

Focus on the Future, Not the North

As the Republic of Korea (ROK) gears up for elections in December 2002, the South Korean presidential candidates are invariably arguing over how to deal with the recent revelations that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has uranium enrichment facilities, the merits of engagement in the face of these revelations, and the future of the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework. But as the presidential hopefuls focus on these proximate issues, they are barely discussing the most fundamental and important policy debates the next Korean administration will contemplate before its departure in 2008. A confluence of security and political trends, including the emergence of Korean concerns about the U.S. military presence and the need to prepare for the contingency of Korean unification, argues that changes in the status of U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK) and the direction of the U.S.-ROK alliance are inevitable, if not imminent.¹ Despite all the transient deafening noise over the North's newly declared nuclear ambitions, those in Seoul and Washington who seek a foundation for a long-term U.S.-ROK alliance continue to hone in on three durable tenets:

- an understanding that the alliance's foundation does not depend solely on the nuclear or conventional military threat posed by the DPRK;
- an assessment that the current form of U.S. military presence is indefinitely untenable; and
- a persistence in privileging the long-term alliance rationalities over the temptation to allow the latest DPRK threat to postpone such a discussion.

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Even before the June 2000 inter-Korean summit, respected military analysts argued that a reassessment of both the benchmark 100,000-troop presence established by the 1995 Nye report and a concurrent reevaluation of U.S. force structure on the Korean peninsula were long overdue.² Divergent U.S. and ROK policy approaches since that time and mounting civil-military tensions over the USFK have likely intensified these calls. Evidence of these concerns is contained in a September 2000 National Intelligence Council study that warned that a stagnant U.S. attitude about its force presence is certain to risk nationalistic backlash in Korea and Japan.³ Another study put it more bluntly: "It is imperative to reduce the footprint of U.S. bases in the major cities. Relatively large concentrations of U.S. forces in the middle of metropolises are crises just waiting to happen."⁴ Thus, as Michael O'Hanlon observes, "it behooves policymakers to begin focusing on this subject without further delay, at least in a preliminary fashion."⁵

In spite of this urgency, surprisingly little discussion of the problem has taken place. None of the presidential candidates in Korea have spoken specifically about the issue. Newspaper editorials, many protests by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and activists, and general complaints about the USFK no doubt provide the undertow for a rising tide of anti-Americanism. Missing beneath all this noise, however, is a deeper substantive discussion between the two sides (and Japan) about the future of the U.S. military presence in Asia and on the peninsula.

Details, not vision, have driven the dialogue on the USFK in Washington and Seoul. Much of the long-term debate between the two governments on the USFK's future has been a product of process-oriented changes on the ground, such as housing, rather than a mutually agreed strategic outlook for the alliance's future. The three governments should invert this prioritization and begin to construct a viable vision for the future of the U.S. presence in Northeast Asia generally and in Korea specifically.

Should the USFK Stay or Go Now?

The debate over USFK changes is often cast in terms of the progress of tension reduction on the peninsula. Some doves argue that the main rationale to restructure or withdraw the USFK should be to achieve peace on the peninsula.⁶ Although there is an intuitive appeal to this view on the South Korean side, especially if one posits that the ROK military is capable of standing on its own, it is less appealing from the U.S. perspective. At a minimum, such a view assumes that North Korea has implicit veto power over the disposition of U.S. forces in Korea.

At the same time, though, the hawkish argument that contemplating any USFK change must await a stable peace on the peninsula, defined as the elimination of the northern threat, is too inflexible. The more interesting and challenging question is whether one can contemplate incremental change in the USFK presence given continued conventional and nuclear threats from the North. Such a plan of action would maintain traditional deterrence against the North and sustain the U.S. allied defense commitment to Seoul, but it would also allow a new vision for the alliance to be introduced that looks beyond the DPRK. USFK changes should be neither the sacrificial lamb nor the bargaining chip for peace on the peninsula but should be driven by a larger U.S.-ROK joint vision.

Regardless of how one perceives the DPRK threat, it is not difficult to argue that certain aspects of the USFK, as currently constituted, are obsolete. Established in 1957, the USFK was built to deter and if necessary defend against a second North Korean ground invasion. Although U.S. force structure is prepared for this one contingency, ROK forces continue to improve their capability of defending against a replay of June 1950, particularly as DPRK forces simultaneously continue to deteriorate. Given the ROK's increased confidence in its own capabilities, policymakers reportedly made a conscious decision in the 1990s to build national military capabilities beyond the peninsula into a regional force.⁷

Nevertheless, the competency of the ROK military to win an actual war does not reduce the important deterrent role played by the USFK. The U.S. pledge to defend South Korea is of far greater significance than any actual military capability. Given ROK capabilities and the favorable trends regarding the balance of forces on the peninsula, the United States can at any time begin thinking about ways to provide such a credible security commitment with a different force structure.

