

The Korean Question: Is There a Future for Forward-Based American Forces in a Unified Korea?

**A Monograph
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Abstract

The Korean Question: Is There a Future for Forward-Based American Forces in a Unified Korea? by MAJOR William T. Harmon, United States Army, 52 pages.

A legacy of the Cold War, indeed a legacy of the past century of the tumult that is Northeast Asia, the Korean peninsula remains divided. The Republic of Korea, the South, has prospered into an “Asian Tiger” and stands as one of the economic miracles of the past quarter-century, dramatically raising the standard of living in one generation. The Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, the North, is a failed nation, with a pathetic economy and a cult of personality almost unrivalled in history. The common theme between the two nations, other than the remarkably homogeneous ethnicity, stand facing each other across the demilitarized zone – two armies of a combined 1.7 million soldiers. United States’ forces have remained in the south following the Korean War in strength.

Unification of the peninsula, of the people, remains a stated policy objective of both governments and many Koreans, as well as foreigners, consider unification the destiny of the Korean people. This study proposes to ask whether American forces would be a part of that unification, specifically, following unification should the United States and Korea seek to retain their security arrangement that bases American forces in Korea?

There are two major components to this argument: Is it in the Korean’s best interest to maintain the relationship? Is it in the interests of the United States to seek the extension of forward based forces in a unified Korea? This paper argues that when the security options of a new Korea are examined the maintenance of the alignment with the United States best fits. Likewise, Korea is the best place for American forces to base in Northeast Asia, the stability of the region is a vital national interest to the United States, and it should pursue the forward basing of forces following unification.

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Chapter 1

Problem Definition

The Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK) represent the most enduring legacy of the Cold War. The demilitarized zone between the two Koreas stretches the width of the peninsula, and completely separates the two countries. The forces arrayed on both sides are prepared for military operations at a moments notice. The Korean people, a people of several millennia of history and amazing homogeneity, have endured fifty-eight years of segregation following the inconclusive Korean War. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this small peninsula in the northeast corner of Asia became one of the last places that the ideology of communism and the American strategy of containment collide. Korea represents an important intersection of the interests of the great powers of Northeast Asia – China, Japan, Russia and the United States.

The United States remains a vibrant and vital presence throughout Northeast Asia, particularly in Korea and Japan. The United States clearly has substantial interest in the stability of Northeast Asia, a region of nearly two billion people and many of the fastest growing and potent economies in the world. The United States, over the past half-century, has invested considerably in the economic development and security of Korea and Japan. The United States maintains a forward presence of roughly 37,000 military members in the Republic of Korea.¹ The senior United States commander in Korea, a four star general, also serves as the Commander, Combined Forces Command (United States and Republic of Korea) and the Commander, United Nations Command.

¹Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, General Thomas Schwartz, testimony, 107th Cong., 27 March 2001.

The unification of the Korean peninsula has enormous implications for Northeast Asia, the security relationship between the United States and Korea, and the future of American forces in Korea. Both the ROK and the DPRK have minister level departments devoted to unification. For many Koreans the question of unification is not if, it is when.

Any exploration of the question of Korean unification contains clear and substantial implications for American foreign policy and military strategy. Given the continuous presence of American forces in Korea following the Korean War (clear evidence of the importance of Korean security to American interests) and the emerging geostrategic importance of the region, such a seismic change portends drastic effect. One of the obvious effects influences the presence of American forces in Korea. This paper asks the question, should the United States seek to maintain a forward presence in a unified Korea? To answer that question it adheres to the following format:

Chapter One establishes the significance of the problem statement by providing a literature review as well as a brief historical review. Chapter One also explains the methodology the monograph follows.

Chapter Two defines the term “forward presence” focusing on the policy implications of prolonged American presence opposed to the temporary deployments of forces for specific missions. It also defines the term “unification.” It reviews the current defense arrangement between the United States and the Republic of Korea. It concludes with examining the scenarios for Korean unification and choosing one as the basis for the remaining analysis.

Chapter Three explores the external security options available to a unified Korea, specifically focusing on American force presence. It evaluates the traditional security arrangements used by medium sized nations including neutrality, regional alignment, super power alignment and isolationism; and specifically, the range of options predictably available to Korea regarding American forces. This chapter produces a determination in the form of a security

arrangement concerning American forces that is the preferred option for Korea, from the Korean perspective.

Chapter Four explores the policy options for the United States focusing on the security of Korea, the balance of power in the region, and the national security strategy. It seeks to determine the preferred option for American forward presence in a unified Korea.

Chapter Five analyzes the implications of the output of Chapters Three and Four. It attempts to resolve any differences in the outcomes and explore the options available to both countries. It concludes with a policy recommendation.

The Korean Question – Literature

Korea as a country has been extremely isolated throughout history, particularly from western nations.² Even so, as the Korean peninsula occupies such a large portion of United States' military strategy and forces, one would expect a robust amount of material on the matter. That is not necessarily the case. Research searching for general histories, demographics, or cultural aspects of Korean history did not produce a large amount of material. Korea's isolation has, in fact, seems to have resulted in a scarcity of western experts and scholars of Korea. While that trend has started to turn, the literature on Korean history, in particular, remains unfulfilling.

The military and diplomatic machinations of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, particularly the brinksmanship of the North Koreans, did bring Korea to the attention of the western world. That attention produced a not insignificant amount of published works that reached the mass market such as Nicholas Eberstadt's *The End of North Korea* and Bruce Cumming's *Korea's Place in the Sun*. Both are substantial works demonstrating true expertise. While Eberstadt is more narrowly

²Chong-Sik Lee, "Historical Setting," in *South Korea: A Country Study*, ed. Andrea M. Savada and William Shaw (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 10-11.

focused on the problems facing North Korea, Cumings provides a superb modern history that enlightens as to the true nature of this perplexing division.

One difficult area of investigation, however, remains reliable economic data from the DPRK. Perhaps the most profoundly protected and isolated society in history, the DPRK publishes almost nothing internationally save propaganda. Economic data can be derived, but it is difficult as discussed in Kim's *The Korean Peninsula in Transition*, an excellent economic analysis of the two Koreas, but dated a few years, not accounting for the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and the subsequent recovery and reform.

Contemporary works lately introduced to Americans include Selig Harrison's *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement*. Harrison, a respected journalist and longtime observer of the Koreas, projects an obvious perspective and bias in his title, and implies that the issues of reunification and United States disengagement are inexorably linked. Furthermore, Harrison has written several commentaries regarding the Sunshine Strategy of South Korean president, Kim Dae Jung, and how that should relate to the apparent hard line stance assumed by the American president, George W. Bush. Mr. Harrison is forcefully on the side of engagement vice confrontation and his book amplifies that basic theme.

Other recent efforts that focus on the scenarios and implications for Korean unification include Marcus Noland's *Avoiding the Apocalypse: The Future of the Two Koreas*, and *Preparing for Korean Unification*, a RAND study, by Jonathan Pollack and Chung Min Lee. These works all demonstrate a relative rarity in the field – anticipatory, predictive analysis that is willing to venture educated hypothesis as to the future of the Koreas. They are both particularly useful in imagining the scenarios that may produce unification, and the implications of unification. Journals also reflect the growing concern with the Korean question as evidenced by a growing body of work such as Dr. Victor D. Cha and Derek J. Mitchell writing in "The Washington Quarterly," and the monograph of General (Retired) John Tilelli and Major Susan Bryant for the Association of the United States Army's Program for the Role of American Military Power.

While Cha and Mitchell both bring academic credentials to the argument, and provide valuable analysis in approaching the challenging question of unification, General Tilelli and Major Bryant approach the topic of Northeast Asian security from a purely military perspective.

Additional general histories and cultural works also help to enlighten this effort including Michael Breen's *The Koreans*, Don Oberdorfer's *The Two Koreas*, Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig's *North Korea: Through the Looking Glass* and *North Korea After Kim Il Sung* edited by Thomas Henriksen and Jongryn Mo. Breen's work reads more as a sociological and cultural study, but provides valuable insight of Korean character and the historical, cultural, and societal basis of behavior. Don Oberdorfer has contributed a masterful work on both the tragic depths of the Korean separation as well as an insightful analysis of the development of the political and military division of the nation as it developed over the past fifty years. The final two works both offer analysis of North Korea. Since this is such a challenge given the secrecy and isolation of the DPRK both are valuable, if too reliant on questionable sources for specific data on the DPRK.

