

The Peace-keeping Role of the American Troops in South Korea

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Abstract

The American troops in South Korea are a contested issue in inter-Korean relations. While the opinion of South Korea and the United States is that they are essential for the South's defense, North Korea's view is that they hinder reunification. The South Korea-United States alliance, which was formed during the Korean War (1950-1953), is analyzed here on the basis of alliance theory. The alliance was strengthened by the signing of a Mutual Defense Treaty in 1953 which is the legal basis for the American troops' presence. The United States prevented South Korea from retaliating against North Korea following assassination attempts against South Korean presidents in 1968 and 1983. Troop reductions in 1970-1971, 1990-1992 and 2004-2008 caused U.S.-ROK tensions. These tensions peaked due to President Jimmy Carter's (1977-1981) troop withdrawal policy, until the policy was reversed due to strong opposition and an underestimation of North Korea's armed forces. American troops have contributed to maintaining peace by building a joint South Korean-American fighting force, providing quality intelligence, and serving as a force that both countries regard to be of the utmost importance for the South's defense.

Key Words: American troops, South Korea-United States alliance, peace-keeping, inter-Korean relations, Korean War

Introduction

The American military presence in South Korea is a long-contested issue in inter-Korean relations. While North Korea has consistently urged a withdrawal, South Korea and the United States have regarded the troops as essential for the defense of the South. Nonetheless, the American forces constitute a key factor in any analysis of how peace has been maintained on the Korean Peninsula since the end of the Korean War.

The purpose of this study is to investigate, based on alliance theory and qualitative methodology, how the American troops have contributed to maintaining peace, partly in relation to a few other factors such as rearmaments. This study differs from available studies by assessing the troops' concrete contributions to securing peace and the significance of those contributions. It first briefly presents alliance theory. Since the peace-keeping role of the American forces cannot be properly illuminated without first reviewing the background of their deployment, the origins of the South Korea-United States alliance are also analyzed.

The following section gives an account of major developments of the alliance since 1953. Rearmaments, incidents involving American troops, and contested issues such as troop reductions in the 1970s, 1990s and 2000s are included. Special attention is devoted to the controversies caused by President Jimmy Carter's (1977-1981) troop withdrawal policy. Opinions in the literature on the troops' peace-keeping role are assessed, including the role they played during some crises in inter-Korean relations. Finally, specific contributions by the American troops to preserving peace that are more difficult to analyze chronologically are investigated, assessed and compared. The section includes data on military exercises, which are less frequently recorded than other criteria of evaluation such as rearmaments.

Alliance Theory

The South Korean scholar Kim Woosang¹ (2009) quotes the American scholar Stephen Walt, according to whom “an alliance is a formal or an informal agreement between two independent countries for security co-operation. This means a formal alliance by signing an alliance treaty and an informal alliance relation through tacit agreement between the parties or military exercises etc.” Military alliances are, depending on their purpose, classified as a) capability aggregations or b) autonomy-security trade-offs. In the former case, alliance partners combine their strength to jointly cope with an enemy threat or amass power to deter war. Support from an allied nation is very important in boosting national power. Such alliances are formed between parties of equal strength and are therefore also referred to as “symmetric alliances.”

In contrast, in the latter case alliance partners’ strengths tend to be unequal. The purpose in forming an alliance between a weak and a strong country, also called an “asymmetric alliance,” is for the former to gain military support from the latter to increase national power. Such an alliance is normally disadvantageous for the strong power since it does not receive military support from the weak partner and may become involved in a conflict against its will. On the other hand, it is possible to exert influence on the weaker nation’s policies. The weak nation can strengthen its defense, but it also loses some of its autonomy by having to adjust to the stronger nation’s wishes and may also have to provide military bases. Since such alliances are formed when both parties assess them to be necessary, they tend to last for a long time.²

¹-Korean names are written according to the author’s own preferences when known. Otherwise, the McCune-Reischauer system is followed. Names of presidents follow standard spelling.

²-Kim Woosang, “Hanmi tongmaeng-tŭi ironjök chaego,” in Yi, Su-hun (ed.), *Chojŏnggi-tŭi*

Regarding the impact of alliances on national security, Stephen Walt (1997) writes: “The formation and cohesion of international alliances can have profound effects on the security of individual states and help determine both the probability and likely outcome of war.” On the persistence of some alliances, he writes: “An alliance may persist despite drastic external changes because its members are still better off in the alliance than they would be outside it.” Another opinion is: “An obvious source of alliance durability is the exercise of hegemonic power by a strong alliance leader.” He also points out the symbolic significance of alliances: “Alliances are more likely to persist if they have become symbols of credibility or resolve.”

Finally, concerning alliance formation, the American scholar Glenn H. Snyder writes (1984) that it is one method for states to accumulate power in addition to armaments and territorial aggrandizement. He analyzes another important issue in alliance politics: the security dilemma. According to the theory, even when no state has any wish to attack others, none can be sure that the others’ intentions are peaceful, or will remain so. Consequently, each must accumulate power for defense. Since no state can know whether the power accumulation of others is only due to defense motivations or not, each must assume that it might be intended for an attack. Consequently, each party’s power increments are matched by the other. Ultimately, security is no greater than it was when the vicious circle began.³

The following sections examine central concepts such as capability aggregations, autonomy-security trade-offs, and the security dilemma.

Hanmi tongmaeng: 2003~2008 (Seoul: Kyōngnam taehakkyo kūkdong munje yōn’guso, 2009), pp. 67-68. Author’s translation.

