

# The Role of U.S. Forces in a Unified Korea

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The geopolitical landscape in East Asia has changed dramatically, and one would hope permanently, as a result of last year's sudden and largely unexpected thaw in North-South Korean relations. The appearance of North Korea's formerly reclusive leader, Kim Jong-il, in the international spotlight through the much-heralded June 2000 inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang and his high-profile meetings with Chinese leaders in Beijing and Shanghai and with Russian President Putin in Pyongyang have resulted in a remaking of both the North Korean leader's and his nation's international image. As one senior U.S. official noted at the time, North Korea has gone, almost overnight, from the "hermit kingdom" to the "hyperactive kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

Pyongyang's sudden opening has many former skeptics openly (if not overly) optimistic about the future of the Korean Peninsula. Even ROK President Kim Dae-jung wrote that "the most important outcome of the summit is that there is no longer going to be a war."<sup>2</sup> As a result, some are already calling for a sharp reduction, if not a complete withdrawal, of U.S. forces on the peninsula, now that the North Korean threat has receded.<sup>3</sup> Others, including President Kim himself, have argued that U.S. forces will be required on the peninsula even after reunification—and that Chairman Kim Jong-il "concurred" with his reasoning.<sup>4</sup> The role of these forces would no doubt change, however, depending on the form of unification or North-South reconciliation and how it occurs.

A word or caution at the outset. Given North Korea's past unpredictability and the history of abrupt swings in North-South cooperation—we experienced a similar, although not quite as dramatic rapprochement in 1991-1992—the peninsula remains a potentially dangerous place.<sup>5</sup> One has only to look at the current lull in North-South high-level interaction imposed by Pyongyang in March 2001 (and continuing at this writing) to understand the fragility of the still

embryonic peace process, an effort which, to date, remains more symbolic than substantive, despite official proclamations from Seoul to the contrary.<sup>6</sup>

But the only thing more unrealistic than believing (or hoping) that everything has changed is pretending that nothing has changed. For better or worse, North Korea's diplomatic charm offensive has changed the way we must look at North-South issues. It will also have an impact on the debate over U.S. alliances, forward military presence, and even missile defenses.<sup>7</sup> In fact, some security analysts (myself included) have argued even before the historic summit that the time for a reassessment of future U.S. force structure on the peninsula and elsewhere in Northeast Asia is long overdue.<sup>8</sup>

This paper will look at the implications various forms of "unification" might have for ROK and U.S. security strategy and the future role of U.S. forces on the peninsula. Several scenarios will be examined: a continuation of the current, or perhaps slightly modified, status quo; peaceful coexistence, including genuine tension reduction measures; a genuine federation or confederation with more open borders and positive interaction; and eventual reunification under one central government, presumably in Seoul, under the current ROK democratic and economic system. Some policy prescriptions will also be offered to help the U.S. and ROK adjust to and facilitate the evolving change in North-South relations.

### **Current Geopolitical Environment**

The dramatic, unprecedented June 2000 inter-Korea summit has been rightfully praised as a major breakthrough in North-South relations. Along with this limited, yet significant opening up of North Korea has come increased economic and food aid, impending or restored diplomatic ties with a wide number of states, and admission into the ministerial-level ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).<sup>9</sup>

Kim Jong-iPs surprise appearance on the tarmac, smiling and warmly greeting President Kim Dae-jung and his entourage during the latter's visit to Pyongyang, was indicative of the kinder, gentler image North Korea has been trying to carve out for itself. However, it is still difficult to know at this stage if the apparent changes represent a genuine change in DPRK attitude or merely a shift in tactics aimed at regime survival.

After all, in June 1999, one year almost to the date before the historic summit, a maritime border confrontation was shaping up off the peninsula's west coast, which culminated in the sinking of a North Korean ship. Meanwhile, the standoff between Washington and Pyongyang over halting DPRK missile tests was heating up, and the

visit to Pyongyang by former Secretary of Defense William Perry left Perry, among others, pessimistic about Pyongyang's willingness to respond favorably to a combined U.S.-ROK-Japanese formula for enhanced cooperation.<sup>10</sup>

The situation changed dramatically with the June 2000 summit and the series of high-level meetings that followed, including the visit of North Korea's defense minister to the South for formal talks with his ROK counterpart. For a time, North-South cooperation seemed more reminiscent of 1991-1992, when the two sides negotiated two yet to be implemented agreements—the Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Exchange and Cooperation (also known as the "Basic Agreement") and the Joint Declaration for Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula<sup>11</sup>—amid summit discussions. The fact that this earlier promising period of reconciliation proved so fragile should be a sobering reminder of the challenges that lie ahead, as is the North's still not fully explained decision to suspend high level talks in March.<sup>12</sup>

Without denying the historic nature of the summit and the still generally cooperative attitude of the North (especially when compared to pre-summit days), it is important to remember what has not changed. North and South Korea still remain technically at war. The 1953 Armistice has yet to be replaced with a genuine peace treaty and discussion of core security issues has continued to be absent from inter-Korean talks. The word "peace" was nowhere to be found in the June 2000 Joint Statement, and Kim Dae-jung's desire for some type of North-South Peace Declaration (not to be confused with a Peace Treaty) at the next summit, in my view, could be a large contributing factor behind Kim Jong-il's reluctance to honor his pledge to visit the South.<sup>13</sup>

North and South Korea also remain two of the most heavily fortified nations on earth. The threat from North Korea remains real, if somewhat diminished as a result of North Korea's economic bankruptcy, its dwindling military capabilities relative to the South, and the adjustment of its Cold War alliances that previously provided less restrictive security assurances. The Pentagon's 1998 *EastAsia Strategy Report* (EASR) rightfully warned that North Korea "can still inflict considerable damage against the South and threaten its neighbors," given its large inventory of artillery, missiles, and a suspected "sizable stockpile of chemical weapons."<sup>14</sup> This has not changed.

