



**STRATEGY
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WILL U.S. FORCES BE NECESSARY IN A UNIFIED KOREA?

BY

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ABSTRACT

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At this moment in history, one of the last symbols of the Cold War is showing signs of crumbling. In June 2000, an unprecedented meeting between the presidents of North and South Korea took place on the Peninsula. Furthermore, a recent U. S. State Department visit to North Korea moves the possibility of a North/South reunification closer to reality. The obvious benefit to reunifying the two Koreas is a reduction in military tension on the Peninsula and throughout Asia. This paper will discuss a brief historic perspective on why U.S. forces are in Korea and their importance there. Furthermore, it will determine what force structure, if any, the U.S. should maintain in Korea to ensure the security of the region.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
WILL U.S. FORCES BE NECESSARY IN A UNIFIED KOREA?	1
DIVIDING THE KOREAN PENINSULA	1
POST WORLD WAR II KOREA	2
THE KOREAN WAR.....	3
THE LONG ROAD TOWARD REUNIFICATION	4
THE SUNSHINE POLICY	5
US SECURITY POLICY IN SOUTH KOREA.....	7
US ECONOMIC POLICY IN SOUTH KOREA	9
US MILITARY FORCE STRUCTURE.....	9
ANALYSIS.....	10
US TROOPS MUST REMAIN IN KOREA.....	10
THE SITUATION IN NORTH KOREA.....	11
CHINA'S ROLE IN ASIA	12
THE GERMAN REUNIFICATION MODEL	12
RECOMMENDATION	13
CONCLUSION.....	14
ENDNOTES	17
BIBLIOGRAPHY	19

WILL U.S. FORCES BE NECESSARY IN A UNIFIED KOREA?

The massively fortified strip bisecting the Korean peninsula was one of the world's most dangerous potential flash points throughout the Cold War. Although the barriers have come down nearly everywhere else, Korea remains the Cold War's last divide. Today American overseas commitments and military forces are at greater risk at the Korean DMZ than anywhere else. It is, in the words of President Bill Clinton during his visit in 1993, "the scariest place on earth."

—Don Oberdorfer

At this moment in time, one of the last symbols of the Cold War is showing signs of crumbling. In June 2000, an unprecedented meeting between the presidents of North and South Korea took place on the Peninsula. Furthermore, a recent U. S. State Department visit to North Korea moves the possibility of a North/South reunification closer to reality. The obvious benefit to reunifying the two Koreas is a reduction in military tension on the Peninsula and throughout Asia. With the promise of reunification, two questions arise. What force structure, if any, will the U.S. need to maintain in Korea to ensure the security of the region? Should the United States shift from a leading military role to a supporting role in safeguarding the Peninsula? To answer these questions, one must first examine the events that led to the division of Korea, U.S. policy towards Korea, and U.S. military force structure and their role in securing the Korean Peninsula. Even in the context of the reunification, forward deployment of U.S. troops in the region creates stabilization. A total withdrawal of U.S. forces from the region may create a power vacuum that could lead to major shifts in the strategic equation in Asia. To guard against this possibility, U.S. forces must remain on the Peninsula and throughout the region in order to maintain the delicate security balance.

DIVIDING THE KOREAN PENINSULA

Japan occupied Korea in 1905 and annexed it as a Japanese possession in 1910. Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government allowed Japan to exercise total control over the Peninsula. In return, Tokyo promised it would not challenge U.S. colonial domination of the Philippines. "The deal is what many Koreans consider their first betrayal by the United States."¹

The war in the Pacific soon shifted the balance of power, leaving the United States and Japan in a struggle for supremacy in the region. Even though Korea was not key to the outcome of World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt understood that control of Korea, because of its strategic location near Japan, China, and the Soviet Union, would significantly strengthen the United States' ability to shape a post war Asia. At the end of World War II, when

the United States was sure Japan would surrender, the leadership of Russia, Great Britain, and the U.S debated the subject of Korea's future. Russia promised that it would declare war on Japan, which it refrained from prior to that time, and proposed that it would secure the Korean peninsula from the Japanese. The United States expectation was that the entire Peninsula would fall under the supervision of the UN. Two days after the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Russia declared war on Japan. The Japanese accepted the allied surrender terms on Aug. 14, however Soviet troops were already on the move into Manchuria and Korea. The U.S. government was now worried that it would find the Soviet Union in a position to exert strong influence on post-war developments in China, Manchuria, Korea, and Japan. The United States had to act quickly. Edwin Pauley, U.S. special ambassador on assignment in Moscow, requested that President Harry Truman send troops to occupy a portion of Korea to guard against Russian expansion and to accept the surrender of Japanese forces on the Korean peninsula. The United States felt that a division of Korea would stop Russian expansion by keeping their forces north of an arbitrary line.