³- Glenn H. Snyder, “The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics,” *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (July 1984), p. 461; Stephen M. Walt, “Why Alliances Endure or Collapse,” *Survival*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring 1997), pp. 156-157, 164, 165.

The impact of alliances on national security in relation to rearmaments is also assessed.

Formation of the South Korea-United States Alliance

In 1953, South Korea opposed the signing of the Armistice Agreement. However, since President Syngman Rhee (1948-1960) regarded its conclusion as inevitable, in a letter to President Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961) he requested a Mutual Defense Treaty to be signed immediately after the armistice had been enforced. The treaty would be similar to the treaties signed between the United States and the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand.

President Rhee, who had advocated reunification by advancing northwards, continued to oppose the signing of the Armistice Agreement until the United States had promised to sign a Mutual Defense Treaty and provide military assistance. Following South Korea's release of 27,388 'anti-Communist prisoners' from prisoner-of-war camps on June 18, 1953, the U.S. believed that it would be impossible to sign and implement the Armistice Agreement without the consent of the South Korean government, so it dispatched an envoy from the State Department to negotiate. At the time, President Rhee aimed for the signing of a Mutual Defense Treaty, long-term economic assistance for reconstruction, reinforcement of the Korean armed forces, and separate American-Korean talks on plans for unification, unless political talks with the Communists showed progress within 90 days. The United States accepted the demands. Immediately prior to the signing of the Armistice Agreement on July 27, 1953, South Korea and the United States agreed that the size of the Army would not exceed 655,000 men. The Navy and the Air Force would be limited to 24,000 men altogether. The quality of the latter forces

would be somewhat raised.⁴

Although South Korea refused to sign the Armistice Agreement, arguing that it would perpetuate national division, following strong pressure from the United States the country declared that it would consent to the agreement and observe it on condition of signing a Mutual Defense Treaty and receiving economic and military assistance. Eventually, the Mutual Defense Treaty was signed on October 1, 1953. The parties agreed to a) resolve international conflicts they may be involved in peacefully, b) consult each other in the case of an external attack, c) recognize military attacks on their territories as threats to peace and security and respond to joint threats on the basis of the Constitution, d) station American military forces in the Republic of Korea, e) ratify the agreement on the basis of the Constitution, and finally, f) permit either party the right to cancel the treaty, which has no time limit, within one year after issuing notification. The first, third, fifth and sixth articles are similar to Articles 1, 3, 4, 7 and 8 of the 1951 United States-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty. These articles are also similar to Articles 1, 4, 9 and 10 of the 1951 Australia-New Zealand-U.S. Security Treaty (ratified in 1952).

The Mutual Defense Treaty became effective on November 17, 1954, following ratification by both countries' parliaments in January. It has since remained unaltered, demonstrating that alliances formed through necessity by both parties tend to last for a long time. Ratification had been delayed by the United States, which wanted to restrain President Rhee from ordering a march to the North. The Mutual Defense Treaty marked the beginning of the South Korea-United States alliance and is the

⁴- Kim Il-Young, "Hanmi tongmaeng-tŭi samwi ilch'e kujo-tŭi hyŏngsŏng kwajŏng," in Kim Il-Young and Cho Seong-Ryoul (eds.), *Chuhan migun: Yŏksa, chaengchŏm, chŏnmang* (Seoul: Hanul, 2003(a)), pp. 66-67, 69-70; Kukpangbu, *Hanmi tongmaeng-gwa chuhanmigun* (Seoul: Kukpangbu, 2002), pp. 36-37; Park Pong-hyŏn, *Chuhan migun-tŭn ŏnje ch'ŏlsuhae-ya hana* (P'aju: Hanul, 2004(a)), p. 11. Original quotation marks.

legal framework for the stationing of American troops in the country as well as a pillar of the South's national defense policy. Weapons and equipment were brought in afterwards.⁵ In order to prevent attacks from North Korea, the troops have always been concentrated on the western front, north of Seoul. Meanwhile, in March 1954 the withdrawal of troops who had remained in South Korea after the end of the war commenced (equipment was handed over to the South Korean military). In 1955, there were 85,500 American soldiers in the country, compared to 325,000 in 1953 and 223,000 in 1954.⁶

Development of the South Korea-United States Alliance

American military assistance had begun already during the Korean War, when the South Korean army had expanded from 100,000 men to almost 600,000. On July 24, 1950, the United Nations Command (UNC)

⁵- The South Korean scholar Park Myōng-nim argues that from a legal point of view the treaty is an armistice violation since Paragraph 13(c) of the Armistice Agreement prohibits troop enforcements and Paragraph 13(d) prohibits rearmaments, colliding with Paragraph 2 of the Mutual Defense Treaty which states "The parties will continuously undertake and strengthen appropriate measures to prevent military attack independently, jointly or on the basis of self-reliance and mutual assistance." Author's translation. From Park, "Nambuk p'yōnghwa hyōpchōng-gwa Hanbando p'yōnghwa," in Han'guk inkwōn chaedan (ed.), *Hanbando p'yōnghwa-nūn kanūnghan-ga?: Hanbando anbo chilsō-ūi chōnhwan-gwa p'yōnghwa ch'eje-ūi mosaek* (Seoul: Tosō ch'ulp'an arūk'e, 2004(b)), pp. 244-245: fn. 32.

