

Six Party Talks and Bush's Military Option

by

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for

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Six nations' diplomats will soon gather in dusty, hot Beijing for "talks" about the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. For the first time in history, representatives of China, Japan, Russia and the United States – the world's major powers - will gather with representatives of North and South Korea. The last great powers meeting about Korea took place at Potsdam, Poland in July 1945. At the time, China, Russia and the United States were allied against Japan, and Korea was not represented. The "Allies" met to decide how to disarm Japan and to restore Korea's independence..

Much has changed since that meeting more than a half century ago. After fifty years of Cold War estrangement, Moscow and Beijing are again on good terms with Washington, and much better terms with Tokyo. This time, the problem is a divided Korea, not a defeated Japan. At issue is North Korea's nuclear disarmament, not the disarming of Japan's conventional weapons. Because of North Korea's new nuclear capability, the situation now has not been so close to war since the Korean War Armistice was signed in July 1953.

Remember the Fall of 2002

Convening six party talks has eased the escalation of tensions in Northeast Asia, at least briefly. But we would do well to recall the situation only one year ago. Prime Minister Koizumi's September 2002 summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il also briefly lowered regional tensions while exciting hopes that normalization of relations between Tokyo and Pyongyang was close at hand. Alas, these hopes collapsed into outrage and intensified distrust.

Washington experienced a similar reversal in October 2002. Observers cheered as a US diplomatic delegation headed for talks with North Korea. Within two weeks, hopeful expectations again abruptly reversed from hope to angry frustration after Pyongyang confirmed its new nuclear weapons program. Tensions quickly escalated. China's intervention and promotion of dialogue eventually halted the escalation, at least for the time being.

Realistic Expectations

Obviously, it would be premature to celebrate now. Rather, this is a time for candor and realism regarding the possible outcome of the six party talks. A half century of confrontation and mistrust haunts the participating nations and their relationships. A single diplomatic session cannot erase this troubled legacy. We need to keep in mind how quickly last year's hopes crumbled into the continuing anxiety over the new nuclear crisis. Also, we should recall the complexity of the bilateral US-North Korea nuclear talks of 1993-94. A diplomatic process that involves six nations will be much more complicated and prone to disruption.

It will require several layers of negotiation. First, hard liners and moderates in Washington and Pyongyang must debate one another concerning negotiating strategies, tactics and concessions. Then each of these capitals must engage their allies in equally candid discussions. Pyongyang must review its preferences with Beijing and Moscow. Washington will have to do like wise with Seoul and Tokyo. Only then can the six nations come together and begin their talks. Ultimately, six party talks may not solve anything.

“Other Steps”

“Speak softly, but carry a big stick.” US President Theodore Roosevelt a century ago used these words to describe his foreign policy. Today, President George W. Bush seems to be following this advice regarding the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula and the six party talks. President Bush continues to “speak softly.” Frequently he reminds the mass media that he “prefers a peaceful, diplomatic solution” to the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

Behind the President’s confident smile and reassuring words, he has ordered the US Defense Department to prepare “big sticks” in the event that diplomacy, or “speaking softly,” fails to disarm North Korea of its weapons of mass destruction. In a previous article, “Beyond Diplomacy - President Bush’s Military Option,” we reviewed the Bush Administration’s Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), reinforcement of US Forces Korea and North Korea’s reaction to these moves. Here we shift from looking to the past to attempting to predict the future. To do so, we will attempt to decipher the Bush Administration’s future intentions by scrutinizing its military contingency plans. As we do so, it is important to dispel any notions that the redeployment of US Forces in Korea, and South Korean criticism of this and US forces, suggests a waning of the US commitment to South Korea’s defense and a faltering of the US-South Korea alliance. If anything, the alliance continues to gain strength, both because of bilateral efforts to improve it as well as Pyongyang intensifying threat to peace in Northeast Asia.

As former Secretary of Defense William Perry recently reminded Americans, President John Kennedy once proclaimed, “Never negotiate from a position of fear, but never fear to negotiate.” President Bush’s retention and strengthening of his military option regarding the Korean Peninsula is consistent with half of President Kennedy’s advice. It remains to be seen whether Bush will ultimately adopt the second half of this advice. Dealing with North Korea from a position of strength, however, is absolutely essential for sustaining peace in Northeast Asia as well as for convincing North Korea to come to the negotiating table.

