

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

CHANGING DYNAMICS IN NORTHEAST ASIA:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S. ARMY

by

Lieutenant Colonel Scott W. Levin  
United States Army

Colonel (RET) Donald W. Boose Jr.,  
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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## ABSTRACT

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For over a half century, the United States Army has provided a credible deterrent against communist aggression while being positioned near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in the Republic of Korea (ROK). Its aim has been to clearly demonstrate United States' commitment and resolve against another North Korean invasion, thereby enabling the defense of the ROK and providing stability throughout the Northeast Asia Region. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic "marketization" of China have left North Korea with less financial backing, while China and Russia established diplomatic relations with Seoul. These factors have changed the overall dynamic on the Korean Peninsula. This new dynamic on the Korean Peninsula provides U.S. strategists with an opportunity to reassess the current U.S. Army posture in Korea. This study examines the current posture of the U.S. Army combat forces in Korea as a permanent base force in light of modernizing this force structure while taking advantage of the new dynamics in the region and Army transformation to effectively reduce the number of troops on the ground. A smaller more agile force would provide the U.S. Army greater regional flexibility, enhance its effectiveness by modernizing its structure, and remain viable as the operational reserve for the ROK-U.S. alliance for years to come.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT..... iii

CHANGING DYNAMICS IN NORTHEAST ASIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S. ARMY ..... 1

**U.S. ARMY TROOP REDUCTIONS IN KOREA AND ALLIANCE CHANGES SINCE THE  
    ARMISTICE..... 1**

**U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS AND SECURITY FOR NORTHEAST ASIA.....3**

**THE NORTHEAST ASIA SECURITY ENVIRONMENT - THE CURRENT SITUATION .....5**

**CHANGES WITHIN THE ROK AFFECTING U.S. FORCES .....6**

**STRATEGIC OUTLOOK; MOVING FORWARD IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY.....7**

**RECOMMENDATIONS.....11**

**CONCLUSION .....13**

ENDNOTES ..... 15

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 17



## CHANGING DYNAMICS IN NORTHEAST ASIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S. ARMY

For over a half century, the United States Army has provided a credible deterrent against communist aggression while being positioned near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in the Republic of Korea (ROK). Its aim has been to clearly demonstrate United States' commitment and resolve against another North Korean invasion, thereby enabling the defense of the ROK and providing stability throughout the Northeast Asia Region. For the last fifty years, the region has been in a period of overall stability. Further, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic "marketization" of China have left North Korea with less financial backing, while Russia and China continue to maintain friendly and supportive relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Both Russia and China have established diplomatic relations with Seoul and have much stronger ties with South Korea than the North. These factors, coupled with a near collapse of the North Korean economy due to catastrophic famine in the 1990s in contrast with the tremendous growth of the ROK's economic development, have changed the overall dynamic on the Korean Peninsula. In broad perspective, this new dynamic on the Korean Peninsula provides U.S. strategists with an opportunity to evaluate the current deterrent value of the U.S. Army in Korea.

U.S. Forces in Korea recently conducted such a review and is implementing a plan to cut the U.S. Army combat forces while repositioning the remaining forces in consolidated "hub" installations south of the DMZ. However, given the modernization of the ROK Army and its Air Force and the enhanced capabilities of the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Army still has a deterrent value as has previous been envisioned in the period since the Armistice. This study examines the value of stationing U.S. Army combat maneuver forces in Korea as a base force in order to deter North Korean aggression in light of U.S. national interests and strategy, the Northeast Asia security environment, and changes in South Korea, including the rise of anti-Americanism in the "new" ROK generation and improvements in the ROK Army.

### **U.S. ARMY TROOP REDUCTIONS IN KOREA AND ALLIANCE CHANGES SINCE THE ARMISTICE**

As one assesses the future for Northeast Asia one can glean from the past the effect of possible future U.S. Army troop reductions on regional stability in general, and specifically on deterrence on the Korean peninsula.

Since the 1953 Armistice Agreement brought an end to combat operations on the Korean Peninsula, the United States has gradually reduced the size of the U.S. Army presence from approximately 300,000 Soldiers to approximately 27,000 today without any negative impact to

deterrence. Each troop reduction was possible due to other factors that provided the necessary deterrent leverage, such as enhanced ROK Army capabilities. Moreover, the ROK-U.S. alliance has remained strong and the ROK has thrived politically and economically throughout the years, even as the United States adjusted its force strength.

