
U. S. Military Presence in Korea: A Cost-Benefit Analysis

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AUTHOR'S NOTE:

This article was written in December 2000, before the events of 2001 changed tremendously the political and security landscape here in the United States and around the world. The new Bush Administration emerged from the debacle of Election 2000 with a strong, often unbending conviction in continuing on with the political decisions and priorities that were established under the leadership of President George Bush, national mandate or no. The new Bush administration presented a hard-line stance towards North Korea in early 2001, increasing tensions between the two nations, and making diplomatic negotiations on the peninsula much more difficult for President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea.

The most politically defining and utterly tragic events of the year (if not of the whole of American history), the terrorist attacks of September 11 have changed U.S. priorities, tremendously increased the focus on terrorism on a global scale, and created a context for the United States in which policies and dialogues of security and cooperation must be reassessed based on the heightened terrorist threat.

Considering that North Korea continues to hold a place on the United States' terrorism list, the argument I make in this article regarding concessions and cooperation between the U.S. and the DPRK will be more difficult to defend. However, there are elements of my argument that I believe are more important than ever in light of the events of this past year, particularly the need for multilateral dialogue and cooperation among nations, displays of respect, and confidence-building measures. More than ever we must focus on the personal, social, and environmental security of all citizens, as we pursue the goal of military

security in a world where terrorists use the very basic elements of our democratic society to attempt to destroy it. We must focus not solely on military readiness and strength, but on strengthening the rule of international law and cooperation on the domestic and international fronts to keep the lives of our citizens secure. And this must be done not only without weakening those very rights on which our democracy is based, but also by promoting democracy in the nations around the world with which we must cooperate to ensure a secure future for all people.

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Introduction

For a half century, the East Asian region has felt the dominant presence of the United States, marked especially by the over 100,000 American military personnel that are stationed among various countries. In South Korea specifically there are 37,000 troops deployed at 95 bases across the country.¹ These troops are key players in a changing security situation on the Korean peninsula, which is the result of the amazing thawing of relations between North and South Korea and the opening up of the North after 55 years of self-imposed isolation. Due to this process of normalization and an increased sense of optimism on the peninsula, there now arises a question of grave importance: is there still a need for a robust U.S. military presence on the Korean peninsula? In answering this question, we must also assess the implications this presence may have for regional security. This query is simultaneously of concern to Americans at home, who worry about national security and the safety of soldiers abroad, and to the people of East Asia, who are directly or indirectly affected by this presence and who are equally worried about their own national and regional security.

In an attempt to answer these questions, we must weigh the costs and benefits of the military presence in the context of a U.S. policy framework characterized by the security concerns of the region. Within this context, it is most effective to compare the costs and benefits of a persistent large military presence with those of various alternative measures. Such a comparison makes clear that a continued large U.S. mili-

tary presence in South Korea, without a reduction in size of force and without a change in other current military policy, will result in a climate of instability not only on the Korean peninsula, but also within the entire East Asian region.

In this paper, I am approaching the question of American military presence as it relates to security, in accordance with the manner in which U.S. policy-makers prioritize the situation. While these priorities are certainly warranted considering the military and nuclear threat that North Korea poses to United States forces and to other countries in the region, I would suggest that relying on this view alone is too narrow an approach. I believe that, in creating policy, one should approach the issue of U.S. forces from a wider security context, one in line with the expanded perspective suggested at the 1991 Kampala Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa. Despite the regional focus of that conference, the concept of security as outlined there applies to the situation on the Korean peninsula as well. As the Conference suggested, "Security must be transcendental of orthodox definition and perception of security in military terms. Security must be all-embracing and all-encompassing and ramifying. It must include personal security...[,] economic security and social security."² With this widened security context as a premise, I will analyze the U.S. military presence first in terms of military security and then in its wider social/environmental context.

In terms of the military, I will argue that it is disproportionately expensive to maintain this force when that step is compared with other measures which are comparatively lower in cost: displays of respect, confidence-building measures (CBMs), and measures that ultimately build a climate of trust. The premise of my argument is that, based on the dramatic and encouraging change in the relationship on the Korean peninsula, the U.S. can and should be flexible on the issue of its military presence, negotiating with the DPRK to produce an environment of mutual trust. In other words, the U.S. can use the military presence as a bargaining chip in order to ease tensions and extract concrete concessions from the DPRK.

Throughout my analysis, I will focus on specific elements of U.S. policy not only toward Korea, but also within the Asian region as a

whole. First, I will focus on the security aspects, mainly the U.S. reaction to the DPRK missile program and nuclear capabilities. I will continue with an analysis of how American forces in Korea are linked to the regional security situation. Then, I will consider the consequences of the American military presence in a wider security context which includes the dynamic between security on the one hand and social and environmental conditions on the other. This element is critical to my argument, as these factors are important not only in ascertaining the welfare of the people, but also in indicating how the people of the East Asian region are reacting to the U.S. military presence. Next, I will touch upon the political situation in the United States, including the complications of election 2000 and its impact on U.S.-Korean relations. Finally, I will make recommendations based on specific confidence-building measures and actions that build trust to promote multi-lateral dialogue rather than military intimidation. I will insist that a more “benevolent U.S. hegemony”³ is needed in order to promote peace and security in the East Asian region.

Background

U.S. MILITARY FORCES IN KOREA: A CHANGING SECURITY SITUATION

For fifty years the United States military has been a dominant force on the Korean peninsula. As a result of the Korean War, American forces were stationed in South Korea to protect that country from a communist invasion from the North. As the Cold War progressed, the chief interest of the United States, besides protecting South Korea from attack, was to block Communist expansion in the free world through this military presence.⁴ Although the Cold War has ended in the rest of the world, it still continues on the Korean peninsula today. American soldiers have continued to be sent there, as the United States has maintained a strong stance of deterrence against North Korea.

