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ROK-US MILITARY RELATIONS:
TRANSITION OF DEFENSE RESPONSIBILITY

BY

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ROK-US MILITARY RELATIONS:
TRANSITION OF DEFENSE RESPONSIBILITY

An Individual Study Project
Intended for Publication

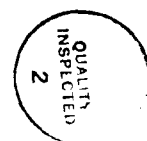
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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Thomas W. Holden, LtCol, USMC

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Since the end of the Korean war in 1953, the United States has been the guarantor of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. Today, after thirty-six years of U.S. military protection, the South Korean economy is one of the world's most dynamic, fully capable of financing its own national defense. Its freely elected democratic government has dropped its hard-line, anti-communist rhetoric and is pursuing a northern diplomacy aimed at a peaceful reunification. Finally, its military stands on the verge of full modernization and is becoming a respected deterrent in its own right. Yet in spite of all this success, the United States remains in firm control of ROK-US military command positions and retains operational control over the Korean defense forces in peace and war. This study examines the need for a continuing U.S. dominance in ROK-US military relations and proposes a transition strategy, whereby defense responsibility can be transferred from U.S. to ROK military forces. Such a move would strengthen and preserve ROK-US political/military relations as well as protect our future regional interests. Key

Introduction

This study looks at the future of ROK-US military relations and proposes changes that will promote continued stability on the Korean peninsula, provide the Korean military greater autonomy, and improve ROK-US relations while meeting the national interests of both nations. The focus of the study is on the transfer of defense responsibility from the United States to the Republic of Korea (ROK).

After years of an unprecedented concession of sovereign rights that allows a U.S. military commander to exercise operational control (OPCON) over Korean defense forces, the ROK government is making rapid progress toward its goal of national defense self-sufficiency. Korean military officers with whom I have worked and still have contact are speaking out, expressing their desire for a greater leadership role in their defense, a role that would equalize command relationships within the existing American led command structure. They believe that an increased leadership role will strengthen the international prestige of the ROK and provide a bridge to even greater self-sufficiency. A programed shift in defense responsibility from the United States to the ROK would help equalize the existing command structure and better serve ROK-US relations on the Korean peninsula.

A plan (or strategy) for the orderly transfer of defense responsibility from the United States to the ROK is supported, in part, by our national strategy that encourages our allies to defend themselves and the Nixon Doctrine, which states, "...we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested and

as appropriate. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its own defense."¹ If we follow our national strategy and the Nixon Doctrine it becomes difficult to justify an American General with OPCON of the ROK defense forces and, more specifically, the ROK ground combat forces, which are 100 percent Korean in peacetime. In essence, the current command structure denies the respect that a mature and self-sufficient ROK ground combat force (as well as its General Officer Corps) deserves.

I do not suggest that the United States lessen its defense commitment to the security of the ROK. Nor do I contend that the present ROK-US warfighting structure is operationally unsound. On the contrary, the present system is a functional deterrent, more than capable of defeating North Korean aggression. What I do advocate is the development of a transition strategy that will provide an orderly transfer of defense responsibility to the ROK military leadership commensurate with its capabilities.

Throughout my research I failed to uncover any comprehensive plan aimed at achieving a ROK-US transition of defense responsibility. To date, every significant transfer of defense responsibility was in response to a troop reduction or expectation of one. In short, our response has been reactive instead of proactive.

The extraordinary pace of ROK economic, diplomatic, and military development is reason enough to consider a transition strategy. The following is a partial list of events that

illustrate the magnitude of growth in the ROK over the last two years:

- Successful 1986 Asian Games.
- Termination of U.S. Foreign Military Sales credits in response to ROK economic growth and a growing U.S. trade deficit, 1987.
- Open Presidential elections, with the President directly elected by the people, 1987.
- Peaceful transition of Head of State, 1988.
- Legislative elections which placed opposition parties in control of the National Assembly, 1988.
- Successful 1988 Summer Olympic Games.
- Open investigation into Presidential wrong doing during the Fifth Republic, 1988.
- Establishment of diplomatic relations and trade missions with socialist block nations, 1989.
- Northern diplomacy aimed at reunification, 1988.

Fully aware of the implications presented by each of these events, The Combined Forces Command, Korea, organized a "CFC in the 1990s" study to examine the future of ROK-US military relations. Add to this another study by the ROK to determine what military capabilities they still require to reach total self-sufficiency and you begin to see that change is coming, and, as I hope to show, coming soon.

Former ROK Minister of Defense, Lee Ki Baik, recognized the accelerated progress in ROK defense self-sufficiency and said in

1987 that South Korea would reach parity with North Korea within years.² A recently published South Korean defense policy paper, however, contradicts the former defense Minister's view. The policy paper predicts that the South will begin to achieve parity or comparable combat capability with the North by 1994 and reach a balance by the year 2000.³ The defense policy paper, however, measures military balance in numbers, not quality. Brian Bridges, Head of the East Asian Programme at Chatham House, England, is quick to point out that, "numerical superiority does not mean a qualitative advantage." He further states that, "...it is likely that South Korea on its own is close to or has already achieved parity with the North."⁴ Regardless of who you believe, North/South military parity is not far off, further justifying the need for a transition strategy.