In 1953, the U.S. troop strength was 302,383 and as the Armistice took hold, the U.S. Army downsized its strength to about 50,000.<sup>1</sup> By 1955, U.S. Army had reduced its forces to a single corps of two divisions, or roughly 30,000 troops.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1970s, President Nixon reduced the U.S. Army further by withdrawing one of the two divisions in Korea in accordance with the Nixon Doctrine, which encouraged the ROK to take a larger role in its own defense.<sup>3</sup> By 1979, after President Carter's unsuccessful attempt to withdraw all U.S. ground forces from the ROK, the Army's strength leveled off at 38,000.<sup>4</sup> The 1989 Defense Authorization Bill (The Nunn-Warner Amendment) directed the Army to reduce its strength in the ROK in three phases by approximately 7,000 Soldiers in total. After the Army reduced its forces by 2000 Soldiers in its initial phase, further withdrawals were halted in light of the 1994 DPRK nuclear program crisis.<sup>5</sup> In 2004, the Department of Defense directed the 2d Infantry Division's 2d Brigade Combat Team to deploy to Iraq. It is expected that once their rotation to Iraq is complete they will redeploy back to the Continental United States and not rejoin the 2d Infantry Division in South Korea, thus bringing U.S. Army troop strength down to about 27,000.

One may conclude that the most dramatic reduction occurred in the early 1970s under the Nixon Doctrine. That reduction also signaled a change of mission for the U.S. Army, which was less responsible for the actual defense of Korea and more of a supporting role. By 2000, within the framework of the ROK-U.S. alliance and within the Combined Forces Command (CFC), the ROK Army had accepted primary responsibility for the execution of the defense plan while the U.S. Army combat forces (primarily the 2d Infantry Division) was in a reserve role. The United States continued to lead the CFC with a four-star commanding general who provided leadership and enabled warfighting synchronization within the ROK-U.S. alliance. Understanding the United States role, one can simply compare the relative troop strengths between ROK Army forces and U.S. Army forces:

The [ROK] Army consists of the Army Headquarters, the three Army commands, the Aviation Command, and the Special Warfare Command. The Army possesses component units including 11 corps, 49 divisions, and 19 brigades, some 560,000 troops, some 2,360 tanks, 5,180 pieces of field artillery, and 2,400 armored vehicles.<sup>6</sup> As of 29 March 2000, there were 35,584 U.S. troops assigned to the ROK: Army (26,782), Air Force (8,305), Navy (407) and Marines (90).<sup>7</sup>

Although the ROK Army completely overshadows the U.S. Army in strength (forty nine ROK divisions to one U.S. division), the power of the deterrence on the peninsula rests with a strong ROK-U.S. alliance.

The role of CFC during the armistice is to deter war. CFC's wartime role is to defeat external aggression. Its mission statement is: "Deter hostile acts of external aggression against the Republic of Korea by a combined military effort of the United States of America and the ROK; and in the event deterrence fails, defeat an external armed attack against the ROK." The CFC is commanded by a U.S. general officer who reports to the National Command Authorities of both countries. CFC's military power resides collectively in the ROK Armed Forces, U.S. Forces in Korea, and U.S. augmentation from the Pacific and the United States. The security cooperation between the U.S. and the ROK is extensive. Some of its key elements are combined defense planning, intelligence integration and sharing, a sophisticated logistical interface, educational exchanges, and defense industry cooperation.<sup>8</sup>

This framework has endured the test of time and perhaps is the paradigm for all bi-lateral alliances. Because of CFC, all the powers in the region understand the U.S. resolve and commitment to regional stability.

### **U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS AND SECURITY FOR NORTHEAST ASIA**

U.S. national interests in the Asia-Pacific region and Korea are reflected in the National Security Strategy.<sup>9</sup> They may be paraphrased as (1) a stable, peaceful region with free and open societies; (2) a prosperous region based on free markets and free trade; (3) a region that poses no military threat to the United States; and (4) a US-ROK alliance that is vigilant toward the North while contributing to the broader stability of the region over the long term.

