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# Should U.S. Military Forces Remain in Korea After Reunification?

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **SHOULD U.S. MILITARY FORCES REMAIN IN KOREA AFTER REUNIFICATION?**

Korea has been divided into two nations since the end of World War II. The northern portion of the peninsula, North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea or DPRK), is a hard-line, Stalinist-Marxist, regime. However, the southern part of the peninsula, South Korea (Republic of Korea or ROK), is a nascent democracy with a market economy. The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has also increased the expectation in the ROK that Communism will suffer a similar fate in the DPRK, and that Korea will be reunified under the South Korean government. Such an event presents the United States with a major policy issue: Should U.S. forces remain on the Korean peninsula after reunification?

This paper is based on three assumptions: 1) the reunification of North and South Korea will occur in a peaceful manner; 2) the DPRK will collapse within 10-20 years; and 3) a reunified Korean nation will be administered by the government in Seoul. It discusses the military, political and economic considerations-- of both the United States and a reunified Korea-- as to whether U.S. forces should remain on the peninsula after reunification. The paper concludes with the recommendation that U.S. air forces should remain in Korea after reunification.

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# **SHOULD U.S. MILITARY FORCES REMAIN IN KOREA AFTER REUNIFICATION?**

**By**

**Lt Col John E. Betts, USAFR <sup>1</sup>**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Korea has been divided into two nations since the end of World War II. The northern portion of the peninsula, North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea or DPRK), is a hard-line, Stalinist-Marxist, regime. However, the southern part of the peninsula, South Korea (Republic of Korea or ROK), is a nascent democracy with a market economy. Relations between North and South Korea are very hostile and there are approximately 40,000 U.S. troops stationed in the ROK to deter aggression from the DPRK.<sup>2</sup> The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has also increased the expectation in the ROK that Communism will suffer a similar fate in the DPRK, and that Korea will be reunified under the South Korean government. Such an event presents the United States with a major policy issue: Should U.S. forces remain on the Korean peninsula after reunification?

This paper discusses both the American and Korean positions on whether U.S. forces should remain on the peninsula after reunification. It is also based on three assumptions: 1) the DPRK will collapse within 10-20 years; 2) the reunification of North and

South Korea will occur in a peaceful manner; and 3) a reunified Korean nation will be administered by the government in Seoul.

## **BACKGROUND**

Korea is a land that has been shaped by its geography, culture and history. Accordingly, any analysis of the future of the US/Korean alliance, especially with respect to the status of the U.S. forces on the peninsula, should begin with a brief discussion of these elements.

**Geography.** Korea, a land that has been divided into two nations since the end of World War II, is a peninsula that is attached to the Asian mainland. It is bordered by China (Manchuria) in the north and west, and shares a small border with Russia in the northeast. Approximately 125 miles across the Korea Strait is Japan. The Korean peninsula is about 600 miles long, from 120-150 miles wide and has a land mass of 86,360 square miles.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the peninsula is mountainous and there is a shortage of farmland.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the Koreans have developed a farming industry with rice serving as the primary crop. With 6,000 miles of coastline, the Koreans have also used fishing for an additional source of food.<sup>5</sup> South Korea lacks significant natural resources, but, since 1962, has followed an aggressive policy of developing manufacturing industries especially for exports.<sup>6</sup>

**Culture.** The Koreans are the ethnic descendants of the Neolithic people who inhabited the Korean peninsula about 4,000

B.C.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the Koreans can trace their ancestry back 6,000 years, and, throughout this time, they have remained one race. Indeed, the fact they have maintained their racial homogeneity--regardless of numerous foreign invasions and occupations--is a great source of pride to them. However, this source of Korean pride is a potential problem because many foreigners believe that the Koreans place too much emphasis on race and racial purity.<sup>8</sup> This issue could strain US/Korean relations after Korean reunification.