Helen Hunter's *Kim Il Song's North Korea* and John A. Wickham's *Korea on the Brink* focus on the political issues and provide context. Hunter's work is a fascinating look at routine life in North Korea, and is important for an unvarnished examination of the tyranny of the regime. Hunter calls on two decades experience as a Far East analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency. General Wickham also provides important analysis of North Korean behavior, focusing on the political brinksmanship practiced as a negotiating tactic by the North.

Several important works on security strategy and American geostrategic interests became very important to this analysis. Dr. Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State, contributed the tome *Diplomacy* that remains an important work in the genre and provided vital expertise on the importance of Northeast Asia to American interests. Likewise, former National Security Adviser to President Carter Zbigniew Brzezinski's *The Grand Chessboard* provides a superb overview of American interests globally. It informed this effort remarkably.

The topic presented is imminently researchable. Several primary sources, interviews with important role players in both Korean and American policy over the past decades, as well as journalists and diplomats, lend great weight to the argument presented here. The openness and cooperation of several notable and esteemed experts in Korean affairs add measurably to this argument, and thanks must be given to Ambassador Donald P. Gregg, Dr. Victor Cha, Mr. Don Oberdorfer, and Dr. Charles K Armstrong.

Korean History – An Overview

While most people think of the current division of Korea as a unique aspect of the Cold War, the nation has, in fact, experienced centuries of similar separations. Prior to the 10th century Korea consisted of three distinct kingdoms, indeed a time known as the Three Kingdoms. Silla, Paekche and Koguryo formed the trinity with Koguryo composing most of what is today North Korea plus a large portion of north east China. Even today, the lore of the Koguryo kingdom colors the tales of North Korea. The influence of the uniqueness of these three kingdoms remains in vestiges of Korean behavior still. It is not unusual for Koreans to assume that regional traits, favored or despised, come from this period.³

It wasn't until 935 that the three kingdoms combined, under military conquest, to form Koryo, the precedent to the modern name of Korea.⁴ That dynasty lasted around 400 years leading up to the Choson dynasty. Choson fully unified Korea in nearly the form we would recognize today were the two Koreas one. The Choson Dynasty lasted until the Japanese occupation of Korea in 1910. During the 15th century many scholars and historians believe that

³Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York:W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 30.

⁴Michael Breen, *The Koreans* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 82.

Korea enjoyed a renaissance equal to any other nation in Asia. During this period we see remarkable developments in most every aspect of life in Korea. Artisans and craftsmen flourished. Civil service was elevated along Neo-Confucian principles. The early 15th century king, Sejong, is credited with remarkable advances in printing and type (indeed, the first metal types, and the oldest known examples of wooden block printing come from Korea) as well as creating the modern Korean alphabet, known as Han Gul. The Choson Dynasty, however, contended with numerous invasions from hostile Japan and China. During one famous period in the late 16th century, they dealt the Japanese a stunning defeat due to the ingenuity of Admiral Yi Sun-shin who is credited with the invention of the world's first iron clad warship, the famous "Turtle Ship."⁵

But the years of war took its toll and the Choson Dynasty suffered great instability, famine and unrest during the remaining years that saw an isolation that was only forcibly opened by western powers. This left Korea vulnerable by the end of the 19th century. When the west began to open Asian nations, Korea became one of the last to fall, and it did to Japan. Japan imposed an increasingly unfair treaty that laid the groundwork for the eventual dissolution of the dynasty and the establishment of Japanese occupation.

Japan's ascent as a power, with military victories over China and Russia in tow, led to the colonial oversight role it assumed over Korea in 1905. The Treaty of Portsmouth, for which Theodore Roosevelt would win the Nobel Peace Prize, produced a colonial quid pro quo in which President Roosevelt agreed to overlook the Japanese occupation of Korea in return for the Japanese recognition of America's claim to the Philippines, effectively recognizing Japan's interest in Korea.⁶ It was only a short five years later that the Japanese Army established full

⁵Cumings, 76.

⁶Robert Leckie, *Conflict: The History of the Korean War* (New York: Putnam Press, 1962; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 25.

colonial rule over Korea with the Korean King, the mentally handicapped Sunjong, abdicating on August 29, 1910.⁷

Japan colonial rule devastated the nation, its culture and historical memory. To this day, great treasures of the Three Kingdoms period lay in Tokyo National Museum. Koreans were forced to learn Japanese. The collusion of wealthy and powerful Koreans, combined with an undocumented and unsuccessful guerilla effort (despite North Korean claims to the contrary, there is little documented evidence of sustained or significant resistance – the fabrication of which is a main claim of Kim Il Sung’s legitimacy as a ruler) ripped the social fabric to shreds.

With that as a background, the end of World War II is of historic importance for the Korean people. Japan, defeated by the Allies, was forced to relinquish all of its colonies. That meant that Korea would soon be free. However, neither the State Department nor the Department of War had prepared for this. The Soviet allies, shifting focus to the pacific following Germany’s defeat, had the war with Japan in 1905 to atone for and were set on achieving territorial gains of their own at the conclusion of the war. The solution, made in haste, split the Korean nation in two at the 38th parallel, establishing two nations under different sponsorship – North under the Soviets and the South under the Americans.⁸ What was intended as a short term political expediency horribly turned into the division that is Korea.

The results of that division continue to haunt the Korean people and the northeast rim of Asia. A terrible and costly war, fought from 1950-1953, destroyed both nations, killed millions and cast in stone the enmity between North and South, China and America; some of which is only in the past decade receding.

⁷Breen, 104.

⁸William Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 11-12. Stueck covers the genesis of the political decision to divide the peninsula between the Soviets and the Americans at the 38th parallel in detail. His analysis reveals the speed at which events were occurring during the final months of the war, as well as the relative lack of expertise in both the State Department and the War Department regarding Korea.

The Korean history, long and distinguished, inspiring and devastating, sad and happy, provides the vital context for the heart of this paper. Analysis and prediction are useless unless informed by history. From here the argument proceeds to provide important definitions in Chapter Two. Chapter Three explores the security options available to a unified Korea seeking to determine the optimal arrangement regarding American presence, from the Korean perspective. Chapter Four analyzes American interests in Korea and Northeast Asia and determines the optimal arrangement for American forward presence in the region. Chapter Five concludes with analysis and recommendations.

Ultimately, this study asserts that the United States should have a policy objective of pursuing forward-based forces in a unified Korea. This study demonstrates that this arrangement, essentially a modification in the footprint of the current force presence, best suits the security needs of a unified Korea and the security concerns of the United States with regards to the stability of Northeast Asia.

Chapter 2

Definitions and Scenarios

Chapter Two defines the term “forward presence” focusing on the policy implications of prolonged American presence opposed to the temporary deployments of forces for specific missions. It also defines the terms unification and national security. It reviews the current defense arrangement between the United States and the Republic of Korea. The chapter concludes with examining the scenarios for Korean unification and choosing one as the basis for the remaining analysis.

Forward Presence Defined

In American security writings and military doctrine the term “forward presence” describes military forces that are stationed, permanently or on a rotational deployment, in a territory or nation other than the United States. In *American National Security*, by Amos A. Jordan, William J. Taylor Jr., and Michael J. Mazarr, the term is used as follows:

Forward presence, or the forward deployment of forces, can now be more usefully thought of as one component of a larger strategy – one that acknowledges the global role of the United States and the need to remain engaged, visible, and with forces deployed outside the United States that are prepared to respond to contingencies in all corners of the globe.⁹

In this definition the authors have identified key components of forward presence, namely the flexibility gained by reducing deployment times and the assurance provided to allies (and potential enemies alike) by the engagement and visibility of the forces.

American military doctrine addresses forward presence in Joint Publication 3-07, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War. In this doctrine forward presence is defined

⁹Amos A. Jordan, William J. Taylor, and Michael J. Mazarr, *American National Security*, 5th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 239.

as, “ activities [that] demonstrate our **commitment**, lend **credibility** to our alliances, enhance **regional stability**, and provide a **crisis response** capability while promoting US influence and access. In addition to forces stationed overseas and afloat, forward presence activities include periodic and rotational deployments, access and storage agreements, multinational exercises, port visits, foreign military training, foreign community support, and military-to-military contacts.”¹⁰
(Bold in original)

Combining the definition of forward presence provided by Taylor and Mazarr with the doctrinal definition produces a comprehensive definition that addresses the situation in Korea with precision: forward-based forces that demonstrate the commitment of the nation to the stability of the region, and contribute to that stability with a wide range of mission capabilities.

