

OPINION

Saying goodbye to Ziggy, the elephant in my room

By Lindsey Laughlin

One day, during a game of hide-and-seek, my 5-year-old called out with concern from the master bedroom: “Mom! There is a skeleton in your closet!”

“Those are Ziggy’s tusks, sweetheart!” I called back, preoccupied with folding laundry.

Ziggy was an Indian elephant who spent most of his life chained indoors at the Brookfield Zoo after a near-fatal attack on his keeper in 1941. As the daughter of an exotic animal veterinarian who took care of Ziggy in the early 1970s, I had grown up with two large portions of his tusks — they had been in the closets, bedrooms and living rooms of every home I’d ever known — and they were as familiar as my reflection.

Setting down a half-folded shirt, I paused. I hadn’t thought about Ziggy’s tusks since my father’s death in 2015.

Pulling them out from behind my wedding dress, I gently placed the tusks on the floor. They were yellowed in places but primarily white; fractured in places but mostly whole. My son ran his fingers down a smooth section of ivory and asked, “Mom, where is Ziggy now?”

At 7 tons and more than 10 feet tall, Ziggy was one of the largest bull elephants ever in captivity. He changed ownership twice in his early years — including a stint with his namesake, Florenz Ziegfeld — before joining Singer’s midwest circus.

At Singer’s, Ziggy bonded with a clown named Charlie Becker who taught him how to play harmonica and smoke cigarettes. When Becker fell ill unexpectedly, Ziggy became unmanageable. He was sold to the Brookfield Zoo in 1936.

George Lewis, a circus worker with a reputation for handling “difficult” elephants, was hired by Brookfield to tame Ziggy. Frustrated with his slow progress, Lewis flew into a rage one evening. In his autobiography, “I Loved Rogues,” Lewis wrote, “I sailed into Ziggy in a fury, and fifteen minutes later, he was laying on his side on the floor.”

Lewis’ moment of domination over the bull elephant resulted in a tentative bond between them. Seeing Lewis calmly walk Ziggy from his enclosure to the exercise



Zookeeper George Lewis polishes Ziggy the elephant’s tusks at Brookfield Zoo in 1938. MAX ARTHUR/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

yard became a familiar occurrence.

The peace between them changed abruptly on April 26, 1941, however, when Ziggy threw Lewis several feet across his exercise yard in front of horrified zoo visitors, then pinned him down with his trunk. Repeatedly, Ziggy slammed his ivory into the dirt trying to impale his keeper. Miraculously, Lewis escaped when Ziggy wedged his tusks into the ground.

Although this attack is as infamous as Ziggy, few people know the likely reason for it: Earlier that day, Lewis had interrupted Ziggy’s intimate foray with Nancy, a female Asian elephant. Ziggy was understandably upset.

Hours after the attack, Lewis faced Ziggy once last time — to secure a chain around his ankle. Once in chains, Ziggy remained isolated indoors for 30 years.

On Aug. 28, 1971, Chicago schoolchildren succeeded in

raising \$50,000 for a new enclosure to set Ziggy free. “I had the privilege to cut his chain off and cut him loose,” said Ed Schneider, Brookfield’s lead keeper at the time. “I used a cutting torch to cut right through it. We kept his ankle cool with a hose.” Ziggy was allowed to spend his days in fresh air and sunlight for the first time in three decades.

Yet, just a few years later, in March 23, 1975, Ziggy tragically fell into the moat at the front of his stall in the Pachyderm House. Schneider’s wife, Gail, the curator of Brookfield’s Children’s Zoo, said, “That day is in my mind like yesterday. We all carried two-way radios. We heard this transmission, ‘Ziggy fell in the moat!’ and our hearts stopped.”

With determination and ingenuity, the zoo staff rescued Ziggy. But his freedom was again short-lived. On Oct. 27, 1975, he died from old age. “For the last week Ziggy

leaned against the walls of his stall for rest,” my dad, Dr. Daniel Laughlin, told *The New York Times*. “When elephants get old and death is near, they won’t lie down for fear they won’t get back up. Ziggy had lost more than 1,000 pounds.”

