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STARS AND STRIPES.

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Thousands of S. Koreans mark Liberation Day

By [Jeremy Kirk](#), Stars and Stripes

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SEOUL — Under a hot sun on Korea's Liberation Day, thousands of demonstrators — both for and against the United States — marched on downtown, focusing on real liberation: the problem of unifying North and South Korea.

Old and young alike carried banners and signs with effigies of President Bush and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il while yelling through bullhorns, causing police to shut down streets and slowing traffic.

Since the end of the Korean War 50 years ago, U.S. forces have been in place as a deterrent against North Korea. But thousands of young students rallied through Chongno Street — a main thoroughfare in Seoul — saying the United States is preparing for an attack on North Korea.

“Get rid of U.S.!” said the demonstrators, many of whom carried an all-white flag with a united blue Korean Peninsula. “Preserve Korean independence! Fight for this country's independence and peace!”



Jeremy Kirk / S&S

Demonstrators deface a mock missile representing North Korea's nuclear program near City Hall in Seoul Friday.



Jeremy Kirk / S&S

Pro-American ralliers gather at City Hall in Seoul Friday. Korea's Liberation Day holiday brought out both pro- and anti-U.S. demonstrators.

Many demonstrators belonged to Hanchongryon, an outlawed student group that advocates closer ties with North Korea and blames the United States for Korea's division. They say that the problem with North Korea can be dealt with only between the Koreans.

Seo Eun-jong, a Hanchongryon member who was passing out leaflets on a street corner, said she was commemorating Korea's independence from Japan 58 years ago.

But soon after liberation, Korea fell victim to the United States and Russia, she said. After World War II, the United States and Russia organized the Japanese surrender, each taking half of the peninsula.

"We became subordinate to the United States," said Seo, 23, from Ansong City. "I believe the United States is preparing for another Korean War. I want to let people know that we are against a war, and it is desirable for the United States to have a nonaggression treaty with North Korea."

North Korea has long sought a nonaggression pact with the United States, saying it is a prerequisite for talks on its nuclear program. North Korea, the United States, China, Russia and Japan and South Korea are scheduled to meet Aug. 27-29 in Beijing, the first round of multilateral talks since North Korea announced its nuclear program in October.

At City Hall, American flags numbered nearly as many as Korean ones. Dominated by older Koreans, the ralliers burned an effigy of Kim Jong Il and defaced mock missiles representing the communist country's nuclear program.

Seo Seog-goo, a lawyer who came to Seoul from Taegu for the rally, wore a small placard around his neck with skulls that said "Let us overthrow the Kim Jong Il regime. By doing so, let us save North Korea." Seo said South Korean president Roh Moo-hyun should not be lenient on groups such as Hanchongryon.

Seo also was heartily pro-American.

"I think North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il is afraid of United States President George W. Bush. If Bush continues to pressure North Korea, there is a really good opportunity to overthrow the North Korean dictator regime," he said.

Younger Koreans do not understand history, and their behavior toward U.S. forces — such as demonstrating at bases — "should not be forgiven," said 82-year-old Chang Byung-mook, who was forced into the Japanese military to fight against Americans in Australia.

Some older Koreans who watched the anti-American protesters march on Chongno Street looked at them with scorn, while others cheered them on and accepted leaflets.

“I don’t think USFK is interfering in Korea relations, but the problem is that North Korea is thinking USFK is in the way,” said Lee Chang-young, 67, who watched as anti-American protesters marched by near Tapkol Park on Chongno Street. “Why are we helping North Korea? They are just making nuclear weapons.”

“We old people should teach these young guys,” Lee said.

— *Choe Song-won contributed to this report.*

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