Recent political overtures and the North's continuing economic and social hardships notwithstanding, the size of the North Korean military has not been diminished; rather it has experienced slight growth in overall numbers and in new hardware over the past decade. North Korea possesses the fourth largest armed forces in the world, with some

1.2 million active duty military personnel armed with over 4,000 tanks and 10,000 field artillery pieces.<sup>15</sup> One-fourth of North Korea's population, some five million men and women, serve in the reserve forces. With 65 percent of its forces heavily fortified and situated in close proximity to the demilitarized zone (which itself is less than 25 miles from Seoul), the first few days of a North Korean-initiated conflict would be extremely destructive. The country that has many times threatened to bring a rain of fire on the South still retains the capability to do so.

Absent from North-South deliberations thus far are any substantive discussions on military confidence building measures (CBMs) and mutual and balanced force reductions and pullbacks from the demilitarized zone.<sup>16</sup> Until security issues such as these are dealt with seriously, the peninsula remains a very dangerous place. Ironically, the North Korean defense minister, during his historic visit, refused to discuss security issues, limiting his discussion to the opening up of a road and rail corridor through the demilitarized zone. The enormous potential security implications of such a gesture were not even discussed, much less reconciled.

All of this is not said to overshadow the positive signs that have come from the inter-Korean summit. Yet it is necessary to counterbalance the optimism with the gravity of reality. It will be a long road to walk for both Koreas. Patience and restraint are needed as Koreans on both sides of the demilitarized zone attempt to break down fifty-year-old barriers. It is also useful to bear in mind the well-founded skepticism that accompanies any dealings with North Korea.

Also important to bear in mind is that when Koreans (South and North) talk about "reunification" today, more often than not they are really talking about reconciliation and peaceful coexistence between two separate state entities, under some type of "one nation-two states or two governments" formula, with both Seoul and Pyongyang retaining their sovereign rights over the peoples of the South and North respectively or, at best, some form of federation or confederation between two equal entities, each presumably with its own political and social systems (and armed forces).

### **Basic Assumptions**

This paper is built on two basic assumptions. First, that as long as the DPRK exists as a separate entity, some form of deterrence will be required and that means the continued presence of U.S. military forces in the ROK and a continuation of a unified command structure. A second basic assumption is that a strong defense alliance relationship

between the U.S. and ROK today and between the U.S. and a reunified Korea in the future provides the greatest assurance of stability on the peninsula. Even after reunification, common ideals, common values, and common objectives between Washington and Seoul can provide the basis for a continued robust security relationship, one that will prevent a resumption of historic strategic rivalries and thus ensure peace and stability on the peninsula. This will enhance the prospects for simultaneous good relations between a reunited Korea and all its giant neighbors.

#### *Deterrence*

The principle deterrent to conflict on the Peninsula continues to be South Korea's well-equipped, highly-capable, well-trained 672,000 military forces, further augmented through their alliance with the U.S. The 37,000 American military forces on the peninsula serve as a symbol of U.S. commitment and as a "tripwire" ensuring that America will become fully engaged immediately upon the initiation of hostilities by the North. U.S. forces would quickly swell to over 500,000 in the event of hostilities.<sup>17</sup>

Lending further credibility to this deterrence capability is the U.S./ROK Combined Forces Command (CFC) that evolved from the multinational United Nations Command (UNC). The U.N. Command, which includes representatives from the United States, ROK, and 15 other countries, oversees the 1953 Armistice. The CFC was established in 1978 in order to give the ROK a greater role in the war fighting, planning, and command structure. The establishment of the CFC was part of a bilateral agreement calling for a U.S. transition "from a leading to a supporting role" in the defense of the peninsula, to ensure that the ROK military had a greater role in the operational planning and combat command and control of combined ROK/U.S. forces both during peacetime and in the event of hostilities.

While the CFC structure allows both for a smooth transition from peace to war and for an effective combined war fighting effort, many in the ROK continue to call for greater indigenous operational control of ROK military forces. Such issues play to the South's "little brother" complex which continues to serve as an irritant which must constantly be addressed. They do not detract, however, from the deterrent value of the alliance nor its centrality to broader ROK-U.S. relations.

Even in the event of more genuine North-South cooperation, or even a loose Korean confederation, I would argue that a continued ROK-U.S. security alliance presents the best insurance policy as a hedge against a sudden change in intent by the North. As a result, Washington and Seoul must continue to make clear to Pyongyang that

the continued presence of U.S. troops in the ROK is not a bargaining chip but an essential stabilizing force which makes U.S.-DPRK and South-North dialogue possible.

Headlines shortly after the historic summit indicating that Kim Jong-il had "approved" of a continued U.S. presence were both encouraging and disturbing: encouraging because it appeared that the North Korean supreme leader understood the long-term value of a continued U.S. presence to the peninsula's stability; discouraging since this implies, at least in the minds of headline writers, if not their readers, that Kim Jong-il's "approval" is somehow required.<sup>18</sup> If these reports are indeed true,<sup>19</sup> Kim Jong-il's willingness to accept this reality is encouraging, but he should not be given the impression that his approval is needed for U.S. forces to remain on the peninsula since this implies a Pyongyang veto over this critical U.S.-ROK decision. Until reunification, the status and fate of U.S. forces based in the ROK should be for Seoul and Washington alone to determine; as far as Pyongyang is concerned, the U.S. presence must be seen as non-negotiable. Once true reunification occurs, it will then be up to Washington and the new unified Korean government to decide the desirability and nature of any new bilateral security arrangement.

This does not preclude reductions in U.S. force levels, pragmatic restructuring and relocation, or modifications to existing command arrangements. If tensions are significantly reduced, the U.S.—in close consultation with the Republic of Korea—could conduct some limited troop withdrawals. Likewise, renewed provocations could justify a measured build-up of U.S. forces. Possible force and command structure modifications will be discussed during the review of potential scenarios. But, under all scenarios short of the disappearance of the North Korean state as a separate entity, I will argue that some credible U.S. military force presence is necessary.

#### *Maintaining the Alliance*

As a "shrimp among whales"—to borrow an ancient Korean proverb—Korea has always been concerned about being dominated by its neighbors. While the most recent transgressor was imperial Japan during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both China and Japan have, over the past millennium, exercised control over the peninsula on numerous occasions. Meanwhile, Russia played the central role in dividing Korea during the U.S.-Soviet Cold War confrontation and exerted sufficient control over Pyongyang first to veto and then to approve (if not order) the North's invasion of the South.<sup>20</sup>

The introduction of a fourth whale into Korean waters has been largely beneficial to the ROK since the U.S. has no territorial or

colonial ambitions and—debates over bases and status of forces agreements notwithstanding—has generally respected the ROK's sovereignty, while providing the security guarantees under which both political and economic reform have safely taken place.