There is little doubt that the importance of Northeast Asia to the United States will continue for the foreseeable future. In the words of one analyst, "In the next half century Northeast Asia will undergo a profound transformation. Yet, enduring continuities will remain that will continue to fundamentally influence the emerging security order. ... Northeast Asia will remain a vital area of interest for the US. ... Suffice it to say that transformations affecting China, Korea and Japan may very well make it even more vital in fifty years than today."<sup>10</sup> Add the post Cold War "Russian Factor" with their engaging policy of greater integration into the world economy by creating significant economic relationships in Northeast Asia,<sup>11</sup> and one can see new dynamics of political, economic, and social interplay for years to come. The United States will have to maintain a strong national strategy of engagement which includes military presence to ensure regional stability, peaceful co-existence, and economic opportunity and prosperity flourish for all the regional countries and for the United States as well.

The overarching theme of the current National Security Strategy for the United States, dated September 2002, may be highlighted as:

In keeping with our heritage and principles, we do not use our strength to press for unilateral advantage. We seek instead to create a balance of power that favors human freedom: conditions in which all nations and all societies can choose for themselves the rewards and challenges of political and economic liberty. In a world that is safe, people will be able to make their lives better. We will defend the peace by fighting terrorist and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations among the great powers. We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.<sup>12</sup>

One of the key objectives of the National Security Strategy is to “Promote a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region.” Other objectives that support U.S. national interests:

- Champion aspirations for human dignity
- Strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against us and our friends
- Work with others to defuse conflicts
- Prevent our enemies from threatening us, our allies, and our friends with weapons of mass destruction
- Ignite a new era of global economic growth [through free markets and free trade]
- Expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy
- Develop agendas for cooperative action with the other main centers of global power; To enhance Asian alliances and friendships, [the United States] will:
  - Look to Japan to continue forging a leading role in regional and global affairs based on our common interests ...
  - Work with [the Republic of Korea] to maintain vigilance towards the North [Korea] while preparing our alliance to make contributions to the broader stability of the region over the longer term ...
- Transform America’s national security institutions to meet the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century<sup>13</sup>

This National Security Strategy reflects refined thinking of transformation and a regional approach by emphasizing partnerships, expanding economies, and supporting democracies.

## **THE NORTHEAST ASIA SECURITY ENVIRONMENT - THE CURRENT SITUATION**

General Leon LaPorte, Commander of U.S. Forces Korea, in recent testimony to members of Congress, described the region's environment this way;

Northeast Asia is a nexus of economic might, competing interests, converging threats, cultures, and historical animosities. Over 17 percent of the world's trade value is with countries in Northeast Asia ... Many of the nations in the region – China, Japan, Russia, and the Republic of Korea – are contending for economic and political influence. Enduring cultural and historical animosities remain a dynamic political force. This region marks the convergence of five of the world's six largest militaries, and three of the five declared nuclear powers. North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and proliferation of missile technology threatens regional and global stability.<sup>14</sup>

While North Korea represents the dominant military threat to regional stability, it has been held in balance by a number of factors. These include a strong Republic of Korea and U.S. alliance that has brought a high degree of deterrence with a U.S. military force of over 37,000,<sup>15</sup> the termination of the Cold War that has left the North without a true "alliance" of its own to underwrite its economy, China and Russia's current focus on expanding their market economies, Republic of Korea initiatives to develop cultural exchanges and trade, and the current Six Party Talks.<sup>16</sup> The Six Party Talks symbolically demonstrate to North Korea regional resolve with the major regional powers working with the North in a "framework" of multinational dialogue. All of these factors have served to maintain deterrence against North Korean aggression and have left the North's regime isolated in creating partnerships of war.

Additionally, the rise of the Republic of Korea economy, coupled with the maturity of the Chinese market-based economy, Russia's strategic interest in economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region (a real change from the Euro-centric mindset of the former Soviet Union policies),<sup>17</sup> and Japan's further regional economic growth, provide an economic power dynamic that enhances stability in this region. Together, these factors act as a jelling force, producing significant economic interplay of trade and engagement, which advances trust and confidence among China, Russia, Republic of Korea and Japan.

