

June 15, 1977

WITHDRAWAL OF U. S. GROUND FORCES FROM SOUTH KOREA

Summary

The proposal by President Carter to remove approximately 32,000 ground troops from the Republic of Korea over the next five years has rapidly generated enormous public discussion with the recall of General Singlaub. Unfortunately, too much of the discussion has focused on this particularly dramatic incident and not on the broad policy questions which must be raised. This paper examines the basic problems which any withdrawal plan must encompass and concludes that as presently posed the unconditional withdrawal of American forces would dangerously lower the threshold of war on the Korean peninsula in the years immediately ahead.

The reasons that tensions will probably increase substantially and the outbreak of hostilities be more likely to ensue results from numerous problems inherent in the withdrawal proposal. These problems are summarized below and examined at greater length in the main body of this paper.

1. The manner in which the proposal has emerged reveals a basic lack of planning and preparation that is needed to engender confidence in the capacity to carry it out and maintain security in the region.
2. The American unit is not just another division of men stationed along the DMZ with vastly larger Korean forces at their side. The unit has far more firepower than any Korean unit and also has the capacity to use tactical nuclear weapons which apparently also would be removed. Thus a huge gap would be created in the existing defenses of South Korea.
3. Presumably, the South Korean Army would be built up to correspond to this elimination of American strength. But the President can only pull troops out; he cannot guarantee Congressional approval of the massive credit sales or loans for Korean purchases of American equipment.

NOTE: Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

4. Even if a military buildup takes place, one cannot know if the North Koreans may in effect offset this with their own strengthening of forces as occurred in the period from 1971 to 1976. They have their own large defense industries and the ROK does not.

5. In order to maintain a credible commitment in Korea, the United States must have potential logistical support to fulfill her mutual defense treaty obligation. But American forces in Japan rely upon the vicissitudes of politics there and none of the Japanese parties will accept the stationing of U.S. nuclear weapons on their soil. The U.S. is now negotiating new base agreements with the Philippines and presumably will lower strength there. Similarly, the direction seems to be to a complete phase out of Taiwan. Bases in Thailand are already closed. Thus, the Koreans sense that the U.S. has no alternative base structure in East Asia that can sustain an American commitment to Korea.

6. Maintaining some air and naval bases in Korea may not sufficiently assure the Koreans of the U.S. resolve. At any moment's notice, the planes can fly away and ships sail away. Only ground forces may demonstrate real commitment to both Seoul and Pyongyang.

7. Koreans feel the withdrawal move is the beginning of an abandonment under the guise of a Koreanization program. Neither the Koreans nor the American military in Korea feel that any real explanation has been given as to precisely why the withdrawal should take place at this particular time. The existing situation has preserved the peace for 24 years and, thus, a crisis may be created in a place where there currently is none. Asserting the Nixon or Guam Doctrine as through a law of American international relations is very curious given both the present reaction to the views of its author and the results of the policy in Vietnam.

8. Removal of American forces raises important technical questions concerning the future of the UN Command structure. Presently, the Commander of the American 8th Army is also Commander of UN forces, including all Korean military forces outside of the capitol of Seoul. If the 8th Army is withdrawn, then presumably the command structure would also vanish. The Koreans have already raised this question and do not feel they should serve an American commander in the field when no American troops accompany them.

9. Similarly, the armistice agreement is between the North Koreans, People's Republic of China, and the UN Commander. Thus, the South Koreans who, with the withdrawal, will be face-to-face with North Koreans are not direct parties to the armistice.

10. Nuclear proliferation may result from the withdrawal if the South Koreans feel that the only way they can adequately provide for their own security is through the development of nuclear weapons. Similarly, Japan will have to reconsider an enormous militarization program if they feel the United States is withdrawing from the region. Or as an option, they may pursue neutrality or make some accommodation with the Soviet Union.

11. Despite their public statements, the PRC similarly may react badly to the lack of American resolve in Korea. This would add more compelling evidence that an accommodation with Russia may be the most prudent thing to do now rather than wait for an inevitable encirclement that the U.S. will not be able to prevent.

