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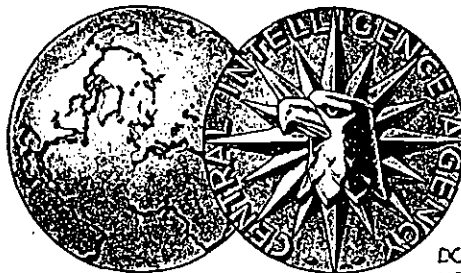
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CONSEQUENCES OF US TROOP WITHDRAWAL FROM KOREA IN SPRING, 1949

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CONSEQUENCES OF US TROOP WITHDRAWAL FROM KOREA IN SPRING, 1949

SUMMARY

Withdrawal of US forces from Korea in the spring of 1949 would probably in time be followed by an invasion, timed to coincide with Communist-led South Korean revolts, by the North Korean People's Army possibly assisted by small battle-trained units from Communist Manchuria. Although it can be presumed that South Korean security forces will eventually develop sufficient strength to resist such an invasion, they will not have achieved that capability by the spring of 1949. It is unlikely that such strength will be achieved before January 1950. Assuming that Korean Communists would make aggressive use of the opportunity presented them, US troop withdrawal would probably result in a collapse of the US-supported Republic of Korea, an event which would seriously diminish US prestige and adversely affect US security interests in the Far East.

In contrast, continued presence in Korea of a moderate US force, would not only discourage the threatened invasion but would assist in sustaining the will and ability of the Koreans themselves to resist any future invasion once they had the military force to do so and, by sustaining the new Republic, maintain US prestige in the Far East.

Note: The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Navy, and the Air Force have concurred in this report. For a dissent by the Intelligence Division, Department of the Army, see Enclosure A, p. 7. The information herein is as of 24 February 1949.

CONSEQUENCES OF US TROOP WITHDRAWAL FROM KOREA IN SPRING, 1949

Assumptions:

1. Final US troop withdrawal would begin before June 1949;
2. Economic and military aid, to the extent presently projected would continue;
3. Continued antagonism between northern and southern Koreans to a degree presenting a constant danger of open hostilities.

Despite the real progress toward stability that has been achieved by the Republic of Korea in both political and military fields, it is doubtful if the Republic could survive a withdrawal of US troops in the immediate future. While Korean security forces now have the capability of maintaining internal security in the face of opposition from strong and efficient underground Communist forces in South Korea (see ORE 32-48), they are neither sufficiently trained nor sufficiently experienced to undertake actions requiring coordination on regimental and brigade levels. Such coordinated action would be necessary against the large-scale border penetrations and simultaneous countrywide internal disorders which would undoubtedly follow the withdrawal of US troops. In the face of combined invasion and uprising, in which local Communists and the North Koreans People's Army might have the assistance of battle-trained Communist units from Manchuria, as well as Soviet aid and advice, the maximum capability of Korean security forces would be control of certain isolated urban and rural areas. Despite a large turnover of personnel resulting from the recently instituted screening system calculated to rid the ranks of infiltrating Communists, the Army has added a considerable number of recruits in the past few months and has now reached a strength of 65,000. The present schedule calls for completion of all basic, battalion, and regimental training by 1 June 1949. It is estimated that an additional six months, at least, will be necessary to develop proficiency with organic equipment in large-scale field operations. Additional training in countering guerrilla techniques would enable the security forces to deal more effectively with large-scale Communist infiltrations. Completion of such additional training would be necessary before any appreciable ability to resist invasion could be guaranteed.

If US troops are withdrawn before the security forces of the Republic of Korea achieve such capabilities, they will not inspire confidence among their people, and until the people possess this confidence, a spirit of defeatism will grow; popular support of the government will diminish, and its will to resist Communist encroachment will be undermined. Although Soviet propaganda has been able to exploit the inherent Korean sentiment against foreign interference, the majority of thinking Koreans in the South have come to accept the continued presence of US troops as a condition necessary to free survival.

The presence of the American Mission in Korea (AMIK)¹ and the United Nations Commission on Korea (UNCOK), after the withdrawal of US troops, would mitigate

¹ AMIK includes the Diplomatic Mission, the ECA Mission, and the Provisional Military Advisory Group (PMAG). AMIK is generally responsible for supply and training of the Korean security force.

the adverse effects of the withdrawal on the will of the southern Koreans to resist Communist revolts and invasions. Their presence probably would not, however, prevent the disintegration of the Republic of Korea and eventual Communist domination if US troops are withdrawn before the Korean security forces are capable of resisting a combination of external and internal attacks.

1. EFFECTS IN JAPAN AND SOUTHEAST ASIA.

a. Political and Psychological.