A second cultural factor to be considered is the influence of Confucianism. Confucianism has been present in Korea since the Shilla Dynasty (668-918).<sup>9</sup> However, it became a dominant philosophy under the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910), which replaced Buddhism with the Chu Hsi school of Confucianism.<sup>10</sup> Confucianism is a philosophy that regulates conduct--among members of a family; between friends and members of society in general; in business relations; and in the nature of government, especially its leaders.<sup>11</sup> And, although a discussion of Confucian philosophy is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that Confucianism has had a profound effect on the development of Korea.<sup>12</sup> In fact, it influences South Korean society today, a fact that U.S. officials must consider when discussing the future of the alliance after reunification.<sup>13</sup>

**History.** The history of Korea is one of numerous attacks, occupations and/or domination by foreign powers, especially China and Japan. Due to its geographic proximity to China, Korea has been continuously invaded and/or dominated by its powerful neighbor from



as early as the Chinese Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.).<sup>14</sup> The peninsula, again because of its geographic location, has also been attacked by the Mongols (six times during a 30 year period beginning in 1231), the Japanese (1592-1597) and the Manchus (1627 and 1636).<sup>15</sup>

In modern times, the Korean peninsula has also been the object of dispute among China, Japan and Russia. The Chinese and Japanese went to war (Sino-Japanese War) over Korea in 1894, with Japan emerging victorious in 1895.<sup>16</sup> In 1904, Russia and Japan went to war (Russo-Japanese War, 1904-05), due in part for influence in Korea, with Japan again emerging as the victor.<sup>17</sup> As a result of this war, Korea became a protectorate of Japan.<sup>18</sup> In 1910, Japan formally annexed Korea, and administered it as a colony until the end of World War II.<sup>19</sup> This period in the Korean history is especially "dark", as the Japanese occupation was brutal. In fact, the Koreans are still bitter about their treatment by the Japanese, a fact which causes tension in Korean/Japanese relations to this day.

The most recent example of foreign intervention on the peninsula, and the one that is probably best known to most Americans, is the Korean War (1950-1953.) During this conflict, thousands of Chinese soldiers crossed the Yalu River to aid the Communist regime in North Korea. When the war finally ended,<sup>20</sup> the United States had 33,629 dead while South Korea had approximately 50,000 soldiers killed.<sup>21</sup> The Communists, both North Korean and Chinese, suffered between 1.25 and 1.5 million killed.<sup>22</sup>

In summary, Korea has continually had to confront invasions and/or domination by foreign powers, especially China and Japan. This history, therefore, should be a major consideration in any decision as to whether U.S. military forces should remain in Korea after reunification.

## **THE U.S. OPTIONS**

The United States has two basic options with respect to its forces in Korea after reunification. The first is to withdraw, which would probably lead to a weakening of the military alliance between the U.S. and Korea.<sup>23</sup> The second option is for the U.S. to keep its forces on the Korea peninsula after reunification. If this option is used, there is always a question of force mix, i.e., the number and type of units and personnel, but the essence of the option--keeping U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula--remains the same. Each of these two options, and their relative merits, are discussed more fully below.

### **Option One: Withdraw**

The case for withdrawing U.S. forces after reunification is very compelling. The rationale for this position can be divided into three functional areas:

- military

● economic

● political

**Military.** It is generally believed that the primary reasons for keeping U.S. forces in the ROK are to deter an invasion by North Korea, and if the DPRK does attack South Korea, to render military assistance to repel the aggression.<sup>24</sup> Once North and South Korea are reunited, however, it can be argued that such reasons for maintaining the alliance cease to exist, and U.S. forces can be withdrawn. Additionally, notwithstanding its history, it is arguably possible that a reunited Korea may not need protection from the other powers in the region: Japan, China and Russia.

In the first place, Japan has not revealed any desire to engage in "military adventures" since the end of World War II. In fact, the Japanese appear to be interested primarily in economic investment and trade issues. Similarly, China and Russia are so preoccupied with their own internal problems--very poor economic conditions and social unrest--that it is unlikely that they pose a near term threat to a reunited Korea. Accordingly, this situation undermines any basis for retaining U.S. military forces on the peninsula because there is no longer an external threat to Korea.

**Economic.** The expense of maintaining U.S. military forces is perhaps the greatest obstacle to keeping them on the peninsula after reunification. A majority in the Congress, as well as a significant portion of the American public, favor a reduction in the size of the U.S. military. The deactivation of the Army and Air Force units in Korea could help meet this goal. Moreover, although

the Seoul government has made significant contributions toward the cost of maintaining U.S. forces in South Korea, Congress may, for political reasons, still want to deactivate these units after reunification.<sup>25</sup> Alternatively, Congress may require that a reunited Korea assume the greater portion of the expense for keeping U.S. forces on the peninsula. In such a situation, it is only possible to speculate on the possible Korean reaction.

