

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

TRANSFORMING DETERRENCE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

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This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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ABSTRACT

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On 25 November 2003, President Bush announced the start of a worldwide review of American military overseas armed forces posture. President Bush's statement has an important impact on the people of the Republic of (south) Korea (ROK). Since the end of hostilities in 1953, Korea and the U.S. have forged a long lasting and unique alliance to deter North Korea. From the time the Armistice was signed in July 1953 to today the ROK has become an economic giant, rising to the 12th largest economy in the world in 2003. In the last 50 years, Korea has undergone dramatic social and political changes. The ROK military has developed from a poorly trained and led armed force in 1953 to a modernized and powerful military. The basic mission and footprint of U.S. forces has remained unchanged since the 1953 Armistice. What represented a prudent and responsive deterrent capability in 1953 may not be appropriate in 2004. The nature of the changing North Korean threat and capabilities of both the U.S. and ROK military may be a good starting point to re-examine our deterrence posture. The debate in both Korea and the United States is ongoing and very animated. On a daily basis the Korean and international press speculate on options that include complete U.S. withdrawal to a preemptive attack on North Korea. The South Koreans do not fear nuclear attack from North Korea. They do fear an uncertain future with a diminished U.S. presence and a powerful nuclear armed North Korea that would be able to blackmail a prosperous south. More importantly, the reality of a diminished U.S. presence/commitment would trigger South Korea to initiate a politically untenable agenda of large increases in military spending and military conscription. Therein lies the delicate balance both the United States and Korea must maintain. This paper will examine both the political, cultural and military changes that have taken place on the Korean peninsula.

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TRANSFORMING DETERRENCE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

On 25 November 2003, President Bush announced the start of a worldwide review of American military overseas armed forces posture. This review is based on the new requirements of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and the improved technology and weapons systems of our transformed military. President Bush's statement has an important impact on the people of the Republic of (south) Korea (ROK). Since the end of Hostilities in Korea in 1953, Korea and the U.S. have forged a long lasting and unique alliance to deter North Korea officially titled the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK). Today, 37,000 U.S. troops are forward deployed in Korea with the primary mission of deterrence against a DPRK attack. From the time the Armistice was signed in July 1953 to today, the ROK has become an economic giant rising to the 12th largest economy in the world in 2003. In the last 50 years the ROK has undergone dramatic social and political changes. The ROK military has developed from a poorly trained and led armed force in 1953 to a modernized and powerful military. The basic mission and footprint of U.S. forces has remained unchanged since the 1953 Armistice. What represented a prudent and responsive deterrent capability in 1953 may not be appropriate in 2004. The nature of the changing North Korean threat and capabilities of both the U.S. and ROK military underscore the need to re-examine our deterrence posture. The debate in both the ROK and the U.S is ongoing and very animated. On a daily basis the Korean and international press speculate on options that include complete U.S. withdrawal to a preemptive attack on the DPRK. The South Koreans do not fear nuclear attack from the DPRK, but they do fear an uncertain future with a diminished U.S. presence and a powerful nuclear DPRK that would be able to slowly blackmail a prosperous south. More importantly to Koreans, the perception or reality of a diminished U.S. presence/commitment would trigger the ROK to initiate a politically unacceptable agenda of large increases in military spending and military manpower conscription. Therein lies the delicate balance both the U.S. and the ROK must maintain. This paper will examine the both the political, cultural and military changes that have taken place on the Korean peninsula that directly influence that delicate balance.

U.S. FORWARD PRESENCE: FIFTY YEARS OF PEACE

Throughout the 50-year alliance the United States and the ROK have continually readjusted the conditions and terms of the alliance. The U.S. and the ROK view was primarily fixed on containment of the DPRK through military deterrence. The declared policy and rhetoric of the DPRK remains unchanged. The DPRK has not wavered in its stated objective of reunification of the peninsula under communist rule as their "Supreme National Task."¹ They

have maintained very large and capable military forces forward deployed on the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) bordering with the ROK. The disposition and forward deployment of over two thirds of their military power on the DMZ has clearly favored offensive operations vice defending against attack.² The DPRK has continued to develop and deploy chemical and biological weapons. Since the early 1990s they have actively developed a nuclear weapons capability. Even today the rhetoric continues. On a daily basis the DPRK news agency website runs editorials calling for a "Death-defying fight against the United States."³