In today's geopolitical setting, the U.S.—as the regional "balancer" or "stabilizer"—continues to help underwrite current and future ROK security.<sup>21</sup> As Professor Rhee Sang-woo notes:

Koreans anticipate that for the next few decades the U.S. will persist as the hegemonic power in East Asia. Close alliance with the U.S. is therefore the only option for Korea in designing its survival strategy. Korea will cooperate to maintain peaceful and stable order in the region. Meanwhile, Korea will also develop and maintain friendly relations with the other members of the regional security system, China, Japan, and Russia.<sup>22</sup>

The U.S.-ROK alliance allows Seoul simultaneously to pursue close and cordial relations with all its neighbors. Without American security guarantees, the options are limited. Korea could attempt to go it alone, although neutrality has not proven to be a successful strategy in the past. Or, it could choose to align with one of the nearby whales. Whichever one Seoul chooses—and China would be the most likely (though not inevitable) choice, since memories of Japan's domination are freshest and Russia today has little to offer—historic rivalries and suspicions are almost certain to be revitalized, leading to greater regional instability.

Particularly unsettling would be a unified Korea that looks toward Japan as its primary future threat or enemy. It is an unfortunate fact that one of the few things that the people of North and South Korea have in common today is an historical sense of distrust for their Japanese neighbors, a distrust shared, and all-too-frequently played upon, by the Chinese. If future South-North or Korea-China ties are built on this factor, however, with Japan emerging as the common concern today and future threat tomorrow, this will put Korea on a collision course with the United States, whose national security strategy rests upon the foundation of close U.S.-Japan relations and greater Japanese participation in regional security affairs (within the framework of the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty and Japan's Peace Constitution).<sup>23</sup>

A unified Korea closely aligned with and under the protection of either China or Japan is sure to make the other great regional powers nervous, even if the relationship is professed to be benign. This is why many South Koreans, President Kim Dae-jung foremost among them, attach high priority both to simultaneous close relations with the four major powers *and* to the continuation of a strong alliance relationship

with the U.S. As President Kim noted in his inaugural address:

To strengthen our national security, we will preserve and maintain alliance ties and close cooperation with the United States—the central factor in our national security.

To maintain peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, we will do our best to elicit positive cooperation with the four major powers around us—the United States, Japan, China, and Russia.<sup>24</sup>

The U.S. likewise sees the value of a continued strong U.S.-ROK alliance relationship even after North-South reconciliation or reunification. *EASR* states that "the U.S. strongly agrees [with President Kim Dae-jung] that our alliance and military presence will continue to support stability both on the Korean Peninsula and throughout the region after North Korea is no longer a threat."<sup>25</sup> This sentiment has been reinforced by the Bush administration. Under most plausible scenarios, I personally see a future role for U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula even after reconciliation or reunification, at least in the near term, in order to help ensure a secure environment conducive to much-needed demilitarization, if for no other reason.

### Possible Future Scenarios

As noted earlier, future force and command structure decisions are scenario-dependent. In this section, I will briefly look at four increasingly optimistic scenarios and comment on the implications of each regarding the future role of U.S. forces on and around the peninsula. Not addressed is the real, but hopefully remote, possibility that none of the optimistic scenarios may come to fruition. Given the roller coaster-like history of North-South relations, it is possible that relations could once again unwind. Renewed tensions and a resumption of North Korean-instigated provocations would, of course, end any prospects for force adjustments, other than perhaps a measured build-up of U.S. forces. In addition, a resumption of North Korean missile tests could (and should) result both in the deployment of additional theater missile defense (TMD) assets and an ROK commitment to participate in future research and development and deployment of advanced TMD systems.

North Korea is not the only one capable of derailing the current peace initiative. It must also be noted that the Kim Dae-jung Administration and opposition party leaders have failed to reach a bipartisan consensus on President Kim's Sunshine Policy toward the North. The main opposition Grand National Party (GNP) has severely criticized President Kim's conciliatory approach to the North, and the

GNP's presumptive candidate in the 2002 elections, Lee Hoi-chang, has made little effort to join with President Kim in crafting a bipartisan policy toward the North. Making matters worse, former President Kim Young-sam has demanded that his successor extract an apology for the Korean War from Kim Jong-il before allowing the North Korean leader to visit the South.<sup>26</sup> It would be an absolute tragedy if, at this historic moment, domestic politics in the ROK were to unravel the peninsula's greatest opportunity for North-South reconciliation since the peninsula was divided.

*Slightly Modified Status Quo*

Despite North Korean unpredictability and South Korean internecine political warfare, I remain cautiously optimistic about the prospects for continued North-South cooperation and expect that, at a minimum, we will see a continuation of the current, or perhaps slightly modified, status quo, especially now that the U.S. policy review is completed and the stage has been set for a resumption of U.S.-NK dialogue. This should include more serious dialogue on tension-reduction measures, such as the installation of a military hotline, a naval demarcation agreement, and perhaps even an "incidents at sea" accord.

Under such a scenario, U.S. troop levels should remain as they are. However, simple statements from Washington stating that "we see no reason yet to adjust our force presence" will not suffice. The U.S. needs to acknowledge the potential for change and express a willingness, in close coordination with Seoul, to adjust force levels "as the security situation permits" while reaffirming the U.S. commitment to remain on the peninsula "as long as the Korean people want American forces to continue." This approach provides a useful reminder that the U.S. is not forcing its presence upon the peninsula but is there at the behest of, and on behalf of, the Korean people and their democratically elected government.

At this stage—or, for that matter, right now—the U.S. needs to enter into serious, private security consultations with the ROK and Japan (perhaps through the TCOG mechanism) to identify the milestones and trigger events that would merit a phased reduction of U.S. forces along the lines outlined below.