There was nothing scientific about the way the country was divided. In fact, no Koreans were involved in the process. "Around midnight, two young officers were sent into an adjoining room to carve out a U.S. occupation zone in Korea, lest the Soviets occupy the entire Peninsula and move quickly toward Japan. Lieutenant Colonels Dean Rusk, who was later to be Secretary of State under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and Charles Bonesteel, later U.S. military commander in Korea, had little preparation for the task. Working in haste and under great pressure, and using a National Geographic map for reference, they proposed that U.S. troops occupy the area south of the 38th parallel, which rose approximately halfway up the Peninsula and north of the capital city of Seoul, and that Soviet troops occupy the area north of the parallel."² The division of Korea was meant to be temporary. It was designed to facilitate the Japanese surrender until the United States, United Kingdom, Soviet Union, and China could arrange a trusteeship administration for the country. "The division is what many Koreans consider the second American betrayal."³

POST WORLD WAR II KOREA

"Along with the long history of U.S. political and economic expansion in the region, the determination to achieve global hegemony provides the appropriate context for understanding post- 1945 U.S. interest in Korea. The United States was determined to limit Soviet influence in China and Japan. Holding onto Korea, or at least part of it, was key to this wider Asian strategy of U.S. policymakers."⁴ The United States, United Kingdom, Soviet Union, and China met in

Cairo and agreed that Korea would be free "in due course." Later, the same countries agreed to establish a four-power trusteeship over Korea. In December 1945, a conference convened in Moscow to discuss the future of Korea. A five-year trusteeship was discussed, and a joint Soviet-American commission was established. The commission met sporadically in Seoul and could not agree on the issue of establishing a national government in Korea. In September 1947, with no solution in sight, the United States raised the Korean question to the UN General Assembly. Earlier hopes for a unified, independent Korea soon evaporated. The politics of the Cold War and domestic opposition to the trusteeship plan resulted in the 1948 establishment of two separate nations with dramatically opposed political, economic, and social systems.

On August 15, 1948, the Republic of Korea (ROK) was established in the South. Syngman Rhee, a Korean nationalist leader, became the republic's first President. On September 9, 1948, the North established the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea headed by Kim Il Sung. Both leaders claimed to be the only legitimate government in Korea. After the establishment of the two states, South Korea experienced several violent uprisings by the local, pro-North Korean leftist guerrillas. When Soviet troops left the peninsula in late 1948 followed by U.S. troops in the spring of 1949, border clashes along the 38th parallel intensified. North Korean forces finally invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950, and a bloody three-year war ensued.

THE KOREAN WAR

Prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, the U.S. was very involved in the development of South Korea. It was contributing more than \$100 million a year and was influential in many aspects of the new state's existence, from government to cultural and educational affairs. It was clear that the United States wanted the South to be able to repel a potential attack from communist North Korea. The invasion by the North upset President Truman who viewed the attack as an assault on America's national interests. The United States quickly ordered military troops to the peninsula to aid the South Koreans. The newly formed United Nations, in accordance with the terms of its charter, elected to engage in its first collective action and establish the UN command in Korea. With the exception of South Korea, the United States contributed the largest contingent of forces to this international effort.

During the three years of fighting, the battle lines shifted north and south, and after large numbers of Chinese soldiers intervened to assist the north, the battle lines finally stabilized north of Seoul near the 38th parallel. "U.S. accounts of the Korean War typically portray it as a war for freedom in which the U.S. supported South Korea fought to repulse a brutal invasion

from the North, whose aim was to create a communist dictatorship throughout the Peninsula. In reality, it was a war fought to determine the political character and vision of a unified Korea.”⁵

Armistice negotiations began in July 1951, but hostilities continued until July 27, 1953. On that date, at Panmunjom, the military commanders of the North Korean People’s Army, the Chinese People’s volunteers, and the UNC signed an armistice agreement. Neither the United States nor South Korea was a signatory to the armistice per se, although both adhered to it through the UNC. The armistice called for an international conference to find a political solution to the problem of Korea’s division. This conference met at Geneva in April 1954 but, after seven weeks of debate, it ended without agreement or progress. “The eventual armistice was a stalemate of military might and the demarcation is along about the same line as it was prior to the conflict. The real result of the struggle was the loss of several hundred thousand lives and an almost utter devastation of both Korea’s. The fighting may have ended but the two parts of Korea then settled in for a generation-long struggle for domination of the Peninsula.”⁶