Beyond these military trends, civil-military tensions over the U.S. footprint in Korea have grown measurably. This friction is not due to a growth of radicalism in Korea but stems from democratization and generational shifts among the middle class that have served to elevate labor, environment, and other quality-of-life issues on the political agenda. NGOs and civic action groups have focused the South Korean public's attention on the negative effects of USFK activities to such an extent that a majority of South Koreans now favor a reduction in U.S. forces.⁸ The sunshine policy of engagement and reconciliation with North Korea, established by ROK president Kim Dae-jung when he

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DPRK threat exists?**

entered office in 1998, has had the unintended consequence of worsening perceptions of the USFK in the body politic in South Korea.

On one hand, the initial exaggerated claims by proponents that the sunshine policy has removed the threat of war on the peninsula has reduced South Korean public support for a sustained U.S. presence. On the other hand, moments in which Kim's policy fell short of expectations have contrib-

uted to a current South Korean search for scapegoats; the USFK is a prime target. Host nations accept the U.S. forward presence around the world because of the military missions and symbols of U.S. commitment that presence is perceived to offer. Occasionally, however, a point is reached at which these benefits pale in comparison to the political damage that the presence causes the alliance relationship overall. Although the U.S. forward presence in Korea has not reached this point yet, it

is on the horizon. As one military official who had served in Korea and Japan noted, "Korea could go the way of Okinawa if we are not careful."⁹

Beyond these factors specific to the peninsula, larger trends in U.S. security thinking presage an imminent reevaluation of the USFK. The 100,000-person benchmark for the U.S. presence in Asia reported in the 2001 quadrennial defense review is increasingly seen by government and nongovernmental experts as obsolete, although the U.S. government still formally adheres to it.¹⁰ Moreover, the revolution in military affairs anticipates long-range, precision-strike fighting capabilities that could fundamentally change the face of the U.S. forward presence around the world.

TAIL WAGGING THE DOG

Despite these trends, neither the ROK Ministry of National Defense nor the Pentagon has initiated a serious dialogue. Instead, a buck-passing response to these imperatives has emerged. Seoul responds to complaints from domestic constituencies about the U.S. footprint by demanding that Washington lay out a plan of action. At the same time, the United States wants its ally to volunteer a vision of its own. Each side draws up lists of discussion questions both at security and military consultative meetings, but neither side really wants to take a crack at answering them. Why?

The problem is that the tail is wagging the dog. First, rather than a larger, joint strategic vision of the U.S.-ROK alliance driving changes to the U.S. force presence on the ground, bureaucratic issues related to USFK maintenance are driving the larger vision. For example, measures such as the land

The sunshine policy has unwittingly stifled discussion about the future.

readjustment program or Yongsan relocation, designed to reduce the military footprint, get bogged down in planning and implementation because a consensual big picture about what the future force structure should look like does not exist. As a result, the larger vision of the USFK becomes incrementally developed, ad hoc, and subject to transient bureaucratic needs.

Second, the absence of a long-term vision on the Korean side, as one specialist noted, is due in part to a void of substantive and serious thinking on the issue,¹¹ partially explained by political imperatives created by the sunshine policy. Although an important and unprecedented strategy of engagement undertaken by Kim Dae-jung, the policy has had the unintended consequence of stifling discussion about the future. Those opposed to the policy feel obligated to emphasize the threat posed by the DPRK and therefore do not believe the time is right to contemplate the long term. Those who support the sunshine policy and believe it has reduced tension on the peninsula also do not want to talk about a post-DPRK alliance for fear of upsetting the North and undercutting the sunshine policy.

