

Beyond Diplomacy - President Bush's "Military Option"

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Washington, D.C.

for

Sekai shuho Magazine

August 2003

On July 27, we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Korean War Armistice's signing. The Armistice stopped the killing, silenced the guns and created a 242 kilometer long, three kilometer wide no-man's land called the "Demilitarized Zone" or DMZ. But the war killed three million people, mostly Koreans. It also killed the hope of Korea's reunification. Alas, the armistice has not fostered an atmosphere conducive to a durable peace and Korea's unification.

The situation today on the Korean Peninsula is a greater threat to peace in Northeast Asia than was true in 1953. Ever since the Korean War Armistice's signing, two huge, hostile armies have waited to resume the war. In mid-July, North and South Korean soldiers exchanged fire in the central sector of the DMZ. Earlier in June, tensions escalated in the West Sea as North Korean war ships again contested the so-called "Northern Limit Line," the United Nations Command and South Korean extension of the DMZ into the West Sea done shortly after the Armistice had been signed. In March, North Korean supersonic fighters unsuccessfully tried to force a US reconnaissance aircraft to land in North Korea.

On the North Korean side of the DMZ, about seventy percent of Kim Jong Il's million man army inhabits a maze of underground concrete bunkers. Some 12,000 long range, rapid firing artillery pieces, thousands of tanks, armored personnel carries, and multiple rocket launchers wait with them. North Korea's air force and navy are less awesome. A small number of modern Soviet-era fighters guard the capital. The navy's small fleet of fast patrol boats and submarines, backed by Chinese-designed cruise missiles with a sixty kilometer range, protect the long coast lines. Most fearsome are North Korea's weapons of mass destructive. The arsenal includes ballistic missiles that can hit any target in either South Korea or Japan, chemical and biological weapons and possibly even nuclear weapons. North Korea did not have any of these weapons in 1953. Today it does.

Once again, North Korea is pushing to develop a nuclear arsenal. The US Bush Administration shares with China, Japan, South Korea and Russia the desire for a "peaceful diplomatic solution" to the nuclear impasse with Pyongyang. While the diplomatic process remains stalled, Pyongyang continues to develop its nuclear arsenal. The leaders of the United States, Japan and South Korea in recent summit meetings have agreed to "pursue further steps" if diplomacy does not convince North Korea to give up its weapons of mass destruction. Here we examine the meaning of these "further steps."

“Further Steps - PSI and the Military Option”

“Further steps,” are the code words for a United States developed, two phase strategy aimed at forcing Kim Jong Il to give up his weapons of mass destruction. Phase one is the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). PSI aims to “impede the trafficking in weapons of mass destruction, missiles and related items.” The initiative was first demonstrated in December 2002 when a Spanish naval vessel, at the behest of the US Department of Defense, seized a Cambodian ship bound for Yemen with a cargo of North Korean produced ballistic missiles. The Bush Administration, however, was forced to admit that this action was inconsistent with international law, and Washington had to release the ship and its cargo. Subsequently, the Department of Defense refined its “preemptive interdiction” and renamed it PSI. But if PSI, like diplomacy, fails to disarm North Korea, “further steps” could ultimately include the “military option.” This two part article will examine each phase of this “further steps” strategy.

Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)

PSI is a Washington led effort to forge a multilateral coalition to support and to carry out the “interdiction” of weapons of mass (WMD) destruction while en route from a producer nation to purchasing nation. President Bush formally launched the effort in his May 31 speech at the G-8 Evian summit. Eleven nations attended the first PSI meeting in Portugal on June 12: Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. The June 25 European Union-US joint Statement on Proliferation of WMD formalized the consensus reached at the June 12 gathering.

Not surprisingly, North Korea and Iran, the two surviving members of President Bush’s “Axis of Evil,” have been pegged PSI’s primary targets. Japan is the first nation to initiate PSI. Beginning in June, the Tokyo government intensified inspections of all North Korean ships seeking to call at Japanese ports. Almost 2,000 Japanese customs and immigration officials began inspecting all North Korean vessels. The strident inspections have halted the North Korean ferry ship *Man Gyong Bong*’s weekly visits to Niigata, a significant blow to commerce between the two nations. North Korean cargo and fishing ships have been detained in other Japanese ports. At the same time, Japanese authorities initiated closer monitoring and investigation of the pro-North Korean Association of Korean Residents in Japan, the *Chosen soren*, and all of its financial activities involving North Korea.