*Peaceful Coexistence*

I believe that there is a better than even chance that "peaceful coexistence" can be achieved and sustained over the next several years, if the earlier momentum can be restored and bipartisan support can be hammered out in the South. This will require the North to be more

forthcoming than it has been of late, but surely Kim Jong-il recognizes that if he does not cement a deal with the ROK under Kim Dae-jung, the current window of opportunity will close and North Korea will be the big loser. Peaceful coexistence would include genuine military CBMs and more general tension reduction measures, to include, at a minimum, some drawback by both sides from the demilitarized zone along with the emplacement of a cooperative monitoring system similar to that installed in the Sinai, with data available to both sides. An open skies agreement would be another significant step toward institutionalizing this state of peaceful coexistence.<sup>27</sup> Eventually, mutual and balanced force reductions would also be seriously considered.

For such a peaceful state to be reached, both South and North Korea need to feel secure enough to take steps leading to some long overdue demilitarization on the peninsula.<sup>28</sup> The U.S.-ROK security alliance today provides that defensive assurance to Seoul. China and Russia both have security alliances with Pyongyang, which could provide the foundation for similar security assurances to North Korea. Rather than talk about a premature withdrawal of U.S. forces from the peninsula—which I have argued would be destabilizing—Moscow and Beijing should seek to provide Pyongyang with the necessary defensive security assurances that will allow North Korea to proceed down the path of enhanced cooperation and measured demilitarization.<sup>29</sup> This should in no way be seen as an endorsement of Russian arms sales to the North, however. Moscow's apparent willingness to upgrade North Korea's military arsenal, especially during the current lull in North-South dialogue, does little to further the cause of peace on the peninsula.

Some downward adjustment in the current level of forward-deployed U.S. forces seems reasonable and appropriate at this stage. If tensions are significantly reduced, the U.S.—in close consultation with the Republic of Korea—could conduct some limited troop withdrawals, starting with the 5,000 ground troops initially scheduled for removal under then Defense Secretary Dick Cheney's *East Asia Strategy Initiative*. This move was subsequently postponed by President Bush's father (George H. Bush, or "41," as he is referred to among Washington insiders to distinguish him from his son, the 43<sup>rd</sup> U.S. president) and then canceled by President Clinton after the 1994 nuclear crisis.<sup>30</sup> The existing command structures—the United Nations Command and the Combined Forces Command—would still remain intact, however. As it is today, the primary role of U.S. forces would be deterrence, although they would assume a less threatening posture toward the North once genuine CBMs are installed.

### *Confederation/Federation*

North-South federation or confederation proposals have been around for many years. North Korea, in particular, has long argued for a South-North confederation as an interim step toward eventual reunification. At a CSCAP North Pacific Working Group meeting in early 1997, for example, a North Korean scholar from the Foreign Ministry-directed Institute of Disarmament and Peace in Pyongyang spelled out the North's confederation views in considerable detail:

It is the international trend today to set up a confederal state or coalition government among the peoples with different ideas and views.

The proposal for national reunification through confederation advanced by the respected President Kim Il-sung is the formula to achieve reunification on the basis of one nation, one state, two systems, and two governments, leaving the ideas and systems existing between the north and the south as they are.

The proposal for national reunification through confederation is the way for the north and the south to embody the idea of independence, peaceful reunification, and great national unity in real terms, and this proposal provides institutional guarantee for coexistence of two systems in the north and the south from the principle of neither side conquering or being conquered by the other.

The proposal is aimed to resolve national reunification by the method which guarantees peace, stability, impartiality, and neutrality.<sup>31</sup>

Former ROK governments have uniformly rejected such proposals as a North Korea scheme aimed at perpetual separation. However, as an opposition leader, Kim Dae-Jung also saw merit in establishing a confederation as part of his "unification in three phases" philosophy. This has now become a part of the ROK's unification policy and is explained as follows:

The three-stage unification formula calls for the formation of a confederation in the first stage, a federation in the second, and complete unification in the third. The most important stage is the first stage which is the preparatory period for unification.

'Confederation' means a systematic mechanism through which the two Koreas will form close, cooperative organizations, while maintaining two different systems and two governments as well as two militaries and foreign policies. Thus, the two sides will peacefully

manage the state of the division of the country and develop a unification-oriented cooperative relationship.<sup>32</sup>

As is evident when comparing the two statements, there is considerable common ground between these two positions. So much so that, in their historic June 14 Joint Declaration, Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il agreed that their respective proposals for a confederation or loose federation system provided a "common element" upon which to build toward eventual reunification.<sup>33</sup> The North has been challenging the South for years to examine such a proposal; finally, Seoul seems willing to see if Pyongyang is really prepared to take "yes" for an answer.

A genuine federation or confederation would be one with more open borders, greater North-South freedom of movement, and other examples of positive interaction, ranging from combined sports teams (already a possibility) or a common flag and anthem, either superceded or augmenting the current national symbols. Inspections of one another's military facilities (with U.S. facilities included in the mix) would also be called for at this stage, if not accomplished earlier.<sup>34</sup>

At this stage, after some demilitarization has occurred on the peninsula and the current Armistice has been replaced by a North-South Peace Treaty (co-signed by the U.S. and PRC and endorsed by Japan and Russia), the United Nations Command could be safely disbanded or perhaps replaced with a more benign peacekeeping or peace monitoring force. The Combined Forces Command would continue to exist, but additional, deeper ground force reductions could be appropriate. Before any significant reductions in U.S. forces on the peninsula or elsewhere in Asia, however, close coordination would be required not only with Seoul but with Tokyo as well, since the U.S. military presence in Korea is closely linked to the presence of American forward-deployed forces in Japan as well. A withdrawal from either country would put strains on the other and would make the remaining presence both more critical (from a geopolitical perspective) and more difficult to rationalize (from a domestic politics perspective, especially to those living in close proximity to the remaining U.S. bases).

Under the DPRK's confederal proposal and under the ROK's first confederation phase, both sides continue to maintain separate governments and independent militaries. As a result, U.S. deterrence is still needed, and a joint command structure (as provided by the CMC) would still be required. The primary U.S. role would be to provide a security blanket under which North-South cooperation would grow. Deterrence would still be an implied mission, however.

