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UNITED STATES FORWARD PRESENCE IN A UNIFIED KOREA

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Although North and South Korea have come a long way since the days of the Korean War, the strategic situation on the Korean peninsula and throughout Asia is more uncertain and potentially threatening today than anywhere else in the world. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Korea emerged as the only divided country who still at war with the most heavily armed face-off any where in the world. The Asian region also has some of the worlds largest and most modern armies, and several nuclear capable states. Asia also has more nuclear powers than any other region in the world. A major conflict could occur on the Korean peninsula at a moments notice and directly involve the United States.

The dynamics of the North – South relationship could very well shift over the next decade. Once again there are signs of North Korea crumbling which may lead to a potential unification of the North and South. Although a Korea unification could be a good thing by reducing military tension on the peninsula; with unification come several questions. What will become the United States rational to retain military presence on the Korea peninsula after unification? Will this potential unification change the force structure of the United States military in Korea? Will the roles and responsibilities of our military change based on unification? Will our policy shift from being the leading military role to possibly a support role or to strictly forward presence?

To address these questions, I will provide a brief historical perspective on the Korean peninsula, highlight the United States, Japan's, China's, and Russia's, enduring interests in Korea, and finally analyze our U.S. military force structure and its role and responsibility upon unification. Although the potential unification of North and South Korea exists; forward deployment of U.S. troops in Korea may be required for stabilization and security balance throughout the region. A total withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Korean peninsula could very easily create a power vacuum that could lead to major shifts in the overall strategic equation in the Asian region.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
UNITED STATES FORWARD PRESENCE IN A UNIFIED KOREA	1
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE	1
KOREA TODAY	1
EARLY KOREA	2
THE KOREAN WAR AND BEYOND	4
ENDURING INTERESTS OF THE UNITED STATES, JAPAN, CHINA AND RUSSIA	6
UNITED STATES	6
JAPAN	8
CHINA	9
RUSSIA	11
U.S. MILITARY FORCES IN SOUTH KOREA	12
POTENTIAL KOREAN UNIFICATION	13
ANALYSIS	15
IMPACTS ON THE U.S. MILITARY IN SOUTH KOREA	15
RECOMMENDATION - CONCLUSION	18
ENDNOTES	23
BIBLIOGRAPHY	27

UNITED STATES FORWARD PRESENCE IN A UNIFIED KOREA

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

KOREA TODAY

The strategic situation on the Korean peninsula and throughout Asia, is more uncertain and potentially threatening today than anywhere else in the world. The situation on the Korean Peninsula remains fraught with danger, as it has been for almost fifty years. North and South Korea have come a long way since the days of the Korean War. However, the possibility of a North Korean attack is ever-present despite the recent lessening of tensions. To make matters more volatile, the Asian region also has four of the world's five remaining communist countries: China, North Korea, Vietnam, and Laos.¹

Since territorial division in 1945, North and South Korea have maintained a confrontational relationship due to their uncompromising ideologies, i.e., liberal democracy vice communist dictatorship. The border along the DMZ is potentially one of the biggest threats in the world today. Although many consider North Korea a failed state, the North Koreans retain a strong military capability. If North Korea decided to attack South Korea with all of its military might, the deaths would quickly number in the hundreds of thousands – a repeat of the Korean War. The United States and the Republic of Korea must continue to work together to pursue some sort of reconciliation or unification in Korea. Additionally, the United States must continue their close alliance with Japan and further develop a better mutual understanding with China if the Asian peninsula is to maintain peace and stability in the coming years.

As of today, North and South Korea have yet to respond to the new world order - that communism is dead. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Korea emerged as the only divided country remaining in the world. These two Koreas are still at war with the most heavily armed face-off any where in the world, (1.1 million troops in the North and 680,000 troops in the South).² The United States continues to deploy 37,000 military personnel to South Korea to assist in deterrence and defense.

The security of Asia is at a crossroad which has a direct impact on the future role of the U.S. forces stationed in Korea. The region could soon become a hostile combat zone or quite possibly turn in the direction of peace and cooperation. The dynamics of the North – South relationship could very well shift over the next decade. Once again, there are signs of North Korea crumbling which may lead to a potential unification of the North and South. It appears as though it is no longer a question of "if" but rather a question of "when" and "how" the two Koreas will unify. Although a Korea unification could be a good thing, by reducing military

tension on the peninsula and throughout Asia; with unification comes several questions that must be answered. Will the United States retain military presence on the Korea peninsula after unification? What impacts will a unified Korea have on the other major powers: Japan, China, and Russia? How would the unification of North and South Korea change the force structure of the United States military in Korea? Will our policy shift from being the leader to more of a support role?

To address these questions, I will provide a brief historical perspective on the Korean peninsula, highlight the United States', Japan's, China's and Russia's policy and enduring interests in Korea. Finally I will analyze our U.S. military force structure and its role and responsibility in securing the Korea peninsula. Although the potential unification of North and South Korea exists; forward deployment of U.S. troops in Korea may be required for stabilization and security balance throughout the region. A total withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Korean peninsula could very easily create a power vacuum that could lead to major shifts in the overall strategic equation in the Asian region. This paper will show that the United States must retain U.S. presence on the peninsula to maintain stability and a balance of power.

