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CONSEQUENCES OF THE NIXON DOCTRINE ON THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF SOUTH KOREA

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In recognition of a new and developing multipolar world, the Nixon Doctrine--willingness to negotiate, partnerships, and strength -- has replaced the United States' policy of the Cold War--containment of communism. South Korea had played a significant strategic role in the containment policy by providing the U.S. with a foothold on the continent at a strategic point where Chinese, Russian, and Japanese influence had historically clashed. This essay appraises the consequences of the Nixon Doctrine and its new perceptions

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by

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ABSTRACT.

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In recognition of a new and developing multipolar world, the Nixon Doctrine -- willingness to negotiate, partnerships, and strength -- has replaced the United States' policy of the Cold War--containment of communism. South Korea had played a significant strategic role in the containment policy by providing the U. S. with a foothold on the continent at a strategic point where Chinese, Russian, and Japanese influence had historically clashed. This essay appraises the consequences of the Nixon Doctrine and its new perceptions on the strategic significance of South Korea to the U. S. Based on research and review of official publications, scholarly journals, and respected journalistic sources, the essay concludes that South Korea has a new strategic significance based on its geographical position, its military strength, and demonstrated willingness to assume its partnership role as envisaged in the Nixon Doctrine. The paper concludes that continued heavy U. S. troop commitment in the area is not consistent with the concept of the Nixon Doctrine.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF KOREA

Thrusting itself southeastward from the northeastern Asiatic mainland, Korea appears to be making a symbolic geographic flight from its two contiguous northern and threatening neighbors, the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) and the Union of Soviet Socialists Republic (USSR). Geography, however, has conspired to frustrate this flight by positioning its third inhospitable neighbor, Japan, but 120 miles from it. In addition to being unfortunately located at the point where Chinese, Russians and Japanese influence meet, the harsh, 600 mile-long Korean peninsula has been sparingly endowed with agricultural land. The North has rugged mountains blocking ready access to the mainland and, at the same time, limiting land available for agriculture. South Korea, considered the more fortunate in its share of arable land, has only about 23 percent of its 38,000 square miles suitable for farming. Mountains rising from Korea's eastern shore line have deprived the eastern areas of first-rate ports except for the excellent port of Pusan in the southeast. The western shoreline while less formidable has, nevertheless, extreme tidal ranges which limit access. Deep water ports, while limited in number are, however, ice-free.[1]

> Few habitable areas of the earth are more unsuited to large-scale, modern military operations. The rugged landscape, a lack of adequate roads, rail lines, and military harbors, the narrow peninsula, and, not least, climatic extremes restrict and hamper maneuver, severely limit logistic support, and intensify the normal hardships of war.[2]

HISTORICAL STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

Notwithstanding the severity of its climate and terrain, Korea has historically been the cockpit of war in the Far East.[3] Subject by its location to ancient and continued influence from the Chinese who demanded traditional tribute,[4] Korea was first exploited for its strategic position in 1274 and 1281[5] when the Mongols launched attacks against Japan. Again, three centuries later,[6] Korea found itself used by Japanese invaders whose interest in Korea was as a base for operations against the Chinese on the mainland. Extricating itself from the Japanese, Korea was able to isolate itself from international involvement until the end of the 19th Century when it again became an object of Japanese, Russian and Chinese interest. Finally the Russo-Japanese War found Japan using Korea as a base of operation against the Russians. Japan's victory enabled her to declare Korea a protectorate,[7] beginning an infamous occupation that lasted through World War II when it was totally mobilized for Japanese militaristic purposes.

With the defeat of the Japanese, the United States was forced to deal with Korea which it considered to be of little strategic importance except as the occupation of it by unfriendly powers might constrain U. S. occupation of Japan. Russia's continued view of Korea as a strategic area, however, was emphasized by the rapidity with which it poured its troops into Korea to accept the surrender

of the Japanese. [8]

Jubilant Koreans welcomed American and Russian liberators in the south and north. Hopeful that they were to be no longer history's pawn, the Koreans discovered that they were again victims of great powers and foreign idealogies. A more mischievious and unthinking allied division of Korea at the 38th parallel would be hard to imagine. Robbing Korea of its territorial integrity, the division of the country paid no heed to the complementary nature of north and south. The north was industrially developed; the South agriculturally. The North provided the South with electricity; the South provided food. The light industry that had developed in the South was designed to process raw materials from the North. In short, an integrated economy had been dismembered.[9] Conditions had been established for the so-called Hermit Kingdom to have preeminent significance in the emerging bipolar nuclear world.