### *Reunification Under One Central Government*

Every Korean continues to dream of eventual reunification under one central government. I will presume that this government will be in Seoul, under the current ROK democratic and economic system. For this to occur peacefully, the current generation of North Korean leaders must either dramatically change (and renounce) their current ideology or agree to go silently into the night. Neither seems very likely today or in the near future. As a result, true reunification seems a long way off. Even if the current regime in the North were to suddenly collapse, it is more likely to be replaced by another totalitarian (or at least highly authoritarian) regime which would want to hold on to power in the North.

Nonetheless, the German example demonstrates that fate does not always happen as anticipated or planned. If and when the border between North and South is opened, people may vote with their feet and create a reunified state, despite the intentions or designs of either side. As a result, serious discussion on this alternative is also needed today.

As noted previously, I would strongly argue that even under a true reunification scenario, a continued U.S.-Korea security relationship is desirable. But, provided there are no other significant changes in the regional threat environment, this relationship can be sustained with considerably fewer troops than are presently deployed either in Korea or in Japan. And the Combined Forces Command structure would become irrelevant, being replaced by a joint planning headquarters involving the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Headquarters, U.S. Forces Korea. This would be a cooperative, rather than a combined relationship, more along the lines of the U.S.-Japan military relationship.

Once North Korea goes away as a credible threat, maintaining the current level of 100,000 forward-deployed U.S. forces in East Asia is neither realistic nor necessary.<sup>35</sup> Significant reductions, especially in the number of U.S. Army combat troops forward deployed, appear advisable and inevitable. The key is maintaining the alliance structure through enhanced planning and coordination mechanisms and periodic military exercises.<sup>36</sup>

The fundamental shift in East Asia's strategic landscape brought about by true Korean reunification will require a major adjustment in strategic thinking by Washington and its allies, including a future justification for a continued U.S. military presence that does not include deterring conflict on the Korean Peninsula. That rationale must center primarily around the need to maintain regional stability. In truth, sustaining stability is not a new mission for the United States in East

Asia. Preserving stability has long been a stated rationale behind the U.S. presence and is one of the primary objectives of the 50-year-old U.S.-Japan Security Treaty as well. What will be new is that sustaining regional stability will be the central mission, one that is harder to define and defend than the more easily comprehended mission of deterrence in Korea.

As McDevitt and Kelly argue, U.S. forward presence forces currently serve both a stability and a deterrence role because they blend multi-service capabilities well-tailored to deal with the three most dangerous Asian security uncertainties: the possibility of conflict on the Korean Peninsula, the possibility of Sino-U.S. military conflict over Taiwan, and conflict over sovereignty claims in the South China Sea (especially over the contested Spratly Islands, claimed in whole or in part by Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam). Forward-deployed forces are relevant because "they have the proper blend of capabilities to deal with the most credible military problems in the region. Limited forces are by no means the solution to all problems, but can be credibly applied to the most likely problems."<sup>37</sup>

Even if the Korean Peninsula problem is resolved, other challenges will remain and other new ones could emerge, so the deterrence function will not disappear completely—in fact, one could argue that removing U.S. deterrent forces could be the surest way of guaranteeing that other challenges will emerge. However, regional stability will become the more important role. It should also be noted that it is sometimes difficult to determine where one stops and the other starts, since deterrence is an essential element in providing stability. The major concern, of course, is to avoid creating a "power vacuum" which others would be tempted to fill.

This is not to imply that a U.S. military presence is the panacea for every form of misfortune in East Asia. Most challenges today are internal, and the U.S. long ago rejected the "world's policeman" role. But it can be argued that the U.S. presence and influence have helped contribute to the process of democratic change by creating a "greenhouse" within which political and economic reforms can blossom and also by reducing the effectiveness of the pretense of external aggression as a justification for military rule. Kelly and McDevitt also argue that the U.S. military presence in East Asia has played a significant role in "dampening out the military dimension of historic animosities and rivalries" by inhibiting the use of military power to change boundaries or resolve territorial disputes, at least in situations that are within the reach or capability of U.S. military power.<sup>38</sup>

The future mission of an American East Asian military presence in

a post-Korean deterrence political scenario—to preserve stability by preventing militarily-induced instability—can best be achieved by what could loosely be called "anti-hegemony forces," i.e., forces that are optimized to prevent others from exerting undue influence over neighboring states. McDevitt and Kelly call them "anti-power projection forces," arguing that "to sustain stability in the future, U.S. force structure will have as its primary warfighting focus defeating power projection anywhere in the East Asian littoral. In the future, anti-power projection ought to be the concept of operations for forward deployed U.S. forces."

This puts increased emphasis on the ability to control the sea and air space around the periphery of Asia which, in turn, suggests a greater reliance on air and naval forces and a greatly diminished ground forces role once the peninsula is reunited and North Korea disappears.<sup>39</sup> Some modest permanent ground force presence might be required to signify commitment and for essential non-stability missions (operations other than war) such as non-combatant emergency evacuation (NEO), humanitarian assistance, search and rescue, and special operations, although this could largely be satisfied through periodic deployments and regularly scheduled exercises and training.

In a post-North Korea scenario, the U.S. Air Force will have an important role to play as an anti-power projection force. Its force structure remaining in East Asia must be a comprehensive mix of air to air, air to ground, surveillance, and aerial refueling, along with earmarked U.S.-based airlift. The current air base at Kadena in Okinawa is critical to this equation, as is a continued air force presence on the peninsula.

Because of the nature of the anti-power projection mission, the current composition of U.S. Navy and Marine Corps forces in the region is the least likely to change greatly. The Seventh Fleet commander based in Japan, a carrier battle group, and an amphibious ready group would remain at the heart of naval capability. The location of the Marines is subject to serious debate, however. Some have suggested Korea, others Australia, and still others Guam or even back to Hawaii or the continental U.S. No option should be ruled out, but it is clear that the people of Okinawa will argue that their "peace dividend," should true peace come to the peninsula, includes the removal of U.S. marines from their island. It will take an extremely persuasive argument (or an imminent outside threat) to convince them otherwise.

The question of command of U.S. forces always presents itself. The U.S. Army has sought a Northeast Asia Command for decades.<sup>40</sup> McDevitt and Kelly argue convincingly that today's separate command

"structures"—one for Korea and one for Japan—make little sense in a post-Korea situation, recommending instead a three-star officer level command with a separate joint headquarters, located in the region. This commander would be, in U.S. parlance, a sub-unified commander reporting to U.S. Pacific Command in Honolulu. The real strength of the stability force is the synergy provided by combining appropriately tailored forces from all the services.