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 it was assumed that with the loss of its communist sponsor, the DPRK would become a lone rogue state certain to collapse without the economic and military support of the Warsaw Pact. In reality, the exact opposite occurred. The DPRK began an aggressive program in the 1990s to replace the resources of it lost super power sponsor. The desire of the American people for the "Peace Dividend" inspired Senator Dale Bumpers to sponsor a bill in Congress that ultimately led to the approval of a three phase plan to reduce troop commitments in the ROK starting in 1990.⁴ At that point, troop levels were 43,000 U.S. service members. Phase One of the withdrawal was completed; several bases and 6,000 U.S. military personnel were reduced down to our current level of 37,000. Further planned phased reductions were halted in 1992 when DPRK revealed it was developing a nuclear weapons program. At the request of the ROK government further troop withdrawals were put on hold pending settlement of the DPRK nuclear program issues. Through long negotiations, the DPRK government agreed to halt nuclear weapons development and agreed to United Nations monitoring of its nuclear power plants and programs in return for massive economic and humanitarian aid. The increased tensions on the peninsula were reduced and the ROK initiated increased political dialogue and cultural exchanges with the DPRK, which ultimately led to the "Sunshine Policy" under ROK President Kim Dae Jung in 1997 for which he was awarded the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize.⁵ At the same time South Korea was undergoing an economic transformation leading their economy to rapid industrial expansion and technological development outgrowing Japan in many sectors. National pride and self-reliance were enhanced with worldwide attention on the Seoul Olympics and the 2002 World Cup competition. Korean nationalism was growing and the large presence of the U.S. in all facets of their foreign and defense policy, combined with the heavy footprint of our military presence, became a political liability to the ROK administration. The advent of the Sunshine Policy also began to highlight a divergence in the view of the means of deterrence. The ROK leadership believes that the only way to reduce DPRK proliferation and influence their behavior is by engagement with economic and social inducements. The American view remained unchanged as one of

hard line negotiations with humanitarian and economic aid provided only upon compliance with international agreements.⁶ U.S. presence in Korea became a volatile political topic with numerous opposition groups forming among college students and young professionals who advocated a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops.

From this setting General Thomas Schwartz, Commander, Combined Forces Command and U.S Forces in Korea, began negotiations with the ROK government in 1999, which ultimately led to the Land Partnership Plan (LPP) initiative. Under this plan, U.S Forces would close 18 U.S Bases (Camps) in the ROK and return several parcels of land used for live fire and maneuver training.⁷ From the U.S. perspective this had several benefits, first and foremost being the consolidation of the Camps. This would allow for improved facilities and quality of Life for U.S. soldiers. General Schwartz believed that by reducing the costs of maintaining numerous small camps throughout the peninsula and investing in improvements to the remaining bases, anti-American tensions would be reduced. It would also address many of the concerns of the Korean opposition groups by both returning valuable real estate and reducing footprint of U.S. forces. The most visible and contentious issue remained the U.S. Forces Headquarters in metropolitan Seoul that occupies over 800 acres or 40% of available city land in a sprawling capital city of 10 million where real estate values are equal to those in mid-town Manhattan.⁸ Both the U.S. and ROK officials signed this agreement on 29 March 2002. To the new ROK administration of President Roh it was a clear victory addressing many of the concerns that had sparked a continued campaign of anti-American protests.

What began in 1999, as a quality of life initiative would become, under the Bush Administration, a shift in military strategy and the method of deterrence under the context of the GWOT. In June of 2003, the Secretary of Defense modified the LPP and declared that, in addition to the elements described in the LPP regarding base closures and return of training areas, that at an undetermined date all U.S. Forces would be withdrawn south of the Han River.⁹ Additionally he formed a working group to review the number of troops in the ROK and their capability with the goal of possibly reducing our troop levels. This addition is a significant change in the ROK public's perception of our military strategy and interpretation of deterrence on the Korean peninsula. No longer would U.S. forces be automatically involved in a conventional attack by the DPRK. The movement of U.S. forces south of the Han River effectively puts them out of range of all DPRK conventional artillery strikes. To many Koreans this eliminated what has become known as the "Trip Wire" effect of automatic involvement of U.S. forces under any attack by the DPRK.¹⁰ The trip wire effect to Koreans is a tangible and irrefutable affirmation of America's commitment. South Koreans perceive that U.S. forces will

transform from their original purpose of DPRK deterrence to a more regional and power projection stance in East Asia. This new positioning of U.S. forces is destabilizing and is perceived as threatening by both North and South Korea.