THE LONG ROAD TOWARD REUNIFICATION

“It was only after Syngman Rhee’s downfall in April 1960 that South Korea explicitly ruled out war or violence as a method of unification. The succeeding regimes denounced reunification by force and committed themselves unequivocally to peaceful unification. In the early 1970s, dialogue entered the repertoire of means for Korean unification for the first time.”⁷ In August 1971, North and South Korea agreed to hold talks through their respective Red Cross societies with the goal of reuniting the many Korean families separated after the division of Korea and the Korean War. After several meetings, both sides announced an agreement to work toward peaceful reunification and an end to the hostile atmosphere that exists on the Peninsula. Officials exchanged visits, and regular communications were established through a North-South coordinating committee and the Red Cross. Unfortunately these historic contacts broke down and ended in 1973 after South Korean President Park Chung Hee’s announcement that the South would seek separate entry into the United Nations and after the kidnapping of South Korean opposition leader Kim Dae-Jung by the South Korean intelligence service. There was no further friendly cooperation between North and South Korea until 1984. Dialogue was renewed when South Korea accepted the North’s offer to provide relief goods to victims of severe flooding in South Korea. Red Cross talks to address the problem of separated families resumed, as well as the talks on economic and trade issues. Unfortunately, the North unilaterally suspended all talks in January 1986 because of the annual U.S.-South Korea “Team Spirit” military exercise.

The election of Roh Tae Woo as president of the Republic of Korea in 1988 made history because it was the first peaceful transfer of power in Korea's 40-year history. Roh quickly made North/South relations his top priority. "Improving inter-Korean relations, preferably achieving a breakthrough, is a goal Roh seems to have set on his own. He made this plain in a series of acts, beginning with his inaugural speech and culminating in the unveiling of the Korean National Community Unification Formula in September 1989."⁸ President Roh put the goal of unification back on a positive track. "He indicated a willingness to visit anywhere in the world and to engage in a sincere dialog with anyone in order to ensure peace on the Korean peninsula and expedite its reunification."⁹

In an effort to apply pressure to the North Korean regime, the South Korean government allowed trade with North Korea beginning in 1988. South Korean businesses were allowed to import North Korean goods. Direct trade between the North and South began in the fall of 1990 after an unprecedented meeting between the two Korean Prime Ministers. Trade between the two countries quickly increased from \$18.8 million in 1989 to \$333.4 million in 1999. Much of the increase was related to industry processing or assembly work undertaken in the North.

The Prime Minister level meetings held in Seoul in 1990 began a highly successful period of dialogue between the two countries. The talks resulted in two major agreements: The Basic Agreement, which includes Reconciliation, Nonaggression, Exchanges and Cooperation, and the Joint Declaration Agreement that called for Denuclearization of the Peninsula. As a result of the agreements, subcommittees were formed and liaison offices were established in Panmunjom.

During president Roh's administration, South Korean policymakers believed reunification by absorption was possible in Korea. It was clear that absorption required maximum contact between the North and South in order to soften and destabilize the North. Unfortunately, in the fall of 1992 the process came to a halt because of rising tension over the nuclear issue.

THE SUNSHINE POLICY

In December 1998, opposition leader Kim Dae Jung was elected president of the Republic of Korea. In the 1960s, Kim was very vocal in opposing the autocratic governments which held power in the South following the Korean War. His opposition was suppressed on the grounds that it gave aid and comfort to North Korea at a time when American protection of South Korea was becoming increasingly unreliable. In 1973, Kim Dae Jung was kidnapped in Japan by the South Korean central intelligence agency and brought back to Korea. As a result, he resented the military regime and fought to change the Korean political system. His goals included

achieving civilian control over the military, an anti-corruption program, and a more caring government. Recognizing that the 1998 presidential election was his last chance at the presidency, the former political prisoner who was labeled as a leftist radical by his opponents, moved to the center of the South Korean political system. "Kim Dae Jung's policies toward the North were very different from those of his predecessor and rival, Kim Yong Sam. In a remarkable statement, the new president declared in his inaugural address, 'We do not have any intention to undermine or absorb North Korea.' His administration established a program of engaging the North through positive gestures and lowered barriers to trade and other official and unofficial interaction. He reiterated this program, which had become known as his 'Sunshine policy,' at the Republic of Korea 50th anniversary observance."¹⁰

President Kim Dae Jung's policy had three fundamental principles: no tolerance of provocations from the North, no intention to absorb the North, and the separation of political cooperation from economic cooperation. Private sector initiatives would be based on commercial and humanitarian considerations. His ideas and policy were shaped by his years as a political dissident.

