

Keynote Speech

Strategic Linkage between Japan and Korea: American Perspectives during the Cold War

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On August 18, 2023, President Joe Biden hosted South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Prime Minister Kishida Fumio at Camp David for a historic trilateral summit. In many ways, this meeting marked the culmination of American efforts begun during the Cold War to weave together the security of Japan and South Korea. The three leaders announced different modes of trilateral security cooperation that were hard to imagine during the Cold War era. Despite this change, however, what stands out is the intractable nature of the geopolitical divide in Northeast Asia. July 27th was the 70th anniversary of the armistice that instituted a ceasefire in the Korean war. But the conflicting parties are still no closer to replacing the armistice with a stable peace system on the Korean peninsula. In fact, the Camp David summit is likely to deepen the confrontation between the United States, Japan, and South Korea on the one hand and China, Russia, and North Korea on the other.

This paper summarizes the evolution of American perspectives on linking Japan and Korea during the Cold War. This history highlights how Washington sought to develop and maintain unfettered access and use of U.S. military assets in Japan for possible Korean military contingencies. The United States also encouraged the improvement of Japan-South Korea relations to pave the way for Japanese economic support for South Korea. Although US leaders considered at various times a significant reduction of US forces in South Korea, they refrained from a comparable reduction in US forces in Japan. Finally, even though the end of the Cold War provided an opportunity to develop a comprehensive strategy for engaging North Korea to reduce tensions and establish a durable peace on the Korean peninsula, US policymakers tended to be reactive, tactical, and even negligent. The situation today in which the US, Japan and South Korea have strengthened trilateral security cooperation at the risk of solidifying a new cold war structure in Northeast Asia arguably reflects this lack of American diplomatic imagination and long-term strategic thinking regarding Korea.

1945-1953: From Occupation to War

Before the North Korean invasion of South Korea in June 1950, American policymakers refrained from explicitly linking Japan and South Korea strategically and debated what role Japan should play in U.S. policy toward Northeast Asia. A State Department working group chaired by the Japan specialist Hugh Borton focused on preventing Japan's revival as a military power and implementing American-led reforms in Japanese politics and economy. The Borton group neither saw Japan as a potential military ally nor acknowledged a Soviet threat in the region. General Douglas MacArthur's view of postwar Japan was largely consistent with this perspective. He opposed a military presence in Japan, looked to the United Nations to ensure

Japan's security, and expected Japan to be strategically neutral.¹

George Kennan of the State Department Policy Staff, however, disagreed. Emphasizing the emerging conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, he insisted that Japanese neutrality was not a viable strategic option. He felt that similar to postwar Germany's strategic role in Europe, Japan should be East Asia's strategic and economic center in order to establish a favorable international balance of power in the U.S. competition with the Soviet Union. Working under Kennan, John P. Davies proposed during the summer of 1947 pairing a peace treaty with Japan with a bilateral U.S.-Japan security treaty that would permit U.S. military bases on Japanese territory. These ideas resonated with senior U.S. military officers who advocated an expansive network of military bases in the Western Pacific, including in Japan as well as Okinawa, to secure America's regional defense perimeter.²

The U.S. military, however, had a completely different perspective regarding Korea. Around the time that the United States and the Soviet Union established different states in South Korea and North Korea respectively in September 1947, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) argued that the United States had "little strategic interest" in maintaining military forces and bases in Korea. For the JCS, a military presence in Korea would be a "military liability." Therefore, they advocated a military withdrawal from South Korea and the establishment of a robust defense posture in Japan and the Western Pacific. Kennan agreed with this assessment. Insofar as Korea was not militarily essential, he favored a graceful yet prompt military exit from South Korea.³

Secretary of State Dean Acheson's famous January 12, 1950, speech at the National Press Club essentially reflected this perspective. Whereas Japan and the Philippines were clearly inside the U.S. defensive perimeter, South Korea as well as Taiwan would be outside of it. John Foster Dulles, who later became the chief U.S. negotiator for the peace settlement with Japan, disagreed. Indicative of his view that South Korea as well as Japan represented a vital American interest, Dulles stated the following to members of the South Korean National Assembly during his visit to Korea in mid-June 1950: Korea "will never be alone so long as you continue to play worthily your part in the great design of human freedom."⁴

U.S. strategy in East Asia changed dramatically after the North Korean invasion against South Korea. On June 27th, two days after the North Korean attack, President Harry Truman stated the following: "The attack upon Korea makes it plain beyond all doubt that Communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war."⁵ Citing the UN Security Council's resolution calling on North Korea "to cease hostilities and to withdraw to the 38th parallel," Truman ordered US air and naval forces to assist South Korean troops. Moreover, concerned about a Chinese communist attack

¹ Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 98-100.