Early in July, PSI member nations convened for a second meeting in Australia. Their purpose was to improve their capabilities to “conduct actual air, ground and maritime interdiction operations in partnership against WMD and delivery systems.” They agreed to participate in training exercises to make more effective use of their existing military and civilian capabilities to identify, intercept and seize WMD and related materials. The next PSI meeting is scheduled for early September.

PSI is still in the early stage of implementation. If diplomatic efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution of the nuclear crisis fail, PSI can be escalated quickly into a global effort to interdict all

North Korean shipping. The avowed purpose would be to search for WMD and related materials as well as other international contraband such as narcotics. The impact on North Korea, however, would be similar to that of a full scale economic embargo. North Korea's international commerce would be disrupted and its trading partners discouraged from dealing with it. Eventually, PSI could have a pervasively negative impact on North Korea's already depressed economy.

Japan would be expected to play a central role in any full scale PSI effort. Under the US-Japan Expanded Defense Guidelines, Japanese Air (JASDF) and Naval Self Defense Forces (JNSDF) would complement similar US military forces in the region. Together they would form the front line of the global PSI effort. JASDF and JNSDF intelligence and reconnaissance resources would monitor movement of all ships near North Korea's east coast. Japan's E-2C electronic intelligence and radar equipped aircraft plus P-3C anti-submarine aircraft are well equipped to do this work. Meanwhile, JNSDF AEGIS equipped destroyers, submarines, patrol craft and minesweepers could be dispatched to waters close to North Korea's coast line. They would track, then halt and search all North Korean cargo ships for possible WMD-related materials and illegal drugs. PSI, in short, has two objectives: deter North Korea's proliferation of WMD and related material while also disrupting its international commerce. The potential impact on North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and its economy is uncertain. More certain is that PSI could greatly increase the risk of war in Northeast Asia. If North Korea contested the disruption of its commerce, armed clashes could result.

“Semi-War Alert”

North Korea is again preparing for another Korean War. Since January 4, 2003, the government has put its armed forces and militia on “semi-war status.” The last time North Korea did this was during the first nuclear crisis of 1992-94. The PSI declarations and meetings have further convinced North Korea's rulers that the “Bush government is escalating its moves to isolate and stifle the DPRK.” (See KCNA, June 9, 2003.) KCNA's commentary referred to “extremely provocative words about ‘further steps’ ...” Pyongyang on June 17 accused “the Bush group” of laying an “international siege network and conduct a blockade operation against the DPRK” and labeled this “a deliberate and premeditated (effort) to ignite a war on the Korean Peninsula.” That same day, the official newspaper *Nodong shinmun* warned that, “The DPRK will take an immediate physical retaliatory step against the U.S. once it judges that its sovereignty is infringed upon by Washington's blockade operation.” The commentary further warned, “In case a war breaks out between the DPRK and the U.S., the front line will not be confined to the Korea Peninsula only but every place where aggressors are stationed will be the target of the DPRK's strike. In this regard, the DPRK cannot but serve a warning to Japan, too.”

“Further Steps” - Phase Two

Since the fall of 2002, the Bush Administration has rushed preparations for its “military option” in Northeast Asia. Public attention has focused in South Korea on plans to re-deploy US forces there. In December, 2002, the US began pushing forward with plans to move all US Army

combat units from their present locations north of Seoul to camps south of South Korea's capital.

Also, most of the US military now stationed in central Seoul at Yongsan will be moved out of the city to a new headquarters area to be built south of Seoul. Receiving less attention from the press has been the simultaneous improvement of the combat capability of US forces in Northeast Asia, primarily those on the Korean Peninsula.

Why US Defense Secretary Rumsfeld assigned urgency to the redeployment of US Forces Korea (USFK) remains unclear. Officially, the Bush Administration has repeatedly claimed there is no crisis on the Korean Peninsula. US diplomatic and military officials in Seoul have explained that the re-deployment of US infantry and headquarter units is urgency needed to reduce the risk of accidents involving US forces and Korean civilians in the heavily populated areas north of Seoul. No one can deny that this is a compelling reason, particularly in light of the tragic accident that took the lives of two young Korean school girls when they were run over by a US Army armored vehicle in 2002. An equally plausible additional explanation for the rush is North Korea's renewed drive to acquire a nuclear arsenal.