Last year was the most successful year for positive relations between North and South Korea since the end of the Korean War. "In June 2000 the world watched as Kim shook hands with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il in the first-ever summit between leaders of the two Koreas. That meeting led in August to the reunion of 100 Koreans from North and South whose families had been separated during the Korean War."¹¹ The mood around the world since the historic summit has been one of hope and promise. One month after the summit, another remarkable event, which was totally unthinkable one-year prior, took place in Washington D.C. "One of North Korea's most senior army officers, Vice-Marshal Jo Myong Rok met President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeline Albright. The two sides agreed that North Korea would not test missiles while talking with the United States."¹² What is even more remarkable is the fact that the international actors usually very involved in the Korean question were degraded to mere diplomatic onlookers. In their June 15, 2001 joint declaration, Seoul and Pyongyang agreed to resolve the question of unification independently and through the joint efforts of the Korean people. "The three days President Kim spent in Pyongyang have raised hopes, perhaps unrealistically, of a speedy reunification of the Peninsula. The two men put their names to a declaration that, though vague in its wording, provided the clearest sign for years that the two sides might eventually see eye-to-eye. It called for an easing of tensions, for renewed efforts to bring about peace and the reunion of divided families, and for an intensification of economic, social, and cultural exchanges."¹³

The next step in easing the tension on the Korean peninsula will be an agreement that is far more reaching than the June 15 declaration. Before the country can reunify, the leadership on both sides must compromise. In the past, the North's obstructionist tactics have been used to protect its weak position. Its refusal to cooperate in accordance with previous agreements has been a familiar story over the years. Most recently, the North Korean government has shown its irrational behavior by indefinitely postponing the inter-Korean ministerial talks scheduled for March 2001. Citing that the Korean people are the main players behind the Joint Declaration for national unification, the North Korean government called on the Korean people to reject the dependence on external forces. It is clear that "external forces" refers to the United States in light of President Kim Dae Jung's recent summit with U.S. President George Bush.

It is still too early to say when or how Korea unification will occur. The long term advantages of unification seem obvious: the reduction of arms costs, reduction in the threat of war on the Peninsula, and reuniting divided families are just a few. Before unification can become reality, certain decisions must be made by people who see it in their best interest to do so. "The leaders of both North and South Korea desire reconciliation. However, leaders in Seoul and Pyongyang, while in general accord on the concept of unification, seem to believe that the process should move forward gradually. Both sides, each for its own reasons, want to see the continued existence of two separate Korean states and steady progress toward some kind of confederation. Seoul is concerned about shouldering the staggering costs it would likely have to bear in order to realize unification, and Pyongyang is concerned that the process of unification may threaten regime survival."¹⁴

US SECURITY POLICY IN SOUTH KOREA

The United States is committed to maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and agreed in the 1954 U.S.-Republic of Korea Mutual Defense Treaty to help the Republic of Korea defend itself from external aggression. The United States currently has approximately 37,000 service personnel in South Korea, including the Army's Second Infantry Division and several Air Force tactical squadrons. To coordinate operations between the U.S. military and the 650,000-strong South Korean Armed Forces, a Combine Forces Command (CFC) was established in 1978. The CFC commander also serves as the commander-in-chief of the United Nations Command. The U.S. commitment to security in the region can be boiled down to four key points;

First, U.S. policy in the Asia Pacific region is based on four pillars: a continued U.S. military presence; stronger efforts to combat the proliferation of weapons of

mass destruction; new regional dialogues to address common security challenges; and support for democracy. America's military strategy in the region also has four elements: strategic deterrence, forward presence, crisis response, and reconstitution.

Second, the principal objective of the U.S.-Korean alliance is to deter North Korean aggression. South Korea's current emphasis on modernizing its air and naval forces is therefore a promising development. However, under the East Asian Strategic Initiative (EASI), U.S. forces are declining. While a final manpower level of 30,000 would serve as a minimal effective deterrent, a force of 20,000, suggested by some, would have no substantive utility. A credible deterrent must be maintained amidst declining forces and shrinking resources for defense on both sides of the alliance.

Third, while a growing economic interest in the Asia Pacific region will insure a continued U.S. military presence, the nature of this commitment, in light of the end of the Cold War and substantial defense reductions, will fundamentally change. America's new security policy in the region will be one of cooperative engagement, a 'places' and not 'bases' approach designed to reassure allies and promote stability. Consistent with this policy, the United States is forging new bilateral arrangements in the region, conducting joint military exercises with regional partners, and engaging in military exchanges and assistance through the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. In this context, burdensharing has assumed far greater importance.