⁶- Gabriel Jonsson, *Peace-keeping in the Korean Peninsula: The Role of Commissions* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2009), pp. 17, 18-19, 66-67; Kim, *op. cit.*, 2003(a), pp. 35, 71, 72-73: "Ingye ch'ōlsōn-ūro-sō-ūi chuhanmigun: kyumo, p'yōnje, unyong pangsig-ūi pyōnhwa-rūl chungsim-ūro," in Kim and Cho, *op. cit.*, 2003(b), pp. 75, 76-77, 90; Kukpangbu, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-39; *Mutual Defense Treaty (U.S.-Philippines)*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutual_Defense_Treaty_\(U.S.-Philippines\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutual_Defense_Treaty_(U.S.-Philippines)); Park, *op. cit.*, 2004(a), pp. 11, 149; *Security Treaty between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America*, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/1952/2.html>. The text of the South Korea-United States Mutual Defense Treaty appears in Kukpangbu, *ibid.*, p. 39. For English see *Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea*, October 1, 1953, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kor001.asp.

was founded on the basis of the July 7 Security Council resolution to integrate the combat units into one organization. The UNC established its headquarters in Tokyo on July 24, but it was moved to Seoul on July 1, 1957 in order to be able to implement its tasks more efficiently. The UNC is represented in the Military Armistice Commission (MAC) which is responsible for implementing the Armistice Agreement and settling armistice violations. As an indisputable sign of the huge weight the United States attached to its support for South Korea, from 1950-1988 military assistance reached almost \$15 billion altogether. From the beginning the United States actively supported education and training of military officers by, for instance, establishing training institutes.

On June 21, 1957, at the 75th MAC plenary meeting, the UNC declared Paragraph 13(d) of the Armistice Agreement prohibiting the import of weapons from abroad to the Korean Peninsula to be invalid, since the North had previously ignored the paragraph by rearming. However, the South Korean scholar Choi Cheol-Young (2004) points out that both sides had thoroughly neglected Paragraph 13(d).⁷ The perceived level of security could have been raised through capability aggregation. On the other hand, in accordance with the security dilemma, there was possibly no greater security than when the vicious circle began, but rearmaments could have reduced the risk for war. Subsequently, the American troops began modernizing. In 1957, atomic weapons were for the first time brought into South Korea as a key aspect of the modernization project. Also, new jet planes capable of carrying nuclear weapons were brought in from Okinawa. On January 28, 1958, the UNC confirmed that 280 mm atomic cannons and air-to-air Honest John missiles had been introduced. In 1959 nuclear weapons for the Air Force were also

⁷-Choi Cheol-Young, "Nambuk kunsajök habüi-wa Han'guk chôngjôn hyöpchông-üi hyoryök," *Sônggyungwan pöphak*, 16, No. 2 (2004), p. 495.

deployed in South Korea. Matador missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons 1,100 kilometers, i.e. into North Korea, China and the Soviet Union, were also brought in.

In 1961 Mace missiles with a range of 1,800 kilometers were introduced. In order to prevent an attack from North Korea, from 1964-66 atomic demolition munitions (“atomic mines”) were brought in. The infantry unit “Nike Hercules,” equipped with nuclear warheads, was also stationed at this time to suggest that, if war broke out, nuclear weapons would immediately be used. In 1973-74, large-scale field artillery pieces were placed in the front areas south of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) to be ready for an attack against North Korea. Although this forward defense strategy put less emphasis on nuclear weapons than previous operational plans did, the nuclear weapons that were moved to the rear areas in 1975 remained stored just 55-80 kilometers from the DMZ. In case of war, those weapons would play the role of a tripwire, along with the American troops north of Seoul, in guaranteeing automatic intervention.⁸

While these rearmaments took place, following the withdrawal of Chinese troops from North Korea in 1958 the main issue within the MAC became the withdrawal of American troops from South Korea. Already at the 77th MAC meeting, convened on July 28, 1957, the Korean People’s Army/Chinese People’s Army (KPA/CPV) had requested a withdrawal.⁹ The KPA/CPV regarded those troops as the major obstacle to

⁸- Jonsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 19-20, 21; Kim, *op. cit.*, 2003(b), pp. 79-80, 91: “Chuhan migun-gwa haekchölyög-tü pyönhwa,” in Kim and Cho, (eds.), *Chuhan migun: Yöksa, chaengchöm, chönman* (2003(c)), pp. 106, 108, 110, 111-112; Kukpangbu, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁹- The KPA/CPV had originally three North Korean and two Chinese officers but since late 1954 there were four North Korean officers and one Chinese officer. From Jonsson, *ibid.*, p. 21. Considering that China and the United States were opponents during the Korean War, it is likely that the opinion to an equal extent reflected the opinions of North Korea and China.

reunification.