This study, including its proposals for change to the ROK-US military command structure is based on the following assumptions:

- The ROK-US Mutual Defense Treaty remains in effect.
- The ROK democratization movement continues peacefully.
- The ROK government remains stable.
- The ROK defense industry continues to grow.
- Efforts to reduce the U.S. budget deficit will focus on the military overseas force structure reductions.

Background of ROK-US Military Relations

The United States relationship with Korea dates back to 1882

and the signing of a vague Korean-American Friendship Treaty. Korea, with the urging of China, sought the treaty hoping that it would blunt the Japanese ascendancy in the region. The United States agreed in principle to the treaty based upon possible future diplomatic developments between the two countries. However, soon after signing the treaty the U.S. promptly forgot it and remained silent when Russia and Japan occupied and divided the Korean peninsula in 1896.⁵

In 1941, there was a challenge to U.S. world order interests in the Far East.⁶ Of concern to the United States was the regional balance of power. The U.S. could not stand-by and allow the Japanese Empire to dominate Asia and the western Pacific. With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States entered the war and subsequently defeated Japan. This broke the Japanese dominate grip on the western Pacific and Asia.⁷

Accepting the Japanese surrender in Korea following the end of World War II became a complex political/military problem for the United States. Russia's late entry into the war against Japan complicated the surrender. Russian forces had accelerated their rapid drive for territory after Japan sued for peace on August 10, 1945, and were moving through Manchuria toward Korea. To facilitate the Japanese surrender and keep Russia from occupying all of Korea, the United States hastily proposed that Korea be divided for purposes of the surrender at the 38th parallel.⁸ Surprisingly, the Russians agreed to this diplomatic solution. Russian forces, already in place to enter Korea, would accept the

surrender north of the 38th parallel and American forces, which had not yet arrived in Korea, to the south. American leaders believed this division of Korea was temporary, since the allied leaders had all agreed at the wartime conferences in Cairo in 1943, and again at Potsdam in 1945, that Korea would, in due course, become free and independent.⁹

The Republic of Korea established its government on May 10, 1948. With a legitimate government in place, the U.S. JCS ordered the withdrawal of its occupation forces to commence on January 15, 1949. A regimental combat team remained behind to continue Korean military training. This regiment, however, left Korea on May 10, 1949, leaving behind a poorly trained and equipped South Korean military force to cope with its own security.¹⁰ All that remained of the American presence was a small Military Advisory Group.

Korea was again all but forgotten. In a January 1950 national security speech to the National Press Club, Secretary of State Dean Acheson depicted the Korean peninsula to be outside the United States line of defense interests in the Far East.¹¹ General Douglas MacArthur also spoke out on United State defense capabilities and national interests and excluded Korea.¹²

On June 25, 1950, North Korea attacked South Korea, thereby placing South Korea once more in the circle of American vital interests.¹³ Washington saw the North Korean attack as open communist aggression. The U.S. President, who was heavily criticized by some conservative political leaders for his lack of support of the Nationalist Chinese in their fight against

communism, had to stop any further spread of communism in the region. Communist control of the Korean peninsula also represented a direct threat to Japan, a country critical to evolving U.S. Pacific strategy and whose defense was now the responsibility of the United States. Thus Korea took center stage in the fight against international communism.

The Korean war ended July 27, 1953, when the United States, the People's Republic of China, and the North Koreans signed an Armistice Agreement. On August 8, 1953, shortly after signing the armistice, the Republic of Korea and the United States negotiated a Mutual Defense Treaty that was ratified by the U.S. Senate on November 17, 1954.¹⁴ The treaty appeased the ROK President, Syngman Rhee, who objected to the Armistice. The treaty also had special significance in that it granted the United States the right to forward base American air, land, and sea forces on ROK territory.¹⁵ The forward basing of forces provided the American led United Nations command the capability to meet its armistice responsibilities, while simultaneously providing for South Korean defense and regional security. According to a U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee report, the United States willingness to accept the armistice responsibility and Korean defense obligation provided a clear signal to the world of American commitment in Northeast Asia.¹⁶

The United Nations command arrangement and mutual defense alliance have served the ROK and the United States national interests exceptionally well. Specifically, it provided the

United States with an opportunity to influence East Asian regional matters, while at the same time adding to the security of Japan. For the ROK it provided a security umbrella under which the Korean people could begin to rebuild their war torn nation.

