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WHY THE U.S. FORCES/KOREA PLAN MAKES SENSE

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, other Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today to discuss the extremely important subject of U.S. military forces in Korea and broader regional dynamics in East Asia and the Pacific. This extremely important part of the world frequently does not get the attention it deserves from American policymakers or the public, and this tendency has been exacerbated by the September 11 attacks as well as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I commend you for focusing on the topic and thank you for the opportunity to share my views.

The Pentagon and White House appear close to approving a plan to cut U.S. troop strength in Korea by one-third and to reposition southward most of those forces that remain. Many South Korean officials may not like this plan, but it appears they recognize that it is becoming U.S. policy and are not opposing it publicly.

Many in Korea and in this country see the proposed plan as a reflection of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's assumed desire to punish "old Asia" for the growing anti-Americanism of the South Korean public and the alleged left-leaning ways of the current Roh government. Since Mr. Rumsfeld was reported to have been pushing just this sort of plan long before it became overall administration policy, and before the ongoing military deployment in Iraq strengthened the case for the changes now proposed, this argument seems even more plausible to many.

I too am frequently concerned by Secretary Rumsfeld's style of alliance diplomacy. (Like many, I am also critical of the Bush administration's North Korea policy, which I would rate overall as a clear failure to date.) It is indeed possible that Secretary Rumsfeld finds the U.S.-South Korea alliance somewhat difficult to manage. What's more, in typical Rumsfeld fashion, he reportedly tried to make this plan a fait accompli a couple years ago--before the South Korean government, or even the rest of the Bush administration, had proper opportunity to consult with the Department of Defense. In addition, President Bush has not displayed his finest alliance management skills in regard to South Korea, going back to his first meeting with then-President Kim Dae Jung of South Korea. Kim favored a flexible policy of engagement known as the "sunshine policy" that Mr. Bush found too lenient towards the DPRK. President Bush made little effort to see if a united U.S.-ROK front could be fashioned for dealing with the DPRK before publicly disagreeing with, and embarrassing, President Kim.

All that said by way of prelude, the Bush administration's force relocation and reduction strategy for South Korea is in my judgment strategically and militarily sound. This is especially true given the ongoing difficulties facing U.S. troops in Iraq, but there are broader reasons to support the changes as well.

THE FORCE RELOCATION/REDUCTION PLAN AND KOREAN SECURITY

There are four main aspect to the administration's USFK (U.S. Forces in Korea) plan. First, following through on an idea that has been on the drawing board for 15 years, U.S. military headquarters would be moved out of the huge site they occupy in the overpopulated South Korean capital. Presently American forces continue to occupy several hundred acres of land there. As Rumsfeld himself rightly put it, we wouldn't like having a foreign military taking up an area nearly the size of Central Park in New York; nor should we expect the citizens of Seoul to do so. Even Donald Rumsfeld may, it turns out, be capable of being a nice guy to the allies once in a while.

This plan will also help make America's overall Asian military presence more efficient by streamlining command arrangements (in Japan and Hawaii as well as Korea). As the plan is carried out, such changes will apparently account for almost half of the 12,000 American troop reductions scheduled in Korea.

Second, repositioning America's second infantry division away from its current positions near the DMZ to sites south of Seoul and the Han river also makes sense. Over the past three decades--since the last major reduction in American force strength on the peninsula--South Korea's military has improved dramatically as its economy and technology base have become first rate. Meanwhile the bulk of North Korea's armed forces have slowed their rate of improvement and then entered a period of prolonged stagnation. By my estimates, and those of an increasing number of other analysts, South Korea is now stronger than North Korea in a head to head match up.

This does not make it safe for America to dissolve the security alliance with South Korea or take all of its forces off the peninsula. Such a drastic move could embolden North Korea to attack the South again, in the hope that surprise and perhaps its new nuclear arsenal could produce the reunification it still formally aspires to. As members of this committee know well, the stronger side does not always win in war. Luck and surprise and such intangibles play a role as well, so North Korea might elect to gamble if it thought it had a chance of success (as Georgetown scholar Victor Cha has lucidly argued). That said, South Korea probably does now have the capacity to hold off any attempted North Korean invasion largely on its own (with the support of American airpower, to be sure) until a major American reinforcement could occur. That reinforcement would then prepare the way for a joint, rapid, and decisive (though still quite bloody) U.S.-South Korea counteroffensive to overthrow the North Korean government.