Finally, America has reaffirmed its security commitment to the Republic of Korea by declaring South Korea's defense to be a 'very high priority.' Although the U.S. troop presence on the Peninsula is down by 16 percent from 1990, the United States will continue to provide reliable military support to deter and, if necessary, to defeat a North Korean attack.¹⁵

It appears that the Bush administration is not likely to abandon the current U.S. security policy. Recently, U. S. Secretary of State Colin Powell stated that the United States has a vital partnership with Seoul. "Powell also is looking forward to strengthening U.S. relations with South Korea, as well as further deepening the vital security and economic partnership, which has worked to promote prosperity and democracy in Northeast Asia for five decades. In his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Powell indicated the Bush administration's willingness to pursue the previous administration's open-door policy with North Korea."¹⁶ Furthermore, the new administration has indicated that the current structure of U.S. forces stationed in East Asia would not be drastically changed.

In the first U.S.-Japan foreign ministers talks since the inauguration of President George W. Bush, Secretary Powell stressed that the U.S. military structure, including its forces in Okinawa, would be maintained under close consultation with Japan on the basis of the 1996 U.S.-Japan Joint Security Declaration. His statement implied that the present deployment of 100,000 U.S. troops in East Asia would be maintained. Saying that although the Cold-War era has receded,

the U.S. military presence is serving as a stabilizing effect on friendly nations. Powell affirmed that the U.S. military deployments in the North Atlantic and Pacific areas would continue.¹⁷

US ECONOMIC POLICY IN SOUTH KOREA

During the past 30 years, the Republic of Korea's economic growth has been tremendous. South Korea, one of the world's poorest countries in the years following the Korean War, is now the United States' seventh-largest trading partner and has the eleventh-largest economy in the world. South Korea's outlook for continued economic success remains strong going into the 21st century. As South Korea's economy has developed, trade has become extremely important to the U.S.-South Korea relationship. The United States seeks to improve access to South Korea's expanding market to increase investment opportunities for American business.

Today, the United States is helping South Korea redefine its role in an environment of increasing economic interdependence through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Internally, the country is trying to transform itself from a low wage/ low technology producer to a high wage/high technology industrialized nation. The success of this transformation depends largely on the political success of President Kim's political programs and the support of the United States and South Korea's other trading partners. South Korean leaders are determined to maintain a successful economic relationship with the United States and continue to take on a more active role in international economics. The United States is committed to helping South Korea build upon its economic accomplishments in order to increase its regional and global role, including playing a more important part in the political and economic activities in the Pacific Rim.

US MILITARY FORCE STRUCTURE

"In the 1970s, a period in which North Korea doubled her military strength, the South Koreans nearly panicked when the United States government disregarded South Korean needs and decided to withdraw all its ground forces from Korea. The timing of President Jimmy Carter's announcement was especially bad, coming in the wake of North Korea's heated military buildup."¹⁸ With the exception of the Carter administration's decision to withdraw U.S. ground troops from South Korea, U.S. troop strength has remained relatively constant. According to the "2000 Report to Congress on the Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula," the current troop strength is:

The U.S. Second Infantry Division (-) has two ground maneuver brigades (one heavy and one light), an aviation brigade, and its organic division artillery. Major U.S. ground weapons systems currently deployed in the ROK include: M-1A1

Main Battle tanks, M-2A2 and M-3A2 Bradley fighting vehicles, 155MM self-propelled howitzers, Multiple Rocket Launchers (MLRS), a PATRIOT battalion and a two-squadron AH-64 Apache brigade. Additionally, there is a pre-positioned heavy brigade set of equipment.

The U.S. 7th Air Force, headquartered at Osan Air Base, consists of the 51st Fighter Wing and the 8th Fighter Wing. Squadrons within the 51st Fighter Wing, also at Osan, are equipped with 24 F-16C/D LANTIRN, and 22 A-10s. Also stationed at Osan are U-2s from the 9th Reconnaissance Wing, Beale AFB. At Kunsan, the 8th Fighter Wing is equipped with 42 F-16Cs.

As of March 29, 2000, there were 35,584 U.S. troops assigned to the ROK: Army (26,782), Air Force (8,305), Navy (407), and Marines (90). There were also 9,453 Command-sponsored family members and approximately 3,275 non-Command sponsored family members residing in Korea.