The situation on the Korean peninsula became incredibly tense in 1994, when inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) found that North Korea had produced illicit plutonium for nuclear weapon production.⁵ This production of fissile material was halted, however, due to an Agreed Framework negotiated between the United States and the DPRK, in which the U.S., along with South

Korea and Japan, agreed to help build two “proliferation-resistant light-water nuclear reactors.” In addition, it agreed to interim annual deliveries of 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil (HFO) to help relieve the energy crisis in North Korea until the first reactor is finished.⁶ In return, the North Korean government agreed to freeze production of nuclear facilities, although it continued to be very skeptical of the United States government’s commitment to honor the bargain. The United States fell behind on the HFO deliveries, as well as on construction of the light-water reactors. Consequently, in response to the feeling in North Korea that the U.S. was not complying with the Agreed Framework, President Kim Jong Il gave in to the wishes of many hard-liners in his government and, in August 1998, launched a long-range Taepodong I Missile, firing it over Japanese territory in an apparent attempt to launch a satellite.⁷ This event was accompanied by press reports that suggested that the DPRK had clandestinely reopened another nuclear facility. There seemed to be no near end to an incredibly tense security relationship in the East Asian region, and certainly no reason, by the U.S. government’s calculations, to withdraw a single American soldier from Korean soil. However, in the past two years this situation has made a positive turn. With the election of Kim Dae-jung as President of South Korea came a new and revolutionary policy toward its northern Communist neighbor. This Sunshine Policy, as it is called, stresses engagement with the North, which has resulted in a gradual normalization of relations on the peninsula.⁸

Simultaneously, the DPRK has taken concrete steps to end its isolation in the international arena. In the past year, North Korea has re-established diplomatic ties with several nations, most recently on November 14, 2000 with Australia.⁹ This show of constructive international engagement is very encouraging. These new diplomatic ties not only indicate that the DPRK is opening up to the outside world, but may result in pressures from these nations to reduce nuclear and missile capacity and work toward peace on the Korean peninsula. Nevertheless, there are critics of this engagement who point out that the DPRK had very few options due to the humanitarian crisis that has been precipitated by food shortages and economic difficulties which have plagued the nation throughout the past decade.

Despite these criticisms, North Korean President Kim Jong Il met with South Korean President Kim Dae-jung in a historic summit in June 2000, setting a precedent for active engagement and open dialogue. Moreover, North Korea sent a high-ranking delegation to the United States, later reciprocated by a visit to Pyongyang by Secretary of State Madeline Albright. This was the most historic and symbolic of meetings, as Albright is the highest-ranking official to visit North Korea since the Korean War ended half a century ago. These developments create a new situation on the peninsula, opening the door for more positive negotiations and presenting an opportunity for the United States and North Korea to cooperate more fully in the normalization of relations.

DPRK-U.S. RELATIONSHIP

Continued U.S. Military Presence

These encouraging and historic developments put into question the wisdom of and need for the continued presence of the United States military on the Korean peninsula. With the easing of tensions, the window of opportunity is open for the United States to start reducing the number of troops stationed in Korea, a process that was first suggested by President Jimmy Carter during his administration and then initiated by President George Bush in the early 1990's.¹⁰ This progress, a positive result of the end of the Cold War, was halted in response to the 1994 nuclear crisis. Traditionally, the North Korean government has demanded the unquestioning and complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Korean peninsula before they would agree to make any concrete concessions concerning their nuclear and missile programs. In light of the Clinton administration's position of maintaining a strong military presence for the sake of deterrence, it seemed that North Korea's stance would pose a serious hurdle to overcome in the quest for peace.

The most surprising recent development, however, has been an announcement made by North Korean President Kim Jong Il in August 2000. *The New York Times* reported that "North Korean leader Kim Jong Il has said it is 'desirable' that U.S. troops stay on the Korean peninsula and that he dispatched a 'high level envoy' to convey that message to the United States several years ago." The article went on to state that Kim Jong Il agreed that "American troops are needed even if

the two Koreas reconcile, to prevent Japan, China or Russia from assuming more power in northeastern Asia.”¹¹ This development represents a key change in the relationship between the U.S. and the DPRK, and, since it officially legitimizes the large U.S. military presence in the region, it prompts one to ask how that presence might be destabilizing for the region when Kim Jong Il clearly agrees that it will serve in the opposite capacity—as a stabilizer? Throughout the remainder of this analysis I will attempt to develop a clear answer to this question.

As an initial move, it is essential to consider what experts in the field are saying. Selig Harrison, one such expert, suggests that Kim Jong Il does not want to push the issue of forces at this moment in the negotiations because it would get in the way of achieving other diplomatic victories, but he insists that it will be an issue in the future. At a recent conference of the National Association of Korean Americans, Harrison commented on the significance of this change in North Korean rhetoric/policy: “We know what he [Kim Jong Il] *did not mean*. He did not mean that U.S. forces could stay in Korea without a change in DMZ [de-militarized zone] forces, without a peace treaty. He *did not mean* that the U.S. and North Korea are no longer adversaries.”¹² With Harrison’s admonition as backdrop, we can turn now to the most contentious issue at hand: the North Korean military.