By 1949 the US had concluded its military government of South Korea and had withdrawn the bulk of its forces. At the same time, the US revealed that its defense perimeter would be a line from the Aleutians - Japan, Ryukus - Philippines. Korea did not appear to have strategic significance to the US. On 25 June 1950 North Korean forces under Soviet auspices moved to takeover South Korea.[10.] U.S. and U.N. forces joined battle and within five months forces from the Peoples Republic of China were committed when

total U. S. /U. N. victory seemed sure. China was apparently fearful of a U. S. -Japan-Korea alignment.

> Northeast Asia would be dominated by an anti-Communist coalition. Peking's passivity in the face of American challenges on its very borders might encourage this coalition to greater ventures. A Chinese Communist show of force, however, might at least remind wavering elements in Japan of a powerful neighbor close at hand. At the most, a smashing of the U. N. offensive in Korea might swing Japan onto a new course of prudent neutrality which would stall further American advances and enable indigenous "friendly" forces to strengthen their hold at the polls and in the trade unions. Thus Korea, as in the past, was less important in itself than for its relationships to adjoining countries.[11]

In 1953 the war ended in a stalemate leaving Korea divided but with the United States ascribing to it new strategic value. Through the remainder of the 1950's and until 1969, South Korea played a dominant role in the U. S. strategy of containment. Acting as the northern anchor in the "chain of deterrence", Korea was strategically significant, as it had been historically, because of its geographical position. It provided the U. S. with a foot hold on the mainland in the proximity of its Cold War enemies the USSR and the PRC.

THE NIXON DOCTRINE, GENESIS AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Under strong public pressure against the U. S. involvement in the Vietnam War and aware that "the whole pattern of international politics was changing,"[13] President Nixon during a diplomatic trip chose a "background" press conference on Guan in July 1969 to sketch a foreign policy which was to bring an end to an era of containment and open one of negotiation. It was, further, a policy

which would be designed to take a longer view of world conditions instead of our previous policy which he characterized as reactive to situations as they occur. This new approach to international relations the President subsequently called the Nixon Doctrine.

On February 18, 1970 President Nixon detailed that doctrine in a report to Congress: "U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970's: A New Strategy for Peace." Professing "a new approach to foreign policy, to match a new era of international relations,[14] the President proclaimed a new role for the United States:

> "...(It) will participate in the defense and development of allies and friends but....America cannot--and will not--conceive all the plans, design all the programs, execute all the decisions and undertake all the defense of free nations of the world. We will help where it makes a real difference and is considered in out interest."[15]

The United States would, therefore, adopt a foreign policy based on three principles: partnership, strength, and willingness to negotiate.[16]

In reality the "Nixon Doctrine" is cut from the same rhetorical fabric as "Peace with honor." The United States had to adopt a policy of partnership. The President described the disintergation of Communist unity,[17] but neglected to comment on disintergation among the Western Allies and the concomitant diminution of America's ability to influence. The fact is that today, whether the U.S. wants to or not, its "allies" will not let it "conceive all the plans, design all the programs, execute all the decisions and

undertake all the defense...."* Thus we must hope for partnership.

A further hard fact is that the "willingness to negotiate" is the only practical policy for the U. S. to adopt in light of the aggressive activity of the U. S. S. R. and P. R. C. not only in international relations but in the international market place where they are wooing the market-hungry producers of Western Europe and Japan -- and the U. S.

Inspite of the rhetorical excesses of the Nixon Doctrine, the perceptions which prompted its formulation are accurate. The U. S., then, by force of a changed world has little to do but seek partnership and be willing to negotiate.