However, the North Korean military alone still poses a major threat to the stability of the region and remains a force that must be countered. The overall U.S. Forces Korea assessment is that:

North Korea poses a dangerous and complex threat to peace and security on the peninsula and throughout out the region. Their growing missile and weapons of mass destruction programs, including a re-vitalized nuclear weapons program, constitute a substantial threat to the world. Moreover, they have shown willingness to sell anything to anybody for hard currency. They will continue to support the military at the expense of the general population and extort aid to

prop up their failing economy. We [U.S. Forces Korea] see no indications that the Kim Regime will change the policies of military first, brinkmanship, and missile proliferation throughout the world.<sup>18</sup>

#### **CHANGES WITHIN THE ROK AFFECTING U.S. FORCES**

While on tour in Asia in June 2004 and speaking on the current situation in the ROK, Donald Rumsfeld, U.S. Secretary of Defense, noted:

We will not weaken the deterrent or the defense capabilities that we have, even though numbers [of Soldiers] and locations [where units are assigned] may shift and evolve as technologies advance and as circumstances change. We have been for a long time in, in effect, where we were when the Cold War ended. And it's time to adjust those locations from static defense through a more agile and more capable and a more 21<sup>st</sup> century posture.<sup>19</sup>

The U.S. commitment to regional stability through a strong deterrent posture in the ROK remains clear and unwavering. However, one cannot ignore the evolving 21<sup>st</sup> century environment that requires U.S. Army structure and capabilities changes to take full advantage of new technologies in weapons, communications, and intelligence programs that provide the Army with greater capability and strength with less actual force structure.

There are other factors that must also be considered. These relate to the social environment in the ROK and improvements in ROK forces. Since the end of the Korean War more than fifty years ago, the memory of the war's devastating effect and the heroic efforts of the United Nations Command to reestablish freedom to the ROK has waned in the minds of the younger generation of South Koreans. Additionally, the country and the entire region have flourished both economically and politically under the ROK-U.S. security blanket. ROK citizens today enjoy greater freedom than any of their predecessors. It is this evolving environment that is shaping the new thinking of the younger generation.

There have been a number of polls recently conducted that sampled overall attitudes of the younger generation. In January 2004, a South Korean research firm surveyed 800 Koreans and found that thirty-nine percent said that the United States poses a threat to the ROK as compared to thirty-three percent who said that North Korea poses a threat.<sup>20</sup> This is an enormous change since a 1993 Gallup poll found that only one percent of South Koreans then felt the United States was the greater threat to the ROK and nearly seventy-five percent considered U.S. forces "essential for peace on the Korean peninsula."<sup>21</sup>

This changing attitude reflects increasing friction between the South Koreans and the U.S. Army that has brought on strong protests and demonstrations, the intensity of which has not been seen during the United States fifty-two year presence. The turning point may have been in

June 2002, when an U.S. Army training accident resulted in the deaths of two South Korean schoolgirls. Thousands protested against the U.S. Army presence and also the eventual court-martial acquittal of the Soldiers involved.<sup>22</sup>

While ROK perceptions of the U.S. Army are worsening, the ROK Army is improving. They, too, are modernizing by making use of the latest technology to enhance their military capabilities. The ROK Defense Improvement Plan (DIP) has gained momentum recently as the country has grown economically.

The ROK DIP was initiated in 1976 to modernize and improve the combat effectiveness of the ROK armed forces. Within the context of their defense strategy, ROK forces are undergoing modernization and improvements in many key areas through indigenous weapons production, co-production, and procurement through Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and direct commercial channels. Currently, the ROK is focusing on securing tactical early warning systems and achieving major improvements in current combat capability. Later, their focus will shift to acquisition of advanced weapon systems to further increase their war-detering capability. Economic success makes it possible for the ROK to share a larger proportion of security-related costs on the Korean Peninsula. However, it must be noted that these contributions come while the ROK is also modernizing its force structure, establishing a more modern command and control system, improving the quality of life for its armed forces, and experiencing increasing political pressures to expand spending on domestic programs.<sup>23</sup>

#### **STRATEGIC OUTLOOK; MOVING FORWARD IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

The United States has previously downsized its force without lessening deterrence. However, one must look deeper to fully understand how to use all elements of national power to achieve the goal of enhancing the ROK-U.S. alliance and thus enhancing deterrence against aggression in the region. ROK Army modernization coupled with U.S. Army transformation enables a major force structure re-design that would result in strengthening the alliance. This modern force structure provides a great opportunity for further troop reductions in the aggregate but would improve the overall U.S. Army capability, enhance the alliance, and reduce the social friction by reducing the U.S. Army footprint. A smaller U.S. Army force would be viewed by the South Koreans as indicating that the ROK Army has greater responsibility for the defense of their nation.