A former commander of United States Forces Korea and the Combined Forces Command provides an excellent summary of both the nature of forward presence and its benefits:

The physical presence of U.S. ground, air, and naval forces in Korea and Japan contributes significantly to U.S. and northeast Asian interests. These contributions endure well into the future. As shown in the figure below, the vital U.S. national interests in the region are many, and the threats to those interests are great. However, the U.S. presence provides the military access in east Asia that allows and encourages economic security, and political stability to the democratic nations of the region, and provides tangible deterrence.

The security offered by this presence is directly and indirectly responsible for the economic vitality and political stability of the region. The physical security has fostered the rapid expansion of the mutually reinforcing elements of democratization and market economies. The political and military stability resulting from U.S. involvement in northeast Asia provides the confidence necessary for foreign investment to flow into the region. The results are staggering. In the course of a single generation, Japan, China, Taiwan, Korea, and Singapore have risen respectively to numbers 3, 4, 7, 8, and 10 in total trade with the U.S., and comprised over \$425 billion in trade in 1999. Most of this would not have been possible without the direct security offered by the U.S. presence. It is the U.S. presence that will allow this regional prosperity, so critical to the global economy, to flourish in the future.¹¹

¹⁰Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-07 *Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War* (Washington D.C.,1995), I-4.

¹¹General (Retired) Thomas Schwartz, Testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 27 March 2001.

Unification Defined

The idea of unification encompasses many aspects from governmental to economic, from arts and culture to interpersonal, from common defense to coherent foreign policy. There are numerous approaches to unification taken by scholars and historians. For the purpose of this paper the term unification is defined as the dissolution of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, the dissolution of the Republic of Korea, and the formation of a new political entity that, under one recognized government, encompasses the geography, borders, and peoples of both current nations. This is contrasted with the idea of a confederation of equal states that may well be an intermediate step to unification.

National Security Defined

Since the advent of the Cold War the term national security assumed characteristics encompassing economic, diplomatic and informational aspects of national power. Security came to mean everything from protection of cyberspace to gaining favorable trade status. For the purposes of this paper, however, the definition of national security concerns the physical security of a nation as provided by military force. Thomas W. Robinson provides an excellent amplification:

It is thus appropriate to reduce national security to its original meaning: matters of a specific military nature (having to do with the threat or use of physical force) that concern the physical survival of a national entity (one possessing territory, population, economy and government). Such matters include military forces and their armaments, military budgets, the military component of international relations, and defense policies and strategies, but they do not include,

directly, the political, economic, diplomatic, or cultural motives or policy means that stand behind these matters or that are parts of the more inclusive foreign policy.¹²

The Mutual Defense Treaty Between The United States And The Republic Of Korea

The bilateral mutual defense treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea, in force since November of 1954, is a straightforward document. It pledges American military commitment to the defense of the Republic of Korea. It authorizes the stationing of American land, sea and air forces in the Republic of Korea. It is defensive in nature, but has two important provisions that directly relate to the topic at hand.¹³

First, as with most treaties of its kind, there is a provision for either signatory to withdraw, providing one year notice to the other, with no restrictions. Obviously, such a unilateral withdrawal by either would, in the absence of another treaty, obviate the mandate for American military presence.

The second, more subtle, provision that directly relates to the question of unification is in the preamble, “Desiring further to strengthen their efforts for collective defense for the preservation of peace and security pending the development of a more comprehensive and effective system of regional security in the Pacific area...”¹⁴ This clearly envisions a day when the bilateral agreement between the two nations no longer represents the most efficacious instrument for mutual security. Perhaps it is also a subtle reminder of the conviction that the nation would one day be unified.

¹²Thomas W. Robinson, “Asia-Pacific Security Relations: Changes Ahead,” in *The Global Century: Globalization and National Security*, ed. Richard L. Kugler and Ellen L. Frost (Washington D.C.: Defense University Press, 2001), 987.

¹³Yale Law School, The Avalon Project, *Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea; October 1, 1953*, (Available from <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/korea/kor001.htm#art1>.)

¹⁴Ibid.

Despite these two provisions, the treaty has proven extremely durable. With no modification past the initial articles of understanding added by the United States (significantly, this clarifies that offensive action by the Republic of Korea would not trigger the mutual defense aspect) the treaty approaches fifty years age. It is not reasonable, however, to presume that this treaty would survive intact following unification. Indeed, the mere act of unification will require the validation of current treaties of both the ROK and the DPRK. This treaty is a legal document between the United States and the Republic of Korea. As such, it would require negotiation after unification as the ROK's treaties and the DPRK's treaties become integrated.

Unification Scenarios

The scenarios that would result in a unified Korea warrant discussion. Each would shape the strategic context, particularly the relationship between Korea and the United States, as well as that between the four Great Powers and Korea, in profoundly different ways. The following analysis focuses on the scenario most likely to produce the greatest tension regarding American forward presence – peaceful, negotiated unification while demonstrating that the other scenarios would not result in a question of American presence, but indeed their further commitment due to the confrontational nature of the scenarios.

It is important to note that the scenarios for Korean unification represent educated guesses. In *Preparing for Korean Unification*, Jonathan Pollack and Chung Min Lee lay out the following:

Depending on the context in which various political, economic, and military events occur, unification could occur with little early warning, or it could be postponed for years or decades. Hence, the goal in examining contrasting unification scenarios is to understand how unification could unfold, and the range of issues that could arise for the U.S. Army.

Toward this end, four principal scenarios are proposed:

- **Unification through peaceful integration and negotiation;**

- **Unification through absorption following a collapse;**
- **Unification through conflict or war; and**
- **Sustained disequilibrium and potential external intervention.**¹⁵

For purposes here these scenarios adequately describe the potential outcomes and challenges of unification. Each has a different implication, however, for American force presence. It is logical to address those scenarios that most likely lead to American force presence first, followed by an analysis of those that are the most unpredictable.

Given the status quo any scenario that involves conflict or war will result in the commitment of American forces to the defense of South Korea, in accordance with the mutual defense treaty. While certainly possible, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which the north wins a conflict. Likewise, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which American and South Korean forces settle for reinstatement of the status quo following northern aggression (the assumption here is that neither the South Koreans, nor the United States, would initiate hostilities). Logically, such a scenario would also result in the long-term presence of American forces given the anticipated wide scale destruction war on the peninsula would cause, and the additional commitments necessary to restore stability in the region.

A collapse scenario imposes an immediate humanitarian crisis, likely requiring the commitment of American forces due to their capabilities, proximity, and objectivity (opposed to ROK forces). By all accounts the North Korean economy is dysfunctional and has ceased providing basic services for its citizens.¹⁶ An abrupt collapse of the north would require immediate military stabilization, followed by considerable economic and humanitarian aid.¹⁷

¹⁵Jonathan D. Pollack and Chung Min Lee, *Preparing for Korean Unification* (Washington D.C.: RAND's Arroyo Center, 1999), 45. It should be noted that this work was prepared for the U.S. Army.

¹⁶Marcus Noland, *Avoiding the Apocalypse, The Future of the Two Koreas* (Washington D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 2000), 348.

¹⁷*Ibid*, 360-361.

American forces, logistically capable of providing relief, could also function as an honest broker between the two peoples as they become one. It is reasonable that in such a scenario American forces would remain in Korea for an extended amount of time, subject to the unpredictable course of such a form of unification.

Therefore, it is the remaining scenarios that drive this discussion. The last scenario, continued disequilibria and potential external intervention, appears the most unlikely. It also, however, would result in continuous American presence depending on the nature of the intervention and the primary actors involved. It is difficult to imagine a scenario in which any of the other regional powers decides to intervene in Korean transition. The current mutual defense treaty between South Korea and the United States makes intervention a very serious proposition for any nation. Any scenario that predictably results in military confrontation between an external nation (not initiated by the DPRK) with the United States appears unlikely.

Peaceful integration through protracted negotiation precisely describes the scenario that most challenges the Korean-American alliance and the question of forward presence of American forces on the Korean peninsula. This scenario introduces the concept that all of the security arrangements of both Koreas would require deliberation, negotiation, and resolution. Among the myriad concerns of a new government, the unified Korea, security surely ranks high. Indeed, security of the unified nation would be of paramount importance. Creating conditions in which resources could be dedicated to the massive amount of both economic relief and socialization required for the northern population would appear to favor Korea seeking maximum protection from foreign intervention.¹⁸

¹⁸Noland, 360-361. The discussion in Noland's conclusion closely resemble those of many other sources. It is widely recognized that unification of Korea would entail far greater social challenges than the Germans experienced due to several factors. Foremost is the absolute nature of the North Korean cult of personality of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. Other factors include, at the time of this writing, the immature nature of South Korean democracy, and the challenges of economic restructuring of the south mandated by the Asian crisis of 1997. While the Korean people are one racially the experience of the past sixty years

In summary, of the educated guesses regarding unification scenarios the one that entails the most variables regarding American force presence attains from peaceful integration through protracted negotiation. This scenario forms the basis for this analysis of the future of American forces in a unified Korea.

