

Korea-US Security Relations in Transition

Tae-Hwan Kwak

The United States has reassessed its strategic-security needs and interests in Northeast Asia for the post-Cold War era. In the spring of 1990 the US and ROK governments agreed to a three-phase plan for US troop reduction and gradual withdrawal from Korea. In the meantime, in order to establish a peace system on the peninsula in this changing world North and South Korea agreed to discuss arms control and disarmament issues.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) has slowly been adjusting to a rapidly changing global security environment, while the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) is quickly adapting to changing security relations between itself and the US, demonstrating a flexible and pragmatic approach to the US troop withdrawal issue.

The purposes of this paper are: (1) to evaluate the new roles of US forces in Korea in the new international security environment in the 1990s, (2) to analyze the North Korean nuclear issue, a major obstacle to the peace process on the Korean peninsula that may delay the implementation of the US force reduction plan, and (3) to offer some policy suggestions regarding the future of Korea-US security relations under the Clinton administration.

The author argues three major points about Korea-US security cooperation in the post-Cold War world:

First, US forces in Korea can play a new role in arms control and peace negotiations with North Korea, and the US troop reduction and withdrawal issue could continue to be used as a *political bargaining chip* in arms control negotiations with the North.

Second, the ROK and US governments could work together to create favorable conditions to help Seoul and Pyongyang sincerely implement their "Basic Agreement" and provisions of the inter-Korean Joint Declaration of a Nonnuclear Korean Peninsula (the "Joint Declaration on Denuclearization").

Third, the inter-Korean security dilemma could be resolved by realizing a "Koreanization of security," on the peninsula through inter-Korean military cooperation.

The Clinton administration could open a new chapter in ROK-US security cooperation based on a mature partnership and mutual interests. Thus, the ROK needs to be prepared for anticipated changes in US security policy in the near future. Let us now turn to American firm commitment to the defense of South Korea.

US Commitment to the Security of the Republic of Korea

ROK security has for the more than forty years since the end of the Korean war been heavily dependent upon a firm US commitment. Thanks to the American commitment to South Korea's security under the US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954, which has provided a stable, credible deterrence against North Korea, there has not been another war on the Korean peninsula.

The 1954 US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty has been a cornerstone of US-South Korean security relations, whereby the US is firmly committed to the defense of South Korea by continuing to maintain the presence of its 35,000 troops. South Korea is the

only place in the world where US forces are kept at DEFCON 4 (Defense Readiness Condition Four), one level above normal.¹

It was reported that by 1991 a few hundred tactical nuclear weapons were stationed in Korea.² President Roh Tae Woo announced in December 1991 that US tactical nuclear weapons were not present in Korea. Because of the American NCND policy (neither confirm nor deny the existence of nuclear weapons), it is not easy to verify this information. However, North Korea argues that there still exist US nuclear weapons in Korea.³ It was argued that the presence of nuclear weapons in South Korea served as deterrence against another North Korean attack, but the Center for Defense Information concluded in 1990 that "US nuclear weapons in Korea serve no military function today and could be returned to the US for storage."⁴

Some argued that war-fighting capabilities on the peninsula could be adequately maintained with ROK forces supported by the US Air Force in Korea. If conventional deterrence failed and tactical nuclear weapons were to be used on Korean soil, the fallout from them would devastate the Korean people as well as Korea's neighbors including Russia, China and Japan. In this case, the use of nuclear weapons in Korea could endanger the survival of the Korean nation. It was argued that nuclear weapons have outlived their usefulness in the post-Cold War era, and that the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Korea was in its

1 William Arkin and Richard Fieldhouse, *Nuclear Battlefields* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1985), p. 120.

2 Ibid., pp. 120-21 and p. 231; Peter Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg: American Nuclear Dilemmas in Korea* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1991), p. 102; House Appropriations Committee, *Military Construction Appropriations for 1987*, Pt. 5., (Washington, DC: 1986), p. 216.

3 *Pyongyang Times*, October 10, 1992. For how North Korea sees deployment of US troops and nuclear arms in South Korea, a US nuclear forward base, see *Pyongyang Times*, 11 November 1989.

4 "Mission Accomplished in Korea: Bringing US Troops Home," *Defense Monitor*, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (1990), p. 8.

best long-term interests. Thus, the ROK government agreed to their removal.

The military justification for the continued presence of US ground forces in Korea has been questioned in view of the changing international security environment in the post-Cold War era, and the changing policies of China and Russia toward the US, Japan and South Korea. Moreover, some have contended that South Korea could defend itself against a North Korean attack because Seoul and Pyongyang now appear to maintain a strategic equivalence, although the ROK still relies heavily on US intelligence units stationed in Korea. Military justification for keeping US ground troops in Korea is thus weakened, although North Korea's ground forces are numerically superior. However, the official rationale for the continued presence of US ground forces in Korea is primarily political and psychological; their very presence symbolizes firm American determination to fulfill a defense commitment to South Korea in the event of another war.

Under the fast-changing post-Cold War international security climate of the 1990s, the US decided on a gradual troop reduction plan based upon certain international and domestic factors and assumptions:

First, the United States is obliged to leave the two Koreas to solve the Korean dilemma by Koreans themselves without interference.

Second, a gradual, partial reduction and withdrawal of US forces in Korea would probably not invite a new war in Korea, and anyway Russian or Chinese military intervention in a conflict would appear extremely unlikely because it would not serve their post-Cold War interests.

Third, such an American troop reduction would not threaten the balance of power in Northeast Asia. Since South and North Korea appear to be maintaining their strategic balance on the peninsula, it is unlikely that North Korea would, to any of its advantage, strike first. Furthermore, the changing international

security environment together with the North's economic stagnation makes it more difficult for Pyongyang to decide to strike first against South Korea even if it so intended, because it simply has no capability to win.

Fourth, North and South Korea signed and effectuated the Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, Exchanges and Cooperation (the North-South Basic Agreement) and their Joint Declaration on Denuclearization. The two sides need to strive together to implement these agreements for the sake of peace and reunification.