It can also be argued that the United States, because of economic considerations, only needs to forward deploy military forces in one Northeast Asian country after Korean reunification. This nation would probably be Japan. It is not only the "key to the United States' strategic framework" in Asia, but Japan can probably contribute more financially than Korea toward the expense of maintaining U.S. forces.<sup>26</sup>

**Political.** There are many potential political justifications for withdrawing U.S. forces from the peninsula after reunification. Some of the primary reasons are likely to be:

- military and economic
- avoiding entangling alliances
- anti-Korean sentiment

First of all, the previously discussed military and economic issues can easily be couched in political rhetoric in order to justify the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the peninsula after reunification. Moreover, these justifications can easily be combined with the notion of avoiding entangling alliances. That is, since there is no longer an external threat to Korea, it can be

argued that it is not in the national interest of the United States to be "entangled" in an alliance with Korea. Such an alliance could only serve to involve the United States in a dispute or conflict--for example, treatment of Korean nationals in a Third World nation--in which no vital U.S. interests are at stake.

The third political justification, anti-Korean sentiment, covers a wide range of US/Korean problems including trade, anti-American demonstrations and Korean beliefs on racial purity. Individually, none of these problems is probably sufficient to affect the alliance. However, taken collectively with other military or economic imperatives, they have the potential to effect change. It should be noted that key to these actions is American public opinion. That is, political leaders will be more willing to call for the withdrawal of U.S. military forces when they perceive that public opinion has turned against Korea.

Trade could also reemerge as a major source of tension between the United States and Korea. If Korean exports to the United States increase, there will undoubtedly be calls to "balance" this trade. American business and labor leaders will urge Korea to open its markets. If Korea fails to respond, many Americans will view it as an "unfair trade practice" directed against the United States. Korea could then find itself being labeled as "another Japan", and lose the battle for American public opinion.

Another source of conflict could be anti-American demonstrations by students, farmers and laborers in Korea. Such

demonstrations have a profound impact on American public opinion, especially when shown on television in the United States. This, in turn, would lead to a very predictable question: why keep U.S. military forces in Korea when the Koreans do not want us in their country?

A potential third source of tension is the Korean belief in racial purity. Indeed, many Americans would probably categorize these beliefs as racist and offensive. Accordingly, any overt Korean statements on this subject could prove to be a major public relations disaster for the Koreans.

Briefly summarized, there are a number of economic, military and political reasons for withdrawing U.S. forces from Korea after reunification. Moreover, some of these problems are viable, and must be addressed, if the U.S. and Korean governments want a continued U.S. military presence on the peninsula after reunification. Additionally, leaders in both countries must be cognizant of the fact that American public opinion will be a significant factor in determining whether U.S. military forces remain on the peninsula.

### **Option Two: Remain**

The case for keeping U.S. forces on the peninsula after reunification is also very compelling. Like the justification for withdrawal, the rationale for this position can be divided into three functional areas:

- economic
- political
- military

**Economic.** There are considerable economic benefits for the U.S. to remain on the Korean peninsula after reunification. The primary advantage, however, would probably be in the area of international trade. During the past several years, the U.S. and the ROK have engaged in active trade negotiations regarding the continuing issue of U.S. access to Korea. As with Japan, this issue is likely to continue for a long time. A continued U.S. presence on the peninsula after reunification will probably make it easier for the United States to leverage its position in future trade negotiations with Korea.<sup>27</sup>

A second international trade issue relates to the sale of U.S. armaments to a reunified Korea. Although shifting towards European suppliers, the ROK purchases approximately 90 percent of its military equipment from the United States.<sup>28</sup> However, nations such as France (Mistral anti-aircraft missiles) and Great Britain (Hawk jet trainers), have recently penetrated the Korean market, and the ROK is also producing a larger portion of its own military equipment.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, if the United States remains on the peninsula after reunification, it will probably remain the largest supplier of military equipment to Korea. If, however, the U.S. should withdraw its forces after Korea is reunited, its ability to influence Korea's decisions on the purchase of military equipment will be substantially reduced.

**Political.** There are several very important political--including diplomatic--reasons for the United States to maintain military forces on the Korean peninsula after reunification. Among the most important justifications are:

- to influence the democratic process
- to maintain stability in Northeast Asia
- to retain a good ally
- to increase cultural understanding

The Republic of Korea has been developing into a democracy since the elections in 1987. Hopefully, this is a process that will continue after reunification. Moreover, the United States has stated that "fostering the growth of democracy and human rights" is a security interest of the U.S. in Asia.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, it is possible that the continued presence of U.S. forces in the reunited Korea will continue to encourage this democratic process.