Troop withdrawals were requested six times in 1958, seven times in 1959 and five times in 1960-1961. At the 93rd MAC meeting, held on January 3, 1959, the North asserted that the American troops obstructed reunification. This argument was repeated at three meetings held in 1960 and one convened in 1968. The South rejected a troop withdrawal at the 81st MAC meeting, held on February 25, 1958, by claiming that it was not an issue for discussion in the Commission. This argument was repeated at two meetings held in 1960 and two convened in 1961. At the 88th meeting, held on October 27, 1958, the South argued that a troop withdrawal should be discussed at a high-level political conference. When the 103rd meeting was held on June 10, 1959, the South repeated its claim and argued that the MAC did not have the authority to discuss the issue. It was clarified that the troops were stationed to defend South Korea and would remain as long as there was an invasion threat. The former argument was repeated once in 1961 and once again in 1969, while the latter was repeated once each in 1962 and 1969.¹⁰

During the 1960s, the number of armistice violations rose. The UNC recorded 88 provocations from the North against the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) in 1965 and 80 in 1966, but 784 in 1967 and 985 in 1968. Most of these incidents occurred along the part of the MDL controlled by the United States Army. Altogether 81 American soldiers were killed during the 1960s. However, North Korea's policy to force a withdrawal of the American troops failed. Instead, it strengthened South Korea's and the United States' will to defend the South. Notably, the former advisor to the UNC/MAC, James Munhang Lee (2004) argues that the main reason for North Korea's failure to achieve national reunification by taking over South Korea, either militarily or politically, was the

¹⁰-Jonsson, *ibid.*, pp. 95, 103, 104, 105-106, 130-131, 583, 584, 585, 586, 598, 602.

presence of the American forces. It is virtually impossible to determine whether Lee's opinion is correct or not, but the American forces were a very important factor in capability aggregation.

While most incidents did not spawn fears of war, a few did - particularly North Korea's seizure of the intelligence vessel USS Pueblo on January 23, 1968. The United States government chose to handle the Pueblo incident through negotiations rather than military retaliation, not least since the country was involved in a war in Vietnam which it could not expect to win. Also the assassination attempt of South Korean President Park Chung-hee (1963-1979) on January 21 caused great tension. The American scholar Mitchell B. Lerner (2002) quotes an anonymous general who, in an article in the August 16, 1968 *New York Times* regarding the assassination attempt, claimed "An infuriated ROK [Republic of Korea] population demanded retaliation, and only extreme American pressure prevented North Korean President Kim Il-sung from sparking a second Korean War." "Few people," recalled an American general, "realize how close we came to war on January 21."

The above-mentioned autonomy-security trade-off derived from the asymmetrical alliance became apparent in this case, but the fact that American pressure successfully prevented South Korea from retaliating after the Blue House raid must in retrospect be regarded as very fortunate, since retaliation would inevitably have raised tension. Additionally, as James Munhang Lee (1971) points out, war was prevented because the signatory powers of the 1953 Armistice Agreement wanted to maintain the status quo, not start a new war.¹¹ Considering the great risks that

¹¹-Jonsson, *ibid.*, pp. 10, 135, 145, 198, 204, 199, 233-234, 529; James Munhang Lee, *Han'guk t'ongil munje-e issô-sô kunsâ chôngjôn wiwônhoe-ga kajinân yôk'har-e kwanhan yôn'gu* (Seoul: Hanyang taehakkyo taehakwôn, 1971), p. 15; *Pammunjom, Korea* (Baltimore: American Literary Press, Inc., 2004), pp. 60, 257; Mitchell B. Lerner, *The Pueblo Incident: A Spy Ship and the Failure of American Foreign Policy* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 60, 249: fn. 46. Second quotation has original quotation marks. Kim

renewed warfare inevitably would have caused, the wish to maintain the status quo can be regarded as more vital to maintaining peace than the presence of the American forces in this case. There can be no doubt that the rearmaments had given rise to mutual fears and thus encouraged restraint, but it is plausible that security was no greater than it had been when the vicious circle began, as was the case during the first post-war years and as is predicted by the security dilemma theory.

In the late 1960s, the United States was struggling with the growing problem of opposition to the Vietnam War, inflation caused by its huge war expenditures, and the weakening of the American dollar. In order to overcome these difficulties, on July 25, 1969 President Richard Nixon (1969-1974) launched the Nixon doctrine, which sought to make Asian countries more responsible for their own defense. Henceforth, American support would be selective and limited. For South Korea, the autonomy-security trade-off reappeared. In 1970-1971, the Seventh Infantry Division and three Air Force airplane battalions, totalling 20,000 men, were withdrawn in spite of passionate opposition from South Korea. The number of troops fell from 63,000 men in 1969 to 43,000 in 1971. One reason for the South's opposition was that the Mutual Defense Treaty does not guarantee automatic American commitment but merely prescribes that the United States government "would act to meet the danger in accordance with its constitutional processes." The average number of troops during the period 1956-1968 had been around 60,000 men.

In 1971, President Park claimed in his New Year's address that the reduction of American troops made it necessary to emphasize self-reliance in national defense. Consequently, whereas previously economic reconstruction was prioritized ahead of national defense, the two targets now began to be pursued simultaneously. Since President Nixon already in

Il-sung was not president but premier in 1968.

1969 at a meeting with President Park had emphasized the need for South Korean self-reliance, the announcement was probably carefully considered in advance. It was followed by the establishment of a defense tax in 1975. While rearmaments also took place outside the South Korea-United States alliance, from 1971-77 the U.S. provided \$1.5 billion in assistance to modernize the South Korean armed forces.