Fifth, the domestic mandate to cut the defense budget and pare down the US deficit will inevitably lead to a reduction of American forces in Korea.

The author argued in 1988 that the Seoul government had to consider serious long-term strategic planning for US troop withdrawal and engage in earnest discussions with Washington. In short, he suggested that the ROK needed to realize "Koreanization of security" on the Korean peninsula by improving and normalizing relations with North Korea in the 1990s.⁵ The rationale is rooted in South Korea's national capabilities: the economy is far stronger than that of North Korea, and an essential strategic equivalence between the North and the South appears finally to have been achieved.⁶ Thus, this strategic planning would obviously require a new adjustment to the ROK-US security relationship.

5 See Tae-Hwan Kwak, "ROK National Security in the 1990s," *Korean Journal of International Studies*, Vol. XIX, No. 3 (1988); also, Tae-Hwan Kwak, "Korea-US Security Relations in the 1990s: A Creative Adjustment," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter 1989).

6 Tae-Hwan Kwak, "Military Capabilities of South and North Korea: A Comparative Study," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring-Summer, 1990).

East Asia Strategic Initiative: Implementation of the Three-phase US Force Reduction-Withdrawal Plan

The US and South Korea agreed to a gradual, partial reduction of US troops and a readjustment in US-Korea security relations for the 1990s. In February 1990 in Seoul, Defense Secretary Richard Cheney and ROK Defense Minister Lee Sang Hoon discussed US-Korea security cooperation and agreed, in principle, on some significant points.⁷ First, South Korea accepted in principle the gradual withdrawal of some 5,000–6,000 noncombatants from US forces in Korea. In January 1990 Washington announced that it would close three of its five air bases in South Korea and withdraw about 2,000 air force support personnel by 1992.

Second, both sides agreed that the American capacity would gradually change from its leading role to one of support, while South Korea would assume more leadership—including the eventual command of key units of the Combined Forces Command (CFC). The ROK would prepare to take over operational control of its own armed forces during peacetime, with the US resuming command if war broke out.

Third, they agreed that South Korea would contribute more to US defense expenses. The US suggested that South Korea should double its \$300 million in annual direct contributions to the \$2.4 billion costs of maintaining its troops in Korea, and they agreed to work out the details and hard numbers of the proposed new arrangements later.

The detailed agreements between the US and South Korea were disclosed in a required report to US Congress in April 1990, in which the Department of Defense announced the East Asian

7 *New York Times*, 15 February 1990; *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1990; *Washington Post*, 24 February 1990; *Korea Newsreview*, 3 and 10 February 1990.

Strategic Initiative (EASI) timetable for a planned US troop reduction and withdrawal from Korea:⁸

Phase I—1 to 3 Years (1990–1992): The United Nations Command must be retained, essentially in its present form. During this phase, the US will reduce administrative overhead and phase out units whose mission can be assumed by the South Korean forces. By 1992, the US will cut back about 7,000 personnel, including 2,000 air force and about 5,000 ground force personnel. These reductions are based on steady improvements in South Korean defense capabilities.

Phase II—3 to 5 Years (1993–1995): During Phase I, the US will reexamine the North Korean threat, evaluate the effects of changes in Phase I, and establish new objectives for Phase II. A restructuring of the US Second Infantry Division will be considered at this point. An additional withdrawal of the Second Infantry Division will be considered in terms of the state of North-South relations and further improvements in ROK military capabilities. According to the Department of Defense report presented in July 1992 to Congress, entitled *A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim*, which is a revision of the initial East Asian Strategic Initiative prepared in April 1990, by the end of phase II in December 1995, minimum US forces in Korea would include the Second Infantry Division with a strength of one mechanized and one combat aviation brigade, and the US Seventh Air Force, with an equivalent strength of one tactical fighter wing.

Phase III—5 to 10 Years (1996–2000): If the earlier phases were successfully completed, South Koreans should be ready to take the leading role in their own defense. During this phase, fewer

8 US Department of Defense, *A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Looking toward the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Dept. of Defense, 18 April 1990), pp. 15–17.

US forces would be required to maintain deterrence on the Korean peninsula.

The US government spelled out three specific bilateral security objectives in this report: to deter North Korean aggression or to defeat it if deterrence fails; to reduce political-military tensions on the Korean peninsula by encouraging inter-Korean talks and the institution of a confidence-building-measures regime; and to change the role of US forces in Korea from a leading to a supporting role, including some force reductions.⁹ These objectives indicate a clear and firm American commitment to the security of the Republic of Korea in the 1990s.

Additional troop withdrawal during Phases II and III will depend on the peace process on the peninsula as well as on improvements in ROK military capabilities. It appears that unless South and North Korea establish a durable peace between themselves, US forces in Korea will remain even after the year 2000.

Let us take a closer look at the implementation process in phases I and II of the East Asian Strategic Initiative.

Agreements at the 22nd SCM in 1990

The Twenty-second Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) between the US and the ROK was held in Washington on 13–15 November 1990. A variety of important topics were discussed including Team Spirit, proposed cost-sharing of maintaining US forces in Korea, moving the US Eighth Army compound out of Seoul, pricing issues for the Korean Fighter Program, future reduction of the American military presence in Korea, a shift in operational control over the combined forces and the dispatch of medical military supplies to the multinational force in the

9 Ibid., p. 15. See also, *A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Report to Congress 1992* (Washington: 1992), pp. 18–21.

Persian Gulf. Among mutually agreed items, the three important ones are discussed here.¹⁰

First, the two sides reaffirmed their commitment to the maintenance of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. American plans to reduce the US military presence by 5,000 ground and 2,000 air force personnel do not indicate any change in the close and long-standing security relationship between the two allies. Both sides reaffirmed that any future reduction or readjustment of US forces in Korea should be made gradually and in a phased manner after a careful evaluation of the changing Northeast security environment in and around the Korean peninsula.