Ziggy was 58 years old, equivalent to 100 human years. The Chicago Zoological Society donated his remains to the Field Museum.

“Ziggy’s skeleton is in a museum in Chicago,” I answered my son. His green eyes looked sincerely into mine, silently asking his next question.

I answered him: “Yes, sweetheart, we will get these tusks back to Ziggy. I promise.”

In life, humans failed Ziggy repeatedly; in death, I intended to honor him. I connected with Adam Ferguson, the Negaunee Collections manager of mammals at the Field Museum.

Ferguson shared that, in 2017,

the museum exhibited Ziggy in-house for employees: “They had Ziggy’s entire skeleton laid flat, every foot bone and tailbone — it was a central piece of this exhibit. They had everything except for his tusks.”

Ferguson arranged for the tusks to be transported from my home in Portland, Oregon, to the Field Museum. On Dec. 9, a truck picked up the carefully packed crate containing Ziggy’s ivory.

With a mixture of sadness and joy, I said a heartfelt goodbye to the elephant in my room.

He had lived there for over four decades, and it was time for him to go home.

Lindsey Laughlin is a science writer and freelance journalist who lives in Portland, Oregon, with her husband and four children. She has degrees in physics, neuroscience and philosophy from the University of California.

How South Korean president’s US visit affects democracy back home

By Seung-Whan Choi

President Joe Biden hosted South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol at the White House on Wednesday, marking the first state visit by a South Korean president in 12 years. This visit was intended to address South Korean concerns with American interests and for the leaders to revisit their commitment to mutual economic and military security.

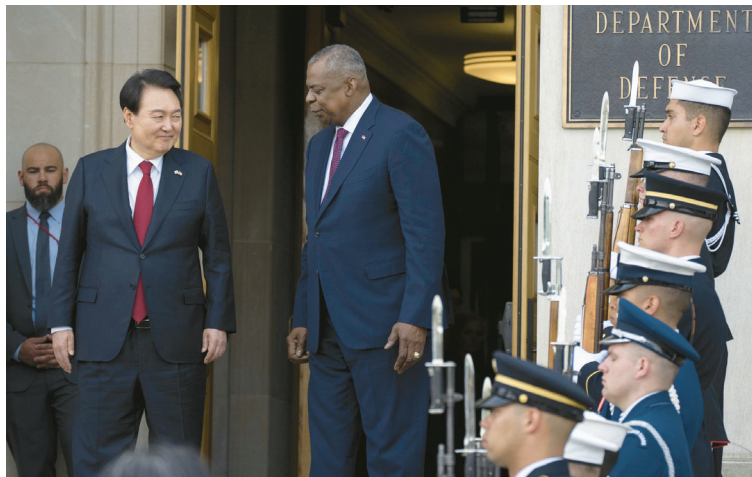
Biden protected America’s interests without making more substantial commitments to South Korea. This diplomatic success for Biden may have negative consequences for South Korean democracy since Yoon returned to his country with nearly empty hands.

Yoon, whose 19% approval rating, due largely to disrespect for democratic values and principles, is a historical low for any Korean leader, is likely to rely on repressive measures to counter criticism of his poor handling of foreign affairs.

During the summit, Biden stood firm on initiatives related to high-tech and economic security. American consumers, who support the Inflation Reduction Act, are incentivized to buy electric cars from Tesla, General Motors, Ford Motor and Volkswagen for a full tax credit of \$7,500. These companies meet sourcing guidelines that require a certain percentage of components and minerals in car batteries be purchased from the U.S. and its trading partners.

Biden did not grant an exemption for South Korean-made Hyundai and Kia cars.

Biden also implemented sweeping restrictions on semiconductor technology exports to China. The policy has negatively affected South Korean-based Samsung. The company’s



Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, center, welcomes South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on Thursday at the Pentagon. AP

chip manufacturing business, Samsung Foundry, has considerable investments in China.