Key U.S. capabilities would play essential roles throughout all phases of operations. The U.S. would enhance or provided the following critical capabilities to the combined war effort: a) airlift and sealift, b) prepositioned heavy equipment and supplies, c) battlefield command, control and communications, d) advanced munitions, e) aerial refueling, f) intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, and g) counterfire against the massive North Korean artillery barrage.¹⁹

ANALYSIS

US TROOPS MUST REMAIN IN KOREA

The biggest challenge facing U.S. policymakers today is how to reaffirm the value of a Republic of Korea/United States military alliance after reunification. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. and South Korean interests overlapped. The United States maintained the strategic balance with the Soviet Union while South Korea kept the communist North above the 38th parallel. In a post- unified Korea, a new rationale must be created to justify an American presence on the Korean peninsula.

Even though there are signs of a failing economy in the North, the prospect of North Korea self-destructing or being absorbed by the South appears unlikely in the near future. In fact, a Germany style absorption would be as unwelcomed to South Korea as it would be to North Korea. Furthermore, it appears unlikely that Kim Jong Il will willingly give up his power. Therefore, the most logical path toward Korean unification appears to be a gradual approach with economic cooperation and cultural ties as the centerpiece. In light of these facts, it is more important than ever to keep U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula for the foreseeable future.

"Military analysts say the United States will keep its 37,000 troops in South Korea even if a formal peace treaty replaces the current armistice that ended the Korean War in 1953. As the principal strategic power in East Asia, they say, the United States cannot afford to pull out of the

region that is home to both Japan, which has the world's second- largest economy, and China, which is expected to become the next global superpower."²⁰ The presence of U.S. forces maintains a sense of stability in the region while adding a capability to assist the two Koreas rebuild after unification. Furthermore, "U.S. troops are a balancing wheel that eliminates the prospect of a power vacuum. If there were a vacuum, there might be a compulsion or instinct by one or more countries to fill it."²¹

The size, type, and mission of U.S. forces remaining in Korea after unification should be based on three factors; the economic and political situation in North Korea, China's role in Asia, and the lessons learned from the reunification of East and West Germany.

THE SITUATION IN NORTH KOREA

North Korea still believes that a strong military, capable of projecting power in the region, is essential to the regime's survival. Within the last few years, the country has invested heavily in its military and has stopped its ten-year degradation of its military capability. Furthermore, North Korea has expanded its short and medium range missile inventory, putting countries in the region at greater risk. If it weren't for North Korea's military power, its capability to launch a destructive war against the ROK, and the strategic location of the Peninsula, Korea would probably draw little attention from the international community. Pyongyang's irrational behavior and its capability to persevere remain the focal point of international attention.

This "military first" policy has inflicted a heavy toll on its people. There is significant evidence that the North is not able to feed its population. The world food program has published statistics that show evidence of malnutrition, and in some cases starvation. There are also reports that North Korea is suffering high casualty rates due to severe food shortages. Only massive world food aid deliveries since 1997 have enabled North Korea to avoid a recurrence of the famine that struck the country in the middle of the last decade.

Today, North Korea's economy is in shambles. The North is severely short of fuel and its industry is only operating at a small percent of capacity. Shortages of materials and a lack of new investment hamper the economy. Chronic energy shortages pose a significant challenge to the North Korean regime.

North Korea has fallen far behind South Korea in economic strength, even though the North was viewed at one time as having significant advantages in terms of natural resources. "The South Korean watchers claimed that the North's economy has shrunk by three to four percent for each year of the 1990s. In 1999, the government itself claimed the economy had shrunk by 50 percent over the last five years. But really reliable figures are not available. The

only thing that is certain is that the collapse of the Socialists economies of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe hurt North Korea greatly."²² There is little evidence to believe that the North Korean leadership can fix the country's economy on its own. They will require outside assistance. "On one hand it has been clear that the North Korean economy has been failing and the regime losing its grip on the minds of its citizens. That the regime is likely to continue to weaken seems apparent but how the South should react remains less clear."²³

CHINA'S ROLE IN ASIA

China has never favored U.S. forces deployed in South Korea. After reunification when North Korea no longer poses a threat to South Korea, the Chinese will most likely ask why U.S. forces remain on the Peninsula. Assuming reasonable economic progress, China will continue to play an important role throughout Northeast Asia, including the Korean peninsula. China is satisfied with the status quo, as long as peace is maintained in Korea. After all, China entered the Korean War to ensure that an anti-communist unified Korea would not exist on its border. The collapse of the North Korean regime, and its absorption into the South would certainly worry China, especially if U.S. forces were to remain on the Peninsula. That said, one could argue that unification in Korea with U.S. troops remaining is not possible as long as China is against it.