REGIONAL STABILITY—WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

Any discussion about the USFK's future must start with a broader discussion of U.S. grand strategy in Asia. The U.S.-ROK alliance does not enjoy a resiliency equivalent to U.S. alliances in Europe. As one study noted, NATO could muddle through an entire decade in search of a mission, but the U.S.-ROK alliance cannot afford to allow events to overtake a discussion of the future.¹²

Perhaps the most often-cited rationale for the future of U.S. alliances in Northeast Asia is "regional stability." This justification, however, raises more questions than it answers. Many have defined this phrase with regard to Korea implicitly to mean enabling the alliance to operate in regional contingencies beyond the peninsula. If this definition implies a combat or logistics role for the USFK in a Taiwan Strait contingency, however, then current U.S. basing on the peninsula is still too distant, at 800-plus nautical miles away.¹³ The alternative would be to station long-range aircraft, heavy bombers, and hardened fuel assets in Korea (rather than their current location in Guam), all of which would probably be politically unacceptable for the Koreans. Furthermore, if regional stability implies using the USFK for contingencies in Southeast Asia, then this too is unnecessary. A crisis in Indonesia, for example, to which U.S. forces might respond, would potentially require the use of U.S. air bases as far north as Kadena and Iwo Jima or the Philippines, not Korea.

More useful than using regional stability as a code word for contingencies that imply a quasi-containment of China, Susan Bryant and Gen. (Ret.) John Tilelli, former commander in chief of the UN Command in Korea, define regional missions for the U.S.-ROK alliance more broadly to

include nontraditional security activities such as humanitarian intervention, peacekeeping and peacemaking, and counterterrorism operations.¹⁴ In one of the more useful characterizations of the term, some define regional missions in military terms as antipower projection. In other words, the primary operational concept for U.S. forward deployment is to prevent power projection by others beyond the East Asian littoral. The rationale behind this thought is that the projection of power by any others incites

What is the goal of the U.S.-ROK alliance beyond peninsular security?

indigenous security dilemmas, historical animosities, and arms competitions destabilizing to the region.¹⁵

Though the latter two definitions of regional stability offer useful guidelines, they lack a specific vision about what strategic landscape best suits the interests of the United States and its Asian allies in the future. What is the goal of the U.S.-ROK alliance beyond peninsular security? If regional

stability includes peacekeeping and antipower projection, then how would the U.S.-Korean alliance contribute to these larger missions? Contrary to twentieth-century U.S. attitudes toward Korea, does a rationale for the alliance exist that can be more than ad hoc, reactive, and derivative of larger balance-of-power concerns in Asia?

Answering such questions must begin with a frank assessment of the geostrategic landscape in Northeast Asia after Korean unification—the likely, if not inevitable, fate of the peninsula. This landscape is unfavorable to U.S. interests. For reasons of geography, history, culture, power, economics, and demography, trends in Asia may emerge such that the domestic politics of Korean unification push the U.S. military off the peninsula. The new Korean entity could seek a continental accommodation with China against Japan as resurgent Korean nationalism and new military capabilities combine to incite security dilemmas with its historical enemy. At the same time, a demographically aged Japan could become isolated from the rest of Asia and be perceived as the last remaining U.S. outpost in the region.

Korean unification certainly might generate a range of alternate scenarios, but given current and past geostrategic trends, this estimate of how events might transpire is most probable. What is striking about this scenario is how heavily it weighs against U.S. interests. If the United States has the will to remain an Asia-Pacific power after Korean unification, then it has no interest in being pushed out. Moreover, this situation is not in the region's interests. An older, weaker, and isolated Japan that does not want to be considered the last U.S. military colony in Asia might finally choose greater self-

reliance for its security. This decision would provoke balancing reactions in China and Korea that would degrade the region's security as tensions, armaments, and the almost-certain prospect of nuclear proliferation rose.

THE WAY FORWARD: PREVENTIVE DEFENSE

U.S. strategic planners should not only seek to avoid future war in Northeast Asia but also should contemplate avoiding this sort of future peace.¹⁶ Geostrategic currents in Asia following unification therefore create a preventive-defense rationale for the alliances in Asia. In other words, the United States and its allies should take prudent and premeditated actions to prevent the emergence of potentially dangerous situations, not simply deal with a threat once it has become imminent.¹⁷ The imperative for the United States is to forestall these unfavorable geostrategic currents in Asia that would follow unification. At its core, this long-term necessity compels Washington to promote stronger relations between its two main Asian allies and to consolidate the trilateral U.S.-Japanese-Korean relationship. Such a U.S. strategy has three elements.

First, in the most immediate and pragmatic terms, the DPRK contingency continues to provide a vehicle for building Japanese-Korean security cooperation. Throughout the 1990s, the threat of North Korean implosion or aggression drove the unprecedented security cooperation involving defense minister-level bilateral meetings, search-and-rescue exercises, port calls, noncombatant evacuation operations, and academic military exchanges despite the deep historical mistrust between Seoul and Tokyo. Although previous South Korean presidents vowed during the Cold War never to engage in these security cooperation activities with past colonizer Japan despite the imminent North Korean threat, more recently they have built bilateral confidence and created an entirely new dimension to Seoul-Tokyo relations beyond the political and economic relationship.

