

## Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 96: Korea: The Case for Disengagement

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### Executive Summary

For 20 straight days last June the Republic of Korea teetered on the brink of chaos. Demonstrations rocked the capital, Seoul, and other major cities after ROK president Chun Doo Hwan abruptly terminated negotiations with the opposition over constitutional reform. Civilian riot police, who had easily broken up earlier protests led by radical university students, lost control when housewives, office workers, and professionals joined the marches. "Democracy is more important than economics," said one businessman.[1] President Chun reshuffled his cabinet and only barely backed away from imposing martial law. A military coup against Chun, a former general who had seized power seven years earlier, seemed increasingly likely.

Officials in Washington were nearly as nervous as their Korean counterparts. The ROK, tied to the United States by a bilateral defense treaty, had long been considered one of this country's closest military allies. The United States maintains tactical nuclear weapons and 40,000 troops in South Korea to back its defense commitment, yet the Reagan administration could only stand by helplessly in the face of the growing disorder.

But the Chun government unexpectedly gave ground. On June 29 the ruling party's chairman and presidential candidate, Roh Tae Woo, proposed an eight-point program that met most of the opposition's demands, including direct presidential elections (scheduled for December 16), the release of political prisoners, and protection of human rights. Chun agreed to the changes, and the demonstrations waned; the ROK moved away from the abyss.

Many dangers remain. Elections have been held in Korea before, but they have been fixed. Civilian governments have attained power there before, but the military has subsequently seized control; its fear of retaliation for past human rights abuses alone could trigger a coup attempt, particularly if long-time dissident Kim Dae Jung is elected.

Moreover, Korea's political future is uncertain. Two opposition leaders who have feuded bitterly in the past, Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam, are running for president, and a split vote could result in Roh's election. Even if one of the two Kims wins, political instability could follow; both disdain compromise and are distrusted by many Koreans. Whoever is elected will have to deal with the continued incarceration of more than a thousand political prisoners, unprecedented labor unrest, and renewed student protests. The current relative calm, warned one Western diplomat, "is just temporary. There are a hell of a lot of fights to come, and some of them will be in the streets. There will be more crises. The Koreans are great brinksmen." [2]

Nevertheless, the ROK has a brighter future today than it did before Roh unveiled his eight-point program on June 29. Unfortunately, the United States can take little solace in that changed outlook. Anti-American sentiment in the ROK may be more intense today than it was before the protests began. And if South Korea's move toward democracy is reversed, the United States is likely to receive much of the blame. After four decades of intervention in Korean affairs,

it is deeply entangled in the ROK's fractious internal struggles.

The case of Korea is yet another in which the political risk posed by popular disenchantment with U.S.-supported autocrats--which has poisoned America's relations with Iran since the shah fell, for example--is not counterbalanced by any substantial security gain. Indeed, the United States' commitment to defend the ROK is a major detriment, costing billions and increasing the risk of American involvement in an Asian war.

The United States should execute a phased military withdrawal from the ROK and should sever its defense guarantee once all the troops have been removed. Economic and cultural relations should be maintained thereafter, of course, but South Korea, a wealthy nation with the capability to match North Korea's military, should be deemed to have graduated from the American military safety net. Even if the ROK then seemed somewhat less secure, the United States' position would be immeasurably better. America would no longer be forced to take sides in South Korea's internal political squabbles or subsidize the defense of a trading rival. Most important, the Korean tripwire, and the consequent threat of U.S. involvement in an armed conflict, would be gone.

### **Early U.S.-Korean Relations**

The United States established diplomatic relations with Korea in 1882, but the latter nation was soon swallowed by Japan, which officially turned the Korean Peninsula into a colony in 1910. At the end of World War II, however, Japan lost its territories, and control of Korea was divided between the United States and the Soviet Union. The two countries agreed to establish a provisional government under a five-year trusteeship, with independence to follow. But the postwar Yalta accords quickly broke down in Korea (as well as in Europe). The Republic of Korea, ruled by Syngman Rhee, a brutal right-wing nationalist, was created in May 1948; the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), led by the even more vicious Kim Il Sung, emerged in December. Both states claimed to represent the entire peninsula. "The ultimate result of great power rivalry, therefore, was to institutionalize the civil war in two contending states, both committed to the cause of unification," observed Callum MacDonald, a lecturer at the University of Warwick in England.[3]

The Soviet troops were pulled out of Korea in late 1948; America's last forces left in July 1949. Though Pentagon defense planners recognized that there was a risk of the North invading the South, they did not intend to commit U.S. troops in the event of a war. Given America's expanding military commitments and declining force levels, the U.S. reaction was to be limited to an appeal to the United Nations.[4]

In his famous speech to the National Press Club on January 12, 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson excluded the ROK, along with the rest of the Asian mainland, from America's strategic perimeter and said that it should look to the UN for help in deterring communist aggression. President Harry Truman's administration later appeared to back away from its noninterventionist stance, but the Pentagon resisted increased military assistance for Rhee. In fact, the thuggishness of Rhee's administration and his repeated threat to retake the "lost territories" in the North caused the United States to refuse to equip the ROK's military with aircraft (either bombers or fighters), tanks, or other heavy equipment.

On June 25, 1950, the North Korean People's Army crossed the 38th parallel. The Truman administration attempted to contain the invasion first by merely supplying military equipment, then by launching naval and air strikes. But the South Korean army was overwhelmed; it yielded Seoul in only three days. American troops, along with small foreign contingents under the aegis of the UN--the Soviets were boycotting the UN Security Council at the time and therefore were unable to veto the enabling resolution--began arriving in July, but by September most of the ROK was in North Korean hands. With the dramatic landing at Inchon, behind North Korean lines, Gen. Douglas MacArthur reversed the tide of battle; within a month the UN troops had crossed into the DPRK.

However, as the UN forces neared the Yalu River, marking the Korean-Chinese border, in November, about 200,000 Chinese "people's volunteers" struck the unprepared Eighth Army. Seoul fell a second time, only to be recaptured by the UN forces, which took and lost Pyongyang, the North's capital, a second time. By mid-1951 the front had stabilized near the original dividing line at the 38th parallel. Two years of tortuous negotiations followed; an armistice was signed on July 27, 1953. The war had cost America some 54,000 lives, 103,000 nonfatal casualties, and \$75 billion--a significant 5.6 percent of its aggregate GNP between 1950 and 1953.[5]

Discussions on the terms of a permanent peace treaty, including troop withdrawals and the reunification of the peninsula, were begun in October 1953 but quickly proved fruitless. So the United States formulated a defense agreement that committed it to consult with South Korea in the event of a threat to peace. Although the Mutual Defense Treaty, ratified in January 1954, does not explicitly guarantee U.S. military assistance to the ROK, the continued presence of U.S. soldiers there acts as a tripwire that would make America's participation in combat automatic.

## **The Current Commitment**

The U.S. troop level peaked at 360,000 during the Korean War; in 1957 two divisions with a total of about 60,000 troops remained. In 1963 Pentagon planners considered reducing U.S. forces further but held off because South Korea had dispatched soldiers to Vietnam. For years the United States funded the bulk of South Korea's defense effort; U.S. military aid accounted for less than 50 percent of the ROK's defense expenditure for the first time in 1969.[6]

In early 1970 President Richard Nixon decided that additional troop reductions in Asia were desirable; he withdrew the Seventh Army Division the following year, leaving about 40,000 U.S. personnel, the current number, stationed in Korea. However, Nixon purchased Korea's assent to the troop pullout by authorizing a \$1.5 billion, five-year modernization program. Additional U.S. force withdrawals, starting in 1973, were stipulated but not carried out.

In 1978 President Jimmy Carter pulled 3,600 soldiers out of South Korea, taking the first step of his plan to remove all but 14,000 U.S. air force personnel and logistics specialists by 1982. He too bought Korea's acquiescence to a troop reduction, through a \$2.2 billion, five-year program of credit and weapons transfers. Under congressional pressure, however, Carter put his plan "in abeyance."