12. Korea has the largest and one of the most powerful armies in the free world aside from the United States. With 50,000 troops stationed in Viet Nam and over 1,000 fatalities, they feel they demonstrated their broad view of defending the non-communist world. The Koreans do not feel that the U. S. is doing them a favor by stationing troops in their country, but instead they have made the major sacrifices for the benefit of the U.S. in holding the strategic defense line in Northeast Asia.

Only Korea remains in the entire East Asia region as a powerful military ally of the United States. A loss of Korea may mean the collapse of any future role of the United States in the entire region.

I. Emergence of the Withdrawal Policy:

For the last several years, proposed amendments to Defense Department bills have been proposed in the Congress that would reduce the number of American military personnel assigned to the Republic of Korea (ROK). Each year these proposals have been voted down by substantial margins. Only with the pledge by candidate Carter to withdraw forces from Korea and his subsequent election to the Presidency did the proposal generate serious discussion.

Apparently Gov. Carter decided as early as January 1975 that all American forces should be withdrawn from Korea. He only later exempted the Air Force but remained wedded to a basic naval proposition opposing static ground positions in exposed areas.

In his meetings with the Japanese two weeks after the inauguration, Vice President Mondale asserted that the withdrawal policy had already been decided upon. But President Carter himself did not specifically refer to the subject until he casually mentioned it in his March 9, 1977, news conference in response to a question. At that time, he stated the following: "My commitment to withdraw American ground troops from Korea has not changed." He estimated that, "In order to carry it out, a four or five year time period is appropriate" but "the schedule for withdrawal of American ground troops would have to be worked out very carefully with the South Korean government."*

After the news conference, the President met with the Foreign Minister from the Republic of Korea and informed him of this policy decision. The Koreans felt that as the ally vitally effected by this policy, they should have been consulted before any announcement.

* Some have contended that the actual tape of the news conference indicates the President said that a "full five-year time period" would be involved, but most commentators, and apparently the Administration, have accepted the "four to five" year interpretation.

American military and embassy officials have expressed similar concerns. In testifying before a Congressional committee after his removal from his position in Korea, General Singlaub complained that the Korean command was "never asked to comment on the desirability of the withdrawal" and thus "we were being asked the wrong questions" by the Administration. Others have contended that the President consulted neither the State Department, the Korean government, nor even the Joint Chiefs of Staff before deciding on the policy change. Even if the Joint Chiefs did confer with the President, they apparently did not relay the strong dissent from such a policy change by the Korean military command. Similarly, the President proceeded with this major new policy declaration without first consulting with Congress.

Only after the recall of General Singlaub did much of an elaboration of policy on Korea emerge. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General George Brown, and Philip C. Habib of the State Department, went to Korea to consult with the Korean government, but only after the policy had been decided upon. Even then, the initial announcement about the withdrawal of 6,000 troops by the end of 1978 leaked from Japanese sources on the return trip to the United States rather than any joint announcement by the United States and Korean governments.

Thus, the whole procedure of announcing the withdrawal of forces from Korea has generated far more anxiety in East Asia than the policy might have caused otherwise. Back in 1971, when only the 7th Division was withdrawn, the United States initially consulted with the Koreans before any announcement and then accompanied the withdrawal with a concrete proposal to modernize South Korean military forces with a \$1.5 billion grant assistance program. Even before the withdrawal revelation, the South Koreans had already been quite uneasy about the Carter Administration because of not being consulted earlier when the United States responded to overtures from Pyongyang to President-elect Carter to visit North Korea.

Thus, the withdrawal announcement confirmed the previous skepticism concerning the diplomacy of the new administration, and even before any substantive changes took place, the government of the Republic of Korea felt they sustained unnecessary damage to their prestige due to the actions of their closest ally.

II. Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula:

For the past 23 years, peace and stability have existed on the Korean peninsula. The American forces, with their enormous

firepower, have maintained the military balance between the forces deployed north and south of the 38th parallel. The American forces fulfill a complicated threefold purpose in Korea: supplement and support allied ROK forces to discourage attacks by the People's Republic of Korea (PRK), restrain ROK forces from possibly overreacting to PRK provocations and launching a general attack themselves, and form an integral role in the United Nations Command structure.

