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US Forces Korea: The Key to Cooperative Stability and Security in Northeast Asia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: US Forces Korea: The Key to Cooperative Stability and Security in Northeast Asia

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Thesis: As long as the United States maintains its current national security objectives and vital strategic interests in the Northeast Asia region, US forces must remain deployed in South Korea in order to deter North Korean aggression and to ensure cooperative stability and security throughout the entire region.

Discussion: Five decades of peace have endured on the Korean Peninsula since the Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953 due primarily to the physical presence of forward deployed US troops. Combined Forces Command which is currently composed of the South Korean Armed Forces and 37,000 US troops under US Forces Korea have created an environment that has deterred North Korean aggression and allowed for a somewhat peaceful coexistence between North and South Korea for the last fifty years.

The Korean Peninsula is significant to United States national security because of its geographical location and the strategic landscape in the Northeast Asia region which includes the presence of five traditionally warring nations: North and South Korea, Japan, Russia and China. Current US national security objectives for the region are to enhance security, promote democracy and promote economic prosperity. A US military presence on South Korean soil allows the US to stay engaged in the region, influence political, diplomatic and economic arenas and prove our commitment and determination to defend our allies.

Due to the continuing buildup of military forces and weapons of mass destruction by the North Korean Government, North Korea is viewed by the US Government as a hostile regime that threatens regional peace. With the world's fifth largest military, highly regimented social system, and desperate economic situation the potential for the implosion of the government or explosion by the people is possible. Also, the potential emergence of China as a viable military competitor in the region is likely to cause regional instability. Rapid growth both economically and militarily, gives China the instruments of power to threaten peace in the region.

Conclusion: US Forces Korea is the key to cooperative stability and security in the Northeast Asia region. The continued forward presence of US forces on the Korean Peninsula allows the US to stay engaged in the region, cements our commitments to our allies, and allows for a peaceful coexistence.

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As the United States enters the 21st century and recovers from the devastating attacks on its homeland on September 11, 2001, it must reevaluate and determine what its true strategic interests are in the world and where best to focus its military capabilities. Throughout history the United States and its allies have built mutually supporting relationships that have offered stability and security throughout several regions in the world. US forces stationed abroad play a large role in securing US vital interests in historical zones of conflict. In particular, the nexus of US vital interests in Asia is Northeast Asia because of the presence of five traditionally warring powers there: North and South Korea, Japan, Russia and China.¹

As changes in the strategic environment take effect, the forward presence of US forces on the Korean Peninsula play a key role in the strategic landscape in this region. Renewed conflict on the Korean Peninsula has been prevented since the Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953. Two factors contributed largely to this: The United Nations Command (UNC) which has represented the United Nations Security Council's will to secure the peace and the presence of US and Republic of Korea (ROK) troops in the Combined Forces Command (CFC).

Since the Armistice Agreement was signed by the military commanders of the United Nations Command, North Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteers, the US has stationed soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines on South Korean soil as evidence of our commitment to preserve the peace, provide security and ensure stability not only on the peninsula but in the entire Northeast Asia region. The original reason to maintain US forces in South Korea was to strengthen and rebuild the ROK Armed Forces and prevent another attack by North Korea and intervention by China and the former Soviet Union.

¹ Robert H. Scales and Larry M. Wortzel, The Future US Military Presence in Asia: Landpower and the Geostrategy of American Commitment (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 999)

In effect, this was a continuance of President Harry S. Truman's containment policy outlined in National Security Study – 68, Strategy of Containment (NSC-68).

Since World War II, nations around the world have looked to the United States for leadership and direction. “The US must lead abroad if we are to be secure at home.”² Historically most Asian governments welcome a US presence in the region to preserve stability and security, even if it means an occupying force. The US has also displayed its willingness to withdraw its forces when requested by the leadership of that country. The nations of Thailand and the Philippines are evidence of this.³

The continued forward stationing of deployed troops in South Korea is periodically called into question by Congress and regularly reviewed by the Department of Defense.

The purpose of this paper will focus on answering the following question: Is the presence of forward deployed US forces on the Korean Peninsula the key to cooperative stability and security in the Northeast Asia region? Should the US continue to station forces on the Korean Peninsula? The US is determined to continue to stabilize the Northeast Asia region by trying to shape a peaceful and economically sound Korean Peninsula. This paper will further analyze the role US forces play on the Korean Peninsula and assess their military importance and effect their presence has. By shaping the future the US can impact its vital interests in the region.

Background

Northeast Asia Region

p. 1.

² The White House, National Security Strategy for a New Century (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1999) p. 3.

³ Scales and Wortzel, The Future US Military Presence in Asia: Landpower and the Geostrategy of American Commitment, 19.

The Northeast Asia region consists of the following countries and the littoral waters that surround them: North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia, Japan, Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. Historically this region has been engulfed in conflict and instability. The Korean Peninsula is referred to by many historians as both a bridge and a dagger among its neighbors; A bridge across into Manchuria China and the Russian Far East for Japan and a dagger at the heart of Japan if used by China, Russia or Korea. Korea has been the bridge to and from the Asia mainland.⁴ China, Russia and Japan each consider the peninsula to be of major importance to their security.

Since the 3rd Century BC, the region has been immersed in armed conflict as international borders and governments changed and clashed. Korea has been invaded numerous times and suffered five major occupations by foreign powers. Four wars were also fought in or around the peninsula. Even today, China and Japan are in dispute over who controls the Senkaku or Diaoyu Islands. The Spratly Islands are another political flashpoint between China, Vietnam and the Philippines. The Chinese-Vietnamese border has been in dispute for many years in Asia.

The Northeast Asia region is significant to United States national security because of its geographical location and strategic landscape. As outlined in the US National Security Strategy, current US national security objectives for this region are to:

- Enhance security
- Promote democracy

⁴ Richard G. Stillwell, "The Need for US Ground Forces in Korea," AEI Defense Review, No.2 (1977) p. 25.

- Promote economic prosperity

The US utilizes the armed forces as an instrument of national power to implement these objectives. A continued US military presence stationed abroad allows the US to stay engaged in the region, influence the political, diplomatic and economic arenas, and prove our commitment and determination to defend our allies. President Franklin D. Roosevelt summed it up best when he said, “ We have learned that we cannot live alone at peace. We have learned that our well being is dependent on the well being of our nations far away. We have learned to be citizens of the world, members of the human community.”⁵ Throughout the 20th Century, Americans have learned how events in Northeast Asia can profoundly affect our security, economy, and way of life.