The political and psychological consequences of US troop withdrawal from Korea would be felt most acutely in Japan. Although many Japanese may anticipate eventual Communist domination of all Korea as a logical development, the impact of actuality would be considerable. Japanese fear of Communist power would increase along with doubts of US willingness or ability to defend Japan.^{*} The Japan Communist Party would be strengthened by easier communication with Communist forces across the Tsushima straits and by the adherence of opportunistic converts. Similar political and psychological effects would follow to a lesser degree in other Far Eastern countries. Groups who have received or hoped for US support might question the sincerity of US intentions to oppose Communism and might feel forced to collaborate with heartened native Communists and assume a more moderate attitude toward the USSR.

b. Military.

Assuming that US troop withdrawal meant consolidation of Communist control over all Korea, the USSR would be able to develop bases in the South from which they could launch air, airborne, or amphibious attacks on Japan, Formosa, and the Ryukyus, or submarine forays against shipping in Japanese waters.

c. Economic.

Economic consequences, as such, would be unimportant. Japan would lose a potential small market for industrial goods and a potential producer of rice. The USSR would gain an additional source of unskilled labor for projects in the Soviet Far East. The potential contribution of consumer goods, particularly textiles, might also enhance the total productive effort of an integrated Korean-Manchurian-Soviet Far East economy.

d. Propaganda.

US troop withdrawal would, of course, enhance the US position by weakening Soviet propaganda on the issue of imperialism and aggression, but it would subject Koreans to inevitable terror propaganda that would play upon their isolated position in the Far East. Furthermore, it must be realized that the probable subsequent collapse of the Republic of Korea would be a news item of such magnitude as to offset any favorable propaganda effects that had been achieved either in Korea or in the Far East generally.

^{*}The deep concern aroused in Japan over the recent newspaper reports that the US might withdraw troops from Japan is a sample of the reaction that would follow US troop withdrawal from Korea. The concern over a withdrawal from Korea, of course, would not be as great as that over a US withdrawal from Japan.

2. EFFECTS ON US SECURITY.

Withdrawal of US troops stationed in South Korea would permit consolidation of US Far Eastern troop strength in the home islands of Japan and also eliminate the danger of having some forces in an untenable position in the event of hostilities with the USSR. Against this gain, however, must be weighed the fact that such withdrawal would allow immediate exploitation of South Korea by the USSR. Bases built there before the outbreak of hostilities would greatly assist Soviet forces in their war task of interdicting US positions in Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippines. In other Far Eastern countries, US withdrawal could and probably would be interpreted as weakness, and might further contribute to the fundamental realignment of forces in the Far East in favor of the Soviet Union for "practical reasons."

(For a discussion of Korean strategic and economic problems and of the contribution of US tactical troops to South Korean stability, see Appendix.)

APPENDIX

KOREA'S STRATEGIC VALUE

a. Geographic Considerations.

A major military power holding Korea would be in a favorable position to dominate the Sea of Japan, the Yellow Sea, and the Gulf of Chihli, to threaten the Soviet Maritime Province and southern Manchuria by ground attack; to threaten Japan and adjacent mainland areas by air, airborne, and amphibious attack, and to threaten targets deep within the USSR and China by long-range air attack. The Soviet Union, by means of interior lines of communication and relative proximity to sources of supply could maintain a military position in Korea at much less cost and effort than could the US.

b. Military Importance.

Southern Korea's strategic importance to the US rests principally on the fact that its denial to the USSR prior to an outbreak of general hostilities would prevent the development of advanced bases from which Soviet forces could threaten or neutralize US operational bases in Japan and the Ryukyus immediately upon any outbreak of hostilities. Such value as southern Korea would have as a defensive or offensive US base after the start of war with the USSR would, however, tend to be negated to the US by the scope of military operations required to hold and maintain a position there. Unless the US strategic plan permitted employment of the major forces necessary to maintain a base there, any US force present in southern Korea at the outbreak of hostilities would have to be written off or evacuated.

The present function of US troops in South Korea is purely psychological but no less important for that reason. Aside from the entirely unlikely event that the USSR would be willing to risk war over the issue of Korea, it is most improbable, so long as US forces are present, that Soviet troops would participate in an invasion of South Korea. It is similarly less likely that the North Koreans themselves, with or without other Communist aid, would make war on the South. It is obvious, however, that should an invasion take place despite their presence, US forces would either have to furnish active assistance to the South Korean Republic or be withdrawn, with serious loss of US prestige.

In the absence of US troops, it is highly probable that northern Koreans alone, or northern Koreans assisted by other Communists, would invade southern Korea and subsequently call upon the USSR for assistance. Soviet control or occupation of southern Korea would be the result.