Over the years, the American military program in Korea was never specifically designed to transfer all on-the-ground military functions to the South Koreans. Thus, specific programs to arm the South Koreans have always excluded either major weapons systems or substantial air power. Only with the withdrawal of the Seventh Division in 1971 did some discussion occur of the possible removal of all American troops. But the withdrawal of 20,000 men at that time merely reduced the size of forces and did not alter the fundamental role of American infantry forces in contributing to the protection of the main invasion corridor to Seoul.

With the withdrawal of these forces, the United States initiated the five-year Korean modernization program. This program, designed to somewhat offset the withdrawal of American forces, never fulfilled its promise. Initially, the United States pledged to provide \$1.5 billion in grant military assistance, or about \$300 million per year over a five-year period. But due to the exigencies of the Vietnam War, the program suffered endless delays as the war received priority attention for equipment.

Moreover, the Koreans later complained that the costs of equipment should have been established at 1971 prices. Instead, inflated costs of equipment substantially reduced the amount of material and only \$1 billion of grant aid was actually extended with the Koreans obtaining another \$.5 billion in foreign military sales financed by 8 percent loans. Rather than substantially modernizing the ROK forces, the program ultimately left a wider gap between the forces north and south of the 38th parallel.

Apparently, the initial announcement to withdraw American forces in 1971 encouraged the North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung to engage in his own military improvement program. The withdrawal signaled to Kim a weakening of American resolve in Korea. Thus, the North Koreans engaged in a massive buildup of their own forces. Only recently has intelligence substantiated the scope of the North Korean buildup in the five years from 1971 to 1976. Thus, in 1977, the disparity in the military power between the two sides is much larger than in 1971.

From 1973 to 1976, the PRK more than doubled their number of submarines, tanks, and helicopter assets. Field artillery increased by 50 percent, amphibious warfare craft rose four-fold, and armored personnel carriers and transport aircraft for paratroop insertion both increased substantially. Besides these material increases in forces, the North Koreans also created a large command-style unconventional warfare force, constructed new naval bases and airfields in forward areas, redeployed armored equipment closer to the DMZ, built concrete reinforcements for artillery positions close to the DMZ, reinforced air defenses, and constructed underground protection shelters for much of their air and naval forces. In general, Kim Il Sung took a wide range of actions all out of proportion and design for any merely defensive purposes.

The American military leader in Korea, General Vessey, posed the simple question: "One has to ask oneself: Why this build-up?"

The result of these efforts has led to a growing disparity between the equipment of the two sides. Thus, by 1977, the PRK enjoys advantages over the ROK of two to one in naval combatants, artillery and combat aircraft, and two and one-half to one in armor. The following chart indicates the balance between the two Korean forces and the size of the American contingent:

	<u>North Korea</u>	<u>South Korea</u>	<u>United States</u>
Troops	495,000	625,000	41,000
Warplanes	655	216	65
Tanks	1,950	1,000	54
Ships	450	174	45 to 50 in 7th Fleet

While revealing in many respects, this chart is also somewhat misleading because of the categories of weapons and their deployment. Despite the recent introduction of some modern equipment, the ROK still lags substantially behind the PRK in the capabilities of their tank force, aircraft, and armor. Moreover, the PRK has 12 submarines to interdict the vital sea lanes of the ROK while their own supply routes from Russia and China come overland. In order to cope effectively with both South Korean and potential American aerial attacks, the North Koreans have installed the best anti-aircraft installations in the Communist world outside of the Soviet Union.

The South Koreans lead the North only in general manpower strength of their forces and have a somewhat larger reserve capability to draw from. However, by all analysis any new outbreak of war would be decided by the amount of firepower both sides can muster early in the conflict and thus the number of personnel in uniform would be a very small factor in the ultimate outcome.

In order to help offset the disparity between the two Korean forces, the United States has maintained both air and infantry forces in South Korea. Although the American Second Division of 14,000 men comprises only 5 percent of the total strength arrayed along the DMZ, they have far more conventional firepower, land and air mobility and anti-tank capabilities than several Korean divisions combined. Moreover, the American forces, air and infantry combined, have access to an estimated 640 tactical nuclear weapons. These weapons constitute one of the key strategic elements on the side of the South Koreans that dissuades Kim Il Sung from launching another invasion. Presumably, the removal of American ground forces would also mean the removal of part of this element of uncertainty in any North Korean calculations.