This chapter provides important definitions and boundaries to the analysis. It establishes vital definitions for the remaining chapters such as of forward presence - forward-based forces that demonstrate the commitment of the nation to the stability of the region, and contribute to that stability with a wide range of mission capabilities; unification, the dissolution of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, the dissolution of the Republic of Korea, and the formation of a new political entity that, under one recognized government, encompasses the geography, borders, and peoples of both current nations; and national security, the physical security of a nation as provided by military force. Unification scenarios provide the appropriate context for this study. Three of the scenarios - unification through absorption following collapse; unification through conflict, or war; and sustained disequilibrium and external intervention – were rejected as the basis for this study due to the fact that each would likely result in the commitment of American forces. The remaining scenario, unification through integration and negotiation, was chosen as it represents the context in which the forward presence of American forces is most open to negotiation.

has changed them socially. The stark contrast in the behavior of both north and south Koreans during the Red Cross family exchanges that have transpired in the past five years is a reminder of the depth of the conditioning of the northerners opposed to the prosperity of the southerners. For these reasons a case study of German unification does not appear to be germane to the analysis here, especially given the vastly different geostrategic conditions of the two.

Chapter 3

The Korean Options

This chapter asks the questions, what are the security options available to a unified Korea, and what appears to be the best solution given the region's history, the legacy of Korean conflict and alliance with the United States, and the appropriateness of forward based forces in a unified Korea? This chapter reviews the concepts of security arrangements and examines how each may apply to Korea, positing that a multilateral arrangement with the United States will remain the best option for a unified Korea. Furthermore, it also posits that American forward presence in a unified Korea, while perhaps altered from the current disposition, also represents an important aspect of the security arrangement between the two nations and should be maintained following unification.

No matter remains as central to the idea of sovereignty than the collective security of a people bound to a nation, indeed one of the basic functions of government concerns providing for the common defense of its populace. History provides numerous examples of the myriad of security strategies and arrangements pursued by widely varying sized states with considerably different security needs. From the convenient alliances of Greek city-states, to the formalized and highly integrated North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and in many iterative steps in between, political entities have long recognized the need for collective security that combines the resources of many for the benefit of all.

Nor has the advent of a post Cold War world diminished the requirements of nations to provide for security. While the balancing act of a bipolar power balance may appear nostalgic, Dr. Henry Kissinger points out that despite the century long yearning of America to cast a benevolent shadow across the world it is indeed a more dynamic and challenging security landscape at the start of the 21st century:

In the emerging international order, nationalism has gained a new lease on life. Nations have pursued self-interest more frequently than high-minded principle, and have competed more than they have cooperated. There is little evidence to suggest that this age-old mode of behavior has changed, or that it is likely to change in the decades ahead.¹⁹

This idea, that nationalism is indeed not dead, and that nations pursue self-interest above all points out that Korea must closely plan for the security arrangements of the new nation.

The options appear unlimited. Considering the geo-strategic shift that a unified Korea represents, one can be assured that the four powers of Northeast Asia will compete, and cooperate when beneficial, in redefining the balance of power in the region, thus weighing in heavily with Korean decision making. While we found in Chapter Two that the scenario of unification most likely leading to a question of American force presence was one of protracted, negotiated unification, likewise the security arrangement of Korea will probably result from protracted negotiations opposed to seismic and sudden shifts.

The traditional security arrangements (those formal, normally treaty-bound, agreements between nation-states that provide for common security in the face of hostile activity) pursued by medium-sized states (defined for our purposes as between 50 million and 150 million in population) include isolation and neutrality, regional alignment, and super power alignment.

These concepts are also known as collective security, aptly defined by Tom J. Farer:

Literally, “collective security” could refer simply to an alliance for deterring and defending against armed attacks. As such it would be a familiar element in balance-of-power politics. In practice, it is generally employed to denote an alternative to balancing – namely, a collective institutionalized commitment not to balance but to gang up on any state that acts in defiance of collective judgments about permissible behavior. Collective security arrangements are designed, in other words, for law enforcement.²⁰

¹⁹Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 19.

²⁰Tom J. Farer “The Role of Regional Collective Security Arrangements” in *Collective Security in a Changing World*, ed. Thomas G. Weiss (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 154-155.

This chapter examines each type of arrangement (isolation and neutrality, regional alignment and superpower alignment) and how they apply to Korea (henceforth referred to as a unified nation.)

The Republic of Korea, in the year 2001, had the 12th largest economy in the world, with a per capita income in excess of \$18,000.²¹ It is an economy of true global dimension with a per capita gross domestic product that is three times that of Russia.²² Its three largest trading partners are the United States, Japan and China.²³ Korea stands as one of the “Asian Tigers” that group of four nations that shot to economic prosperity in one generation.

This simple data points to an obvious conclusion: Korea’s economic development, inexorably linked to security, derives from global trade, Korea’s security, and regional stability. It is argued that the nation’s meteoric rise from a third world economy in the 1960s to one of the “Asian Tigers” of the 1990s benefited in no small measure to both the economic aid and military commitments coming from Washington.²⁴

This does not auger well for an isolationist stance in security measures, nor does it portend neutrality. As the economy becomes dependent on increasing amounts of foreign investments and trade, the security of the nation becomes more important for investor confidence. That argument coincides with the observation regarding the current change of administration in

²¹CIA Factbook, *South Korea*, (Available from <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ks.html>.)

²²Nicholas Eberstadt and Richard J. Ellings, Introduction to *Korea’s Future and the Great Powers*, ed. Eberstadt and Ellings (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 12.

²³CIA Factbook, *South Korea*.

²⁴Donald W. Boose, Jr., editor, Conference Report, International Workshop on the U.S.-ROK Alliance (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 1996), 6-7. This reports covers key territory in the discussion of the benefits of the U.S.-ROK alliance. While recognizing the enormous benefits accrued to the ROK over the past half century, in both economic and security measures, it also draws out the then emerging idea that the ROK, due to its miraculous economic progress, was becoming a more equal member of the alliance and that prior to the 1990s it was recognized in both Washington and Seoul that the arrangement between the two countries was extremely unequal with the U.S. almost completely responsible for the defense of the ROK as well as its economic development.

the ROK, and, “Perhaps it wouldn’t hurt if top Korean business leaders tactfully remind Roh²⁵ that investment doesn’t flow to countries where the security environment is shaky.”²⁶

There are few historical precedents for nations this size successfully pursuing neutrality and/or isolation. Modern states that pursue such strategies appear limited to Switzerland (much smaller at a population of only 7.3 million), which has been prosperous and successful, remaining neutral throughout both world wars.²⁷ It does not appear to be an option for a nation surrounded by powers, economically globalized, and situated astride a key geo-strategic pivot point.²⁸

Selig Harrison, the respected journalist and lifetime student of the region, posits that the best option for a unified Korea is neutrality and denuclearization, positioning Korea as a buffer state.²⁹ He argues that history is not doomed to repeat itself and that a unified Korea could effectively balance security with neutrality despite the millennia of conflict between the regions major antagonists – China, Japan, Russia, Korea and the United States. While roundly argued, this position seems filled with more hope than hard analysis. Dr. Brzezinski provides an excellent summation arguing against the utility of isolation and neutrality in Eurasia:

The growing economic interdependence among nations is making the political exploitation of economic blackmail less compelling. Thus maneuver, diplomacy, coalition building, co-optation, and the very deliberate deployment of

²⁵Roh Moo-hyun, the new President of the Republic of Korea – Roh follows Kim Dae Jung, the architect of the “Sunshine Policy” of engagement with the DPRK that won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000

²⁶Kansas City Star, Editorial, 23 December 2002, p. B4.

²⁷CIA Factbook. *Switzerland*.

²⁸Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard* (New York: Basic Books, 1997). In Chapter 2 the author discusses extensively the geo-strategic importance of the Eurasian land mass. Korea, given its history and location, occupies what the author calls a geo-strategic pivot point because it is at the intersection of the world’s great powers, militarily, economically and demographically in population.