Second, it was agreed that by 1992 Korean generals would take over the two posts of commander of the UN Command Ground Component Command and top representative of the UNC Military Armistice Commission. Since the Korean War, American generals have held these positions, and a four-star US general is still commander-in-chief of the ROK-US Combined Forces Command (ROK-US CFC). The agreement heralded a reduced role of the US ground force stationed in Korea and also reflected the process of the ongoing inter-Korean talks.

Third, they agreed that South Korea would increase its direct contribution to the cost of maintaining the US forces stationed in Korea. Seoul would pay \$150 million for 1991 share of defense burden, compared to \$70 million for direct contribution in 1990.

In accordance with US-ROK bilateral agreements, the United Nations Command appointed a South Korean army general as chief delegate at the Military Armistice Commission talks at Panmunjom in March 1991. The appointment of Major Gen. Hwang Won Tak as senior delegate provided more authority and responsibility to South Korea in defending itself against the North. North Korea refused to accept Gen. Hwang's credentials by arguing that a South Korean military delegate cannot repre-

10 See also *Korea Herald*, 16 and 17 November 1990.

sent the UN Command as the South refused to sign the 1953 Armistice Agreement.¹¹ The US, however, maintains that anyone appointed by the UN Command can represent the UN.

Agreements at the 23rd SCM in 1991

The Twenty-third US-ROK Security Consultative Meeting was held in Seoul in November 1991. The two sides discussed several important topics, including Team Spirit, cost sharing, North Korean nuclear arms development, and future US troop reductions.

The nuclear development issue was a hot item. Both governments agreed to postpone any further reduction of US forces in Phase II so long as North Korea refuses to drop its nuclear arms program. In Phase I of the three-stage troop reduction plan in the Nunn-Warner Report, 7,000 out of 43,000 US troops would be pulled out by early 1993, and in Phase II then 6,000 to 7,000 more were to have been withdrawn from Korea between 1993 and 1995.

Both governments agreed to consider bringing in Patriot defense missiles against the threat of Scud missiles from North Korea. They signed the agreement of the Wartime Host Nation Support, and agreed that South Korea would provide \$180 million to help maintain the US forces in FY1992, up \$30 million from the 1992 contribution, which totaled \$2.62 billion.

South Korea and the US also agreed that they would maintain a military alliance after the year 2000, even after eventual unification of the Korean peninsula. They also agreed to name a South Korean four-star general to head the ROK-US CFC Ground Component command by late 1993.¹²

11 *Korea Herald*, 25 March 1991.

12 *Korea Newsreview*, 30 November 1991.

Agreements at the 24th SCM in 1992

The Twenty-fourth Security Consultative Meeting in Washington on 7–8 October 1992 continued discussion of cost sharing, North Korea's nuclear program, and further US troop reductions. It was reaffirmed that peace and stability on the Korean peninsula are vital to American security.

Several significant developments at this SCM should be noted. First, the US and the ROK agreed to continue to delay the second phase of US troop reduction in Korea, by another 6,500 US troops, originally scheduled for 1993–1995, until suspicion of North Korea's nuclear weapons development disappears.

Second, both sides reaffirmed that the US will continue to provide a nuclear umbrella for South Korea.

Third, the two sides agreed that the ROK would before the end of 1994 take over from the US side peacetime operational control of the South Korean combat forces. The commander of the Combined Forces Command, an American four-star general, has exercised peacetime operational control over most of the Korean troops since November 1978. The ROK government wanted an earlier transfer but the US side reacted negatively. The Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman will exercise operational control over Korean combat forces in peacetime, while in time of war the CFC commander, a US general, will command both the Korean and US forces in Korea to take responsibility for the defense of the South.

Fourth, it was not completely settled whether to resume the ROK-US joint military exercises Team Spirit '93, but they did agree to continue preparations for it in case North-South bilateral nuclear inspections did not occur.

Fifth, both sides agreed that a "flexible deterrence option" would be used at the point of war in Korea to deter a North Korean invasion. Flexible deterrence is a new strategic concept that enables rapid deployment of combat forces, centering on the US air forces and navy, to be dispatched to Korea prior to a war

to deter a North Korean assault whenever signs of attack might be detected.¹³

Sixth, South Korea agreed to increase both its financial support for the US troops in Korea to \$220 million in 1993, \$40 million more than 1992, as well as its Won-based defense-sharing contribution, to one-third of the Won-based costs of stationing US forces in Korea by 1995.

North Korea's response to Team Spirit '93, which both the US and South Korea "agreed in principle" to resume, was indeed hostile, and the DPRK government sent to the South and the US a fierce message that the resumption of Team Spirit '93 "is a criminal act to intentionally create difficulties in the way of the implementation of the North-South agreement."¹⁴

The Clinton Administration's New Defense Plan and the 25th SCM in 1993

For six months the Clinton administration reviewed American military needs and defense strategy in the post-Cold War world, and unveiled a new defense plan in early September 1993 for cutting the armed forces and for being able to fight more than one of any new regional wars simultaneously. The new defense plan in the Report on the Bottom-up Review would cut troop strengths to 1.4 million and perhaps lower, from a current total of 1.7 million, thereby keeping about 100,000 troops in Europe and 100,000 in Asia for foreseeable future. Some highlights of a new defense plan include the following features:¹⁵

1. Continue development of the air force F-22 stealth fighter, but cancel the navy's planned FX attack jet while upgrad-

13 *Korea Newsreview*, 7 October 1992. For the joint communique of 24th ROK-US SCM, see *Korea Herald*, 9 October 1992.

14 *Pyongyang Times*, 17 October 1992.

15 For further details, see Les Aspin, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review* (US DoD, October 1993).

ing current navy F-18 attack planes. Stop construction of air force F-16 fighters next year.

2. Maintain a force of twelve aircraft carriers, including one training carrier, and have General Dynamics Corporation build a third billion-dollar Seawolf attack submarine.
3. Reduce the size of the current fleet of 450 warships to about 340 by the turn of the century.
4. Cut the number of active army divisions from 14 to 10 and active and reserve air force fighter wings from 28 to 20.
5. Modify B-2 stealth bombers and swing-wing B-1 bombers, built to drop nuclear weapons on the former Soviet Union, to carry conventional and highly accurate "smart" bombs and missiles.