Aware of the enormous gap between their own military equipment and that of their potential adversaries, the ROK had inaugurated a Force Improvement Program which was projected to entail a cost of over \$5 billion by the early 1980's, although much of the material would not arrive until later. Overall, since the U.S. Congress ended grant aid to Korea, the Seoul government has substantially increased their own military spending, doubling it in recent years from \$700 million to \$1.4 billion. In 1970, the ROK devoted 4 percent of their GNP and 23.9 percent of their total government budget to defense. By 1976, these figures rose to 6.1 percent and 32.7 percent and will rise further by 1981 to 6.6 percent and 34.3 percent. This effort considerably dwarfs that of almost any country in the non-communist world. Any larger military outlays by the ROK would invariably undermine their economic development program that provides the resources to sustain these projected levels of defense spending.

However, this new defensive effort was not designed to overtake the lead held by the PRK. In fact, even with the projected increases in material, the ROK would still be trailing the PRK in many critical areas. Moreover, since the inauguration of this program preceded any change of American troop deployment, the ROK never had the intention of replacing American equipment.

Therefore, the ROK fears that without massive new loans from the United States, possibly involving as much as \$15 billion over the next five years, the gap between the two military forces in the field would constitute an invitation to aggression by Kim Il Sung when the last American ground forces withdraw.

This estimated amount of required loans considerably surpasses the current request by the Carter Administration before Congress for \$250 million in military credits for FY 1978 and an additional \$100 million in sales of arms. Thus, the government of Seoul, together with the American military personnel working with them, remain very skeptical of the prospective success of any Koreanization program. They fear that they will receive inadequate military assistance and that in the future there will be an increasingly less likely American response to a renewal of hostilities. As in Vietnam, withdrawal may become tantamount to abandonment in a future crisis when material support must supplement verbal pledges.

However, the existence of a Mutual Security Treaty and continued operation of air bases in Korea remain distinguishing characteristics between the residual American commitments to Vietnam and Korea. But, given the scope of the general de-escalation of presence in East Asia, the question has invariably arisen as to just how the United States could project strength in order to rapidly reinforce a besieged Korea. Administration officials have referred to possible alternative defense dispositions in the Pacific region.

However, such locations are increasingly difficult to imagine. Negotiations for a probable reduction of forces in the Philippines have already begun, and a complete phaseout of the air bases in Taiwan appears likely. All bases in Thailand have already closed. A change of parties in power in the next election in Japan could lead to the expulsion of all American forces stationed there. Thus, aside from the 7th Fleet, which has fewer and fewer resupply ports, the United States may have to resort to Guam and Wake Island as the nearest reliable support facilities in the years ahead. This prospect does not augur well for convincing either North or South Korea of the American determination to maintain her commitments.

III. United Nations Command Structure:

The Military Armistice Agreement signed at Panmunjom on July 27, 1953, forms the basis of the continuation of peace in Korea. At that time, General Mark Clark acted as Commander of both the United Nations forces and their American component. Since then, the American military commander has continued to function in this dual role; General Vessey presently commands both the 8th Army,

including the Second Infantry Division, and the United Nations forces. Any change in the presence of American ground forces in Korea necessarily entails a reevaluation of the UN Command function.

This command structure includes not only the United States forces and other token United Nations elements, but also the entire South Korean military force, except for the units stationed in Seoul. This arrangement derives from both the Armistice Agreement and the need for a single unified command structure. Since technically the United Nations Commander signed the armistice agreement with the representatives of North Korea and the People's Republic of China, he has the responsibility for maintaining the peace. Thus, the Americans, rather than the South Koreans, have met periodically with North Korean representatives at Panmunjom in order to discuss, and occasionally resolve, various disputes arising along the DMZ. Through this mechanism of mediation, the actual forces of the South and North Koreans have been effectively separated from a direct clash.