US Forces Korea Re-deployment

Last spring, several incorrect perceptions circulated in Seoul and beyond regarding the re-deployment of US military units in South Korea. One rumor tied the re-deployment to the present nuclear crisis. Another linked it to last winter’s anti-American demonstrations in South Korea. Yet another claimed that the Bush Administration was both rushing and virtually dictating the terms of the re-deployment. For a while, these inaccurate perceptions fanned the flames of anti-American sentiment and aroused Pyongyang’s suspicions.

For reasons still unclear, the administration of President Roh Moo-hyun did little to stifle these rumors. Actually, President Roh’s public remarks since he became president as well as during his president campaign, tended to fuel this speculation. Then on May 13, prior to his summit with President Bush, Roh told the *New York Times* regarding the timing of the redeployment that, “my hope is that this plan should be reconsidered when there is no more threat from the North Korean nuclear program and when our people as well as global businessmen would

fell no concern about our security.”

Less than one week later, the two presidents issued a joint statement that read, in part, “Concerning the proposed relocation of U.S. forces in Korea, the two presidents agreed to work out plans to consolidate U.S. forces ...” They also agreed that, “relocation of U.S. bases north of the Han River should be pursued, ...” They concluded that “the actual relocation would take place after the North Korean nuclear issues is resolved.” Roh’s comments prior to the summit, and the wording of the joint statement, sparked rumors that President Bush had forced a reluctant Roh to accept the re-deployment plan. Back in Seoul, President Roh encountered a storm of criticism.

The remarks of some active duty and former US military personnel contributed to the illusion that the re-deployment issue was tied to anti-American sentiment in South Korea. Their number was relatively small, but some of these individuals held highly visible public positions that amplified their personal views far beyond their actual influence on events. These persons tended to react personally to South Korean criticism of the US military, the clamor for revision of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and the occasional calls for the US to withdraw its forces from South Korea. Many of these Americans countered the criticism by voicing the sentiment that the South Korean public either express appreciation for the US military presence in South Korea, or else the US military should withdraw from South Korea. Such views further confused the situation.

Subsequent US-ROK negotiations and official public explanations early this summer, however, largely dispelled South Koreans’ concerns, but Pyongyang remains deeply suspicious of US intentions. Such an atmosphere is not conducive to productive diplomatic dialogue.

Agreements on Relocation

US-Korea negotiations regarding redeployment of USFK have a long history. In June, 1990, the United States agreed to relocate the headquarters for US Forces Korea from Yongsan in central Seoul to a new base south of Korea. The plan was to have been carried out by 1996 with South Korea paying the estimated \$9.5 billion cost. When the first nuclear crisis erupted in the spring of 1993, the plan was suspended.

The negotiations resumed in 2001 and proved to be generally cordial with both sides readily making concessions to each other. They produced the 2002 Land Partnership Plan (LLP). US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asian Affairs Richard Lawless visited Seoul in February 2003 to open a series of talks regarding the relocation of the US Forces Korea headquarters and US units from their present locations. A second round of talks followed in April and a bilateral agreement was announced on June 6.

The US-South Korea agreement, officially named the “Future of the US-ROK Alliance Policy Initiative,” clearly indicates both sides had exchanged important concessions. The allies agreed to “the relocation of Yongsan at an early date and the consolidation of U.S. forces in Korea around key hubs, ...” Specific plans for the relocation are to be completed by September, 2003. The South Korea government agreed to begin purchasing land for the new bases in 2004. The

relocation will take several years and be carried out in two phases. In phase one, US troops north of Seoul are to be consolidated into two large, existing camps. Next, these combat units will be moved to new bases south of Seoul and South Korean troops will replace them north of Seoul. This phase of the redeployment will take several years to complete. In a subsequent agreement dated June 30, South Korea agreed to the relocation most of US Forces Korea personnel from Yongsan in Seoul to a new base, yet to be built, south of Seoul near Osan Air Force Base. The headquarters of the UN, Combined Forces and US Forces Korea commands will remain in Seoul at the greatly reduced Yongsan compound. This will facilitate close coordination between these commands at South Korea's Ministry of National Defense which is located nearby.