EARLY KOREA

The United States was Korea's first western ally. Ties between the United States and Korea date back to 1880 when Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt established the first fruitful United States diplomatic contacts with Korea through the Chinese in 1880 and was able to finalize the Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce, and Navigation in 1882.³ The Korean's were very satisfied with this treaty because it provided some counterbalance to Japanese interests. The Shufeldt Treaty established diplomatic and trade relations. During this time, the United States gave notice to Japan and China to not infringe upon the Kingdom's independence and sovereignty. During this period, Americans in Korea were the most ardent supporters of Korean independence. That support ended when Japan won the 1905 war with Russia.⁴

The attitude of the American government toward Korea quickly changed after Japan won the war with Russia. The United States' supported Japan's occupation of Korea in 1905 and withdrew all U.S. forces from the country. In return, Japan promised it would not challenge U.S. colonial domination of the Philippines. At a time when Korea desperately needed American help once promised, a secret agreement between the United States and Japan allowed for annexation of Korea as a Japanese possession in 1910. This deal is what many Korean's consider the United State's first betrayal towards Korea.⁵

After the Japanese annexation in 1910, the United States all but forgot Korea until 1919 when President Wilson's pronouncement of self-determination of nations gave new hope for independence to the Korean people. This hope was quickly suppressed by the Japanese without any assistance from the United States. In fact, the United States government failed to concern itself with Korea until the end of 1945. The eight years following World War II is the period in which Americans and Koreans came more closely together than ever before. It was then that the contemporary American and Korean relationship was born.⁶

The Japanese surprised attack on Pearl Harbor brought a sudden and significant change in American Policy toward Korea and shifted balance of power leaving the United States and Japan in a battle for supremacy in the region. In Cairo, the United States, Great Britain, and China declared that Korea would become free and independent at the end of the war. At this point, the United States once again committed itself to post-war independence for Korea. This was a significant turning point in U.S.- Korea foreign relations.

Only after the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and sent its troops into North Korea did the United States give serious thought to its post-war policy on the peninsula. The United States realized that Russia's occupation of Korea would have important implications for the future of Japan and East Asia. In 1945, President Truman sent 72,000 U.S. troops to occupy a portion of Korea to guard against Russia's expansion and to except surrender of Japanese forces on the Korean peninsula. Additionally, the U.S. forces established a U.S. military government and remained the only governing body in South Korea until the inauguration of the government of the Republic of Korea in 1948.⁷

The United States thought that the division of Korea would stop Russian expansion and complete control of Korea. Simply put, an agreement was made between two officers that proposed that U.S. troops occupy the area south of the 38th parallel and that the Soviets occupy the peninsula North of the 38th parallel. This division of Korea was not meant to be permanent. It was a temporary agreement until the United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom and China could finalize the trusteeship over Korea. Many Koreans consider this to be the second betrayal by the United States.⁸

The language barrier, cultural differences, insufficient information and a lack of experience and training in military government soon caused critical problems. Despite America's good intentions, the Korean people began to view the United States occupation with suspicion and discontent. The Koreans eagerly awaited their long awaited independence.⁹

Once law and order was established south of the 38th parallel, the United States immediately began reducing their forces on the peninsula. The number of American troops was

soon reduced from 70,000 to 40,000. In 1947, the United States assessed the situation in Korea and determined that the Republic of Korea forces were capable of defending the south against an armed invasion of North Korea and that U.S. forces could return home to fill other personnel shortages in the armed forces.¹⁰

On August 15, 1948, the Republic of Korea (ROK) was established in the South. Throughout this period, and prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, the United States stayed committed and was very involved in the development of South Korea. It continued to contribute millions of U.S. dollars to South Korea and was influential in many aspects of the new states existence, from its form of government to cultural and educational functions. The United States wanted the South Koreans to be able to defend themselves and to repel any potential attack from communist North Korea.

In the later part of 1948, the National Security Council (NSC) confirmed the United States desire to withdraw all remaining 40,000 troops from Korea. "By June, 1949, the United States completed its withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Korea leaving only a small military advisor group with 500 officers and enlisted personnel behind."¹¹

When the Soviet Union and United States troops departed the peninsula, border clashes along the 38th parallel intensified. North Korean forces soon attacked South Korea on June 25, 1950 which resulted in a bloody three-year war.

THE KOREAN WAR AND BEYOND

On 12 January 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, with the President's endorsement, delivered a major speech to the National Press Club in which he stated that the United States' defense perimeter in the Pacific stretched from northwest to southwest along the Aleutians to Japan to the Ryukyus to the Philippines. North Korea misunderstood his speech as a signal that the United States had abandoned South Korea. As a result, on Sunday, 25 June 1950, the North Koreans launched a major attack along the 38th parallel in an effort to reunify Korea under communist rule.¹²

At the start of the invasion, the United States and the Republic of Korea had no security treaty that ensured U.S. military intervention in the case of an external military attack on South Korea. However, the United States was quick to act and immediately became committed to the war by rapidly increasing its military strength on the peninsula.

The invasion by the North was viewed by President Truman as an assault on America's national interests. Although North Korea was the aggressor, the United States held the Soviet

Union responsible for the attack. President Truman stated that communism was acting in Korea just as Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese had acted ten, fifteen, and twenty years earlier.¹³

In the wake of the North Korean invasion, the United States' military was again reengaged in Korea. In this intervention, the United States committed over 350,000 soldiers, spent at least 18 billion dollars, and suffered some 157,000 casualties, including 33,600 battle fatalities and over 54,000 deaths. The United States also equipped the South Korean forces, which burgeoned from less than 100,000 in 1950 to 250,000 in 1952 (despite the loss of roughly 80,000 men) and to 650,000 two years later. The North Korean and Chinese casualties totaled over 1.4 million as a result of the Korean War.¹⁴

Intense fighting took place in bloody battles during the next three years. The battle lines shifted north and south, and after the Chinese entered the fight, a DMZ was established. United States' accounts of the Korean War typically portray it as a war for freedom in which the U.S. supported South Korea and fought to repulse a brutal invasion from North Korea attempting to create a communist dictatorship throughout the peninsula. In reality, this was a war fought to determine the political character and vision of a unified Korea.