The essential National Security Objective that should be analyzed in shaping the future is to "Promote a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region." The U.S. has been highly successful in the past establishing bilateral alliances with Japan and the Republic of Korea and a close working relationship with both China and Russia. It is critical to further develop this political cooperation as the U.S. Army modernizes and reduces its troop levels in order to

reassure all in the region that less U.S. Army troops does not mean less U.S. resolve. Recently, the United States joined a multinational effort to avert crises created by North Korea. The Six Party Talks provides a good example of bringing regional partners together to deal with the security challenges that Kim Jung Il, the leader of the DPRK, poses to the region in contrast to dealing with Kim alone. This framework assures that all regional powers in the region take overall ownership in keeping the DPRK in balance. While Kim prefers only to deal with the U.S. and has recently walked away from this framework, China is insisting that Kim participate. It is to be hoped that strength of commitment by the Six Party members will bring North Korea back to this framework. Meanwhile, U.S. bilateral relationships have also had a great stabilizing influence among China, the Republic of Korea, and Japan by helping to defuse historical animosities among all these players in this volatile region.

Recently, Admiral Thomas Fargo, Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, testified to members of Congress;

Our long-standing bilateral alliances in the Asia-Pacific region, our friendships both old and new; and the presence of our forward-deployed combat forces continue to be the foundation of the region's peace and stability. Based upon my extensive travels throughout Asia and the Pacific, it is clear that more and more nations appreciate the constructive role forward-based American forces play in the regional peace and stability. We are capitalizing on these sentiments to build bilateral relationships while nurturing multinational efforts that support regional security needs.<sup>124</sup>

As is the case with Korea, the U.S. alliance with Japan is one of the most important partnerships in the Pacific with over 57,000 U.S. forces on station. Admiral Fargo has said that, "Without these forces, it would be very difficult to meet our commitments both to Japan and to the rest of the [region]."<sup>25</sup> U.S. forces in Japan assure the Japanese government of the U.S. security commitment, as well as assuring all its neighbors that Japan is not a threat regionally. Both the nations of East Asia and the Japanese public have strong memories of Japanese aggression in the 1930s and 40s. An unchecked Japan draws fears from the regional neighbors of a resurgence of Japanese militarism. Although Japan has one of the most powerful defense forces in the region, it is a force that lacks a power-projection or offensive capability. Its use overseas is tightly restrained by Japanese policy and public opinion, and it is only referred to as a "Self Defense Force," not a traditional military force. Moreover, a Japan that is allied with the United States has less incentive to build a larger military and is viewed with less alarm by its neighbors than a Japan that would have to carry the entire burden of self-defense.

After fifty years, the U.S. current military posture in the Northeast Asia region can still stand the test of time. However, given all the factors addressed above, there are changes that must occur if the force is to stay relevant, conduct the necessary transformation as the National Security Strategy indicates, and account for the new dynamics now in clear view in this region.

During his congressional testimony, General Leon LaPorte described the transformation that is currently taking place within his command. These changes involve the modernization of U.S. forces on the peninsula, thus enhancing their capabilities, and modifications to the alliance itself.<sup>26</sup> U.S. Army forces are being consolidated from forty-eight different military installations into twenty-three centralized installations. This allows for efficiencies in base operations, accommodates future force structure changes, and reduces the U.S. Army's footprint in highly populated areas where congestion adds friction to both army and civilian mobility. Additionally, the U.S. Secretary of Defense and the Republic of Korea Minister of National Defense have agreed to conduct a Future of the Alliance Policy Initiative with the aim of "modernizing" and strengthening this alliance and its arrangements in light of the new regional dynamics.<sup>27</sup> This initiative began in 2002 and concluded in 2004. The key tasks of this consultative body were to integrate the transformations of the United Nations Command, ROK-US Combined Forces Command, and United States Forces Korea; establish a repositioning plan of U.S. forces that better enables sustainability of those based in Korea; and examine ways to strengthen the alliance in the mid-to-long term. These discussions made significant progress, resulting in agreements to enhance, shape, and align forces to deter North Korea and prepare the future security missions to enhance stability in the broader Northeast Asia region.<sup>28</sup> This agreement improves U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) overall capabilities by enabling its transformation concept of consolidating U.S. Forces Korea into two hubs. In short, USFK Headquarters would relocate from Seoul to the Osan area while the 2d Infantry Division would realign and reduce its footprint and relocate from areas north of Seoul to better consolidate into less intrusive facilities south of Seoul.<sup>29</sup>