At present, there are about 35,141 US military personnel in South Korea, 27,019 army and 8,122 Air Force divided among 85 installations. The US Army has 12,780 soldiers scattered in numerous bases north of Seoul, another 3,646 personnel at the Yongsan Compound in Seoul (more than 10 percent of the total US military personnel in South Korea), and the remaining 10,593 soldiers are divided among many small bases south of Seoul. Air Force personnel are concentrated at Osan and Kunsan Air Force Bases, both south of Seoul.

Reasons for the Relocation

Nurturing suspicions both in Seoul and Pyongyang was the reluctance of the US side to publicly and fully explain its intentions. The US Defense Department and USFK commanders, only after mounting criticism of the USFK relocation plan, reluctantly revealed their reasoning. Initially, USFK commanders explained that their intent was to enhance the security of US Forces Korea from possible terrorists' attacks. When huge anti-American demonstrations erupted in South Korea late in 2002, the USFK command shifted to accenting the positive consequences for USFK relations with the Korean public. Not until June 2003, did the Defense Department officially and publicly explain that the redevelopment is tied to altering the USFK role in Northeast Asia. As the relocation is implemented, South Korea is expected to increase its defense burden and assume primary responsibility for Seoul's defense. The linkage between South Korea's defense and US forces in Japan as well as Japanese Self Defense Forces will be accentuated. Simultaneously, USFK will assume a broader role in the region's over all defense, including the countering of terrorism and the coordination of the interdiction of North Korea's potential shipments of weapons of mass destruction.

General Thomas Schwartz, Commander in Chief of the United Nations/Combined Forces and US Forces Korea Commands, in March 2002 partially explained to the US Congress reasons for the relocation. Seoul's expansion northward into areas previously used for USFK training exercises was undermining his forces' combat readiness, he explained. Redeployment, he continued, was necessary to move his combat units to less densely populated areas. Secondly, the general continued, the dispersal of his forces into several small army posts made them more difficult to defend against terrorist attacks. Reducing the number of military installations from the current 85 would, he claimed, enhance their security. Not addressed was the fact that concentrating combat units in a smaller number of military installations would make them better targets for North Korea's rapid fire, long range artillery and ballistic missiles.

A year later in March 2003, UN/Combined Forces/US Forces Commander General Leon LaPorte confirmed his predecessor's reasoning to the US Congress. LaPorte pointed to the beneficial impact that the redeployment would have on US Forces relations with the Korean public. The general told Congress that the US-South Korea Land Partnership Program (LPP) signed in November 2002 would return half of the USFK installations to the Korean government to use as it wished by reducing the number of US installations from 85 to 23. Most importantly, USFK presence in Seoul and the surrounding region would become less intrusive, the general emphasized.

General LaPorte also pointed to the beneficial consequences for US Forces. The redeployment would place US Forces in new facilities, all paid for by the South Korean government. Housing for US military families would be greatly increased from its current level of 10 percent for all US military families in Korea to about 70 percent, which is the level in Europe and Japan.

Both generals, however, did not comment on the potential adverse impact of USFK relocation on their primary mission - the defense of South Korea. This and confusion over the redeployment's timing gave the opposition Grand National Party an opportunity to criticize the redeployment. About 135 members of the National Assembly declared their opposition to the plan. They reasoned that the redeployment indicated a waning US commitment to defend South Korea. Also, they expressed the concern that North Korea would reach a similar conclusion. President Roh Moo Hyun's effort to straddle the issue only compounded the confusion. While declaring himself in favor of US Forces Korea remaining in South Korea, he also urged that the redeployment be delayed to avoid any appearance that South Korea's "security would be jeopardized ..." Pyongyang listened attentively.

