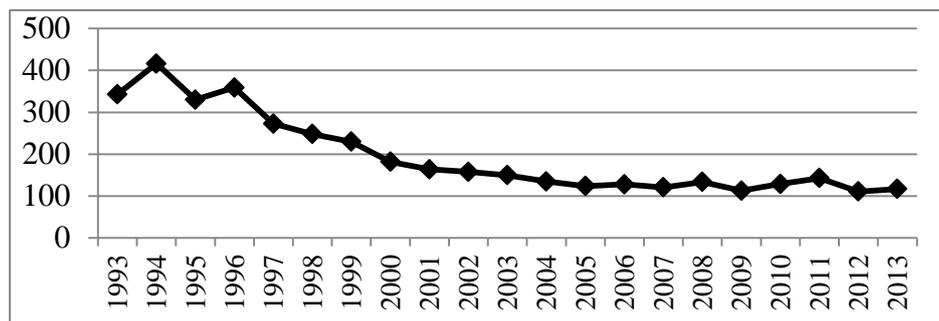
Finally, the measures associated with individual officers' attainment in terms of expertise and performance revealed a time-invariant effect on promotion to colonel. KMA graduation ranking has a positive effect on promotion to colonel: a one-unit increase in the rank order of KMA graduation record (indicating a less favorable graduation ranking) leads to a decrease in the odds of promotion to colonel by .8%. Graduation from the NDU had the greatest positive effect at that level. An officer's NDU education increased the odds of promotion to colonel by 12.85 times that of others. This difference can be explained by the goals pursued by KMA and NDU. KMA was established to produce regular Army officers, while NDU was created to train experts in military affairs and thus those who complete NDU courses are likely to be preferred as high-ranking officers. Individual officers' ability has a statistically significant positive effect on promotion to colonel, increasing the chances

²⁰ Jun, 2001, p.131.

²¹ Silverman, 1993, p.xi.

of securing it by 12.3%. Results are consistent with a 1995 survey finding: 54.0% of respondents felt that individual ability is very important for promotion and assignment, while only 3.9% gave the same answer to the question of the incidence of regional ties.²² Such being the case, individual officers had a clear reason to show off their military expertise and performance, producing a positive effect on the functionality of the military as a whole. Government statistics indicate that the non-combat death toll, which is closely associated with combat effectiveness, continued to decrease after the political transition to civilian rule, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Total Non-Combat Death Toll by Year



Source : South Korean Bureau of Statistics.

Radical Change in Defence Policy, Politicization of Retired Generals

Opposition party leader Kim Dae-jung defeated the ruling party's presidential candidate Lee Hoi-chang in the 1997 presidential election. This election outcome caused worry about provoking the military because officers were now expected to obey a president who was eager to cooperate with what they saw as the major source of security threats: North Korea. President Kim Dae-jung wanted to liquidate the hostility that had lasted for close to half-a-century – since the end of the Korean War (1950-1953) – and called for an engagement policy towards the North called “sunshine policy”. In fact, the military leadership's main grievance against the Kim Dae-jung government was that it instilled doubt as to the status – enemy or friend – of North Korea, and would produce deleterious effects on the country's national security posture. The primary goal of the sunshine policy was indeed to “lay the foundation for peaceful Korean unification by breaking the vicious cycle of negative, hostile actions and reactions through peaceful coexistence and peaceful exchanges and cooperation”.²³ In order to achieve such a goal, it was most important for Kim Dae-jung to reduce public awareness of North Korean military threats. Not surprisingly, the sunshine policy caused confusion, and proved divisive: while 75% of colonels answered yes to the survey item “South Korean government should indicate North Korea as the main enemy of South Korea”, only 35% of new conscripts did so in 2001.²⁴ Second, the Kim Dae-jung government's response to North Korean provocations differed