In 1971, when the United States removed 20,000 ground forces, the Republic of Korea agreed to permit continued American operational control over their armed forces. But at the same time, the United States pledged that any further significant reduction in forces would lead to a reexamination of the entire command structure. Now with the proposals to remove all American ground forces, the Koreans want to discuss whether and when they will assume operational control over the United Nations Command, assuming it survives.

Quite understandably, without any significant military forces in the field in Korea, the South Koreans do not feel that they should remain under the command of an American general. Thus, coincident to any American force withdrawal the entire United Nations Command structure must be reexamined or, quite possibly, abolished, as the North Koreans have proposed before the General Assembly. (See below p. 12).

This has caused considerable anxiety among both American and South Korean military personnel in Korea. The removal of the mediating force of the United Nations Command would considerably increase tensions along the DMZ. The ax murders of two Americans on August 18, 1976, quite conceivably did not escalate into a reprisal assault by South Koreans due to the actions of the UN Command. A rage for retaliation swept South Korea, but since command functions did not rest with Korean leadership, they could successfully divert responsibilities to the American commander.

In this manner, the UN Command structure has contributed substantially to the maintenance of peace in the area for the past 23 years by preventing any direct confrontations from the sharply antagonistic forces of the two Koreas. Incidents along the DMZ could much more easily escalate into major violence and confrontations if the UN Command structure is removed. Precisely because of this likelihood, the United States has consistently opposed proposals in the United Nations over the years by the Communist bloc countries to abolish the Command and attempt to force the American military presence out of the area.

Finally, the technical question has been raised as to whether the South Koreans have a legal obligation to abide by the terms of the armistice agreement of 1953. As a government they never signed the agreement, but instead only indirectly assent to it as part of the United Nations Command forces. The North Koreans refused to allow them to either be a party to this agreement or participate in any other substantive discussions at Panmunjom over the past 23 years. The North refuses to recognize them as a legitimate government and has consistently opposed dual entry into the United Nations or any other actions that would shed tacit legitimacy on the government in Seoul. The South Koreans quite likely will feel that the maintenance of peace serves their long-range interests, but whether the actual armistice can continue depends upon good will between North and South Korea that has not been demonstrated previously.

IV. North Korean - South Korean Confrontation: Red Cross Talks and U. N. Debates.

Any proposal that eliminates the presence of American ground forces in Korea probably also removes a buffer between the North and South Korean forces. Therefore, one should examine the results of previous contacts between these two forces in order to assess and anticipate future developments.

The only significant direct contact between the ROK and PRK took place in a series of meetings beginning in September 1971 under the general auspices of the Red Cross. The initial meetings led to the issuance of a joint communique (on July 4, 1972) and

the creation of the South - North Coordinating Committee "to implement the agreements and solve various problems including unification." But the subsequent discussions rapidly deteriorated as unbridgeable gulfs developed between the two parties. The disputes between the two Korean sides spilled over into the United Nations General Assembly in November, 1975, and have remained stalemated since that time. The arguments presented in these confrontations deserve additional scrutiny in the context of the withdrawal proposal.

The talks began when the President of the ROK Red Cross Society proposed in August, 1971, that non-political, humanitarian negotiations take place in order to reunite an estimated ten million family members separated since the conclusion of the war in 1953. Several meetings with a much broader range of discussions followed in Seoul, Pyongyang and Panmunjom that resulted in a three-point communique signed on July 4, 1972, which provided that:

- 1.) Unification should be achieved through independent Korean efforts without external interference;
- 2.) Unification should come only through peaceful means;--
- 3.) National unity should be sought which transcended ideas, ideologies, and systems.

Pledges of "exchange in many fields" and the installation of a hotline between the two capitals also emerged from the talks.

This effort at normalization of relations between the two countries ended quickly, however, as the North Koreans introduced broad non-negotiable principles into all subsequent discussions. Rather than acceding to the ROK request to proceed with humanitarian measures, such as the reunion of families, the North Koreans demanded that the Park government abrogate its anti-Communist and National Security laws and proceed directly with re-unification discussions.

The ROK continuously asserted the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of each country as a necessary premise for any discussions.