DPRK Nuclear and Long Range Missile Program

The number one concern of the United States, as reported in the Perry Report of the U.S. State Department, is the North Korean Nuclear and Long Range Missile program. The Perry Report states that, despite the supposed freeze in North Korean production of nuclear materials, “[T]he policy review team has serious concerns about possible continuing nuclear weapons-related work in the DPRK.” The report authors go on to declare: “The years since 1994 have also witnessed development, testing deployment, and export by the DPRK of ballistic missiles of increasing range, including those potentially capable of reaching the territory of the United States.”¹³ This assessment of North Korea in terms of arms sales has been supported by a recent report in Britain’s *Daily Telegraph*, which reported that Libya had received 50 North Korean Rodong missiles and launchers, thus verifying that North Korea

continues with the sale of arms. This conclusion was based on a report released by the Pentagon in early September that also indicated that more Rodong missiles have been deployed along the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea.¹⁴

There is a clear reason for these actions: the DPRK nuclear and missile program is the main bargaining tool, the main leverage, in dealing with the United States. North Korea is very weak comparatively in terms of power, military and otherwise. In her March 2000 testimony before Congress, Wendy Sherman of the State Department summed up one of the four key points made in the Perry Report: “[T]he military correlation of forces on the Korean Peninsula strongly favors the allied forces, even more than during the 1994 crisis. And, most importantly, this is understood by the government of the DPRK. Therefore, *deterrence is strong*. But that deterrence could be undermined by the introduction of nuclear weapons, especially nuclear weapons on ballistic missiles.”¹⁵ The threat of nuclear weapons demonstrates exactly why the DPRK would want to continue to develop its own weapons: if the deterrent capabilities of the U.S. military are compromised, its security is threatened. Therefore, the combination of a large U.S. military presence and an economic crisis that is forcing North Korea into a vulnerable position could serve as a catalyst to a highly volatile situation. Furthermore, in a policy brief appearing in the *Foreign Policy in Focus* online magazine, John Feffer argues that the North Korean threat is inflated. He suggests that the South Korean military is already adept at handling any crisis situation that may occur. He cites the discrepancy in military budgets as evidence: North Korea’s entire government budget of \$9.4 billion is smaller than South Korea’s military budget of \$13 billion.¹⁶ This gap gives the United States room to use the military as a bargaining tool.

In addition, the DPRK did agree to freeze the production of missiles and nuclear materials, as was laid out in the Agreed Framework. Unfortunately, the United States is not following through on its side of the bargain. As a result, the DPRK is reacting negatively to what it sees as a lack of U.S. commitment to honor existing compromises and agreements. Harrison suggests in his article that the DPRK uses measures such as launching ballistic missiles to pressure the United States

into complying with the agreement, and to let the U.S. government know that it will not be pushed around. The North Korean Central News Agency reported recently that the government is very unhappy with the slow rate at which the light-water nuclear reactors are being built, and sees this as continued U.S. non-compliance. The report states that “The United States set about the project without sincerity from its outset... [T]he United States seeks an ulterior aim in delaying the project deliberately.”¹⁷ Such statements indicate a serious climate of distrust between the two nations. Even Dr. William Perry himself said, “We do not think of ourselves as a threat to North Korea. But I truly believe that they consider us a threat to them.”¹⁸ Russian analysts, through a publication of the Center for Non-Proliferation Studies at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, also report this North Korean distrust of the United States: “North Korean officials in private still describe the United States as ‘the only true “rogue state” in the contemporary world.’ They argue that ‘America is the sole country that totally ignores the United Nations, international laws, and the views of other states.’” The analysts continue, “North Korean diplomats say that ‘The ultimate U.S. goal is to destroy the socialist DPRK.’”¹⁹ With this North Korean fear and desperation comes a very volatile and sensitive situation.

The Perry Report, among a myriad of other publications and statements by U.S. government officials and the NGO community, has shown that the United States is equally distrustful of North Korea. The actions of the DPRK, which some experts indicate are clearly a reaction to the United States’ *inaction*, are perceived by the U.S. government as unpredictable and dangerous.

Due to this climate of distrust, there are clear costs and benefits associated with continuing the robust American military presence. The obvious benefit of this presence, according to the U.S. government, is the deterrence of the DPRK. This, I believe, is the general consensus among many interested in the situation on the Korean peninsula. Wendy Sherman, in her report to Congress, makes this point very clear: “We recognize fully that everything we and our allies do in our diplomacy requires the maintenance of strong allied deterrent posture. This is fundamental. Congress’s support of our forces in the region remains essential. The presence of 37,000 U.S. troops in South Korea and

47,000 in Japan demonstrates our commitment to stand with our allies against any threat of aggression.”²⁰

However, I suggest that, to the extent that it is threatening and alienating, this strong deterrence may be more costly than beneficial. Harrison indicates that the North Korean government will only concede on the issue of U.S. military presence in Korea for so long, that eventually there will have to be some compromise reached concerning the United States Air Force threat.²¹ Because the United States has such a strong deterrence posture, and because there is such a discrepancy between the U.S.-South Korea allied forces and the DPRK forces, the U.S. has room to use the military as a bargaining chip to reach concessions on certain issues. If the United States uses the military as a bargaining chip, as a supplement to the Agreed Framework, then it is likely that North Korea will view this action as an obvious demonstration of commitment by the United States. The hard-liners within the North Korean government will have less reason to push for the continuation of the nuclear and missile programs. It is also imperative that the United States sign a peace treaty and officially end the Cold War. This step would provide an even greater opportunity for the reduction in the size of American military presence. In addition, it would potentially make the DPRK less inclined to develop weapons and maintain such a strong deployment on the DMZ to protect itself from a U.S. threat. We must attempt to develop mutual trust, through such measures as I will outline later in this essay.