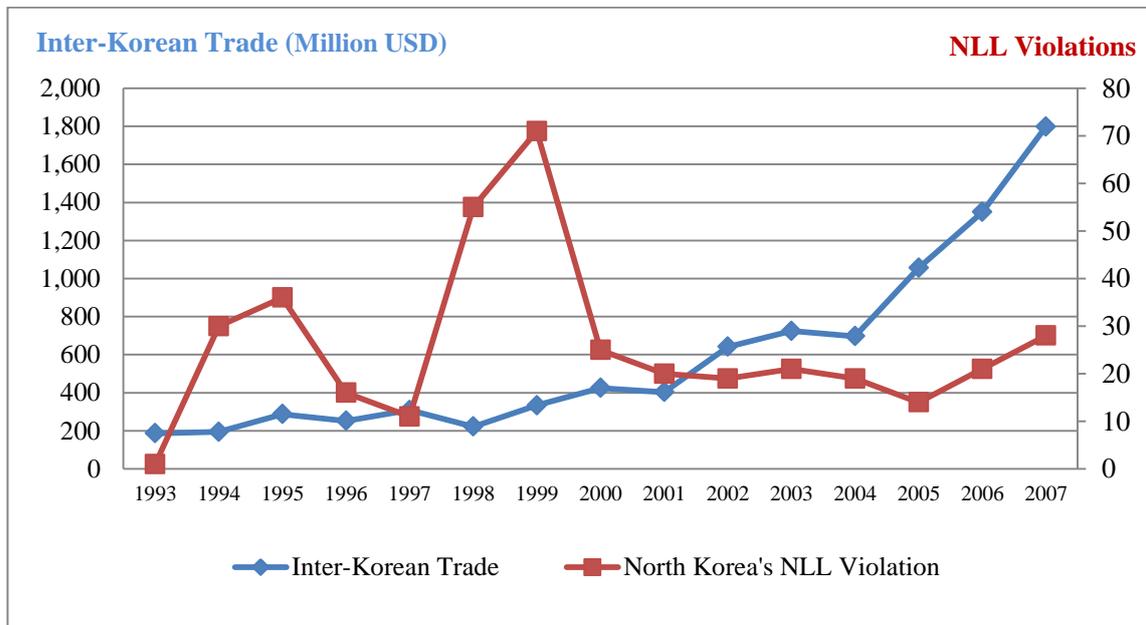
²² National Defense University, 1995, p.158.

²³ Moon, 2000, p.6.

²⁴ National Defense University, 2001, p.38.

from its predecessor's. Since, in the early 1990s, North Korea continued to provoke South Korea with nuclear test and threats to turn Seoul into a sea of fire, Kim Young-sam's government had attached much importance to military preparedness against North Korea's threats. On the contrary, when in 1999 North Korea aggressively violated the Northern Limit Line (NLL) – a maritime border between the two Koreas – in the West Sea, causing the two Koreas to exchange fire in the disputed NLL waters, President Kim Dae-jung sustained his North Korean policy as if nothing had happened. He began increasing the volume of inter-Korean trade and imposed strict restrictions on the use of fire against North Korea. This precautionary measure resulted in a second naval clash in 2002 in which six South Korean sailors were killed as a result of North Korea's surprise attack. In order to prevent the naval clash from destroying the reconciliatory atmosphere between the two Koreas, President Kim Dae-jung completely ignored the dead and wounded South Korean sailors.

Figure 2 : Inter-Korean Trade Volume and North Korea's NLL Violation by Year



Source: Kim & Lee, 2011, p.59.

Faced with such a state of affairs, the South Korean military leadership did not raise its voice against a government definitely more inclined to appease North Korea than to challenge its provocations.²⁵ Since the principle of civilian supremacy over the military does not necessarily mean that military leaders should refrain from speaking up or resigning when national security seems endangered by policy, it is relevant and important to examine the South Korean military's inaction. The first plausible explanation for it is that the majority of military officers voluntarily upheld the sunshine policy just as they had supported President Kim Young-sam's military reforms in the early 1990s. Yet it became

²⁵ Han Chul-yong, the former chief of communication monitoring unit, accused Defence Minister Kim Dong-shin and Combined Forces Vice Commander Nam Jae-joon of intentionally disregarding a clear indication of North Korea's provocation against South Korean sailors.

clear that by increasing the total volume of inter-Korean trade, the sunshine policy hardly helped pacify the conflict, as shown in Figure 2. Moreover, it can be supposed that South Korea’s mature democracy forced the military to be submissive to civilian government. However, it is a normal process even under a mature democracy for the military to try and rally the civilian authorities to their point of view, especially when essentials are at stake.²⁶ But President Kim Dae-jung was likely to use subjective civilian control means to assert his authority over the military leadership: for instance, favour politically reliable officers from the Cholla province – the ruling New Political Union’s regional base –, or keep discontented officers under surveillance. This proposition gains support from data analyzed here.