History and geography have made the Korean peninsula the crossroads of confrontation and conflict. On a geostrategic level Korea represents the regional focal point of four major powers: the Soviet Union, United States, Japan, and China.¹⁷ It is the competing ambitions and inter-acting policies of these nations that influence the East Asian security environment.¹⁸ Although these nations provide guidance and support to their respective ally on the Korean peninsula in pursuit of their national objectives, none favor a return to hostilities. In fact, while they publicly endorse reunification as a long term goal, they are privately content in preserving the status quo.¹⁹

Korea's geographical advantage to the United States is readily apparent. To remain a Pacific power the United States faces a formidable challenge in projecting its military strength across the broad region.²⁰ The ability to forward base U.S. forces on ROK territory helps the U.S. meet this challenge while maintaining a regional military balance of power. Additionally, the Korean-Japanese control of the Korean/Tsushima Straits, a critical sea lane that can be interdicted in time of war to thwart Soviet naval operations, has global significance to the United States. These geographical considerations make Korea an extremely important ally.

Effect of ROK-US Economics on Military Relations

ROK-US military relations are directly linked to the economic capabilities of the two nations. In fact, it may be the economic situation that ultimately dictates the shape of future ROK-US military relations and signals the transition of defense responsibility to the Korean military.

American hegemony over South Korean economic policy has clearly eroded. It can be said that American support in this arena has generated a remarkable, and even threatening, success.²¹

Today, Korea is a world class economic power and a leading Third World arms exporter. In just two short decades, the Korean political leaders transformed an agrarian oriented society into an economic power that ranks 20th in the world in terms of GNP and 12th among trading nations.²² With a projected 1988 GNP topping \$154 billion and a five year trade surplus with the United States, Korea has been able to repay its foreign debt and continue its economic expansion.²³ In 1987, the South Korean rate of real growth was 12 percent. The 1988 estimated growth rate is 10 percent with inflation remaining at just 3 percent.²⁴

From a national security point of view, the most important aspect of South Korea's economic strength is its ability to fund its own military defense programs. This ability to finance and manufacture military aircraft, missiles, and tanks on Korean soil adds to South Korea's international prestige and supports its goal

of national defense self-sufficiency. Recently South Korea completed construction of over 200 Type 88 MBT tanks (a substantially modified M-1 Abrams) and is introducing the Javelin surface-to-air-missile.²⁵ South Korea's aircraft industry earlier completed construction of the F-5 "Tiger" fighter jet and is currently negotiating a U.S. licensing agreement to build the F/A-18 or F-16 fighter. The establishment of a defense industrial base allows Korean officials to pursue foreign suppliers who can transfer defense technologies to Korea.

In light of Korea's extraordinary economic success and the growing trade and budgetary imbalances, the United States terminated Foreign Military Sales (FMS) credits to the ROK in FY 87.²⁶ This elimination of FMS credits did not lessen the United States commitment to Korea, but openly recognizes and highlights its economic defense self-sufficiency.

Adding to the ROK's worldwide economic achievements was the unprecedented success of the 1988 Summer Olympics held in Seoul. The summer games were truly a watershed event in the history of Korea, providing international recognition as well as economic and political opportunities.

Not only were the Olympic Games an enormous success in terms of gold medals won by Korean athletes, but also for the formal and informal diplomatic ties forged with North Korea's socialist allies.²⁷ Since the Olympics, Hungary has established formal diplomatic relations and opened a trade mission in Seoul. Further, the ROK and the Soviet Union have agreed to open trade

without third nation brokers.²⁸ An example of the intense Soviet interest in South Korea is seen in its recent \$270 Million dollar contract for nine ships to be built by Hyundai Ship Yards.²⁹

While the South Korean economy continues to soar, the North Korean economy struggles to maintain even the most modest rate of growth. North Korea's failing economy is illustrated by the fact that Austria has closed its embassy in response to North Korea's failure to meet debt obligations.³⁰ Word is that Sweden may consider a similar course of action. Adding to the problem is the ANZ and Morgan Grenfell-led-bank-consortium, which declared North Korea in default of a \$770 million dollar debt.³¹ It is easy to see why the North Korean attempts to attract free world foreign investment have failed.

Of grave concern to North Korea is the decision by many of its socialist allies to establish trade agreements with South Korea. The only bright spot in the North Korean economy comes from potential trade agreements with none other than the ROK itself. In 1988, the ROK government lifted the ban on inter-Korean trade, thereby allowing South Korean companies to import North Korean products.³² I view this unlikely North/South trade as a shift in the economic strategies within the two Koreas and perhaps an attempt by North Korea to emulate the economic openness of China and the Soviet Union.