The Bush administration believes this is no change from our current commitments. In a recent speech General Pace, Vice Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs, made the following remarks: "New technologies and tactics would provide the opportunity to do a better, more efficient, more effective defense of Korea."¹¹ The DPRK government reacted strongly, pointing this out as yet another indication of U.S. preparations for a preemptive attack by moving American soldiers beyond DPRK artillery range to avoid U.S. casualties from the promised DPRK retaliation strike.¹² Many South Koreans also saw this move as destabilizing in light of DPRK nuclear weapons program and a U.S. National Security Strategy that has added the right of preemptive attack in defense of the American homeland. With the potential for DPRK missiles to reach the U.S. west coast, the perception of an American focus on homeland defense rather than defense of Korea was unsettling to the ROK government and people. Very quickly the anti-American protesters in Seoul had to share their ground with pro-American demonstrations. President Roh, who won election on a nationalist and subtle anti-American platform, began to question the wisdom of an American withdrawal while working through the latest DPRK nuclear crisis.¹³ In May 2003, during the visit of newly elected President Roh to Washington, President Bush agreed with President Roh's request to delay movement of U.S. combat forces south of the Han River until the present nuclear crisis is resolved.¹⁴ Despite Secretary Rumsfeld's reassurances in his public statements regarding our commitment to their security and prosperity, the Korean public remains unconvinced.¹⁵ Many Koreans see the movement of troops south of Han in context of an American foreign policy that has included the doctrine of preemption and unilateralism, leaving them vulnerable to an aggressive U.S. foreign policy and military retaliation by the DPRK leadership. South Koreans do see the DPRK's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program as a threat to regional and world stability, but in a recent poll only nine percent of South Koreans believed that North Korea would employ WMD against fellow Koreans.¹⁶ For the most part they believe the DPRK political leadership's statements that their nuclear programs are for deterrence against a preemptive American strike.¹⁷

The Bush administration has acknowledged the ROK's concerns. Repeated statements by the National Security Advisor (Dr. Condoleezza Rice), Secretary of Defense (Donald Rumsfeld) and the Secretary of State (Colin Powell) confirm the administration's policy of a diplomatic rather than a military solution to the current crisis and the U.S. continued commitment to deter DPRK aggression. In remarks made upon conclusion of talks with ROK Foreign

Minister Yoon on 3 September 2003, Secretary Powell restated the U.S. Government's commitment to South Korea: "I again reaffirmed to him that there is absolutely no change or slackening in the commitment that the United States has to the safety and security of our partner and ally South Korea. As we continue further discussions on the North Korean situation, we will consult in the closest possible manner with South Korea as we move forward."¹⁸

On the same day, Secretary Rumsfeld addressed the nature of the changing alliance when addressing the U.S. Korean Business Council and he highlighted the U.S. view of the emphasis changing from deterrence to regional stability:

"We have discussed transforming our combined forces, which is both a necessity but it's also an opportunity to modernize the alliance and adapt it to the changing security requirements of the region and the world. Let there be no doubt we are in a new security environment. This is a different period than the preceding period when our relationship was fashioned and put in place."¹⁹

Both speeches addressed a continued commitment to deterrence, but Secretary Rumsfeld plainly alludes to the new environment. These remarks have different meanings to Americans focused on the GWOT and to Koreans with 7,000 artillery tubes arrayed on their border with the North. To a Korean audience, this is the first step toward a shift in American focus away from deterrence and confirmation that the ROK is to become another military power projection platform with an eye towards future threats to stability in the region. In early 2003, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld initiated a worldwide review of overseas permanent U.S. military deployments with the goal of reduced presence with a more mobile and flexible force. Repositioning troops in the ROK sends a strong signal that they are available and destined for deployment elsewhere in the region, potentially to such GWOT hotspots as Malaysia or the Philippines.²⁰ Former U.S. Commander in Korea, General Gary Luck, had estimated that a conventional attack by the DPRK would cost one trillion dollars in economic damage and over one million civilian and military casualties.²¹ To the older and more conservative Koreans the cost of a delayed American ground force response, or one that involved solely strategic air and missile forces, is frightening.