In 1981 President Ronald Reagan reaffirmed America's commitment to the ROK's defense. Reagan visited the ROK in 1983, and in 1986 Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger pledged that American troops would remain there "as long as the people of Korea want and need that presence." [7]

Today "that presence" includes several hundred tactical nuclear warheads; 29,000 soldiers, assigned to an infantry division, a missile command, and a number of smaller units; and an 11,000-member air force division composed of two squadrons of F-4Es, two squadrons of F-16s, and a squadron of A-10s. In addition, 450 marine corps and navy personnel are stationed in Korea.

Moreover, military units throughout the Pacific are essentially on call for a Korean conflict. America's military commitment to the ROK, according to defense analyst Earl Ravenal, requires "perhaps as much as seven or eight air wings, either land- or sea-based, . . . several ground divisions (though here the planning is not precise), the maintenance of bases in Japan, Okinawa, and Korea itself, and a significant airlift capability." [8]

American military aid has continued to flow into Seoul as well. In 1986 the administration proposed to provide \$230 million in foreign military sales credit and \$360 million in weapons transfers to the ROK. In recent years Washington has extended enough credit to cover about one-third of Korea's weapons purchases from the United States.

## **The Costs of Commitment**

America's umbilical cord to South Korea is expensive to maintain. The annual budgetary impact is not necessarily the most important cost; the consequences of America's promise to go to war on the ROK's behalf could be catastrophic. And the recent turmoil in the ROK has highlighted the political drawbacks of the U.S.-Korean defense relationship.

## **Budgetary Consequences**

The direct marginal cost of stationing 40,000 U.S. troops in Korea is relatively small--about \$2 billion, of which the ROK offsets roughly half. However, as Ravenal observed, "The continued commitment of one ground division is just the tip of the iceberg." [9] The cost of all the military units--army, navy, marine corps, and air force--that are earmarked for a Korean conflict must also be included, as must their share of the Pentagon's overhead. Of the \$305

billion defense authorization requested in fiscal year 1985, Ravenal estimated, \$47 billion was designated for eastern Asia. Korea's defense accounted for about half of those projected outlays.[10]

It is particularly important to recognize that America's defense commitment to the ROK, not just its military presence there, creates most of the expense. Merely withdrawing the U.S. troops from the ROK without demobilizing them would save little money; in fact, redeploying them elsewhere could actually increase the cost. Only if the military guarantee was terminated could the forces be disbanded, and only if the latter occurred would there be any significant savings.

### **Military Risks**

The presence of U.S. troops in the ROK probably reduces the likelihood of a North Korean invasion to some degree. However, the placement of U.S. soldiers between Pyongyang and Seoul also guarantees that the United States would be involved in a Korean war.

Moreover, any such conflict would be bloody and protracted. The concentration of military manpower in Korea is virtually unparalleled elsewhere in the world; almost one and a half million troops face each other across a 155-mile border, in contrast with only two million across the 4,600-mile Sino-Soviet border. The two Koreas are technically still at war; since 1953 more than 1,000 South Koreans and 90 Americans have died in border skirmishes. Just three years ago a 20-minute battle erupted when North Korean troops tried to stop a Soviet student from defecting. There is no hotter flash point for U.S. troops.

The risks resulting from America's defense commitment are exacerbated by the presence of nuclear weapons on the peninsula. Although the DPRK does not possess nuclear weapons, it deploys nuclear-capable FROG-VII missiles.[11] The United States, in contrast, maintains several hundred nuclear warheads in South Korea. It is difficult to predict how the Soviets and the Chinese would react to the use of those weapons, but the potential for them to respond in kind is obviously considerable.

### **Political Damage**

The U.S. political record in Korea is not a particularly honorable one. At the conclusion of World War II Syngman Rhee, a nationalist who had been exiled during Japan's colonial rule, returned to Korea to lead the rightist forces. America backed Rhee, according to historian Callum MacDonald, because it considered his regime "an instrument of containment" and "the only reliable barrier against communism." [12] The United States helped repress strikes and uprisings and engineered the creation of an independent South Korean state.

Rhee's savagery at times rivaled that of the North's Kim Il Sung. Rhee's regime slaughtered an estimated 50,000 political prisoners before Seoul first fell, for example, and mistreated DPRK civilians when the war moved to the North.[13] Nevertheless, America was remembered for having saved the ROK from Pyongyang's army.

The Korean War may have preserved America's reputation for a time, but the war generation is now a minority; two-thirds of the ROK's citizens were born after the conflict ended. And the memories of younger Koreans are not of liberation but of repression. "It's not that we don't like Americans," said one demonstrator in July 1987, "but for 37 years you've been supporting the wrong guy here." [14] The ROK has been governed by a succession of right-wing authoritarians, all supported by the United States. In 1960, after the fall of Rhee, a civilian government was voted in, only to be ousted by the military the following year. U.S. embassy officials tried to support the elected government, but Washington refused to back them; the Kennedy administration decided to assist the military junta instead.[15]

It is not surprising, then, that many Koreans suspect America of having been involved in the coup staged by then-general Chun in 1980. Chun overthrew an interim administration after the assassination of President Park Chung Hee. In executing the coup, Chun redeployed Korean troops from the Demilitarized Zone to Seoul; Gen. John Wickham, then the U.S. commander in the ROK, said that he had not had an opportunity to block the move. But Wickham was quoted as saying that the Koreans were "lemming-like" and needed "a strong leader," and his disavowal of responsibility is widely disbelieved.[16]

An even worse blow to America's reputation was inflicted in 1980 by the Chun regime's brutal suppression of student demonstrations in Kwangju. Having endured a 10-day takeover of the city, Chun brought in South Korean military units. The official death toll is 191, but many observers believe that at least 2,000 civilians died.[17]

It is probably unfair of the Koreans to accuse the United States of complicity in that incident--Wickham did not have operational control of the special forces that took the lead in crushing the demonstrations. Moreover, Wickham's formal release of other ROK troops for "security work" in Kwangju was probably unavoidable, because it is unlikely that U.S. disapproval would have stopped Chun from using Korean military units to bolster his control. But the fact that Wickham raised no objection to Chun's use of the troops and later publicly stated that the Koreans were not ready for democracy made it appear that Washington would blindly support any pro-American government, regardless of whether it was cruel.[18] "America is morally responsible for [the Kwangju] incident," said Chonnam National University professor Kim Dong Won, "so America must apologize." [19]

Nor is it clear that South Korea's move toward democracy has redounded to the United States' political advantage. Last summer the anti-American sentiments of many of the pro-testers were quite apparent; on June 26 the U.S. embassy was closed because demonstrations were to be held nearby. "We used to have good feelings" about Americans, said one businessman, "but now it is quite different because the U.S. authorities support a dictator. Everyone thinks the U.S. stands for peace and liberty, but they just watch and keep quiet in their own interests." [20]

Although the United States eventually persuaded Chun to exercise restraint in dealing with the protesters and to compromise with the opposition, the Reagan administration had spent years tilting toward Chun. It entertained him at the White House only two weeks after Reagan was inaugurated, whereas American officials studiously avoided meeting with the opposition's leaders. Reagan's first ambassador to the ROK, Richard Walker, defended Chun, and Walker's successor, James Lilley, attended the ruling party's convention in May and did not protest Chun's decision to suspend negotiations on constitutional reform. At one point a State Department spokesman called the troubles in the ROK "an internal Korean matter." [21] But the Korean people know better; the United States is maintaining 40,000 troops in their country. After Chun announced his concessions, dissident Kim Dae Jung praised the final U.S. role in resolving Korea's political crisis and predicted that anti-Americanism would wane, but a stolen election or a military coup could create a tidal wave of anti-American sentiment. Said one worried U.S. diplomat, "We're the elephant on their back." [22]

Indeed, U.S. officials have shown a clear preference for the ruling party's candidate, Roh Tae Woo. Ambassador Lilley has been criticized in the ROK for reportedly calling Roh a "hero" and the creator of Korean democracy. [23] Any disruption in the ROK's move toward democracy would severely mar the U.S.-Korean relationship. "Even if we admit that this decision by Roh is the result of our struggle," said the ROK's joint student association after the government had agreed to constitutional reform, "our doubt and suspicion increase because of the fear that . . . by calming down the people's enthusiasm for democracy, the U.S. and this present regime could plan to perpetuate their interests." [24] Politically, the United States can only lose if American troops remain on the peninsula.