The current South Korean economy is five times larger than that of the north. Consequently, if the military spending in the South is between 6 and 7 percent of GNP, then the equivalent GNP

spending in North Korea, in real terms, must fall between 36 and 42 percent.³³ More importantly, the South Korean economy is forecast to grow at a annual rate in excess of 8 percent, while the North Koreans will be hard pressed to maintain their 2.5 to 3 percent rate growth.³⁴

Another economic factor critical to the future of ROK-US military relations is the United States budget deficit. Pressure to reduce the deficit and balance the budget may translate into deeper defense cuts. The cost of maintaining the 43,000 U.S. soldiers in Korea is approximately \$4.8 billion a year.³⁵ With budget constraints already a reality and U.S. Defense Department desires to maintain the present overseas defense posture, the only alternative is to increase burden-sharing by the ROK. However, a changing geostrategic view of east Asia, that includes improved U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Chinese relations, may influence the President and the Congress to reduce defense spending by cutting the forward deployed force structure from Korea.³⁶

A reduction in U.S. forces would also lessen the burden-sharing costs on the ROK budget. Current ROK burden-sharing costs are estimated to be \$45,000 per year per U.S. soldier in Korea. In 1987, the total cost to the ROK government was approximately \$1.9 billion.³⁷

South Korea's economic self-sufficiency in national defense allows it to expand its military industrial capacity and produce the combat arms necessary for force modernization. It is this growing military industrial base coupled with the force

modernization programs that will enable South Korea to reach its goal of military self-sufficiency.

The Korean Perspective

The intense stirrings of "nationalistic pride" and "self-confidence" has given rise to anti-American sentiment within many segments of the Korean society.³⁸ Moreover, this unrest is becoming more focused on ROK-US military related issues.

Some Koreans believe that the ROK military relies too heavily on United States military leadership and support. They see this overreliance as an impediment to their own efforts toward self-sufficiency. The perception is that constant United States support, training, and education develops a passive and dependent mental attitude within some senior Korean officers.³⁹ If this is true, it was not apparent during my two years on the Combined Forces Command staff, where I worked daily with numerous ROK general officers, none of which were passive or dependent upon U.S. support.

The highly visible American military presence in Korea is another source of anti-American sentiment. The American military installation in Seoul that occupies some of the best business property in the capital city is a prime example. It is the continued American use of this base that ultimately forced the issue of relocating of U.S. forces.⁴⁰ Sensing the growing frustration of the Korean people over this issue, President Roh

instructed his foreign minister to expedite an early settlement regarding the U.S. forces relocation.⁴¹

Because the American presence is so pronounced, most Koreans hold a widely accepted view that the Americans can, and do, control events on the peninsula. This view makes it very difficult for United States to disassociate itself from ROK policies that are counter to its interests. The net result, which is now routine in most ROK demonstrations, is the denouncement of the United States and its military forces in Korea.

Yet another growing anxiety among Korean civilians and military personnel alike is the issue of United States nuclear weapons in Korea and a nuclear command system that almost wholly excludes Korean planners.⁴² Complicating the problem is the American policy to neither deny or confirm the presence of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula. Regardless of the United States policy, several high ranking American military officers have implied that nuclear weapons are in place on the peninsula leading a majority of Koreans to believe that the weapons do exist.⁴³

Many Koreans, as well as Americans, have serious doubts about the use of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula. These doubts arise from the close proximity of the DMZ to Seoul.⁴⁴ Retired Lieutenant General John Cushman, a former Combined Field Army Commander in Korea, said during a conference on Korean-American Security Relations in Seoul that, "nuclear weapons are no longer necessary for the defense of South Korea."⁴⁵ While many at the conference were in agreement with General Cushman, other high

ranking U.S. military officers disagreed, citing a continued need for the weapons. An early resolution to the issue of the nuclear weapons will help defuse an emotionally volatile subject, eliminate a North Korean propaganda target, and restore United States prestige on the peninsula.

The issues of U.S. OPCON over ROK forces and the complex and blatantly unequal ROK-US military command system are also receiving increased attention in the Korean press.

Of these two issues the most irritating to the young Korean military officers that I worked with is the issue of OPCON of ROK combat forces by a U.S. General. This system continues the ROK dependence on the United States and delays recognition of the ROK military maturity.⁴⁶ Moreover, U.S. OPCON provides another lucrative target for North Korean propaganda and acts to hinder the ROK efforts at a North-South dialogue.⁴⁷

The second issue, the complex and blatantly unequal military command structure, is a slight to the Koreans nationalistic pride.⁴⁸ Although the Korean military self-sufficiency strategy noted progress in additional defense responsibility and increased force modernization, the leadership and operational control of Korean defense forces remains firmly in the hands of the Americans.

In fairness to the United States, the ROK government has not formally requested additional leadership responsibility commensurate with its capabilities. Informally, however, ROK military officers continue to indicate a strong desire for more

control. Dr. Young Koo Cha, the chief researcher for the Korean Institute for Defense Analyses, displays in his writings a timidity when discussing the OPCON issue. He explains that, "although the ROK is eager for greater political, diplomatic, and military independence, it has no desire to provide the justification for a U.S. withdrawal."⁴⁹ Development of a transition strategy would work to dispel any mistrust in the United States' firm commitment to the ROK security and create a better mutual understanding.