Table 4 : Logit Regression Analysis on Promotion to Brigadier General (Class of 1966)

Variable	Model 1 (S.E.)	Model 2 (S.E.)
<i>Experience</i>		
Internal security forces (ISF)	1.234(.123)**	1.012(.151)
ISF*Period(1998-2002)		1.353(.256)
<i>Seniority in grade</i>		
Year of promotion to colonel	.715(.047)***	.624(.051)***
<i>Education</i>		
KMA	.999(.001)	1.000(.002)
NDU	.752(.222)	.674(.207)
<i>Ability</i>		
Official commendations	1.049(.022)**	1.054(.023)**
<i>Private Ties</i>		
Hana faction	.323(.252)	.371(.285)
School ties to Kim Young-sam (1993-1997)	.832(.787)	.914(.851)
Regional ties to Kim Young-sam (1993-1997)	.589(.327)	.596(.337)
Regional ties to Kim Dae-Jung (1998-2002)		4.222(1.86)***
Pseudo R-square	.128	.168
Log-likelihood	-144.08	-137.47
AIC (2k-2log-likelihood)	304.16	294.94
Cases	253	253

Note: *** p<.01; ** p<.05, * p<.01.

The coefficients in Table 4 present odds ratios that indicate the extent to which the chances of getting promoted to brigadier general are affected by a one-unit increase or decrease in the independent variables. Model 2, which has lower AIC value, is significantly better than Model 1. Results highlight that President Kim Dae-jung used political allegiance as an eligibility criterion for promotion – for two reasons. First, even though it is not statistically significant, the positive effect of interaction between experience in internal security forces and promotion definitely indicates the possibility that Kim Dae-jung attempted to keep the military under surveillance: under his presidency (1998-2002), a

²⁶ Finer, 1962, p.140.

one-unit increase in experience in ISFs (from captain to colonel) increased the chances of getting promoted to brigadier general by 35.3% controlling for other independent variables. Second, military officers from Kim Dae-jung's birth region (Cholla province) had a better chance of securing such a promotion: a regional tie to the president increased the odds of promotion to brigadier general 4.22 times.

This change in eligibility criteria for promotion to general rank helped enhance the principle of civilian supremacy over the military. However, it caused a furious backlash from retired military officers who were not under control of the civilian government. Given that the Korean Veterans' Association (KVA), a puppet organization of the government since its establishment in 1989, had until then unflinchingly supported the government's defence policy, anti-government protests by retired military officers were an uncommon occurrence. Vocal dissidence among ranking military retirees could be a major obstacle to the pursuit of the President's sunshine policy. The antagonism between the progressive government and conservative retired military officers was amplified after the second naval clash in 2002. Accusing Kim Dae-jung of responding lukewarmly to North Korea's provocation, at least five hundred retired generals, including thirteen four-star generals, joined the opposition Grand National Party (GNP).²⁷ Bearing in mind that less than fifty colonels are usually promoted to brigadier general every year, this number was large enough to threaten the policy's legitimacy. Even though President Kim Dae-jung attempted to gain support within the forces by enabling his military protégés to ascend to leadership positions, the sunshine policy was destined to fail because retired military officers could provide the opposition party with military expertise hitherto monopolized by successive governments, and effectively obstruct it politically.

Conclusion and Implications

This article has attempted to explore the effect of the political transition to democracy on promotion prospects in the South Korean Army, a neglected topic in the recent literature. Several propositions were tested using data from two KMA classes. Two findings stand out. First, the data refute a reciprocal relationship between a mature democracy and objective civilian control. While the latter was dominant under conservative civilian rule, it was replaced by subjective control under progressive civilian rule. A high level of distrust on defence or military policy among military officers was found to have a negative effect on objective civilian control. There was a time-variant effect of experience in internal security forces and of social ties to the President on chances of promotion across civilian governments: whereas prior to 1993 the military government that a majority of officers regarded as the cause of their professional marginalization had favoured those with extensive experience in internal security forces, this was no longer the case under civilian rule; while social ties to the President were a major factor under military rule, they became irrelevant under conservative civilian rule, but less so under progressive government.