In subsequent talks, the ROK continued to urge that the two sides proceed with settlement of easier problems such as economic and unilateral exchanges, but Pyongyang issued broad demands for the withdrawal of all foreign troops (i.e., Americans), and the termination of the importation of all war supplies into the Korean Peninsula. In later discussions, the PRK focused their attacks upon the expulsion of the American "imperialist aggressors" from Korean soil, knowing that this would substantially turn the military balance in their favor.

The North Koreans pressed the same set of issues in November, 1976, before the United Nations General Assembly. The PRK supported a resolution which demanded the termination of American jurisdiction over the UN command asking "Why should the United States Army continue to enjoy the signboard of the UN forces?" They demanded the abolition of both the UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK) and the entire UN Command in Korea.

The supporters of the ROK (especially the U.S. and Britain) proposed another resolution which welcomed the North-South dialogue as a possible substitute for the UNCURK, urged dual Korean membership in the UN as a means of promoting security and peaceful unification, and continued the UN Command under the auspices of the Security Council.

A formula worked out by Chou En-lai and Henry Kissinger avoided a showdown vote in the General Assembly. Instead, the UN tacitly endorsed the military status quo in Korea, called for continued dialogue and abolished UNCURK.

Nearly one year later, the Korea issue again came before the General Assembly. The ROK supporters urged full implementation of the proposal accepted a year earlier and mentioned that foreign troops and the UN Command should only be withdrawn when "new arrangements for maintaining the Armistice Agreement" were worked out. In contrast, Pyongyang's supporters demanded not only that the UN Command be abolished and foreign troops be withdrawn, but also that "real parties" to subsequent negotiations specifically exclude the ROK. The United Nations General Assembly adopted these conflicting draft resolutions and has subsequently ignored them.

The withdrawal of American forces from Korea will undoubtedly encourage the PRK to bring the issue again before the UN. Since the American sponsored resolution in 1975 prevailed by only 8 votes, the prospective abrogation of field support for the UN Command will probably cause the General Assembly to withdraw their jurisdiction from Korea. By having already announced the withdrawal of forces from Korea, the United States has reversed the previous position of negotiating an alternative arrangement for maintaining the armistice before ending support for the UN Command.

Thus, the PRK will probably finally prevail in the UN and thereby place the ROK under a serious defensive diplomatic position in the world. Until this move, the North Koreans had suffered a series of serious reversals in their foreign policy objective with disappointing support at the non-aligned conference in Sri Lanke in August, 1976, their inability to fulfill financial obligations to creditors and the expulsion of their diplomats for several European countries for engaging in illegal transactions.

A statement by the ROK Foreign Minister, Kim Tyong-shik in July 1973, attributed possible Korean detente to the presence of American forces:

The continued U.S. military presence in Korea has been a vital element which has made the South-North dialogue and detente possible. Any severe diminution of the U.S. military presence in Korea would pull the rug from under Korea's policy of detente and dialogue with the north.

Thus, the withdrawal of American forces without any correlative arrangement to maintain the status quo in Korea will precipitate an era of extreme uncertainty. While the ROK may desire some accommodations reached during the withdrawal period, the PRK now has no incentive to deal at present with the ROK, but instead only needs to wait for one of their major demands to be met (American withdrawal) and work to isolate the ROK in the world diplomatic community.

V. Korean View of Withdrawal Proposal:

The Republic of Korea has consistently supported the continued presence of American forces in Korea.

They have felt that through their mutual security arrangement, including ground forces, the peace has been maintained in their region for the past two decades just as American NATO forces in Europe have preserved the status quo in that area. Believing that they have provided valuable front-line support for both the United States and Japan in Northeast Asia, the Koreans feel that a genuinely reciprocal beneficial relationship has existed. Sending over 300,000 men to Vietnam and suffering over 1,000 fatalities, demonstrated clearly, they felt, their interest in supporting the United States in East Asia. They also point out that their own military forces constitute the largest in the free world outside the United States and despite Japan's economic strength, Korea remains the foremost power in the non-communist Orient.

Given this perception of their American relationship, they have never satisfactorily understood the motivation behind the proposed troop withdrawals from their country. Given the military buildup in North Korea and the growing rift between Russia and China, they conclude that American interest would be better served by a larger, rather than a smaller presence in the region. As one prominent Korean stated, "If we had our way, the United States would bring in an additional two divisions." Instead, they invariably feel that the withdrawal emerges from the residue of the Vietnam conflict as politicians in Washington scrambled to avoid

the last war. Witnessing the Vietnam scenario, Koreans wonder ominously whether the departure of American ground troops from Korea will only precede the kind of diminished military support that plagued America's former allies in Vietnam.