U.S. Military Presence: Implications for Regional Security

One cannot analyze the issue of U.S. military presence in Korea without considering the implications of this presence for the region. I am basing this analysis on the premise that the U.S. military presence in Korea is linked to other security situations in the region, namely those involving China-U.S. and China-Taiwan relations. While there are others who believe that there is no linkage here,²² what is plainly clear is that even North Korea understands that the United States military presence has implications for the region, as demonstrated by its change in policy toward American forces. Therefore, I believe a link-

age is evident and will have implications for the security of the region in the future.

U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS

The idea that the Korean peninsula could be used as a strategic base for U.S. forces in the region, to protect Taiwan from an attack by China and simultaneously attempt to contain China, was first mentioned to me in an interview with James Matlack of the American Friends Service Committee.²³ He suggested that the United States government considers China as an emerging military threat. There is speculation as to the possibility that China is developing more sophisticated weapons that could be used against Taiwan or even the United States. According to this line of thinking, a policy of containment is therefore necessary. Subsequently, with or without peace on the Korean peninsula, the continued strong deployment of forces there would be considered essential. This assessment of the situation was reiterated by a Specialist in the United States Army.²⁴ This Specialist, speaking on condition of anonymity, indicated that the United States military considers the Korean peninsula a “strategic stepping stone” for their forces in the region, primarily to contain China and to protect Taiwan in case of attack. Thus, according to the United States military, a presence is needed to assure the capacity of the United States to respond to a crisis in the region. If this is the case, then U.S. military presence in Korea is certainly linked to regional security.

The issue is whether the United States should develop a policy of containment or a policy of cooperation and engagement with China. I believe that a policy of containment is dangerous in the face of a changing Chinese society. In a recent talk given at the Brookings Institution, Dr. Robert Scalapino of the University of California, Berkeley, suggested that the region as a whole is witnessing a strong resurgence of nationalism, especially when it feels threatened or feels that it has not been treated as an equal.²⁵ He indicated that China in particular seeks acceptance as a strong, leading nation, a desire that accompanies a growing sense of nationalism. This trend in Chinese society could ultimately produce an explosive situation in the region.

However, there is still hope that this situation can be salvaged. At

present, there continue to be many hard-liners among the older generation in China who are still mired in a strong Marxist ideology. Scalapino suggested, however, that the information technology revolution has put distance between the generations in China. Young people are seeking full access to the Internet, and are more interested in getting good jobs than in studying Marx. They are approaching life with a pragmatic rather than ideological mind-set, a situation which suggests that it is among the young faces of China that the best hope for a more positive relationship lies.

These conditions suggest the potential for two very different paths into the future—one that could lead us to a new era of conflict and war in the 21st century, the other to a more peaceful region and cooperation among the various world powers. The first path is made more likely if the United States enacts a policy of alienating and polarizing China, and, in the event that peace is negotiated with North Korea, substituting China for the DPRK as the regional “bad guy.” Reacting to a U.S. stance of containment in the region, the young Chinese, not to mention the older generation, may be attracted to the nationalistic rhetoric that could develop into severe anti-American sentiment and resentment to the perceived disrespect of their country. There would be a serious discrepancy between U.S. economic policy and security/military policy. Nevertheless, there is still hope that within China, the “democratization of information,”²⁶ a characteristic of globalization, may lead to an attraction to more democratic ideals and a demand that the Chinese adhere to these ideals.

The idea that democratization of information, cooperation and multilateralism breed trust is reiterated by Admiral Dennis C. Blair of the United States Navy, the Commander in Chief of the U.S. Pacific Command. In a speech presented to the Senior Policy Seminar held at the East-West Center in Honolulu on August 8, 2000, he made clear what he believes is needed to bring security to the Asian region: “Genuine security within the region will come only when nations share dependable expectations of peaceful change and act in concert to address common challenges.” His next phrase helps to support the idea that the “democratization of information” and globalization may well be key for East Asian security: “I believe that the path to security in the region

ultimately will be through the effects of the information age—loosening state control of data and opinions—through financial and economic interactions with their prerequisite long-term security, and through diplomacy and cooperation in nonmilitary areas: law enforcement and environmental cooperation.”²⁷ Blair’s comments highlight the view that this is an historic opportunity to promote open engagement and dialogue with China in order to solve the contentious issues between the two countries.

Unfortunately, however, the United States government seems poised to proceed with the development of complicated weapons systems in the region. Intensifying an atmosphere of distrust and fear by building weapons systems such as National Missile Defense and Theater Missile Defense, otherwise known as Star Wars, would be a very dangerous decision for the United States to make. Many, however, would argue that a Star Wars system is a very important defense shield which is needed to protect against “rogue nations ” as well as against China, and which would be beneficial to our security interests as well as to those of our allies.

The issue of Star Wars is very complicated, and while I cannot deal with it in all its complexity here, let me suggest the reasons behind my belief that the implementation of these systems is more costly than beneficial: It will not only intensify the atmosphere of distrust, but also be seen as a sign of disrespect and alienation to the people of China, not to mention the possibility of it sparking a regional arms race. The chance for engaging in multilateral talks with China in order to deal with mutually sensitive issues will be lost. The situation is already deteriorating, as evidenced by *The Washington Post’s* recent report that China now views the U.S. as a threat. John Pomfret reported that Shen Dingli, an arms control expert at Fudan University in Shanghai, said, “China’s public view of the United States has changed quite seriously since 1998. The U.S. has been painted as a threat to Asian-Pacific security. We’ve never said it so bluntly before. . . . I think China is more clearly preparing for a major clash with the United States.”²⁸ In addition, reports show that China and Russia are discussing the U.S. proposal for Star Wars systems, and coordinating their reactions and possibly their policies to this likely security development.²⁹ North Korea is still allied with

these nations—perhaps not as strongly as before, but they still have diplomatic ties.