The second, and perhaps most important reason for keeping U.S. forces in Korea after reunification, is to maintain the requisite stability in Northeast Asia required for economic and political development. As discussed earlier, the Korean peninsula has traditionally been dominated and/or invaded by the major powers in the region. A U.S. withdrawal from Korea could create the perception of a power vacuum, which another regional power might be tempted to fill. And, while this may not seem likely in the near future, it is very difficult to predict the future 20-30 years from today. Indeed, since the Korean peninsula has a 1,000 year history of foreign domination and/or invasion, the possibility of either



event occurring cannot be summarily dismissed. Accordingly, since "maintaining regional peace and stability" in Asia is a stated security interest of the United States, the U.S. should probably keep its forces in Korea after reunification.<sup>31</sup>

A third reason for maintaining U.S. forces on the peninsula after reunification is to retain a good ally. The ROK has been a "good friend", supporting U.S. efforts in Vietnam and the Gulf War. Arguably, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the peninsula after reunification would signal the end of the alliance, and the loss of a good ally.

The fourth justification for remaining on the Korean peninsula is to maintain "communication" with a major trading partner. The Americans and Koreans have markedly different cultures--due in large part to the influence of Confucianism on Korean culture--and both nations must make a sincere effort in order to foster mutual understanding. The continued presence of U.S. military forces in Korea serves as a stimulus to increase communication and, hopefully, a better understanding of two very different cultures. If U.S. forces should be withdrawn, however, it is possible that such an action will markedly reduce attempts to reach mutual understandings. This, in turn, could lead to reduced trade as well as "diplomatic tension" between both nations.

**Military.** The principal military imperative for keeping U.S. forces in Korea--stability being classified as a political factor--is to provide a U.S. overseas base in support of other forces in Asia. Indeed, this is a stated principle of U.S. security policy in

Asia.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to giving the U.S. a forward deployment base from which to operate, retention of U.S. forces on the peninsula would also create a "psychological presence" in Asia. That is, it would "send a message" that the United States is a strong and dependable ally--the victor in the Gulf War--and not a superpower in decline. Providing this "message" has become significantly more important since the U.S. withdrew from the Philippines, notwithstanding the fact that the Philippines asked the United States to leave. In spite of continued U.S. statements to the contrary, many of our allies in East Asia and the Pacific are concerned about the long term U.S. commitment to the region. A continued U.S. military presence on the Korean peninsula is an unequivocal signal that the U.S. will remain engaged and interested. In this regard, the regional benefits of a continued U.S. presence in Korea are significantly greater than the absolute cost of keeping U.S. forces deployed overseas.

The biggest problem with keeping U.S. forces in Korea after reunification will be economic. Stated differently, who will pay to maintain the forces after the two Koreas become a single nation? This is a complicated issue which will not be easily resolved. However, it must be noted that should the U.S. withdraw its military forces, it will be more expensive--for both Korea and the United States--to bring U.S. forces back to the peninsula in the event they are ever again needed.

Briefly summarized, there are very good economic, political

and military reasons to keep U.S. military forces in a reunited Korea. The critical importance of maintaining stability in Northeast Asia, the need for overseas bases and the importance of keeping a "psychological presence" in Asia, make a cogent case for remaining on the peninsula.

### **SUMMARY: THE U.S. OPTIONS**

The decision on whether to retain U.S. forces in Korea after reunification will not be an easy one for U.S. policy makers. With the ROK no longer facing a threat from North Korea, there will be strong pressures, especially from Congress and the American public, to remove U.S. troops from the peninsula. This would comport with the present U.S. policy of reducing its military forces because of economic considerations. In addition, this policy could possibly receive political momentum because of anti-Korean feeling engendered by trade disputes, anti-American demonstrations in Korea, and possible "cultural misunderstandings".

Nevertheless, the case for remaining on the peninsula outweighs the previously described problems. The retention of U.S. forces in Korea is essential to maintaining stability in Northeast Asia. Moreover, the need for overseas bases--a forward deployment--and the importance of keeping a "psychological presence" in Asia, "make the case" for remaining in a reunited Korea.