²⁹Selig S. Harrison, *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 288.

one's political assets have become the key ingredients of the successful exercise of geostrategic power on the Eurasian chessboard.³⁰

Regional, bilateral, or multilateral arrangements, or superpower alignment appears to best fit the security needs of Korea. Mutual security arrangements, the cornerstone of post World War Two security world wide, allow burden sharing, an aspect particularly compelling for a country facing daunting economic challenges as a newly unified Korea would. These arrangements can be divided into two types, namely regional and superpower. Whether they are bilateral or multilateral depends on the power calculus of the participants. In other words, regional alliances can be bilateral or multilateral, but superpower alignment is strictly bilateral.

Asian multilateral security alignments do not have a particularly good history. Brzezinski points out that there is no Asian equivalent to either the European Union or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and that, "...Asia is singularly deficient in regional political development. It lacks the cooperative multilateral structures that so dominate the European political landscape and that dilute, absorb, and contain Europe's more traditional territorial, ethnic and national conflicts."³¹ Currently, other than bilateral mutual defense treaties there is not a parallel in Asia to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Turning again to Robinson we find that in regards to Asia, "There is no balance-of-power system, no collective security system, no great power condominium, or any of the other traditional means of regulating cross-border behavior."³² Thomas L. Wilborn further states that, "There are no Northeast Asia security organizations or consultation for a – nothing even remotely similar to NATO or CSCE in Europe."³³ Finally, Admiral Dennis C. Blair, former Pacific Command (PACOM) Commander

³⁰Brzezinski, 36.

³¹Ibid, 153.

³²Robinson, 988.

³³Thomas L. Wilborn, *International Politics in Northeast Asia: The China-Japan-United States Strategic Triangle* (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 1996), 2.

points out that, “Unlike Europe, where multilateral security structures predominate, the APR [Asia-Pacific Region] has a tradition of bilateral security relations.”³⁴

Korea would not be positioned for regional alliance easily. Northeast Asia retains a distinct flavor from the rest of the continent, and Korea’s security interests will likely remain focused almost exclusively on the region. Traditional means, bilateral mutual defense, appear unlikely because of the exact history that Mr. Harrison disregards. It is the historical enmity of the nations of the region that mandated the presence of American forces in Korea, long after the demise of the Soviet Union and the strategy of containment was fulfilled.³⁵ Outside of the cultural and historical issues, Korea, with a population no greater than one half Japan or Russia, one quarter the United States and one twentieth of China, cannot expect to muster the economic or military strength to stand on equal terms with any of these powers.

The complexity of the security situation in Northeast Asia is highlighted by this passage by Nicholas Eberstadt and Richard J. Ellings:

The ROK seeks to minimize its dependence on China, Japan, and the United States, but understands the importance of the region’s great powers in protecting its security and dealing with the North.... In fact, strategic coordination is essential from the ROK’s perspective. Without outside help, South Korea cannot, for instance, easily absorb the North in the event of a collapse....To the extent that China or the DPRK are perceived as a threat, the ROK’s continued natural ally is the United States, along with Japan.³⁶

Conversely, it is unlikely that any of the great powers would be interested in regional alliances or structures similar to NATO. China and Japan are economic powers of the highest

³⁴Admiral Dennis C. Blair, Comments to the Asia Society, Hong Kong, 18 April 2002, (Available from <http://www.pacom.mil/speeches/sst2002/020423asiasociety.htm>).

³⁵Nicholas Eberstadt and Richard J. Ellings, “Assessing Interests and Objectives of Major Actors in the Korean Drama”, in *Korea’s Future and the Great Powers*, Eds. Nicholas Eberstadt and Richard J. Ellings (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 320.

³⁶Nicholas Eberstadt and Richard J. Ellings, 325-326.

order.³⁷ Russia retains significant military capability, especially in strategic rockets and missiles. The United States stands preeminent in both economic and military power and there is little reason to judge that descendant. What hope would a multilateral, regional alliance have in the face of the often conflicting interests of such great powers? Regardless of that prognostication, Korea, as the lesser power in any calculus of Northeast Asia, would find itself as a role player, not decision maker, similar to France during the Cold War.

Dr. Charles K. Armstrong, the Director of the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University, points out that after unification, “The most important relationship for Korea will be with the United States, precisely because the US is too far away to have a great stake in local power rivalries.”³⁸ South Korea remains bound to the United States by a mutual defense treaty as does Japan to the United States.

An excellent overview of the likelihood of an enduring Korean-American alliance comes from Professor Kim Woo Sang, of Sookmyung Women’s University in Seoul, in a summary from a conference on the very subject:

Prof. Kim suggested that a unified Korea should maintain a bilateral alliance, not with any contiguous countries, but with one far away from the Korean peninsula which has strong interests in the region and possesses sufficient power projection capability to be able to intervene in a timely and effective manner in case of conflict. At present, the United States is the only power satisfying these criteria. Such a post-unification alliance would assure the security of Korea, which has too small a resource base to contend unilaterally with neighboring great powers.³⁹

While this opinion may not appeal to the ego of the Korean people (an increasingly important aspect of the alliance) it represents a harsh calculus on power. However, we must recognize that the South Koreans’ view of the current relationship will surely color the future of

³⁷CIA World Factbook.

³⁸Dr. Charles K. Armstrong of Columbia University, interview by author, 18 February 2003, electronic mail, Leavenworth, Kansas.

³⁹Boose, 24.

the alliance and that the South Korean population is becoming increasingly aware of their growing negotiating power, and have become considerably more assertive vis-à-vis their place in the Korean-American alliance.⁴⁰

Finally, we are reminded that, “Korea has long served as a strategic battleground for regional powers who desire to safeguard their security by providing a buffer zone against the aggression of others. Because Korea is a traditional pathway into China, Japan, and the Russian Far East, each surrounding actor perceives the strategic importance of the Korean landmass. China, Japan, and Russia can each point to moments in history in which their territory was threatened by vulnerabilities from the Korean periphery. That history will continue to inform their strategic perspectives.”⁴¹

Americans In Korea

The preceding discussion serves to establish the range of options foreseeable to Korea for national security. It argues that a bilateral security arrangement between a unified Korea and a superpower represents the most likely course of action open. It is not intended to cover the myriad of non-military options, but the mutual defense arrangements common to states of similar size and disposition. Within the context of Korea maintaining a bilateral agreement with the United States, however, rests the question of the forward basing of American military forces in Korea. Certainly, a bilateral security arrangement, such as the one that currently exists between Korea and the United States, may include the forward presence of one of the party’s forces in the other’s territory. Or, as with the bilateral treaty between the United States and Thailand, may

⁴⁰James T. Laney and Jason Shaplen, “How to Deal with North Korea,” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 82, num. 2, March/April, 2003.

⁴¹Derek J. Mitchell, “A Blueprint for U.S. Policy toward a Unified Korea,” *The Washington Quarterly* 26 Winter 2002-03, 127.

include little to no forward presence. As with security arrangements, the quantity and disposition of American forces in Korea is open to negotiation and can take a myriad of form.

The idea that Korea and the United States could maintain a bilateral security arrangement with a modification of the current forward presence of American forces in Korea is receiving increased attention. Recently, the United States Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, highlighted this very point in his comments regarding the future of American forces in Korea. The Secretary specifically addressed the idea that American forces, and their disposition on the Korean peninsula, was open to evaluation and change, including redeployment to the United States.⁴² Victor Cha points out, this arrangement could morph into one of increased naval and airpower presence concurrent with a reduction in ground forces.⁴³ However, it is significant to note that the outgoing Korean president, Kim Dae Jung, the newly inaugurated President Roh Moo-Hyoung, and the North Korean leader, Kim Chong Il, have all, at one time or another, articulated a need for American force presence even after unification. Amplifying the growing awareness of the Korean people regarding the American alliance, President Roh recently commented, “The Staunch Korea-U.S. combined defense arrangement is greatly contributing to our national security. The solid (South Korea)-U.S. alliance should be maintained even more so.”

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The options of what American presence looks like are secondary to the question of their existence. Ambassador Donald P. Gregg asserts that American presence in Korea is vital to the

⁴²Rowan Scarborough, “U.S. Plans to Shift Troop in South Korea,” *Washington Times*, 7 March 2003, p. 1.

⁴³Victor Cha, “Focus on the Future, Not the North,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2002-03, 98-100.

