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THE FOLLY OF CLINTON'S DEFENSE PLANS FOR KOREA

(Updating *Backgrounder* No. 957, "Thumbs Down to the Bottom-Up Review," September 22, 1993.)

In the wake of former President Jimmy Carter's recent visit, the communist dictatorship in North Korea has promised to freeze its nuclear program. Pyongyang's refusal to cooperate with international inspectors and fears that the North was developing nuclear weapons prompted the Clinton Administration to announce its intention to seek economic sanctions from the United Nations Security Council; Pyongyang has said that sanctions would be treated as an act of war.

A war in Korea is one for which the Clinton Administration should be particularly well-prepared. In 1993, the Administration conducted a comprehensive review of America's defense requirements. Known as the Bottom-Up Review (BUR), it has served as the basis for Clinton's 1995 defense budget and for White House national security strategy through 1999. To develop these budgets and strategies, then-Secretary of Defense Les Aspin noted in his October 1993 "Report on the Bottom-Up Review" that "while a number of scenarios were examined [for planning purposes], the two that we focused on most closely...envisaged aggression by...Iraq against Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and by North Korea against the Republic of Korea."¹

In the Bottom-Up Review, these two scenarios were referred to as major regional conflicts. The Clinton Administration proposes that the U.S. must be prepared to fight two such conflicts "nearly simultaneously," and that America's military forces must remain large enough to do so. But with each passing month, the rapid military draw-down on which the Administration has embarked makes it clearer that U.S. conventional forces today are nowhere near large enough to conduct two such operations at the same time. If Clinton holds firm to his intentions as outlined in the Bottom-Up Review, then military commanders will be given far fewer resources to fight in Korea than commanders were provided to fight the war in the Persian Gulf. In fact, the Korea force will be almost 50 percent smaller than the Desert Storm force. The impact of fighting a war in Korea with a force this small would certainly be higher casualties and a longer time to victory. Moreover, because of difficult terrain, a more well-disciplined enemy, and the absence of extensive basing facilities nearby, such as those provided by Saudi Arabia in the Gulf War, a war in Korea would be a more challenging endeavor than Desert Storm.

Depending on the duration and intensity of a second Korean war, U.S. military planners preparing for the conflict would certainly ask for forces much larger than those allocated by the Bottom-Up Review for a single regional war. But the Administration's track record on supporting the needs of its overseas commanders

1 Department of Defense, *Report of the Bottom-Up Review*, October 1993, p. 14.

for military equipment is suspect. A request last year by the U.S. commander in Somalia for armored fighting vehicles was turned down because of the political sensitivities of civilian Pentagon officials.² Shortly thereafter, the absence of armor led directly to the deaths of 18 American soldiers trying to rescue peacekeepers caught in a firefight with armed military factions in Mogadishu, the Somali capital.

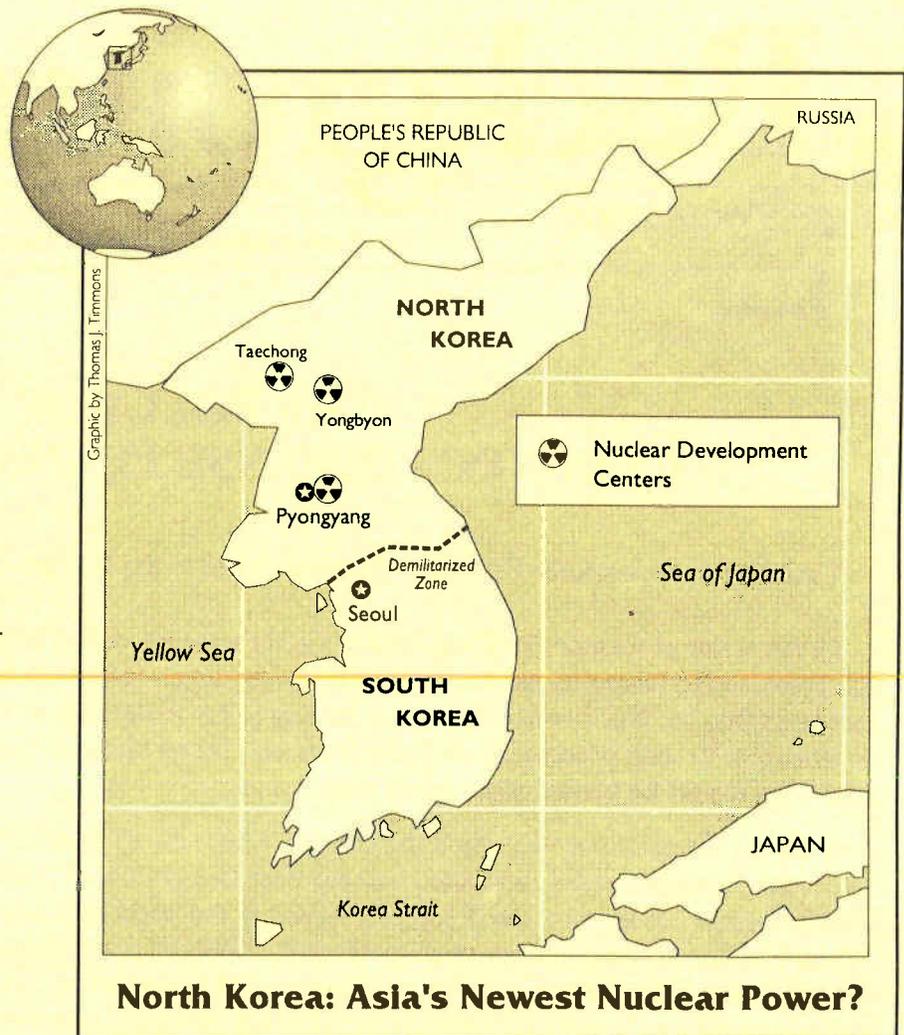
Will Pentagon planning for a war in Korea be similarly hampered by political considerations, which might include the Administration having to acknowledge that its own comprehensive review of America's defense requirements is invalid? Will the military services be asked to conduct a war in Korea that in many respects will be more stressful than the Persian Gulf War with far smaller forces? To prevent these outcomes and avoid a disaster similar to that seen in Somalia, but on a much larger scale, Congress should:

- ✓ **Adopt** a sense of the Congress resolution expressing the view that the Bottom-Up Review should in no way be seen as limiting the size of the force military commanders planning a campaign in Korea may request.
- ✓ **Insist** that regular military briefings on the U.S. preparations for a war in Korea be given to select Members of Congress.

The Clinton Administration's Plans for War in Korea

When then-Secretary of Defense Les Aspin announced the findings of the Bottom-Up Review on September 1, 1993, he asserted that his recommendations for the size of the military America needs were based on the need to fight two major regional conflicts "nearly simultaneously." The force proposed to meet this requirement included: 1) between 15 and 16 Army divisions, 2) 346 Navy ships (including 11 active aircraft carriers and one reserve/training aircraft carrier), 3) 20 Air Force tactical fighter wings, and 4) 174,000 active-duty Marine Corps troops.

² Secretary Aspin acknowledged during an October 7, 1993, White House press conference that he turned down the request for armor. Aspin said his decision was motivated in part by a political commitment to withdraw U.S. forces from Somalia.



Total U.S. forces now remain somewhat larger (see adjacent chart). But while the North Koreans buy time through disingenuous negotiations, the U.S. is continuing to cut its defense budget. In fact, during the 1990s defense outlays will decrease by 35 percent.

With each concession Washington makes to the North Koreans, U.S. forces approach the wholly inadequate levels outlined in the Bottom-Up Review. That force would be too small to fight two major regional conflicts, such as in Korea and the Middle East, "nearly simultaneously."

An Army Too Small

According to the Clinton plan, the Army will be reduced to between 15 and 16 divisions. One division will be dedicated to forward presence in Europe to meet minimum NATO obligations. At least one division is to be available for peacekeeping; the Administration has already committed to deploying a future peacekeeping force in Bosnia, for example. Press accounts indicate that the Administration expects to send up to 25,000 troops to Bosnia, assuming a settlement is reached in the conflict.³

This means that as few as 13 divisions will remain to be divided between the two major regional conflicts in Korea and the Middle East. Of this, a maximum of four Army divisions could be committed to Korea at the outset of the conflict because three divisions would have to be held in reserve as a so-called rotation base. Six divisions would have to be allocated to prepare for the second conflict in the Middle East. The rotation base will allow troops to be relieved in the event of a lengthy deployment and as replacement for combat losses. The six divisions allocated to the Middle East would allow four to be sent to the conflict and two additional divisions would serve as a rotation base for this second hypothetical conflict. By comparison, the force deployed to the Persian Gulf for Operation Desert Storm included seven divisions plus two armored cavalry regiments (see above chart).