ROK-US Political and Diplomatic Relations

Democratization of the ROK took a major step toward maturity in December 1987. The open, direct election of a President by the people, followed by the peaceful transition of Head of State, was a hallmark event in Korean political history. Adding to the democratization process was the 1988 election of the National Assembly in which opposition parties, containing long time political rivals of the new President, won a majority of the assembly seats.

Following the Presidential election, the new President, Roh Tae Woo, quickly embarked on a strategy of diplomacy, designed to strengthen existing international relations while developing new ones with socialist block countries. Honored with an invitation to be the first South Korean President to speak before the United Nations General Assembly, President Roh was able to articulate the

ROKs desire for peace and expanded relations.

On February 25, 1988, prior to his United Nations speech, President Roh became the first ROK president to lay aside the typical hard line, anti-communist rhetoric and set forth a northern diplomacy aimed at reunification.⁵⁰ The ROK President took his initiative even further when he called for a North/South summit meeting. The ROK President was indeed launching a diplomatic effort of major proportions. A South Korean political scientist wrote, "previous policies just paid lip service to reunification, but this shows a will to discard hostile attitudes."⁵¹ The ROK President's goal, which many consider optimistic, is a single social cultural and economic community before the end of the century.⁵² So far, several North/South political meetings have taken place, working out details for a proposed summit. There are stumbling blocks in the process, however, not the least of which is the continued American military presence in South Korea.

During President Roh's October 18, 1988, United Nations address, he called for a six nation "consultative conference for peace" to end the armed standoff between North and South Korea.⁵³ His address was devoted to improved relations between the two Koreas and the need for regional stability. President Roh also indicated in his address that once he meets with the North Korean leadership he will search for a way to transform the current armistice agreement into a permanent peace arrangement.⁵⁴ A North/South peace accord, although welcomed, has significant

military implications. A peace accord will terminate the Armistice and negate the need for the United Nations Command, thereby reducing, to some extent, American influence on the Korean peninsula.

The ROK diplomatic strategy is active throughout the world. Seldom do business magazines or investment journals fail to include a new diplomatic initiative on the part of the South Koreans. In Southeast Asia, China, and Australia new bilateral trade and emigration agreements have been reached. The most startling success of the diplomatic strategy, however, has been in the improved relations between the Soviet Union and the ROK.

As the world economic center continues to shift to the Far East during the next decade, the government of South Korea will move into a position of increased regional influence. Will the ROK-US Alliance become strained because of the United States intransigence? Or will the United States seize the opportunity to shape events and assume a role aimed at reaching a partnership with the ROK.

ROK-US Command Structure

The Korean theater command structure is a complex binational political/military relationship between the United States and the Republic of Korea. The military command structure, as we know it today, has its roots in the Korean War.

On 7 July 1950, only 15 days after the North Korean attack on

South Korea, the United Nations adopted a resolution that established a U.N. unified command in Korea with a U.S. designated commander.⁵⁵ The first Commander of the United Nations forces was U.S. Army General Douglas MacArthur. Sixteen U.N. member nations responded to the U.N. resolution and sent military forces to fight communist aggression under the United Nations flag.

An Armistice Agreement terminated hostilities on July 27, 1953. The agreement made the Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command (CINCUNC) responsible for maintenance of the Armistice south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). For the past 35 years the United Nations command (UNC) has successfully accomplished this mission. Until the creation of the Combined Forces Command (CFC), it also served as the warfighting headquarters responsible for the defense of South Korea.

Until the late 1960s, the Eighth U.S. Army's I Corps, with the U.S. 2nd and 7th Infantry Divisions and ROK Army forces, defended the western half of the DMZ. The withdrawal of the U.S. 7th Infantry Division, on April 1, 1971 triggered the first major transition of defense responsibility to the ROK military.⁵⁶ As U.S. forces departed, ROK Army units moved forward and assumed defensive positions on the DMZ.

Concurrent with the withdrawal of the U.S. 7th Infantry Division was the reassignment of the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division to a reserve mission. The 1st ROK Army Division relieved the U.S. 2nd Division units on the front lines.⁵⁷ This left the United States with responsibility for only two guard posts on the DMZ,

both adjacent to the Joint Security Area (JSA). During the withdrawal and reassignment of U.S. forces, the Eighth U.S. Army's I Corps evolved into the combined ROK-US I Corps Group, exercising OPCON over the western half of the DMZ. The eastern half of the DMZ remained under the command and control of the First ROK Army.

The newly combined ROK-US I Corps Group was a field-army-size organization commanded by an American Lieutenant General. The American commander had OPCON over three ROK Army corps and a Brigade of ROK Marines.⁵⁸ This ROK-US I Corps Group arrangement continued until 1980.