With regard to the implications of a significant shift of U.S. forces away from this region and the direction in implementing the President's National Security Strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, transformation must be carefully planned and discussed with U.S. partners throughout the region. They have grown accustomed to significant troop levels in both Korea and Japan and any major changes may cause concern or, worse, create a power vacuum in the region leading to instability. The National Security Strategy also calls for Korea and Japan to take on more responsibility for regional stability. Korea needs to be more vigilant regarding peninsula defense

responsibility and the U.S. leadership should look to shape a broader regional stability strategy over the long term.

In the past, U.S. policy makers viewed U.S. troop basing as a primary deterrent to the North Korea threat, perhaps now taking advantage of the new regional dynamics, the United States can still maintain a strong deterrent posture by taking a more regionally oriented approach that includes U.S. force capability enhancements and consolidates military unit basing while leveraging the new political and economic relationships now available. No one in this region wants war. To the contrary, China and Russia appear to see a stable Korean peninsula as vital to their economic growth. They are likely to continue to play a positive role by dissuading the North's regime against initiating military hostilities.

When the transformation policy settles and the ROK-U.S. alliance discussions close, one thing should remain constant. The United States should still maintain a creditable force structure in Korea and in Japan in order to continue to play a role as the "honest broker" for security and stability for years to come. The United States will need to be careful not to reduce its forces to the extent that China, North Korea, or the Republic of Korea perceive a diminution of the U.S. commitment in the region in favor of other priorities around the world. Such an action could cede our position to China, Russia, or both, while also unwittingly encouraging Japan to increase its military strength to fill a perceived void caused by a major U.S. troop withdrawal. Troop reductions, just for the sake of troop rotations, could have unintended consequences if executed abruptly.

The next fifty years may bring tremendous opportunities for the region in terms of economic and democratic growth. The United States can begin to shape this future environment by engaging and nurturing multinational efforts to eliminate some of the other obstacles that undermine stability. Recall General LaPorte's description of the strategic environment, "...economic might, competing interests, converging threats, cultures, and historical animosities. Over 17 percent of the world's trade value is with countries in Northeast Asia ...". It may be that the next area on which to focus multilateral efforts is the reduction of historical animosities by mediating reconciliation between Korea and Japan. Overcoming their historical animosities and distrust would enable them to become true coalition or alliance partners. This would be an enhancement to their normalization of relations that was brokered by the United States back in 1965.<sup>30</sup>

This notion is described by Jiyul Kim in his article, "Continuity and Transformation in Northeast Asia and the End of American Exceptionalism."<sup>31</sup> This study projects fifty years into the future and analyzes regional developments. Kim speculates that in the future Korea will be

unified and China will emerge as an economic powerhouse culturally dominating the region. With unification, U.S. influence in Korea will be diminished because the North Korean threat, a common interest that binds Korea and the United States, will be gone. Kim does not foresee a regional hegemon, but rather a bipolar balance of power: Korea with China, and Japan with the United States. Kim sets forth a complex analysis that examines influencing factors such as the demographic trends that suggest by 2050 China will be the clear winner with a surplus of labor, Korea will break even, but Japan will be a clear loser with a negative labor pool to maintain its economic standard. This will force Japan to adopt an immigration strategy that compensates for its labor shortfall. This will be a tough position for Japan, as its society has never fully accepted immigrants as equal members. Kim makes a persuasive case for his imagined future. The trends he examined have further implications for a future U.S. troop presence in Korea. It is imperative that the United States maintains a strong military alliance with the ROK to assure a stable region in order to enhance continued economic growth and continued political cooperation with the United States.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The United States must remain engaged and maintain a credible modern U.S. military presence in Korea and Japan for the foreseeable future. In Korea, the United States should strengthen the ROK-U.S. alliance by continuing the ongoing U.S. Army modernization efforts and strengthening command, control, and intelligence interoperability in order to improve the deterrent posture against the North's still viable military threat. As USFK implements the Future of the Alliance agreement to consolidate U.S. forces to fewer installations while developing greater efficiency in operations, training, and future force structure, it should also continue to reshape the actual U.S. Army force structure. The ongoing modernization effort in communications, weapons, and weapon systems across USFK provides USFK with a modern and lethal force. This force improvement adds greater warfighting agility and complements the ROK ground forces in a fight while it also enhances a strong military deterrent against North Korean aggression.