⁴⁴MSNBC News, (Available from <http://www.msnbc.com/news/850567.asp?0bl=-0.>)

region, to Korea, and to the ongoing prosperity and development of China, Japan and Korea.⁴⁵ Additionally, the Ambassador points out that a compromise on the disposition of American forces [Ambassador Gregg noted that the footprint of American forces is, at present, very intrusive to the Koreans, and that the options of relocating forces to the south of Seoul, and relying on larger air and naval forces opposed to ground forces may be the trend] must be acceptable to China and Japan, and sensitive to their security requirements as well.⁴⁶

There has been, to date, little call for American forces to leave the Korean peninsula, now or after unification. While certain radical elements, especially younger, student organizations, routinely call for the expulsion of U.S. forces, and the North mixes in this call with other propaganda and rhetoric while maintaining an official policy of agreeing with American presence, we find no groundswell of support for this among the other powers of the region.⁴⁷

In summary, a unified Korea could expect to reshape its security arrangements almost from the start. The seismic shift of unification would so dramatically alter the landscape of Northeast Asia that all of the regional powers would be forced to reconsider collective security. Short-term challenges of unification (economic and cultural shock, rebuilding the northern infrastructure, humanitarian relief – hardly would Korea face these alone) would subside rather rapidly, leaving the new Korea to consider security in a historically hostile region.

The choices - isolation and neutrality, regional alliance, or superpower alliance - narrow down under scrutiny. Korea, in a day of globalization, possessing a dynamic, information age economy, could not expect isolation and neutrality to suffice. There is currently no regional

⁴⁵ Ambassador Donald P. Gregg, interview by author, 5 December 2002, Abilene, Kansas, written notes.

⁴⁶ Ibid. The Ambassador discusses at length the importance of the American presence in Korea. He also advocated the reshaping of the presence.

⁴⁷ Pollack and Lee, 84-86. The authors discuss the implications of unification from the perspectives of each of the great powers. They point assert that regional stability is in the best interests of each of the powers.

security arrangement in Northeast Asia, nor is there reason to predict that one may emerge in the near future. That leaves superpower alignment. While Korea has a long history with China, it has a more recent and powerful history with the United States.

Korea, following unification, should continue to pursue a bilateral security arrangement with the United States, including the consideration of the forward presence of American forces in some appropriate form. This arrangement provides best for Korean security, economic development, and sovereignty in a region of giants.

Chapter 4

American Interests

This chapter examines American interests in Northeast Asia and how the forward presence of forces satisfies the strategies that address those interests. Specifically, should the United States, based on its current security strategy, seek to maintain forward based forces in Northeast Asia following Korean unification? For context this chapter first reviews the United States' interests in Northeast Asia. It then reviews the elements of national power, establishing the military instrument as the primary component of our research. Finally, it compares the courses of action available to the United States regarding forward based forces in Northeast Asia, arguing that due to the uniqueness of the region, combined with the history of American engagement and the ongoing presence of forces in both Korea and Japan, that the United States would best fulfill its strategy by maintaining forces in Korea.

It has long been recognized that defining national interests is an elusive and difficult endeavor. Interests can be divided among vital, important and humanitarian, and can often be competing. In the United States, with its democratic form of government, this can be even more complicated as different presidents carry different political ideologies and agendas from administration to administration. What may be important to one president may be vital to another. In Northeast Asia, regarding a unified Korea, we are concerned only with vital national interests, defined in Joint Publication 1.0 as those that regard the fundamental well being, territory and safety of the nation, and can include threats to allies.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1.0, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 14 Nov 2002), II-1.

There is a multitude of evidence that suggests that the regional stability of Northeast Asia represents a vital national interest to the United States.⁴⁹ The first two nations specifically discussed in President George W. Bush's National Security Strategy, published in 2002, are Russia and China.⁵⁰ As discussed earlier the region represents a large part of the trade of the United States and is home to several economic powers and military powers. Zbigniew Brzezinski writes that, "...in addition to becoming the world's center of economic gravity, Asia is also its potential political volcano."⁵¹ Henry Kissinger, in *Diplomacy*, describes the region, "Of all the great, and potentially great, powers, China is the most ascendant. The United States is already the most powerful, Europe must work to forge greater unity, Russia is a staggering giant, and Japan is wealthy, but, so far, timid."⁵² Thomas L. Wilborn points out that, "...U.S. engagement in the Northeast Asia is likely to be one of the necessary conditions for regional stability, which in turn is one of the necessary conditions for expanding international trade and investment opportunities."⁵³ From these disparate, and expert opinions, a picture clearly emerges of an important region, a region that is perhaps inexorably tied to the security and prosperity of the United States because of its population, economies, and potential for conflict.

It is also widely recognized that Korea plays a unique and important role in the stability of the region. Ambassador Donald P. Gregg notes that Korea is where Asian wars historically

⁴⁹There are too numerous sources to list. It is considered axiomatic that because of the intersection of the four great powers of the region, combined with the economic and population dimensions of the region, that a stable Northeast Asia is a vital interest to the United States. Additionally, three of the declared nuclear powers are here (U.S., Russia and China), one is currently undeclared (DPRK) and the Japanese retain the capability to rapidly gain nuclear weapons, raising the importance of a stable region, devoid of an arms race.

⁵⁰The White House, *The National Security Strategy*, (Available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nssintro.html>.)

⁵¹Brzezinski, 153.

⁵²Kissinger, 829.

⁵³Wilborn, 48.

start.⁵⁴ Korea's position makes it unique as a springboard into the Asian landmass. Don Oberdorfer perfectly describes Korea, "Geography dealt Korea a particularly difficult role. Located in a strategic but dangerous neighborhood between the greater powers of China, Japan, and Russia, Korea has suffered nine hundred invasions, great and small, in its two thousand years of recorded history."⁵⁵ An average of one invasion every two years is brutal testimony to the geostrategic importance of Korea to Northeast Asia.

The National Security Strategy provides an analysis of the importance of Northeast Asia, and the approach the current administration takes, "America will encourage the advancement of democracy and economic openness in both nations [Russia and China], because these are the best foundations for domestic stability and international order. We will strongly resist aggression from other great powers—even as we welcome their peaceful pursuit of prosperity, trade, and cultural advancement."⁵⁶ While not specifically addressing forward presence, this excerpt clearly states that America considers the region important enough to use force if necessary.

Likewise, the National Security Strategy discusses the importance of the region second only to NATO, and establishes the strategy behind the necessity of forward-based forces:

To enhance our Asian alliances and friendships, we will:

- **look to Japan to continue forging a leading role in regional and global affairs based on our common interests, our common values, and our close defense and diplomatic cooperation;**
- **maintain forces in the region that reflect our commitments to our allies, our requirements, our technological advances, and the strategic environment; and**
- **build on stability provided by these alliances, as well as with institutions such as ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, to**

⁵⁴ Ambassador Donald P. Gregg, interview by author.

⁵⁵ Oberdorfer, 5.

⁵⁶ The White House, *The National Security Strategy*.

develop a mix of regional and bilateral strategies to manage change in this dynamic region.⁵⁷

For the purpose of this argument, how does the forward-based presence of American forces address the stability of Northeast Asia, and is Korea the right place to base them? These are all questions that are vital to this analysis. As the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Eric Shinseki, explained to the Senate Armed Services Committee regarding forward presence, “What we’ve always said is clear strategy is the best route to that long-term stationing set of decisions.”⁵⁸ The importance of the regions has been established, as has the strategy of engagement by the National Security Strategy. The linkage of the strategy to the forward presence of forces in Korea, precisely the import of General Shinseki’s point, remains the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

The Pacific Command Commander, Admiral Thomas Fargo, addressing Chinese students in Shanghai, made the following point regarding the interaction of strategy and engagement, as well as forward presence. The Admiral was listing PACOM priorities:

Next is reinforcing what I call the "constants" in the Pacific region, which includes our alliances, our friendships, and the presence of our forward-deployed combat forces.

We have long-standing bilateral alliances in the Pacific with Japan, Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and Australia. We also have important friendships with Singapore and Malaysia, and we are confident a new relationship with India will also contribute greatly to the security of the region, especially in the Indian Ocean. And of course we are looking for opportunities to work with China to provide stability in the crucial crescent from Northeast Asia to South Asia.

And my last priority is to promote change and improve our Asia-Pacific defense posture for the future. Undoubtedly, you have heard a lot about the strategic guidance we have received from Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld (my boss) concerning our effort to "transform" our military. In the Pacific, our job is to take

⁵⁷Ibid, Chapter VIII. It is important to point out that ASEAN and APEC are indeed multilateral forums. They are, however, economic and not security arrangements.