A second critical ingredient in the medium-term strategy for consolidation is to infuse the U.S.-Japanese and U.S.-Korean alliances with meaning and identity beyond the Cold War. History shows that the most resilient alliances share common ideals, a basis that runs deeper than the adversarial threats that might have initially brought the alliance into existence. Currently, this process has elevated maintaining regional stability to become the alliance's future purpose, but there is room to go further. Beyond regional stability, a host of extraregional issues, such as liberal democracy, open economic markets, nonproliferation, universal human rights, anti-terrorism, and peacekeeping, among others, define the relationship. Ideally, the U.S.-ROK and U.S.-Japanese alliances will stand *for* something rather than simply against a threat. This common ideational grounding makes the relationships

more sustainable, becoming the glue that prevents these alignments from being washed away by regional geostrategic currents.

Third, this U.S. strategy for Korea should hedge, or have a straddle component. Theoretically speaking, the United States should commit to deterring a Korean adversary but should not grant the kind of unconditional commitment that might allow the ROK to feel comfortable free-riding its way through the alliance and doing little on its own to ensure Korean national security. In practical terms, the United States should seek to consolidate the trilateral U.S.-Japanese-ROK axis to reaffirm U.S. continued alliance relationships in the region but should do so without the type of unconditional and asymmetric security guarantee it provided to its allies during the years of Cold War patronage.

This is a lesson of history. The United States has always been the strongest advocate of better Japanese-Korean relations, but ironically, Seoul and Tokyo have responded more favorably to burden-sharing entreaties when Washington has been perceived to be somewhat less interested in underwriting the region's security.¹⁸ The U.S. position in Asia should therefore be recessed enough in this new arrangement to impart responsibilities on the allies to consolidate their own bilateral relationship, but not so recessed that Japan and South Korea choose self-help solutions outside the alliance framework. Specifically, two elements of this strategy would be to reduce the U.S. ground presence greatly but still maintain a minimal forward presence as a tangible symbol of commitment and to reinforce the U.S. political commitment by maintaining the nuclear umbrella.

Any discussion about the USFK's future should begin with antipower projection and counterterrorism as two rationales for regionalizing the U.S.-ROK alliance. To supplement them, the U.S.-ROK (and U.S.-Japanese) alliance(s) should serve a nonproliferation function, dampen security dilemmas, and prevent the rise of regional hegemons, currently and postunification, particularly but not exclusively to mitigate against the contingency where Japan is isolated, the United States is expelled, and tensions are heightened between a unified Korea and her neighbors.

The Next USFK

To perform these new missions and address its traditional role, the United States should restructure its forces on the peninsula to be:

- *Credible.* In spite of any transformations in the USFK, the resulting force must still represent and preserve the traditional role as a reliable manifestation of the U.S. commitment to the defense and security of Korea.

- *Flexible.* While being large enough to be militarily significant, the U.S. presence should be flexible enough to handle a broad range of tasks ranging from antiterrorism operations to peacekeeping to force-projection dominance in the region.
- *Deployable.* Combined with other U.S. capabilities in the region (especially in Japan), the presence in Korea must be capable of reacting swiftly to regional developments and offer an integrated joint force with the full range of mobility, strike, maneuverability, and sustainability.
- *Unobtrusive.* While being politically equivalent to the old force structure as a symbol of the alliance, the new presence should possess a footprint that the Korean people do not perceive as an obstacle to peace.

With these objectives in mind, the United States should transform USFK ground, air, and naval assets from a heavy, ground-based force to a more mobile, rapid-reaction force. The types of changes needed in Korea will certainly be contingent on the status of other U.S. forces and bases as well as on access arrangements elsewhere in the region, but such a restructured USFK could resemble the force described below.

The United States should restructure the existing ground presence along the lines of Gen. Eric Shinseki's objective force concept, as a mobile, medium-sized force, easily deployable but more lethal and sustainable than existing light infantry.¹⁹ This army force of about one medium-sized deployable brigade (5,000) could react quickly to regional developments, including but not limited to unification of the peninsula, and maintain a strong U.S. presence in the region. These forces might be stationed in the southern portion of the peninsula around the demilitarized zone and outside of Seoul.