Expectation of another U.S. troop reduction, proposed by President Carter in 1977, provided the catalyst for the next major transition in defense responsibilities to the ROK military. The western half of the DMZ was divided and the Third ROK Army, under ROK Army command and control, given defense responsibility for the critical western corridor of the DMZ. The ROK-US I Corps Group, which would be redesignated in 1980 as the ROK-US Combined Field Army, was assigned the center of the DMZ.

The 1977 troop reduction proposal, which was never approved, also sparked a major command structure change for U.S. and ROK forces. During the 10th annual Security Consultative Meeting, held July 26, 1977, the ROK Minister of Defense and the U.S. Secretary of Defense agreed to establish a binational Combined Forces Command.⁵⁹ The framework for the command structure had been in being for some time, prompted by a possible deactivation of the United Nations Command. The test case for the concept was

the combined ROK-US I Corps Group.

The purpose of the new CFC was to improve the conduct of combined ROK-US operations and provide a command channel between the United States and the ROK military command authorities.⁶⁰ Unofficially, Koreans believe that the CFC is the vehicle whereby the transition of defense responsibility will occur. To the United States, the CFC represents a command structure that can facilitate the introduction of U.S. forces into the Korean theater.

The new CFC was activated on November 7, 1978, with a U.S. four star general in command and a Korean four star General as the deputy.⁶¹ The principle staff directorates were divided between the ROK and the United States with the dominate staff assignments, C3, C4, and C5 filled by U.S. Generals.⁶² The CFC mission is to deter external aggression and, should deterrence fail, defeat aggression.⁶³

The CFC assumed the warfighting responsibility from the United Nations Command based on the probability that, should hostilities occur again, only U.S. forces would respond to the crisis.

The Commander-in-Chief, Combined Forces Command (CINCCFC) is multi-hatted along with his staff.⁶⁴ His two most significant hats are CINCUNC and CINCCFC. He will fight the war wearing one of these hats. CINCCFC if combat forces are ROK-US, and CINCUNC if other U.N. member nations enter the war. To simplify the command arrangement all OPLANS are written as CINC UNC/CFC.

Dual hatting of the UNC and the CFC has several advantages. One is the economy of manpower achieved with a dual hatted staff. Often overlooked is the importance of including ROK military staff officers in U.N. staff actions. Further, both commands share common political and strategic perspectives and conduct operational level theater operations aimed at integrating air, land, and sea combat power.

The next command structure change took place in 1980. The ROK-US I Corps Group became the ROK-US Combined Field Army (CFA). An American Lieutenant General continued to command the new organization and exercise OPCON over two ROK Army corps. Although the CFA has an American General in command, the primary staff directorates, with the exception of the U.S. C4, are Korean officers with American deputies. The CFA command, which is 60 percent Korean, is still seen by the Koreans as another U.S. controlled organization simply because a U.S. commander controls policy. The United States rationale for this command arrangement is based on maintaining an American presence on the front lines as a visible symbol of the American commitment and deterrence. Unfortunately, U.S. combat forces, excluding JSA Security forces, are not on the front line. This makes the U.S. rationale more of a symbolic gesture that is less than creditable with Korean officers.

Ground Combat Forces

The South Korean ground forces have matured into a well led, highly confident fighting force capable of employing advanced weapons systems and fighting at the operational level. They are also beginning to see themselves as a creditable deterrent to North Korean aggression. The Ground Component Command (GCC) is made up of three field armies: Third ROK Army (TROKA), First ROK Army (FROKA) and the Combined Field Army (CFA). Each army is assigned defensive responsibility along the DMZ. Behind the GCC rear boundary is the Second ROK Army (SROKA), which is under ROK Army, not GCC, command and control. SROKA conducts rear operations. OPCON of forward deployed ground forces (FROKA, TROKA, and CFA) belongs to Commander, GCC, a U.S. General who is also CINCCFC.

As I noted earlier, OPCON of ground combat forces is a highly sensitive issue. Under the initial UNC structure, the Commander of U.N. Ground Forces was the CINCUNC, an American four star General, who was multi-hatted. With activation of the CFC in 1978, the American CINC continued to hold on to the GCC position, thereby continuing OPCON over a ground combat force that is 100 percent Korean during peacetime.

CINCUNC/CFC has OPCON of theater component commands. The Naval Component Command (NCC) is commanded by a ROK Navy Admiral, the Air Component Command (ACC) is commanded by the Commander 7th U.S. Air Force and the Combined Unconventional Warfare Task Force

(CUWTF) is commanded by a ROK Army General. There is little controversy over these command relationships since the designated commander represents the preponderance of the combat power in time of war.