## **THE KOREAN OPTIONS**

The Koreans will most likely have four options regarding a continued U.S. military presence on the peninsula after reunification.<sup>33</sup> One possibility is to retain some U.S. forces on the peninsula--the type and/or mix to be determined by mutual agreement--after North and South Korea form a single nation. As previously discussed, however, this decision cannot be made solely by the Koreans independent of Washington. The other three courses of action involve the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from the country, whether by Washington's initiative or at the request of a reunified Korean government. The four most probable options the Koreans will have are:

- a "go it alone" form of nationalism<sup>34</sup>
- a Swedish form of neutrality<sup>35</sup>
- new security agreements<sup>36</sup>
- retain U.S. military forces<sup>37</sup>

### **Option One: Nationalism**

Driven by a combination of nationalism and disputes with the U.S., a reunified Korea could ask the United States to withdraw its military forces from the peninsula. This scenario envisions an independent Korea following a course of near "belligerent self-reliance."<sup>38</sup> Such a course of action could be caused by one or more

of the following issues:

- Anti-American sentiment
- Economic disputes
- Military disagreements

**Anti-American sentiment.** The precise impact that U.S. military forces have had on South Korean culture is very difficult to estimate. It is probably accurate to state, however, that U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) have had a significant affect on South Korean society. Indeed, some Koreans would argue that no other nation has had such a profound impact on Korea.<sup>39</sup>

The U.S. forces in Korea had the greatest impact on Korean society, greater than any other foreign presence in her history. Even the Japanese had less influence on Korea in their 35 years of colonial rule than the US Forces, who were never autocratic, did. The USFK brought a new wind, "American style." The new wind created a whirlwind of democracy in the political and social systems. The modernizing trends clashed with intolerant customs and primitive industries. South Korea's whole culture and lifestyle were Westernized. As a result, some old Korean standards of good morality and customs are dying away, unfortunately. American cowboy movies, broadcasting, Christian churches, pop music, relief material, PX goods, books, magazines, soldiers' attitudes, transcultural marriages--all were suddenly introduced into Korean society. (emphasis added)<sup>40</sup>

This view portends the likely clash of American and Korean cultures in the future. Moreover, after Korea is reunified, and the threat of war on the peninsula has ended, there may be even less tolerance by the Koreans for cultural differences. This is evidenced by the fact that U.S. military forces are already experiencing problems in South Korea.

"U.S. Army Golf Course Sparks Wrath of Korean Radicals" ran the headline in *Washington Times* of August 24, 1988. This pointed to another emerging problem, that

of the visibility of U.S. forces. Whether it be the golf course and bowling establishments of Yongsan, the shopping and entertainment area of Itaewon, or the American Forces Korea Network (AFKN), the visible American presence is under attack for taking land from Koreans, subverting Korean culture and morals, and symbolizing the patron-client relationship between the two countries. Many of these accusations are exaggerated, but irritants and disputes between the U.S. establishment and South Korean civilians will likely increase in the future.(emphasis added)<sup>41</sup>

It would seem, therefore, that cultural differences between Korea (regardless of whether it is unified) and the United States are going to affect any future US/Korean security agreement. Anti-American sentiment due to cultural differences may result in the United States withdrawing its forces from the peninsula after reunification. This likelihood increases if anti-American sentiment combines with economic disputes and/or military disagreements.

**Economic disputes.** As stated previously, trade issues are an increasing source of tension between Washington and Seoul, and serve as a major factor in influencing U.S. policy toward South Korea.<sup>42</sup> This situation will probably not change after reunification. In fact, it may become worse, especially if the United States insists on selling rice to Korea.

Rice imports is an issue that stirs deep emotions in Korea. The Koreans have a deep psychological attachment to the rice farming community, and bitterly resent U.S. attempts to open the Korean rice market. In fact, the Koreans may view U.S. attempts to "open the rice market" as an attack on their culture. This situation will probably not change after reunification, thereby

increasing public demands in Korea that the U.S. military withdraw from the peninsula.

**Military disagreements.** In addition to anti-American sentiment and economic disputes, military disagreements could also result in a reunified Korean government requesting that U.S. military forces withdraw from the peninsula. The most contentious issues after reunification would probably be burden sharing and the transfer of military technology.

The United States and a reunified Korean government will, undoubtedly, negotiate the amount Korea must contribute as a fair share of the alliance's common defense burden. However, Korean and American perceptions may vary as to what constitutes a fair share of the burden. This could have significant political repercussions for a reunified Korean government--as it would for Seoul today--if there was a perception that Korea was being asked to contribute too great a share of the defense burden.<sup>43</sup>

The situation with respect to the transfer of military technology is not quite as volatile as burden sharing, but it is a problem. There is a perception in Seoul today that the United States applies pressure on the ROK to purchase U.S. weapons systems, but the U.S. then withholds essential defense technologies.<sup>44</sup> If this perception should continue after reunification, it will only add to the tension--and problems--between the two governments.