The United States quickly began withdrawing its forces from South Korea once the Armistice was signed in July, 1953. President Eisenhower announced the reduction of American troops in December of 1954 and in March two divisions were already withdrawn. By 1957, American forces in Korea were reduced to only two divisions with a total of 60,000 U.S troops remaining on the peninsula.¹⁵

The Korean War dramatically reversed U.S. security policy to Korea by both creating an awareness of the strategic importance of Korea to the United States, and by instilling a general "brothers – in - arms" sentiment. As a result, of the North Korean invasion, South Korea became not only a central part of the United States forward defense zone, but also a trusted and valued ally. The signing of the Armistice Agreement marked the end of fighting and the conclusion of a mutual defense treaty which persists to this day.

Once the Korean War ended with a truce in 1953, and the tense border was put in place between the two Korean adversaries, the United States - ROK relations entered into a new phase. The United States left behind a major contingent of U.S. forces in South Korea to guarantee the U.S. commitment to the ROK and train South Korean armed forces to defend themselves. They also provided a broad spectrum of economic and political support for the Republic of Korea.¹⁶ This placed ROK in a much stronger position in rebuilding South Korea and keeping it from falling to communism.

The United States involvement in Korea was most visible during the years following the Korea War. The United States maintained roughly 60,000 troops in two divisions, backed up by air and logistical support in order to deter and/or repel another invasion from North Korea. Also, the senior military commander served as the commander of all United Nations (UN) forces. The United States also retained operational control over all Korean Armed Forces and left behind a large group of military advisors (K MAG) to assist South Korean forces in improving their organizational, training, and maintenance skills, as well as their operational abilities. Although the Republic of Korea's military capabilities gradually improved over the course of the 1960's; South Korea remained almost totally dependent militarily upon the United States presence.¹⁷

ENDURING INTERESTS OF THE UNITED STATES, JAPAN, CHINA AND RUSSIA

UNITED STATES

The United States and the Republic of Korea have maintained a close military relationship over the years which was based upon strategic objectives and interests with a global containment strategy focused against a monolithic communist threat and deterrence against North Korea. This military alliance has contributed a great deal to the economic development of the Republic of Korea and the peace and stability of Northeast Asia. The two countries have been pursuing more of a multidimensional and comprehensive security partnership in response to a new security environment over the past decade.

The basic interests of the United States on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia can be summarized as 1) economic engagement and enlargement with maintaining regional stability including peace on the Korean Peninsula, 2) continuing a leading role and preventing the emergence of a new dominant power over the region and 3), pursuing nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction.¹⁸ The United States has four basic national interests in Asia: defense, trade and commerce, building of a stable world order, and promotion of American values abroad.

Current U.S. National Security Strategy and its enduring National Military Strategy and Security Strategy for the Korean peninsula are still under review by the Bush administration. Despite this review, it is reasonable to expect the existing core objectives of the U.S. National Security Strategy to remain essentially intact because of their primary connection to basic U.S. national interests. These core objectives are to enhance America's security, to bolster America's economic prosperity, and to promote democracy and human rights abroad.¹⁹ The current National Security Strategy recognizes that maintaining U.S. presence overseas promotes regional stability, gives substance to our security commitments, and contributes to deterrence

by demonstrating our determination to defend U.S. allied, and friendly interests in critical regions as Asia. Forward presence also better positions the United States to respond rapidly to crisis.²⁰ Based on the Quadrennial Defense Report recently published and the concern for North Korea's weapons of mass destruction, it appears as though the Bush administration will continue a strong U.S forward presence in Korea well into the future.

One of the major foreign policy challenges facing the Bush administration is managing their relations with a potentially volatile and generally unpredictable North Korea. The rising of other powers in the region also complicates U.S. engagement policy on the peninsula. Despite the changing situation on the Korean peninsula, the new U.S administration appears to have the same objectives as did the Clinton regime – stability, nonproliferation, reconciliation, and a strong U.S. – ROK alliance. The overall U.S. objective on the Korean peninsula is not to transform North Korea but to diminish the security threat and maintain peace and stability, and a balance of power throughout the Asian region.

The strategic environment of Asia is dominated by the presence of four big powers: China, India, Russia, and Japan. There continues to be deep-seated historical, territorial, religious and ideological differences throughout Asia. For the past decade, the Asian region has not had any type of successful multilateral security cooperation or arms control.²¹ As a result, for the past 50 years, the national interests of the United States in Korea have been a policy of maintaining stabilization and a military balance in the region. The United States and the Republic of Korea have maintained a strong relationship, especially a close security relationship throughout the years. This relationship has been based on common interests and a strategic objective to combat a communist threat and maintaining peace and stability in the region. The United States has maintained its military presence in South Korea since the end of the Korean War to satisfy these U.S. national interests .

The Asian region is entering into a particularly complex strategic situation; a new balance of power may be evolving that the United States must remain focused on. The economic crisis, tension between China and the United States over Taiwan, North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs, the risk of war between India and Pakistan, and the possibility of Indonesian disintegration have all arisen suddenly, and they serve to underline the basic security of the region. Whether or not Asia remains a peaceful region will largely depend upon the struggle for power and influence between the major powers: China, Japan, India, Russia and the United States. It is not in the interest of the United States or of its allies to see the region dominated by any one Asian power or by a concert of them.²² The United States must continue to keep focus on this balance of power before it becomes a significant obstacle in

Asia. Additionally, the U.S. policy will continue to focus on eliminating North Korea's weapons of mass destruction.

The Korean peninsula has always been a critical geopolitical location in spite of its relatively small size. The United States is in Korea, militarily, for the same exact reasons today, as it was almost 50 years ago - to protect the United States and its regional interests against communist encroachment. The U.S. vital interests would remain the same even after the two Korea's unify. The United States will still promote a stable, secure, prosperous Asia – Pacific region in which the United States is an active player, partner and beneficiary.