The third principle of the Nixon Doctrine -- strength -- while not forced on the U. S. as are the other two is equally realistic. For there to be peace United States strength "in relation to strength of others"[18] is essential and very likely the most critical principle of the three (the nature of the world has not changed that much!). The Nixon Doctrine recognizes that the bipolar world has gone and a multipolar world is emerging with power shifting from the U. S. S. R.

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*Western Europe is still deaf to U. S. plans for greater commitment to NATO; Japan refuses both to lower tariffs significantly and to assume the responsibility for underdeveloped Asian nations which the U. S. has asked; France will not let U. S. transports land in resupplying the Israelis; etc.

and U.S.A. to Western Europe, Japan and The Peoples Republic of China. Notwithstanding this diffusion of power, the new foreign policy recognizes that "Peace requires strength. So long as there are those who would threaten our vital interests and those of our allies with military force, we must be strong. American weakness could tempt would-be aggressors to make dangerous miscalculations".[19] This third principle, then, is a statement to the world that the U.S. does not intend to become militarily weak, and gives force to the statement of national self-interest: "We will help where it makes a real difference and is considered in our interest."[20]

THE NIXON DOCTRINE ADDRESSES ASIA

As shown above, the Nixon Doctrine is both a statement of international accomodation and national assertion. It declares a reduced U.S. commitment and involvement while demanding self-reliance of allies. In his 1970 foreign policy report to Congress, the President declared that in Asia "The responsibilities once borne by the United States at such great cost can now be shared."[21] Citing Japan's economic wealth and consequent duty to shoulder greater responsibilities the President, nevertheless, reaffirmed that the U.S. continued to have interests in Asia and commitments to those interests. He asseted that:

- The United States will keep its treaty commitments.
- We shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us, or of a nation whose survival we consider vital

to our security and the security of the region as a whole.

- In cases involving other types of aggression we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested and as appropriate. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.[22]

To demonstrate his determination to implement the new foreign policy the President announced the reduction of U. S. forces in Korea by 20,000 men,[23] declaring this to be an instance of sharing responsibility.

When closely considered U. S. troop reduction in Korea was a safe and convenient move for the U. S. The Republic of Korea Army was demonstrably superior to that of North Korea. Stability between the two Koreas had been achieved and was unlikely to be threatened while the U. S. continued to have forces available behind the DMZ, regardless of North Korean rhetoric. This troop reduction was a sound diplomatic move internationally and welcomed domestically.

While the U. S. found the Korean Peninsula stable, it nevertheless found Asia less so. The early seventies saw China emerging from its total introspection to a seeming preoccupation with international recognition and, more importantly, with heated border disputes with the U. S. S. R.

The PRC's activity in peripheral areas seemed to diminish with the growing fear of a Soviet offensive. The PRC seemed to assume a defensive posture seeking to improve Sino-American

relations to play off the U. S. and U. S. S. R. and, at the same time, to gain time to develop further its nuclear capability. The U. S. S. R. in the Asian area had been keeping a relatively low profile except for its continued troop buildup on the borders of China in the disputed areas and its continuos negotiations with Japan for development and exploitation of Siberian oil fields.

Japan has been the element in the area that has been the great concern of all. Secure under the U. S. nuclear umbrella, the Japanese have demonstrated the great success of the capitalistic system with a gross national product ranking third in the world. In its headlong pursuit of profit the Japanese have proven to be insensitive to the cultural and nationalistic sensitivities of the countries in the Far East. Hostility and fear of Japanese economic dominance is everywhere - S. Korea, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia and Maylasia. The widespread unpopularity of the Japanese strongly militates against its assuming the role envisioned for it in the Nixon Doctrine. Not only is Japan not enthusiastically assuming a role of benign leadership, her lack of military strength does not qualify her to assume the American role -- much to the relief of many nations in the area who remember a militarily strong Japan. One might suspect that the U. S. S. R. and PRC inspite of their apparent policy to weaken the U. S. -Japan alliance may prefer such an alliance to nuclear armed Japan or Japan in alliance with either of the other communist powers.

