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Securitizing trade: the case of the Korea-US free trade agreement

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Abstract

The Korea–US free trade agreement (KORUS FTA) of 2007 clearly shows how countries simultaneously pursue economic benefits and strategic

interests in trade negotiations. This study argues that the surprise launch and the successful conclusion of the KORUS FTA illustrate the joint efforts by the United States and the Republic of Korea to *re-securitize* their bilateral economic relations. Security and strategic calculations held by top policy-makers on both sides catalyzed the official launch of FTA negotiations by removing a number of longstanding trade irritants such as Korea's screen quotas and ban on US beefs. At the post-negotiation stage, however, the lack of bipartisanship — particularly in the United States — to provide trade liberalization for their allies in favor of their own broader strategic interests has led to the legislative stalemate of executive efforts at re-securitization of trade relations. This study concludes that the stalemated ratification process shows the erosion, not the strength, of US power to provide security and trade liberalization as public goods.

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