Only then, on May 5, did General LaPorte address publicly the redeployment's impact on the future role of USFK. He admitted that the redeployment would alter fundamentally the mission of his forces. Since the Korean War, US forces had performed the role a "trip wire" in the event of a North Korean invasion. Not only were US combat forces deployed to block a North Korean invasion, they were positioned in "harms' way" to ensure unrestricted US Congressional support to counter any North Korean invasion. Commander LaPorte labeled the "trip wire" concept obsolete and unworthy of USFK. Instead, the general called for a new "front line partnership" between US and South Korean forces.

The subsequent May Bush-Roh summit and the June 5 "Future of the US-ROK Alliance Policy Initiative" agreement outlined a compromise. Planning for the redeployment would go forward, but the movement of US combat forces would be done on a gradual, phased basis. Most military personnel now posted in Yongsan, Seoul would be relocated to a new military complex south of Seoul as soon as possible, but the major headquarters commands would remain in Seoul. The South Korean government would pay the bill for the move, but the US would provide \$11 billion in military equipment upgrades for South Korean forces. Two weeks later, the governor of Kyonggi Province announced plans to build a new home base for US Forces Korea in the vicinity of Osan Air Force base south of Seoul. The new "English Village" would be erected at a cost of \$3.3 billion. It will house 70,000 families, provide English language schools from grammar

school through university, and other collateral facilities, including a new golf course and additional recreational facilities.

Not until Defense Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz's visit early in June was USFK's new role outlined in some detail. He claimed the redeployment gives USFK "greater, immediate deterrent abilities." He also tied Korea's defense to the swift movement of US forces in Japan, "If a war broke out, they (US Marines on Okinawa) could come within two days; the U.S. forces in Okinawa are very different from before." He concluded that, "As we increase our fighting power to contain North Korea, South Korea can and must increase its defense spending – ... I believe that more of the burdens of defense can be transferred to them (the South Koreans). US Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and his South Korean counterpart confirmed these various understandings in a joint statement issued on June 27, 2003.

For the most part, the South Korean government and public appear reconciled to the redeployment. The US Defense Department and USFK eventual willingness to negotiate with the South Korean government, and to offer the South Korean people convincing reasons for the relocation, appear to have assuaged concerns south of the Demilitarized Zone. Pyongyang, on the other hand, remains deeply concerned.

Defense Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz concisely summarized US strategy on the Korean Peninsula in his June 2, 2003 speech in Seoul. He pointed to two principles, "First, deterrence remains a key objective of our common (US and South Korean) defense posture. To strengthen deterrence, we need to take advantage of new technology to counter North Korean asymmetric advantages. Second, the changes we make should help to sustain a strong alliance over the long run, by reducing unnecessary burdens on both sides and ensuring that the alliance will remain relevant far into the future." He emphasized that "modernization" of the US military commitment to South Korea would strengthen political support in the US for continuation of this commitment well into the foreseeable future. Referring to the "trip wire" concept current until recently, Wolfowitz claimed, "The real trip wire is the letter and spirit of our mutual defense treaty, backed up by the substance of our alliance and our strong military."

OPLANS

US military intentions regarding North Korea are reflected in the dynamics of US training exercises, according to former USFK Commander Thomas Schwartz. In March 2002, he told the US Congress that "training events exercise the 'real go-to-war' plans" of USFK, and characterized these plans as a "tornado in a closet." In other words, training exercises closely follow actual contingency plans for war. Although such "operational plans" (OPLAN) are highly classified, the outlines of several have become publicly available. Analysts furthermore have brought greater detail to these outlines by studying Ulchi Focus and Foal Eagle annual exercises. OPLAN are adjusted to accommodate changing circumstances. New intelligence assessments of an enemy's capabilities and the improving capabilities of the US and its allies require changes in the plans. Changing objectives can also alter OPLANS. But all OPLANS for the Korean Peninsula are based on two fundamental, unchanging considerations: geography, and the quick, decisive defeat of North Korea's military.