The United States is not the only country with enduring interests on the Korean peninsula. The strategic environment of Asia is controlled by the presence of four big powers: China, India, Russia and Japan. The external impetus for a Korean unification does not exist amongst these major regional powers and the United States. All are happy and benefit from a status-quo mentality. However, all four countries clearly understand the potential of a Korean unification and are reworking their national strategies and policies, including increased attention to crisis-management requirements as well as planning for longer - term peninsula dynamics. Because the stakes are so high in Asia, it is urgent that the United States, Japan, China and Russia develop a common understanding and approach regarding their relationship into the near and long-term future.²³ The security of Asia is currently at a crossroad. The region could quite possibly go in the direction of peace and cooperation or, if not careful, find itself in a full scale war.

Tokyo, Beijing, and Moscow all offer lip service to the goal of a Korean unification, but it is doubtful that any are eager to see the two Koreas come together. All three countries concur with the predominant goals of the United States policy on the peninsula (i.e., deterrence and defense, preventing WMD proliferation, and avoiding an acute humanitarian crisis or abrupt collapse.)²⁴ In the near to mid-term, all three countries share a common interest in maintaining stability, as seen from their vantage points. The interests of all three powers vary considerably. Let me now briefly discuss each major power individually.

JAPAN

The most critical strategic relationship in the region will continue to be the relationship and alliance between Japan and the United States. The Bush Administration has begun with the proclamation that more attention will be given to U.S. – Japan relations because they constitute our most important relationship in Asia.²⁵ Japan and the United States are working closely together to increase the credibility of the bilateral alliance. Additionally, the U.S. is

encouraging Japan to carry forward essential reforms involving initiatives taken by both private as well as official sources. Currently, the Japan – U.S. security relationship is strong and remains the cornerstone for achieving common security objectives maintaining a stable and prosperous environment for the Asian Pacific region well into the future.

Although Japan is the world's second largest economy, next to the United States, their economy is in trouble. For many years, the economy has been mired in minimal growth or recession. They face the prospect of aging quicker than any other industrial country in the years ahead. Japan's political leaders have been unable and unwilling to undertake serious in-depth reforms. If Japan continues to weaken as China emerges as East Asia's new power, equilibrium in the region could be profoundly affected.²⁶ The United States would then have to face the issue of whether it is prepared to assume an ever greater role in maintaining a balance of power on the Korean peninsula and throughout the Asian region.

Japan continues to be amongst the top four or five global military spenders in the world and is by far the most important economically in Asia. Nonetheless, China whose economy is less than a fifth the size of Japan's – has a higher political profile in the region. Japan spends more on defense than any other Asian country and it has the most modern navy and air force in the Asia-Pacific. However, Japan continues to be unwilling to use its military forces except in the most modest of United Nations peacekeeping operations.²⁷ Japan's continued inability to provide leadership in Asia commensurate with its economic power is a worry to the United States. Furthermore, if war was to break out in Korea, the United States would be expecting Japan to provide military support contributions. Failure on Japan's part to actively engage in this conflict would put at risk its relationship with the United States.

The immediate challenge and goal for the United States and Japan is to actively involve China as part of the team and work them into all negotiations and talks concerning the region. To China, the United States and Japan alliance provides an essential assurance that Japan will not dangerously rearm. This will not occur if Japan retains confidence in the United States and its military presence in the Asian region. However, it could become disastrous if Japan loses confidence in the United States and a military confrontation occurs between Japan and China.

CHINA

China is a rising power that poses the biggest threat to the future stability in the Asian region. China continues to be amongst the top four or five global military spenders in the world and views the United States as the biggest security threat to their country. Chinese leaders aspire to be the natural leader in all of Asia. To China, the only country in the way of this

aspiration is the United States with their forward presence of troops in the region. China has shown a strong and direct interest in the problems of war and peace on the Korean peninsula since 1949. Some examples of this interest being the direct intervention of the Korean War in 1950 and the substantial economic and military assistance for North Korea's post-war recovery and arms build-up, and the signing of a mutual defense treaty in 1961.²⁸

The United States is currently in dialogue with China and is committed to working economic and strategic issues into their dealings. The China – U.S relations will continue to be delicate yet important in the years to come. China does in fact have issues with the United States. They believe that the United States – Japan alliance is an attempt to contain China. They are concerned by Japan's participation in the U.S. theater missile defense (TMD) program. China does not believe that North Korea is on the verge of collapse and has opposed the United States attempts to put pressure on the Pyongyang regime. Chinese leaders would prefer a future Asia in which China and not the United States plays the primary regional balancer role, where military alliances no longer exist, where a reunified Korea looks to Beijing for its security guarantees, and where U.S. military forces are no longer deployed on the Korean peninsula. These long-term visions will remain, even as China and the ROK and the United States cooperate in order to achieve complementary short-term goals.²⁹

China has good relations with its border countries. China's relationship with Russia continues to grow and appears as though it is the best it has been since the 1950's. They have recently joined together in a "strategic partnership." This tie is based on their common opposition to American hegemonies and interference in the internal affairs of other nations as well as their common concern about Islamic separatism in Central Asia.³⁰ China's continued economic growth and military modernization will make their relationship with Russia even stronger in the years to come.³¹ China's hope is that the modern military equipment being procured from Russia will enable them to prevail militarily in the South China Sea against any regional power. China also maintains a special relationship with North Korea which it maintains as a low international profile. On the other hand, China's declining influence over North Korea, India's acquisition of nuclear weapons, political tensions with Taiwan, and, above all, U.S. capabilities and willingness to project military power globally, has caused China some immediate concern.

The United States is regarded as hegemonic and expansionist by Chinese leaders. China believes that the United States is trying to prevent any reunification between Taiwan and main land China. They also resent U.S. alliances and regard them as directed against China. The larger strategic issue for China in the post-unification of Korea is the future character and

terms of the U.S. – ROK alliance. Additionally, they are concerned about the purpose and extent of a continued U.S. military presence on the peninsula following unification.