² Paul J. Heer, *Mr. X and the Pacific: George F. Kennan and American Policy in East Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 52-55; and Schaller, *American Occupation*, 99-100.

³ Heer, *Mr. X and the Pacific*, 140.

⁴ Richard B. Finn, *Winners in Peace: MacArthur, Yoshida, and Postwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 258.

⁵ Statement by the President, June 27, 1950, "US Enters the Korean Conflict," National Archives (<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/korean-conflict>).

on Formosa (Taiwan), the president deployed the 7th fleet to prevent such an attack since communist occupation of Formosa “would be a direct threat to the security of the Pacific area and to the United States forces performing their lawful and necessary functions in that area.”

Although the United States had excluded South Korea from its defense perimeter, the Truman Administration eventually decided to intervene militarily in the Korean peninsula because of concerns that the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China might have approved if not encouraged the North Korean invasion. Recent research does indeed indicate that North Korean leader Kim Il Sung sought Joseph Stalin’s approval for the attack. Although Stalin was initially cautious about Kim’s plans, he became more favorable after concluding that a US military intervention in response to a North Korean invasion was unlikely given the diplomatic signals that Washington was sending such as the January 1950 Acheson speech. Furthermore, Stalin was aware that some Truman Administration officials were considering a policy to drive a wedge between Moscow and Beijing. To reassert Soviet leadership in the international communist movement and keep Mao’s China tethered to the Soviet Union, Stalin gave the green light for the North Korean attack.⁶

Initially, Truman was reluctant to deploy U.S. ground forces to help defend South Korea because he wanted to avoid provoking a Soviet counter intervention which could escalate into a direct Soviet-American military conflict. General Douglas MacArthur, however, reported from Tokyo on the dire situation of the South Korean army and recommended the deployment of US ground forces into the combat area. Convinced by MacArthur that South Korea was unable to defend itself, Truman eventually authorized the use of US ground forces. Ultimately, Truman saw the Korean conflict from a global perspective that had emerged because of the tragic developments during the 1930s and subsequent second World War.⁷ With the Soviet Union tightening its grip in Eastern Europe and the communist victory in China, not to intervene in Korea would endanger international peace and security. And not to intervene would make President Truman increasingly vulnerable to domestic political accusations that he was soft on communism.⁸

The Soviet Union’s boycott of UN Security Council deliberations regarding China’s representation in the United Nations allowed the United States to get UN authorization for the military intervention on behalf of South Korea. Established on July 7, 1950, the UN Command consisted largely of U.S. forces led by General MacArthur, but eventually 21 other nations contributed to this UN “police action.” American military assets in Japan played a critical role in the war effort. Numerous ports in Japan served as the rear-area base for moving and

⁶ Kathryn Weathersby, “Should We Fear This? Stalin and the danger of War with America,” *Cold War History Project (CWIHP) Working Paper* No. 39 (July 2002); and Thomas J. Christensen, *Worse Than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 50-57.

⁷ James I. Matray, “US Entry into the Korean War: Origins, Impact, and Lessons,” *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* Vol. 5, No. 51 (2022), 175-180.

⁸ “US Enters the Korean Conflict,” National Archives (<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/korean-conflict>).

supplying U.S. troops to Korea.⁹ American B-29s in Yokota Air Base participated in bombing operations in North Korea throughout the war.¹⁰

Regarding a regional security architecture after the outbreak of the Korean conflict, John Foster Dulles, who was appointed by Truman to be the chief negotiator for the World War II peace settlement in East Asia, originally entertained a collective defense system known as the Pacific Pact modeled somewhat after NATO in Europe.¹¹ But while countries like Australia, the Philippines, the Republic of China (on Taiwan), and South Korea were eager to get American defense commitments, they resisted any reciprocal obligation to defend Japan as part of a multinational alliance. Moreover, Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru himself had no stomach for committing Japan to help defend other countries in the region. Therefore, the United States eventually settled for a network of bilateral alliances, which came to be known as the “hub-and-spokes” system. Nevertheless, the US military secretly ordered Japan to dispatch ships to engage in dangerous minesweeping operations near North Korean waters.¹²