In the fall of 2003, in the midst of a nationwide emotional political debate, the South Korean media widely reported on rumors that the U.S. was threatening the redeployment of the Korea based Second Infantry Division if Korea did not support Operation Iraqi Freedom with the deployment of a Korean infantry division.²² Although U.S. commanders quickly denied this story, its extensive publication in Korean media demonstrated how wary the public is of American intentions. To the Korean public, this was a further example of the United States prioritizing the GWOT and regional stability ahead of deterring war on the Korean peninsula.

Both the U.S. and ROK officials agree the alliance must evolve. Despite repeated assurances by senior American officials of our commitment to deterrence, our actions of moving troops farther south send a very different message. South Korea remains one of our strongest allies and the majority of South Koreans and President Roh's administration support continued U.S. military presence.²³ Increasing South Korean nationalism and pride in their economic and social achievements are manifesting in the younger Korean peoples' demand for an equal partnership with the U.S. The U.S. must recognize this and demonstrate that our commitment to peace on the peninsula is not in conflict with our current policy towards the DPRK nuclear proliferation. The U.S. must show that our movement of troops south of the Han and our GWOT strategy does not pose a threat to maintaining peace in Korea or put their "Sunshine Policy" of engagement at risk. We also must weigh the wisdom of moving troops further south out of harms way if we cannot effectively convince our allies of our commitment. Statements made on 19 October 2003 by both President Bush and Secretary Powell on the television show "Meet the Press" is a hopeful indication. President Bush stated, that in coordination with our Allies, the U.S. would be willing to state in a written document (not a Treaty) that the U.S. would not preemptively strike North Korea but would continue negotiations towards a diplomatic solution. By clearly addressing both North Korea's and South Korea's greatest concern, the possibilities of a peaceful solution to the current crisis of DPRK nuclear proliferation are strengthened. Most importantly, it would set the conditions to move beyond the proliferation issue and the context of the GWOT and evolve the U.S.- Korean alliance in ways that will support the realignment of U.S. military forces in Korea and the long-term regional stability in East Asia.

CHANGING POLITICAL AND CULTURAL OUTLOOKS IN SOUTH KOREA

Since the signing of the Armistice in 1953, Koreans have steadily built their nation into a prosperous and highly educated society. As we hope to see in Iraq, Korean democracy has slowly developed from the dictatorial powers of President Syngman Rhee in the 1950s to the popular election of President Roh. It is easy to overlook that their current President is only the fourth democratically elected president in their history. Frequent government scandals, labor strikes and the friction between ancient agrarian societies with a fast encroaching industrial economy dominate Korean politics. Labor unions are very powerful political voices that make any changes in government price supports or economic restructuring very painful and sometimes trigger violent confrontations. The ROK is a country whose modern history is dominated by war, military occupation and political scandals. All of these factors make the ordinary Korean very suspicious of government officials and any outside foreign influence.

Korean society has two distinct cultures among their older and younger citizens. South Korea has a median age of 32 years. Over 85% of the population has little to no personal recollection of the Korean War.²⁴ The 75-year-old Koreans, however, lived through a brutal 25-year Japanese occupation and the horrific Korean War. They remember their country in ruins after the war and, for the most part, Koreans have very positive memories of America's help and aid in rebuilding Korea. The older Korean also has the most to lose in the event of an American withdrawal, many of whom have grown up in service professions supporting one of the dozens of American bases. In a culture where retraining middle age workers for new job skills is rare, the closure of these bases will cause high unemployment of these senior workers in areas near American camps.