Furthermore, the US vital strategic interests in the Northeast Asia region are:

- Developing regional and bilateral security and economic relationships
- Assisting in conflict prevention and resolution
- Expanding US participation in regional economies ⁶

These strategic interests link US security interests with economic growth and commitment to democracy and human rights. By staying engaged in the Northeast Asia as a stability force the US is cementing its commitment to future stability in the region. The strategic interests support our enduring national interests that contribute to the development of the US defense posture.

As outlined in the latest Quadrennial Defense Review, the purpose of the US Armed Forces is to protect and advance these enduring national interests:

- Ensure US security and freedom of action, including:
 - US sovereignty, territorial integrity and freedom

⁵ The White House, National Security Strategy for a New Century, 1.

⁶ The White House, National Security Strategy for a New Century, 37.

- Safety of US citizens at home and abroad
- Protection of critical US infrastructure
- Honoring international commitments, including:
 - Security and well-being of allies and friends
 - Precluding hostile domination of critical areas particularly Europe, *Northeast Asia, the East Asian littoral*, and the Middle East and Southwest Asia.
 - Peace and stability in the Western hemisphere
- Contributing to the economic well-being, including:
 - Vitality and productivity of the global economy
 - Security of international sea, air, space and information lines of communication
 - Access to key markets and strategic resources⁷

Post World War II

Japan ruled Korea from 1910 to 1945. Following the defeat of the Japanese at the end of World War II, the Allied forces agreed that the Soviet Union and the United States would accept the surrender of Japanese troops and jointly occupy the country. At midnight on 10 August 1945, Colonel Charles H. Bonesteel and Major Dean Rusk drafted the portion of the order that delineated the Soviet and American zones of occupation. Both men wanted to follow provincial boundary lines that did not violate political divisions and place the capital city of Seoul in the American zone. They used the only map available, which was a small-scale map of the Far East. They were given thirty minutes to complete the draft for the US State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee. Colonel Bonesteel and Major Rusk noted that the 38th parallel passed north of Seoul and almost divided the Korean Peninsula in equal halves. Thus, the 38th parallel became the proposed zonal boundary.⁸

⁷Department of Defense, Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review, (Washington, DC: GPO, 2001) p. 2.

⁸ Lee Suk Bok, The Impact of US Forces in Korea, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1987), p. 4.

Following the acceptance of this boundary by the allies, US and Soviet troops deployed to Korea and occupied their respective zones. It was not the intention of the Allies to make this boundary line a permanent border. On the contrary, the allies wanted a unified and independent Korea. However, disagreement over free elections and unification between the Soviets and the United States led to a stalemate and to the establishment of two separate governments in the north and south. This established the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north and the Republic of Korea in the south.

Preoccupied with the Soviets in post World War II Europe, the US considered South Korea of little strategic value. In light of a military manpower shortage and the recommendations of the US military Joint Chiefs Staff and the Secretary of State, President Truman decided to withdraw the occupying force of 45,000 men in June 1949, and replace it with a 500 man advisory group and to provide military equipment and defense funding to rebuild the South Korean military.

Korean War

On June 25, 1950, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) communist forces invaded the Republic of Korea (South Korea) by crossing the international border at the 38th parallel. The Republic of Korea Army (ROK Army) defended against the coordinated attack but the element of surprise and the shock of enemy armor overcame their defenses. The North Korean People's Army (NKPA) crushed the ROK Army and within three days captured the capital city of Seoul and continued their advance south.

In response to this aggression, President Truman, with the support and mandate of the United Nations, ordered US forces into South Korea to stop the aggression and halt the

expansion of communism. The UN Security Council established a united command in Korea and requested that the US designate a commander of forces, Commander in Chief United Nations Command (CINCUNC). This is a position that the US still holds today.

Initially the UNC conducted delaying actions against the NKPA until US and ROK forces withdrew and took up defensive positions within the Pusan Perimeter. The UNC was outnumbered and outgunned and it was not until the arrival of reinforcements from the US and other UN countries could the UNC conduct a counterattack. Once the two pronged counterattack was begun which consisted of an amphibious assault at Inchon and a breakout of the Pusan perimeter followed by a pursuit across the 38th parallel, the war turned into a series of “seesaw battles for Korea’s freedom.”⁹ Eventually the shooting stopped after two years of intense negotiations. The armistice was signed which provided an end to the fighting and eventual political settlement of the war. The shooting ended, but the troops from both sides remained withdrawing 2,000 meters from the last line of military contact to insure the peace, to watch the Demilitarized Zone, and to guard against the resumption of hostilities.

From 1950-1953 military forces from twenty-one countries under the United Nations Command (UNC) fought and died for the freedom of the South Korean people and to demonstrate the UN’s resolve to stop unprovoked aggression by a communist country. The countries of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Columbia, Denmark, Ethiopia, France, Great Britain, Greece, India, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway,

⁹ U.S. Forces Korea Homepage, online edition under “Combined Forces Command,” Accessed on 2 January 2002.

the Philippines, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey and the United States provided troops from all echelons of combat, support, logistical, and medical fields.¹⁰ The US provided the majority of troops, approximately 5,720,000 served during the period 25 June 1950 to 27 July 1953.¹¹

The Korean War was the first “hot war” during the Cold War. The invasion of South Korea by North Korea forced the United States and members of the United Nations to stand up to aggression and commit to a “limited” war or abandon South Korea to her enemies. The North Korean’s ultimate goal under then President Kim Il Sun, was to unify the Korean Peninsula under a communist regime. Kim Il Sun consulted with both Josef Stalin and Mao Zedong on his intentions of reunification. Both concurred with his plan and provided support. The Soviet Union provided arms and equipment and the Chinese provided troops that were “volunteers”.¹²

United States Forces Korea

Since the end of the war the US and the UN focused their efforts on the tremendous task of literally rebuilding a nation, its economy, its military and all of its infrastructure and support mechanisms. On August 8, 1953, the US and South Korea signed the Mutual Defense Treaty. The Mutual Defense Treaty provided the basis for the continued presence of US forces in Korea, (US Forces Korea –USFK), military aid for the rebuilding and strengthening of the ROK Armed Forces, security of South Korea and support by US air, ground, and sea forces should another attack occur.

¹⁰ Uzal A. Ent, Fighting on the Brink: Defense of the Pusan Perimeter (Puducuh, KY: Turner Publishing Co, 1996) p. 26.

¹¹ U.S. Forces Homepage, online edition under “Casualties and Participants in the Korean War,” Accessed on 16 March 2002.