The Korean war fundamentally transformed the American orientation regarding Japanese rearmament. The emphasis on Japan’s demilitarization was abandoned, and Washington pressured Tokyo to develop a military force capable of helping US forces to defend Japan against possible communist aggression. Although the Yoshida government initially resisted this pressure, Japan established the lightly armed National Peace Reserve in August 1950, which eventually evolved into the Self-Defense Force in July 1954.¹³ Moreover, Japan agreed to permit the United States to maintain armed forces in Japan not only to help defend Japan, but also to maintain peace and security in the Far East.¹⁴ Although Japan’s direct military involvement in the Korean War was limited to the minesweeping operations, Japan benefitted enormously from wartime procurements. This economic boom helped to realize the Kennan strategic vision of making postwar Japan the dominant regional economic force in containing communist expansion in Asia.

1953-1965: Korean Armistice to Normalization of Japan-ROK Relations

MacArthur’s reckless march to the Yalu River triggered China’s massive military intervention into Korea, and the Korean war evolved into a bloody military stalemate. The warring parties signed an armistice on July 27, 1953 that established a ceasefire and a demilitarized zone along the 38th parallel. In 1957, the UN Command relocated from Japan to South Korea; but a UN Command Rear was created in Japan that provided the legal framework for maintaining

⁹ Yasuzo Ishimaru, “The Korean War and Japanese Ports: Support for the UN Forces and Its Influences,” *NIDS Security Reports*, no. 8 (December 2007), 55-70.

¹⁰ Wada Haruki, *The Korean War: An International History* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 301.

¹¹ David W. Mabon, “Elusive Agreements: The Pacific Pact Proposals of 1949-1951,” *Pacific Historical Review* Vol. 57, No. 2 (May 1988), 147-177.

¹² Wada, *The Korean War*, 137-139.

¹³ Michael Schaller, “The Korean War: The Economic and Strategic Impact on Japan, 1950-53,” in William Stueck (ed.), *The Korean War in World History* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 160-169.

¹⁴ “Security Treaty between the United States and Japan; September 8, 1951” (https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/japan001.asp)

a Status of Forces of Agreement between the United Nations and the Japanese government.¹⁵ As a result, seven bases in Japan became UN-designated bases: Camp Zama, Yokota Air Base, Yokosuka Naval Base, Sasebo Naval Base, Kadena Air Base, White Beach Naval Facility, and Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. The US military presence in Japan thus became inextricably linked to the security of South Korea.

On October 1, 1953, the United States and South Korea signed a bilateral mutual defense treaty. Like the US-Japan security treaty, this defense pact gave the United States the right to deploy military forces in the Republic of Korea. But the US-ROK treaty differed from its US-Japan counterpart by being more symmetrical. The US-Japan treaty only obligated Japan to defend itself as well as allow the US to use its military assets for Far Eastern peace and security. Japan did not incur any explicit obligation to contribute actively to the defense of US territories in the Pacific. The US-South Korea treaty, however, declared that the Republic of Korea as well as the United States would be expected to respond to “an armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the Parties in territories now under their respective administrative control.”¹⁶ As a consequence, while this pair of bilateral security treaties effectively linked the U.S. military to the security of both Japan and South Korea, there was no explicit articulation of an expected Japanese defense contribution to South Korean security.

When the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty was revised in 1960, Japan sought to mandate through a “prior consultation” system a Japanese voice regarding the American use of military assets in Japan for combat missions that did not directly involve the defense of Japan. But Washington did not want this prior consultation to impede the use of US forces in Japan to respond to a possible North Korean attack. Therefore, the United States got Japan to agree secretly to an exemption regarding a Korean contingency. Known as the “Korean Minute,” Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke agreed to the following: “as an exceptional measure in the event of an emergency resulting from an attack against the United Nations forces in Korea, facilities and areas in Japan may be used for such military combat operations as need be undertaken immediately by the United States armed forces in Japan under the Unified Command of the United Nations.”¹⁷

