

Pyeongtaek 2020: Militarism-Urbanization Linkages in South Korea

Bridget Martin*

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*Department of Geography

University of California-Berkeley

505 McCone Hall

Berkeley, CA 94720-4740

Martb244@berkeley.edu

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Abstract

This paper describes how emerging trends in territorial development in South Korea intersect with major shifts in the US-South Korea alliance. Focusing mainly on USAG Humphreys in Pyeongtaek, the key observation of this paper is that US imperialism—which has already been imbricated with South Korean developmentalism since the end of the Korean War—has converged in new ways with neo-developmental approaches in territorial development. First, Pyeongtaek has received significant compensation from the central government in the form of cash support, administrative support, and special laws, as the city will host two expanded US military bases. Second, the city of Pyeongtaek is vigorously attempting to spin local base expansion into an asset rather than a liability. It invokes neo-developmental discourses and pursues the concrete development of the “international city” in attempt to overcome Pyeongtaek’s gritty “camp town” (*gijichon*) image. These two key military-urbanization linkages not only help to produce an ambitious and aggressive development regime in Pyeongtaek. They also illuminate how neo-developmental projects can be heavily influenced by the central government. This calls into question assumptions that local-global connectivity characteristic of neo-developmental planning undercuts the authority of the central government.

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