Hostilities between North and South Korea are deterred today by a binational defense team that evolved from the multinational UNC during the Korean War. The Combined Forces Command (CFC) is the warfighting headquarters whose mission it is to deter, or defeat if necessary, outside aggression against the ROK. In support of that, USFK is deployed in South Korea to support the UNC and CFC by coordinating planning among US component commands in South Korea and exercises operational control (OPCON) of assigned US forces as directed by the Commander in Chief, Pacific (USCINCPAC). USFK also coordinates US military assistance to the ROK and functions as the US Defense Representative in Korea.¹³

Currently there are approximately 35,654 total active duty military service members and 3,985 US civilian employees stationed in South Korea:

- Army - 26,987
- Air Force - 8,322
- Navy - 293
- USMC - 52

They are augmented by 19,153 Korean National civilian employees and 4,185 Korean Augmentation to the United States Army (KATUSA), a program continued from the Korean War.¹⁴ At present the Army service component command is Eighth US Army and the Air Force Service Component is 7th Air Force. These two components make up the majority of the forces currently stationed on the peninsula.

North Korean Threat

¹² Ent, Fighting on the Brink: Defense of the Pusan Perimeter, 26.

¹³ U.S. Forces Korea Homepage, online edition under “USFK Mission,” Accessed on 2 January 2002.

¹⁴ U.S. Forces Korea Homepage, online edition under “USFK Manpower Strength,” Accessed on

“Tensions on the Korean Peninsula remain the leading threat to peace and stability in East Asia.”¹⁵ North Korea has publicly stated that it remains committed to a peaceful reunification. However, it continues to dedicate a large portion of its dwindling budget to its huge military force. Currently, the NKPA has approximately 1 million active duty personnel and 5 million in the reserves dedicated to the army. More than half of the North Korean ground forces are prepositioned within 65 km of the DMZ prepared to launch an offensive. Long-range artillery guns are directed at cities and critical targets in northern South Korea. Particularly important are the emplacement of anti-tank barriers in the forward area and dug-in combat fighting positions along the major routes to and from the DMZ to Pyongyang.¹⁶ “ This deployment of troops poses a severe security threat to South Korea.”¹⁷ In a meeting of the members of the House Armed Services Committee in March of 2000, Lieutenant General Thomas A. Schwartz, Commander USFK, UNC and CFC, stated that North Korea remains a major threat to the regional stability and is the country most likely to involve US forces in a large-scale war. Military improvements over the past year clearly illustrate North Korea’s emphasis on being prepared for war no “matter what the cost”.¹⁸

In addition to conventional forces, 100,000 troops are dedicated to special operations forces with a large helicopter insertion capability to take them into the South Korean rear area. The North Korean Air Force has 103,000 personnel and an inventory of 1,600

2 January 2002.

¹⁵ The White House, National Security Strategy for a New Century, p. 35.

¹⁶ The National Institute for Defense Studies Japan, East Asian Strategic Review 2001, (Tokyo: The National Institute for Defense Studies, 2001) p. 143.

¹⁷ The National Institute for Defense Studies Japan, East Asian Strategic Review 2001, 142.

¹⁸ Kozaryn, Linda D. “Korea Commander Tackles Readiness Challenges,” Armed Forces Press Service, Accessed on 2 January 2002.

aircraft. Aircraft types include MiG 23s & 29 fighters, SU-25 ground attack aircraft and the recent purchase of 40 MiG-21s from Kazakhstan in 1999.¹⁹ The North Korean Navy consists of over 600 personnel and includes an inventory of 430 combat vessels – patrol craft, attack submarines, guided missile boats, torpedo boats, missile attack boats and fire support craft.

North Korea is capable of producing and employing chemical weapons. All their fire support systems can deliver chemical weapons. Their chemical defense teams train for operations in chemical environments. Until 1994, North Korea had an active nuclear weapons program. The research reactor at Youngbyon was capable of producing plutonium. North Korea shut down the facility in addition to two smaller ones and ceased production in 1994 after signing the US-North Korea Agreed Framework. The agreement froze North Korean nuclear facilities in return for the provision of alternate energy sources provided by the United States, South Korea and Japan. It also subjected North Korean facilities to inspections by the Nuclear Atomic Energy Agency. However, the suspicion that North Korea continues to develop weapons of mass destruction remains.

In 1994, Kim Jong Il replaced Kim Il Sun as the President of North Korea. The transition in power was not exactly smooth, but he has maintained power by placing loyal members of his party, the Korean Workers Party, in top level government, military, security service, and party headquarters positions. He maintains that loyalty by further allocating national resources to key industries, programs and military units. Despite years of worsening economic, social and quality of life conditions he and his party have remained in power. However, since 1999, Kim Jong Il has directed major policy changes in order to rehabilitate the North Korean domestic economy

¹⁹ The National Institute for Defense Studies Japan, East Asian Strategic Review 2001, 143.

by emphasizing science and technology while still maintaining a large and robust military machine. Figures show that in 1999, due to an increase in food production resulting from key agrarian changes and international aid, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rose 6.2%.²⁰ This was after nine straight years of decline and horrific suffering by the North Korean population. However, at the same time the North Korean government has tightened the security measures on its populace to maintain domestic stability and order. The Government of North Korea fears that the increased contacts with the outside world will have destabilizing effects on their traditional communist domestic order.²¹ This is particularly relevant since a large majority of the North Korean population is dying off and its global communist support structure is no longer in place. However, “Despite years of drought, famine and a steep economic decline, Lieutenant General Schwartz stated that the “North Koreans maintain a “military first” policy while spending 30% of gross national product to that end. North Korean officials ensure the military has what it needs to do what Kim Jong Il’s regime asks.”²²

However, a number of South Korean critics and US experts disagree with Lieutenant General Schwartz’s testimony. They believe that North Korea does not pose a great direct military threat. They argue that North Korean conventional military capabilities have eroded since 1990 due to the obsolescence of offensive weaponry like tanks and aircraft, logistics deficiencies, the lack of major field exercises from 1994 to 2000, food shortages among troops

²⁰ The National Institute for Defense Studies Japan, [East Asian Strategic Review 2001](#), 122.

²¹ The National Institute for Defense Studies Japan, [East Asian Strategic Review 2001](#), 124-125.