### **Time for a Reassessment**

"Short of pulling out troops," stated one U.S. diplomat after Chun consolidated his power in 1980, "which is out of the question, there is blessed little we can do about it." [25] But withdrawal is not "out of the question." Rather, it is the logical outgrowth of a quarter-century of changes in the international economic and political arenas.

The Korean War--which President Truman called a "police action"--was not popular in the United States. A majority of the public originally supported U.S. intervention, but once China entered the conflict, a majority believed that U.S. involvement had been a mistake. And after the armistice was agreed to, a majority opposed U.S. participation in a new war in Korea even if it was started by China. According to political scientist Donald Hellmann, "Similar opinion polls regarding Vietnam did not show a comparable level of public opposition until well after the United States had begun to withdraw its troops and symbolically the war had been 'lost.'" [26]

The unpopularity of U.S. intervention in a Korean conflict persists today. Though government, business, and media leaders support a U.S. military response to such a war, the general public opposes intervention by 64 percent to 24 percent. In fact, American roles in supporting China against the Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia against Iran, and El

Salvador against the communist guerrillas are all backed by larger percentages of the public than enforcement of the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty.[27]

Though most of the Americans who oppose intervention in Korea probably have not studied geopolitics, their instincts are sound; there is no justification for continuing to provide a defense guarantee to the South. Even if U.S. involvement was warranted when the ROK was being overrun by the DPRK's militarily superior forces, the situation is far different today.

The most important change is that South Korea has accomplished an economic miracle. In 1945 the ROK was but the southern portion of an impoverished Japanese colony. Though manufacturing was concentrated in the South, production fell by 80 percent at the end of World War II with the loss of access to the North's electrical power and the flight of Japanese factory managers. By the time an armistice to the Korean War was signed in 1953, much of the country lay in ruins. A million South Koreans had died, Seoul had been desolated, and more than half of the ROK's manufacturing capacity had been destroyed. The nation's per capita GNP was \$134 a year.

Since then, however, the ROK has been industrializing rapidly. Its per capita GNP of \$2,300 puts it near the top of the developing world and is three times that of North Korea. And the gap will only grow. Last year South Korea's economy expanded by 12 percent; the DPRK's economy has not increased significantly since 1970. Whereas North Korea has acknowledged energy, land, and labor shortages, transportation bottlenecks, and low productivity and has defaulted on about \$800 million worth of foreign debt, South Korea has become one of the world's leading trading nations, dramatically breaking into the international auto and computer markets. It has invested much of that new wealth in defense and thus has largely redressed what was a gross military mismatch in 1950. Moreover, the population of the South, 43.3 million, is more than twice that of the North, 20.5 million. On all counts, South Korea is off the strategic critical list.

### **A Disengagement Plan**

The United States should withdraw the forces it has stationed in Korea and, equally important, sever its commitment to intervene on the ROK's behalf in the event that the South is invaded by the North. A five-year phased withdrawal of the troops would give the ROK time to offset the DPRK's current military advantage. (Army units should be removed first because South Korea could compensate for their absence the most easily.)

Proposals to undertake the initial step--withdrawing the troops--have been controversial but not unusual. An amendment sponsored by Rep. Robert Mrazek (D-N.Y.) earlier this year would have required the Defense Department to develop a plan for the "orderly reduction" of the U.S. forces in the ROK. The National Council of the Churches of Christ has advocated a phased withdrawal. President Carter originally planned to bring the troops home over a five-year period, and President Nixon sharply reduced the number of American soldiers in Korea.

But the next step--eliminating the underlying defense guarantee--has rarely been mentioned, let alone seriously considered. Mrazek's amendment did not address the issue, and the Carter administration refused to make any changes in the Mutual Defense Treaty. "It probably makes sense to continue approximately our current deployments in the Western Pacific, and with them, our ability to react swiftly to any aggressive moves by North Korea," Carter's defense secretary, Harold Brown, told Congress in 1977.[28] The administration even sent an aircraft carrier to South Korea after the assassination of President Park to reinforce its commitment to the country's defense.

Similarly, William Gleysteen, Jr., a former ambassador to the ROK, recently suggested cutting U.S. ground forces when the South's army reached parity with that of the North. But he added that the tripwire must be preserved because "the United States will have to ensure that no misleading signals about unwavering U.S. commitments are conveyed to any player--North, South or beyond the peninsula." [29] The question that Gleysteen failed to answer, however, is, Why bother? Preserving the commitment requires the United States to maintain sufficient military forces to fulfill it in the event of war, which precludes a meaningful cost reduction. The risk of America's involvement in a Korean war remains unchanged. And the problem of America's automatic entanglement in Korea's internal politics would be only slightly ameliorated, if at all, by the withdrawal of U.S. troops. The most visible symbol of America's intervention might thus be removed, but its role as protector of the ROK would continue to force the United States to choose sides.

Thus, the defense guarantee must be eliminated entirely. The American infantry division should be withdrawn during the first two years and the air force and other units during the next three, after which the Mutual Defense Treaty should be terminated. During the five-year withdrawal period the United States should allow the ROK to purchase any conventional military weapons it desired, including the equipment of the departing U.S. forces (which should be demobilized). The United States should also encourage Seoul to formulate a bilateral security arrangement with Tokyo. But whatever steps South Korea took, after five years it should be deemed to have outgrown the American safety net and to be responsible for its own defense.

### **The Implications of Withdrawal**

Ending the bilateral defense pact would obviously have a major impact on American-Korean relations, but its long-term effect on the sovereignty of the ROK--and the stability of eastern Asia--would likely be small. South Korea would become stronger militarily; Japan might play a larger defense role in the region. With the end of direct American involvement, cross-recognition of the two Koreas by their leaders and those of the United States, the People's Republic of China, and the Soviet Union, long advocated by American diplomats but opposed by the DPRK, would be more likely to become a reality. A persistent roadblock to Seoul's improved relations with Pyongyang would thus be eliminated.

The outcome of greatest interest to the United States is the impact of a pullout on its political influence, military security, and economic competitiveness. Strategic disengagement would benefit the United States in all three areas.

### **Political Benefits**

The absence of an American security guarantee would obviously reduce Washington's ability to influence Seoul; the "elephant" to which an American diplomat referred would no longer be on the ROK's back. But the disadvantages of losing that presumed clout are relatively minor. In fact, the United States' control over recent events in Korea was surprisingly limited. "You can't snap your fingers and make people do what you think," said Secretary of State George Shultz.[30] And as Korea continues to grow both militarily and economically, America's influence will erode still further. In 1953 the United States was the only force guaranteeing the ROK's sovereignty; today its role is much smaller.