The American troops issue strongly affected the first inter-Korean dialogue, held from 1971-73. Following the announcement of the July 4 Joint Communiqué in 1972, which expressed the belief that national reunification should take place without external interference and peacefully, transcending differences in ideas, ideologies and systems, North Korea argued that since the two Koreas had agreed to reunify peacefully without foreign intervention, there was no excuse for the American troops to remain. Instead, they should withdraw immediately. However, South Korea rejected the demand to withdraw the American forces, which in the South was a taboo issue, and thus North Korea broke up the plenary session of the South-North Coordinating Committee that had begun in October 1972 at the sixth meeting on August 28, 1973, using the Korean Central Intelligence Agency's abduction of opposition leader Kim Dae-jung in Tokyo as an excuse.¹²

The KPA/CPV continued to raise the American troops issue at MAC meetings. Once each year in 1970, 1971 and 1972, the North requested troop withdrawals. In 1973 the demand was made three times and then once each year in 1981, 1982 and 1983. At the 305th MAC meeting on September 8, 1970 the North again claimed that the presence of American

¹²-Jonsson, *ibid.*, pp. 253, 254, 257-258; Kim, *op. cit.*, 2003(b), pp. 85-86, 87: table 2.1, 89, 90, 97: *op. cit.*, 2003(c), p. 111; Kukpangbu, *op. cit.*, p. 42; William J., Taylor Jr., Jennifer A. Smith and Michael J. Mazarr, "U.S. Troop Reductions from Korea, 1970-1990," *Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (Summer/Fall 1990), pp. 260-261. Original quotation marks.

forces was the reason reunification had not been accomplished. If the troops had been withdrawn, they claimed, Korea would already have reunified. At the 332nd MAC meeting held on September 7, 1972 and the 340th meeting convened on June 28, 1973 the South again argued that troop withdrawal was not an issue to be raised by the Commission.

The greatest cause of concern since the formation of the South Korea-United States alliance was the troop withdrawal policy pursued by President Jimmy Carter (1977-1981). According to American scholars William J. Taylor Jr., Jennifer A. Smith and Michael J. Mazarr (1990), the troop reduction plan was “the result of his desire to avoid a loss of control over the extent of U.S. [United States] involvement in another Asian conflict and to reflect public opinion about U.S. troops in Korea, even to the detriment of prudent defense planning in Northeast Asia.” Previously, on August 21, 1976, the UNC had made a massive demonstration of military strength by bringing more than 100 soldiers and engineers in 23 American and South Korean vehicles into Panmunjom to simply cut a disputed tree in the area, leaving only a three meter stump. Air support was provided by 27 helicopters. The operation took place following the North’s killing of two American soldiers on August 18 (“axe-murder”) but did not face any North Korean reaction, indicating that the American forces had prevented a dangerous situation from escalating further.

On March 9, 1977, President Carter promised a complete withdrawal of troops in 1978-1982. At this time, the American withdrawal from Vietnam and the communization of Vietnam in 1975 had already caused security concerns for the South Korean government. A plan to withdraw the troops within the period 1978-1982 was proclaimed on May 5. The Korean government was officially informed on July 26 at the tenth Security Consultative Meeting but had not been consulted in advance. Taylor, Smith and Mazarr (1990) claim that the Carter administration publicly gave two main reasons for the troop withdrawal. First, admin-

istration officials thought that it was not in the interest of China or the Soviet Union to “encourage or support actions which would raise the risk of war on the Korean Peninsula.” Second, South Korea was both economically and militarily capable of assuming more responsibility for its own defense.¹³

Nonetheless, due to the South Korean government’s strong opposition as well as fierce domestic resistance from many in the United States, including high-ranking officials, the plan was not implemented. However, the main reason for the cancellation was a report by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) claiming that North Korea’s military force was much stronger than expected. In July 1978, President Carter announced that the withdrawal would be held in abeyance after it had become known from intelligence work that North Korea had many more tanks and pieces of artillery than was previously known and its ground forces had reached 680,000 men, up from 485,000. North Korea had a two-to-one advantage in the former case and for the first time had more men under arms than South Korea.

On February 9, 1979, President Carter stated that the withdrawal would be temporarily deferred. Later, on July 20, he officially declared that the withdrawal plan had been suspended until 1981. Referencing the CIA report, the president claimed that tensions on the Korean Peninsula would have to be reduced before stability could be sufficiently assured to allow for a reduction of American troops and pointed to the expansion of Soviet military power in Asia and the need to reassure allies of the United States regarding its commitment to the region as a whole. In 1978, only 3,000 soldiers had left. The number of nuclear weapons had fallen from

¹³–Jonsson, *ibid.*, pp. 263-264, 293-294, 296, 301-302, 332, 333, 604, 607, 608, 610, 624, 626, 628; Kim, *ibid.*, 2003(b), pp. 85, 93-94: *ibid.*, 2003(c), p. 112; Park, *op. cit.*, 2004(a), p. 12; Taylor, Smith and Mazarr, *ibid.*, pp. 264, 266, 270, 272. Second quotation has original quotation marks.

more than 700 to around 250. The average number of troops was 42,200 men in the 1970s and 41,600 men in the 1980s.¹⁴

As was the case after the 1968 assassination attempt on President Park, the autonomy-security trade-off became apparent when the United States again restrained South Korea from retaliatory actions following the Rangoon bombing on October 9, 1983, an attack that aimed to assassinate President Chun Doo-hwan (1981-88) but instead killed four South Korean cabinet ministers and 13 other high-ranking dignitaries. At the 422nd MAC meeting held on October 31, the North Koreans complained that South Korean forces were put on alert and the South Koreans openly talked about retaliation. According to the American scholar C. Kenneth Quinones (2001), many South Koreans, including President Chun, were ready to risk war to get revenge. The United States restrained the president from taking action by reminding him that it controlled the ammunition, bombs and fuel needed for such an action and saying that the United States-Republic of Korea Mutual Defense Treaty would not apply, since it only obligated support in the case of an external attack. Again, it must be regarded as very fortunate that no retaliation took place, since tensions would inevitably have risen as a result.