²² Kozaryn, “Korea Commander Tackles Readiness Challenges,” [Armed Forces Press Service](#), Accessed on 2 January 2002.

on the DMZ and the decline in the physical and mental capabilities of North Korean conscripts after years of malnutrition.²³

Analysis

Why US Forces Were Sent To South Korea

In order to answer the question, “Is the presence of forward deployed US forces on the Korean Peninsula the key to cooperative stability and security in the Northeast Asia region?” an examination and justification of why the US forces were sent to the peninsula to intervene at the advent of the Korean War in the first place is required. After North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950, the President of the United States armed with a United Nations resolution, deployed air, land and sea forces to the Korean Peninsula. By getting this diplomatic approval and mandate from the United Nations, the United States had the multi-lateral backing of nations from across the globe to intervene. Together, the US and UN forces under the auspices of the United Nations Command (UNC) implemented the grand strategy of containment. The main objectives of the containment strategy were to:

- Halt the aggression and restore the border at 38th parallel
- Not conquer, but contain the North Koreans on the north side of the 38th parallel
- Restore the peace through a cease fire at the 38th parallel
- Stop the war from spreading

Although the grand strategy changed during the course of the war to liberation and the rollback of communist forces, it reverted back to a containment strategy due to the

²³ Larry A. Nicksch, “Korea: US-South Korean Relations – Issues for Congress,” [CRS Report for Congress](#), B98045, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 22 January 2002), p. 10.

intervention and subsequent loss of territory to the Chinese communist forces.

Once the Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953, these objectives were reached.

However, in order to safeguard against any efforts of renewal, the United States and South Korea entered into the Mutual Defense Agreement that validates the requirement for defensive forces in South Korea to ensure that the North Koreans do not renew their offensive efforts. This is in keeping with America's role in the world as outlined in the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review. "America's goals are to promote peace, sustain freedom and encourage prosperity.... US military strength is essential to achieving these goals, as it assures friends and allies of an unwavering US commitment to common interests."²⁴ The Armistice Agreement that was signed did bring somewhat of a lasting peace to the Korean Peninsula, but did not formally end the war. The presence of US forces in the peninsula contributes to that evolving peace process and is still a necessary deterrent to resumption of the conflict.

Deterrence

Since the Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953, the primary purpose of the US military presence in South Korea has been to deter any further acts of aggression by North Korea and to contain the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) at the 38th parallel. To this day, the US has been successful in accomplishing this mission. Although there have been several documented breaches and clashes with the NKPA the combined efforts of the US and Republic of Korea (ROK) forces have thwarted their efforts. The presence of the US and ROK forces stationed throughout South Korea particularly concentrated on likely invasion routes, coupled

²⁴ Department of Defense, Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review, 1.

with a large combined air force and naval forces in the region not only guarantees to the people of South Korea that the US is committed to the defense of South Korea, but also demonstrates to North Korea that any act of aggression will be met with an immediate and lethal response.

Besides the psychological impact of a massive army on the southern side of the 38th parallel, the presence of US troops demonstrates our commitment to the Northeast Asia region in the event of a crisis or contingency where forces would be needed. The 37,000 troops coupled with the US forces stationed in Okinawa, Japan, represent a significant amount of military capability and presence that can be rapidly deployed throughout the region if needed. Also, an established military presence in the region allows for the continued forward rapid deployment of additional troops and equipment to the region in the event of a major regional conflict. Access to land in the region and the ability to preposition large numbers of troops, equipment and supplies there as part of an intermediate staging base gives the US an immense strategic capability which would be invaluable during a crisis situation.

Although there has been peace on the peninsula since 1953, the presence of US forces is still required due to the continuing build up of military forces and weapons of mass destruction by the North Korean Government. The perceived threat that North Korea poses not only to South Korea but also to the region was categorically emphasized by President George W. Bush in his State of the Union Address on 29 January 2002. In his address President Bush said, “North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens.” He further stated that the hostile regimes of North Korea, Iraq and Iran constituted an “axis of evil” and along with their terrorist allies “were actively seeking weapons of mass

destruction, threatening the peace of the world.”²⁵ Referring to the Axis alliance of Germany, Italy and Japan during World War II, this emphasized the belief within the current administration that the threat to security and stability in the region is real and must be dealt with.

North Korea has the world’s fifth largest military, with over half of its ground forces prepositioned along the border at the 38th parallel postured to launch offensive operations. Although these conventional forces pose a major threat to the region, an even greater and more dangerous threat is its ability to make and use weapons of mass destruction. An unclassified CIA Report to Congress for the period of 1 January through 30 June 2001 stated that,

During this timeframe North Korea continued procurement of raw materials and components for its ballistics missile programs from various foreign sources, especially through North Korean firms in China. We assess that North Korea is capable of producing and delivering via missile warhead or other munitions a wide variety of chemical agents and possible some biological agents.” The report went on to say that the North Korean Government is continuing its attempts to procure technology that could help its nuclear program. The report further states that, “We assess that North Korea has produced enough plutonium for one, possibly two, nuclear weapons.”²⁶

The actual presence of nuclear weapons or even the perception of a presence on the peninsula not only generates instability in the region but also increases nuclear proliferation pressures among its neighbors.

Previous Withdrawal Plans

The US has had four planned withdrawals from South Korea. Three of them were completely executed. All of the withdrawal plans have met with staunch resistance by the South Korean Government. The South Korean Government vehemently opposed troop

²⁵ “CIA Outlines North Korean Weapons Plan,” CNN, Accessed on 1 February 2002.

²⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, Unclassified Report to Congress on the Acquisition of Technology Relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction and Advanced Conventional Munitions, Accessed on 9 February 2002.

withdrawals and protested loudly to each presidential administration that proposed it.

The first withdrawal of forces in 1949, 45,000 troops, sent a clear message to the North Koreans that the Korean Peninsula was outside the US defense perimeter. General Douglas MacArthur stated in 1949 that, “Our line of defense runs through the chain of islands fringing the coast of Asia. It starts with the Philippines and continues through Ryukyu Archipelago, which includes its main bastion, Okinawa. Then it bends back through Japan and the Aleutian Island chain to Alaska.”²⁷ In addition, Secretary of State Dean Acheson stated in a speech to the National Press Club in January 1950, that the American defensive perimeter included the Aleutians, Japan, the Ryukyus and the Philippines. Neither Taiwan nor Korea was included in the perimeter. Acheson further stated that they were among other areas in the Pacific and that, if attacked, “the initial reliance must be on the people attacked to resist it and then upon the commitments of the entire civilized world under the charter of the United Nations.”²⁸ By 29 June 1949, the last combat unit departed South Korea, leaving a 500 man advisory group, the Korea Military Advisory Group (KMAG). The result was that on 25 June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea and in three days captured the capital city of Seoul and continued to advance south. The US and UN response resulted in a three year war to regain the territory that was overtaken and contain the communist forces at the North Korean-South Korean border. The withdrawal of US forces in 1949 was one of the largest contributing factors to the Korean War.

With each change in US presidential administrations since the Korean War, there has been a reevaluation in the policy concerning the presence of US forces in Korea. The second

²⁷ Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 475.