⁵⁸General Shinseki’s Testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Washington D.C., 25 February 2003. The General was answering a question regarding the proposals by the European Command Commander, General Jones, USMC, that forces may require alignment in Europe. His point regarding the correlation between strategy and forward presence is directly related to the discussion here.

those strategic concepts and translate them into practical applications to meet our future needs.

We are examining new ways of operating and organizing our forces, developing new capabilities, updating our plans, improving our forward posture, and maturing our joint and coalition operations. This ambitious evolutionary effort, both conceptually and practically, will make us more adaptable to respond to, and secure against, emerging threats and challenges.⁵⁹

These comments are significant for several reasons. First, Admiral Fargo clearly identifies the stability and security of Northeast Asia as a priority for PACOM. He foresees a future of change for the region, and implies that as the region evolves geostrategically, important matters such as forward-deployed forces will undergo review, and possible change. These comments, not surprisingly, echo the comments of the Army Chief of Staff, the EUCOM commander, and the Secretary of Defense. All point to the evolution of forward presence as a component of American military strategy.

Joint Publication 1.0 provides the framework for this discussion of forward presence in the form of the four elements of national power: diplomatic, informational, military and economic.⁶⁰ It points out that in peacetime the military serves a political role as well, deterring and dissuading potential adversaries with forward presence among other strategies.⁶¹ That focuses how to approach this problem. This paper does not address the three other elements of national power, but it is important to recognize that the military instrument never acts in a vacuum and that the other elements, indeed any one of which may be more significant than military power at any given time, will contribute to the challenges of stability in Northeast Asia. The obvious element of power in the region is economic, as already noted is the massive amount of trade that goes between the region and the United States. The other two, diplomatic and

⁵⁹Admiral Thomas Fargo, Remarks to students at Fudan University, Shanghai, China, 17 December 2002. (Available from <http://www.pacom.mil/speeches/sst2002/021218fundan.htm>.)

⁶⁰JP 1.0, I-6.

⁶¹Ibid, I-4.

informational, are always in use as well. Within the four elements, however, this study focuses on the military.

The spectrum of military use is illustrated in Joint Publication 3.0. Operations range from full-scale war to counter-drug, from peacekeeping to engagement, including forward presence.⁶² Forward presence has a proven record of success in both Korea and Europe. American forces have been in Europe since the end of World War II, and were an important part of the successful defense of Western Europe during the Cold War. Likewise, American forces stayed in Japan after World War II, and in Korea following the Korean War. While Brzezinski argues that both of these dispositions (Europe and Northeast Asia) were key to the containment strategy that ultimately succeeded in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, effectively bounding the Soviets at both strategic frontiers, the contribution of both forces exceed containment.⁶³

World War Two devastated both Europe and Northeast Asia. American forces in both theaters therefore had a role beyond containment that included the physical rebuilding of nations, humanitarian relief, and ushering in democracy. An unintended consequence, perhaps, of these achievements remains the important alliances of Germany, Japan and Korea with the United States. As the constabulary nature of occupation forces in postwar Germany and Japan remained to address the security concerns of those nations the relationships formed became longer lasting than perhaps envisioned. Likewise, the steadfast commitment of forward presence in Korea following the Korean War became an important aspect of the remarkable growth to prosperity of the ROK. NATO, as well as the mutual defense treaties between Japan and the United States, and Korea and the United States, are important results of these long term commitments, and all

⁶²Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3.0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 10 September 2001), I-2.

⁶³Brzezinski, 7.

represent the bedrock of security and stability in both Europe and Northeast Asia. Whether such results could be attained with a unified Korea is difficult to forecast, but not unlikely.

The cost of forward presence, in both treasure and other intangibles, varies greatly. Each arrangement is different. In Korea the host nation bears a significant portion of the real costs in supporting the American presence, from providing the electricity consumed at camps and bases, to augmenting American forces with Korean conscripts who often serve as interpreters and translators. In dollar terms, the Korean government generally bears approximately forty to fifty percent of the non-personnel costs of American presence.⁶⁴ Beyond that, however, is the much larger issue of sunk costs, those one time and major investments for support infrastructure that are vital to maintaining a high quality of life for soldiers. In the past half century the United States has invested considerably in infrastructure in both Korea and Japan, including port facilities, airfields, encampments, headquarters, and training facilities. Beginning again in a new nation would undoubtedly be expensive. However, as several factors pertinent to evolving strategy change, it is vital that such issues gain attention.

American Options

It is simply beyond the scope of this paper to analyze what form American forward presence in Northeast Asia should assume following Korean unification. The achievable aspect of that issue is whether or not America should pursue the forward presence of forces in Korea, pursuant to its stated strategy, and in line with its interests in the region. The two salient points,

⁶⁴GEN Thomas Schwartz, testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 27 March 2001. In his discussion of defense burden sharing, GEN Schwartz cites data from fiscal year 2000: the Republic of Korea paid \$751 million out of \$1.83 billion United States non-personnel stationing costs, a forty one percent contribution. The 2000 Report to Congress on Allied Contributions to the Common Defense sets a goal of seventy five percent for this.

therefore, become: Does the United States have a vital interest in the stability of Northeast Asia?

Is forward presence in Korea the correct approach to securing that interest?

There are always options. The following suggests concepts for addressing the vital interest of a stable Northeast Asia:

- Status quo, with adjustments. America, in conjunction with her allies, shapes a forward presence similar to the current disposition that is acceptable to the regions powers.⁶⁵
- Seek forward presence arrangements with other nations in the region. This is unlikely as Korea and Japan are the oldest allies of the United States in the region. Additionally, a survey of possible locations in Northeast Asia results in only two other nations – China and Russia.
- Radical reduction in forces in Korea and Japan, resulting in a logistical capability, focused on air and naval power.⁶⁶
- Complete redeployment. It is possible to maintain bilateral defense treaties without forward presence. Both Thailand and Australia are examples.

It is impossible to eliminate any of these options without greatly expanding the scope of this paper. However, several conclusions do come from these ideas. American forces are firmly established in both Korea and Japan, with sophisticated infrastructure and long-term relationships. Despite the predictable tensions, both have endured for nearly sixty years and have served the nations involved well. While not inconceivable, it is highly unlikely that American forces will ever find themselves forward based in either China or Russia. While Japan is clearly

⁶⁵ Ambassador Gregg stressed that any presence of American forces in a unified Korea must bring needed capabilities to the region, and that their presence must be acceptable by the Chinese in particular. Interview by author, 5 Dec 02.

⁶⁶ Both Selig Harrison and Victor Cha advocate this as the most likely alternative. Both cite the increased autonomy desired by the Koreans and the burdens of hosting large forces by both nations, combined with the increasing military potential of airpower.

an economic superpower, China and Russia are true regional powers with world superpower potential. Taiwan would be politically explosive because of its importance to China. There are no obviously feasible, acceptable, or suitable options for relocation of American forces from Korea and Japan in Northeast Asia, therefore option two appears highly unlikely.

However, besides relocation the remaining alternatives – status quo with alterations; radical reduction; and redeployment – each have merit. The status quo is obviously the simplest. Major modification of the force footprint also deserves study. The United States Forces Korea recognizes the attractiveness of returning as much land as possible to Korea, a growing nation of severely limited space.⁶⁷ While unification will result in a less densely populated nation, it will also clearly allow the restructuring of the USFK, as the primary threat, the DPRK, will vanish. Simply, it is predictable that the American forces would reduce their footprint in a unified Korea. The final option, complete redeployment, appears to be incompatible with the geostrategic importance of the region. Eliminating American forward presence in Northeast Asia would significantly diminish American influence in a region of vital national interest.

Absent such a presidential decision, it appears that American forward presence would have a role in unified Korea due to the geostrategic importance of the region. However, it is also apparent that those forces should anticipate a modification in their current disposition. Planners should begin considering what that presence should look like.

The United States clearly can pursue different approaches regarding forward presence of forces and the stability of Northeast Asia. The calculus of what is most efficacious presents a formidable challenge for a strategist, or operational planner. Forward presence, ultimately, is not just a military problem either. All four elements of national power come to bear when the United States seeks to place forces in another sovereign nation. It is a reasonable conclusion that the stability and prosperity of this region subsequent to both World War Two and the Cold War

⁶⁷General Schwartz Testimony, 27 March 2001.

derives in no small measure from American presence. The regional stability of Northeast Asia will constitute a vital national interest for the United States for the foreseeable future, and the question of pursuing forward presence in the region will remain relevant and important. The United States must anticipate unification and prepare for an adjustment of the forward presence in Korea.