In this light, the U.S. Army should adopt a new strategy for basing its forces. Taking advantage of the modernization efforts in the ROK forces, as well as in the USFK forces in general, coupled with the U.S. Army rapidly moving to its transformation of its warfighting divisions to Units of Employment (UEX), the Army should relook the mix of what forces are permanently stationed in Korea. To complement these regional dynamics and provide for maximum global force flexibility, the U.S. Army should permanently station a division type of

headquarters –under the UEx format—and the complement of combat service support units that can provide the combat multiplier benefits to both USFK and also to ROK forces that are currently in the lead in the defense of South Korea. Additionally, the U.S. Army should maintain a smaller than division size combat unit, one that is versatile, lethal, maneuverable, and highly flexible, on one year rotations to act as the U.S. ground force. Stated a different way, the U.S. Army should permanently station only a base force consisting of command and control, intelligence, combat service support, and aviation units enhanced with the latest technological capacity and ability in order to assure interoperability with the ROK Army while keeping a small but powerful combat force on the ground through annual rotations. The combat force should be a STRYKER Brigade that would rotate every twelve months as a force enhancer for the ROK Army under Combined Forces Command and also serve as the regional reserve able to rapidly respond to crises or to project U.S. influence as required. This non-permanent unit would provide the Combined Forces Command a flexible, highly mobile, and highly lethal force capable of conducting the missions assigned to the current force, the 2d Infantry Division, with a lesser footprint. The STRYKER is now the signature unit of Army transformation and is combat tested in Iraq. This unit will also reassure U.S. allies and adversaries in this region of continued U.S. commitment to deterrence on the peninsula as well as stability in Northeast Asia.

Why only one STRYKER Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) instead of two or three? One SBCT has a division range of capabilities to include communications, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and is designed to either operate independently or in a large division size formation. Having a permanently based command infrastructure to “plug” into provides the necessary level of command required for successful operations.

The SBCT is designed to bridge the gap between the Army’s light and heavy forces. The unit provides combatant commanders increased operational and tactical flexibility. The Stryker, an eight-wheeled medium weight armored vehicle, is the SBCT’s primary combat and combat support platform. Significantly lighter and more transportable than existing tanks and armored vehicles, the Stryker fulfills an immediate requirement to equip a strategically and tactically deployable brigade, capable of rapid movement worldwide.<sup>32</sup>

SBCT’s rapid deployability feature also provides confidence that other SBCTs could quickly reinforce the region from bases in the Pacific or the United States, thus providing the U.S. Army the means of being well postured to support regional contingencies and ensure the ROK’s and Japan’s long term security remains intact. Moreover, in the long term, if unification occurs on the Korean peninsula, this force mix could also continue to serve as a regional stability force and not threaten the balance of power with other regional states.

The U.S. must also consider weighing in on another obstacle to stability by using its influence to broker Korea-Japan reconciliation. In the long run, this would help build greater regional cooperation and enhance our Asian friendships by removing friction between two key regional allies. Once this is in place, it would open the door for greater economic and cultural engagement between these two countries and remove the potential divide that China could exploit in the future.

With a stable region, the United States should cement economic ties with all major players in the Northeast Asia region by establishing an economic cooperation zone. This economic cooperation zone could take a form similar to the North America Free Trade Act or similar to the European Union, for example. This would potentially serve all in the region, China, Korea, Japan, the United States, and Russia and make this a powerhouse region for economic development. This idea of free trade could reduce the probability of armed conflict in the region and lend itself to greater political and social cooperation on a level similar to Europe. Northeast Asia is already huge in trade; one may imagine great prosperity for all in the region if these countries were formally tied together by free trade. Russia also adds economic growth and emerging markets to the mix, as well as access to vast oil reserves.