Individually or collectively any of the three previously discussed problem areas could end a reunified Korea/U.S. security

agreement. Indeed, it is possible that the Koreans could ask the U.S. to withdraw its military forces from the peninsula, because of the tension created by these problems. Moreover, it must be noted that Korean national pride may be superimposed on any of these problems, thereby making it very difficult to ever obtain a solution satisfactory to both nations.

A reunified Korean government will not behave as a "junior partner" in an alliance with the United States. Justifiably proud of South Korea's economic accomplishments--some would call it an economic miracle--and international recognition for hosting 1988 Summer Olympic Games, a reunified Korean government dominated by Seoul will undoubtedly insist on being an equal partner in the alliance. If it perceives it is not being treated as an "equal", national pride may force it to end the alliance. Moreover, if a reunified Korean government obtains North Korean nuclear technology--and possibly nuclear weapons--the temptation to have a "go it alone", nationalist foreign policy may be very attractive. In fact, Korea, as a small nation that has often been invaded by its powerful neighbors, would probably need a nuclear arsenal to have such a policy.<sup>45</sup>

### **Option Two: Neutrality**

A second option for a reunified Korean government would be to "become the Sweden or Switzerland of Asia: nonaligned, neutral in major power disputes, and combining a small, tough core of armed



force with a large militia and its imposing terrain to make itself unattractive as a target of attack."<sup>46</sup> This option may seem to solve some problems for the Koreans--an arguably uncomfortable alliance with the U.S. (discussed above) and the possible domination by the other major powers in the region--but it ignores the history of the peninsula. As previously discussed, Korea has been the object of dispute between and among China, Japan, and Russia. It would seem, therefore, that this policy would probably not be successful as a long term solution, and that the Koreans would eventually adopt some other policy option.

### **Option Three: A New Security Agreement**

A third option for a reunified Korean government is to terminate its alliance with the United States and form an alliance with one of the other powers in the region: Russia, Japan or China.

A Korean partnership with Russia appears to be an unlikely prospect at this time. Russia is experiencing too many economic problems and there are vast cultural differences between the Koreans and the Russians. This situation could change, however, if China became a threat to Korea and the Koreans needed a nuclear power for protection.<sup>47</sup>

Japan is also an unlikely candidate for a future alliance with Korea. The Koreans have not forgotten the brutality of the Japanese occupation from 1905-1945, and this situation is not

likely to change in the near future. Moreover, even though international politics often produces some unusual alliances, a Korean-Japanese security arrangement is probably not a viable possibility in the next 20-30 years. Indeed, a possible "partnership with Japan would probably only emerge if Japan began rearming, the United States withdrew from the region, and Korea determined that a reasonably equitable accommodation was preferable to once again placing itself on a collision course with Japanese expansion."<sup>48</sup> However, Korea would probably align with some other regional power, probably China, before forming an alliance with Japan.

China is a good cultural match for Korea and "there may be some nationalistic sense that an alliance with an Asian nation is less onerous to the Korean psyche than the U.S. relationship."<sup>49</sup> China is also a nuclear power that is capable of protecting Korea from other powers in the region, particularly Japan.<sup>50</sup>

The possibility of a Sino-Korean alliance also increases if Japan and Russia should resolve their differences, especially with respect to the Kurile Islands. This scenario envisions Japan supplying capital and technology to Russia in exchange for raw materials, probably from Siberia. The advantages of such an alliance are very apparent: economically depressed Russia receives the capital and industrial technology it needs to build its economy, while resource poor Japan receives the raw materials it requires for its industry. This scenario would almost certainly increase the likelihood of some type of Chinese-Korean security

agreement, even if a reunified Korea had nuclear weapons.

#### **Option Four: Retain U.S. Military Forces**

The fourth option is for a reunified Korean government to continue the alliance with the United States, including a U.S. military presence on the peninsula. This position was favored by the ROK government of former President Roh Tae Woo and is, presumably, still the position of the present government in Seoul.<sup>51</sup> It has several advantages for the Koreans, the primary benefit being security.