²⁸ Ent, Fighting on the Brink: Defense of the Pusan Perimeter, 26.

withdrawal of forces took place between 1954-1955. President Dwight D. Eisenhower gradually withdrew six Army divisions and one Marine division over a two year period. This resulted in the Mutual Defense Agreement between the US and South Korea. South Korea activated five additional infantry divisions to fill the gap left by the US. Military equipment was transferred from the US to the South Korean forces.²⁹

The third withdrawal occurred in 1971 under President Richard M. Nixon. One Army division, 7th Infantry Division, was withdrawn from the peninsula leaving only the 2nd Infantry Division. The US continued to provide economic and military assistance for the defense of South Korea, however, the majority of the manpower would have to be provided by South Korea. In order to increase the industrial capabilities of the South Korean economy including manufacturing capacity the development of self-sufficient military hardware, then South Korean President Park launched the Third Five-Year Economic Development Plan.³⁰

The fourth withdrawal occurred in 1977 under President Jimmy Carter. President Carter wanted to withdraw approximately 32,000 ground forces over a four to five year period leaving only US air and naval forces in South Korea for support. Due to a dual intelligence reassessment conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) of the current North Korean military capabilities, the withdrawal program was put on hold. After reviewing intelligence data that indicated that North Korea had achieved numerical superiority in both ground and air forces the Carter Administration put the withdrawal program on hold. The number of North Korean

²⁹ Bok, The Impact of US Forces in Korea, 59-60.

³⁰William E. Berry, Jr., The Invitation to Struggle: Executive and Legislative Competition over the U.S. Presence on the Korean Peninsula (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 1996) p. 8.

Army divisions had increased from 29 in 1977 to 37 in 1979; and the number of tanks and armored personnel carriers had increased by 35 and 20 percent, respectively. In the end the withdrawal program under President Carter resulted in the withdrawal of only one infantry battalion.³¹

More importantly was the way the North Koreans changed their military posture. Previously, the DPRK was dedicated to a forward defense deployment in which forces were deployed along the 38th parallel and reinforced from the rear. Reinforcements would require time and could be detected through our intelligence capabilities. North Korea had changed to a defense in depth whereby they could launch an attack without reinforcements required by forward defense planning.³² Thus, the US and South Korea's reaction time was severely reduced.

The second, third and fourth withdrawal plans illustrate that history can repeat itself on the Korean Peninsula. As the presence of US forces diminished, the North Korean military machine gained power and momentum through increased buildup and forward posturing of offensive forces. The intentions of North Korea are transparent – reunification of the Korean Peninsula under a communist regime. Why else would the government spend so much of its GDP on its military and so little on feeding its own people? The former North Korean President, Kim Il Sung, had vowed to reunite Korea and envisioned a united Korea under his leadership.³³ His son, Kim Jung Il, is continuing that vision today. Should the US withdraw its

³¹ Berry, Jr., The Invitation to Struggle: Executive and Legislative Competition over the U.S. Presence on the Korean Peninsula, 9.

³² Berry, Jr., The Invitation to Struggle: Executive and Legislative Competition over the U.S. Presence on the Korean Peninsula, 9.

³³ Ent, Fighting on the Brink: Defense of the Pusan Perimeter, 26.

forces from Korea, Kim Jung Il may view this as a window of opportunity to accomplish his late father's 50 year old goal to reunify the peninsula under a communist regime.

The presence of US forces in South Korea remains a clear statement of a shared commitment not only to the people and democratic government of South Korea but also to the continuance of peace in the region. The US forces in South Korea are strategically pre-positioned and designed for employment not only as a deterrent to North Korea but for contingency operations and crisis in the Asia-Pacific region. The physical presence deters aggression and encourages conflict resolution at the lowest level vice another war on the peninsula.

Implosion or Explosion

The current socio-economic conditions in North Korea give rise to the potential for the implosion of the current government – collapse of the regime of Kim Jung Il. Due to North Korea's preoccupation with conventional and nuclear military buildup, it has fiscally drained the resources of the country. In their attempt to continue their military buildup, the impact is continued economic depression for the people of North Korea. According to the latest CIA economic overview report,

North Korea is one of the world's most centrally planned and isolated economies facing desperate economic conditions. Industrial capital stock is nearly beyond repair as a result of years of under investment and spare parts shortages. The nation faces its seventh year of food shortages because of weather-related problems, including a major drought in 2000, and chronic shortages of fertilizer and fuel. Massive international food aid deliveries have allowed the regime to escape the major consequence of spreading economic failure, such as mass starvation, but the population remains vulnerable to prolonged malnutrition and deteriorating living conditions.³⁴

³⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, "North Korea," The World Fact Book, Accessed on 12 January 2002.

The UN World Food Program requested donations of 810,000 tons of food for North Korea in 2001.³⁵ Given the desperate economic situation in North Korea, years of food and energy shortages and lack of adequate healthcare, the threat from North Korea is not only focused outward but inward as well. The desperate situation of the North Korean people has given rise to the possibility of the implosion of the government. Although Kim Jung Il rules his country with as authoritarian dictator, conditions raise the question how long will the generations of young North Koreans be willing to accept a military first policy when their children are dying from malnutrition or starvation. How long will countries continue to provide North Korea food aid when there are other countries in the world that are getting much more global media exposure and are willing to accept a market economy, e.g., Afghanistan? How long will these countries continue to provide aid to a rogue state that isolates itself and is not willing to open up its economy to free trade?

If the North Korean Government did implode, this could give the Chinese the opportunity to intervene in the peninsula once again. The presence of US forces on the peninsula could deter the Chinese from invading North Korea or at least remain above the 38th parallel. The possible collapse of the North Korean government is a real threat to the border of China. As during the Korean War, the Chinese view North Korea as a buffer zone on its flank from the United States.

Another facet of the North Korean instability is the potential for explosion of the government – an eruption by the will of the North Korean people against the ideals of communism that could lead to a national revolution. The North Korean Government continues

³⁵ Nicksch, “Korea: US-South Korean Relations – Issues for Congress,” CRS Report for Congress, 2.

to preach a line of self-reliance, self-sufficiency and isolationism among its people from the rest of the world. However, self-reliance will only permeate so far when the populace is cold and starving from lack of food and energy. The Ministry of Unification in South Korea estimated that despite all the humanitarian aid received from the international community in 2000 (\$178.88 million), North Korea had a shortage of 2.4 million tons of food grains.³⁶ The government under Kim Jung Il continues to fear that outside global contacts with the North Korean people will have destabilizing effects on the regimented domestic order within North Korea. Thus, North Korean authorities continue to try and strengthen domestic stability and order by continuously stressing the importance of maintaining purity of thought and the vital role the military plays in their lives.³⁷ But in no way at the expense of relinquishing central control.