There are fundamental differences between China and the U.S. over East Asia's strategic conditions that must be resolved, mainly the Taiwan situation. "From Beijing's perspective, Taiwan remains the single most important issue in Sino-American relations."²⁴ Despite the tension between the two sides over the issue, there are signs that China and the U.S. could come to an agreement.

Chinese officials have taken pains to emphasize that the recent improvement in China's relations with South Korea has not been directed in any way at the United States or the U.S.-South Korean alliance relationship. Chinese officials have acknowledged that while Sino-South Korean relations, especially economic relations, will continue to grow, the U.S.-South Korean relationship remains very broad and multifaceted and has a critical security dimension involving a defense treaty and U.S. troop presence in South Korea. As one Chinese official put it in mid-1997, "for South Korea, the U.S. is much more important than China." South Korean officials have echoed this sentiment. They have noted that Seoul needs China's "understanding" and "constructive role" in seeking reunification, but that relations with China cannot in any way substitute for South Korea's relations with the United States.²⁵

THE GERMAN REUNIFICATION MODEL

Compared to the German unification a decade ago, the Korean situation is very different. For U.S. policy to be effective, policymakers must understand the differences between what

happened in Germany and what might soon happen in Korea. There is no doubt that a United States security commitment to Korea is likely to endure. Therefore, a new form of engagement policy, mainly the use of the U.S. military, must be considered.

Germany may have become one country in 1989, but its economy still suffers. By comparison with the rest of Germany today, the former East Germany remains poor, unhealthy, and polluted. Economic reunification for Korea will be even more difficult than what Germany faced. There are four main reasons for this fact.

First, North Korea is larger than was East Germany. There were four West Germans for every East German, but only two South Koreans for every North Korean. Absorbing and providing for this difference in population will become a much larger task for Seoul than it was for Bonn.

Second, North Korea's economy is in much worse shape than was East Germany's. Furthermore, communist North Korea's infrastructure is much more primitive than that of communist Germany's. The scope of rebuilding the northern infrastructure is likely to be much greater than it was in Germany.

Third, even though there have been great advances in South Korean society, its per capita income is still under half of West Germany's. It appears unlikely that Seoul will be able to finance a renovation in the North by raising taxes. A newly formed Korean central government will have to borrow hundreds of billions of dollars to finance reconstruction efforts.

Finally, unlike East and West Germany, North and South Korea have had virtually no contact with each other over the past fifty years. North Koreans know very little about life in the South. A unified Peninsula will offer the opportunity for millions of North Koreans to migrate South. This massive migration will quickly overwhelm the current social and economic infrastructure in the South.

RECOMMENDATION

U.S. military forces must remain on the Korean peninsula and the Pacific region. These forces must be prepared to conduct a wider range of roles and missions. These missions will be under new operational conditions different from current established policies and practices. The new missions will include humanitarian assistance, various types of peace operations, dismantling and management of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and a partial demobilization of the North Korean Armed Forces. In all cases, the U.S. military should perform a support role. The United States will have to evaluate the type of forces that are currently stationed on the Peninsula and restructure them to perform the new missions after reunification.

The Infantry Division should remain in Korea to provide security for humanitarian efforts. The division should be equipped with the lighter, more mobile combat vehicles that are being developed for Army transformation. More civil affairs and engineer units should also be deployed to provide assistance in rebuilding the nation's infrastructure.

The U.S. Air Force should be restructured to provide additional tactical airlift in order to move humanitarian relief supplies. Combat aircraft should also remain to avoid the impression of a security vacuum.

New operational control arrangements will have to be developed including new rules of engagement and new logistical requirements. The Combined Forces Command must restructure its forces and their locations. U.S. forces will perform a peacekeeping mission to maintain order during reconciliation through reunification. Additionally, the Combined Forces Command must devise new command, control and communications procedures between U.S., North, and South Korean forces to prevent possible flash points .

Politically, the United States should use the Taiwan issue as leverage to gain Chinese support for keeping U.S. forces in a unified Korea. As China's power in the region increases, the America's future in Asia becomes more threatened. As long as the U.S. and China are divided on Taiwan, a satisfactory resolution on troops in Korea may not be possible. Once the U.S. is removed from the Taiwan-China question, a new beginning of mutually beneficial relations between Beijing and Washington will occur. The adoption of a "give and take" policy allows the United States to win the bigger prize by maintaining our presence in the Asian Pacific region.