While Washington and Seoul were negotiating their mutual defense treaty, conflict between South Korea and Japan erupted regarding the Dokdo/Takeshima territorial dispute. On April 20, 1953, the ROK stationed volunteer coast guards on the islets, which provoked skirmishes between Korean and Japanese coast guards. In 1954, South Korea consolidated its claim by erecting a lighthouse and a helicopter pad on the disputed territory. Washington did not want to get involved in this conflict between two treaty allies. It declared that the United States had no obligation to protect Takeshima from South Korean incursions; and Washington refused to respond positively to Japanese inquiries about raising the dispute in the UN Security

¹⁵ United Nations Command Rear Fact Sheet, 25 November 2014 (<https://www.yokota.af.mil/Portals/44/Documents/Units/AFD-150924-004.pdf>)

¹⁶ “Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea; October 1, 1953 (https://www.usfk.mil/Portals/105/Documents/SOFA/H_Mutual%20Defense%20Treaty_1953.pdf).

¹⁷ Dong-jun Lee, “From the Secret ‘Korean Minute’ to the Open ‘Korea Clause’: The United States and Japan and the Security of the Republic of Korea,” *Asian Perspective* 36 (2012), 124.

Council. In the end, the United States staked out a neutral position. It neither recognized South Korea's de facto control over Dokdo/Takeshima, nor acknowledged the Japanese claim.¹⁸

By the mid-1960s, the United States was eager to have Japan and South Korea normalize relations. Given the increasing costs of the US military intervention in Vietnam, Washington calculated that Japan-ROK diplomatic normalization might clear the way for Japanese economic assistance to South Korea and relieve the U.S. burden of supporting the South Korean economy. To facilitate an improvement in Japan-South Korea relations, the United States urged both South Korea and Japan to exercise restraint regarding the Korean seizure of Japanese fishing vessels near the so-called Rhee line. It also leaned on Japan to issue some sort of apologetic statement regarding its colonial rule over Korea. And in March 1965, Secretary of State Dean Rusk even proposed that Japan and South Korea construct and jointly operate a lighthouse on the disputed islet to defuse bilateral relations; but South Korean President Park flatly rejected this idea. Nevertheless, U.S. diplomatic efforts finally paid off; and Japan and the Republic of Korea finalized their agreements to establish normal diplomatic relations and the terms of Japanese economic assistance to South Korea in June 1965.¹⁹ From the American perspective, Japan and South Korea were now finally linked strategically through economic relations.

1965-1980: Changes in US Policy and Japan-ROK Relations

The U.S. quagmire in Vietnam set the stage for a major change in U.S. policy toward Northeast Asia. While the Johnson Administration struggled to wind down US military involvement in Vietnam by commencing negotiations with North Vietnam, doubts emerged in South Korea about American military resolve to preserve regional security –especially in the wake of US reluctance to retaliate militarily against the attempted North Korean raid on the South Korean presidential palace and the North Korean capture of the US intelligence ship USS Pueblo in January 1968.²⁰ In this international context, Richard Nixon articulated a shift in U.S. foreign policy. When he accepted the Republican Party's nomination for president in August 1968, Nixon called on "other nations in the Free World to bear their fair share of the burden of defending peace and freedom around this world." Rather than a new isolationism, Nixon argued for "a new internationalism in which America enlists its allies and its friends around the world in those struggles in which their interest is as great as ours." And in addressing "the leaders of the Communist world," Nixon stated that "After an era of confrontation, the time has come for an era of negotiation." He went all to say, "We extend the hand of friendship to all people, to the Russian people, to the Chinese people, to all people in the world."²¹

This new approach to foreign policy manifested itself in East Asia in what came to be known as the Nixon or Guam Doctrine. In his July 24, 1969, comments to the press, Nixon

¹⁸ Mike M. Mochizuki, "A Balancing Act: US Cold War Policies regarding Japan's Territorial Disputes with Korea and China," *Rivista Italiana di Storia Internazionale* Vol. 2 (2022), 327-329.

¹⁹ Victor Cha, "Bridging the Gap: The Strategic Context of the 1965 Korea-Japan Normalization Treaty," *Korean Studies* Vol. 20 (1996), 123-160.

²⁰ Chong-Sik Lee, *Japan and Korea: The Political Dimension* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 70.