The acceptance of formal multilateral dialogue has not spread from South East Asia to North East Asia because of mistrust between China and Japan, and between the two Koreas. Chinese analysts have argued that the time is not right for a formal trilateral security forum given the tensions over the revised U.S. – Japan defense guidelines, the lack of basic trust between China and Japan, and the fear that China would be isolated in a two – against - one war in which it engaged the U.S. – Japan alliance as a corporate entity.³²

Although there is a lot of distrust between China, Japan and the United States – the common goal amongst all three countries is to preserve peace, security, and stability throughout Asia. China is still many decades from being a peer competitor or dominant world power. However, one of the biggest dangers to the region is the risk that the next military confrontation will be between China and the United States.³³

RUSSIA

Russia, which is the other major power, remains marginalized in the current dynamics on the Korean peninsula. However, President Putin is working hard to reassert Russia's claim to major power status. He continues to foster an improved relationship with China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, (DPRK). Additionally, he has sought to reestablish a close relationship with India, a country long associated with the Soviet Union, to offset earlier Pakistan – China – U.S. ties.³⁴ A stable North Korea (either a recovering state or one that has been amalgamated under a unified government) could very likely open the door to Russian involvement in an array of infrastructure projects (e.g., in energy development and resource exploitation). Still Russia's larger prospects on the peninsula will very likely depend on its own political and economic evolution than on a Korean development per se.³⁵

Russia is unlikely to be a significant player in Asia for the foreseeable future, even though it possesses important military assets in Northeast Asia. It will remain preoccupied with its internal political and economic affairs and the situation along its borders, especially in Siberia and the former Soviet Central Asian republics.³⁶ Russia's ability to supply advanced conventional weapons to China and India is, however, a matter of concern to the United States. Arms exports are one of the few competitive products of the ailing Russian economy. Russia has the capacity to upset the regional military balance, and it is already doing this through its arms shipment to China.

Over the long run, as Russia seeks to reestablish its credibility as a major power in East Asia, political, economic, and security opportunities could well arise, but at present these prospects seem severely constrained. Russia may seek to find ways to legitimize a longer - term role in Korean peninsula affairs; the fact alone of a common border provides one of the building blocks. But in comparative terms, Japan and China will have more capability than Russia to shape longer - term peninsula outcomes.

Of concern to the U.S., Russia and China are working closely together and appear to be working against the United States. Recently, China has demilitarized its border with Russia, demarcated the boundary, and increased Sino-Russian cooperation directed against the United States. In addition to rhetorical statements denouncing U.S. "hegemonism", Russia has also increased its arms sales to China.³⁷ At some point in the future Russia could very well return as a major power.

U.S. MILITARY FORCES IN SOUTH KOREA

Since the Korean War the United States has maintained a balanced forward presence on the Korean peninsula. The most controversial debate and really only significant issue concerning U.S. military presence in Korea occurred in 1976 when Jimmy Carter announced he was going to keep his campaign promise to withdraw all U.S. ground forces from Korea . Carter's advisors felt it essential that he avoid a situation in which the U.S. could become involved in another ground war in Asia. However, faced with strong public, congressional and international opposition and after having been enlightened on the potential consequences for instability in Northeast Asia, the President reversed his position on withdrawing forces.³⁸

When President Reagan assumed the presidency, he established a completely different view towards Korea. President Reagan assured the Korean President that he would not withdraw its ground forces from Korea. Instead, he offered to increase U.S. military presence by adding an air contingent. Reagan reiterated the commitment of the U.S. to abide by the provisions of the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty and to come to the assistance of South Korea in the event of an invasion from the North.³⁹

Further negotiations took place about the future of the USFK in 1985 when the question was raised concerning the command structure of the combined forces of the ROK and U.S. forces. At the U.S - Korean government levels an agreement was reached on a three stage implementation plan to change the size and role of the U.S. forces in accordance with East Asia Strategic Initiative (EAST). During phase one (1990 - 1992), 7,000 troops were pulled out of Korea. However, phase two of the plan which called for cutting 6,500 troops by the end of 1995

was put on hold in 1991 over concern that North Korea was trying to develop nuclear weapons. Both sides soon agreed that any further draw down of U.S. forces from Korea would be made only after the uncertainties surrounding the North Korean Nuclear program had been put to rest.⁴⁰

Besides the reduction of USFK troops, there were changes made to the ROK - U.S command and control structure. Both countries agreed to the appointment of a ROK general as the senior member of the Military Armistice commission, a ROK general as the Commander of the CFC's Ground Component Command, and deactivated the Combined Field Army.⁴¹ Other than these slight changes, the U.S - ROK military force structure and strength on the Korean peninsula has not fluctuated much over the past 10 years.

According to the "2001 Report to Congress on the Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula," the current troop strength is:

The U.S. Second Infantry Division (-) has two ground maneuver brigades (one heavy and one light), an aviation brigade, a division artillery and a division support command. Major U.S. ground weapon systems currently deployed in the ROK include: M-1A1 Main Battle Tanks, M-2A2 and M-3A2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, 155MM self-propelled howitzers, Multiple Rocket Launchers (MLRS), a PATRIOT battalion and a two-squadron AH-64 Apache brigade. Additionally, there is a prepositioned heavy brigade set of equipment. The U.S. 7th Air Force, headquartered at Osan Air Base, consists of the 51st Fighter Wing and the 8th Fighter Wing. Squadrons within the 51st Fighter Wing, also at Osan, are equipped with (24), F-16C/D LANIRN, and (22) A-10s. Also stationed at Osan are U-2s from the 9th Reconnaissance Wing, Beale AFB. At Kunsan, the 8th Fighter Wing is equipped with (42), F-16Cs. As of March 29, 2001, there were 36,425 U.S. troops assigned to the ROK: Key U.S. capabilities would play essential roles throughout all phases of operations. The U.S. would enhance or provide the following critical capabilities to the combined war effort: a) airlift and sealift, b) prepositioned heavy equipment and supplies, c) aerial refueling, d) battlefield command, control and communication, e) advanced munitions, f) intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, and g) counter fire against the massive North Korean artillery barrage.⁴²

POTENTIAL KOREAN UNIFICATION

Many believe that the Korean peninsula is frozen in time. Yet, despite this seeming rigidity, inter-Korean dynamics, driven particularly by internal changes in the North, could create a fundamental transformation on the Korean peninsula in the coming decade and quite possibly much sooner.⁴³ Regardless of how North Korea collapses, the timing of its demise will likely be unexpected.