Defense Secretary Les Aspin and General Colin Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that to carry out the "win-win strategy" of fighting two nearly simultaneous non-nuclear conflicts with fewer forces, the Clinton administration made plans to store enough weapons and equipment for several army brigades at various overseas locations for use in the Persian Gulf or a conflict in Korea, and to spend more money on precision-guided missiles and bombs and to buy more ships for transporting troops and equipment.¹⁶

The US will maintain the number of troops in Japan and South Korea at their current level of one hundred thousand. Aspin said in his Report on the Bottom-Up Review that "our commitment to South Korea's security remains undiminished as demonstrated by the one US Army division consisting of two brigades and one wing of US Air Force combat aircraft we have stationed there." He also said:

In light of the continuing threat of aggression from North Korea, we have frozen our troop levels in South Korea and are modernizing South Korean and American forces on the peninsula. We

16 *New York Times*, 2 September 1993.

are also exploring the possibility of prepositioning more military equipment in South Korea to increase our crisis-response capability. While plans call for the eventual withdrawal of one of our two Army brigades from South Korea, President Clinton recently reiterated that our troops will stay in South Korea as long as its people want and need us there.¹⁷

The Twenty-fifth ROK-US SCM was held on 24 November in Seoul. The US agreed to transfer peacetime operational control of the Korean armed forces, which now belongs to the commander of the ROK-US CFC, to the Korean side by the first day of December 1994. In the future, the Korean military will take a greater initiative in ensuring security on the Korean peninsula, with US forces in Korea playing more of a supporting role. It was reconfirmed by both sides that the flexible deterrence option will be used in case of war in Korea to deter an invasion from North Korea. The ROK government agreed to increase its financial support for US forces in Korea to \$260 million in 1994, up another \$40 million from the 1993 contribution of \$220 million.

The two countries agreed not to decide yet whether to suspend Team Spirit in 1994, but said they probably would if North Korea shows a dramatic change in its nuclear policy and returns to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), accepts IAEA terms for international inspections and implements the inter-Korean Joint Declaration of a Nonnuclear Korean Peninsula (the "Joint Declaration on Denuclearization").¹⁸

The New Military Operation Plan for South Korea's Defense

What is the US-ROK joint military strategy for repulsing an attack? Since North Korean forces are deployed close to the demilitarized zone, the ROK-US CFC may have as little as 24 to 76 hours warning.

17 Aspin, p. 23.

18 *Korea Newsreview*, 6 November 1993, pp. 7-8.

American military authorities estimate that the North Korean military strategy in the event of a war would be to try to seize all of South Korea before US reinforcements arrive. The new operation plan for the defense of the ROK developed by Gen. Robert W. Riscassi, the previous commander of US forces in Korea, and refined by his successor Gen. Gary E. Luck emphasizes an aggressive counteroffensive strategy instead of static defenses.¹⁹ According to the five-phased plan, the US-ROK combined forces would (1) try to slow the North Korean ground attack north of Seoul, (2) buy time while US reinforcements arrive, (3) repulse the North Korean forces, (4) cross the DMZ and march to Pyongyang, and (5) occupy the North Korean capital.

The new plan provides for a counteroffensive strategy intended to seize Pyongyang and try to overthrow the government in the event of North Korean preemptive attack on the South. Under this ROK-US CFC Operation Plan 5027, in the event of a war on the Korean peninsula the US-ROK forces would take Pyongyang in two weeks.²⁰

North Korea's Changing Perception of US Forces in Korea

North Korea has officially and consistently maintained that the presence of US troops in Korea is the basic obstacle to inter-Korean dialogue and Korean reunification. Pyongyang's demand for US troop withdrawal has never changed in principle. Nevertheless, in recent years there have been significant signals of change in the North's perception of the American military presence.

19 See Michael R. Gordon and David E. Sanger, "North Korea's Huge Military Spurs New Strategy in South," *New York Times*, 6 February 1994.

20 See Kim Dang, "CFC OPLAN 5027," *Sisa Journal*, No. 218 (30 December 1993), pp. 24-27.

In view of changing domestic and international environments it has become imperative for South Korea to take a new look into the role of US troops in Korea and to pursue a new security policy toward Pyongyang. In other words, neither a status quo policy favoring permanent presence of the US troops in Korea nor an anti-status quo policy calling for their unconditional and immediate withdrawal would be conducive to the peace process on the peninsula.

It should be pointed out that North Korea also agreed to a phased withdrawal of US forces from Korea. North Korea wants a step-by-step, but complete, withdrawal of US forces for achieving national reunification.

Why has North Korea been calling for a complete withdrawal? It appears to have been linked to two assumptions, one that a complete withdrawal of US forces could contribute to the demise of the Seoul government, which would lead to a "South Korean revolution," thereby creating a sympathetic government in Seoul. This is why the North argues that the presence of US troops is the basic obstacle to Korean reunification. Pyongyang also believed that former North Korean President Kim Il Sung's Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo unification formula could be achieved with the complete withdrawal of US forces. If these assumptions were accurate, one could understand Pyongyang's insistence. In reality, however, even if US forces were to be withdrawn, the North Korean regime is keenly aware that under the present international environment reunification cannot be achieved on its own terms.

In the meantime, Pyongyang has been using the US troop withdrawal issue for effective domestic and international propaganda. Domestically the Kim Il Sung regime used it over the past forty-five years of his autocratic rule to generate political stability and legitimacy. Internationally, the issue has also been used as a tool to enhance his status as a leader of the anti-imperialist movement in the Third world. In the South, Kim also appealed

to some radical students and progressive forces as an anti-American hero.

If and when US forces are completely withdrawn from Korea, the regime may face serious problems of justifying its rule and legitimacy in North Korea, because it has used the presence of US troops to justify its forty-five-year rule. Furthermore, if US troops are not present it may be afraid that Seoul might attempt to use force to unify the peninsula. If this analysis is acceptable, then the demand for the complete US troop withdrawal would appear to be nothing but political propaganda.