## **CONCLUSION**

The National Security Strategy provides a solid foundation of objectives that would benefit the U.S. vital interests in Northeast Asia. Currently, application of these objectives and goals is being studied by the U.S. Defense Department, U.S. Pacific Command, and U.S. Forces Korea, to name a few. While studying potential implementation of their recommendations to support the National Security Strategy, it is very important for strategists to take the longer view. By making empowering decisions today, U.S. policy makers will improve the opportunity for the United States to remain well positioned in the long term. The essential stabilizing factor for the past fifty years has been a sizable U.S. presence in the region; that presence must be sustained in some fashion in the future to ensure another fifty years of stability. However, as the actual number of troops in the region is reduced, U.S. engagement by other elements of power must increase to counter the perception of lessened U.S. commitment. Therefore, strong regional political and economic cooperation organizations that include all members of the region should be created to ensure stability and prosperity for years to come.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> United Press International, "U.S. Korean-Troop Recall Largest in 30 Years." 7 June 2004; available from <<http://www.washtimes.com/upi-breaking/20040607-015753-3049r.htm>>; Internet; accessed 15 January 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Michael F. Davino, *Should the U.S. Continue to Maintain Forces in Korea?* Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 2004), 5

<sup>3</sup> "U.S. Korean-Troop Recall Largest in 30 Years."

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Davino, 5.

<sup>6</sup> "North Korea – U.S. Forces Order of Battle," May 2004; USFK Force Poster, May 2004; available from <<http://www.globalsecurity.org>>; Internet; accessed 15 January 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, "2000 Report to Congress on the Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula September 12, 2000," September 2000; available from <<http://www.defenselink.mil>>; Internet; accessed 20 January 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The White House, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," (Washington DC: The White House, September 2002), vii, 1-5, 20-28.

<sup>10</sup> Jiyul Kim, "Continuity and Transformation in Northeast Asia and the End of American Exceptionalism: A Long-Range Outlook and U.S. Policy Implications," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 13, (Autumn 2001): 229-237.

<sup>11</sup> Anna V. Shkuropat, *New Dynamics in Northeast Asia: The Russian Factor*, (Washington DC: The Brookings Institute Center for Northeast Asia Studies, 2002), 1-3.

<sup>12</sup> "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," vii, 1, 26.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Leon J. LaPorte, "Statement of General Leon J. LaPorte, Commander, United Nations Command/Combined Forces Command and U.S. Forces Korea," Sworn testimony before the Senate Armed Forces Committee, 13 March 2003, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> The Six Party Talks are a negotiation process aimed at finding a peaceful solution in eliminating the DPRK's nuclear program. The Six Party Talks, a diplomatic construct, involves North Korea, United States, South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia. The talks are hosted by the Chinese Government and held at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing. Three rounds have been completed, August 2003, February 2004 and the last round taking place in June 2004. A fourth round of talks was scheduled to take place before the end of September 2004,

but the DPRK refused to attend. Currently, there are no formal meetings scheduled but diplomatic activity is ongoing in the hopes of convincing the DPRK to return to the Six Party Talks.

<sup>17</sup> Shkuropat, 1-12.

<sup>18</sup> LaPorte, 2003, Testimony, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> "U.S. Korean-Troop Recall Largest in 30 Years."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, "2000 Report to Congress on the Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula September 12, 2000," September 2000; available from <<http://www.defenselink.mil>>; Internet; accessed 20 January 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas B. Fargo, "Statement of Admiral Thomas B. Fargo, Commander, U.S. Pacific Command," Sworn testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, 31 March 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> LaPorte, 2003, Testimony, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Leon J. LaPorte, "Statement of General Leon J. LaPorte, Commander, United Nations Command/Combined Forces Command and U.S. Forces Korea," Sworn testimony before the Senate Armed Forces Committee, 1 April 2004, 13.

<sup>29</sup> LaPorte, 2004, Testimony, p. 20-22

<sup>30</sup> Kim, 255.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> The United States Army Certification of Stryker Brigade Combat Team, available from <<http://www.army.mil/features/strykroe/>>; Internet; accessed 16 February 2005.

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