Yet the Koreans' damaging perception that the United States has enormous power over their affairs persists. "Without U.S. support for its junta, the military dictatorship that rules Korea would fall overnight," argued a student at Seoul's Sogang University.[31] His attitude is manifestly unrealistic but also understandable--the United States designated Rhee as its bulwark against communism and has supported a succession of authoritarian regimes. And by feeding the Korean population's nationalistic and xenophobic impulses, America's current security relationship with the ROK makes political intervention virtually inevitable. The complaint of an ROK official--"We're tired of being treated as a colony of the United States"--differs little from that of the student demonstrator who told American reporters, "We are trying to free the Korean peninsula from American imperialist influence." [32]

Nor is that view of the U.S.-ROK relationship held only by outspoken Koreans. Columnist Joseph Harsch asserted that "the U.S. has the right of any imperial power to intervene in the internal domestic affairs of one of its proteges and clients." The United States has "invested" in South Korea, he argued, so American involvement is appropriate; "Washington has to do something about" developments like the recent turmoil.[33]

Indeed, America's efforts to promote democracy were not even universally endorsed by the Koreans who took to the streets for the same purpose. Kim Dae Jung thanked the United States for its support, but Kim Sung Nam, the president of Chonnam National University's student body, said that "the U.S. should not interfere with the current government, whether for or against democracy." [34] Another student leader denounced U.S. manipulation of "our internal affairs" and argued that "democracy in Korea should be established by the Korean people themselves." [35]

Thus, disengagement would involve trading marginal power to affect events in South Korea for freedom from the pernicious Korean perception that the United States has great control. Moreover, America's reputation would no longer be held hostage to the vagaries of military and civilian strong- men. In the short run, a pullout might leave the U.S. government less able to influence any given Korean policy; in the long run, however, American-Korean relations

would likely be more stable and productive.

## Security Gains

As is the case with most other communist nations, the DPRK has invested disproportionately in the military. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Pyongyang has an active troop strength of 838,000, compared with 598,000 for the ROK.[36] (The South has the edge in reserves, according to recent estimates--between 1.24 million and 1.5 million, versus between 270,000 and 540,000 for the DPRK.)[37] North Korea also maintains a substantial numerical advantage in aircraft (740 versus 490), naval combat vessels (although the ROK has more tonnage), tanks, artillery pieces, and other heavy equipment.

Yet such dramatic statistics, according to congressional staffer Stephen Goose, "are usually overstated, almost always misleading, and often meaningless." In fact, Goose observed, the South is not without its compensating advantages, so "it is essential to look beyond numbers at capabilities, missions, and other non-quantifiable factors." [38]

The mountainous terrain separating the two countries, for instance, "is such a dominant factor in assessing the Korean military balance that conventional measures of military strength do not fully apply," concluded the Congressional Budget Office in 1980.[39] The CBO predicted that North Korea could not use all of its tanks efficiently in an invasion and that the ROK military could use its extensive fortifications and antitank traps to achieve as much as a 3 to 1 kill ratio. Even Gen. William Livsey, the U.S. commander in Korea, has pointed to "our concentration of firepower--now there's something we can talk about." [40]

South Korea's weapons are generally more sophisticated than those of the DPRK. They are also newer and hence more reliable. Goose called that advantage "the single most important aspect" of any ROK-DPRK military comparison.[41] Even the Pentagon has acknowledged that the ROK's aircraft, transportation system, and military-industrial capability are superior.[42] The North's overwhelming reliance on hydroelectric power makes its industrial base more vulnerable to air strikes than the South's. Moreover, the ROK's soldiers, some of whom received extensive combat experience in Vietnam, are believed to be better trained and led--a significant advantage. Finally, South Korea would presumably be on the defensive in any war, so its military requirements would be less substantial than those of the North.

In any case, the South's quantitative military disadvantage is an inevitable consequence of the U.S.-ROK defense treaty. As long as the United States is willing to station an army division between Seoul and the border and devote substantial naval and air power to South Korea's defense, the ROK would be foolish to substantially increase its defense spending. Indeed, its fear of losing U.S. support by becoming self-sufficient may be a powerful incentive for it to never quite match the North's forces, particularly those in the air and on the sea.

The ROK is certainly not locked into a position of inferiority; it has sufficient knowledge and resources to build a far more powerful military. Yet the United States has reportedly thwarted Seoul's acquisition of advanced weapons. Rhee Sang Woo, director of the Asian Studies Center at Sogang University, contended, "To have our own deterrent, we have to have some ability to attack North Korea. But the U.S. has never allowed us to have any kind of offensive capabilities." [43]

Moreover, South Korea's defense outlays rose sharply after the Nixon administration reduced the number of U.S. forces on the peninsula and President Carter announced his withdrawal plan--by one estimate, from \$558 million in 1974 to \$3.5 billion in 1984. And the ROK could easily hike its defense outlays still further. Such an increase, "even if covered by additional taxes, is not likely to create any serious unrest or problems . . . given the widespread concern regarding the North Korean threat," reported the Rand Corporation.[44]

In fact, Seoul has outspent Pyongyang since the mid-1970s, although estimates of the spending differential vary widely. The Arms Control and Disarmament Agency judged the ROK's edge in 1983 to be 31 percent, \$4.7 billion versus \$3.6 billion. The International Institute for Strategic Studies, however, found the gap to be more than twice as great, \$4.4 billion compared with \$1.9 billion. The South also greatly outspent the North in succeeding years, but fewer estimates are available and the results continue to differ significantly.[45]

Moreover, South Korea has built a domestic arms industry over the past decade, spending twice as much as North

Korea on procurement. Ten years ago the ROK could not even manufacture rifles. Today it produces almost all of the conventional arms used by its military, including F-5 fighters, helicopters, rocket launchers, M48 tanks, frigates, and Hawk and Honest John missiles.[46]

By almost any measure, then, the South is approaching military parity with the North. The ROK's defense minister recently told a forum at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies that his country expected to achieve a military balance with the DPRK within two to three years.[47] Eulkwon Kim of Korea's Ilhae Institute offered a slightly different analysis: "There's a maxim in military strategy that if you have only 70 percent of the enemy's objective capability, you can defend against him. And within the next one to two years, South Korea will have reached that level." [48]

Even some American leaders acknowledge that South Korea could readily become militarily independent, at least when they are not propagandizing for higher defense outlays. In 1982 Assistant Secretary of State James Buckley told Congress, "We have in Northeast Asia a strong and economically vital South Korea that is able to deter its northern neighbor from military advances." [49] And the U.S. commander in Korea, General Livsey, has stated that the military balance will favor the ROK by the 1990s.[50]

Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage, in contrast, is far more pessimistic; he has argued that "the North Korean military now poses as great a threat as any time since the Korean War." [51] But no one else seems to think that Seoul has squandered its large spending advantage during the last decade. A variety of U.S. officials, including Armitage in 1984 as well as the Defense Department analysts of the Korean theater in 1987, have asserted that the current force levels in the ROK are sufficient to deter the DPRK.[52] Indeed, a month after the article that recorded Armitage's later statement appeared, the same writer reported in the same newspaper that "military analysts say the South Korean forces have never been stronger, better equipped or better led than they are at present." [53]

A range of other factors have been said to constitute potential military advantages for the North--extensive tunneling, the largest commando force in the world, a forward deployment strategy, hardened military facilities--but none of them appear to materially alter the military equation. The usefulness of the tunnels is limited, the commandos could not infiltrate the ROK easily, the warning time for an invasion would nonetheless be adequate, and U.S. officers anticipate destroying the North Korean air force after the planes had been flushed from their strengthened hangars.[54]

At any rate, Pyongyang is involved in a race that it cannot win. A 1985 Rand Corporation study estimated that the DPRK would have to devote 36 to 42 percent of its GNP, more than twice the current share, to the military in order to simply match an annual expenditure of 6 to 7 percent of GNP by the ROK.[55] Of course, that significant, irreversible shift in power could conceivably encourage the North to launch a preemptive attack; given the high quality of the South's forces, however, such an outcome seems unlikely. Succession problems in both countries--Kim Il Sung's monarchical desire to transfer control of the DPRK to his son, Kim Chong Il, and the ROK's perilous transition to a civilian government-- make the peninsula unstable. The North's demand to cohost the 1988 Olympics is also a point of contention, but it is not apt to spark a new war.