"Hence the continuation of the basic security relationship between Japan and the United States remains vital to the stability of the Pacific Basin. Of the powers in the U. S. -Soviet-Chinese triangle only the United States can provide a security guarantee that furnishes a clear alternative to Japanese remilitarazation or neutralization."[24] Thus the Nixon Doctrine finds in Asia multipolar forces (U. S. -U. S. S. R. - China)* establishing an equilibrium (perhaps unsure) that allows the United States maneuverability not previously allowed in a bipolar world.

SOUTH KOREA ASSESSED

The United States' commitment to the Republic of South Korea is a long and expensive one. Since 1945, when it accepted the surrender of Japanese troops south of the 38th parallel, the United States has been intimately involved with the defense, development and preservation of this small Asian nation. For three of these twenty-nine years the U. S. fought in a conflict that cost it 56, 246 American lives and 103, 384 wounded. Since the end of that war the South Koreans have received nearly nine billion dollars [26] in aid funds.

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* A. Doak Barnett, among others, views the multipolar force operating in East Asia as a "four power balance... the product of the Sino-Soviet conflict, the reemergence of Japan, and the trend toward a reduced United States military role in the region."[25] I have not considered Japan in this formula because of its very limited military strength at this time. Japan is in a dependent status, as is none of the other three.

In addition, the United States has committed itself through the ROK-US Mutual Defense Treaty, which was signed in 1954, to U.S. military support of the South Koreans in case of another attack on the Republic of Korea. In support of this commitment the United States has garrisoned U.S. combat and support forces in Korea at considerable expense. In fiscal 1972, a year after significant reduction of forces had been effected, the cost of maintaining a 40,000-man force was $584 million.[27] An additional $192 million in economic assistance and $155 million in military assistance brought the total cost for the year to nearly $1 billion.

Currently the U.S. has forces and installations scattered across and throughout the peninsula. Major U.S. bases are at Taegu, Osan, Seoul, Uijongbu, Chunchon, and Tangduchon.[28] The 13,000-man 2d Inf. Division and the 8,300 -man U.S. Air Force Korea with 90 tactical and support aircraft including 3 squadrons of F-4D'S (54 acft) constitute the main forces. These are supported by substantial administrative and logistical units[29] "The principal function of the American troops here today is to provide a 'tripwire' guaranteeing nearly automatic U.S. military involvement in any resumption of the war in Korea."[30] Does the United States need this "tripwire" in light of the Nixon Doctrine?

Before we can answer this question an assessment of South Korea's condition and status should be made. The U.S. relationship

to South Korea provides an opportunity to consider the manner in which the U.S. can exercise its new-found maneuverability as afforded by the multipolar nature of the world. If the U.S. is, indeed, functioning in a multipolar world where balance of power is operating, the role and strategic significance of South Korea to the U.S. is worth considering what is South Korea's value to the United States' global concerns? What is the strategic significance of South Korea in 1974? To what degree does South Korea offer the U.S. maneuverability with regards to other powers?

Geographically South Korea offers a variety of positive benefits to the U.S. Notwithstanding its limited use as a corridor into the mainland, South Korea provides a foothold on the continent, facilitating logistical operations by land, sea or air. More importantly, it is useful as a forward strategic base for land-based missile and air operations against the mainland where many Chinese cities are within fighter striking distance. Likewise, naval operations can be directed against the fleets of both the U.S.S.R. and P.R.C. Continued control of ice-free Korean harbors deprives the Soviets of them and forces them to operate inconveniently out of the frequently fog-bound and ice-bound naval bases of Petropavlovsk, Sovietskaya Gavan' and Vladivostok.[31] Ultimately the U.S. concern in this area is for the security of Japan, its most significant economic partner in the East. The Korean peninsula, as it has historically,

continues to be a potential invasion route into Japan. Control of South Korea contributes to the security of Japan. One can imagine that Japan might be more likely to remilitarize if its security were threatened by the entire peninsula being under Communist control.