The younger Korean born after the war has no memories of poverty and destruction. They were born into an economic boom. This younger generation is known in Korea as "386's"-Koreans in their thirties (3), educated in the 80's (8), and born in the sixties (6). They are very nationalistic and growingly intolerant of what they view as American domination and occupation of the ROK. National opinion polls reflect this group's belief that North Korea would never attack their "brothers" in the South. They believe that the aggressive North Korean weapons policy is more a reflection of hard-line US diplomacy, not a desire to violently overthrow the ROK government. In their youth, the Koreans spend an average of eight hours a day, six days a week in school in order to prepare for the national college entrance exams which will determine future employment and prosperity. The young have grown up in a society where a 26-month mandatory military service obligation comes at a time in their lives that severely disrupts their college education and future employment. Military life for the South Korean is tough physical duty with little or no opportunities to continue their education such as in the U.S Army. Sentiment against military service is growing increasingly negative. In 2002, 9,000 Korean men avoided military duty by claiming overseas residency or getting large tattoos on their bodies, common ploys to avoid military service.²⁵ With public opinion amongst the young growing against mandatory military service and the belief that North Korea is not a threat, it is no coincidence that an aggressive American foreign policy towards the DPRK has given rise to increased anti-American sentiments amongst the younger Koreans.

The 1988 Olympic games, co-hosting the 2002 World Cup, and the 2002 award of the Nobel Peace Prize to President Kim, marks the Korea's emergence onto the world's stage. These events served to supercharge a nationalistic feeling and a belief that Koreans could now solve their own problems without the dominance of the U.S.

Public opinion in the ROK shows a very divided country on the issues of U.S. foreign policy and military forces in Korea. In recent polls, 61 percent of Koreans believe U.S. forces should remain in Korea. A further 31 percent favor withdrawal in stages. Only four percent of the respondents wanted immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces. Age was a factor in individual responses. Out of all respondents who favored continued U.S. presence only 40 percent were in their 20s and 30s.²⁶ On the same poll, 44 percent supported President Bush's North Korean policy while 49 percent were opposed. South Korea is a divided nation on both U.S. policy and military presence. This represents a great challenge to their political leaders in formulating domestic and foreign policy. Although the streets of the ROK are often filled with thousands of college students protesting U.S. policy, several opinion polls indicate a large segment of Korean society are very concerned over any changes to U.S. presence. The older Koreans who represent the middle class and the segment of the society most involved in maintaining their economy and most resistant to change is at best a split electorate on their views of U.S. policy. This was graphically demonstrated on the occasion of the last two North Korean long-range missile tests. In the early 1990s, when North Korea test fired a missile in the Sea of Japan, the South Korean stock market dropped six percent. In 1998, when the DPRK fired a missile over Japan, the market hit its lowest point in 22 months.²⁷

The strong feelings of the young are also tempered by their political leaders' understanding that, although the DPRK arguably may not be an immediate threat, the physical presence and demonstration of a strong U.S. commitment to the ROK brings great stability in a region where they must compete with an economic power of Japan and the economic and military power of China. South Korean leaders also understand American history. Just as President Syngman Rhee aggressively demanded a bi-lateral mutual defense treaty with the U.S. in 1953 in return for his support for the armistice, his successors today fundamentally believe that only a physical presence of U.S. forces will guarantee continued U.S. interest and engagement in event of attack. South Koreans understand very clearly the fate of the Kurds and Iraqi Shia in 1992, and the South Vietnamese once the American troops withdrew.

On a very practical level Korean political leaders understand that a U.S. withdrawal or troop reduction would require a significant increase in their own military budget. South Korea has avoided billions of dollars of military spending because the U.S. has forward deployed high tech weapons and surveillance equipment such as Patriot Air Defense, Early Warning Aircraft, Apache Attack helicopters and over 225 combat aircraft to Korea. The ROK ranks 57th among nations with 2.8% of its GNP devoted to military expenditures.²⁸ Compare that to Israel, another

country with an enemy at its border and who is ranked eighth in the world at 8.75% of GNP devoted to military expenditures.