North Korea's military first vice people first policy could cause a major humanitarian disaster that has the potential to topple the regime of Kim Jung Il. Regardless, if the regime implodes or explodes, the region would see a major influx of refugees flowing out of North Korea towards the borders of China, South Korea, or out to sea.

Reunification or Reconciliation

National reunification on the peninsula has long been a goal of both North and South Korea. Reunification meaning that North and South Korea become one united country under one form of government. In contrast, reconciliation is centered on both sides remaining separate countries but eliminating political and military confrontation and the acceptance of mutual recognition of

³⁶ The National Institute for Defense Studies Japan, [East Asian Strategic Review 2001](#), 125.

³⁷ The National Institute for Defense Studies Japan, [East Asian Strategic Review 2001](#), 125.

and respect for the other side's form of government.³⁸ The Government of the United States supports a peaceful reunification or reconciliation and has therefore supported South Korean President Kim Dae Jung's Sunshine Policy in the hope that the direct social and economic interaction between the two Koreas would promote peace and cooperation on the peninsula, thus, increasing peaceful stability in the Northeast Asia region. The premise of this policy is that engagement rather than containment will be more effective in inducing positive changes in the political and diplomatic interactions coming out of North Korea.

Through the engagement policy, both South Korea and the United States are dealing with the fact that the previous containment policy has produced aggressive and uncooperative behavior from the North Korean Government. Through economic and humanitarian aid, increased diplomatic and political ties, the policy attempts to draw the North Korean Government out of isolation and engage in economic cooperation and improved diplomatic relations. Thus, by actively participating in conflict prevention and expanding US participation between the two governments the policy supports the increased US role in strategic and enduring national interests.

Whether the outcome is either reunification or reconciliation, the US will still need to stay engaged on the peninsula to ensure that peace and stability endure. The US must continue to discourage aggression by the remaining communist hard-liners in the North Korean Government.

Public Opinion

Although the US Government views the North Korean military buildup as a severe

³⁸ Gennady Chufirin, "Russian Interests in Korean Security in Post-Cold War World," in Asian Flashpoint-Security and the Korean Peninsula, ed. Andrew Mack (Australia: Allen & Unwin Australia Pty Ltd, 1993), p.

security threat to South Korea, South Koreans' fear of military invasion has declined in the past decade particularly among the younger generation. According to recent polls, South Koreans do not register the same level of concern as many Americans over a potential North Korean invasion, nuclear weapons development, ballistic missile testing and missile sales abroad.³⁹ The majority of older South Koreans, who experienced the Korean War or were born shortly after it, understand and continue to fear North Korean aggression. For the most part, these groups welcome a continued US military presence.

Due to the increased dialogue and engagement opportunities between North and South Korea created by the Sunshine Policy, fears of invasion have decreased and South Korean debate about the continued US military presence has increased. Several well-publicized cross-border family reunifications have replaced fear with hopeful expectations of a full reunification of the peninsula. Young radical groups have united with several citizen groups demanding a full US withdrawal of forces.⁴⁰ The debate particularly intensifies when US service members are involved in incidents involving South Korean citizens and violating local laws and customs.

Several contentious issues also generate debate on the continued need for US military presence in South Korea. Most recently the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) was updated and signed in December 2000 after six years of negotiations. It now requires that US military personnel accused of certain crimes will be turned over to South Korean law enforcement personnel prior to their trial and that they will receive certain legal guarantees from the South Korean Government. Another heated issue deals with the South Korean monetary contribution to the stationing of US forces in South Korea. Currently it costs over \$2 billion annually to

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³⁹ Nicksch, "Korea: US-South Korean Relations – Issues for Congress, [CRS Report for Congress](#), 10.

station US forces in South Korea. South Korea pays \$350 million annually to the US to help offset this cost. The Bush administration is seeking a 30% increase in host nation support. However, the South Korean Government and population are very hesitant to increase their financial support.⁴¹ In comparison, the Japanese Government pays a majority of the costs of stationing US forces in its country.

The presence of US forces in South Korea has an enormous impact on both the society and the economy which impacts public opinion. Currently, the US footprint in South Korea consists of 100 Army installations, 18 Air Force sites, and 2 Navy facilities. Over 19,153 Korean national civilian personnel are employed by the US military on these military bases.⁴² Obviously, a reduction in US forces in South Korea would eliminate a proportional number of these jobs, and would return the native workers to find work out on the Korean economy. Like most military installations in the continental United States, businesses outside of US military installations in South Korea tailor their business to meet the needs of the military stationed on the base. Thousands of South Koreans depend on soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines for the jobs and dollars they generate to the local economy through such businesses as barber shops, tailors, laundry, etc. Many South Korean opponents of a continued US military presence resent this local economic reliance on the US.

Japanese Connection

The Japanese Government has traditionally regarded the presence of US forces in South Korea as essential to the security of Japan. In 1969, Premier Eisaku Sato stated that the

⁴⁰ Nicksch, "Korea: US-South Korean Relations – Issues for Congress, [CRS Report for Congress](#), 12.

⁴¹ Nicksch, "Korea: US-South Korean Relations – Issues for Congress, [CRS Report for Congress](#), 11.

⁴² U.S. Forces Korea Homepage, online edition, under "USFK Manpower Strength," Accessed on 2 January 2002.

security of South Korea was “essential to Japan’s own security.”⁴³ The US commitment and presence of forces in South Korea have prevented the domination of the peninsula by a major superpower unfriendly to the government of Japan. Since 1951, when the United States and Japan signed the Mutual Defense Treaty, the Japanese Government has allowed the United States to retain military bases in Japan and the US has committed US forces to the defense of Japan in the event of an attack or outside aggression by another country.

The Japanese view the US troop presence in South Korea as the first line of defense from their previous enemies: The Republic of China and Russia. Since World War II, the Japanese Government has relied on the United States Government to ensure a relatively friendly and democratic government in South Korea. “The US commitment to South Korea and the presence of US forces there prevent the domination of the peninsula by a major power unfriendly to Japan.”⁴⁴ American bases in Japan also play a major role in the defense of South Korea. In particular, bases on the island of Okinawa provide a substantial amount of forces and equipment that would deploy to the peninsula in the event of a North Korean invasion.

From an economic standpoint, stability on the peninsula is essential to the Japanese economy. South Korea and Japan are major trading partners and throughout the years South Korea has been a major recipient of investment by Japanese industries. Japan is South Korea’s second largest trading partner while South Korea is Japan’s third largest trading partner. Total trade between the two countries in 1999 exceeded \$40 billion. Total Japanese direct investment in South Korea total \$8 billion.⁴⁵ On the other side, Japan is North Korea’s second

⁴³ Ralph N. Clough, Defense and Deterrence in Korea, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1976) p. 45.