Militarily a comparison of North and South Korea shows the South to have a stronger army but inferior in its naval and air forces.[32]

	North Korea	South Korea
Army:	408,000	560,000
	reserves: 750,000	1,000,000
Navy:	17,000	18,900
	3 submarines	5 destroyers
	10 Komar - and 8 Osa-class	3 destroyer escorts
	80 torpedo boats	15 coastal escorts
	2 fleet minesweepers	21 patrol boats
	35 patrol vessels	6 coastal minesweepers
	60 motor gunboats	6 escort transports
	Samlet SSM (6 sites)	20 landing ships
	reserves: 15,000	30,000
Air Force:	45,000	25,000
	598 combat aircraft	195 combat aircraft
	reserves: 40,000	35,000

In terms of strategic considerations the South Koreans can clearly perform on the ground in a superior manner. Their two divisions in Vietnam proved to be extremely effective and reliable. South Korean support of the U. S. in Vietnam was a clear demonstration that it is a staunch ally.[33] Modernizing and strengthing its naval and air forces would make South Korea militarily secure against the North Koreans and continue to provide security for Japan.

Economically the conditions of South Korea are promising. During the past few years inspite of the economically unfavorable division of the country at the end of World War II, economic development has been better than 10% annually. There has been rapid growth in industry and relative stability. Exports and trade are increasing favorably with Japan and the U.S., its major trade partners. If South Korea were to be absorbed by North Korea in event of a total U.S. withdrawal there would be "serious limiting effects on Japan's long-range economic development."[34] Inspite of the demonstrations of anti-Japanese feeling, the economic relationship between the two is productive and contributes to the economic health of both countries. South Korea has surprised the world in its economic growth and we are witnessing a "time of unprecedented prosperity in a nation once written off as an economic 'basket case'".[35]

Economic prosperity has contributed to the political stability of South Korea inspite of the harsh undemocratic and totalitarian measures of the Park regime. Strong and long-standing hostility toward the Japanese brings a unity that is further enhanced by the anti-communist sentiment that is long and frequently inflamed by the erratic and hostile behavior of North Korea. In short, South Korea is politically reliable to the United States.

We have, then, in South Korea a proven, politically reliable ally and partner that is showing economic health, is strong militarily,

and offers significant strategic geographical benefits.

Two questions remain before us: (1) What is Korea's strategic significance in light of the Nixon Doctrine? and (2) Is there a necessity for continued American presence in Korea?

The concepts of the Nixon Doctrine seem nowhere more operable than in Korea. Brought to a high condition of readiness and strength, growing economically, and stable politically, South Korea is able to assume even greater responsibility for its defense and has demonstrated its willingness to be a partner as the Nixon Doctrine requires of its allies. It provides the strategic benefits cited above which make continued alliance advantageous for the United States and consistent with its principles enunciated in the Nixon Doctrine.

On the matter of the advisability of continuing to maintain U.S. forces in South Korea, several cogent arguments can be made. Withdrawal can be seen as indication of the United States "reluctance to maintain a forward position that might require military engagement.....(and) once American troops are withdrawn....the United States will be unable and unwilling to return.... (and with improved N.K. and P.R.C. relations) China will be available as a 'reliable rear' for Northern military efforts against the South...."[36] Further, American presense, it can be argued, inhibits both North Korea and South Korean aggression, thereby producing stability in an area where stability is important to the U.S. Also American withdrawal

makes Japan more vulnerable and consequently she may be given impetus to rearm---a condition, as previously indicated, not desirable to most in the area. Still further, an American presence eases "fears by China that a quick American pullout might encourage bolder Soviet moves in the area." [37] The final and perhaps most cogent reason for U. S. continued presence is the simple fact that the North Koreans are busy trying to get "foreign" forces out of the peninsula.