Troop reductions reemerged as a contested issue in the 1990s, causing the autonomy-security trade-off to reappear. In the late 1980s, at a time when the Cold War had just ended, the U.S. Congress attempted to readjust military power and curtail military expenditures by adopting the July 1989 Nunn-Warner Amendment which altered the budget to reduce the number of troops in East Asia. In accordance with the Nunn-Warner Amendment, in April 1990 the Department of Defense established the "East Asia Strategic Initiative," a program aimed at re-

¹⁴-Jonsson, *ibid.*, p. 291; Kim, *ibid.*, 2003(b), pp. 90, 94-95; *ibid.*, 2003(c), pp. 112, 113; Kukpangbu, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51; Taylor, Smith and Mazarr, *ibid.*, pp. 270, 271-272.

ducing the number of American troops in South Korea over ten years while maintaining regional stability (Japan and the Philippines were also included). Within one to three years, 7,000 troops would be withdrawn. Depending on the outcome, the second stage would be implemented within three to five years. The final stage would be implemented within five to ten years on the condition that regional stability was not disturbed. The American troops' role would be transformed from leading to supportive. Subsequently, in March 1991 a South Korean general was appointed senior member in the MAC. In 1994, the operational command over the armed forces in peace-time was transferred to South Korea.

The East Asia Strategic Initiative faced strong opposition from the South Korean government, which was uncertain of North Korea's defense capabilities. However, in contrast to when President Carter announced his troop withdrawal plan, this time South Korean officials had been consulted from the beginning. Subsequently, from 1990-1992 7,000 troops were withdrawn as a measure allowing the United States to cut its budget deficit, but rising tensions over North Korea's nuclear program delayed any further reduction. Already in November 1991, in a clear sign of a more symmetrical relationship, the Korean and American ministers of defense had agreed to "delay the second phase of the Nunn-Warner USFK [United States Forces in Korea] troop withdrawals until the uncertainty and threat of North Korea's nuclear development disappears, and our national security is absolutely safeguarded." In July 1992, the American Department of Defense decided to postpone the second phase of troop reductions. In 1992, the number of troops was 36,450. During the 1990s, the average number of troops was 37,700.¹⁵

¹⁵-Jonsson, *ibid.*, p. 347; Kim, *ibid.*, 2003(b), pp. 91: table 2-2, 102-104; Kukpangbu, *ibid.*, pp. 42-43; C. Kenneth Quinones, "South Korea's Approaches to North Korea," in Park,

In February 1995, the United States released its “East Asia Strategic Report,” which suggested a freeze of the number of troops stationed in Asia at 100,000 due to the North Korean nuclear threat. In this report, the American wish to remain in the region was more clearly expressed than it had been in the preceding East Asia Strategic Initiative.

Later, on October 6, 2004, South Korea and the United States simultaneously announced that the original plan from July of the same year, which called for reducing the 37,500 American troops by 12,500 soldiers by late 2005, was to be extended to September 2008 in accordance with the wishes of the South. However, the Tayōnjang Rocket forces and equipment of the Second Army Division would remain to protect the capital region. At this time the United States was working to relocate troops abroad, but again, in a clear sign of a more symmetric alliance than previously, the plan was established in cooperation with South Korea, which had been informed in June 2004. Of the troops in South Korea, 3,600 soldiers had in August 2004 been dispatched to Iraq in line with President George Bush’s (2001-2009) “strategic flexibility” concept of dispatching forces in Korea elsewhere, but altogether the plan called for 5,000 troops to be withdrawn during 2004. This concept caused serious disagreement since the Koreans feared that it might lead them to get involved in other regional conflicts, such as a confrontation in the Taiwan Strait. Eventually, it was agreed that South Korea would respect the necessity for strategic flexibility of the American forces, while the United States would respect the South Korean position that it would not get involved in any regional conflict against the will of the Korean

Kyung-Ae and Kim, Dalchoong (eds.), *Korean Security Dynamics In Transition* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 31; Scott Snyder, *Pursuing a Comprehensive Vision for the U.S.-South Korea Alliance* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2009), p. 4; Suh, Jae-Jung, “Transforming the U.S.-ROK Alliance: Changes in Strategy, Military and Bases,” *Pacific Focus*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1 (April 2009), pp. 62-63; Taylor, Smith and Mazarr, *ibid.*, pp. 279, 281. Original quotation marks.

people.

Another 3,000 soldiers would be withdrawn in 2005 and 2,000 in 2006, followed by 2,500 in the third stage from 2007-2008. Ultimately, the number of troops was to be cut down to 25,000 by 2009. However, in April 2008 at the summit meeting between Presidents George Bush and Lee Myung-bak the two countries decided to freeze the planned troop reductions at 3,500 shy of this goal, so the number of soldiers remained at 28,500.¹⁶ Considering that the plan in 2004 was to strengthen the remaining troops' fighting power by reorganizing the Second Army Division and investing \$11 billion by the end of 2006 to elevate fighting power, it is hard to believe that this reduction in any way affected the ability to deter an attack from North Korea. Unsurprisingly, North Korea still regarded the American troops as the main obstacle to unification on its own terms and wanted to sign a bilateral peace treaty with the United States to force a troop withdrawal. Meanwhile, in 2007, 77 percent of South Koreans supported the stationing of American forces.¹⁷ Clearly, the general opinion was that the troops actively contributed to maintaining peace.