Although air assets on the peninsula would vary somewhat, they would likely remain relatively constant compared to the other services. For domestic political reasons in Korea, retaining two main operating air bases at Osan and further south at Kunsan will be difficult. The presence at Osan could be reduced and redeployed in Kunsan or even further south, placing aerial assets as much as 500 miles closer to southern contingencies. Although reductions are likely, the reconfigured force in Korea must be capable of assisting Guam in supporting some assets that might be transferred from U.S. air bases in Japan to aid the reduction of the U.S. footprint there.

Ultimately, between reconfigured U.S. air bases in Korea and the Kadena air base in Japan, the United States would ideally retain air-to-air, air-to-ground,

The domestic politics of Korean unification may push the U.S. military off the peninsula.

surveillance, refueling, and airlift capabilities for a truly regional role. The current force structure in Korea will support contingencies extending only about as far as the Senkakus, but the addition of longer-range craft, heavy bombers, refueling, and hardened fuel assets might enable range rings to be extended as far as the Taiwan Strait, which conceivably might be problematic for Koreans as previously mentioned. The United States could base most assets in Guam and move them if China misbehaves in the strait. Reconfigured aerial assets on the peninsula, however, would probably not be able to assist with contingencies in the South China Sea, even with aerial refueling.

Of all the services, the navy could host the largest augmentation in the USFK presence on the peninsula, depending upon how widely the force presence would be oriented and how the U.S. presence in Japan and Australia might be concurrently changed. For example, some have advocated reducing the U.S. Marine presence in Okinawa by moving them to Australia, while augmenting the presence in Northeast Asia by homeporting a second aircraft carrier in the region, possibly in Korea, with the crew based in the United States to reduce the infrastructure and base footprint. Unlike restructuring aerial assets, this plan would effectively mean a USFK presence able to assist in contingencies as far south as the South China Sea. Such missions might not be necessary if U.S. forces were positioned in, or gained access to, bases in Southeast Asia. Under any circumstances, a revised force presence in Northeast Asia should include a carrier homeport, U.S. Army and Marine training capability, and an operational air force hub, which would constitute the foundation for any anticipated subregional buildup.²⁰

COMMAND STRUCTURE ISSUES

Integrating assets in Japan and Korea as part of a broader USFK transformation would most likely necessitate revising the regional combatant commands. Some have advocated a joint headquarters for Northeast Asia with a three-star commander reporting to Pacific Command rather than the two existing, separate Korea and Japan commands.²¹ Others have advocated a separate Northeast Asia command covering China, Japan, Taiwan, and Korea. This commander would have the equivalent status of the other four existing regional commanders. As these proponents argue, “Northeast Asia hosts five of the six largest militaries in the world and stands out as a subregion too critical to the United States to be subsumed under an umbrella-like regional command including the entire Asian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific.”²²

To remain consistent with the vision of a more equal alliance, the full transfer of operational command authority over Korean forces should be transferred to the ROK. As far back as the establishment of the USFK dur-

ing the Eisenhower administration, the traditional rationale for the United States holding operational command authority was not just for enhanced defensive-fighting efficiency but also to keep a leash on unilateral offensive acts by the South Koreans. Little known even to most experts and historians of the alliance, declassified documents show a standing U.S. policy that any unilateral ROK military actions would prompt Washington to take the severest of actions against the ROK, including the immediate cessation of economic and military aid, disassociation of the United Nations Command from support of ROK actions, and even use of U.S. forces to impose martial law.²³ President Dwight Eisenhower even confidentially considered the forcible removal of South Korean leadership and covert support of new leaders.²⁴

The U.S. concern about a South Korean preemptive attack has abated considerably over the years, particularly after democratization in 1987, to the point in 1994 when the United States transferred peacetime authority to the ROK. Although military concerns may remain that still dictate a combined command, a future, regionally oriented alliance would do well to distance itself from a command structure that epitomized the asymmetrical nature of the alliance during the Cold War. Instead, a joint-planning headquarters with two independent militaries led by the ROK joint chiefs of staff and the USFK, operating under a set of mutually agreed defense guidelines, would be the blueprint. Admittedly, from a U.S. military perspective this development would mean a less integrated and potentially more difficult alliance to manage with the Koreans than in the past. It could mean tedious negotiations and contractual wrangling over definitions of regional contingencies, much along the lines of the U.S.-Japanese alliance. To do otherwise, however, would violate the unobtrusive precondition for an acceptable USFK outlined above.

The ideal vision is to stand for something rather than simply against a threat.

PLACES, NOT BASES?