Command of the GCC, however, is another story. Currently CINCCFC dual hats as the Commander GCC. This arrangement appears to be a hold over from the Korean war when the ROK Army's greatest weakness was leadership.⁶⁵ At the start of the Korean war the Korean military had not yet developed the necessary senior military leadership essential for leading a ground campaign. Considering this shortfall in ROK senior level leadership, it was only natural for CINCUNC, with the expressed approval of the ROK President, to assume OPCON over the ROK ground forces. This argument, however, does not hold true today. Unlike the CINCUNC of 1950, who had four hats to wear, today's CINCCFC must juggle seven hats. Moreover, the Korean military is made up of three decades of Korean Military Academy graduates, several of whom are well qualified four star generals with combat experience.

Since CINCUNC/CFC is also Commander GCC, his staff must also assume this hat and contend with the additional wartime responsibilities uncommon to their UNC/CFC political and strategic roles. While each U.S. staff officer executes his UNC/CFC duties, he must also be responsible to his own national chain of command for U.S. Forces Korea and service component staff actions. When you add the GCC defense responsibility to the existing UNC/CFC and national command staff actions the command structure becomes

heavily burdened and increasingly complex.

CINCUNC/CFC and his staff respond to strategic and political direction. At the operational level their primary concern is the synchronization of Joint/Combined combat power on the battlefield. GCC taskings must compete with the UNC/CFC strategic taskings from higher commands. Because of the staffs possible preoccupation with UNC/CFC functionally related, politically sensitive tasks, GCC operational matters can be (and often are) neglected. Close examination of CFC suspense logs reflect delays in GCC taskings compared to those of the UNC/CFC. It was my personal experience, and that of other multi-hatted CFC staff officers, ROK and U.S., that multi-hatting presents a deleterious effect on the timeliness and, in some cases, the thoroughness of GCC staff actions.

A critical warfighting factor to consider in combining the GCC hat with that of UNC/CFC is the possible degrading effect it can have on the critical information flow in time of war. At the CFC level communications traffic can become saturated with messages from ROK and United States national command authorities, CINCPAC, and the component commands. Because of the GCC hat, traffic from the three field armies and Combined Aviation Force (CAF) must compete for space with the sensitive political level communications inbound to CFC.

The existing ROK-US command structure is definitely complex and unbalanced. There are, however, ways to change the present command system so as to balance the leadership, simplify the multi-command relationships, and still show U.S. resolve to

defend the ROK.

A Change to the ROK-US Military Relationship

The United States military presence in Korea was not meant to be indefinite. U.S. policy is to support the ROK defense until they can assume the total defense responsibility themselves. From the demonstrated progress in economic, political, and military growth, the ability of the ROK to assume its own defense responsibility is not far off. Consequently, the time to develop a transition strategy that equalizes the command structure and improves ROK-US relations is now. As the ROK military matures we must gradually phase them into more responsible defense roles, a phasing that is not dictated by U.S. troop reductions. If the U.S. takes the initiative in developing a transition strategy, it can influence the pace of change and dispel fears of a weakened U.S. defense commitment. This will enhance the United States' image and work to protect our long term regional objectives.

The ROK-US transition strategy should accomplish four things:

- Provide the ROK with the prestige deserving of self-sufficiency.
- Transfer defense responsibility commensurate with capability.
- Reflect continued U.S. support for the Mutual Defense Treaty.
- Protect U.S. long term national strategic interests.

To meet the aforementioned objectives, I believe a ROK-US transition strategy must include:

- Transfer of peacetime operational control of ROK defense forces to the ROK JCS.
- Establishment of a separate Ground Component Command under a Korean commander.
- Deactivation of the CFA.
- Reassignment of the CFA combat forces and area of operations to TROKA.
- Redesignation of CFA and its staff as Headquarters, GCC.
- Continued U.S. combat service support on a combined basis with an agreed upon phase out period.
- Development of a phased plan to transfer total command authority for defense of the ROK to the ROK military.
- Negotiations for support of United States national security interests on the Korean peninsula, i.e. U.S. Basing rights, combined intelligence information.

Of the proposed changes the most important to the Korean people and the easiest to accomplish is the realignment of peacetime OPCON of ROK defense forces. U.S. forces in the Korean theater are not OPCON to CINCCFC and neither should the ROK forces. In other theaters of operations in the world, participating forces remain OPCON to the nation providing the force until reaching a specific threat condition. U.S. forces in Korea currently use this method. Changing the OPCON of ROK forces is relatively easy. Simply tie the transfer of OPCON of ROK

forces to CFC to an automatic Korean theater threat condition measure. The cost and operational disruption to CFC is minimal. In short, the shift in OPCON is a remarkably simple change that produces increased self-confidence within the Korean military.

As stated earlier some senior Korean leaders are reluctant to support a change in OPCON, because they fear that it will limit American support to the defense treaty and cause troop withdrawals. Considering the geostrategic importance of the Korean peninsula, and the expanding Soviet regional military build-up, it is highly unlikely that the United States will abandon its defense treaty with Korea over the OPCON issue. To do so would be to relinquish our regional position to the Soviets.