Although many consider North Korea a failed state, the North Koreans retain a strong military capability. North Korea's nuclear and missile program could also trigger U.S. military

action and cause a general war on the peninsula. If North Korea decided to attack South Korea with all of its military might, the deaths would quickly number in the hundreds of thousands – a repeat of the Korean War. Additionally, a sudden collapse of the North should not be ruled out. Bringing together the two Korea's would present the South with horrendous costs of creating a unified nation. The United States and the ROK must continue to work together to pursue some sort of peaceful reconciliation or unification on the peninsula.

The memory of the Korea War still lingers in the hearts and minds of many Koreans throughout the peninsula. Since the division of Korea in 1945, North and South Korea have kept a confrontational relationship due to their differing ideologies. The tensions associated with the division still have the potential to trigger a new and more devastating Korean War. Therefore, it is no surprise that a majority of Koreans strongly support a peaceful unification. Nonetheless, the two Koreas are still enemies as no peace treaty was signed when the Korean War ended in 1953. Hostilities still exist as was evident in September 1996, with the submarine intrusion by North Korea. Based on these uncertainties, the United States and the Republic of Korea continue to plan for a full range of contingencies on the peninsula, including major theater war.

It is under these conditions that the Korean governments have engaged in efforts to facilitate a national reconciliation. In March of 1998, the government in Korea announced that its policy toward North Korea would be aimed at realizing the concept of peace, reconciliation and cooperation. The objective of South Korea's policy is to lay the foundation for peace and unification. The United States is also interested in the emergence of a unified Korea that is peaceful, democratic, non-nuclear, friendly with regional powers, and allied with the United States. Despite the overall desire of many on both sides of the Militarized Zone and the United States to end the division of the peninsula, all efforts have failed to reunify the country by either war or diplomacy.

It is difficult to predict the circumstances under which a Korea unification could occur. However, there are several possibilities – unification as a result of an armed conflict, the internal collapse of North Korea or a peaceful unification. The year 2000 was the most promising year for positive relations between North and South Korea since the end of the Korean War. "In June, 2000, the world watched as South Korea's President shook hands with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il in the first ever Summit between leaders of the two Koreas. That meeting led to the reunion of 100 Koreans from North and South whose families had been separated during the Korean War."⁴⁴ The mood around the world since the historic Summit has

been one of hope and promise. If Korea is unified in the near future, it will be the first time in nearly one hundred years since it has been a single, independent actor.

One month after the summit, another remarkable event, which was totally unthinkable one year prior, took place in Washington D.C. "One of North Korea's most senior army officers, Vice - Marshal Jo Myong Rok met President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeline Albright. The two sides agreed that North Korea would not test missiles while talking with the United States."⁴⁵ In a June 15, 2001 joint declaration, Seoul and Pyongyang agreed to resolve the question of unification independently and through the joint efforts of the Korean people. The three days that President Kim spent in Pyongyang raised hopes, perhaps unrealistically, of a speedy reunification of the Peninsula. The two men put their names to a declaration that, though vague in its wording, provided the clearest sign for years that the two sides might eventually see eye-to-eye. It called for an easing of tensions, for renewed efforts to bring about peace and the reunion of divided families, and for an intensification of economic, social, and cultural exchanges.⁴⁶

A fall of North Korea will be much more difficult for South Korea to absorb than was the Federal Republic of Germany's absorption of the former German Democratic Republic. The disparity in the two Korea's economic performance is only one problem and is a minor issue compared to the fact that South Korea was attacked by, and suffered millions of casualties at the hands of North Korea. North Korea has been isolated from the outside world to an extent no other nation has ever experienced. To the people of North Korea, the dictator style leadership, controlled feeding plan, and shallow life styles is their way of life. Although a unification may occur in the near future – it will come with many challenges.

ANALYSIS

IMPACTS ON THE U.S. MILITARY IN SOUTH KOREA

The United States has played a continuous role for over half a century in stabilizing the Asian Pacific region, especially Korea. Although many consider North Korea a failed state, the North Korean's retain a strong military capability. North Korea's nuclear and missile program could also trigger U.S. military action and cause a general war on the peninsula. If North Korea decided to attack South Korea with all of its military might, the deaths would quickly number in the hundreds of thousands – a repeat of the Korean War. Additionally, a sudden collapse of the North should not be ruled out. Bringing together of the two Korea's would present the South with horrendous costs of creating a unified nation. The United States and the ROK must continue to work together to pursue some sort of peaceful reconciliation or unification in Korea.

If the alliance remains intact, it is unlikely that North Korea will launch an all-out invasion of the South during the next 5 years. Although the outbreak of war is unlikely, the North Korean regime has been and will continue to be extremely unpredictable and threatening in the years to come. Today, the Korean peninsula remains the one place in the world where total war could erupt with less than 24 hours' notice. North Korea maintains an Army of over one million men and an arsenal of more than 10,000 artillery tubes, as well as scud-type missiles and unknown quantities of chemical weapons. They are still giving priority to allocating national resources to the military and continue to modernize their armed forces to maintain and improve readiness.⁴⁷

As long as the North retains the ability to inflict massive damage on greater Seoul, the U.S. - ROK alliance cooperation that has underpinned stability on the peninsula for the past 50 years must be retained. Given the massive firepower the North Korean military retains, instability North of the DMZ could lead to new threats to the security of the South and the region. In spite of the North Korean threat, and because of the nature of the threat, the United States and South Korea should not attempt to cause the North to collapse.