A potential alternative to basing the USFK in Korea permanently would be for Seoul and Washington to negotiate an access arrangement while redeploying these facilities and troops elsewhere. The United States has negotiated such agreements in Southeast Asia, and the question may become a salient one from the Korean perspective. Access arrangements, however, would not be an optimal alternative. Although they might meet the unobtrusive prerequisite for the alliance's future, they would not meet other key conditions, primarily, providing a credible U.S. security commitment to Korea.

First, access arrangements are not consistent with the broader vision of the U.S.-Korean alliance going beyond a transitory bilateral defense arrangement to becoming a permanent relationship based on similar political values and economic ideologies. The United States will seek a variety of access arrangements and military understandings networked throughout the region, but at the center of these varied relationships, a set of core alliances involving Korea, Japan, and Australia should remain. These core partnerships are based on common views about constitutional democracy, market economies, civil liberties, nonproliferation, and counterterrorism that are not necessarily shared throughout the entire region. They are distinguished by their relatively higher level of military ties with the United States, which include hosting some base and troop presence. The model for the future therefore is not “hub and spokes,” in which the United States has discrete relationships with other Asian powers and little interaction takes place between them, but a “core and network” model in which the United States’ primary stake in the region lies with these core countries.²⁵

Second, the core countries have strong reasons themselves to accept bases rather than merely access arrangements with the United States. Alliances offer allies ways to dampen U.S. tendencies toward unilateralism.²⁶ In the Korean case, an alliance with two independent militaries would enable Seoul to say “no” to the United States in ways that they could not before. In military terms, this situation might not be ideal, particularly given the history of this alliance, but politically this potential could be the ultimate symbol of a new, more equal, and long-term alliance relationship. Some European allies did not allow the United States to fly over their air space during attacks on Libya in 1986. U.S. allies also did not allow U.S. planes to refuel on their territories while carrying supplies to Israel during the 1973 Mideast war.²⁷ Under certain circumstances, the ROK might refuse to allow the United States liberties with the bases. Bases, rather than places, actually give Korea more leverage. With a relationship based merely on access arrangements, saying “no” could mean the end of that relationship, as happened with New Zealand. A relationship undergirded by a basing and forward presence, however, is much more difficult to abrogate.

CREATING ACCEPTABILITY

The first key to making the USFK more acceptable in Korea and throughout the region centers on China. In order to enhance regional stability and mollify geostrategic tensions between China and the United States over Korea, efforts at remaking the U.S.-ROK alliance, the USFK, and trilateral cooperation should be as low profile and transparent to Beijing as possible. Promoting Seoul-Tokyo bilateral security cooperation, for example, should not focus on

military assets but on transport platforms for preplanned disaster relief or on joint use of transport craft for out-of-area peacekeeping operations. Transforming the language of Cold War alliances into, for example, permanent unions among U.S.-Asian market democracies would address Beijing's incessant complaints about the anachronistic nature of U.S. alliances in Asia.

Beyond the broader alliance missions, the ground troop presence on the peninsula, which the Chinese have always found disconcerting, would appear less provocative to Beijing after restructuring. China will undoubtedly still oppose any configuration that maintains a U.S. presence in Korea, but a USFK that relies less on pre-positioned heavy equipment and two-division-sized ground force deployments and more on air and naval presence (excluding long-range bombers) to improve regional stability would generate less opposition in Beijing than the alternative.

The second key to improving USFK sustainability is to engage in some public diplomacy to adequately address the perceived negative aspects of the Cold War U.S. force presence. My interviews with USFK personnel have revealed that one of the biggest sources of civil-military tensions remains the asymmetric reporting that highlights negative USFK activities. The Korean media underreports any positive or conciliatory actions taken by the United States to appease complaints about the military footprint. It often omits or ignores information that might contribute to a more balanced public debate on civil-military relations between the USFK and the host nation. An agreement, for example, to move USFK bases to Pyongtaek in recent years failed largely because the South Korean government's commitment to underwrite costs did not materialize. Korean press reporting, however, focused largely on U.S. unwillingness to pay for the move, underemphasizing the South Korean pledge. On economic issues related to the military presence, such as host-nation support or land use, the United States is generally portrayed as a selfish patron, trying to push costs onto Seoul. Missing from the picture is the overall long-term savings that the ROK accrued from the alliance. Indeed, preliminary data shows that the ROK's defense spending as a share of gross domestic product is lower over time than that of other newly industrialized countries and exponentially lower than countries with less of a U.S. forward presence, such as Israel or Saudi Arabia.²⁸

Although the press coverage of crimes committed by U.S. servicemen in Korea is massive, what goes missing is the other side of the story. Some crimes by U.S. servicemen are indeed brutal and deserve public attention, but overall

Alliances offer allies ways to dampen U.S. tendencies to unilateralism.

a much higher percentage of servicemen in the Korean military than in the USFK commit crimes. In a related vein, the aftermath of the June 2000 inter-Korean summit coincided with several random attacks by inebriated Koreans against U.S. servicemen, one of which was an unprovoked stabbing of a USFK physician shopping alone in Itaewon. Internal USFK precautionary warnings ensued about walking in pairs and avoiding off-base activities in the evening. This episode received no coverage in the South Korean press.