A continued U.S. military presence on the Korean peninsula would help foster regional stability. More importantly, it would serve to deter the other powers in the region from trying to dominate or--in the worst case scenario--attack Korea. And, because of its geographical separation from Korea, the United States is the ally least likely to interfere in Korean domestic issues.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, both China and Japan have invaded and occupied Korea, and Russia was active on the peninsula at the beginning of the century.

Maintaining the alliance with the United States could also provide other benefits to a reunified Korea. Korea could use the alliance to leverage its position on international trade issues with the U.S., thereby ensuring that American markets remain open for the export of Korean goods. It could also use the alliance to

obtain more military technology from the United States, notwithstanding Seoul's current perception that it does not receive enough U.S. military technology.

## **SUMMARY: THE KOREAN OPTIONS**

The Koreans have four primary options regarding the alliance after reunification. The most viable option is to keep the alliance and maintain a U.S. military presence on the peninsula. However, a combination of nationalism and problems with the United States may force Korea to seek other security alternatives. Thus, the Koreans could opt for neutrality, which is probably not a viable option, or a "go it alone" type of nationalist foreign policy. The latter policy, however, would probably require a number of nuclear weapons to ensure Korean security.<sup>53</sup> Finally, a reunified Korean government could also seek another regional power for an ally, most probably China.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Given the competing national interests of both the United States and a reunified Korea, is there any policy with respect to keeping U.S. forces in Korea that would satisfy both countries? In my opinion, the most likely policy to succeed is to withdraw ground

forces and retain air assets on the peninsula.<sup>54</sup>

There are numerous advantages to such a plan for both Korea and the United States. For the U.S., withdrawal of ground forces would satisfy American public opinion--the "bring the boys home" syndrome--as well as "ease" Congressional demands to downsize the military and cut defense spending. For the Koreans, it would also prove to be a "cost saving" measure, as it would decrease the expense of burden sharing. It would also reduce the U.S. presence on the peninsula, thereby decreasing the opportunity for "cultural misunderstandings" between U.S. soldiers and the civilian population in Korea.

There are also many economic, military and political advantages for both nations in keeping U.S. forces--even if only air assets--on the peninsula after reunification. These benefits were discussed in detail previously so they do not have to be repeated. Among the more important advantages, however, are the following:

- maintaining stability in Northeast Asia
- protecting Korea from its powerful neighbors
- an overseas base--forward deployment--for U.S. forces and an American "psychological presence in Asia
- maintaining a security agreement between two good allies and friends
- ensuring continued communication between two allies, especially on international trade and military cooperation issues.

These benefits would appear to make retention of U.S. air forces on the peninsula after reunification advantageous for both

nations. In my opinion, however, the planning for a post-reunification alliance should begin as soon as possible. That is, once reunification occurs, "events" will move very quickly, and U.S. military assets may be forced to withdraw rapidly in response to public opinion--both Korean and American. And, once withdrawn, they will probably never return.

## CONCLUSION

The United States and Korea can and should continue the alliance after reunification. This can best be accomplished by removing U.S. ground forces from Korea, which satisfies many political and economic concerns for both governments, but keeping U.S. air assets on the peninsula. Nevertheless, both nations will still have to work hard to resolve mutual problems. If these difficult issues can be satisfactorily resolved, both nations will reap significant benefits.

The Koreans will benefit from a continued U.S. military presence, as it provide regional stability and serve to deter aggression against the peninsula. The United States, in performing this function, will receive a valuable forward deployment location. However, both nations must resolve problems related to burden sharing, military technology transfer, cultural differences and trade. It remains to be seen whether the alliance will be able to survive the strain of these problems.

## Endnotes

1. I wish to thank my ICAF faculty advisor, Dr. John E. Starron, Jr., for his invaluable assistance in helping me prepare this paper. I would also like to thank the following individuals for their assistance: Dr. Robert W. Beckstead, ICAF faculty; Minister Ki Moon Ban, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the Republic of Korea, Washington, D.C.; Professor Lee, Hyock Sup, Korea Military Academy, Seoul, Korea; LTC James Marett, U.S. Army, former assistant army attache, USDAO Seoul, Korea; and Professor Ryoo, Jae-Kap, Korea National Defense College, Seoul, Korea. Finally, a special thanks to my daughter, Allie Betts, for typing this paper and having the patience to deal with me.
2. In addition to U.S. forces, there is also a United Nations' command structure in South Korea.
3. Andrew C. Nahm, *Korea Tradition and Transformation* (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1988), p. 17.
4. Ibid., p. 18.
5. Ibid., pp. 18-19.
6. It is difficult to obtain accurate information on the North Korean economy.
7. Lee Ki-Biak, *A New History of Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 3-4
8. Robert P. Kearney, *The Warrior Worker* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1991), p. 76.
9. Lee, *A New History of Korea*, p. 105.
10. Chester A. Bain, *The Far East* (Totowa: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1967), p. 90.
11. See Lucian W. Pye, *Asian Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).
12. See Hong Sung-chick, "Korean Social Values in the Year 2000," *Korea in the Year 2000*, edited by Han Sung-Joo and Robert J. Myers, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), pp. 119-125.
13. It is difficult to ascertain whether Confucian philosophy still has any influence on the leaders or population of North Korea.