¹⁶ - The author has found no explicit explanation of why the two countries decided to freeze the reduction of troops. However, in the April 19, 2008 joint press conference with President George W. Bush, President Lee Myung-bak referred to a "twenty-first century strategic alliance." At Camp David, the two presidents announced the establishment of a "strategic alliance for the twenty-first century" (original quotation marks). From Snyder, *ibid.*, 2009, pp. 2, 7.

¹⁷ - Jonsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 400, 414, 467; Kim, *op. cit.*, 2003(b), pp. 91: table 2-2, 104: "Hanbando-tŭi 'kin p'yŏnghwa'-wa Hanmi tongmaeng: [Samwiilch'e+1] kujo-tŭi hyŏngsŏng-gwa pyŏn-hwa kŭri-go chŏnmang," *Kukpang chŏngch'aek yŏn'gu* 24, No. 3 (Fall 2008), p. 34; *Kukpang Chŏndŏl*, "Chuhanmigun 3tan'gye kanch'uk 2008nyŏn kkaji yŏnjang: tayŏnjang rok'et pudae challyu, 2sadan changbi-do tugi-ro" (November 2004), pp. 28-29; "Hyŏmnyŏk-chŏk chaju kukpang kyehoek-tŭng Mich'ŭk sŏlttŭk chuhyo" (November 2004), pp. 28-29; Suh, *op. cit.*, pp. 64, 72, 78.

The Peace-keeping Role of the American Forces

The above account lends credibility to the view expressed by the Ministry of Defense (2002) that the American troops have contributed to preventing war by establishing a joint South Korean-American fighting force and playing the role of a strategic “stabilizer” and “balancing power” in Northeast Asia. This opinion is in accordance with both capability aggregation and the significance of alliances as symbols of credibility or resolve. In addition, in terms of the intelligence power necessary to detect a North Korean attack in advance, the troops have played a decisive role in increasing national security. Reconnaissance satellites and U-2 reconnaissance planes supervise the skies around the Korean Peninsula 24 hours a day. In 2003, intelligence gathering on North Korea by the local CIA section and a supportive agency under the South Korean Ministry of Defense used intelligence satellites to monitor the North’s military movements and take photos of them. The American troops investigate intelligence through their ground bases. An Air Force reconnaissance unit operates using U-2 planes. The joint Combined Intelligence Operations Center operated by the Joint Intelligence Staff Unit is the core of American-South Korean intelligence work that analyzed the moves by the North Korean armed forces. The mere awareness in North Korea of the American intelligence capacity has helped to prevent war.

On the other hand, the South Korean scholar Cho Seung-Ryoul (2003) argues that the Korean military has been too dependent upon the American forces’ early warning functions and intelligence assets. In 2003, in terms of Human Intelligence and Public Intelligence the military was self-reliant, but in the case of such scientific areas as Signal Intelligence and Imagery Intelligence it was highly dependent on the American forces. All strategic intelligence, 99 percent of signal intelligence, 98 percent of imagery intelligence and 70 percent of tactical intelligence from North

Korea was provided by the American forces. Especially intelligence satellites, U-2 reconnaissance planes and equipment for investigating intelligence were valuable strengths that could not be purchased. In the case of imagery intelligence, the South Korean Air Force's reconnaissance plane RF-4C was only capable of photographing and monitoring rear areas located a certain distance from the Military Demarcation Line. In 2006, the situation had not changed at all. The South Korean journalist Kim P'il-chae then wrote that the Korean military relied upon the American forces for all strategic intelligence, more than 70 percent of tactical intelligence, 99 percent of signal intelligence and 98 percent of imagery intelligence.

According to the South Korean journalist Park Pong-hyŏn (2004), as long as the 37,500 American troops remain they fill the loopholes of the Korean Air Force and Navy through the superior intelligence and reconnaissance capacities enabled by their U-2 reconnaissance planes and satellites. Consequently, their contributions to stability on the Korean Peninsula through enhanced intelligence capacity should not be underestimated. The American forces have a plan enabling them to confirm, on the basis of intelligence, signs of war four to 48 hours in advance, helping to prevent war. Finally, in accordance with the above account, the South Korean scholar Kim Woosang (2009) writes that while military support from the United States has been strengthened, self-determination in national security has to a certain extent been sacrificed in the asymmetric relationship.¹⁸

In the case of military equipment, Cho (2003) records that in

¹⁸- Cho, Seong-Ryoul, "Chuhan migun-ŭi anbojŏk yŏk'hal-gwa yŏnhap pangwi t'aese," in Kim and Cho, *Chuhan migun: Yŏksa, chaengchŏm, chŏnmang* (Seoul: Hanul, 2003), pp. 183-184, 191; Kim, "Chuhanmigun ch'ŏlsu-nŭn imi sijaktoego itta: ch'ŏmdan changbi, pyŏngnyŏk sarajigo chaejŏng pudam-gwa Pukhan wihyŏm-man nŭrŏ ganŭn de," *Han'guk nondan* (December 2006), pp. 65, 68; Kim, *op. cit.*, 2009, pp. 68, 78; Kukpangbu, *op. cit.*, pp. 46, 54; Park, *op. cit.*, 2004(a), pp. 17, 19, 133. Original quotation marks.