The third aspect of Rumsfeld's current plan is to deploy one of two main U.S. combat brigades now in South Korea to Iraq. This plan is simply necessary, given the enormous

strains on the American Army today. The Pentagon is also right in my judgment to take forces from previously untouchable locations--the national military training centers in California and Louisiana, the 25th Infantry Division's bases in Hawaii (where that division had until now been reserved almost exclusively for a possible Korea contingency)--to send to Iraq. Rumsfeld's only mistake here is not to substantially expand the size of the standing U.S. Army as a further measure (please see my recent Brookings Saban Center policy memo at www.brookings.edu/sabancenter for more on this latter subject). But sending U.S. forces from Korea to Iraq would be prudent in any event.

Fourth is the most controversial aspect of the plan--the expectation that, after serving in Iraq, the brigade of U.S. troops taken from Korea will not return. The American force reduction will be permanent, not temporary. The Pentagon goes too far in arguing that a planned $11 billion modernization initiative to improve its hardware on the peninsula will fully compensate for this huge reduction in troop strength. But the broader trends mentioned above--continued improvement in South Korean forces and decline in the North's, together with the U.S. military's enormous progress in precision-strike technology in recent decades--make such a move eminently feasible.

The United States will still have 25,000 uniformed personnel in Korea. Not counting Iraq, this will still be America's third strongest overseas military contingent (after Germany and Japan). And were war to erupt, we would have to wait two to three months for sufficient reinforcements from the United States before mounting a combined U.S.-ROK counteroffensive in any event--whether we had 25,000 troops or 37,000 (or for that matter even twice as many) on the peninsula in peacetime.

The idea of a U.S. force cut in Korea may seem counterintuitive at a time of crisis on the peninsula. But it really is not such a bad idea even in psychological and symbolic terms. First, our main risk in dealing with North Korea today is not the possibility that we will appear weak. If anything, the Bush administration has gone too far in the other direction with its preemption doctrine, which has scared some allies (including many South Koreans) and given North Korea an excuse for holding onto its nuclear program. Second, we are unlikely to use force in any event given the strong opposition of the ROK, our commitments in Iraq, the huge carnage that would result from any all-out war on the peninsula, and the lack of limited or "surgical" military options now that the plutonium formerly at Yongbyon has been reprocessed and presumably removed. (In my judgment, the Bush administration does deserve considerable criticism for not having prevented this latter development, but now that it is a fait accompli we must move on.)

BROADER REGIONAL DYNAMICS

Then there are broader regional dynamics to consider, and a number of other possible East Asian military contingencies to plan for. They run the gamut from defending the sea lanes near Indonesia to preventing war between China and Taiwan to conducting counterterrorism or stability operations by ourselves or with allies in another part of the region. Again, it might seem counterintuitive that, in an era when such Asia/Pacific

contingencies seem more worrisome than in the recent past, we would be downsizing.

But U.S. ground forces in Korea are not particularly useful for these contingencies. Problems in the Indonesian Straits or Taiwan Strait would be much more likely to require naval power, airpower, or even expeditionary Marines than Army forces.

As for a counterterrorist or stability operation that could conceivably require an Army contribution, the troops in Korea--always seen as dedicated exclusively to a possible Korea contingency--would probably not have been available even if they had remained in the general region. Better to have them elsewhere in the region or the United States where they could deploy with fewer practical or political restrictions on their future movement.

So on balance I strongly support this set of force relocation and reduction decisions by the Bush administration. Indeed, it is so strategically sound in my judgment that I hope future policy towards restructuring U.S. forces in Japan shows a similar degree of flexibility, creativity, and change.

U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL ABROAD
(as of December 31, 2003)

EUROPE (including former Soviet Union)	
Germany	73,000
Italy	13,300
U.K.	11,700
Bosnia	3,000
Turkey	2,000
Spain	2,000
Iceland	1,800
Belgium	1,500
Portugal	1,100
Afloat	2,500
Others	2,400
Regional Total	114,300
EAST ASIA/PACIFIC	
Japan	40,600
Republic of Korea	40,600
Afloat	14,900
Others	800
Regional Total	96,900
NORTH AFRICA, SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST ASIA (not counting Iraq-related forces)	
Qatar	2,500

Bahrain	1,300
Afloat	600
Others	1,500
Regional Total	5,900

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Regional Total	900

WESTERN HEMISPHERE (not including U.S., where 1,166,000 are normally stationed)

Regional Total	1,700

OTHER DEPLOYED FORCES (includes some additional Operation Iraqi Freedom forces)

Global Total	37,300

GLOBAL GRAND TOTAL	257,000

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (double-counts some of the above personnel)

Regional Total	167,300

Figures rounded to nearest hundred; countries with deployments of more than 1,000 shown.

Source: Department of Defense, www.web1.whs.osd.mil.

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