Given the odds against its mounting a successful military conquest, the DPRK may instead be forced to reconsider its hostile policies. The Rand Corporation believes that "the North's current soft line may be a step in this direction, although it is far too soon to make any judgment." [56] In July 1987 the DPRK called for a mutual troop reduction to 100,000 by 1991 (along with the withdrawal of all U.S. forces) and pledged to unilaterally reduce its forces by 100,000 by the end of this year. That proposal could also reflect Pyongyang's concern over the growing economic disparity between the two Koreas, though of course one should be skeptical of the North's professed desire for peace. Whether Pyongyang follows through with its promise to pare its military--to "open up a practical breakthrough," according to DPRK officials--will clearly be a test of its sincerity.[57]

Indeed, there has been a perceptible thaw in Pyongyang's relations with Seoul and Washington. In March the DPRK proposed to renew discussions on political and military matters with the South, and the United States lifted its prohibition on unofficial social contacts between U.S. and DPRK diplomats. In April the Reagan administration offered to remove the ban on exporting medicine, food, and other nonstrategic products to the DPRK and said that it would acquiesce to North Korea's participation in various international organizations if the DPRK agreed to attend the

1988 Olympics and to participate in talks with Seoul. The two Koreas have also exchanged proposals for meetings of their foreign ministers. Irrespective of the progress of such initiatives, a phased withdrawal by the United States would maintain the ROK's security until it was capable, both politically and militarily, of dealing with northern threats.

And if cutting the tripwire would marginally increase the chances of a DPRK attack on the South by removing the specter of American intervention, it would also increase the chances of a genuine, lasting peace on the peninsula by eliminating the North's major irritant: the presence of U.S. troops. Such a peace may be unlikely to come while Kim Il Sung is alive, but it is equally unlikely to occur while the United States has troops in Korea.

Some policymakers fear that either China or the Soviet Union would intervene in an armed conflict on the peninsula and thus upset the DPRK-ROK military balance, a concern reflected in a 1986 Heritage Foundation Backgrounder headlined "Sino-Soviet Rivalry Threatens Korean Truce." [58] But the probability of such an intervention is extremely low. China, of course, did intervene in 1950 to save its communist neighbor--just as the United States sent troops to save its client state. But there is no evidence that the PRC was involved in planning the initial invasion, though Mao Zedong may have been forewarned of it. [59]

In any case, it is apparent that China now places a high priority on maintaining the peninsula's stability. The government of Deng Xiaoping has reportedly told Japan that the division of Korea was "acceptable." [60] As early as 1975 the PRC indicated that it would not support another North Korean invasion; in 1983 China began pressing the DPRK to take a more flexible position during reunification talks. China has also advised the DPRK to participate in three-way negotiations with the ROK and the United States. That the PRC has been urging moderation on the DPRK is acknowledged by even the South Koreans. [61]

Moreover, the ROK and the PRC have been moving ever closer to each other politically, economically, and culturally. The two nations have resolved potentially serious confrontations over defections by Chinese servicemen. Their bilateral trade exceeds \$1 billion annually, more than the amount of trade between the PRC and the DPRK. Finally, South Korea and China have initiated a variety of cultural, academic, and sports exchanges in recent years. The PRC has not publicized those activities for fear of antagonizing the DPRK, but according to South Korea's assistant foreign minister, Park Soo Gil, "It isn't a matter of if we're going to have closer relations with China, but when." [62] U.S. ambassador James Lilley believes that full normalization will come eventually.

Heritage Foundation president Edwin Feulner, for one, takes a dimmer view of the Soviets' current role on the peninsula. He warned that the Soviet Union's competition with China for influence in the DPRK, which has resulted in its "alarming . . . willingness to provide North Korea with advanced weapons," could advance the North's goal of conquering the South. [63] That argument seems overblown, however. The South imports far more weapons than the North; since 1953 American military aid to Seoul has been triple the combined amount of Soviet and Chinese assistance to Pyongyang.

Nor did the Soviet Union appear to welcome the Korean War. It armed Pyongyang in the late 1940s and provided supplies and advisers during the war but apparently did not help plan the initial attack. In fact, although Kim Il Sung reportedly proposed forcible reunification of the two Koreas when he visited Moscow in 1949, the Soviet Union seemed surprised by at least the timing of the attack (it was boycotting the UN Security Council and was not prepared to issue an official reaction). Moreover, Stalin informed Washington that his government did not intend to enter the war, though in early 1951 he warned that it might intervene if the United States again advanced on the Yalu River after defeating the Chinese troops. [64]

The Soviets have clearly been trying to gain equal status with the Chinese--whose relationship with Pyongyang has been called a "bond sealed in blood"--but a recent study by the Center for Defense Information concluded that "China remains North Korea's main ally." [65] That judgment is confirmed by the DPRK's diplomatic overtures toward the PRC earlier this year, which included a visit to Beijing by Kim Il Sung.

In any case, the potential cost of the Sino-Soviet competition for influence in North Korea is strictly limited by political, economic, and military factors. According to the Rand Corporation, "Neither China nor the Soviet Union is prepared to give all-out assistance and support to the North Koreans. The Soviet Union in particular has withheld specific forms of assistance in order to bring the North Koreans into its camp." [66] ROK-Soviet relations were frozen

by the 1983 shutdown of KAL flight 007 but have warmed slightly since then. Moreover, the Soviets have no desire for their unpredictable ally to start a war over which they would have no control. They have generally discouraged Pyongyang's aggressive designs on the South. In fact, the Soviet Union, by way of East Germany, has encouraged the DPRK to follow the two-Germany model (while publicly backing North Korea's claim to be the peninsula's sole legitimate government).[67]

Even if the Soviets wanted to provide military support for a North Korean attack, they would face serious difficulties. According to the Congressional Budget Office, "the territory is so constraining" near the 10-mile Soviet-DPRK border "that the operations would have to be considered very risky." Given the short border, the irregular terrain, and the presence of only two potential supply routes, added the CBO, Soviet intervention "would require the acquiescence of China for both the initial troop movement and subsequent supply convoys--an unlikely prospect." [68] In short, neither of the two communist giants can readily afford to support a war on the Korean Peninsula.

Moreover, a counterweight to Chinese and Soviet influence on Korean affairs might be afforded by a militarily revitalized Japan. Tokyo has an interest in preserving Korea's stability, since part of the Korean Peninsula is only 35 miles from the Japanese border (though Japan is within easy reach of Soviet, Chinese, and North Korean forces). It has provided Seoul with considerable amounts of economic aid, including \$4 billion worth of credit in 1983 alone. It is not surprising, then, that Japan's foreign minister objected to presidential candidate Carter's initial withdrawal plan on the grounds that it "could create a very dangerous vacuum." [69] In addition, Japan has an incentive, usually unacknowledged, to see the peninsula remain divided: the potential of a reunified Korea with a population of 64 million to become a major economic and political rival in eastern Asia, irrespective of its government's ideology.

However, Japan could help fill any security vacuum in Korea. It is in the process of surpassing the Soviet Union and becoming the world's second-ranking economic power. And by at least one estimate, Japan's current annual military expenditure, about \$32 billion, is the third largest in the world. [70] Japan's arsenal--470 combat aircraft, 52 destroyers and frigates, and 3,700 tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery pieces--is comparatively large, though not as large as those of the leading military antagonists. Moreover, Japan is capable of contributing far more to the region's defense and would gain a powerful incentive to do so if America brought its troops home from the ROK. In fact, Japan broke the 1 percent GNP barrier--long a psychological deterrent--this year and has embarked on a long-term modernization program that will add F-15 fighters, submarines, and antisubmarine weapons to its arsenal.

Increased Japanese and South Korean cooperation would not come easily. The Korean people's feelings toward Japan were poisoned by its lengthy occupation of the peninsula and long-standing ethnic antagonisms, and their resentment has worsened even as bilateral government relations improved. But the military necessity created by a U.S. troop withdrawal could eventually override the South Koreans' current reluctance to cooperate.

### **Economic Competitiveness**

America's extensive military commitments abroad impose a significant burden on its domestic economy. Indeed, the United States is subsidizing the defense of some of its most tenacious trading partners, including South Korea and Japan. Of particular concern, given the growing importance of high technology, is the drain on American research and development caused by military expenditures. Although this nation's outlays for R&D are higher than those of Japan and Western Europe combined, a much larger share of the U.S. effort is devoted to defense; civilian R&D spending accounts for just 1.8 percent of the U.S. GNP, compared with 2.5 percent for both Japan and West Germany.