CONCLUSION

No one can predict exactly when Korea will reunify. Recent developments in the world and on the Peninsula appear to have brought the idea closer to reality than was thought possible 10 years ago. Even so, Kim Jong Il remains at the center of the unification process. Few political systems are as dependent on the whims and decisions of a single leader. No dimension of North Korea's present or future policies can be assessed without direct reference to Kim Jong Il. His extreme control of power in Pyongyang is a crucial factor when assessing North Korea's goals and policy options. "Pyongyang's record of brutal and violent deeds and the nature of the Kim dynasty dictatorship itself provide powerful reasons to be skeptical about the regime's commitment to reform. Hence the United States must remain vigilant and continue to work hand in glove with our allies, the Republic of Korea, and Japan to ensure we are

prepared for any eventuality."²⁶ For this reason, the United States must keep its full contingent of forces and war plan responsibilities in place on the Korean peninsula.

If reunification in Korea is approaching, the circumstance under which it is achieved is crucial to Korea and the international community. A positive and constructive U.S. policy toward Korea will play a major role in a successful integration of a unified Korea.

America's Korea policy over the past sixty years has been riddled by disasters, unpleasant surprises, and missed opportunities. When the United States divided Korea along the 38th parallel, little attention was paid to the destiny of the people living on the Peninsula. The same can be said of U.S. policy when President Carter's administration decided to withdraw U.S. ground troops from South Korea. The reunification of Korea will provide U.S. policymakers a perfect opportunity to reassess the importance of Korea's geographical location and the destiny of its people.

Peaceful reunification and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula is certainly in the United States' national interests. "American military presence in Japan and Korea has in recent years become recognize by all regional actors as a stabilizing factor. The expansion of the current U.S.-ROK alliance to cover the entire united Korea would provide the protection of a big power which has proven to be relatively non-intrusive, and which harbors no regional territorial ambitions."²⁷ If the United States wants to remain a major power in Asia, it must assist a unified Korea by keeping its Armed Forces stationed on the Peninsula.

WORD COUNT=6594

ENDNOTES

- ¹ John Oberdorfer, The Two Koreas (Indianapolis, Indiana: Basic Books, 1997), 6.
- ² *Ibid.*, 5.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ Martin Hart-Landsberg, Korea Division, Reunification, and U.S. Foreign Policy (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), 41.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.
- ⁶ Steven A. Leibo, East, Southeast Asia, and the Western Pacific 2000 (Harpers Ferry, West Virginia: Stryker-Post Publications, 2000), 79.
- ⁷ Jay Speakman and Chae-Jin Lee, The Prospects For Korean Reunification (Claremont, California: The Keck Center for International and Strategic Studies, 1993), 79.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Oberdorfer, 407.
- ¹¹ Michael Westlake, ed., Asia 2001 Yearbook (Hong Kong: Review Publishing Company, 2001), 142.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 143.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 142.
- ¹⁴ Dr. Andrew Scobell, "Time To Think Ahead On Korea," ROA National Security Report (March 2001): 33.
- ¹⁵ Summary of a Transpacific Dialogue, The Korean-U.S. Relationship In an Era of Change (Pentagon City, Virginia: The Institute For Foreign Policy Analysis and The Sejong Institute, April-May 1993), xi.
- ¹⁶ Andrea Koppel, "Powell to Push Reconciliation Process," 29 January 2001; available from <<http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/east/01/29/korea.powell/index.html>>; Internet; accessed 30 January 2001.
- ¹⁷ Shim Kyu-Sun, "U.S. To Maintain 100,000Troops In East Asia, Powell Says," 29 January 2001; available from <<http://english.donga.com/srv/srv.php3?biid=200101294158>>; Internet; accessed 30 January 2001.
- ¹⁸ Sang-woo Rhee, "Calculated Cooperation: A Reflection On Military Relations," Reflections (June 1982): 303.

¹⁹ "2000 Report To Congress, Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula," 12 September 2000; available from <<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep2000/korea09122000.html>>; Internet; accessed 3 February 2001.

²⁰ Andrea Stone, "U.S. Troops Will Remain in South Korea," 25 October 2000; available from <<http://pgdweb?TS=980801863&RQT=309&CC=1&Dtp=1&Did=000000062911787&Mtd>>; Internet; accessed 29 January 2001.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Leibo, 88.

²³ Leibo, 85.

²⁴ Leibo, 33.

²⁵ Robert G. Sutter, Chinese Policy Priorities and Their Implications for the United States (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 100.

²⁶ Scobell, 33.

²⁷ Ben Kremenak, Korea's Road to Unification: Potholes, Detours, and Dead Ends (College Park, Maryland: Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland, 1997), 60.

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