2003 the American Eighth Army was equipped with more than 140 brand-new M1 tanks and 170 Bradley armoured vehicles as well as over 70 AH-64 helicopters equipped with 30 independent 155 mm howitzers and 30 rockets and guided missiles, etc. Consequently, it was able to successfully implement its tasks regardless of the circumstances. The American Air Force possessed more than 100 planes, including 70 brand-new fighters such as F-16s and more than 20 A-10 anti-tank planes and U-2s, enabling operations regardless of weather conditions. In 2003, the Ministry of Defense estimated the total American troops' combat equipment and maintenance costs at \$14 billion. The total price of the ground troops' equipment was around \$17.5 billion.

Although Park (2004) emphasizes the great importance of the American forces, he also argues that South Korea has the capacity to fill the gap in terms of national defense if the U.S. troops leave. Since South Korea is superior to North Korea militarily and has an economy about 30 times larger, Park argues the American troops are not needed as a tripwire. Their role as a deterrent against the North Korean threat no longer exists. In contrast, the American scholars Catherine Boye, Mike Bosack and Russ Gottwald argue (2010) that "...it would be prohibitively expensive for Korea on its own to maintain a military capable of deterring North Korea."¹⁹ In brief, the American troops have contributed to maintaining peace through capability aggregation by establishing a joint South Korean-American fighting force, providing superior intelligence capabilities to augment that fighting force, and serving as a force that both countries regard to be of the utmost importance for the South's defense.

Finally, it should be noted that the Ministry of Defense (2002) writes that exercises such as Ŭlchi Focus Lens (UFL) and Reception,

¹⁹- Catherine Boye, Mike Bosack, and Russ Gottwald, "Assumptions Underlying the U.S.-ROK Alliance," *Pacific Forum CSIS, Issues & Insights*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Honolulu: February 2010), p. 3; Cho, *ibid.*, pp. 167-168, 192; Park, *ibid.*, 2004(a), p. 48.

Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (RSOI) have given the South Korean military opportunities to learn to use advanced technologies that would have been difficult to acquire by themselves. The purpose of UFL, which has been implemented annually since 1976, is to improve the ability to lead and pursue war and to master wartime procedures. The purpose of RSOI, held annually since 1994, is to improve the coordination of American and South Korean troops through training in a war-case scenario. In 2006 the exercise involved more than 100,000 troops. Another exercise, Fowl Eagle, has been conducted annually since 1961 and is designed to display determination and complete preparedness for joint action in order to prevent war. Other exercises include "Team Spirit," which in 1980 involved 160,000 soldiers altogether. In 1981, the exercise involved more than 61,500 American and 170,000 South Korean troops. In 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1986 respectively, the figures exceeded 160,000, 188,000 and, on the last two occasions, 200,000 troops. In 1987, the figure was 200,000. The figures indicate that a significant portion of the South Korean armed forces should have acquired new military skills through the RSOI and Team Spirit.

An opinion similar to that of the Ministry of Defense was expressed in 2001 by General Thomas A. Schwartz, then Commander-in-Chief of the UNC and the United States Forces Korea, who wrote: "Each of these annual exercises is critical to achieve war-fighting readiness." He regards the exercises as "world-class exercises." The exercises integrated active and reserve forces deployed on the Korean Peninsula. A major objective of each exercise was to incorporate logistics at the strategic and operational levels. The exercises maximized simulation technology along with air, sea and ground maneuvers to allow for optimal evaluation of war plans.²⁰ Since peace has been maintained, the opinions expressed by

²⁰-Jonsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 330, 331, 332, 334, 335, 486; Kukpangbu, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 60-61;

Schwartz are reasonable.

Conclusions

The American troops in South Korea have actively contributed to maintaining peace in three mutually reinforcing ways: the establishment of a joint South Korean-American fighting force, the provision of superior intelligence capabilities, and their role as a force that both countries regard to be of the utmost importance for the South's defense. Firstly, the legal basis for the American troops in South Korea is the Mutual Defense Treaty from 1953. The troops have contributed to capability aggregation which has made troop reductions a contested issue. The American troop presence itself is also a long-contested issue in inter-Korean relations. While the opinion of South Korea and the United States is that the troops are essential for the South's defense, North Korea's view is that they hinder reunification.

Troop reductions implemented in 1970-1971, 1990-1992 and 2004-2008 created tensions, but on the two latter occasions the reductions reflected a more symmetrical relationship, indicating that South Korea's bargaining power against the United States had become stronger. President Jimmy Carter's (1977-1981) policy to withdraw the troops caused the most concern, and it was cancelled due to strong opposition in both countries and an underestimation of North Korea's armed forces. Regarding the autonomy-security trade-off, the United States prevented South Korea from retaliating against North Korea following assassination attempts on South Korean presidents in 1968 and 1983. U.S. military

Thomas Schwartz, "United Nations Command/Combined Forces Command/United States Forces Korea Strength through Friendship," *Han'guk kunsu*, No. 13 (July 2001), pp. 18, 22.

power was mobilized when a disputed tree was cut in Panmunjom in 1976, again preventing a dangerous situation from escalating.

Secondly, although South Korea's dependence on U.S. intelligence power has been excessive, its contribution to maintaining peace cannot be overestimated.

Thirdly, while rearmaments violated the Paragraph 13(d) of the Armistice Agreement, they nevertheless strengthened South Korea's defense and spawned mutual fears of the consequences of renewed warfare. The power of symbols of credibility and resolve should not be underestimated. On the other hand, given the security dilemma, it is not clear whether security actually has been enhanced, even though the perceived level of security has apparently risen.

▪ Article Received: 3/31 ▪ Reviewed: 5/25 ▪ Revised: 5/31 ▪ Accepted: 6/14

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