It should be noted in closing that alliance relationships do not necessarily or always require large forward detachments of American troops to be credible. The alliance relationship itself is based on the presence of common interests, values, and objectives. These are expected to continue between the United States and a peacefully reunified (under Seoul) Korean Peninsula. The number of forward-based forces is geared more toward the existing security environment. A case in point: few doubt the solidity of the U.S.-Australian alliance, given the number of times Americans and Aussies have fought shoulder to shoulder in the century just passed. Yet, on a day-to-day basis, there are few American military officers based on Australian soil. The U.S.-Australia model may apply to a more benign Northeast Asia at some time in the future, even if some modest forward presence may well be desirable in both Korea and Japan to promote regional stability.

### **Policy Prescriptions: Getting There From Here**

There are a few steps that both the ROK and the U.S. should consider taking in order to help move the peace process in the direction of the more optimistic outcomes.

#### *Achieve Bipartisan Support of a Policy of Engagement with North Korea*

Despite the current lull, the Sunshine Policy still appears to be the best alternative for proceeding with North Korea. As Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly has noted, in the final analysis, the U.S. has no real option other than to support the ROK. But, President Kim's policy still enjoys scant support among many of the ROK elite and especially among opposition leaders. Achieving ROK domestic support is critical to long-term success, and this will require greater effort on the part of all parties. As one frustrated Korean security specialist told me earlier this year, "President Kim has spent more time consulting with the Americans and Japanese on his North Korea policy than he has with the Korean people themselves."<sup>41</sup> In order to alleviate anxiety, the world's newest Nobel Peace laureate needs to exert as much effort mending fences at home as he does building bridges

abroad, since international support for his policies will be for naught if domestic consensus cannot be achieved.

Meanwhile, U.S. support appears to have gone from slightly more than lukewarm under Clinton to downright tepid (or worse) under Bush, despite outward professions of continued support. The U.S. needs to demonstrate and not merely profess its support for Kim Dae-jung's engagement policy, and this can best be done through a rapid completion of its Korean policy review, followed by the promised resumption of U.S.-NK dialogue. This will help President Kim build an ROK consensus in support of deeper engagement with the North as well.

The U.S. also needs an agreed-upon, well-articulated, closely-coordinated, bipartisan, long-term strategy aimed at opening up the North and preparing the geopolitical landscape for closer South-North interaction and cooperation. This strategy should not be aimed at hastening the collapse of North Korea, nor should it be specifically aimed at propping up the current North Korean regime. If, however, some policies contribute to the DPRK's survivability, at least in the near term, so be it! The goal is to open up the North, to build confidence, and to expose the people of North Korea to the prospects of a better, safer, more prosperous and secure life. The aim is to create a desire and incentive for eventual reunification under Seoul's political and economic system.

The basic recommendations in William Perry's October 1999 report still provide a good starting point for crafting this long-term strategy.<sup>42</sup> Those recommendations are summarized as follows:

- Adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach to the DPRK's nuclear weapons- and ballistic missile-related programs;
- Create a strengthened mechanism within the U.S. government for carrying out North Korea policy;
- Continue the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) mechanism to ensure close U.S. cooperation with the ROK and Japan;
- Take steps to create a sustainable, bipartisan, long-term outlook toward the problem of North Korea; and
- Approve a plan of action prepared for dealing with the contingency of DPRK provocations in the near term, including the launch of a long-range missile.

While Perry's efforts have rightfully garnered bipartisan praise, little was done during the Clinton administration to implement his recommendations beyond the continued smooth functioning of the

TCOG process, an important but by itself inadequate step forward. The Bush administration has already made good on its promise to continue the TCOG process, but it should give serious consideration to the other Perry proposals as well.

*Honor the spirit and intent of the Agreed Framework*

The United States must continue to demonstrate its good faith adherence to the Agreed Framework. At a minimum this includes continued fuel oil deliveries and obtaining broader political and financial support for the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). To accomplish this, a broader constituency for KEDO must be developed within the U.S. Congress. The Bush administration must also eventually face the need for a formal U.S.-DPRK Nuclear Cooperation Agreement in order to transfer American nuclear technology used in the ROK reactors to the North. This will also require bipartisan Congressional support. For its part, the U.S. Congress must also face the need and responsibility to keep the KEDO process alive through assured funding.

One final point about the Agreed Framework: the press is full of speculation about American desires to change the terms of the agreement, but the Bush administration is firmly on record supporting the current agreement as long as Pyongyang also honors its commitments, which it has done thus far. However, the real moment of truth for Pyongyang and for the Agreed Framework in general is the requirement for the North to come in full compliance with the IAEA prior to the delivery of any sensitive components of the promised light water reactors (LWRs). This requires detailed inspection to determine past accountability, a process which some speculate could take a year or more. Thus far, Pyongyang has not allowed the IAEA to begin this task and thus will have only itself to blame if additional delays occur in the completion of this project.

In the meantime, the U.S. and the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) are honoring their part of the bargain. Construction activity continues on the LWR site (even though striking North Korean workers had to be replaced with Uzbek laborers), and KEDO continues to provide North Korea with 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil annually as compensation for shutting down its Yongbyon reactor. These deliveries are scheduled to continue until the first LWR becomes operational, making North Korean demands for compensation if the project is delayed doubly inappropriate: first because they are already being compensated and second because they have been at least as much at fault for delays experienced thus far (which make the 2003 target date unattainable) and will guarantee

future delay if they do not start cooperating with the IAEA to come into full compliance.