For all these reasons, a strong containment policy by the United States, which would include the continued deployment of American forces in South Korea to “maintain regional stability” and to ensure the containment of China, in conjunction with the development of Star Wars, could very possibly lead to the polarization of the region, an increase in tensions, and, ultimately, a serious state of instability that could lead to future war.

Social and Environmental Dynamics of U. S. Military Presence

The issue of American forces in Korea must also be analyzed from an expanded security perspective. The situation on the Korean peninsula must be analyzed in terms not only of military security from a North Korean attack, but also of the social and environmental security of the South Korean people. Moreover, I believe that the United States cannot afford to operate in a narrow “national interests” and “national security” framework, ignoring the importance of “small details” such as the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with South Korea, which deals with the laws and regulations between the host country and the United States concerning the U.S. military, and the behavior of United States soldiers. The United States has been in a dominant position in South Korea for so long that the inequitable relationship between the two countries has been taken for granted, and the protests of its people ignored. There are social and environmental impacts associated with U.S. military presence in South Korea that must be taken into account when assessing the security of the South Korean people, and ultimately the costs and benefits of this presence.

SOCIAL IMPACT

I was first alerted to the social impact of American forces in South Korea, and became interested in the topic of this essay, when a Korean civil society delegation, representing two prominent South Korean non-governmental organizations, came to Washington DC and held a public briefing on Tuesday, September 26, 2000. This delegation gave testi-

many of several instances of abuses inflicted upon the Korean people due to activities at U.S. military bases. This testimony is a furthering of initial attempts to alert the United States government to the irresponsible practices of American forces in Korea and elsewhere. The main reason for this delegation's trip to Washington was to pressure the U.S. government into negotiating a more just and fair Status of Forces Agreement with South Korea, which was up for renegotiation in the last months of the year 2000. Prior to that tour, several Korean representatives of the same delegation participated in The International Grassroots Summit on Military Base Cleanup, held at Trinity College in Washington DC in October 1999. In the Conference report, which was prepared by the Institute for Policy Studies, there are several examples given of the detrimental social impact of American forces. One of the most severe instances is that of Mehyang Ri in Hwasong Kun, Kyonggi Province, a township that is bordered by a U.S. Air Force base. This Air Force base is the site of explosives practice, where every Monday through Friday an average of 600-700 trips are made by aircraft practicing gunfire or explosive drops. According to the report, these practices have resulted in great land, water, and noise pollution. Dongshim Kim, author of this section of the report on Korea, suggests: "In conditions which resemble the full onslaught of warfare, the psychological discomfort of great uneasiness and insecurity as well as fatigue, digestion problems and the respiratory problems of the townsfolk must also be considered."³⁰

In addition, the leader of the delegation from Korea, a well-known Catholic priest, Father Mun Jeonghyeon, relayed to those present accounts of the then-recent protests that had been occurring in the summer of 2000 as a reaction to the presence of American forces. One such protest was held at a firing range of the United States Air Force. A group of students and young people forced their way through a South Korean police line onto the actual firing range. A video of this protest shown to us pictured a young man carrying a Korean flag on his shoulders and running onto the firing range while United States air fighters continued to fly overhead and proceeded with the dropping of explosives and gun fire—without stopping even when they were notified that a person was on the field. To say the least, this was a disturbing event to watch, but

one which helped convey how strongly some Koreans feel about the effects of the United States military presence on their country, and just how insensitive the United States military can be to the protests of Koreans.

The situation at Meyang Ri is not isolated, and is accompanied by other stories of similar circumstances surrounding military installations in Korea. But these instances do not affect *all* Koreans, as would an attack by North Korea, so these protests may seem to be less important than maintaining a strong military presence on the peninsula. I maintain, however, that the security of the Korean people from human rights violations and abuses perpetrated by the U.S. military, however indirect, must be an element considered in the discussion of American forces in Korea.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The issue of most concern to South Koreans at this moment, in terms of American forces, is the environment, according to South Korean journalist Chi Yoel Kim.³¹ Environmental pollution and degradation as a consequence of U.S. military actions has been the focus of many concerned citizens. One such incident of environmental degradation, cited by Dongshim Kim in the Conference report, is that of the illegal waste burial within the compounds of the 2nd Corps Base in Tongdu Chon, Kyonggi Province. Kim reports that, "From 1996 to 1997 bulldozers, fork lifts, and dump trucks were employed under the supervision of the Facilities Engineering Corps to effectively bury the waste which included asphalt, tar and concrete, but also asbestos."³² Another incident as reported by Dongshim Kim is the Madison Communications Corps oil spillage at Pekun Mountain, Uiwang City, Kyonggi Province. This oil spill affected over 600 people living in the Pekun Mountain area, contaminating the community's water supply. At a public briefing at the Institute for Policy Studies, Father Mun also spoke of an incident in which a toxic substance was illegally poured down a drain as a manner of disposal. This drain empties into a major Korean river from which a large population draws its domestic supply of water. There is an outcry in Korean society for the United States government to accept full responsibility and to provide full compensation for, and to clean up after, these actions.

In light of this expanded security perspective and the consequences of such incidents, it is clear that the costs of a continued large U.S. presence outweigh the benefits. Although it can be argued that American forces maintain a sense of safety among the population, a recent Korean newspaper poll shows that the other issues mentioned are becoming more important to Koreans, and the result is a public perception that a shift in United States military posture in Korea is needed. An October, 2000 article in *The New York Times* stated that a recent poll in a South Korean newspaper showed that 67.3 percent of Koreans already favored a gradual withdrawal of United States troops, while 10.7 percent wished them to leave immediately.³³ South Koreans are evidently not as worried about a North Korean attack as in the past and are now turning to other issues that are contentious within their society, mainly that of environmental degradation. However, South Koreans are so accustomed to the U.S. military presence that a withdrawal of troops would cause an intense reaction among the people. Chi Yoel Kim mentioned that he does not know exactly what type of reaction South Koreans would have to the withdrawal of American troops, just that there would be a strong reaction.