An argument supporting the discontinuing of U. S. presence is that the continued threat of military activity on the Sino-Soviet borders make P. R. C. support of N. K. action against the South unlikely. The P. R. C. could conceivably become militarily involved with both the U. S. and U. S. S. R., a condition it certainly doesn't want. [38] Also the strength and training of South Korean ground forces make it a formidable army, [39] and if modernization of air and naval forces continue it will be superior in all respects to N. K. A large military vacuum would not be created by U. S. withdrawal and the U. S. could continue logistical support and respond militarily if in its best interest. Next, there is the economic argument. All or part of the $584 million cost of maintaining U. S. forces in Korea in 1972, the last year for which figures were available, can be a welcome saving to the U. S. taxpayer. Even if not saved but redirected to priority defense items, the dollar value can be improved. Cost of

maintaining U. S. personnel is very high when you consider that "Washington can support eight to ten foreign soldiers for the cost of one U. S. soldier."[40]

The most compelling reason for U. S. troop withdrawal, however, is found in the Nixon Doctrine itself. Declared to be a policy that gives the U. S. greater options and eliminates the "reactive" character of our previous foreign policy, built on the concept of a multipolar world where greater maneuverability can be enjoyed, the Nixon Doctrine can not be what it claims if the U. S. stations troops in an area so that if they are overrun and decimated they provide a "tripwire" for immediate and understandably popularly supported response. American troop commitments on the scale presently in Korea do not give us the options the Nixon Doctrine envisions as desirable.

CONCLUSIONS

A country once strategically significant to the United States exclusively for its geographical position which provided a foothold on the mainland in the era of a containment policy, South Korea has a new strategic significance to the United States in the era of the Nixon Doctrine. Realistically assessing the new and developing multipolar nature of the world and the United States' new role in that world, the United States has in South Korea an ally with increased strategic significance. Largely because of its acknowledged military strength

South Korea has brought a stability in the area which is at the apex where Sino-Soviet-Japanese interests have historically converged. Its military strength and geographical location provide a degree of security to an exposed and militarily impotent Japan, the nation of primary concern to the U. S. in the Far East. Finally, it is a staunch and proved ally willing to share its responsibility as the Nixon Doctrine demands of its friends who seek its aid.

While aid costs are high and the U. S. investment in Korea has been large, reductions in total expenditures can be made sizeable - U. S. troop reductions, if not total withdrawal from a politically stable South Korea. Nor is cost the only factor favoring further U. S. troop reductions. The Nixon Doctrine's declaration to provide greater opportunity for options and a less reactive policy demands that we not be forced into a conflict only because our troops are overrun, a condition that surely would obtain with the present 40,000-man commitment. Withdrawal does not have to mean an abdication from U. S. security commitments to Korea nor a sign of lessening of the country's importance to the United States. It is, rather, a testimony to S. Korea's reliability and an opportunity for the U. S. to increase its options.

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FOOTNOTES

1. U. S. Department of State, Background Notes (South) Korea, p. 1.

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4. Frank Gosfield and Bernhardt J. Hurwood, Korea: Land of the 38th Parallel, pp. 22-23.

5. Ibid., p. 34.

6. Ibid., p. 39.

7. Ibid., pp. 60-66.

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9. Ibid., pp. 11-12.

10. J. C. Pennington, LTC, Is Korea of Continuing Importance to United States Strategy in East Asia?, p. 6.

11. Allen S. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, pp. 156-157.

12. Pennington, p. iii.

13. Richard M. Nixon, U. S. Foreign Policy for the 1970's: A New Strategy for Peace, p. 1.

14. Ibid., p. 2.

15. Ibid., p. 6.

16. Ibid., p. 5.

17. Ibid., p. 3.

18. Ibid., p. 4.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., p. 5.

21. Ibid., p. 51.

22. Ibid., pp. 55-56.

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25. A. Doak Barnett, "The New Multipolar Balance in East Asia; Implications for United States Policy," in A New Posture Toward Asia, ed. by James C. Charlesworth, Vol. 390, p. 73.

26. "An Ally Saved: Now, Mixed Feelings," U.S. News and World Report, 29 July 1974, p. 70. (hereafter referred to as "An Ally Saved").

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34. James W. Morley, Japan and Korea: America's Allies in the Pacific, p. 53.

35. "An Ally Saved," p. 70.

36. Fred Greene, "The Case for and Against Military Withdrawal from Vietnam and Korea," A New Posture Toward Asia, ed. James C. Charlesworth, Vol. 390, p. 9.

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38. Greene, pp. 9-10.

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