South Korea spends considerably more of its GNP on defense than Japan and all but one NATO country, yet it trails the United States, 5.4 percent to 6.9 percent, even though it confronts a far greater direct military threat. An American withdrawal, by permitting Washington to reduce U.S. military outlays and forcing the ROK--as well as Japan--to increase its defense expenditures, would make the United States more competitive internationally.

Congressional irritation over defense subsidies for wealthy allies is growing. Rep. Patricia Schroeder (D-Colo.), for instance, has introduced legislation that would impose a defense fee based on each recipient nation's trade deficit and military expenditures. The approach is flawed--there's no reason to "hire out" the U.S. military when other nations can raise their own forces--but the problem is very real. The best way to reduce both the economic burden on the United

States and its risk of war is to sever unnecessary commitments such as the U.S.-Korean defense guarantee.

In economic terms, providing direct cash transfers to the ROK is even more ludicrous than maintaining U.S. troops there, yet Washington lent Seoul \$230 million under the foreign military sales program in FY 1985 and \$163 million in FY 1986. The Reagan administration asked for another \$230 million earlier this year, before Congress finally killed the program. America also spends \$2 million a year to train Korean military students. Moreover, the United States spent \$500 million in FY 1986 and \$263 million in FY 1985 under foreign military sales and construction agreements with South Korea, and the administration requested another \$500 million this year. Even that largess is considered insufficient by former Heritage Foundation policy analyst Daryl Plunk, who has advocated increasing U.S. military assistance to the ROK in order to counter what he sees as a serious northern threat.[71]

Yet in 1986 alone the ROK amassed a \$7.6 billion trade surplus with the United States; the total for the last three years was \$16.8 billion. This year the ROK is intentionally reducing its exports to the United States in an effort to stabilize the surplus, which would otherwise exceed \$10 billion. (In July, for instance, South Korean electronics companies set price floors on such exports.) What conceivable justification is there for the United States to underwrite South Korea's defense expenditures, particularly when the ROK is limiting its exports to offset a U.S. trade deficit? Said the Reagan administration in its FY 1987 budget proposal: "If the ROK spent much more on defense than it does now (about 6 percent of GNP) it could damage its economy." [72] Damage to America's economy is apparently irrelevant to the administration.

Instead of transferring money to the ROK, the United States should accept all the Korean goods that Americans want to buy and should start selling--at market rates--all the planes, ships, and tanks that the ROK needs to become militarily independent. That policy would truly benefit American producers and consumers.

## **Risks and Benefits**

Nothing is certain in life, and a U.S. pullout would entail some risks. But America would survive even in the highly unlikely worst case of an ROK collapse. Former assistant secretary of state Richard Holbrooke has said that the loss of Korea "would be the end of our position in the entire Pacific," [73] but U.S. government officials are often far too promiscuous in declaring foreign countries to be vital. Although the United States is better positioned to intervene in eastern Asia when there is a friendly government in Seoul, America's defense would not be materially weakened if it relinquished that Asian outpost.[74] Indeed, in September 1947, during the depths of the cold war, the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared the Korean Peninsula to be strategically unimportant. U.S. intervention in the Korean War was motivated primarily by the fear that symbolic and psychological damage would be done to the policy of containment if a helpless pro-Western state was perceived to have been swallowed by a Soviet-inspired conquest. Prior to the DPRK invasion that began the war, even General MacArthur maintained that it was unnecessary for the United States to defend the ROK.[75]

The peninsula is, of course, the center of great power rivalries and would offer the United States an advanced base in the event of hostilities with either the Soviet Union or China. But isolated forward outposts are also the hardest territories to hold; the United States could not offset the pressure that the Soviet Union, for instance, could place on Korea. In fact, in 1950 Pentagon planners believed that if the Soviet Union entered the war, Western forces could maintain military superiority on the peninsula only through atomic bombings in Siberia.[76]

In any case, even a triumphant North Korea would not likely be a lackey to either of its communist neighbors. Though it has granted the Soviet Union overflight, landing, and docking rights, the DPRK has steadfastly maintained its independence. In fact, according to a political science professor at Seoul's Yonsei University,

It may not be far-fetched to argue that Kim Il-sung may seek to become closer to the United States in order to distance himself from the Soviet Union and China and to bolster himself as a world leader. North Korean officials have reportedly told American visitors that North Korea does not want to be under pressure "solely from the North," implying that meaningful relations with the United States and Japan could be used to counterbalance relations with the Soviet Union or China.[77]

The sea lanes adjoining South Korea are vital to the Soviet Union and China but not to the United States and Japan.

More important to the latter two nations, in Heritage Foundation analyst Katsuro Sakoh's view, is the Soya Strait, which lies between Japan's Hokkaido Island and the Soviet Union's Sakhalin Island. Control of Korea, however, does not help protect the channel. Communist domination of the South might extend the reach of the Soviet Union's Far Eastern fleet--if the DPRK broke with its past policy and provided the Soviets with a base--but China would be more threatened by that development than the United States or Japan.

Moreover, Japan could rearm to meet whatever threat a communist Korean Peninsula would entail. In fact, a multipolar world in which most of the poles, including Europe, Japan, and South Korea, were closely linked, if not formally allied, with the United States would do more to constrain Soviet power than the present arrangement, in which the United States carries the bulk of the anticommunist military burden.

We have economic and cultural interests in Korea, of course, as well as the desire to prevent a semifree country from being consumed by Kim Il Sung's version of the Dark Ages. However, as important as those interests are, they do not warrant an American promise to go to war on the ROK's behalf. Such a costly commitment should be reserved for instances in which this nation's own survival is clearly at stake.

But the fall of South Korea is a worst-case scenario; it would be very unlikely to occur even after a full U.S. withdrawal. In 1950 the ROK was not prepared for war; America had denied it access to heavy weapons. Today the South has twice the population and five times the GNP of the North, and the economic gap is widening rapidly. The ROK's arsenal will soon achieve equivalence with that of the North, and a U.S. pullout would force a more rapid ROK buildup. Moreover, Japan is capable of helping to maintain a regional balance. In short, it is inconceivable that America's Korean ally could not defend itself if given sufficient time to bolster its military.

## **Conclusion**

Korea is one of the many victims of the cataclysm that rent the world more than four decades ago. Support for reunification remains strong in the South, though it is hard to imagine what could meld such different systems, short of military conquest. But Washington cannot ignore the growing anger over the ROK's dependence on the United States, especially among young Koreans, most of whom do not view Americans as liberators.

In fact, Korean historians are increasingly blaming the United States as well as the Soviet Union for the division of the peninsula, and many South Koreans, including government officials, consider formal U.S. control of ROK military units a national affront. Warned Selig Harrison, "The furtive nationalism of earlier years has been replaced by a desperate, assertive brand colored by a new anti-Americanism that embraces progovernment elements as well as the opposition." [78]

Unfortunately, Koreans' anger at the United States has only been fueled by its latest meddling in the ROK's affairs. America's attempt to promote democracy may have been well-intentioned, but it had only a marginal impact on the course of events and exacerbated Korean nationalism. And if the South's military-backed ruling party ultimately refuses to yield power, the United States will be blamed again, with a disastrous long-term impact on U.S.-ROK relations. Said one fearful Western analyst: "These guys have raised expectations dangerously high. If they drag their feet now, if they don't deliver and deliver fast, the lid's going to blow off this place in a way that'll make the French Revolution look like a wedding reception." [79]

Thus, to protect America's interests, the administration should develop a plan for a phased troop withdrawal whose final stage would be the termination of the Mutual Defense Treaty. A withdrawal from Korea would allow the United States to remain the dominant Pacific power if it wished. But it would also reduce the risk of war by eliminating one of America's seemingly interminable military commitments. The resulting budget savings would be an especially important benefit because they would permit the increased private investment needed to make America more competitive in world markets.