The pledge of continued American presence through the maintenance of air bases and possible naval support has not assuaged their doubts. As someone commented, "Warplanes are like geese, they can honk and fly away." The infantry forces have always represented the touchstone of American resolve in Korea and consequently no verbal assurances can blunt the simple fact that Americans will no longer be placing their own lives in the likely path of a North Korean advance down the Uijongbu Corridor.

Naturally, Korean officials have not voiced their concern in public for fear of causing some panic among both their own people and foreign investors who provide the critical financial backbone to the growing Korean economy. President Park stated quite tersely, "I am confident that our ground troops can smash the invasion of the North Korean Communists if only we are provided with adequate air, naval, and logistic support."

Previously, the Koreans took the position that preceding any American or United Nations withdrawal, a non-aggression pact with the North Koreans should be concluded. Through this agreement, they hoped to change basic attitudes in Pyongyang from conquest of the south to recognition. At the same time, they wanted mutually agreed upon third-party oversight teams to mediate disputes and inspect any incidents along the border, i.e., replace the United Nations Command. But the major leverage for obtaining this new framework vanishes with the American ground forces. Rather than extracting any possible concessions or assurances, they feel the Americans have unilaterally squandered their position in Korea and can only encourage continued intransigence by Kim Il Sung.

Thus, the Koreans, and to some extent, the remaining Americans in Korea, feel that they now must try to make the best of an unfortunate, ill-considered decision. But until the troops actually begin departing, they still hope, along with American military leaders, as exemplified by General Singlaub, that the entire decision can be reconsidered. Barring such a reconsideration, they fear that they will either receive inadequate military support to offset the loss of American forces or, more importantly, that no amount of equipment will deter another invasion attempt by Kim Il Sung after American ground forces have departed.

Their skepticism about American resolve resides in their intimate involvement in the unravelling of support in Indochina compounded with the apparent fixation in Congress with questions of human rights and charges of bribery. On the issue of human rights, they feel many Americans fail to perceive that no peace treaty ever ended the war; and, thus, they continue to live in a precarious military-political environment. Moreover, the entire human rights issue narrowly focuses on a very limited range of rights respected only in the advanced Western democratic systems. It ignores the most basic rights of people to be left alone by the government. In contrast to the PRK, freedom of religion, movement, employment, and the whole range of social actions involving family and community relationship proceed unhindered in the ROK.*

Finally, the withdrawal proposal has engendered an unprecedented unity among all the people in South Korea. Even the most vigorous dissenters from the government of President Park have united in opposition to the proposed withdrawal policy. On May 22, 1977, 500 Christians, many of them government critics, held a prayer meeting in Seoul urging a change in policy by Washington. The leader of the group, Reverend Kim Kwan Suk, Secretary General of the Korean National Council of Churches, said, "We tried to express our misgivings and uneasiness about the troop withdrawal. If it's possible, we would like to reverse the decision." The group fears the threat to their own security and their country, as well as the prospective imposition of stern new government measures if a crisis develops.

*

The author has examined this issue extensively in an essay on "Human Rights and Democracy in North and South Korea", Korea in the World Today (Council on American Affairs, 1976.)

VI. Withdrawal Policy: Implementation and Implications:

Thus far the withdrawal program presumably will commence with the removal of one brigade of the First Infantry Division (about 6,000 men) in the first year. After this, additional ground forces will be withdrawn on an incremental basis over the following four years. No conditions have been established that would either accelerate, slow down, or indefinitely postpone the program. In short, a commitment has been made to withdraw forces, but all factors that could or should interrelate to that basic decision have been left vague -- either deliberately or through oversight. A brief summary follows which lists various options and considerations that should be weighed and evaluated in the implementation of any withdrawal of American forces.