14. Bain, *The Far East*, pp. 6-7.
15. Lee, *A New History of Korea*, pp. 148-49, 209-217.
16. Nahm, *Korea Tradition and Transformation*, pp. 176-179.
17. Ibid., pp. 204-210; Bain, *The Far East*, pp. 112-118.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., pp. 216-219.
20. The Korean War ended with an armistice agreement and, to date, no formal peace treaty has been signed.
21. James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of the Korean War* (New York: Quill, William Morrow, 1988), p. 254.
22. Ibid., p. 253.
23. The United States must be careful not to place Korea outside of its defensive perimeter, if U.S. military forces are withdrawn from the peninsula. Such a policy could encourage Korea's powerful neighbors to become aggressive. In fact, it is arguably possible that Secretary of State Dean Acheson's remarks before the National Press Club on January 1, 1950, in which he placed Korea outside of the U.S. defense perimeter, may have contributed to the outbreak of the Korean War.
24. Several other possible justifications can arguably be made for keeping U.S. military forces in South Korea including: forward deployment; preserving regional stability; and protection of Japan.
25. I am assuming that a reunited Korean government would, as a minimum, continue to contribute what the Seoul government now pays for keeping U.S. forces in South Korea.
26. *National Security Strategy of the United States*, (The White House, 1993), p. 7.
27. Preserving economic access is a defined security of interest of the United States. See *A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Report to Congress 1992*, (Department of Defense, 1991), p. 9.
28. Terrence Kiernan, "South Korea Expands Sales, Import Markets", *Defense News*, August 17-23, 1992.
29. Ibid.
30. *Strategic Framework*, p. 9.



31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. The four post-reunification options available to Korea with respect to keeping U.S. military forces on the peninsula--nationalism, neutrality, new security agreements and retention of U.S. military forces--are very clearly and distinctly listed and discussed in an excellent article by Dr. William J. Taylor, Jr. and Dr. Michael J. Mazars. See William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazars, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, (Seoul: Korea Institute for Defense Analysis, vol. IV, no. 1, Summer 1992).
34. See William J. Taylor, Jr. and Michael J. Mazars, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post-Reunification," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, (Seoul: Korea Institute for Defense Analysis, vol. IV, no. 1, Summer 1992).
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., p. 159.
39. Lee, Suk Bok, *The Impact of US Forces in Korea* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1987) p. 98.
40. Ibid.
41. Larry K. Nicksch, "Future Issues in U.S.-ROK Security Cooperation", *Regional Security Issues* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University, 1991) p. 172, edited by Patrick J. Garrity, John E. Endicott and Richard B. Goetze, reprinted from *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, (Seoul: Korea Institute for Defense Analysis, vol. 1, no. 1, Summer 1989).
42. Ibid., p. 160.
43. Chung Min Lee, "U.S. Korean Security Relations in Transition" (Paper presented at a conference sponsored by the Council on U.S.-Korea Security Studies, Seoul, Korea, November 21-22, 1992), p. 23.
44. Ibid.
45. See Taylor and Mazars, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post Reunification," p. 158.

46. Ibid., p. 158.
47. The Korean government-a monarchy-fearing Japanese expansion on the peninsula, sought and received help from Russia in 1896.
48. Taylor and Mazars, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post Reunification," p. 159.
49. Ibid.
50. An alliance between China and Korea would not be without problems especially since China maintains a Communist form of government.
51. Lee, "U.S. Korean Security Relations in Transition", p.6, quoting the *Korea Herald*, June 29, 1992.
52. Taylor and Mazars, "US-Korean Security Relations: Post Reunification", p. 159.
53. Ibid.
54. I believe, as a matter of policy, it would be best to keep both ground forces and air assets in Korea. However, I do not believe that such an option is viable.