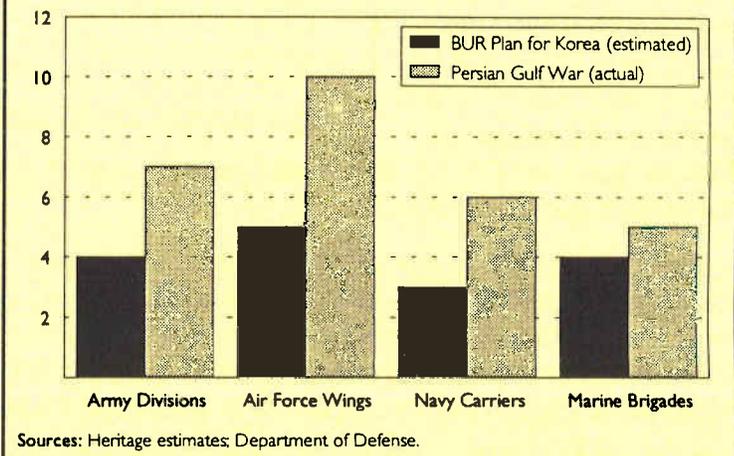
While American troops would be fighting alongside well-trained forces of The Republic of Korea, no American commander would rely solely on the forces of another country to guarantee minimal loss of American lives. A ground war on the Korean peninsula could be expected to be a much more challenging proposition than the war in the Iraqi and Kuwaiti desert, due to difficult terrain and a lower probability of a decisive air campaign. General Cary E. Luck, Commander of U.S. forces in Korea, implicitly acknow-

Bottom-Up Review Force Represents a Significant Reduction from Gulf War Military Force Levels

	1991 (Actual)	1995 (Clinton Budget Request)	1999 (BUR)
Army Divisions	26	20	15
Air Force Wings	34	20.5	20
Navy Ships	528	373	346
Active Marine Corps Troops	194,000	174,000	174,000

Source: Department of Defense.

Clinton's 1994 Korea Force Significantly Below 1991 Gulf War Force Levels



3 Susanne M. Schafer, "Shalikhvili: About 25,000 U.S. Troops Likely in Bosnia," The Associated Press, March 10, 1994.

ledged as much when he told Congress recently that he would need an additional 400,000 troops to reinforce those already assigned to Korea should war break out.⁴

An Air Force with Nothing in Reserve

The Bottom-Up Review is no easier on the Air Force than on the Army regarding a future war in Korea. The plan calls for the Air Force to retain 20 tactical fighter wings, ten for each major regional conflict. This leaves nothing available for forward presence in Europe or for peacekeeping operations. Aside from leaving no tactical aircraft in the United States for the defense of U.S. airspace, the Clinton plan would leave no reserve forces to back up those squadrons fighting in one of the major regional conflicts.

Balance of Forces on the Korean Peninsula				
	North Korea	South Korea	U.S. Forces in ROK	Other U.S. Forces in Asia
ARMY				
Men	1,000,000	520,000	26,000 (2nd Div)	in Japan: 18,300 Marines
Tanks	3,700	1,800	116	in Hawaii: 18,000 Army Troops
Armored Personnel Carriers	2,500	1,550	138	
Artillery	2,300	3,500	48	
Self-Propelled Artillery	4,500	900	0	
Multiple Rocket Launchers	2,280	140	36	
Surface-to Surface Missiles	30-100+	12	0	
Surface-to-Air Missiles	10,000	850	0	
Helicopters	290	588	200+	
AIR FORCE				
Combat Aircraft	730, includes: 14 MiG-29 46 MiG-23 160 MiG-21 180 MiG-19 240 MiG-17 36 Su-25	445, includes: 48 F-16 96 F-4 190 F-5	84, includes: 72 F-16 12 OA-10	in Japan: 36 F-15C 18 F-15E 24 F-16 +60 combat aircraft on U.S.S. Independence
NAVY				
Aircraft Carriers	0	0		6
Cruisers	0	0		29
Submarines	25	4		34
Destroyers	0	9		17
Frigates	3	29		14
Patrol Craft	387	120		
Amphibious Craft	231	14		
<small>Note: Figures represent estimates of early 1994 force levels. Sources: Military Balance 1993-1994; Department of Defense.</small>				

This is obviously an unrealistic allocation of resources. How might Air Force wings really be allocated in the event of a conflict in Korea? First, at least one wing likely will remain in Europe to support NATO forces. Another probably will be dedicated to a peacekeeping operation such as in the Balkans. Finally, no fewer than three wings will remain in the U.S. for air defense and training. This leaves 15 Air Force tactical wings to be divided between conflicts in Korea and the Middle East.

Perhaps as many as eight wings, or more than half of those available, could be dedicated to the Korean conflict. But at least three of these eight would have to be held in reserve to reinforce those sent into the conflict at the start. This means that the Air Force will be able to send only five tactical fighter wings to Korea in the event of a conflict, if the war is fought as outlined in the Bottom-Up Review. In Operation Desert Storm, by comparison, 29 Air Force fighter squadrons, or roughly 10 wings, participated.

