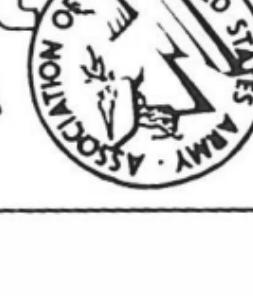


Defense Report

AUSA



Korea—Last Frontier of the Cold War

Forty-seven years ago, American and Soviet negotiators agreed to divide the military occupation of the Korean peninsula. In retrospect, the other side had hidden motives, while we were naïve and paid dearly for underestimating the motives of our opponent. However, neither nation envisioned a divided and tense peninsula that would threaten conflict constantly for the next half century. The severity of this tragedy was greatest on the Korean people themselves.

A new war in Korea is no longer in the interests of any of the surrounding powers. Soviet leaders recognized this and ended their partisan role even before the Soviet Union fell apart. Late last summer, the People's Republic of China followed suit and opened official relations with the Republic of Korea (South Korea). In this case, China's economic interests now find a profitable soulmate in South Korea, far more so than in the north. The great benefit of these changes is that any conflict now in Korea would no longer risk a superpower confrontation. In fact, all of the surrounding powers have a stronger interest in the survival of South Korea than of North Korea.

Only North Korea seems not to have fully recognized these changes. While professing a desire for peaceful change, North Korea is apparently still in the process of developing a nuclear weapon and continues to sustain an incredibly expensive and threatening conventional arsenal, with a one-million man, well equipped Army. North Korea's words and deeds are remarkably dissimilar and its motives are highly suspect.

The struggle in Korea, ongoing for nearly half a century, is nearing its end, but there is risk today in premature optimism. In 1945, it was the Soviet Union's motives we should have questioned. In 1993, it is North Korea's.

The solution to the Korean dilemma rests ultimately in fundamental but peaceful changes within the peninsula itself. Until this occurs, continued U.S. military commitment to South Korea is imperative.