Recovery from the Asian economic slowdown in the late 1990s has been gradual in South Korea. In a very fragile economy that depends on export of consumer goods and import of virtually all forms of energy, increases in the military budget to purchase weapons systems from the U.S. and Europe would have a significant effect on Korean economic growth. South Korea's failure to significantly increase military spending has long been a source of criticism by U.S. officials who look upon a portion of the Korean economic miracle as having been a free ride on the American taxpayer. Realistically, most acknowledge that a Korean administration that spends billions of dollars on foreign weapon systems at the expense of social and economic programs would not survive very long. South Korea's failure to increase defense spending is not due to an aversion to spending on defense when it is provided at little cost by the U.S., but it is an acknowledgement that reductions in domestic program spending are politically unacceptable to the Korean people. In recent agreements the ROK has purchased both F15/F16 combat aircraft but long promised deals for Patriot PAC-3 missiles, EWACs and AH64 Attack helicopters have not come though to fruition. In a recent announcement, the U.S. promised over 11 billion dollars of military aid to help soften the blow to the South Korean economy due to a probable reduction in U.S. presence.²⁹

President Roh was elected to office in 2003 on a platform of political reform and self-reliance of South Korea's national defense. Many Koreans and Americans read his self-reliance defense policy as a call for withdrawal of U.S. military forces. In subsequent statements after his election President Roh stated, "The role of USFK will continue to be important in the years to come."³⁰ President Roh realizes the economic impact of a U.S. troop withdrawal. In a regional sense a South Korea without a U.S. presence cannot hope to successfully negotiate on an economic, political or military basis with a powerful DPRK military threat and will increasingly be subject to the economic or political demands of a dominant China.

STATUS OF FORCES OF THE KOREAN PENINSULA

The armistice established what would become the most heavily fortified and defended border in the world. Two powerful allies, China and the Soviet Union, pledged to guarantee North Korean sovereignty. Frequent border skirmishes and combat over the next 20 years into the early 1970s reinforced the threat of invasion with little warning. There was no doubt that South Korea's military could not withstand another DPRK attack without substantial ground forces from the United States. The threat has changed dramatically since 1953. The pace of

modernization in both the U.S. and the ROK military has been dramatic. The DPRK military has not modernized at nearly the same pace, but through conventional means and the geographic forward positioning of their armed forces along the DMZ, it has maintained a substantial threat. An examination of the status of the U.S., ROK and the DPRK capabilities will show just how dependent the ROK military is on U.S. support for critical defense capabilities.

The Korean Peoples Army (KPA) of North Korea is the focal point of their society both politically and culturally. The KPA is constitutionally linked to the Workers Party with loyalties directly tied to the Communist Party. The military is seen as the instrument to their supreme national task of reunification or liberation of the Korean peninsula.³¹ The military has always come first in their society. Despite reports of millions of deaths by starvation, the DPRK spends 34 percent of its Gross National Product on its military. The KPA is reported to have grown in strength from 400,000 in 1960 to over one million soldiers, with another 4.7 million in their reserve today. Over 7,000 artillery pieces are arrayed on the DMZ together with over 3,500 tanks and 2,700 armored personnel carriers. Of note is their 88,000 special forces believed to be among the best trained in the world. Based on numbers alone, the KPA is second only to China in the region and fourth in the world for the strength of its military. The KPA has had limited success in the modernization of their artillery and armor formations which consist of 1960s era Warsaw Pact equipment. It has been over a decade since the last new conventional weapon system, a 270mm rocket launcher, was fielded to their army.³² The KPA bears a strong resemblance in capability and technology to the Iraqi armies of both Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The KPA has modernized its military in many other more significant ways. Taking lessons learned from the first Gulf War, North Korea has invested heavily in over 11,000 underground facilities and fiber optic communications. The KPA has fielded secure frequency hopping radio sets for tactical units. Over 70 percent of their ground forces are forward positioned at the DMZ. They have positioned their artillery in hardened underground facilities that are capable of a sustained rate of fire of 300,000 rounds an hour into South Korea including the ROK capital, Seoul, 45 kilometers from the DMZ.³³ Even with our substantial technical surveillance capability, as recently as March 2003 senior U.S. military leaders in Korea, estimated that they would have at best 48 hours notice of an impending attack.³⁴ The large KPA stockpile of both artillery and missile delivered chemical munitions add an even more sinister threat of instant war to the South Koreans' daily lives.