Beyond North Korea, the Asian region has some of the worlds largest and most modern armies, and several nuclear capable states. In fact, Asia has more nuclear powers than any other region in the world. Hostilities that could directly involve the United States in a major conflict could occur at a moments notice on the Korean peninsula.

The United States' military is postured in Korea to fight a full-scale major theater war. The role of the U.S military remains a necessary stabilizing influence on the Korean peninsula. Today, the deterrence of North Korea is dependent upon the United States military maintaining the status quo on the peninsula of Korea. However, it is fairly obvious to all that a Korean reconciliation is likely to occur sometime in the near future. The United States must begin now constructing a U.S. policy toward a unified Korea. The military must be prepared for a much wider range of roles and missions based on a Korean reconciliation.

The method by which North and South Korea unify will affect the scale and timing of the challenges that will confront the U.S. military. Unification resulting from defeat of a North Korean armed thrust into the south would be different from a gradual process of reconciliation leading to a Korean unification.⁴⁸ The U.S. military has trained for decades and is prepared for a full-up major theater of war in Korea. However, depending on how Korea unifies could result in outcomes that depart substantially from a full-scale attack.

Peaceful reunification or reconciliation on the Korean peninsula is certainly in the United States' best national interests. "American military presence in Japan and Korea has in recent years become recognized by all regional actors as a stability factor. The expansion of the

current U.S. - ROK alliance to cover the entire united Korea would provide the protection of a big power which has proven to be relatively non-intrusive, and which harbors no regional territorial ambitions."⁴⁹

The United States must continue forward presence of U.S. forces in Korea even upon a Korean unification. The Korean peninsula has traditionally acted as bridge between the Asian landmass and Japan. Korea is also surrounded by three major powers in Northeast Asia; Japan, China, and Russia. The strategic geographic location of the peninsula, its central location among major regional powers and the economic vitality of the region continue to make Northeast Asian stability an interest of the United States.

Secretary Richard Solomon argued in 1997 at the Annual Asian Conference that China would have to confront a range of territorial and security issues that would likely lead to a polarization of the region. Solomon asked, how would China deal with a scenario in which the United States was no longer in Korea to stabilize the situation on the peninsula? What would be the resulting strategic environment in Korea, if China decided, in the absence of the U.S. military, to deal with Taiwan by force? How would Korea handle potential hot spots in the region. Furthermore, Japan would be concerned about China's military build-up and would take initial steps to provide for its own defense – steps that would lead to an escalatory arms race in the region.⁵⁰ U.S. presence in Korea keeps allies as well as potential adversaries in check during times of tension.

A unified Korea might perceive both its historical enemies, China and Japan, as potential security threats. The peninsula of Korea is a prime piece of strategic terrain as it is located amongst major world powers. In his book, *Pacific Defense: Arms, Energy, and America's Future in Asia*, Kent Calder foresees the future world as having seven powers in Asia, (the United States, Russia, China, Japan, India, a unified Korea, and Vietnam). With the exception of Vietnam, these powers all meet at the Korean peninsula. Forward presence by U.S. forces could be a deterring and stabilizing force in the region as critical to the stability of the future as it has been since the 1953 armistice of the Korean War.⁵¹

Despite the Korean War defeat, North Korea has never given up its desire to communize the entire Korean peninsula in a military manner in spite of many internal challenges to include a failing political system and lingering economic problems. Fortunately, U.S. military strength has prevented and will continue to prevent this from happening. Any perception of pulling out our armed forces from the Korean peninsula could lead to rapid destabilization in the region.

Stability of the Asia-Pacific will continue to be a vital U.S. national interest well into the next decade. The most important strategic contribution of the U.S. military stationed on the

Korean peninsula is to continue to deter the outbreak of a major war. Based on my analysis, I believe that the most likely scenario on the Korean Peninsula for the next 5 – 6 years is status-quo; a continuation of a manageable degree of tension throughout the region and not a Korean unification. Although our U.S. foreign policy in Korea will never be simple or without debate, I don't anticipate any strategic developments in the region that will pose fundamental challenges to the United States' military power over the next 5 – 6 years.

RECOMMENDATION - CONCLUSION

The years ahead on the Korean peninsula offers great opportunities for the United States. However, with these opportunities come many challenges. The United States may soon need to adjust and re-define the strategic role of the U.S. forces stationed on the Korean peninsula and look at expanding its role linked to a balance of power in Northeast Asia. Even after a Korean unification, the United States should retain a large forward presence on the Korean peninsula. This military presence will help prevent deterioration of Korea – Japan relations and defuse rivalries in North West Asia between China, Japan, Russia and Korea that could emerge after unification.

The United States, by virtue of its enduring interests and power, will remain the most powerful actor in the Asian region in the years ahead. The 37,000 U.S. military forces on the peninsula act as a symbol of U.S. commitment and as a "tripwire," ensuring that the United States will become fully engaged immediately upon the initiation of hostilities by the North. U.S. forces would quickly swell to over 50,000.⁵² The United States needs to keep America troops in Korea but must begin working closer with others to build a future that works towards maintaining peace and stability in the region. Future U.S presence will only be effective with a vigorous network of allies and future friends in the region. The U.S. military must become a more flexible role vice being in the lead. A Korean unification will be a time for the United States to restructure, not reduce, American military presence in Korea.

The United States' military force package must be credible and reliable but at the same time non-threatening to other Asian nations. The United States has met this objective in the past and must continue this balance in the future. The U.S. must ensure that the right force package is deployed forward to deal with the evolving nature of the North Korean unification. Furthermore, this force must become more versatile with the ability to rapidly deploy and project power outside the Republic of Korea.

Deterrence of North Korea is dependent upon the United States military remaining in country. The United States must continue to think about what force structure will be required

after unification. Depending on how the unification occurs, the outcome to the United States military on the peninsula could range from no change to its current force structure and roles to a complete change in mission. Preparing for this unification will increasingly define the U.S. military's role and responsibility on the peninsula.