Of course, the ROK might mishandle its own defense. But the Pentagon should no longer act as an international welfare agency for wealthy foreign countries such as Korea. In any case, no foreign policy is without cost or risk. Americans now pay a very high price to ensure the safety of a nation that is capable of defending itself. Chancing an extremely unlikely foreign loss would be a small price to pay for the benefits of reducing federal spending,

strengthening the economy, ending our entanglement in another country's volatile internal affairs, and reducing the likelihood of war.

## FOOTNOTES

[1] Clyde Haberman, "Seoul Plans: Some Doubts," *New York Times*, June 18, 1987, p. A-10.

[2] Morton Kondracke, "Seoul Searching," *New Republic*, July 27, 1987, p. 25.

[3] Callum MacDonald, *Korea: The War before Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1986), p. 15.

[4] Memorandum, Joint Chiefs of Staff, June 23, 1949, JCS 1483/74, RG 218, Box 25, Modern Military Records, National Archives, Washington.

[5] Barton Bernstein, "Dubious Venture," *Inquiry*, June 1982, p. 44; Council of Economic Advisers, *Economic Report to the President* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1987), p. 244.

[6] Young-Sun Ha, "American-Korean Military Relations: Continuity and Change," in *Korea and the United States*, ed. Youngnok Koo and Dae-Sook Suh (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), p. 119.

[7] "Weinberger Assures South Koreans 40,000 U.S. Troops Will Not Pull Out," *Washington Times*, April 3, 1986, p. A-6.

[8] Earl Ravenal, "The Way Out of Korea," *Inquiry*, December 5, 1977, p. 16. The Department of Defense has denied that there are any units outside the ROK "whose primary mission is reinforcement in Korea" but conceded that there are "several units, all of which are assigned responsibilities in other areas of the world, which have a potential secondary mission of reinforcement in Korea." Department of Defense, "Report to Congress on the Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula," February 1987, p. 8.

[9] Ravenal, p. 16.

[10] Earl Ravenal, *Defining Defense: The 1985 Military Budget* (Washington: Cato Institute, 1984), p. 16; Ravenal, "The Way Out," p. 16.

[11] Selig Harrison, "Dateline South Korea: A Divided Seoul," *Foreign Policy* no. 67 (Summer 1987): 173.

[12] MacDonald, pp. 13-14.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 60.

[14] "Banner Battle Rouses Crowd at Seoul Rally," *Washington Post*, July 10, 1987, p. A-18.

[15] Bae-Ho Hahn, "Major Issues in the American-Korean Alliance," in Koo and Suh, pp. 99-100.

[16] Harrison, p. 157.

[17] Nicholas Kristof, "In Kwangju, Rage and New Cynicism," *New York Times*, July 6, 1987, p. 6

[18] Sanford J. Ungar, "South Korea: Old Ally, New Competitor," *Atlantic*, December 1983, p. 23.

[19] Kristof.

[20] Susan Chira, "Many South Koreans Venting Anger at U.S.," *New York Times*, June 20, 1987, p. 4.

[21] Raymond Bonner, "It's Time We Start Backing Democracy in South Korea," *Washington Post*, June 28, 1987, p. C-1. See also Selig Harrison, "Let's Not Pat Ourselves on the Back over Korea," *Washington Post*, July 27, 1987, p. A-

21.

[22] Bernard Wysocki, Jr., "South Korean Turmoil Has a Strong Element of Anti-Americanism," *Wall Street Journal*, July 15, 1987, p. 1.

[23] Fred Hiatt, "Death of Student Triggers Renewed Clashes in Seoul," *Washington Post*, July 6, 1987, p. A-18.

[24] Daniel Sneider, "South Korean Students Vow Continued Vigilance," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 3, 1987, pp. 7-8.

[25] "As South Korea Goes Its Own Way," *U.S. News and World Report*, September 8, 1980, p. 32.

[26] Donald Hellmann, "The American Perception of Korea: 1945-1982," in Koo and Suh, p. 81.

[27] John Rielly, ed., *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1987* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1987), p. 32.

[28] Ravenal, "The Way Out," p. 15.

[29] William Gleysteen, Jr., and Alan Romberg, "Korea: Asian Paradox," *Foreign Affairs* 65, no. 3 (Spring 1987): 1048. Similarly, the Rand Corporation study called the "psychological" role of the troops more important than the "material benefits." Though it acknowledged that South Korea could have made up for the American pullout planned by the Carter administration, the Rand study argued that the proposal was "a fundamental psychological miscalculation" because it was viewed as a step toward full disengagement. Richard Sneider, *The Political and Social Capabilities of North and South Korea for the Long-Term Military Competition* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1985), no. R-3271-NA, p. 11. Brig. Gen. John Bahnsen said that he favored the retention of U.S. troops in Korea for the same reason--political symbolism rather than military deterrence. *Armed Forces Journal International*, November 1985, p. 88.

[30] Eduardo Lachica, "Two Opposition Leaders Figure Heavily in U.S. Efforts to Quell Chaos in Korea," *Wall Street Journal*, June 24, 1987, p. 23. Another American official characterized as "fantastically exaggerated" the view that the United States "has the kind of control over South Korea that the Soviet Union has over Jaruzelski" of Poland. George Moffitt, "U.S. Prodded South Korea to Democracy," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 2, 1987, p. 5.

[31] Frederick Kempe, "South Korean Tensions Put U.S. to Test," *Wall Street Journal*, April 7, 1987, p. 30. Woo Sangho, the president of Yonsei University's student body, complained, "We're controlled militarily by the Americans, who hand down commands to our military." Nicholas Kristof, "A 'Moderate' Tells Why Students in Korea Fight," *New York Times*, August 2, 1987, p. E-3. Such problematic perceptions are explored in detail in James Fallows, "The Burden of Omnipotence," *Atlantic*, October 1987, pp. 20-26.

[32] John Hughes, "Korea: The U.S. Role," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 12, 1987, p. 14; Nicholas Kristof, "Anti-Americanism Grows in South Korea," *New York Times*, July 12, 1987, p. E-3. Establishment political and military figures have reserved their most vehement objections for U.S. command of the ROK's armed forces--"the most remarkable concession of sovereignty in the entire world," in the estimation of a former U.S. commander. Gregory Henderson, "Time to Change the US-South Korea Military Relationship," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 24, 1987, p. 36.

[33] Joseph Harsch, "South Korea: A Classic Imperial Problem," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 23, 1987, p. 16. Many U.S. policymakers share his attitude. "This [the ROK government's human rights abuses] is not why Americans fought at Pork Chop Hill," said Sen. Barbara Mikulski, who, before the Chun regime accepted the opposition's demands, cosponsored legislation that would have imposed economic sanctions on the ROK if elections were not held. Russell Watson et al., "Crisis in Korea," *Newsweek*, June 29, 1987, p. 29. But neither did the United States fight the Korean War to guarantee its right to run Korean affairs--at least, that is not how the Truman administration explained its intervention to the American people.

In fact, America's earliest contact with Korea was imperialistic. In 1866 the armed schooner General Sherman traveled up the Taedong River seeking trading opportunities. When the expedition's overtures were rebuffed, the sailors kidnapped a local official; soon thereafter Koreans captured the ship and killed the crew. Five years later the United States launched a six-ship expedition whose mission was to forcibly "open up" the country. It destroyed several forts before withdrawing. Dae-Sook Suh, "The Centennial: A Brief History," in Koo and Suh, p. 5.

[34] Kristof, "Anti-Americanism Grows."

[35] Daniel Sneider, "High Stakes at Seoul Meeting," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 24, 1987, p. 8. Of course, the ROK's government has also criticized America's pressure for democratic reform. Seoul "doesn't like brutal, naked interference," said its assistant foreign minister; "there's a certain boundary beyond which you shouldn't dare to step, because it hurts the national pride." Joseph P. Manguno, "Chronic Frictions between Korea, U.S. Are Starting to Take On an Uglier Tone," *Wall Street Journal*, September 23, 1987, p. 30.