²⁷ Lee, 2001.

Second, perhaps severe competition for success and the lack of esprit de corps among military officers are much more important in explaining why a mature democracy does not necessarily lead to objective civilian control. According to Huntington, the latter presupposes mature military professionalism involving a balance among expertise, social responsibility, and corporateness. Given that subjective civilian control basically consists in fragmenting the military into competing groups, how can a political transition to liberal democracy turn a fragmented officer corps into cohesive one with a sense of organic unity? Intra-military cohesion is not easily secured: it comes from a shared experience of life in the military and the “*more or less organized ensemble of the beliefs and sentiments common to all [its] members*”²⁸ as a result of military socialization. Given a fragmented officer corps inherited from an authoritarian regime, a political transition to liberal democracy will accelerate objective civilian control of the military *only if* individual officers collectively regard mature military professionalism as most effective for their individual success.

This study could not directly test if and how reforms for greater civilian authority and oversight affect the effectiveness of defence policy and the ability to defend against external threats. Instead, it examined whether individual officers with professional skills and expertise enjoyed better opportunity for career success after South Korea’s political transitions. Such an analysis is useful for a better understanding of evolving South Korean civil-military relations because military professionalism is one of factors most likely to enhance the effectiveness of defence policy and the functionality of defence establishments.²⁹ There is some evidence that the political transition to civilian rule and subsequent military reforms shifted promotion prospects in a way that favoured those better equipped with military skills and expertise in fighting external threats, and discriminates against those whose experience is mainly in internal security forces. As a consequence, the non-combat death toll, which is closely associated with combat effectiveness, decreased rapidly after the end of military rule. A safe conclusion is that successful military reforms initiated to eradicate the flawed and biased system of military promotion and assignment encouraged officers to gain more military skills and expertise, thus enhancing their professional ability to fight a war.

Finally, the disparity in political attitudes towards civilian authorities between active-duty and retired officers is puzzling. Why did only retired military officers organize themselves into a protest movement calling for an immediate suspension of assistance to North Korea and a fundamental amendment to the sunshine policy? A possible answer may be derived from the fact that an active-duty officers’ main concern is the cost of resisting civilian authorities. Taking into account that the South Korean military has failed to nurture a strong sense of organic unity, it is reasonable to expect that few officers will raise their

²⁸ Finer, 1962, p.9.

²⁹ Huntington, 1957, p.85.

voice for the institutional interest of the military. On the contrary, retired officers have nothing to lose and can overcome collective action dilemmas relatively easily with help from an NGO (namely, the Korean Veterans' Association).³⁰ The South Korean case may not capture all explanatory factors relevant to constructing a theory of defence or military reform and its impact on combat effectiveness or the functionality of the armed forces in new democracies. For example, the stronger esprit de corps the military maintains, the more difficult it may be to implement military reforms. Therefore, it is more important for future research to gather additional historical cases for further comparative work.

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³⁰ Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p.137.

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Appendix

Correlation Table of Independent Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Experience	1.00							
2. Seniority	0.29 0.00	1.00						
3. KMA	-0.08 0.18	0.06 0.40	1.00					
4. Army College	0.21 0.00	0.54 0.00	-0.09 0.11	1.00				
5. NDU	0.18 0.00	0.26 0.00	0.02 0.69	0.38 0.00	1.00			
6. Commendations	0.09 0.10	0.29 0.00	-0.10 0.10	0.65 0.00	0.42 0.00	1.00		
7. Hana faction	0.23 0.00	0.12 0.08	-0.15 0.01	0.13 0.02	0.17 0.00	0.13 0.02	1.00	
8. Regional ties	0.10 0.08	0.07 0.29	-0.02 0.74	0.03 0.62	0.09 0.13	-0.01 0.83	0.06 0.30	1