The United States Army Specialist whom I interviewed indicated to me that his Special Forces team had been alerted in the summer of 2000 to ten or so possible "situations" involving riots erupting in protest over the U.S. military presence. A *Global Beat* report by Richard Halloran indicates that there is a rise in anti-American sentiment. Halloran reports that military officers indicated that the United States must respond to protests against the presence of U.S. forces in Japan and Korea, protests which have resulted in a searching review of the American strategy of stationing ground forces in these two countries. Such an awareness is an encouraging step, which, despite other demonstrations of insensitivity to Korean perceptions and concerns, shows that the Department of Defense is not ignoring trends in attitude among host countries. However, as I pointed out earlier, the present U.S. policy, as outlined by Wendy Sherman of the State Department, would not allow for too dramatic a shift in deployment of these forces. Halloran also alluded to a warning published in October 2000 by the National Intelligence Council in Washington, which concluded, "An

unmoving U.S. stance on military bases and related issues would risk nationalistic backlash in Japan and perhaps South Korea.”³⁴ This acknowledgment, along with the video of protests shown by the Korean delegation, points out that anti-American sentiment, particularly in regard to U.S. troops, is a growing trend, one that is related to the surge in Korean nationalism. Therefore, a continued “unmoving stance” concerning the bases and the renegotiation of the SOFA would be costly in that the prevailing attitude towards the United States in host countries would be negative. Increasing anti-American sentiment could cause conflict between the people and the government of the host countries, since the government is legally bound to abide by the SOFA. The result could be unnecessary disruption within a host society, particularly in Korea and Japan. This analysis indicates that, due to the impact on Korean society in this changing security context, it is more costly than beneficial to maintain a robust U.S. presence without a shift or reduction in deployment.

Complications of the Issue: Political Atmosphere in the U.S.

As if the issue were not complicated enough, it is made even more complex by the political situation in the United States. There have been disagreements within the government in the last few years as to how the United States should be dealing with the issue of American forces in Korea, and more broadly, of East Asian regional security. In the keynote speech at the 2000 National Association of Korean Americans Conference, James Matlack postulated the reasons for this struggle within the government. He suggests that the U.S. stance—particularly that in Congress—is to dominate rather than adopt multilateral approaches in dealing with security issues. Dr. Matlack defines this attitude as “parochialism and triumphalism wrapped up together” to create a “fortress America mindset.” In terms of allocating resources for international operations, those involving both multilateral engagement and the military, Dr. Matlack mentions a phrase attributed to Sandy Berger, National Security Advisor to President Clinton: “[B]illions for defense, [a] penny for prevention.”³⁵

With the election of George W. Bush as President, this situation

does not look favorable in terms of multilateral cooperation and engagement. In the presidential debates and throughout the campaign, Bush seemed to indicate that he supports a Star Wars initiative and a more isolationist and unilateralist approach to foreign policy. Despite this predisposition, Richard Halloran suggests that, due to the “debacle in Florida,” Bush “will be scared, will lack a mandate, and will be so consumed with domestic politics and trying to get a handle on the government that he will have little time to think about Korea or China-Taiwan.”³⁶ This situation does not bode well for the future of this sensitive situation, as the issue of East Asian regional security demands a focused and engaged leadership on the part of the United States.

Confidence Building Measures Versus Military Intimidation

Confidence-building measures build trust between countries. . . . Through openness about security matters, nations gain insights into each other’s strategic intentions, reducing pressure to engage in arms competition and chances for miscalculation.

—Secretary of Defense William J. Perry

Throughout my analysis I have attempted to demonstrate that the United States military should not be used as the only measure of deterrence, nor as the only measure in negotiating the security and peace of the region. In the event that the U.S. military leaves the Korean peninsula, the fear of a power vacuum as has been expressed by North and South Korea as well as by people in other nations,³⁷ is all the more reason to promote confidence-building measures and multilateral dialogue among these nations. Open dialogue and engagement is needed to counter any miscalculation and misinformation that could cause an increase in tensions.

South Korea has set the precedent for engagement by proposing direct, bilateral confidence-building measures such as a military “hotline” with the DPRK that will allow a clear line of communication between the two governments on military issues and concerns, as well as the exchange of military observers. The purpose of this “hotline” is to

counter any misinformation between the two militaries that could lead to miscalculations and possible conflict. In addition, a cross-border railway reconnecting the two countries has also been proposed.³⁸ These measures show that South Korea is ready to make concrete steps toward establishing trust between the two nations, rather than opt for pure military intimidation. However, it is not clear how North Korea is responding to these propositions. Despite these uncertainties, the United States should follow South Korea's lead, because, in the past, military intimidation and non-commitment by the United States have proven only to increase tensions and to push North Korea into unfavorable actions.

The United States should also focus more attention on the regional confidence-building measures (CBMs) that have been enacted in the East Asian region within the past decade. There are two tracks to this confidence-building project that have been proposed. Track I, officially recognized by the United States, is called the Official Regional Security Cooperation Fora. This track is, essentially, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF). The ARF, according to the Henry L. Stimson Center in Washington DC, is "a multilateral forum for dialogue on regional security issues,"³⁹ which consists of official meetings among ARF government officials. Track II is not officially recognized by the United States, and would be the next step to more effective cooperation in the region. Track II is a compilation of non-government organizations and international institutions working on CBMs in the Asia-Pacific region, such as the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific and the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue.