Public diplomacy can help address the perceived negative aspects of U.S. force presence.

The press and NGO community were, however, galvanized by revelations in the summer of 2000 regarding the illegal disposal of formaldehyde through the wastewater sewage system on the Yongsan compound into the Han River (the main river flowing through central Seoul). Press reports fixated on discrepancies between USFK reports of the amounts disposed and Green Korea United's (Noksaek Yonhap) reports. Although its absence does not excuse the USFK's inappropriate and un-

warranted action, completely missing from this controversy was any discussion of environmental damage committed by the South Korean military over the years, which far exceeds USFK actions. The point here is not to deflect blame from the USFK, but to illustrate some very strong biases in public images of the USFK that detract from a rational, balanced public discussion.

The reason for these disparities stems from both press reporting in Korea and the way the two governments have passed the buck between them. In the former case, corporate Korean state manipulation of the press was historically the problem. South Korean governments were infamous for utilizing public media channels to distort messages and stir anti-American sentiment when convenient to deflect blame from an angry public or to gain leverage in bilateral negotiations with its ally.²⁹ The problem today is different. Overt government intervention has decreased somewhat, but what has emerged is a culture of newspaper editorial offices as well and a generation of Korean journalists that contribute to a bias toward reporting negatively on the U.S. presence. Young, ambitious, and overzealous reporters operate with a cowboy mentality trying to seize the story and give it the most sensationalist slant. Often, the intrusive U.S. military footprint provides a ready target. Editors gain no points, let alone respect from their peers and subordinates, for choosing stories that might report positively on the U.S. military. They sell more papers when they report negatively.

In the latter case, USFK spokespeople feel that their public briefings do not get adequate attention from the domestic press. When the USFK makes these complaints to their Korean counterparts, the South Korean govern-

ment responds that this problem is a U.S., not Korean, one. When the USFK pushes the problem up the chain of command, the Pentagon responds that the military is not in the business of public relations. The legacy of the USFK today will be a critical image that will determine the future acceptability of a transformed USFK tomorrow and the attendant level of residual anti-Americanism.

Ad Hoc No More

No matter how successful a U.S. public diplomacy campaign might be in Korea, it is now time to begin to restructure the U.S. forward presence and reconceptualize the U.S.-ROK alliance. The rationale is not that there is no longer a threat from the North—as the recent revelations about its secret nuclear weapons program have shown—nor that improved ROK military capabilities have rendered the USFK expendable. A confluence of trends argue that the U.S.-ROK alliance is slowly but steadily approaching a moment of change likely to occur in the next South Korean administration. The DPRK continues to pose threats, but their conventional fighting capabilities have declined. Meanwhile, Korean civil society increasingly calls for a change in the U.S. footprint in Korea as anti-U.S. sentiments slowly spread among media, political, and business circles in a post-Korean War generation. None of these trends is overwhelmingly compelling on their own, but together they constitute a critical mass that could induce a crisis if left unaddressed. It is time to stop thinking about the alliance in ad hoc terms and start creating the vision for the future.

Notes

1. The U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) is defined as the U.S.-only subunified command on the Korean peninsula of the U.S. Pacific Command. This group can be broadly construed as consisting of three components: the United Nations Command, the Combined Forces Command, and the 37,000-strong military presence and attendant base structure.
2. Ralph Cossa, "The Role of U.S. Forces in a Unified Korea," *International Journal of Korean Studies* 5, no. 2 (fall/winter 2001): 118.
3. Richard Halloran, "Ground Forces in Japan, S. Korea under Review," *Washington Times*, September 29, 2000, p. A1.
4. Jiyul Kim, "Continuity and Transformation in Northeast Asia," *Korean Journal of Defense Analyses* 13, no. 1 (autumn 2001): 259.
5. Michael O'Hanlon, "U.S. Military Force Structure after Korean Reunification," *Korean Journal of Defense Analyses* 13, no. 1 (autumn 2001): 215.
6. Selig S. Harrison, "Time to Leave Korea?" *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 2 (March/April 2001): 62–78.