OPLAN /CONPLAN 5026 reportedly focuses on so-called “surgical strikes” aimed at specific targets like the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Facility and countering North Korea’s anticipated retaliation. The key to this plan is a swift air attack on a specific target using stealth F-117 fighter bombers and possibly stealth B-2 long range bombers. The bombardment would drop so-called “smart” bombs on a single target or a small number of targets. Cruise missiles launched from a submarine or surface naval vessel also might be used. Both the Clinton and Bush Administration ruled out surgical strikes on North Korea’s Yongbyon nuclear facility because they most likely would trigger massive armed retaliation from North Korea. Also, a highly radioactive target such as the nuclear spent fuel rods and reactor at Yongbyon could release deadly radioactive material into the atmosphere. Winds could then blow this deadly debris over Japan, and even as far as Canada and the United States.

OPLAN 5027 is the US-South Korean Combined Forces command (CFC) major war plan for the Korean Peninsula. It has been modified several times since 1994. The 1996 and 1998 revisions took into account Japan’s expanded supporting role as set forth in the US-Japan Expanded Defense Guidelines which the Japanese Diet approved in May 1999. In the 1998 revision, a senior US official reportedly explained that the goal would be to “abolish North Korea as a functioning state, end the rule of its leader Kim Jong Il, and reorganize the country under South Korean control.” OPLAN 5027’s revision in 2000, according to the South Korean government’s White Paper on Defense, increased significantly the number of US Forces expected to rush to South Korea’s defense in the event of a North Korean attack. In 2002, study began on modifications to adapt the plan to the Bush Administration’s doctrine of “pre-emptive counter proliferation strategy” which focuses on destroying North Korea’s weapons of mass destruction arsenal. The plan is also being adjusted to incorporate Theater Missile Defense (TMD), or an improved anti-ballistic missile capability and the upgrading and closer linking of US, South Korean and Japanese command and control, communications, intelligence, and logistics.

A new Operational Plan, OPLAN 5029, reportedly is being developed to deal with the situation on the Korean Peninsula in the event that the Kim Jong Il regime collapses. In August 1999, then USFK Commander General John Tillelli confirmed that the plan’s development was underway, but declined to provide details. The plan anticipates the possibility of an exodus of North Korean refugees into South Korea, China and possibly across the Sea of Japan (East Sea) to Japan. Food and medical supplies have been stock piled in South Korea to deal with such a situation. Also, the Japanese government has been asked to develop plans for quickly erecting refugee camps in Japan and to provide other humanitarian assistance. Also of concern is the political aftermath of a regime collapse in North Korea. One concern is that the subsequent power vacuum could spark a power struggle within North Korea’s military. OPLAN 5029 anticipates this and similar scenarios, and sets forth contingency plans for the response of South Korean and US forces.

A new OPLAN 5030 came to the public’s attention in May 2003, and was discussed briefly in July issue of *US News and World Report*. According to press reports, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld ordered US commanders to develop a new approach for dealing with North Korea. It is believed that the draft OPLAN calls for USFK to conduct military maneuvers that

would make North Korean commanders believe that an invasion is imminent. The apparent intent is not to trigger a war. Rather, the US and South Korean military exercises would be conducted in the hope of compelling North Korea to exhaust its war reserves of food and fuel, and to wear out faster its military equipment. Ultimately, North Korea's ability to revitalize its economy would be undermined. The plan remains highly classified.

“Tornado in A Closet”

A second Korean War would explode on the Korean Peninsula like a “tornado in a closet,” as a former commander of US Forces Korea exclaimed. Advance warning would come no more than 48 hours before an assault, and more likely only 24 hours in advance. Early on the morning of day one of the war, North Korean special operations forces would infiltrate into South Korea. Submarines and specially designed infiltration boats would land several hundred commandoes on South Korea's long, largely unguarded coast line. A prime target would be South Korea's nuclear power plants, communications and electric grid installations. Meanwhile, several hundred more commandoes would float low, beneath radar detection, and silently over the De-militarized Zone in vintage Polish built bi-planes. Once over South Korea, these small planes could re-start their engines and climb higher so that the commandoes could parachute into South Korea. Once on the ground, these heavily armed soldiers could disrupt communications, blow up bridges and create panic in and around Seoul.

That same day, a ferocious bombardment might greet the dawn. Thousands of rapid firing, long range artillery would bombard military installations, transportation hubs and communications centers in and around Seoul. Ballistic missiles would devastate military installations and urban areas not just in all areas of South Korea, but also across Japan. Only then would North Korea's million man army and its huge arsenal of armored vehicles roar south across the DMZ into South Korea. By then, thousands of South Korean, Americans and Japanese will have become victims of the second Korean War.