*Establish a Korean Peninsula Agricultural Development Organization*

As part of the Sunshine Policy's goal of separating economics and humanitarian assistance from politics, South Korea has provided food aid and promised other agricultural assistance to the North. It has also urged the United States, Japan, and others to provide such assistance. What is needed is a means for putting the ROK in the driver's seat in the application of such humanitarian aid and agricultural developmental assistance. Whether or not one supports the Agreed Framework, it is clear that its implementing mechanism, KEDO, has been one of the bright spots in U.S.-ROK-Japan cooperation with North Korea. I would propose a parallel organization, KADO—the Korean Peninsula Agricultural Development Organization—chaired by the ROK, to administer future food aid and agricultural assistance programs that would be a central part of any package deal. KADO would provide a vehicle for channeling U.S., Japanese, and broader international food aid to North Korea with Seoul in the driver's seat and with emphasis not just on handouts but on agricultural development to address North Korea's long-term food needs. This could help depoliticize U.S. and Japanese food aid by casting such aid not merely as "handouts propping up a corrupt regime" but rather as a meaningful demonstration of support for President Kim's engagement policy and an instrument of ROK leverage over the North.

*Build a "Virtual Alliance" Among the U.S., ROK, and Japan*

Close security cooperation among Tokyo, Washington, and Seoul has already paid rich dividends in pressuring North Korea both to keep its Agreed Framework commitments and, at least temporarily, to abandon its missile testing program. As one of the "key findings" of the Perry Report notes, "no U.S. policy toward the DPRK will succeed if the ROK and Japan do not actively support it and cooperate in its implementation." The creation of the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group has helped to institutionalize this three-way cooperation, as least as far as dealing with Pyongyang is concerned. The challenge is to bring the three sides even closer together in a way that serves all three nations' national security interests, while also taking into account the concerns of others (especially China and Russia).

Absent a clear and present threat, a formal, official trilateral security alliance is neither necessary nor advisable, either today or in a post-Korean reunification era. The challenges involved in

creating—and in gaining both public support for, and legislative approval of—a formal treaty would be daunting and, for Japan, would raise serious constitutional issues as well. The creation of a "virtual alliance" is achievable, however, and in the interests of long-term peace and stability.<sup>43</sup> This virtual alliance can be achieved through the maintenance of a reinvigorated U. S.-Japan alliance, the continuation of a solid U.S.-Korea security relationship post-unification, and the strengthening of bilateral security cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul. This will allow all three states to deal more effectively with North Korea as well.

### **Conclusion**

Until the Korean Peninsula is peaceful, prosperous, nuclear-free, and reunified, the U.S.-ROK security alliance and a credible U.S. military force presence remain essential for continued peace and stability. The alliance remains a potentially relevant factor in assuring peace on the peninsula post-reunification as well. The American security blanket provided through a continued alliance relationship will continue to make it possible for Seoul, both now and after reunification, to pursue close, cordial relations simultaneously with its three giant neighbors: Japan, China, and Russia. Absent such assurances, Seoul might feel compelled to establish security links with one of its larger neighbors to the perceived detriment of the other two, a destabilizing prospect, especially if it resulted in a Sino-Korean strategic relationship seemingly aimed at Japan.

However, the desire and ability of both sides to continue a close security alliance after unification cannot and should not be presumed. If U.S. and Korean officials and strategic planners are convinced that a continued U.S. military presence is necessary or desirable even after North-South reconciliation or reunification, they must begin serious discussions now in order to develop the strategic rationale. They must then begin making convincing arguments to potentially skeptical legislatures and publics in both nations, lest they be overtaken by events should reunification come more quickly than expected.

## Notes

1. Comments attributed to then-U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia Stanley Roth.
2. Kim Dae-jung, "Koreans Are One People and Will Fight No More," *International Herald Tribune*, June 20, 2000.
3. Most of these calls have come from anti-base activists, but even staunch anti-communists like U.S. Senator Jesse Helms have begun to question the continued need for U.S. forces on the peninsula in light of recent developments.
4. See, for example, Kim Dae-jung, "Momentum of Change in North Korea Brings New Opportunities," March 8, 2001, speech at the American Enterprise Institute/Council on Foreign Relations luncheon, Washington D.C., as excerpted in *Korea Update*, vol. III, no. 2, March 2001.
5. For the immediate post-summit anti-euphoria perspective, see Han Sung-joo, "The Koreas Must Develop Trust, Confidence and Cooperation," *International Herald Tribune*, June 17-18, 2000, and Ralph A. Cossa, "With No Peace Deal, the Peninsula Remains a Dangerous Place," *International Herald Tribune*, June 20, 2000. The 2001 ROK Defense White Paper also realistically underscores the continued threat.
6. For background information on this break in high-level dialogue, see Aidan Foster-Carter, "Will It All Go Well: Ups and Downs in the New Inter-Korean Normality," *Comparative Connections*, vol. 3, no. 1, April 2001. *Comparative Connections*, a quarterly on-line journal that provides analysis of key Asia-Pacific bilateral relationships (complete with chronologies of significant events), is available on the Pacific Forum CSIS web site [[www.csis.org/pacfor](http://www.csis.org/pacfor)].
7. I reject the view of those who claim, however, that the U.S. needs North Korea as an enemy to justify its missile defense programs and is thus dragging its feet on resuming its missile dialogue with Pyongyang. For more on the rationale behind the review, see Ralph A. Cossa, "Bush Asia Policy Off to Rocky Start," *Comparative Connections*, vol. 3, no. 1, April, 2001.
8. The Pacific Forum CSIS, in cooperation with the Yoido Society in Seoul and the Okazaki Institute in Tokyo, have been examining this topic over the past two years, as have several other organizations at the non-governmental level. Official dialogue still appears lacking, however, with the U.S. still holding to its increasingly unrealistic figure of 100,000 American troops forward deployed in East Asia "for the foreseeable future."
9. Current membership includes the ten ASEAN states (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) plus Australia, Canada, China, Japan, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Russia, South Korea, North Korea (as of July 2000), New Zealand, the United States, and the European Community. For an assessment of the implications of North Korea's participation in the ARF, please see Ralph A. Cossa, "North Korea's Coming Out Party: A Potential 'Win-Win' for All," *PacNet* No. 29-00, July 21, 2000. *PacNet* is a weekly newsletter available on the Pacific Forum web site.
10. For continuing analysis of the Korean Peninsula developments, including North and South Korean relations with the U.S., China, and Japan, as well as with one another, please see the quarterly issues of *Comparative Connections* [[www.csis.org/pacfor/ccejournal.html](http://www.csis.org/pacfor/ccejournal.html)].
11. For more on these agreements, see Byong-Hyo Choi and Seo-Hang Lee, "Peace and Stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia: A Korean Perspective," in *IFANSReview*, Vol. 3, No. 6, December 1995, pp. 1-12.