⁴⁴ Clough, Deterrence and Defense in Korea, 45.

⁴⁵ Joseph A.B. Winder, “The Economic Dynamics of the Korean Peninsula Peace Process,” Korean Economic Institute, p 6-7. Accessed on 21 February 2002.

largest trading partner. Total trade between July 1998 to June 1999 reached \$400 million.

Japan is North Korea's largest export market. South Korea has experienced real GDP growth in recent years, particularly in 1999 (10.9%) and 2000 (8.8%).⁴⁶ All of these have produced great dividends for the Japanese.

Due to the geographical location of the Korean Peninsula, at the strategic crossroads between China, Russia and Japan, the stationing of US forces in South Korea is viewed as essential by the Japanese as a clear sign of commitment to their security and defense. The Government of Japan realizes that their economic prosperity and future growth in the global economy are directly linked to stability and cooperation in the Northeast Asia region. The Japanese Defense Forces (JDF) were established in 1954 to defend Japan from conventional attack from outside Japan for a brief period of time until US forces intervene in support of the Mutual Defense Treaty. Under the existing treaty, Japanese Defense Forces cannot be utilized in an Asian regional conflict unless there is a direct attack against Japan. Therefore, Japanese military contribution to regional peace and stability is limited and thus linked to alliance cooperation with the United States.

Emergence of a Military Competitor

In light of the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union, the emergence of a new world order developed whereby there is only one global superpower – the United States. However, due to constant changes in the evolving political and military situation in the Northeast Asia region, a major military competitor could emerge in the region. One could argue that

⁴⁶ Korean Economic Institute, "South Korea Slows Down Economic Data," Accessed on 21 February 2002.

Russia is on the periphery of the Northeast Asia region power struggle and does not play a leading role like it used to. As Russia moves to a more global market economy and focuses inward towards domestic social and economic reforms, it is not viewed by the US as a threat or military competitor in the region.

However, stability and cooperation in the region is the focus of Russia's new foreign policy under President Vladimir Putin, particularly to promote economic development in Siberia and the Far Eastern region of Russia. President Putin visited North Korea and China in July 2000 with these ideals in mind. Putin's diplomatic efforts are aimed at coaxing the North Korean Government to be less isolated from the global economy.

Putin characterizes the situation on the Korean Peninsula as a serious security concern to Russia. The new Russian foreign policy concentrates on "its equal participation in the solution of the Korean problem and balanced relations with the two Korean states."⁴⁷ If successful in this endeavor Russia could become more influential in international political affairs and could be viewed by the US as an important intermediary in dealing with the North Koreans. However, given Russia's current economic situation, their influence as a major military competitor in the Northeast Asia region is limited and minimal.

The People's Republic of China, on the other hand, continues to build momentum as it emerges as a viable military competitor in the Northeast Asia region. The Chinese Government embarked on a transformational journey as it tries to maintain a communist regime yet focuses its economic development on a global market economy. Rapid growth and internationalism of its economy have led Chinese leaders to seek membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO). However, socially and politically the communist way of life is clashing with capitalism.

Chinese communist hard-liners try to remain in control of all facets of Chinese society, restricting the spread of capitalism.

China's foreign policy in the Northeast Asia region can be characterized as oscillating between cooperation and confrontation.⁴⁸ China supports Korean reunification. However, China does not support a continued US military presence on the Korean Peninsula. China supports stability and cooperation on the peninsula in part for its own economic development and prosperity in a stable regional environment. Both Russia and China are opposed to the superpower dominance status the United States holds in Northeast Asia. In July 2000, President Putin and President Jiang Zemin signed the Beijing Declaration. The declaration stated that China and Russia would develop a strategic cooperative partnership, and promote a multipolarized world. They expressed their opposition to US hegemony or "group politics". (Group politics referring to US led military alliances such as the Japanese – US security arrangement and NATO.)⁴⁹

In order to stay engaged in Northeast Asia and not let China fill the power vacuum, each of the last six US presidential administrations has advocated a positive cooperative approach to China instead of containment or confrontation.⁵⁰ The current administration, under President George W. Bush, is clearly concerned about China. The latest Quadrennial Defense Review addresses this issue by stating that US defense strategists will focus on promoting security cooperation with friends and allies to create a "favorable balance of military power" to improve

⁴⁷ The National Institute for Defense Studies Japan, East Asian Strategic Review 2001, 238-239.

⁴⁸ The National Institute for Defense Studies Japan, East Asian Strategic Review 2001, 172.

⁴⁹ The National Institute for Defense Studies Japan, East Asian Strategic Review 2001, 176-177.

⁵⁰ David Shambaugh, "From the White House, All Zigzags Lead to China," The Washington Post, February 17, 2002, p. B3.

deterrence and prevent aggression and coercion.⁵¹ The emergence of China as a strategic military competitor is a real threat, particularly with the largest military in the world with over 2,380,000 troops.⁵² The Chinese Government continues to develop and sell missiles and technology used in the creation of weapons of mass destruction. But most importantly, China has a credible nuclear retaliatory capability. Actively engaging the Chinese Government and integrating it into the world community serves not only the national interests of the US but acts as a stabilizing force in the Northeast Asia region.⁵³ Thus, lessening the political and military tensions and reducing proliferating arms races.

Achievement of US National Security Objectives

The forward stationing of troops in South Korea not only demonstrates US commitment to its allies but also is consistent with and contributes to the achievement of its national security interests and vital strategic interests for the Northeast Asia Region. As stated previously, current US national security objectives for the Northeast Asia region are to enhance security, promote democracy and promote economic prosperity. The physical presence or “boots on the ground” of 37,000 US troops on South Korean soil not only demonstrates US commitment to a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula but support for multilateral economic and security cooperation and stability for regional peace and progress.

Since the end of the Cold War, the US has emerged as the sole superpower in the world today with the “world’s largest economy and supremacy in every field – from its technology to

⁵¹ Michael McDevitt, “The QDR and East Asia,” Proceedings, March 2002, p. 88.

⁵² Bruce E. Bechtol Jr., Who is Stronger? A Comparative Analysis on the Readiness and Capabilities of the North and South Korean Militaries, (Washington D.C.: American Military University) p. 2.

