
Defense Report

AUSA



The Korean Tinder Box

As many Americans have forgotten, the Korean War is not necessarily over. No peace treaty has been signed. The Armistice of 1953 is still in effect, and war involving the U.S. is possible at any time.

The North Koreans are well aware that there is no peace and since the Armistice was signed, North Korea has become one of the most militarized states in the world, spending about 15 per cent of its GNP on national defense. They have put together a powerful military force which is in a position today to launch a major attack south featuring armor, artillery, and fighter aircraft and their forces are backed up by large, prepositioned stockpiles and a well developed defense industry which produces much of its own combat equipment.

To help guarantee against the renewal of hostilities, the U.S. has maintained significant forces in South Korea, composed today of about 33,000 Army troops—including a full combat division—and about 7,500 Air Force members. The South Koreans have also not been idle and also have built a large, powerful force which is disposed in defensive positions south of the DMZ. This army is professional, well-trained, well-led, and much of it saw combat in South Vietnam.

However, the Republic of Korea forces are well behind the North from the standpoint of modern weapons and equipment. To help remedy this situation, the U.S. Government approved a \$1.5 Billion five-year ROK modernization plan in 1970. About 95 per cent of this program was to be funded by the U.S. Progress has been substantial, but slower than planned and will not be completed until 1977.

As the plan was implemented, it became apparent that more modernization would be necessary. Consequently, the ROK last year developed a Force Improvement Plan (FIP) for the 1975-80 period which would complement and reinforce the five-year plan. The new plan will cost about \$5 Billion, but will be funded by the ROK rather than the U.S. To pay for the plan, the Koreans will increase their military expenditures from below five per cent of GNP to over seven per cent.

In recent testimony before Congress, DOD spokesmen pointed out that U.S. forces should stay in South Korea at least until the completion of the FIP provides military parity between North and South. At that time a U.S. pull out may be logical, especially if the international climate in 1980 is not too dangerous. Although the Korean Tinder Box is still smouldering, the ROK's apparent willingness and capability to shoulder the main fire-fighting load is a bright spot in today's troubled world.