1. The United States must make clear a determination to remain committed to the defense of the Republic of Korea. This is not only crucial to the continued viability of the Korean government, but even more so is necessary to discourage a renewal of warfare launched by Kim Il Sung. Thus far, no formula of substantive alternative American support for the ROK has emerged and consequently, various scenarios for the renewal of warfare have invariably arisen.
2. A massive program of military assistance, even if in the forms of long-term low interest loans, coupled with an augmentation of American air support, may be able to adequately compensate for the material and psychological loss of American forces from Korea. Only if such proposals are inextricably tied to a timetable of withdrawal does it appear that such a program would receive the necessary support of the American Congress and be fulfilled coincident with actual withdrawals. Moreover, the Congressional Budget Office has already estimated that the cost of posting the Second Division in the United States will actually run \$150 million more over a five-year period than keeping them in Korea. Thus, the removal of forces becomes an expensive proposition beyond additional material for the ROK.
3. Without compensating support from the United States outlined above, the ROK would be forced to attempt to maximize their own security by whatever devices possible. The country would be compelled to move

much closer to a wartime basis of operation with much tighter restrictions upon the society to prevent any internal instability or demoralization. The social sectors of the economy would be compelled to make additional sacrifices to the growth of defense industries. Additional support from the other countries, particularly Japan, would be solicited by the ROK. Although Japan could not provide military assistance, she could extend economic assistance that would allow the ROK to devote additional resources to the military sector.

4. The withdrawal proposal itself could be tied to a general formula for the creation of an alternative framework for peace in Northeast Asia. Initially President Carter apparently considered this option, but later rejected it. This would require the assent of the Soviet Union, China, Japan, and both North and South Korea. Assuming that the United Nations Command would likely be abolished, some other modality of settling disputes would have to be created or the likelihood of war would substantially increase regardless of the nature of the military balance. But given the initial announcement of withdrawal without any reciprocal actions by other countries and the past positions taken by North Korea, this problem now appears the most difficult to resolve satisfactorily.
5. At present the United States has no available alternative defense posture in East Asia that can compensate for the withdrawal of forces from Korea. Thus, the actual withdrawal of forces will invariably be perceived as another step away from America's interest and commitment in the region. In Japan, 235 members of the two major political parties recently co-sponsored a declaration that a withdrawal would constitute "an invitation to instability in the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia as a whole." Moreover, there will be repercussions felt by the 230 million people in non-Communist Southeast Asia as well.

With the de-emphasis of military forces in Korea, the remaining American bases in the Philippines, Japan, and Taiwan would increase in importance. The action, therefore, strengthens

the hand of President Marcos in his negotiations with the United States for bases at Clark and Subic Bay. Similarly, any further reduction of the air bases in Taiwan would leave the American position in Northeast Asia precariously relying upon the vicissitudes of Japanese elections.

6. The perception of the American withdrawal from Asia at the time of growing Soviet power and interest in the area may force all the countries there to reassess their roles in East-West relations. The traditional allies of the United States, especially Japan and Taiwan, may feel compelled to make some accommodations with the Soviet Union rather than rely upon vanishing American strength for their future security. Also, the People's Republic of China may reevaluate their own developing relations with the United States as they increasingly feel the pressures of impending Soviet encirclement.

VII. Conclusion:

The enormous number and range of problems associated with any American withdrawal of ground forces have led most experts on Korea to call for a basic reexamination of the proposal itself.

Rather than saving any money as initially believed, the redeployment of forces stationed in Korea will engender enormous expenses either directly or indirectly. Even if a maximum effort is made to compensate the South Koreans for the loss of American forces in the area, it appears that no adequate substitute exists that will not pose grave risks of another war in Korea.

More broadly, adverse repercussions will probably be felt throughout the entire East Asian area as the move is perceived as a part of a more general withdrawal from the area beginning with the collapse of Indochina in 1975.

At the time of victory of the North Vietnamese army in 1975, Kim Il Sung apparently sought support for intensifying his own liberation war in Korea in visits to Peking and other communist capitols. But American steadfastness and the desire for stability by other powers in the area prevailed and peace and stability remained in the region. However, the new withdrawal proposal has once again brought uncertainty to the area and is creating a crisis where none has existed for nearly a quarter century.

By Jeffrey B. Gayner
Policy Analyst