Establishing a Korean commanded, separate GCC has numerous advantages, not the least of which is the restoration of ROK national and military pride. From an operational standpoint, a separate GCC will simplify the command and control structure of the ground combat forces. Formerly, Korean ground forces reported to the Korean Army on matters of command and logistics and to GCC, which is also CFC, on matters relating to operations. Under the new Korean commanded GCC, the ground forces would report to a single GCC headquarters for all their needs. The GCC will coordinate logistic needs with the ROK Army Headquarters. This simplifies reporting procedures, saves time, and improves logistic coordination. Improved coordination of air support, air defense, and rapid wartime adjustment of field army boundaries adds to the list of net gains with a separate GCC. The result, operationally

speaking, is a command with a single, land campaign focus.

An additional advantage is the reduction in language problems that currently exist between the Korean speaking field armies and the English speaking CFC staff. Although the GCC staff will remain combined, the Korean Commander can react prior to the completion of the translation. This is current practice on the CFC staff to avoid delays.

A separate GCC also establishes an important, highly visible Korean four star general position. This position will boost the morale and self-confidence of the South Korean military. Activation of a separate GCC will also work to reduce the CFC's visibility and will represent an important step toward equalizing the command structure.

There are those who oppose a separate GCC. Often cited by the opposition is the cost of equipment, facilities, and personnel to stand up a new headquarters. This would be a valid argument if my proposal was only to activate a separate GCC without other supporting changes. The transition strategy I recommend, however, includes deactivation of the ROK-US CFA and uses its headquarters, staff, and equipment to stand up and house the new GCC Headquarters.

Another objection to a separate GCC is that in time of war it places U.S. forces under a foreign commander. This situation is perhaps less than desirable, but nevertheless a fact in coalition warfare. Currently in Korea, the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division is part of a ROK Army Corps. If renewed hostilities occur, this

American division will fight as part of that corps under the command of a ROK three star general. In NATO, the United States forces find themselves under similar command arrangements.

Deactivation of the CFA is the next step in providing the Koreans with greater military autonomy, while at the same time reducing U.S. presence. The Third ROK Army can easily absorb CFA's combat forces since it already has command and logistic responsibility for them. Given the size of the frontage along the DMZ, two field armies can more than adequately provide the required defenses. Additionally, assigning the Third ROK Army the CFA area of operations will enhance its battlefield coordination.

Deactivation of the CFA adds to the simplification of the GCC command structure and reporting channels. It also eliminates a North Korean propaganda target. Transition of the former CFA staff into a GCC staff will require minimal effort and greatly reduce the turbulence associated with the standing up of a new command. The size of the U.S. staff within the GCC would remain at the same level as that of the former CFA, however, future phased reductions of U.S. personnel must be planned.

The former CFA commander, an American Lieutenant General, would serve as the GCC deputy commander and function as the U.S. link between GCC and CFC. This enables continuity during the transition and provides a spokesman to influence employment of American forces in time of war.

During implementation of the ROK-US transition strategy, U.S. support must continue at current levels. Negotiations must take

place, however, to phase out this support in accordance with the ROK self-sufficiency. Although the UNC must remain under American leadership in accordance with the United Nations resolution, the CINCCFC position is negotiable. While it is difficult to find a Korean official who desires a switch to a Korean CINCCFC, now is the time to set the parameters for such a change. The initial focus of this change should center on equalizing responsibilities within the staff directorates. Once again, a time phased plan based upon capabilities is essential. The Koreans willingness to continue their support for an American General as CINCCFC indicates the importance of the position and its deterrent value to renewed hostilities.

This brings me to the last point of the transition strategy and the one I consider most important. For the United States to continue to assert its influence in the Far East, it must have regional bases from which to operate. Realizing that the ROK still has several defense shortfalls, we are in an excellent position to provide some long term critical defense support in exchange for basing rights.

Combined intelligence collection is critical to both nations and is an ideal example of where cooperation is in the best interests of both parties. U.S. naval augmentation fills another void in the South Korean predominantly coastal naval defense force. Continued use of ROK port facilities in support of sea control and access to economic markets is again essential for both nations. There are other critical areas of defense support, such

as air base access, where a small presence may serve the critical needs of both nations. These areas need exploration and resolve to keep the ROK-US mutual defense treaty viable and strong.

Conclusion

The rebuilding of the Korean military, orchestrated by Korean Military Academy graduates and dedicated political leaders, has produced a regional military power dedicated to the ROK objective of national defense self-sufficiency. Having worked with vintage military equipment from 1950 through the mid 1970s, the Korean military is at last on the edge of full modernization. Equipped with high technology, advanced weapon systems, the South Korean Army is coming of age and will soon provide a credible deterrence to external aggression without U.S. assistance.

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