Since the end of the Gulf War, Kim Il Sung may have thought about the needs of the continued presence of US troops in Korea because he wanted domestic stability in the North and peaceful transition of power to his son, Jong-il. He might have even concluded that the presence of US troops in South Korea would continue to serve his regime's interests best by contributing to the stability of the upcoming Kim Jong-il system.

Kim Yong-sun, Korean Workers' Party Secretary for International Affairs, formally told the US in January 1992 that North Korea would accept the continued stationing of US forces in Korea and that after the two Koreas were reunified it would allow them to be withdrawn gradually.²¹

Li Sam-ro, an adviser to North Korea's Disarmament and Peace Institute, made a statement in Hawaii in June 1992:

If it is impossible for the US forces to leave South Korea right now, they may leave in stages until Korea is unified in a federated form. After reunification, foreign troops should withdraw and North and South should complete arms reduction so that they cannot attack each other.²²

In sum, since it is not unreasonable to conclude that the Northern regime's interests would be best served by the presence

21 *Korea Herald*, 7 July 1992.

22 *Ibid.*, 28 June 1992.

of US troops stationed the South, and it does not really want their complete withdrawal in any near future. Whether this analysis is correct or incorrect, the issue could be still used as a political bargaining chip in the negotiations with Pyongyang. The important point is that the US troop withdrawal issue needs to be used as an effective policy instrument to achieve American policy goals toward North Korea.

North Korea's Nuclear Arms Development Program as Key Obstacle to the Peace Process on the Korean peninsula

The US believed that the presence of nuclear weapons in the South had acted as a deterrent to a nuclear threat by the former Soviet Union and China. It is American nuclear policy that the two Koreas must not join the ranks of the nuclear powers, because North Korean acquisition of nuclear weapons could prompt Japan also to become a nuclear power. The late President Park Chung Hee announced on several occasions that South Korea could and would produce its own nuclear weapons if necessary to defend its own security. After President Park did embark on an indigenous nuclear program in the 1970s, in anticipation of US troop withdrawal from South Korea, the Carter administration pressured him to abandon it and promised a firm US security commitment to the South.²³

23 It is reported that Carter's decision to cancel his planned withdrawal of the US ground forces from South Korea was closely related to Park's renunciation of a nuclear weapons program. Carter persuaded him to disavow South Korea's nuclear development program in 1978 in exchange for a firm US security commitment to the South. For more details, see Kap-Je Cho, "Bukhan Haeksisul Pagiron [Bombing of the North Korean Nuclear Facilities]," *Wolgan Chosun* (March 1991), pp. 123-25. In 1984-85, Seoul tried, with Canadian assistance, to acquire plutonium extraction technology and produce plutonium from its spent fuel. The attempt was foiled by US objections. See Leonard Spector, *The Undeclared Bomb: The Spread of Nuclear Weapons 1987-1988* (Ballinger, 1988), quoted in *Arms Control Reporter*, 257E1.7.89). Peter Hayes nicely reexamined US nuclear policy in Korea. He said that the US nuclear strategy in Korea originated from its military conflict with North Korea. Whatever the effect on the North, he argued, the US has kept nuclear weapons to reassure the South that it does

Since the US has maintained its NCND policy on the presence of nuclear weapons in Korea, the exact number of nuclear warheads stored in Korea could not be verified. A few hundred tactical nuclear weapons were reportedly stationed in South Korea. The Kunsan air base was known as the storage site for sixty tactical nuclear weapons.²⁴

The United States believes that North Korea has the intention and capability to develop nuclear weapons, and argues that Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program will be another obstacle to the peace process on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia. Washington has put direct pressure on North Korea to discontinue its nuclear program and also has asked Japan, China, the Soviet Union and Russia to exercise their influence on North Korea in connection with its nuclear program.

The US government is concerned about the possible export of North Korean nuclear technology, missiles, tanks, and submarines to Third World countries. North Korea has already sold 90 to 100 Scud missiles to Iran and 20 of improved versions of the Scud to Syria.²⁵ It is also reported that a North Korean cargo ship

not need its own nuclear weapons. For details, see Hayes, pp. 199–207. For further details of problems relating to the Korean denuclearization, see Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seung-Ho Joo, "The Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula: Problems and Prospects," *Arms Control*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (August 1993), pp. 65–92.

24 According to Peter Hayes, 60 nuclear gravity bombs were stored in Kunsan in early 1985, and 70 nuclear-tipped artillery shells and 21 atomic demolition munitions were located in South Korea. In addition, US surface ships and submarines have carried Tomahawk sea-launched land-attack nuclear cruise missiles since 1984. For more details about the US nuclear weapons in South Korea, see Hayes, *Pacific Powder keg*, pp. 249–53, pp. 89–103. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, the US stored about 40 nuclear-tipped shells and 60 nuclear bombs in South Korea. *Washington Post*, 8 November 1991. In contrast, the North Korean government has been claiming that there are more than 1,000 American nuclear weapons in South Korea. *Pyongyang Times*, 3 August 1991. On 10 July 1986, the Pentagon acknowledged its plans to build vaults for nuclear weapons at Kunsan Air Force base in South Korea (*Arms Control Reporter*, 850-1-310.7.86). On 13 November 1986, the Pentagon announced that it would deploy nuclear-capable Lance missiles near the demilitarized zone within a few months (*Arms Control Reporter*, 850-10313.11.86).

25 *New York Times*, 19 November 1991.

suspected of carrying Scud missiles and components arrived at Bandar Abbas in Iran for the second time in March 1992.²⁶

President Bush announced on 27 September 1991, that all US land- and sea-based tactical nuclear weapons and US artillery shells deployed in South Korea would be withdrawn.²⁷ It was reported in November 1991 that air-delivered nuclear weapons deployed on F-16 aircraft also would be withdrawn from Korea.²⁸ The new US security policy was intended to provide favorable conditions for Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear weapons development program.