Anti-Americanism

In any event, the US push to redeploy its forces could not have come at a worse time in South Korea. When a US Army court found the two US soldiers innocent of any wrong doing in the school girls' deaths, tens of thousands of Koreans protested not only the innocent verdicts, but the presence of US forces in South Korea. Protests over the verdicts mingled with calls for reform of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that governs legal procedures involving US military personnel. The tiny group of South Koreans who believe that the US military presence obstructs national re-unification added to the clamor demands that the US Army go home.

By this past spring, traffic jams had replaced demonstrators in South Korea's urban streets. A tardy out pouring of public apologies by high ranking US civilian and military officials stilled the public's outrage over the verdicts. Adroit handling of the SOFA issue also appears to have assuaged the public's displeasure in this regard. A highly visible joint commission promptly negotiated several significant improvements to the SOFA agreement. Consequently, the minority of South Koreans who believe the US military presence obstructs Korea's re-unification again find themselves an isolated minority outside the mainstream of Korean society.

Last December's large demonstrations in South Korea were inappropriately labeled "anti-American." More accurately, the largely peaceful and orderly demonstrations involved the main stream of South Korean society. Their demonstrations were earnest expressions of frustration and displeasure with the preferential treatment that the South Korean government has always given, and that the US Army has come to expect. In this regard, the public outcry was a democratic display and a call for greater accountability and transparency on the part of the US military in South Korea. So long as US diplomatic and military officials in South Korea demonstrate an earnest sensitivity for the concerns of the South Korean people, the people of South Korea will continue to welcome the presence of US forces.

US Forces Korea Make Over

Beyond the headlines and demonstrations, the Pentagon has forged ahead with its plans to upgrade and to redeploy US Forces Korea. US Army General Leon Laporte, commander, United Nations Command (UNC), Commander, Republic of Korea-United States Combined forces Command (US-ROK CFC) and United States Forces Korea (USFK) outlined his intentions to the US Congress on March 13, 2003.

The general indicated that the military mission of US Forces Korea (USFK) has been expanded. It now has the dual role of serving as a “tangible demonstration of the United States commitment to peace and stability in Korea and throughout Northeast Asia.” Previously, USFK had the single role of deterring and defending South Korea from North Korean aggression. In a subsequent article, we will examine the expanded “regional security” role of US forces on the Korean Peninsula.

As for the priorities of force modernization, the US general listed: “C4ISR functionality and interoperability, increasing the pre-positioned stocks of preferred munitions, improving counter fire capabilities, missile defense, force protection, and logistics.” “C4ISR” is Army jargon for “combined command, control, computers, communications, and intelligence architecture” in Korea. US military forces in South Korea and Japan are working to improve the ability of all three nations - the US, ROK and Japan - to communicate with each other, to collect and exchange information and intelligence, and to coordinate all their activities.

C4ISR

Cutting edge communications, reconnaissance and computer technology and equipment are being acquired by all three nations. US Forces headquarters in Korea and Japan will serve as the communications and intelligence bridges between South Korean and Japanese militaries. A secret high-speed encrypted internet system is being built. The network must be completely secure so that no one can break into it or disrupt its operation. All this system’s hardware and software must be “interoperable.” This means that all the communication and computer equipment used by the three allies use must be compatible. This will ensure a rapid and unimpeded flow of information between the three military commands. The project also requires very special and expensive hardware plus extensive training.

Preferred Munitions

Again, this is US military jargon that refers to so-called “smart bombs.” In short, the arsenal of laser and satellite guided weapons available to USFK is being expanded. These same kinds of weapons were used with devastating effect in the recent war on Iraq. They include the Global Positioning Satellite (GSP) guided Joint Direct Attack Munitions and inertial-guided Wind corrected Munitions Dispensers. These bombs can be dropped with great accuracy regardless of the weather and time of day. Also to be added are Conventional Air Launched Cruise Missiles. “Smart”

missiles are loaded with non-nuclear high explosives and can be launched with great accuracy from aircraft in any weather. Guided Multiple Launch Rocket systems (MLRS) are land-based and may be aimed with great precision at distant targets and fired in large salvos. The Commander of US Forces in Korea has also asked for more Javelin and Hellfire anti-tank weapons. These missiles also are “smart” but can be fired from jet aircraft and helicopters to destroy enemy armored vehicles and fortified positions. Also on the general’s wish list are “thermo-baric weapons and tactical missile system penetrator (sic) munitions.” These are high technology, cutting edge weapons that are designed to destroy heavily fortified, under ground bunkers and tunnels.