United States presence is necessary in Korea the same way it is necessary in Europe today. In Europe, the U.S. presence holds in check the mutual suspicions within Europe; and similarly in Asia, the United States presence holds in check those mutual suspicions that today are even more deeply seated than they are in Europe.⁵³ It is my recommendation that the United States military presence will continue to be necessary in Korea as it will not only serve the U.S. security interests - it will also serve the broader strategic interests of all of Asia.

This force could be more flexible, play a dual - purposed regional role, thus allowing the Republic of Korea (ROK) forces to defend South Korea in a more self reliant manner. Some potential missions of the U.S military forces deployed to Korea could include, Korean defense, act as a balance of power, defense of other U.S. alliances in Asia and forward deployed offensive missions against other potential adversaries. Such a mission would increase the need for U.S. armed forces in Korea and become more important to U.S. national security.

Security is the core of the issue when one considers the benefits and disadvantages to U.S. forward presence on the peninsula following a Korean unification. The U.S. credibility is based not only on its military presence but also on its long historical ties to the region, extending back a hundred years. The South Korean government supports continued U.S. forward presence following unification. During the 2000 Korean Summit, North Korea leader Kim Jung Il stated that U.S forces remaining on the peninsula may be beneficial to protect Koreans from surrounding hegemony. He said "Yes, we are surrounded by big powers - Russia, China, and Japan - and therefore, it is desirable that the American troops continue to stay."⁵⁴ Both North and South Korea favors continued U.S. forward presence on the Korean peninsula upon unification.

Additionally, ASEAN nations also support U.S. forward presence after a Korea unification. ASEAN, as a group of states with existing and potential disputes, was initially formed as a political body to identify common political interests and to determine conditions under which member - states would provide mutual support to one another.⁵⁵ The initiative of the ASEAN Region Forum, (ARF) to conduct a multilateral security dialogue and develop bilateral measures is one result of ASEAN - political efforts. There is little doubt that the continuing commitment of the United States to remain a Pacific power, expressed in forward military presence.⁵⁶ The nations of ASEAN fully support U.S. forward presence in Korea.⁵⁷

The policy of the United States must be consistent with the approaches of the Republic of Korea and Japan and proactively coordinated with both. The U.S. – ROK and U.S. - Japan alliances are key to deterrence on the Korean peninsula. If the United States wants to remain a major power in Asia upon Korea unification, it must keep its armed forces stationed on the peninsula.

Failure to work together could become disastrous for all four major powers. The merging of North and South Korean armies could result in the world's largest ground force, a large naval and air force, and most important, the capability to strike Japan, China, Russia, and the United States, with long-range missiles armed with chemical, biological, and possibly nuclear warheads. For this reason alone, it is imperative that all four powers work toward maintaining a stable, prosperous, democratic, capitalist, and militarily allied Korea after unification.

It is imperative that the United States begins working closely with China to bring them to the same level of discussions, interest, and policies that the U.S. currently has with Japan. Although the relationship between the United States and China will never be perfect, talk and common goals are imperative if the Korean peninsula is to maintain peace and stability. However, the U.S. must handle these talks with kid gloves. They can't ignore the other players of Asia at the expense of working closer with China. The overall relationship between the United States, China and Japan must be one of cooperation in order to maintain peace and prevent war in the future. Obviously this will require continued emphasis, hard negotiations and bargaining among the three powers now and well into the future.

Military analysts say the United States will keep its 37,000 troops in South Korea even if a formal peace treaty replaces the current armistice that ended the Korean War in 1953. As the principal strategic power in East Asia, they say, the United States can't afford to pull out of the region that is home to both Japan, which has the world's second largest economy, and China, which is expected to become the next global super power.⁵⁸

The United States is the only nation with the power to enforce security across the region. However, the U.S. needs to actively work towards developing multilateral security ideas with their Asian allies. The United States should seek to build a coalition of states with South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia, that have a common interest in peace and stability in the region. Korea is a good example of this. Neither China nor the United States wants a collapsed North, a nuclear North or another conflict on the Korean peninsula.⁵⁹ Despite some differences, the United States must work bilaterally with China and others in a variety of ways in order to maintain peace and stability on the peninsula. Additionally, the United States should actively

support multilateralism while continuing to improve these bilateral ties. A successful bilateral partnership that strives to extend and enlarge their cooperative scope and vision, will improve the chances that Asia's future will be peaceful and stable and not a bomb ready to explode.

The United States can contribute to stability during and after unification by keeping its military in Korea. Only the United States has the power, credibility, and distance (both geographical and cultural) from the region to maintain the regional balance. Most countries in the region, apart from China, agree that the departure of the United States would leave the region open to fierce contentions between China and Japan or India, possibly leading to war.⁶⁰ Even after a unified Korea, the U.S. presence will balance the influence of major powers surrounding the Korean peninsula.

The U.S. military presence will be proof to Koreans and foreigners alike that the United States stands by a Democratic Republic of Korea. In an emergency, such as civil disturbances in the North, the U.S. forces could assist the ROK Armed forces by providing air lift, intelligence, and other support functions, short of combat unless there were a major communist insurrection, the government of the United States and the ROK would want the American military to stay out of inter-Korean fighting.⁶¹

America's forward presence and alliance relationship have prevented a second war on the peninsula and may have persuaded North Korea that it has no better options than diplomacy. When North Korea is ready to take steps toward strengthening peace on the peninsula, the United States should be fully prepared to respond.⁶² In the meantime, it is in the best interest of all concerned that the United States retains, now and well into the future, a viable military presence in the country of Korea and continues to support the patient efforts of our South Korean ally. The presence of U.S. military forces in a unified Korea will continue to support the United States' vital interests while ensuring peace, stability, and a security of balance throughout the region.

WORD COUNT = 9,623

ENDNOTES

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