Both Seoul and Washington made it clear that discussion about a nonnuclear Korean peninsula would be possible only after Pyongyang opened its nuclear facilities to IAEA inspection. Since around May 1991 the US has closely consulted with South Korea about countermeasures to Pyongyang's nuclear program.²⁹ Washington called upon Seoul to resolve the North's nuclear issue before concluding the North-South Basic Agreement between the two Koreas, and was unhappy about Seoul's hasty decision to sign it before resolving the nuclear issue.

The US now maintains the position that it will improve relations with North Korea only after Pyongyang implements promptly and fully its commitments under the Joint Declaration on Denuclearization, which means accepting credible and effective North-South bilateral nuclear inspections, including challenge inspections. The first highest-level talks between the US and North Korea in four decades at the under-secretarial level were held on 22 January 1992 in New York. The talks failed to bear fruit because Pyongyang refused to present a concrete

26 According to US intelligence officials, the final destination of the cargo was Syria. *New York Times*, 18 March 1992.

27 For the text of Bush's announcement, see *New York Times*, 27 September 1991.

28 *New York Times*, 9 November 1991. *Washington Post*, 8 November 1991.

29 *Chosun Ilbo* (New York edition), 17 December 1991.

timetable for nuclear inspection.³⁰ The US has maintained diplomatic contacts with North Korea in Beijing at the councilor level since late 1988. The American decision to withdraw all tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea was based on the judgment that doing so would not destabilize the military balance in Korea. Many military experts have expressed the view that US nuclear weapons on the peninsula itself would not affect peace and stability one way or the other. William Crowe, former chairman of US Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated:

The actual presence of any nuclear weapons in South Korea is unnecessary to maintain a nuclear umbrella over the ROK. In fact, such a presence would likely become a political football in US-ROK relations over time. Thus, solutions should be found that would lead to the North's accepting full-scope safeguards, the removal of any American nuclear weapons that might be in South Korea, and the establishment of relations between Washington and Pyongyang.³¹

The presence of nuclear weapons in South Korea served well as a deterrence to any further North Korean aggression with Chinese or Soviet support. Without these weapons now, however, it seems that South Korea can maintain war-fighting capabilities with the support of US high-tech conventional weapons and a defensive weapons system such as the Patriot.³² US nuclear

30 *New York Times*, 24 January 1992; *Chosun Ilbo* (New York edition), 24 January 1992.

31 William J. Crowe, Jr. and Alan D. Romberg, "Rethinking Pacific Security," *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1991), pp. 132–34. William Taylor, vice president for international security programs at the US Center for Strategic and International Studies, also argued that US nuclear weapons should be withdrawn from South Korea; see *Kyonghyang Shinmun*, 27 June 1991; *Korea Herald*, 27 June 1991. Robert Scalapino and Kim Kyong Won, former Korean Ambassador to the US, made a joint statement calling for the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from South Korea. *Joong Ang Ilbo*, 13 February 1991, and *Dong-A Ilbo*, 12 February 1991.

32 The author also argues that South Korea enjoys qualitative superiority over North Korea in military weapons and equipment, although the latter has quantitative advantage. See Tae-Hwan Kwak, "Military Capabilities of South

weapons in Korea outlived their usefulness by potentially endangering the survival of the Korean nation as well as the security of its neighbors, including Russia, China, and Japan.

The American decision to withdraw tactical nuclear weapons from Korea was also based on the political judgment that it would promote favorable conditions for inter-Korean dialogue and for the North to accept IAEA inspections. It certainly did facilitate the Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, Exchanges and Cooperation and the Joint Declaration of a Nonnuclear Korean Peninsula, both made between Seoul and Pyongyang.

The issue of the North Korean nuclear arms development program is an obstacle to the Korean peace process. It is a real threat to the security of the Korean peninsula and the Northeast Asian region. Despite wide publicity on its nuclear capability, North Korea officially denies the intention or capability to make nuclear arms. Nevertheless, the US, South Korea, Japan, and other UN members believe that North Korea is embarking on production of nuclear weapons. Is it? Only a few in Pyongyang can answer.

In December 1985, North Korea signed the NPT. Within 18 months thereafter it should have signed a safeguards agreement with the IAEA for international inspection of its nuclear facilities. Pyongyang finally did sign this agreement on 30 January 1992, six years after signing the NPT. Why? North Korea would not have signed the safeguards accord if it were developing nuclear weapons, which would also directly contradict its declared policy of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

North Korea demanded three conditions for signing the safeguards agreement: (1) the US must remove all nuclear weapons from South Korea; (2) the US and the South must agree to allow international inspection of nuclear sites in the South simulta-

and North Korea: A Comparative Study, *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring-Summer, 1990), pp. 113-43.

neously with those in the North; and (3) South Korea must abandon the American nuclear umbrella. If it is true that, as North Korea stated, it has neither intention nor capability to produce a nuclear bomb, why did the North delay signing the safeguards accord? In my opinion, Pyongyang was using the safeguards agreement *as a bargaining chip* in the negotiations with the South and the US to have them meet the three conditions.

Many still believe that the North is developing nuclear weapons in an attempt to improve worldwide prestige and to protect the survival of its political system. Some believe North Korea will go to any means to protect its nuclear weapons program. There are mounting pressures on North Korea. A worldwide trend is moving towards nuclear arms reduction. Nuclear proliferation will not be tolerated. None of the four major powers surrounding the Korean peninsula, the US, Russia, Japan or China, want North Korea to have a nuclear bomb. For economic reasons and for the survival of its regime Pyongyang has been trying to improve relations with Japan, the US and South Korea, and a nuclear weapons program would certainly jeopardize this relationship. Chinese leaders also advised Kim Il Sung during his visit to China in October 1991 to sign this long awaited safeguards agreement.