7. Michael McDevitt, in *Korea's Future and the Great Powers*, eds. Nicholas Eberstadt and Richard J. Ellings (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), note 6. See also Victor Cha, "Strategic Culture and the Military Modernization of South Korea," *Armed Forces & Society* 28, no. 1 (fall 2001): 99–128.
8. See Larry Nicksch, "Korea: U.S.–South Korean Relations—Issues for Congress," *CRS Issue Brief for Congress*, March 5, 2002, p. 10; Balbina Hwang, "New SOFA Agreement Strengthens U.S.–Korea Alliance," *Korea Herald*, January 19, 2001; Scott Snyder, "Anti-Americanism and the Future of USFK," *Korea Times*, August 10, 2000.
9. U.S. official, conversation with author, Seoul, September 12, 2002.
10. Halloran, "Ground Forces in Japan, S. Korea under Review"; Cossa, "The Role of U.S. Forces in a Unified Korea."
11. Chung Min Lee, "Future of ROK-U.S. Security Relations and Command Structure" (paper presented at "Practical Steps from War to Peace on the Korean Peninsula," Sejong and Asia Foundation, September 20–23, 2000).
12. Michael Finnegan, "The Future of the U.S.–ROK Alliance: Challenges and Opportunities" (unpublished manuscript).
13. Zalmay Khalilzad et al., *The United States and Asia: Toward a New U.S. Strategy and Force Posture* (Arlington, Va.: RAND, 2001), pp. 67–68.
14. Gen. John H. Tilelli (Ret.) and Maj. Susan Bryant, *Keeping the Calm: Northeast Asian Regional Security*, (Arlington, Va.: Association of the United States Army, 2002), pp. 39–40, <http://www.ausa.org/RAMPnew/tilellibryantpaper.pdf> (accessed October 10, 2002).
15. Michael A. McDevitt and James A. Kelly, "In Search of Stability: Designing for a Better Peace in East Asia," in *U.S.–Korea–Japan Relations: Building toward a Virtual Alliance*, ed. Ralph Cossa (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 1999). See also McDevitt in *Korea's Future and the Great Powers*, p. 286.
16. Nicholas Eberstadt and Richard J. Ellings, "Assessing Interests and Objectives of Major Actors in the Korean Drama," in *Korea's Future and the Great Powers*, eds. Nicholas Eberstadt and Richard J. Ellings (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 323.
17. Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, *Preventive Defense: A New Security Strategy for America* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), p. 14.
18. For the full argument, see Victor Cha, *Alignment despite Antagonism: The United States–Korea–Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).
19. Gen. Eric Shinseki, "The Army Transformation: A Historic Opportunity," *Army Magazine* (October 2000).
20. For further details, see Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Restructuring U.S. Forces and Bases in Japan," in *Toward a True Alliance: Restructuring U.S.–Japan Security Relations*, ed. Mike M. Mochizuki (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), pp. 168–173.
21. McDevitt and Kelly, "In Search of Stability."
22. Tilelli and Bryant, *Northeast Asian Regional Security*, p. 41.
23. "Statement of U.S. Policy toward Korea," NSC 5817 (August 11, 1958), in *FRUS, 1958–1960*, vol. XVIII, doc. 237, p. 485.
24. See NSC 170/1, Annex A. See also "U.S. Objectives and Courses of Action in Korea," NSC 170/1 (November 20, 1953), in *FRUS 1952–1954*, pp. 1620–1624; "Memorandum from the Acting Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Gleason) to the Secretary of State, February 18, 1955," in *FRUS, 1955–1957*, vol. XXII, doc. 21, pp. 37–38.

25. See Dennis C. Blair and John T. Hanley Jr., "From Wheels to Webs: Reconstructing Asia-Pacific Security Arrangements," *The Washington Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (winter 2001): 7–18.
26. See John Ikenberry, "Getting Hegemony Right," *National Interest* 63 (spring 2001): 17–24. See also Yoichi Funabashi, "Tokyo's Temperance," *The Washington Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (summer 2000): 135–144.
27. O'Hanlon, "U.S. Military Force Structure after Korean Reunification."
28. Taejoon Han, "An Economic Assessment of USFK" (paper presented at the "U.S. Troops in Korea" seminar, Pacific Forum and Ilmin Institute, Honolulu, August 8, 2002), p. 4.
29. See Jae-Kyoung Lee, "Anti-Americanism in South Korea: The Media and the Politics of Signification" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Mass Communications, University of Iowa, 1993).