The ROK Army is a highly modernized force, consisting of 560,000 ground troops and over 12,000 modern tanks, APCs and artillery pieces.³⁵ Over four million reservists who train

annually on their wartime defensive operations support the active forces. The army is composed of three-field army's, Capital Defense Command, Special Warfare Command and Aviation Command. Ground forces consist of 51 infantry divisions, including two ROK Marine divisions considered light by U.S. standards but which are organized into combined arms formations with armored infantry fighting vehicles and tanks. The Korean defense industry has produced indigenous equipment closely resembling current U.S. Army tanks, armored personnel carriers and artillery. Their rotary wing equipment includes AH-1 (Cobra) attack helicopters as well as UH-1 (Huey) and recently fielded UH-60 transport aircraft. In the last several years the ROK Army has made great improvements in their digital communications and artillery fire control systems.

In addition to their ground forces, the Korean government, in coordination with Combined Forces Command, has built a formidable array of defenses between the DMZ and the capital in Seoul. The defenses are laid out in five defensive belts that span the width of Korea starting at the DMZ and ending at the capital city of Seoul. These defensive belts consist of obstacles, active minefields and surveyed minefields ready for emplacement. Bridges and key road junctures are pre-wired for demolition. Defensive fighting positions have been surveyed and built down to the individual soldier's fighting positions. Forward defensive belts are occupied with men and equipment. In the midst of this 49 division force is the U.S. Army's Second Infantry Division. It is easy to conclude that the contribution of one U.S. infantry division among this force is relatively inconsequential in a ground fight.

Korea's critical shortfall is in fixed-wing attack aircraft, aircraft delivered precision-guided munitions, surveillance and targeting capability. The ROK Army is more than capable of fighting and winning a conventional attack. In terms of ground combat, the ROK Army has shortfalls in artillery counter-battery capability especially in target acquisition radars. This is a critical shortfall, which Korea relies on the U.S. Army to make up for. In the event of a DPRK attack, detection and destruction of their 7,000 artillery and missile sites is essential to victory.

In a preemptive attack on the DPRK scenario the U.S. and the ROK would certainly have an overwhelming advantage. Given time to target and destroy artillery, troop formations, communications and missile sites with precision munitions, the KPA would be unable to sustain any form of offensive maneuver. But these advantages are largely countered with our defensive posture. The DPRK clearly does not have the ability to sustain and win an offensive war into South Korea. But any form of attack into an urbanized ROK would result in substantial infrastructure destruction and civilian casualties. It is up to debate whether a surprise attack, in

which hundreds of thousands of Koreans are killed in the opening hours, might result in economic and political conditions that the ROK cannot recover from.

CONCLUSION

To senior American political and military leaders the inevitable change in the U.S. military presence in the ROK is viewed as a purely technical adjustment based on increased weapons and intelligence capabilities. To Koreans it represents a complex cultural and political conflict in which their national identity and sovereignty are at stake. The younger Koreans are confident in their ability to reunify with the north on their own terms. They are ready to cast off what they see as 75-years of foreign occupation of their homeland. Middle aged and older Koreans are wary of what they perceive as a lessening of U.S. support. This is complicated by a very fragile but robust economy and their developing democracy.

The ROK political leaders understand that South Korea without a dominant world power as an ally leaves their country with very little influence on world and regional issues. Few Koreans see the DPRK as a threat to attack. They understand that the DPRK's nuclear weapons program and their willingness to sell to anyone on the world's markets is a threat to regional security and threatens economic growth. The generational differences of opinion regarding U.S. military presence in Korea make the ROK's domestic politics of U.S. troop movement difficult. Change is accepted in small increments in Korea. For a U.S. realignment to be successful we must continue our movements in small steps. With each movement, such as base closing or troop withdrawal, we must allow the Korean government to gauge public opinion, make adjustments in domestic policy to allow for job displacements and other disruptions, and deflect the reactive North Korean propaganda that will certainly occur.

The Korean military is modernized and professional. On a balance sheet it is more than capable of defending against a conventional attack. It is unlikely that an attack by the DPRK would limit itself to conventional weapons. There are critical intelligence and weapons capabilities we must continue to provide the ROK for many years to come. If our goal is a stable ROK government capable of administering an eventual reunification we must be very sensitive to public opinion and their domestic politics. To effectively transform our alliance and military capability in Korea we must look beyond just military force ratios.

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ENDNOTES

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