The allied response would be awesome and even more devastating. Within hours of North Korea's first bombardment, thousands of bombs will have fallen on Pyongyang, North Korea's other major urban areas and front line military installations. Long range B-52, B-1 and B-2 bombers from Guam would quickly spread the devastation. Jets fighter bombers from bases in South Korea and from the huge USS Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier would destroy North Korea's armor vehicles, transportation network, railroads and port facilities. Cruise missiles launched from US submarines, cruisers and destroyers would turn North Korea's multitude of underground fortifications into tombs and rubble. Meanwhile, Japanese Naval Self Defense Forces would blockade North Korea's primary ports to block the movement of men and material along the coast, and to prevent fuel and other supplies from reaching North Korean ports.

On day two, US and South Korean ground forces would concentrate on preventing North Korean forces from encircling Seoul and locating and killing North Korean commandoes. Once confident that Seoul would not become hostage to North Korean forces, the combined armies of South Korea and the US would prepare a counter offensive. By day three, US Marines from Okinawa will have arrived off North Korea's east coast. Circumstances - status of the fighting,

weather and logistical considerations - would determine the timing of the counter attack.

Current US-South Korea combined war plans call for a massive land and sea counter-offensive. A large allied army would attack northward through the central part of the DMZ. Simultaneously, US and South Korean Marines would land on North Korea's coasts and attack inland to prevent the retreating North Korean army from escaping northward. Within a matter of a few weeks, North Korean forces will have been destroyed and all of North Korea fallen to the US-South Korean Combined Forces counter-offensive.

The price of victory, however, will have been tremendous. Tens of thousands of lives, US commanders estimate, will have been lost in South and North Korea, as well as Japan. US civilians living in Korea and Japan also will have suffered casualties, and US Forces military personnel will have died and been maimed for life, along with their South Korean and Japanese colleagues in arms. North and South Korea's industrial and transportation infrastructure will have sustained horrendous damage. Commercial activity in Northeast Asia will have been thoroughly disrupted, adversely affecting commerce around the world. Incalculable and long term damage will have been done to the process of reconciliation between the two Koreas. Hopefully, China will have stayed out of the war.

Who Wants Another Korean War?

No government or people, not even Kim Jong Il's regime, want to repeat the Korean War. But the risk of another Korean War will remain high, and even escalate, the longer the current nuclear crisis and diplomatic impasse persists. The North Korean military's provocative challenges to South Korean naval patrols in the West Sea (Yellow Sea) along the Northern Limit Line have already triggered armed clashes in recent months. The North Korean air forces efforts to force a US reconnaissance aircraft to land in North Korea this past spring could have sparked a serious armed confrontation. Even Japan's Naval Self Defense Forces have clashed in recent years with suspicious North Korean ships near Japan's home islands.

If the soon to begin six party talks do not quickly set the stage for a "peaceful, diplomatic solution," tensions in Northeast Asia will resume their rapid upward spiral. A decision by President Bush to expand implementation of the Proliferation Strategy Initiative along North Korea's coasts could excite a highly provocative, possibly even "pre-emptive" armed response from North Korea. Given the current highly charged atmosphere in Northeast Asia, a relatively minor armed clash could explode beyond the ability of any government to contain short of war.

When dealing with North Korea, it is imperative to be realistic. On the one hand, this means that we must deal with North Korea from a position of strength, keep our military option on the table, and be prepared to follow through with military action. At the same time, we must be just as realistic about the probable consequences of the "military option." Ultimately, the only way nations have broken deadlocks like the one now confronting Washington and Pyongyang is to engage in diplomatic negotiations. President Bush thus far has kept all options on the table, except for diplomatic negotiations. At the same time, Kim Jong Il continues to build a nuclear arsenal.

Both sides have a responsibility to the international community to blink and find a way out of the corners into which they have placed themselves. Only then can there be hope of a diplomatic resolution. Otherwise, a second Korean War could become reality.