⁵³ Shambaugh, “From the White House, All Zigzags Lead to China,” The Washington Post, B3.

its military.”⁵⁴ With that position comes the inherent responsibility of the US Government, based on its enduring national interests, to play a greater role in the Northeast Asia region by expanding its political, economic and security influence. By continuing to maintain strong alliances with the governments of South Korea and Japan and continuing to improve relations with Russia and China, there is the perception of a new industrial balance of power between China, Russia, Japan and the Korean Peninsula.⁵⁵

Several political and economic issues in the region require US influence in order to ensure a continued dialogue and cooperation between the countries involved. Political disputes over territory, islands, sea lines of communication, trade, fishing and natural resource rights have kept the US actively engaged in the region. Protecting and contributing to the well-being of the economic communities in the Northeast Asia is essential to US economic stability and prosperity. The South Korean and Japanese economies have historically relied on US support and intervention following the Korean War and World War II, respectively. The ability to promote access to key markets and strategic natural resources is critical to the well-being and future existence of the global economy in the region.

Since the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Russia has relied on the US for economic assistance and political influence to help shape and establish a market economy. China, although still a communist country, is moving towards a more open global market economy. North Korea, however, continues to isolate itself from the global economy depending on humanitarian assistance from the United Nations and western countries to cover the basic

⁵⁴ Tai-Tiong Tan, “East Asia & US Need Each Other,” Proceedings, March 2002, p. 62.

⁵⁵ Byoung Yong Lee, “Changes in Northeast Asia Order and Korean Peninsula Unification,” Korean Peninsula Trends and US-Japan-South Korea Relations Vol. 3. (Washington D.C.: The Center for Strategic International Studies, 1994) p. 24.

necessities of its people. This dependence on outside nations for aid has not changed their forward offensive military posture on the DMZ regardless of the high cost to maintain such a high level of military readiness that could be applied and redirected to assist in their desperate economic situation

Summary

In summary, the United States maintains several multi-faceted relationships with all five major players in the Northeast Asia region at different places on the diplomatic spectrum. Relationships with South Korea and Japan have developed into strong, decades old bilateral alliances built on political, security and economic concerns. Relationships with Russia and China are continuing to evolve as their socio-economic domestic issues take center stage in the redevelopment of their governments in light of the international community. The US relationship with North Korea, however, has remained tense, cautious and suspicious.

Since the Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953, the North Korean government has remained a horrific repressive regime that has focused its efforts on military buildup, both conventional and weapons of mass destruction, and isolating its people and economy from the rest of the world. Unfortunately, this isolationism has led to massive degradation of basic human rights and starvation of the North Korean people.

In trying to answer the questions: “Is the presence of forward deployed troops on the Korean Peninsula the key to cooperative security and stability in the Northeast Asia region? And should the US continue to station forces on the Korean Peninsula?” this paper examined and analyzed the key roles US forces play on the Korean Peninsula and the effect their presence has not only in Korea but also throughout the region. In analyzing the different aspects

of these questions, reviewing and comprehending US security objectives and vital strategic interests for the region are essential. Active and transparent engagement in the region allows the US to protect and advance their enduring national interest of:

- Ensuring US freedom of action
- Honors international commitments
- Contributes to the global economic well- being

The background of the Northeast Asia region provides the historical perspective needed to understand the complexities of issues facing the region today. Analyzing the North Korean regime under Kim Jung Il and the current military capability puts the threat to stability on the peninsula into perspective and provides an appreciation for continued regional peace. The future implication of the peninsula reunification or reconciliation not only impacts the Korean people but all of the regional neighbors. The impact of public opinion between generations of South Koreans plays a major role in the continued presence of US forces on the peninsula and their role in preserving stability. Continued peaceful relations between Japan, Russia and China towards both North and South Korea will continue to provide a vital link to sustained stability. The presence of US forces under the UNC in cooperation with the ROK forces is built upon the premises to defend freedom and deter aggression. Since 1953, US Forces Korea have accomplished this mission.

Conclusion

After examining and analyzing the different aspects of the questions, “Is the presence of forward deployed troops on the Korean Peninsula the key to cooperative security and stability

in the Northeast Asia region? And should the US continue to station forces on the Korean Peninsula?" the evidence suggests the following conclusions:

The forward deployed presence of US forces in South Korea for the last fifty years has reinforced and assisted the Republic of Korea in the defense of their country, deterred not only North Korean aggression but other regional neighbors, and maintained a peaceful coexistence. All of which have provided for a lasting peace not only on the Korean Peninsula but also throughout Northeast Asia.

Although it can be argued that North Korea's conventional military capabilities may have eroded since 1990 due to antiquated weaponry, the amount of conventional weapons, the large physical military personnel presence prepositioned in an offensive posture and the ability to employ weapons of mass destruction far outweigh that argument. US intelligence estimates concluded that existing facilities in North Korea give them the capability to produce over 30 atomic weapons annually.⁵⁶ Even existing North Korean artillery and multiple rocket launchers in prepositioned positions north of the DMZ can hit Seoul, located just 25 miles south of the DMZ. The North Korean military has the capability to launch a fierce attack. For the past fifty years US forces stationed in South Korea have successfully deterred them from doing just that. It is hard to argue with success.

Besides defending South Korea from North Korea aggression, US forces in South Korea provide critical prepositioned forces and access to the Asian theater. In an era where access is key in order to execute full spectrum military operations, the utility of US forces on the peninsula provides a dual capability: protection for South Korea from North Korea and being a deterrent for conflict in the entire region. Access to land based prepositioned supplies, equipment and

infrastructure is a combat multiplier. Even more, it provides the capability to provide large-scale reinforcements by sea and air from the continental United States.

Since the American way of war is heavily dependent on air power to do a majority of the fighting or shape the battlefield prior to a ground campaign, access to air bases is essential. Without access, employment of land based air assets is severely limited.⁵⁷ The ability to project the US military as an instrument of national power in a contingency operation or crisis situation enhances the US Government's ability to respond to the needs of our allies in this region. Security on the peninsula also provides Japan the reassurance that the US is committed to Japanese security, the Mutual Defense Agreement and the stability of their economy. The hegemony of US military power helps balance other regional powers and keeps belligerents in check at a very low security cost to them. This allows our allies to focus their resources on economic development and not high defense budgets.⁵⁸

The US presence in the region continues to allow the US to maintain a foothold and keep other potential military competitors within their own borders. The People's Republic of China understands that any steps of aggression in the region will provoke a US response.

As long as the US maintains its national security objectives and vital strategic interests in the Northeast Asia region, US forces must remain on the peninsula in order to shape the environment. Even if the peninsula reunifies or reconciles, US Forces Korea provide a stabilizing force that can and have for five decades provided cooperative security and stability among neighboring countries in the Northeast Asia region.

⁵⁶ Nicksch, "Korea: US-South Korean Relations – Issues for Congress," CRS Report for Congress, 2.

⁵⁷ Devitt, "The QDR and East Asia," Proceedings, 88.

⁵⁸ Tan, "East Asia & US Need Each Other," Proceedings, 63.

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