Dr. Harrison suggests in his article in the *World Policy Journal* that the North Korean government would be more cooperative and, in the future, more likely to accept a continued yet reduced U.S. military presence if it perceives a shift on the part of the U.S. to a new role as "honest broker." This new role would entail an attempt to "deter aggression by either side against the other." Two steps involved in this honest broker role would be to sign a peace treaty and to create a "Mutual Security Commission."⁴⁰ This Commission would be made up of generals from the United States, North Korea and South Korea, and would create a multilateral dialogue that would help to establish a relationship of mutual trust.

In addition, confidence-building measures are relatively low cost when compared with military expenditures associated with ensuring regional security. The annual United States military budget expenditure for Korea in 1997 was \$1,834,917,000.⁴¹ Since the entire military budget has increased in the last three years, the budget for Korea has likely increased as well. That increase does not account for the cost of the development of Star Wars systems, which are astronomically expensive. Comparatively, confidence-building measures and displays of respect are much less costly, and will help promote a more pervasive atmosphere of trust and cooperation.

Conclusions

Throughout my analysis, I have suggested that the continuation of the United States military presence at its present size and deployment is more costly than beneficial, and is ultimately destabilizing for the region. Based on the developments in relations on the Korean peninsula, and on active international engagement by the North, the window of opportunity is open to make a change in the United States military posture in Korea. However, there continues to be a pervasive climate of distrust between the United States and North Korea that makes negotiations difficult to conduct and commitments difficult to uphold. Part of this climate of distrust stems from a strong U.S. stance of deterrence, which, I believe, is threatening and serves as an impetus for the continuation of DPRK military programs and forward deployed military posture on the DMZ. It is not only possible, but would be beneficial, to use the U.S. military presence in Korea as a bargaining tool to elicit concessions from the DPRK concerning its nuclear and missile programs. This advance is achievable due to the United States' stance of strong deterrence and the military power of the South Koreans, and could serve as the catalyst for promoting trust and easing tensions. The Agreed Framework can be supplemented and made stronger by this use of American forces in bargaining. I believe that, in backing away from an offensive military posture, the United States may be able to diffuse this atmosphere of distrust and create a new climate in which the two sides are not constantly suspicious of each other's intentions. In addition, by complying with the Agreed Framework and completing the

construction of the light-water nuclear reactors, the United States can show that it is willing to negotiate in a fair manner and move toward peace. No matter what other steps are taken, however, it is imperative that a peace treaty be signed by the two countries.

A continued offensive military posture ensures a dangerous situation for the future not only in Korea, but in China as well. With a surge in nationalism in the region, and with China's desire to establish itself as a powerful nation in the international community, a containment policy that includes deployment of troops in Korea could be polarizing for the region. A polarized East Asia, each side led by an alliance of the great powers of the world, coupled with an arms race sparked by the construction of Star Wars systems, could lead to a very volatile situation in which all would pay a high cost.

If we agree that the costs of a continued robust U.S. military presence outweigh the benefits, it becomes clear that the enactment of other measures to ensure cooperation, trust and security is absolutely essential. In terms of the social and environmental dynamic of security, the SOFA must be renegotiated to be more equitable, and the United States must take responsibility for environmental and social damage caused by its armed forces. If these measures are not enacted, then we will continue to witness a rise in anti-American sentiment in South Korea, among other nations, which includes protests and disruption in society, possibly pitting the public against the government.

I do recognize the fear among regional players that the removal of U.S. forces in Korea would cause a regional struggle for hegemony and power, a struggle that has cultural roots. That is why I advocate the limited use of U.S. forces in Korea as a bargaining chip. The U.S. should not remove all forces now, but gradually over the next decade. These forces would be supplemented and eventually substituted by the multilateral confidence-building measures and forums already in existence, as well as the development of new measures as the situation progresses. However, the confidence building measures that I have outlined in this essay are relatively new and their effectiveness has yet to be determined. But it is imperative that the countries of this region persevere in an open regional security dialogue that promotes peaceful cooperation, rather than solving security crises through military means.

The role of the United States as a dominant power in the world is changing, and the U.S. government must adapt. Multilateral cooperation and dialogue rather than a focus on military defense initiatives is needed to confront the security challenges of the 21st Century. Strong leadership is essential; however, this strong leadership must be characterized by an emphasis on “benevolent U.S. hegemony.” This stance is imperative in dealing with the security situation in the East Asian region—if we continue to focus on defense initiatives and military solutions to regional problems, we may end up paying the ultimate cost and engaging in another war among the world’s major powers.

Notes

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- ² “The Kampala Document,” *Africa: Rise to Challenge*. Obasanjo and Mosha, Eds. in Soloman Gomes, “The OAU, State Sovereignty, and Regional Security,” *Africa In the New International Order: Rethinking State Sovereignty and Regional Security* (1998). Edmond Keller and Donald Rothchild, Eds.
- ³ Gershman, John. “Still the Pacific Century?,” *Global Focus*. Eds. Martha Honey and Tom Barry, St. Martin’s Press, 2000: 295
- ⁴ Jong-II, Kim. *The Future of the US-Republic of Korea Military Relations*, St. Martin’s Press, 1996: xiii.
- ⁵ “Not yet at ease,” *The Economist*. 14 October 2000.
- ⁶ Sherman, Wendy. Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington DC, 21 March 2000.
- ⁷ Harrison, Selig S. “The Missiles of North Korea”. *World Policy Journal*, Fall 2000: 17-18.
- ⁸ *Ibid.* 3
- ⁹ “Australian Minister Hopes for Korean Reunification: Report,” *Agence France Presse*, 15 November 2000. *NAPSNet Daily Report*. The Nautilus Institute.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.* 3
- ¹¹ Struck, Doug. “South Korea Says North Wants U.S. Troops to Stay.” *The New York Times*. 30 August 2000: A1, A19.
- ¹² On October 24th, 2000, I was able to attend the annual meeting of the National Association of Korean Americans, which hosted an afternoon panel of Korean experts titled “U.S. Policy Toward Korea: Changes and Challenges”. The experts included Selig Harrison, who has been intimately involved with many of the negotiations in the past few years and has met with many of the same North Korean leaders as U.S. Secretary of Defense Dr. William J. Perry.
- ¹³ Perry, William J. PhD. “Review of United States Policy Toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations”. United States Department of State, October 12, 1999.