The congressional proposal to impose economic sanctions would have only exacerbated such sentiments. Yet the liberal sponsors of the measure--Sens. Mikulski, Edward Kennedy, and Tom Harkin and Reps. Tom Foglietta, Fortney Stark, and Lane Evans--specifically rejected a reconsideration of the U.S.- ROK military relationship. Both conservatives and liberals are apt to meddle in other nations' affairs, only in different ways.

[36] International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1985-1986* (London: IISS, 1985), pp. 127-28.

[37] *Ibid.* (higher estimates); Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook 1985*, pp. 127, 129 (lower estimates).

[38] Stephen Goose, "The Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula," in *Two Koreas--One Future?* ed. John Sullivan and Roberta Foss (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987), p. 57.

[39] Congressional Budget Office, *U.S. Ground Forces: Design and Cost Alternatives for NATO and Non-NATO Contingencies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1980), p. 69.

[40] Edward Neilan, "South Korea Faces Constant Threat of Northern Invasion," *Washington Times*, May 6, 1987, p. B-9.

[41] Goose, p. 57. In his view, even in the absence of U.S. Air Force units, "the battle for the skies would clearly be won by the South." *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[42] Department of Defense, p. 1.

[43] David Pitt, "Seoul, U.S. Forces and the North: The Balance Is as Delicate as Ever," *New York Times*, April 8, 1987, p. A-10.

[44] Richard Sneider, p. 44.

[45] Goose, p. 60.

[46] Hwang Dong Joon, "South Korea's Defense Industry: An Asset for the U.S.," *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder* no. 38, December 10, 1985.

[47] Gus Constantine, "Imbalance in Arms Endangers South Korea," *Washington Times*, May 11, 1987, p. C-8. Five years ago the ROK government boasted that "the Republic's defensive power is fully capable of meeting North Korean tank assaults and aerial offensives." *A Handbook of Korea*, 4th ed. (Seoul: Ministry of Culture and Information, 1982), p. 454. The ROK's defense minister nevertheless called the question of reducing U.S. forces "premature." Constantine.

[48] Pitt. Soviet offensive doctrine calls for an advantage of 6 to 1 in artillery, 5 to 1 in tanks, and 3 to 1 in manpower. Donald Cotter and N. F. Wilkner, "Korea: Force Imbalances and Remedies," *Strategic Review* (Spring 1982): 67.

[49] House Appropriations Committee, "Foreign Assistance Appropriation, FY 1983," pt. 1, March 11, 1982, p. 152.

[50] Army, October 1985, p. 134. Several South Korean and U.S. officials "expressed the view that a satisfactory balance could be achieved around 1984-85 if longer range plans went according to schedule." They believed that one way to enhance the ROK's military was faster delivery of TOW antitank missiles. Larry Nicksch, "Korea: U.S. Troop Withdrawal and the Question of Northeast Asian Stability," Congressional Research Service Issue Brief no. IB79053, April 16, 1980, p. 17.

[51] Neilan.

[52] See Goose, p. 58; Department of Defense, p. 2.

[53] Edward Neilan, "Military Girded against Invasion from the North," Washington Times, June 25, 1987, p. A-8.

[54] Goose, pp. 73-76. In fact, military analyst John Keegan has argued that the DPRK's army is better suited for a long defensive war than for a southern blitzkrieg. John Keegan, *World Armies* (New York: Facts on File, 1979), p. 410.

[55] Charles Wolf et al., *The Changing Balance: South and North Korean Capabilities for Long-Term Military Competition* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1985), no. R-3305/1-NA, p. v. In fact, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency's report showed the DPRK devoting a steadily smaller share of its GNP to the military in recent years.

[56] Richard Sneider, p. vi. Ambassador Gleysteen made a similar point. Some elements of the North Korean leadership are apparently seeking to reach a political agreement in order to free up military resources and forestall clear ROK superiority, "but so far adjustment to these new realities has been minimal, erratic, and interspersed with periods of hostility and violence," such as the 1983 attempt to assassinate ROK president Chun. Gleysteen and Romberg, p. 1049.

[57] Clyde Haberman, "North Koreans Propose Reduction of Troops in the North and South," *New York Times*, July 24, 1987, p. A-10. By forcing the ROK to increase its defense outlays, an American withdrawal would encourage Seoul to reach an accommodation with Pyongyang.

[58] Daryl M. Plunk, "Sino-Soviet Rivalry Threatens Korean Truce," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder no. 46, May 8, 1986.

[59] MacDonald, p. 28. Given the UN move toward the Yalu River in the context of U.S. support for Chiang Kai-Shek, Beijing may have viewed its intervention as being necessary to forestall an American attack on the People's Republic of China; "the subtleties of U.S. policy . . . were lost on the Chinese." MacDonald, pp. 52-53.

[60] Myung Chey, "China in American-Korean Relations," in Koo and Suh, p. 148.

[61] "The Korean Herald: Lessons of Vietnam," *Newsreview*, April 27, 1985, p. 30. See also Edwin Feulner, Jr., "The U.S.-Republic of China Partnership in the Year 2000," Heritage Foundation Lecture no. 85, 1987, p. 6.

[62] Joseph P. Manguno and James R. Schiffman, "Beijing and Seoul: Arms-Length Flirtation," *Wall Street Journal*, July 10, 1987, p. 10.

[63] Feulner. Oddly enough, a Heritage Foundation Backgrounder published two years earlier concluded that "neither Beijing nor Moscow would welcome conflict on the Korean peninsula at their backdoors." Daryl M. Plunk, "Korea Reunification Talks: High Stakes for the U.S.," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder no. 33, August 5, 1985, p. 9.

[64] MacDonald, pp. 28, 34.

[65] "Soviet Geopolitical Momentum: Myth or Menace?" *Defense Monitor* 15, no. 5 (1986), p. 28.

[66] Richard Sneider, p. 30.

[67] Ibid., p. 31; see also Harrison, "Dateline South Korea," pp. 156-57.

[68] Congressional Budget Office, pp. 52, 53.

[69] Frank Baldwin, "Japan: Roadblock on the Way Out of Korea," Inquiry, April 3, 1978, p. 20. However, Japan's fears for its homeland defense did not prevent it from helping to finance North Korea's industrial development in the 1970s.

[70] Katsuro Sakoh, "How Japan Can Do More to Defend Itself," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder no. 57, February 25, 1987, p. 7. International comparisons are notoriously difficult to make; other estimates place Japan between third and sixth in global defense outlays.

[71] Plunk, "Sino-Soviet Rivalry," pp. 2-3.

[72] Department of Defense, Congressional Presentation for Security Assistance Programs FY 1987, vol. 1, p. 74.

[73] Pitt. Feulner called the U.S.-Korean defense pact "a linchpin for stability in the entire Northeast Asian region." Feulner, p. 5.

[74] Ambassador Gleysteen, for example, lauded the U.S.-ROK relationship for contributing "importantly to the regional balance of power" and providing "a vital constituent of the strong U.S. presence throughout Northeast Asia." Gleysteen and Romberg, p. 1052. However, he did not assert that the Mutual Defense Treaty helps maintain the security of the American homeland.

[75] MacDonald, pp. 13, 30, 35. See also Soong-Hoom Kil, "Japan in American-Korean Relations," in Koo and Suh, pp. 155-56. Of particular note is that the Pentagon pronounced South Korea to be of "little strategic interest" and recommended a U.S. military withdrawal even though it recognized that Soviet domination of the ROK thereafter would "have to be accepted as a probability." Joseph Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), p. 28.

[76] MacDonald, p. 33.

[77] Chin-Wee Chung, "American-North Korean Relations," in Koo and Suh, p. 185.

[78] Harrison, "Dateline South Korea," p. 167.

[79] Joseph P. Manguno, "Koreans Impatient for Promised Reforms," *Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 1987, p. 8.