Statement by US Army Commander, US Forces, Korea, before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate

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The following article was presented to the Armed Services Committee of the United States Senate by General Louis C. Menetrey, US Army, Commander of US Forces, Korea on 19 April 1989.

Introduction

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Armed Services Committee: It gives me great pleasure to add my views to those expressed by my esteemed colleagues concerning US national security strategy. I will limit my remarks to US military strategy and objectives in the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Northeast Asia region.

Importance of Northeast Asia

When we look back on Northeast Asia (NEA) some thirty years ago, Korea was a poor nation, still reeling from the ravages of war. We had only limited trade with Japan. The Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) was our avowed adversary, and we focused our attentions on preventing the spread of Marxist-Leninist ideology like that which was espoused by Kim Il Sung and his North Korea puppet government. Since that
time many changes have occurred. Today, the economies of the NEA region have prospered. Japan is now one of our largest trading partners, we have cordial relations with the PRC, and the Republic of Korea is flourishing under perhaps the greatest "economic miracle" in modern history.

In economic terms, Korea is an exceptionally important player in the interdependence of the US-Japan-Korea relationship. Korea's real GNP grew 12.2% in 1988, while her imports from the US were up 46% to $12.8 billion. In 1988, Korea's trade with the US totalled about $33.5 billion making her our seventh largest trading partner overall and the second largest country market for our agricultural products. Korea is a fertile market-of-opportunity for American enterprise whose investments in 1988 totaled $248 million. Additionally, Korea is one of several bases in Asia that allows American companies to jump off into other Asian markets, especially those being developed in China.

With respect to Japan, Korea's imports totaled $16 billion in 1988 while exports came to $12 billion, making her Japan's second largest provider of goods. In fact, Korea supplies Japan with six percent of all Japanese imports. Korea-Japan interdependence allows for the production of relatively low-cost capital consumer goods. In other words, your Hitachi VCR was probably made in Korea of mixed Korean-Japanese components. Despite her economic ties with Japan, however, Korea has begun to shift import sources away from Japan to the US, in order to assist the US with our large trade deficit.

Military, the Soviets were a second class power in Northeast Asia thirty years ago. Today they have the preponderance of nuclear and conventional forces in the region and have evolved into a first rate naval threat pushing to exert influence into the lucrative Northeast Asia area. Despite talk of force reduction, the Soviets have given no indication of lessening their attempts to gain entrance into this part of the world. The Soviet land force, equipped with modern weaponry, is massive with 57 divisions alone stationed in the Asian region. The Soviets also support North Korea, which has the world's fourth largest armed force and is located just across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) dividing the Korean peninsula. In addition, the Soviets maintain a large blue-water fleet homeported in Vladivostok.

The Republic of Korea is a bastion of democracy on the northeastern part of the Asian continent. With the world's 17th largest economy,