- ¹⁴ Lea, Jim. "British report: N. Korea sending missiles to Libya". 26 September 2000.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. 5 [my emphasis added]
- ¹⁶ Feffer, John. "North Korea Reaches Out", *Foreign Policy in Focus*, Institute for Policy Studies, Vol. 5, No. 18, July 2000.
- ¹⁷ "U.S. urged to fulfill its commitments in good faith," *Korean Central News Agency of DPRK*. 26 November 2000.
- ¹⁸ Interviewed on "The News Hour," Public Broadcasting System, September 17, 1999.
- ¹⁹ "The DPRK Report," Center for Non-Proliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies. No. 25 (July-August 2000).
- ²⁰ Ibid. 5
- ²¹ Harrison, Selig. Comments given during 6th Annual Conference of the National Association of Korean Americans, held 24 October 2000 at United States Senate Building, Washington DC.
- ²² E.g., Richard Halloran, Adjunct Senior Fellow in the Asia Program of the Center for War, Peace, and the News Media, and former foreign correspondent in Asia and on military issues for the *New York Times*. Interviewed via e-mail correspondence, November 18, 2000.
- ²³ Interview conducted on November 16, 2000 at the American Friends Service Committee Office in Washington DC.
- ²⁴ Specialist, United States Army Special Forces, stationed in South Korea for two years: returned to the United States, September 2000. Interviewed December 3, 2000.
- ²⁵ "Current Trends in East Asian Opportunities & Challenges," *Asian Voices Promoting Dialogue Between the U.S. and Asia Series*, Sasakawa Peace Foundation-USA. Held at The Brookings Institution, 15 November 2000.
- ²⁶ This is a term coined from Thomas Friedman's recent book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999).
- ²⁷ Blair, Dennis C., Admiral USN. "The Role of the Armed Forces in Regional Security Cooperation", *PacNet Newsletter #34*, Center for Strategic and International Studies. 25 August 2000. www.csis.org/pacfor/pac0034.html.
- ²⁸ Pomfret, John. "U.S. Now a 'Threat' in China's Eyes," *The Washington Post*, 15 November 2000: A1. *NAPSNet Daily Report*. The Nautilus Institute.
- ²⁹ "Russia, China Discuss U.S. Anti-Ballistic Missile Plans," ITAR-TASS News Agency, Beijing, 15 November 2000. *NAPSNet Daily Report*. The Nautilus Institute.
- ³⁰ Kim, Dongshim. "South Korea", *The International Grassroots Summit on Military Base Cleanup*, Institute for Policy Studies, April 2000: I 20.
- ³¹ Chi Yoel Kim, Journalist for *The Honam Shinmun*, a newspaper based in Kwangju, Korea. Interviewed on November 22, 2000 at the Institute for Policy Studies. The State Department indicates that he is a journalist specializing in international affairs, widely respected by his Korean colleagues.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ French, Howard W. "If Koreans Unite, Will Asia Divide?" *The New York Times*, A 18. 15 October 2000.
- ³⁴ Halloran, Richard. "U.S. Reconsiders Ground Forces in Korea, Japan," *Global Beat Issue Brief No. 62*. 8 October 2000.

- ³⁵ 6th Annual Conference of the National Association of Korean Americans, held October 24, 2000, United States Senate Building, Washington DC.
- ³⁶ Richard Halloran was interviewed via e-mail correspondence, November 18, 2000.
- ³⁷ Ibid. 35
- ³⁸ "The Koreas start a slow march, not yet in lockstep," *The Economist*, 28 September 2000.
- ³⁹ "Track I: Official Regional Security Cooperation Fora," *Confidence Building Measures Project*, The Henry L. Stimson Center.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid. 7
- ⁴¹ *Atlas/Data Abstract for the United States and Selected Areas: Fiscal Year 1997*, United States Department of Defense.



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INTERVIEWS

Dr. James Matlack, American Friends Service Committee, Washington Office, Director. Interviewed November 16, 2000. This interview provided me with a progressive non-governmental organization viewpoint.

Specialist in the United States Army, stationed in South Korea for two years. Returned to the United States in September 2000. Interviewed December 2, 2000. This interview provided me with a military viewpoint.

Richard Halloran, Adjunct Senior Fellow in the Asia program of the Center for War, Peace, and the News Media, former foreign correspondent in Asia and military correspondent in Washington DC for *The New York Times*. Interviewed by e-mail correspondence on November 18, 2000.

Chi Yoel Kim, Journalist for *The Honam Shinmun*, a newspaper based in Kwangju, Korea. Interviewed on November 22, 2000 at the

Institute for Policy Studies (IPS). I was able to ask Chi Yoel Kim several questions following an interview between Kim and Erik Leaver of IPS. I have used responses by the participants from both interviews in this paper. The State Department indicates that Kim is a journalist specializing in international affairs, widely respected by his Korean colleagues.