Chapter 5

Analysis, Conclusion And Recommendation

Korea, perched as it is between China and Japan, sharing a border with Russia, and vital to United States' interests in the region, occupies a geostrategic pivot point of great importance. The best description of Korea's importance comes from Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Korea, the geopolitically pivotal state in Northeast Asia, could again become a source of contention between America and China, and its future will also impact directly on the American-Japanese connection."⁶⁸ The ineluctable importance of this state, and the extrapolation of that importance to an emergent, unified Korea, focuses the conclusions to this study.

The stability of Northeast Asia will continue to occupy a prime position in both American and Korean priorities. It is one of the most important regions of the world. As the economy of the world becomes even more globalized this region will become even more important. Through the course of this paper the idea that that stability can be achieved best by maintaining a bilateral security arrangement between the United States and a unified Korea emerged from analyzing the interests of both nations and eliminating the options available.

In Chapter Three the argument developed as an analysis of the normal security arrangements available to a medium size nation such as Korea. The options of neutrality and isolation, regional multilateralism, regional bilateralism, and superpower alignment were examined in turn and tested for suitability to a unified Korea.

Neutrality and isolation was rejected for several reasons, foremost being the dynamic economic interdependence of the region's nations, combined with the millennia old history of conflict in the region with Korea occupying the key geostrategic terrain. Regional multilateralism was also rejected, largely due to the complete absence of such security structures throughout the

⁶⁸Brzezinski, 190.

region. While Asian nations are making strides with economic forums, multilateral security forums have not taken hold.

Regional bilateralism was rejected for a similar reason, mainly that Korea's alignment with one of the local regional powers, China, Japan, or Russia, would come at the expense of a relationship with the others, an unattractive idea to a nation surrounded by great nations, with a long history of invasion and dominance by those nations. That left the structure of superpower alignment as a viable option.

The United States, as the only superpower, uniquely fits the requirements of a unified Korea. Indeed, the past half century of alliance, augmented by the shared blood spilt in defense of South Korea, and the ever increasing trade between the two nations, led to a logical conclusion that the bilateral, mutual defense arrangement between the two best suited the needs of a unified Korea. However, for two nations to reach such an arrangement, both must perceive the need.

Chapter Four explored the options available to the United States vis-à-vis security in Northeast Asia. First, it established that the stability of Northeast Asia does represent a vital national interest of the United States. It examined how forward presence of American forces fits into the strategy of, and vital interest of, a stable region. The idea that it would be easier to retain forward presence in two nations, rather than just one, combined with the evolving friction caused by the long term presence of those forces, led to the conclusion that evolution of these dispositions was required, regardless of Korean unification. The options available for forward presence were discussed, with the conclusion that no other nation in the region was likely to emerge as a host. Regardless, the enormous expense of creating life support infrastructure makes shifting forces to new nations economically daunting, but not impossible.

An Alternate View

It would be too easy to conclude that a unified Korea and the United States would both recognize the imperative to retain both a bilateral defense arrangement as well as the concurrent

forward presence of American forces. Indeed, such a conclusion requires little other than the recognition of historical inertia; the idea that left alone most systems will stay on the same path. Or similarly, the hypothesis of Ockham's razor—which states that one should not assume the existence of more things than are logically necessary— and that all else being equal the simplest solution is usually correct.⁶⁹ For it is indeed simplest for the nations to retain their agreements and continue to develop the alliance. But it would be similarly shortsighted to disregard the burgeoning nationalism, that the west may be evolving out of, that the east and other regions of the world may be growing into. For while the United States enters its third century under the same constitution, it is worthy to remember that the Peoples Republic of China's current government is less than 75 years old, despite the august and ancient history of that civilization.

Northeast Asia is home to three of America's largest trade partners, Japan, China and the Republic of Korea. Two of the world's nuclear powers, China and Russia, find intersections of vital interests in the region. Four of the world's top economies are here. Historically, the region contains multiple antagonists. The Japanese have fought the Chinese, Russians and Koreans over the last century alone. The Chinese have fought the Koreans. The Russians and the Chinese have never had more than an uneasy coexistence. General Tilelli and Susan Bryant remind us that, "The region is a potential flashpoint among four of the world's great powers: the United States, China, Russia, and Japan."⁷⁰

Ambassador Gregg makes the excellent point that it is easier to remain forward based in two countries in the region opposed to just one.⁷¹ The long term American presence in Japan, mainly in Okinawa, causes friction at times with that ally. While not proof that one is necessarily

⁶⁹MSN Encarta Online Encyclopedia, Western Philosophy (Available from <http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/refpages/RefArticle.aspx?refid=761574677¶=43#p43>.)

⁷⁰General John H. Tilelli and Major Susan Bryant, *Northeast Asian Regional Security: Keeping the Calm*, (Arlington: Association of the United States Army, 2002), 9.

⁷¹Ambassador Donald P. Gregg, interview by author, 5 December 2002.

related to the other, it seems logical that a successful grass roots effort to relocate, or even redeploy, American forces in one nation would certainly be encouraging to opponents of American presence in the other. However, both the Koreans and the Japanese benefit from this arrangement and if they continue to perceive that the burden is shared and not singular then it is more likely to continue.

Long-term presence causes tension at times on the Korean population as well as evidenced by the vitriolic demonstrations this past year regarding the tragic death of two young Korean girls in a U.S. military vehicle accident. The current Korean President is regarded as exploiting this anti-Americanism for his political gain. While the threat of a nuclear North, combined with hints that America may reconsider the redeployment of troops in the country, has abated the trend somewhat, young Koreans increasingly appear to view American forces as “occupiers” and not “protectors.”⁷² While the value of American presence in the region undoubtedly contributed to the post World War II recovery and later prosperity of both Japan and Korea, the duration of both in the year 2003 enters new dimensions as Korea marks 53 years and Japan 58 years. The stability of Northeast Asia, of vital interest to many nations, benefits from the dual arrangements of Japan and Korea. Should American forces depart from either, they would surely follow from the other.

The quixotic nature of international affairs makes such an assertion, that the region cannot remain stable without American force presence, questionable. It is pure hubris to suggest that the United States can assure regional stability among a people of ancient culture, storied history, and dynamic future. During prolonged stages of modern history the regional antagonists have peacefully coexisted, finding common grounds in economic prosperity. Likewise, during prolonged stages of modern history the regional antagonists have gone to war, fighting over

⁷²Doug Struck, “Anti-U.S. Sentiment Abates in South Korea,” *The Washington Post*, 14 March 2003, pg. 18, (Available from <http://ebird.dtic.mil/Mar2003/e20030314162217.html>.)

territorial disputes, scarce resources, and cultural ascendancy. The idea that any one nation can so influence a region of nearly two billion people, especially when that nation, the United States, is only 300 million strong and 5000 miles away, appears curious. But it is the influence and power of that nation that fuels this discussion.

That is why these issues require exploration in this complex proposition. For that is what this is, a proposition. The Koreans are no closer to unification as of this writing than twenty or so years ago. In fact, recent developments seem to indicate that unification under peaceful, negotiated, and protracted terms appears unlikely, and that unification may come from violent confrontation. China, long an enigma to western minds, remains a huge wildcard in this calculus. Will China fight another war against the United States in defense of North Korea? Will Russia? What would the United Nations do under the circumstances of a North Korean invasion?

Looking Ahead

American forward presence means far more than the number and type of troops on the ground. It signifies perhaps the deepest commitment one nation can make to another, the positioning of its citizens in defense of another country. Far more than treaties, economic relations, trade, cultural exchange, or tourism, forward presence plants American flags in foreign nations with no corresponding imperial ambition.

The forward basing of American forces in a unified Korea should be an objective of American foreign policy. America has vital national interest in the stability of Northeast Asia. American vital interests lie in the region in the forms of trade, investment and military power. Northeast Asia is a geostrategic region of global importance as evidenced by its population, economies and dynamism. The looming peer competitor to the United States, China, dominates the region. Much American blood has already been shed in the defense of the region's nations and in conflict with others.

Furthermore, it is in the mutual best interests of the nations of this study, Korea and the United States, to retain a vigorous mutual security arrangement following Korean unification. The security Korea can gain from alliance with a global superpower, combined with the geostrategic flexibility the United States gains from forward presence in Northeast Asia, makes the arrangement mutually beneficial. While there are certainly challenges to this maturing relationship, Korea and America should look to the future of the alliance and prepare for the seismic shift of unification.

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