Many South Koreans see these policies as an attempt to make their country a pawn in America’s trade war with China. The South Korean semiconductor industry accounts for more than 19% of total exports and has made a big dent in the trade imbalance since Yoon’s inauguration.

On the security front, Biden asked South Korea to provide military aid to Ukraine and laid the foundation for a triadic alliance with South Korea and Japan to counter the growing military and economic power of China and North Korea.

Yoon has shipped out a large quantity of artillery shells that are reportedly headed to Ukraine, reversing his previous stance that South Korea would provide only humanitarian and financial assistance.

Given that 53% of South Koreans rate Russia favorably and 35% hold an unfavorable view, Yoon’s unilateral policy change is not welcomed. Concerned citizens and the opposition party

see Yoon’s policies as responsible for deteriorating relations with Russia.

Biden’s proposal to build a security coalition with South Korea and Japan would, if successful, greatly help Washington isolate and weaken Beijing and Pyongyang. Biden praised Yoon on restoring friendly relations with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, but many South Koreans do not support a military alliance with Japan.

South Koreans still have bitter memories of Japanese colonialism from 1910 to 1945. Koreans were treated as second-class citizens and enemies in their own country. Korean girls and women were sexually enslaved for Japanese soldiers, and horrific human experiments were conducted on Koreans.

Despite no official apologies from Kishida for the historical wrongdoings of his country, Yoon remains committed to restarting Seoul-Tokyo relations. For example, Yoon has raised a South Korean public fund rather than securing compensation from Japanese firms for Koreans

who were forced to work during World War II. This has improved relations with Tokyo but directly challenges the 2018 order of the South Korean Supreme Court.

South Koreans displeased with Yoon’s overly friendly gestures toward Japan have demanded Yoon’s immediate resignation to restore South Korea’s national sovereignty and constitutional values. Yoon’s undemocratic and unconstitutional decision has reignited sociopolitical and religious groups that were the main engine of the South Korean democracy movements before the installment of the democratic constitution in 1987.

South Koreans are unlikely to rally around Yoon if he agrees to a triad military partnership. It is particularly tough for South Koreans to embrace Japanese rearmament backed by their own government.

While North Korea relies on a nuclear deterrent for regime survival, South Korea lacks such nuclear capabilities. Doubtful the U.S. would risk San Francisco for Seoul in the event of a nuclear war with the North, about 77% of South Koreans express support for building their nuclear weapons and forces.

Biden knows that U.S. military supremacy might erode as North Korea strengthens its nuclear capabilities and develops new weapons systems. Nevertheless, Biden has no desire to let South Korea go nuclear. He instead promised Yoon that the U.S. would strengthen the level of extended deterrence for the South. The new extended deterrence means the periodical deployment of a nuclear-armed submarine in South Korea and commits Washington to consult Seoul regarding the use of nuclear weapons.

This is a small but much-

needed victory for Yoon. Strengthened extended deterrence is a slightly improved version of conventional extended deterrence, but it is not enough to extinguish many South Koreans’ anxiety over potential nuclear attacks from the North.

The summit allowed Biden to bolster national interests in America, Eastern Europe and East Asia. Biden received unequivocally strong support from Yoon. For his part, Yoon seemed to forget his duty to find a way to safeguard South Korea’s interests. In the eyes of ordinary South Koreans, Yoon appeared to act like Biden’s lap dog.

Biden’s achievements correspond to Yoon’s failures. Back home, Yoon faces protests over his submissive and subservient diplomacy and undemocratic decisions. In anticipation of growing domestic opposition, Yoon has prepared to impose more repressive measures: getting police officers and prosecutors ready to control dissenters and critical media, and ordering the Korean CIA and the Defense Counterintelligence Command to conduct a physical search or wiretap on South Korean citizens secretly.

If protests arise, Yoon will likely suppress voices of dissent by painting them as anti-American or North Korean sympathizers, harming South Korean democracy.

Yoon, if he interprets Biden’s diplomacy as personal goodwill, may be emboldened to pursue undemocratic measures to consolidate his power, which will have dire consequences for the future of South Korean democracy.

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