²¹ Richard M. Nixon, "Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speech," August 8, 1968 (<https://www.4president.org//speeches/nixon1968acceptance.htm>)

stated that with the exception of major power threats involving nuclear weapons, the United States expected the Asian countries to assume responsibility for their own military defense. Nixon then followed up in November 1969 by including in a joint summit statement with Prime Minister Sato the phrase that the Republic of Korea was “essential to Japan’s own security.” In return for the reversion of Okinawa back to Japan, the United States was seeking reassurance that Japan would give the United States unrestricted use of military assets in Okinawa as well as the rest of Japan if necessary for the defense of South Korea.²² Moreover, Washington made sure that the so-called “Korea Clause” of the 1969 joint statement did not weaken the secret 1960 “Korea Minute” that exempted US-Japan prior consultation regarding the use of US military forces in Japan in response to a military conflict in Korea.²³

Although Nixon did not intend to signal a U.S. military withdrawal from Asia, his unilateral decision in 1970 to reduce the U.S. military presence in South Korea by 20,000 troops made both South Koreans and Japanese nervous. The troop reduction gave Japan more incentive to increase its defense spending in the 1972-1976 fourth defense buildup plan and to give greater weight to “autonomous” defense capabilities. Moreover, US-China rapprochement and US-Soviet detente under Nixon encouraged both Japan and South Korea to consider the easing of tensions with North Korea. Japan moved gingerly toward a more equidistant policy regarding the two Koreas. For example, in 1974, Japanese Foreign Minister Kimura Toshio declared that the “peace and security of the entire Korean peninsula” was essential to Japan’s security, denied that North Korea was a threat to Japan, and stated publicly that the Republic of Korea was not the only legal government in Korea.²⁴ To harmonize with Sino-American rapprochement, even the stridently anti-communist regime of Park Chung-hee initiated a new policy to engage North Korea.²⁵ Consistent with its preference for peaceful coexistence between North and South Korea, Japan agreed with Park’s proposal for simultaneous entry of the two Koreas in the United Nations and “cross-recognition” of the two Koreas by the four major powers (i.e., the United States, Japan, China, and the Soviet Union).²⁶ But neither the Japanese nor the South Korean diplomatic moves toward North Korea dramatically changed the tense security situation in Korean peninsula.

Much more alarming for Japan and South Korea than the 1970 Nixon reduction of US troops in South Korea was President Jimmy Carter’s intention to follow through on his campaign pledge to withdraw all US forces from Korea in about five years. The 1970 Nixon troop reduction had inspired Carter to consider a complete military withdrawal. He felt that having American ground forces in South Korea as a “tripwire” was dangerous because it would guarantee that the United States would become automatically involved in a new Korean war. As part of a phased US military pullout, Carter wanted to get assurances from both China

²² Chong-Sik Lee, *Japan and Korea*, 71.

²³ Lee, “From the Secret ‘Korean Minute’ to the Open ‘Korea Clause’,” 134-135.

²⁴ Chong-Sik Lee, *Korea and Japan*, 80-81.

²⁵ Choi Lyong, “Reluctant Reconciliation: South Korea’s tentative detente with North Korea in the Nixon era, 1969-72,” *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 54, No. 1 (2020), 59-94.

²⁶ Hong N. Kim, “South Korean-Japanese Relations in the Post-Park Chung-Hee Era,” *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (November-December 1981), 90.

and the Soviet Union that North Korea would not invade South Korea.²⁷ Japanese and South Korean leaders expressed their misgivings if not their outright opposition to Carter's plan. Their views resonated with Congressional opposition to the withdrawal. Some American critics of Carter expressed concern that North Korea might see an opportunity to invade South Korea after the fall of Saigon in 1975. A January 1979 intelligence report indicated that North Korea still possessed "clear ground superiority" over South Korea; and in April 1979, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that additional troop reductions be suspended after the scheduled pullout of one battalion in 1978.²⁸ Several months later, the Carter Administration announced that it was suspending the troop withdrawal until 1981. Reagan's defeat of Carter in the 1980 presidential election effectively ended further consideration of a military pullout from South Korea.