The armed forces of southern Korea, although completely dependent on the US for training and logistic support, are of considerable strategic significance to the US insofar as they enhance the security of Japan. If fully developed, the Korean Army could, by itself, deny southern Korea's exploitation as a Communist offensive

base in the period prior to an open attack by either major units of the Chinese Communist forces or by the USSR. The security of US bases in Japan would thus be enhanced while the strain on US manpower involved in occupying southern Korea would be decreased. Furthermore, if the Korean Army were specially trained in guerrilla warfare techniques, it might continue to serve US strategic interests by carrying on guerrilla warfare against a Soviet occupation.

c. *Economic Importance.*

Southern Korea, as a separate entity apart from northern Korea, has a deficit economy and is a liability to the US. The area can supply no strategic raw materials other than small amounts of tungsten and graphite. Only the intensive application of imported chemical fertilizers can bring about the surplus rice production which would increase Korean economic and political stability as well as contribute to the feeding of US-occupied Japan. Industrial production, presently insufficient for domestic requirements, is confined mainly to consumer goods. It is not of strategic value to the US except to the degree that rehabilitation and development may reduce the economic strain on the US involved in sustaining the economy.

Southern Korea is of some potential economic significance to the US in that integration of the economy of the Republic of Korea with economies of Japan, Formosa, and the Philippine Islands could result in a greater degree of economic stability in all the countries concerned.

d. *Political Importance.*

Survival of the Republic of Korea in the southern zone is strategically important to the US. The Republic not only serves as a deterrent to physical infiltration of Communist agents into Japan but, more important, represents for the Japanese and other nationals in the Far East, a symbol of US determination to resist further encroachments of Communist forces in eastern Asia. The Republic of Korea is one concrete evidence that the US is sincere in its professions of support for the struggle of the Far Eastern world against Communism. The continued survival of the Republic of Korea would be proof to the peoples of the Far East that Communist domination is not inevitable and would lessen the psychological impact of the fall of China.

US tactical forces in Korea now number approximately 8,000 as opposed to the original force of over 40,000. Their task has been reduced or has been turned over to indigenous institutions as the latter developed strength and efficiency. US troops today are only concerned with serving as a limited reserve which might be used to assist Korean security forces in maintaining internal order and stability; * as a deterrent to, but not an absolute guarantee against, an overt invasion by northern Korean forces; and, most important, as concrete and visible evidence to the Korean Army and to the Korean people generally that the US continues to support their government against threatened Communist domination.

* Present Army forces in Korea are not charged, except indirectly, with assisting Korean security forces in maintaining internal order. United States troops, according to their present instructions, may intervene to maintain internal order in Korea only if attacked or if required to protect US nationals or property.

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ENCLOSURE "A"

DISSENT BY THE INTELLIGENCE DIVISION, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

1. The Intelligence Division, Department of the Army, dissents from ORE 3-49, Consequences of US Troop Withdrawal from Korea in Spring, 1949. The Intelligence Division does not believe that US troop withdrawal would be the major factor in the collapse of the Republic of Korea. Neither does the Intelligence Division believe that "such withdrawal would allow immediate exploitation of South Korea by the USSR."

2. The Intelligence Division believes that an invasion of South Korea by the North Korean People's Army is a possibility at present, and recognizes that the likelihood of such an invasion will increase somewhat, following the departure of United States troops. However, the Intelligence Division considers that an invasion is a possibility, rather than a probability, for the following reasons:

a. Action short of invasion might bring about the result desired by North Korean and, presumably, Soviet authorities, without incurring the risks involved in a military operation. Such action could include the instigation of Communist-led disturbances in South Korea, the infiltration into the south of armed and trained agents and guerrillas, and continuation of border incidents on the 38th parallel.

b. The People's Army still is a relatively small, although well trained and efficient, military force. At present it does not have, of itself, the preponderance of strength over South Korean military forces which would be required to insure victory in an armed struggle. The People's Army, as a force in being, may well be considered by North Korean authorities to have greater value as a constant threat than if it were committed to a military adventure which conceivably could result in its defeat or in expenditure of its strength without proportionate returns.

3. The Intelligence Division concludes, for the reasons cited above, that an invasion of South Korea by North Korean forces is a possibility rather than a probability at the present time; and further, that this state will continue until such time as South Korean military forces are reduced to such a state as to render them incapable of resisting significant North Korean military action.

4. Further, it is the belief of the Intelligence Division that political and economic factors other than the presence or absence of United States troops will have a decisive influence on the future course of events in Korea, and that the continued maintenance of a small United States Army force in South Korea would be only a relatively minor psychological contribution to the stability of the Republic of Korea. If continued economic and military aid to the Republic of Korea, to the extent presently projected, plus the presence of a United Nations Commission, are not sufficient to sustain South Korean morale and will to resist Communist expansion, it appears doubtful that the presence of a small United States combat force would do so.

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