It is of worldwide concern because nuclear development in North Korea would destabilize the security of the entire Asian Pacific region. Due to mounting international pressures on Pyongyang, it finally signed the safeguards agreement on 30 January 1992. Since the time it ratified the agreement with the IAEA in April 1992, the IAEA conducted six international inspections of seven declared nuclear facilities in North Korea in 1992–93. However, in February 1993, North Korea rebuffed an IAEA request to inspect two sites believed to be storing nuclear waste from plutonium production. Earlier tests of samples given to the IAEA proved that the plutonium and the waste did not match, also suggesting that North Korea has a bigger reprocessing program. According to Western intelligence sources, North

Korea has already separated the seven to twelve kilograms of plutonium needed to make a bomb.³³

In the meantime, the IAEA requested North Korea to open the two suspected sites for inspection by 25 March 1993. In response Pyongyang announced on 12 March 1993 that it would withdraw from the NPT and renege on its safeguard agreement with the IAEA. The North's decision heightened tensions in inter-Korean relations and in its relations with the US, Japan, and other UN member states. The US and North Korea began to negotiate over the North's nuclear issue at the first stage of US-North Korea high-level talks in New York in June 1993. After four rounds of high-level talks, the US and North Korea finally issued a joint statement on 11 June 1993, that North Korea had decided "unilaterally to suspend as long as it considers necessary the effectuation of its withdrawal" from the NPT.³⁴

The second stage of US-North Korea high-level talks was held over July 14-19 in Geneva to resolve the issue. North Korea agreed to hold consultations with the IAEA on its obligations as a signatory of the NPT, and also agreed to improve relations with the South. The US, on the other hand, promised to help North Korea replace its gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactors with a light-water type.³⁵

US President Clinton and ROK President Kim Young Sam at a summit meeting in Washington DC in November 1993 jointly proposed to North Korea that the US and South Korea governments would suspend Team Spirit '94 joint military exercises if North Korea would renew the IAEA's routine inspections and agree to exchange envoys North and South. As soon as

33 *US News and World Report*, 22 February 1993; *New York Times*, 11 February 1993; Stephen Engelberg and Michael Gordon, "North Korea likely to have developed own atomic bomb, CIA tells President," *New York Times*, 26 December 1993.

34 See *North-South Dialogue in Korea*. No. 58 (Seoul: Office of North-South Dialogue, October 1993), pp. 69-74.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 79-85.

Pyongyang would accept these two conditions, the third stage of US–North Korea high-level talks would be held to discuss American economic and technical aid including replacement of gas cooled nuclear reactors with light-water ones, and diplomatic normalization of relations between the US and North Korea—in return for the North’s acceptance of special inspections of two suspected nuclear waste sites.³⁶

After ten months of painful negotiations over the nuclear issue between the US and North Korea and between the IAEA and North Korea, Pyongyang finally accepted the seven-member IAEA inspection team in early March 1994, to visit seven declared nuclear facilities. North Korea also agreed to inter-Korean talks to discuss the exchange of special envoys between the South and the North. As soon as the IAEA inspection team entered North Korea, the US and ROK governments announced the suspension of the Team Spirit '94. Whether North Korea will sincerely demonstrate good deeds remains to be seen. I believe North Korea will continue playing its nuclear card until achieving its political-military, diplomatic, and economic objectives. On the other hand, Pyongyang clearly understands that if it fails to resolve the nuclear issue, then the US and South Korea have no choice but to bring the issue to the UN Security Council for possible economic sanctions, which may not be in Pyongyang’s best interests.

Following the effectuation of the Joint Declaration on Denuclearization, the inter-Korean Joint Nuclear Control Commission was inaugurated on 19 March 1992. The two Koreas agreed to prepare rules on mutual inter-Korean nuclear inspections by the end of May 1993 at the latest, and conduct mutual inspections within twenty days thereafter. As of this writing, since the first JNCC meeting of 19 March 1992 thirteen commission meetings, nine commission chairmen’s contacts and commission members

36 *New York Times*, 24 November 1993; *Washington Post*, 23 and 24 November.

contacts were held over more than a year, but they have failed to produce a bilateral inspection regime.

What should and could be done to achieve the nuclear-free zone on the Korean peninsula through sincere implementation of the Joint Declaration on? Needless to say, it is essential that North and South Korea cooperate. A nuclear-free zone in Korea could be realized, first, if Pyongyang would abandon its nuclear weapons development program including nuclear reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities. At the same time, South Korea also needs to forsake the American nuclear umbrella protection and must eventually agree on the principle of non-transport of nuclear weapons into ports and air bases in South Korea.

One can argue that the North's nuclear weapons development will not only accelerate inter-Korean nuclear arms racing but destabilize Northeast Asia as well, so it would be in Pyongyang's best interest to abandon its nuclear development program.

The US should play an important role in the denuclearization process in cooperation with Russia, China, and Japan to induce North Korea to implement the safeguards agreement with the IAEA in good faith. To lay a basic framework for a nuclear-free zone on the Korean peninsula, the South Korean government should also cooperate with the United States. Washington and Seoul should take advantage of the emerging international security environment to improve their relations with North Korea.

In the long term, the United States, China, and Russia need to consider guaranteeing they will not use their nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula. The Korean nuclear dilemma can be solved peacefully by Koreans themselves in cooperation with the four major powers concerned with the Korean problem. To realize a nuclear-free Korean peninsula, South and North Korea, first of all, should sincerely implement the provisions of the Joint Declaration on Denuclearization, on the basis of mutual concessions and compromise. If North Korea soon understands that its

nuclear arms development program is a basic obstacle to the inter-Korean peace process, the North will accept the bilateral nuclear inspections. In my view, it would be in the best interest of both North and South Korea to implement in good faith this Joint Declaration.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The US and the ROK need to continue using the US troop reduction and withdrawal issue as a political leverage in dealing with North Korea, as the author has advocated since 1983.³⁷ How could this issue be used as a bargaining chip? Both US and ROK authorities could use it as a policy instrument to achieve security and peace on the Korean peninsula along with reduction and gradual withdrawal of US forces in Korea in the 1990s. With the close security cooperation between the US and the ROK, such a policy instrument could be very effective. Hence, US forces in Korea can play a new role as a bargaining chip in arms control negotiations with North Korea. It was a wise decision for the US and the ROK to postpone the removal of the 6,500 troops that had been earmarked for the second phase of the East Asia Strategic Initiative (EASI). This is a good example of using the US troop withdrawal issue as a political bargaining chip in negotiations with North Korea.

