
Defense Report

AUSA



Korea—Still A Powder Keg After 24 Years of "Peace"

A few weeks ago an American general voiced his opposition to Carter Administration plans to withdraw U.S. ground forces from Korea and got an overdramatized chewing-out from the President for his trouble. The general was no rabblouser or maverick. His quick trip to the President's office was ticketed by his frank statement of disagreement with the withdrawal plans, not because his military peers and superiors did not agree with him.

The issue of the Korea troop withdrawal has been hotly debated for several years, with the military advisors to the President consistently recommending against it. President Carter has now decided to go ahead with the pullout and, despite their misgivings, the military hierarchy will support that decision. Despite fictionalized *Seven Days in May* accounts of admirals and generals in revolt the U.S. military leadership is the most jealous guardian of constitutional guarantees of the civilian control of the armed forces.

None of this, however, diminishes the anxiety caused by the President's withdrawal decision. No acquiescence to constitutional authority will change the trends that have gradually increased the war-making potential of the belicose North Koreans. And one has only to look as far back as August, 1976 when the unprovoked murder of two U.S. Army officers demonstrated the North Koreans' capacity for irrational action.

While the Republic of Korea has more men under arms, North Korea has been building substantial superiority in weaponry of all sorts—artillery, tanks, aircraft—even submarines. Intelligence reports indicate that North Korean military installations have been dug in and hardened to the point of near-invulnerability. Nothing in the demeanor of the North Koreans gives the slightest hint that they are prepared to "live and let live."

The President proposes to keep U.S. tactical air units in Korea after the ground forces have been withdrawn. This, he says, will help offset the North Korean advantages. The question he seems to have overlooked in the public announcement of his decisions is "What happens if the U.S. air bases are threatened by a North Korean invasion and the South Korean ground forces cannot defend them?"

The obvious answer is to try to reinject U.S. ground forces to stabilize the situation. Having been forced to do this once before, in 1950, and without the slightest indication that the 1950 aggressor has changed his goal, the President seems to be taking an unsupportable risk. The disappearance of U.S. ground troops from Korea will serve only to tantalize the dedicated aggressor.