Too Few Aircraft Carriers

The Clinton Administration intends to retain a navy built around 12 aircraft carriers, one of which will be dedicated to training new pilots. In the Bottom-Up Review, the Administration plans to commit four to five aircraft carrier battle groups to each major regional conflict. But the simple math of aircraft carrier employment does not add up for the Clinton plan. One carrier battle group is deployed in the Mediterranean Sea to

4 "Clinton May Add G.I.'s in Korea While Remaining Open to Talks," *The New York Times*, June 17, 1994, p. A1.

support such U.S. and NATO commitments as the no-fly zone in former Yugoslavia. One carrier is dedicated to training. This leaves ten carriers to be divided between a war in Korea and a war in the Middle East.

Of the ten remaining carriers, at least one will be out of action undergoing a long-term overhaul, as is always the case. Further, given the normal rotation of aircraft carriers around the world, an additional three will be unavailable because they either will have just returned or are preparing to embark upon an overseas assignment.⁵ This leaves six aircraft carriers for the two major regional conflicts the Clinton Administration envisions. Thus, three aircraft carriers could be sent to Korea, three to the Middle East. By way of comparison, six aircraft carriers were sent to the Persian Gulf.

Naval aviation will be even more critical to the defense of the Korean peninsula than it was during Operation Desert Storm. In that conflict, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states provided large and well-equipped airfields at which the U.S. could deploy the significant numbers of U.S. Air Force fighters and bombers that conducted so much of the air campaign during the war. Equally capable facilities close to the Korean peninsula simply do not exist and will make the U.S. that much more dependent upon naval forces to provide the aviation superiority that proved so critical in the Persian Gulf.

A Marine Corps Stretched Thin

The Bottom-Up Review does not cut the Marine Corps strength as deeply as it does that of the other services. As a result, the Marine Corps probably can meet the requirement to fight at full strength in two major regional conflicts at the same time. But the Corps will have little room to spare. The Clinton plan provides the Marine Corps with 12 brigades, made up of both active and reserve units. Assuming one brigade is participating in a peacekeeping mission, 11 brigades will remain to be divided between the two conflicts. The Marines could thus assign four brigades to both Korea and the Middle East conflicts and have three in reserve. Five Marine brigades were deployed during the Persian Gulf War.

Avoiding a Repeat of the Disaster in Somalia

Military commanders preparing for a war in Korea are certain to ask for forces larger than those envisioned in the Bottom-Up Review. When this happens, it will be clear to military commanders that the entire Bottom-Up Review force is inadequate. The likely result will be that civilian officials will be tempted to overrule the professional judgment of the military commanders and deny requests for forces large enough to win the war at the minimum cost to the U.S.

Doing this would be a repeat of the mistake made when this Administration in September 1993 refused a request of military commanders for armored fighting vehicles in Somalia. Only this time the mistake would have much graver consequences than the 18 Americans who lost their lives because of that decision. Moreover, such actions would be contrary to the prudent decision-making process established during the Persian Gulf War. In that instance, force requirements were left to the professional judgment of competent military officers.

5 For a full discussion of aircraft carrier deployment patterns, see John Luddy, "Charting a Course for the Navy in the 21st Century," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 979, March 9, 1994, pp. 4-5.

Avoiding a Future Disaster: What Congress Can Do

The time for Congress to express its concern about declining defense capabilities is now. To do so, Congress should consider:

- ✓ **Adopting a sense of the Congress resolution that states that the Bottom-Up Review should not be used to impose a cap on the forces that could be allocated to a campaign in Korea.** Further, the resolution should state that Congress is prepared to reconsider the Bottom-Up Review in its entirety in light of force requests from the military in planning for a Korean conflict. In other words, the resolution should state that Congress will send the Administration back to the drawing board if the real-world lessons taught by preparing for a Korean campaign show the Bottom-Up Review is invalid—as is becoming increasingly apparent.
- ✓ **Insisting on regular military briefings on preparations for a war in Korea for select members, including the Speaker of the House, the House Minority Leader, the Senate Majority Leader, the Senate Minority Leader, and the Chairmen and Ranking Members of both Armed Services Committees.** These briefings will give congressional leaders the opportunity to assess the preparations for war and the degree of support the military commanders are receiving. This option should be supported by the Clinton Administration because the President will need congressional support for war should a Korean nuclear stalemate lead to that. By offering Congress briefings from his military commanders, Clinton will be seen as a Commander in Chief confident of his preparations and eager to elicit the support of the American people through their elected representatives.

Conclusion

The U.S. still has forces strong enough to prevail in Korea, although not as strong as those used in the Persian Gulf War. But the likelihood of a disaster in Korea will increase dramatically if military planners' options are narrowed by the unrealistic assumptions and dictates of the Clinton Administration's budget-driven Bottom-Up Review. Congress can take steps to ensure that America's military commanders are given every chance to succeed. Thousands of American lives hang in the balance, as does the nation's security and global standing. The stakes are too high to defer entirely to an Administration that has shown itself to be unsteady and unsure in its handling of U.S. foreign and defense policy.

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