12. Pyongyang originally provided no explanation, even though the press speculated at the time that the North's decision could have been in response to the new Bush Administration's seemingly more hard-line approach toward North Korea. Kim Jong-il's recent statement that he was waiting for the Bush Administration to complete its Korean Peninsula policy review before setting a date to visit Seoul feeds this belief, although I remain somewhat skeptical (more on this later).
13. For additional arguments, also see Scott Snyder, "Is the U.S. Really an Obstacle to Inter-Korean Dialogue?" *PacNet* no. 21, May 25, 2001.
14. Officially titled *The United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, December 1998), p.23.
15. According to U.S. Forces Korea unclassified Command Briefing.
16. The ROK has put forth several security-related proposals, including establishing a military hot line, which the North has "reacted to in a positive way" ("Two Koreas Near Accord on Reduction of Military Tensions," *Korea Times*, August 30,2000) but, positive headlines notwithstanding, no dialogue has occurred on actual CBMs.
17. According to U.S. Forces Korea unclassified Command Briefing.
18. See, for example, "Pres. Kim Reaffirms Kim Jong-il's Approval of US Troops Here," *Korea Times*, August 18,2000, and "North Korean Leader Okays US Forces on the Peninsula: Report," *Korea Times*, August 10, 2000.
19. I say "if true" because, Kim Dae-jung's assurances notwithstanding, official North Korea broadcasts still repeatedly call for a full withdrawal of U.S. forces from the peninsula. See, for example, Choi Win-ki, "N.K.-U.S. Dialogue Not Important, Pyongyang Broadcast Reports," *Joongang Ilbo*, May 27, 2001, as reported in the May 30, 2001, *NAPSNet Daily Report*.
20. See, for example, "Reexamining [sic] Causes of the Korean War," *Korea Now*, Vol. 29, No. 9, May 6, 2000, pp. 12-13.
21. Some, like Professor Song-woo Rhee immediately below, use the terms "hegemon" or "benign hegemon" to describe the U.S. I reject these terms as doubly false. The U.S. is not, nor should it be, benign in Asia and the basic characteristic of a hegemon - the imposition of its will by force - does not apply.
- <sup>22</sup>Sang-woo Rhee, "Korea-Japan Security Cooperation: A Prescriptive Design," in Sang-woo Rhee and Tae-Hyo Kim, *Korea-Japan Security Relations: Prescriptive Studies* (Seoul: New Asia Research Institute, 2000), p. vi.
23. This should not be read, as some are inclined to do, as a U.S. desire to "deputize" Japan to carry out current U.S. security responsibilities. This is not likely to be acceptable to either side. But Japan has earned the right and appears increasingly ready to accept the responsibility to participate more fully in regional security affairs.
24. Kim Dae-Jung, "Address to the Nation," December 19, 1997, as reprinted in *A Profile of Courage and Vision: Kim Dae-Jung* (Seoul: Korean Overseas Information Service, February 1998), p. 26.
25. EASR, p. 62.
26. "Kim YS Demands NK Apology for' Korean War Before Kim Jong-il's Visit," *Korea Times*, August 26, 2000.
27. For more on the author's suggestions on confidence building measures, please see Ralph A. Cossa and Alan Oxley, "U.S.-Korea Alliance" in Robert Blackwill and Paul Dibb (ed), *America's Asian Alliances* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 61-86.
28. Combined, the North and South have more forces under arms than the United States, Russia, or any other nation, save China—this from a peninsula with a combined population of under 65 million people.
29. For more on this argument, please see Ralph A. Cossa, "Coming of Age and Coming Out," *Comparative Connections*, July, 2000.

30. The so-called EASI Reports, produced by the Bush administration in 1990 and 1992, preceded the EASR documents and outlined the initial post-Cold War force reductions in Asia.
31. Pak Hyon-jae, "Problems in Confidence-Building in North Pacific Region," paper presented at the second CSCAP North Pacific Working Group meeting, Vancouver, Canada, Jan 31 - Feb 2, 1997, pp. 3-4.
32. "The New Administration's North Korea Policy," Korean Overseas Culture and Information Service, Seoul, Korea, Feb, 1998, pp.2-3.
33. For more on the author's views of the summit and Joint Declaration, see "North-South Korea: The Path Toward Reconciliation," *PacNet* 24-00, June 16, 2000.
34. Such inspections were called for under the 1991 Basic Agreement. At the time, the U.S. had agreed that its facilities would also be open for inspection. Of note, South Korea hosted an ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-sessional Support Group meeting on confidence building measures in November 2000 which included a visit to an ROK military facility. This would have provided North Korea, as an ARF member, with its first opportunity officially to visit an ROK military installation, but Pyongyang elected not to send a delegation.
35. Short of the emergence of a new credible threat to regional security—a resurgent China or a revitalized, angry Russia most readily coming to mind.
36. For a discussion of possible force dispositions and missions, please see Michael A. McDevitt and James A. Kelly, "In Search of Stability: Designing for a Better Peace in East Asia," in Ralph A. Cossa, ed., *U.S.-Korea-Japan Relations: Building Toward a "Virtual Alliance"* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS Press, 1999), pp. 150 171. The remainder of this section draws heavily from their analysis.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*
39. A contrasting view with greater employment of ground forces is in Michael O'Hanlon, "Keep US Forces in Korea After Reunification," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, pp. 5-19, Seoul, Vol X, No. 1, Summer 1998, pp. 5-20.
40. See, for example, Richard L. Bogusky "The Impact of Korean Unification on Northeast Asia: American Security Challenges and Opportunities," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Seoul, Vol X, No. 1, Summer 1998, pp. 49-73, for a more comprehensive review of the Northeast Asia Command issue.
41. This comment was made on a not-for-attribution basis.
42. William Perry, *Review of United States Policy Toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations* (Washington, D.C.: State Department, October 1999).
43. For more details, see Ralph A. Cossa, ed., *U.S.-Korea-Japan Relations: Building Toward a "Virtual Alliance"* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS Press, 1999).