1981-1993: Ending the Cold War and the Prospect of Tension Reduction

During the early 1980s, as the Soviet-American cold war heated up again, the United States saw the security situation in the Korean peninsula as increasingly precarious. The commanding officer of US Forces in Japan argued in November 1982 that "Japan and ROK should fight against a Soviet attack to ROK in cooperation with the US, and hoped for close military cooperation between Japan and ROK in order to prepare to fight against a common foe."²⁹ A succession of events reinforced a bleak assessment. In September 1983, the Soviet Union shot down a Korean Air Line passenger jet in Soviet airspace. In October 1983, North Korea attempted to assassinate President Chun Doo-Hwan of South Korea in Rangoon, Burma. Although President Chun avoided the attack because a traffic-related delay, the North Korean bomb killed 21 people including four South Korean cabinet members. And in November 1987, a bomb placed by North Korean agents caused the destruction of a Korean Air passenger jet over the Andaman Sea.

Despite these alarming developments, South Korean foreign policy specialists had been quietly studying West Germany's *Ostpolitik* policy with East Germany in order to fashion a comparable South Korean *Nordpolitik* toward North Korea. The gradual improvement in Soviet-American relations under Gorbachev and Reagan provided a favorable context for such a bold diplomatic initiative. South Korean president Roh Tae-woo unveiled his *Nordpolitik* diplomacy on July 7, 1988, by announcing his intention to improve relations with the Soviet Union, China and other socialist countries, to stop blocking non-military trade with North Korea, and to support North Korean efforts to improve relations with both the United States and Japan. Washington facilitated this dramatic shift in South Korean diplomacy by serving as a communication channel from Seoul to Moscow and Beijing.³⁰

After the successful summer 1988 Olympics in Seoul, Washington decided to take

²⁷ Don Oberdorfer, "Carter's Decision on Korea Traced Back to January 1975," *Washington Post*, June 12, 1977.

²⁸ Chong-Sik Lee, *Japan and Korea*, 97-99.

²⁹ *United States Forces, Japan: Command History* 1982, 74 (<https://nautilus.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/USFJ1982.pdf>).

³⁰ Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1997), 186-192.

modest steps towards Pyongyang to support Roh's *Nordpolitik*. The United States encouraged unofficial, nongovernmental visits by North Koreans to the United States, eased financial restrictions that impeded travel to North Korea by American citizens, permitted limited commercial export of American humanitarian goods, and revived permission for substantive discussions with North Koreans in neutral settings. In response to these modest steps, U.S. policymakers hoped to see constructive North Korean responses in five areas: (1) progress in the North-South dialogue, (2) return of the remains of Americans missing in action from the Korean War, (3) elimination of anti-American propaganda, (4) the implementation of confidence-building measures along the DMZ, and (5) credible assurances that North Korea had abandoned terrorism as an instrument of state policy. With this overture, direct U.S.-North Korean diplomatic talks took place over 34 sessions between December 1988 and September 1993.³¹

With the Cold War coming to an end in Europe, there was a rapid succession of positive developments in Northeast Asia. The Republic of Korea normalized relations with the Soviet Union in 1990 and with China in 1992. In 1991, both North and South Korea were admitted to the United Nations. In December 1991, North and South Korea signed an agreement on reconciliation, non-aggression, exchange and cooperation that encompassed the following five points: (1) recognize and respect each other's system, (2) cease to compete or confront each other, (3) agree not to use force or armed aggression against each other, (4) promote military confidence and a phased reduction of armaments, and (5) engage in economic exchanges and cooperation. The two countries also agreed to a joint declaration on denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. They declared the following: (1) shall not test, manufacture, produce, receive, possess, store, deploy, or use nuclear weapons; (2) shall use nuclear energy solely for peaceful purposes; (3) shall not possess nuclear reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities; and (4) verify denuclearization through inspections agreed upon between two sides. In January 1992, North Korea signed a safeguard agreement with the International Atomic Energy Commission.³²

The United States eventually became a more active supporter of Roh's *Nordpolitik*. In July 1989, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution calling for the reduction of U.S. forces in South Korea. The Bush Administration followed up in 1990 with a three-stage plan to reduce US forces in Korea. And in 1991, Washington decided to withdraw all tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea. Finally, in 1992, the United States suspended the large-scale Team Spirit military exercises that usually involved over 200,000 American and South Korean troops. This suspension was especially important to North Korea as an expression of American good faith.³³ Japan also made parallel diplomatic moves toward North Korea. In September 1990, LDP leader Kanemaru Shin led a Japanese delegation to Pyongyang. He delivered to North Korean leader Kim Il Sung a letter from Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu indicating that Japan was prepared to offer to North Korea an apology and compensation for Japan's colonial rule

³¹ Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 192-195.

³² Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 260-267.

³³ Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 192-196.

over Korea.³⁴

These positive developments came to a grinding halt during the 1992 presidential campaign in South Korea. Kim Young Sam, the Democratic Liberal Party candidate, feared that a dramatic improvement in North-South relations might benefit his political rival Kim Dae-Jung who favored more proactive comprehensive engagement with North Korea. With the presidential campaign in full swing and Roh a lame duck president, South Korea began to slow down the normalization process with North Korea. In this context, American and South Korean defense ministers announced in October 1992 preparations to resume the Team Spirit military exercises in 1993. The South Korean military had taken the lead in pushing for the resumption of these military exercises, and the U.S. military commander in Korea was ready to go ahead with the exercises unless there was an explicit decision from Washington to the contrary. Unfortunately, the US and South Korea defense ministers announced the resumption of military exercises without any high-level interagency review of this critical decision in Washington. This dysfunctional policy process revealed how little attention was being paid by principal American policymakers regarding basic strategy toward North Korea. Donald Gregg, the U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, criticized the public announcement of the resumption of military exercises as “one of the biggest mistakes” of Korea policy.³⁵

North Korea called the resumption of Team Spirit exercises “a criminal act” designed to “put the brakes on North-South relations and drive the North-South dialogue to a crisis.” In January 1993, North Korea refused to allow special inspections of two unreported nuclear facilities; and two months later North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. And then in November 1993, the United States moved to suspend the reduction of military forces in Korea because of suspicions about North Korea’s clandestine nuclear program. This negative dynamic terminated any prospect of “cross-recognition.” Since US and Japanese normalization of relations with North Korea did not follow Soviet and Chinese normalization of relations with South Korea, Pyongyang found itself more isolated and vulnerable; and North Korea became even more motivated to develop nuclear weapons. Thus the Korean peninsula became engulfed in a North Korean nuclear crisis that has continued to this day.

Conclusion

The North Korean invasion of South Korea in June 1950 transformed the way American strategists viewed Japan and Korea. Before the Korean war, US policymakers saw the intrinsic strategic value of Japan, but viewed South Korea more as a strategic liability. But after the outbreak of war, the United States linked Japan and South Korea in an overall strategy to contain communism in East Asia. US defense planners wanted to make sure that the United States would have unfettered access and use of its military bases and personnel in Japan to defend South Korea. The United States also sought an improvement in Japan-South Korea relations so that Tokyo would support South Korea’s economic development and thereby

³⁴ Tanaka Akihiko, *Japan in Asia: Post-Cold War Diplomacy* (Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture, 2017), 48-56.

³⁵ Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 272-274.

reduce the American burden to bolster the South Korean economy. During the Cold War, American policymakers may have preferred more proactive Japanese rear area support during a Korean contingency, but this was not a priority issue. It would later become so during the mid-1990s in the context of the North Korean nuclear crisis.

At various times, American leaders supported a significant reduction of US troops in South Korea, and such moves provoked anxiety in both Japan and South Korea about a possible weakening of the US security commitment. Remarkably, U.S. policymakers did not seriously consider a comparable significant reduction of the US military presence in Japan. This suggested that despite the strategic linkage between Japan and Korea, Washington continued to value Japan more than South Korea as a defense ally. While the United States promoted an operational military link between its forces in Japan and South Korea to address the North Korean threat, it did not devote much attention to enhancing defense cooperation between its two Northeast Asian allies.

Finally, despite periodic reviews of its military presence in South Korea, US leaders did not devote much attention to engaging North Korea directly to reduce tensions and to exploring ways to develop a stable system for peaceful coexistence between North and South Korea beyond the 1953 armistice agreement. Only after President Roh began to vigorously pursue his *Nordpolitik* diplomacy did Washington begin to play a supportive role. But the US role tended to be reactive rather than proactive and strategic. As a consequence, the United States contributed to a missed opportunity at the end of the Cold War to establish a durable peace on the Korean peninsula. And this set the stage for a multi-decade crisis regarding North Korea's nuclear and missile programs in the post-Cold War era.