Some time is required before these munitions could be used on the Korean Peninsula. First, the Pentagon must replenish its depleted inventory. Large numbers of these “preferred munitions” were used during the invasion of Iraq this past spring. An ample supply should be available for dispatch to South Korea by early this fall. Also, many of the US and South Korea Air Force aircraft must be modified before they can drop these weapons. Again, these adjustments should be completed by this fall.

Counter-fire Capability and Missile Defense

North Korea’s large inventory of long range, rapid firing artillery is a major threat to Seoul. In the event of a war, the estimated 12,000 artillery pieces positioned north of Seoul could fire upwards of 500,000 high explosive shells into Seoul within one hour. To counter this threat, USFK has asked the US Congress to upgrade its ability to quickly locate and destroy these weapons. Actually, the US commander said he intends to develop a “proactive capability” which he explained would enable USFK to destroy North Korea’s artillery before it fires at South Korea. Such a capability would require counter-battery artillery on the ground that is equipped with radar to locate the enemy artillery, precision “smart” bombs to be dropped on the targets by jet aircraft and upgraded reconnaissance and intelligence capabilities to identify the targets before a war began.

Finally, General LaPorte asked the US Congress to approve funds to increase USFK’s inventory of PAC III Patriot missiles. These missiles were originally developed to knock down enemy aircraft. But during the Gulf War of 1991, their early version was used to hit Iraqi Scud ballistic missiles. The Patriot missile has since been improved and is believed to be better able to counter ballistic missile attacks. Their ability in this regard, however, remains uncertain since PAC III Patriot missiles have not been used in actual combat.

Reinforcements

US Forces Korea currently does not appear to have plans to increase the number of US military personnel posted in South Korea. The tours of duty for about 1,800 personnel were extended by several months. Otherwise, the level of US military personnel assigned to USFK, barring an emergency, is expected to remain at its present level of 35, 141 personnel: 27,019 with the US Army and 8,122 with the US Air Force. The number of combat troops could be quickly

doubled by the deployment of 15,000 US Marines from Okinawa. Additionally, the dispatch of an aircraft carrier battle group from Yokosuka, Japan would increase the number of US combat aircraft available to USFK. The cruise missile equipped Aegis destroyers and nuclear attack submarines would enable the US to bombard any target in North Korea.

The US Department of Defense, according to South Korean press reports, notified the South Korean government this past spring of its intention to position three or four transport ships in a South Korean port. No troops would be aboard the ships. Instead, the vessels would serve as warehouses for 130 tanks and infantry fighting vehicles, plus another 110 transport vehicles of various types. This is sufficient ammunition and supplies to equip a brigade of combat troops. This pre-positioning of equipment would facilitate rapid reinforcement of US Forces Korea by flying combat troops from Hawaii to Korea where they would find their equipment waiting for them. US Army units in Japan, Hawaii and the United States could be flown to Korea, teamed up with the pre-positioned equipment and put into combat within a few days.

Also under consideration is the possible deployment of a Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) to the 2nd Infantry Division. "Stryker" is the name for a new lightly armored, high speed vehicle equipped with a computer guided, rapid firing gun. The vehicle's mobility and firepower enables it to catch enemy units off guard and destroy them quickly. Deployment of this unit probably will be delayed because the first "Strykers" to be delivered to the US Army now appear destined for Iraq. Deployment of a Stryker Brigade Combat Team to the 2nd Infantry Division in South Korea might take place late this year.

Air defenses are also being reinforced. Sixteen PAC-3 Patriot anti-aircraft missile batteries reportedly will be added to the 48 already in South Korea. These missiles could also knock down North Korea's short range Scud and medium range Nodong ballistic missiles. Also, the US Air Force apparently plans to build another run way at Osan Air Force Base south of Seoul. This would greatly increase the US military's ability to rapidly reinforce and re-supply US Forces Korea via air transport.

USFK Re-deployment

The Pentagon, despite South Korea's strong objections, is going ahead with plans to relocate US combat unit in South Korea. Before his May 14 summit with President Bush, South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun told US journalists that he would ask the US to put off the relocation plans until North Korea had dismantled its nuclear weapons programs. But after their brief summit, the two presidents issued a joint statement in which they said, "relocation of the U.S. bases north of the Han River should be pursued, taking careful account of the political, economic and security situation on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia."

In a subsequent article, we will look at whether US contingency plans for a possible second Korean War call for the redeployment of US Forces Korea.