In the second phase (1993–95) of the EASI, when the North Korean nuclear issue is resolved, the ROK government needs to be prepared for the anticipated changes in the US troop withdrawal plan, because according to the Clinton administration plan the US would make substantial cuts of troop level in Korea

37 The author argued for the first time that the US troop withdrawal issue should be used as a *political bargaining chip* in negotiations with North Korea in 1983; see "How to Deal with the Stalemated inter-Korean Dialogue: The Nonzero Sum Formula," paper presented at the Fifth Joint Conference of the Korean Political Science Association and the Association of Korean Political Scientists in North America, 8–10 August 1983, Seoul.

by 1999.³⁸ If inter-Korean relations improve dramatically, the Second Infantry Division may be withdrawn, perhaps leaving a brigade with support personnel.

It would be in the best interests of both Korea and the US that this phase of the EASI plan not be implemented without significant concessions from North Korea. Pyongyang's faithful implementations of the inter-Korean Basic Agreement and the Joint Denuclearization Declaration are the minimum requirements for significant developments in inter-Korean relations.

It is essential and desirable for South Korea, North Korea and the US to sit down at trilateral talks to reach an agreement in principle on a phased withdrawal of US troops from Korea, in order of importance: (1) US ground troop reductions with a peace treaty between the US and North Korea, (2) complete withdrawal of US ground troops, and (3) after the firm establishment of a peace regime on the Korean peninsula, US air forces. Even after the American ground troops are taken out, the US Air Force should remain for some time to provide a strategic stability on the peninsula. In addition, the American early warning system should remain even longer until the ROK has its own independent warning system.

What about North Korea's nuclear issue? Will the North abandon its nuclear arms development program if it has not yet done so? In my view, Pyongyang will eventually accept an inter-Korean bilateral nuclear inspection regime to implement the denuclearization declaration, which will contribute to firmly rooted institutionalization of peaceful coexistence with South Korea.

The Pyongyang regime needs to show sincere deeds to the world, not just words, by accepting IAEA inspections and inter-Korean bilateral inspections. The North Korean nuclear weapons development program would certainly violate the Joint

38 For further details, see Aspin, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review*.

Declaration on Denuclearization as well as contradict Kim Il Sung's statement that North Korea will not build a nuclear bomb.

Assuming he remains in power, Kim Jong-il can now unilaterally take his own version of common security-building measures on the Korean peninsula by sincerely implementing the North-South Basic Agreement and the Joint Denuclearization Declaration. If he demonstrates sincere behavior, there will be meaningful and productive developments in inter-Korean relations as well as significant developments in relations between the US and North Korea.

On the other hand, both Seoul and Washington must clearly understand that, in the North Korean view, Team Spirit is also an obstacle to the peace process. The North has made it crystal clear that so long as this joint exercise is taking place there will be no progress in inter-Korean talks. The North's response to the joint US-ROK preparation for Team Spirit '93 was extremely hostile.³⁹ Hence, Seoul and Washington need to consider permanently suspending US-ROK joint military exercises; the rationale for continuing them gradually weakens in view of the changing political and security environment in Northeast Asia and gradual improvement in inter-Korean relations and US-North Korean relations.

Now is the time for North and South Korea to take into serious consideration the reduction of inter-Korean armed forces to a level of reasonable sufficiency in the post-inter-Korean Basic Agreement era. Both sides need to reduce their military force level for economic reasons. In this post-Cold War era, neither can North Korea afford over 20% of its GNP nor South Korea some 30% of its annual budget for national defense.

The two have yet to agree upon an acceptable formula for arms reduction. Given the rapidly changing international security environment and positive developments in inter-Korean rela-

39 *Pyongyang Times*, 17 October 1992. For details of the DPRK Foreign Ministry's memo regarding Team Spirit '93, see *Rodong Shinmun*, 29 October 1992.

tions, the author argues that both sides need to consider at least a fifty-percent cut in their military forces. Of course, each will maintain a credible, stable deterrence against the other with reduced troop level and qualitative improvement in modern weapons systems. Realistic arms reduction could better serve the common interests of South and North Korea. Both sides need to implement sincerely the Basic Agreement and the Joint Denuclearization Declaration in order to achieve the Korean reunification.

In the final analysis, what are future prospects of US-ROK security relations under the Clinton administration? What are continuities and the changes in US security policy toward the Korean peninsula? As discussed above, the US commitment to the security of South Korea under the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty will remain firm and changeless. Nevertheless, some gradual modifications in US security policy can be expected under the Clinton administration if North Korea abandons its nuclear development program. These include: (1) the new US defense plan with deep cuts of US defense spending will have a profound effect on the second phase of EASI; it is expected that there will be an acceleration of US troop reduction in Korea; (2) the ROK will share more of the cost of maintaining US forces in Korea; and (3) when North Korea accepts inter-Korean nuclear inspections and IAEA inspections of suspected nuclear facilities, US-North Korea political-diplomatic relations will dramatically improve.

What should the ROK do to prepare for these modifications in US security policy? The author would recommend the ROK government to take the following measures: (1) South Korean leaders under the Kim Young Sam administration need to change to a new pragmatic thinking in dealing with North Korea. For example, Team Spirit should be suspended in order to promote favorable conditions for continuing the peace process on the peninsula, which will eventually lead to a solution of the nuclear issue. (2) The ROK needs to be prepared for an acceleration of

the US troop reduction plan under the Clinton administration, with a big improvement in diplomatic relations between the US and North Korea. (3) The ROK needs to be prepared to pay for more defense cost sharing; and (4) thus, the ROK's best option would be to achieve "Koreanization of security" by improving and normalizing inter-Korean relations.

Assuming South and North Korea work together to establish a peace system through Koreanization of security on the Korean peninsula, which they must, then the South will no longer need the presence of US forces in Korea. However, neither the US nor Seoul should risk South Korean security by reducing or withdrawing US forces in Korea.