

**RUSH!**

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## IN WAR WITH NORTH KOREA, THE NAVY COULD COME UP SHORT

Notwithstanding recent diplomatic progress, the crisis on the Korean peninsula is not over.<sup>1</sup> There is little doubt that the communist regime in Pyongyang intends to develop nuclear weapons, and may already have done so. The United States has been talking with the North Koreans for more than three years in an effort to convince them to permit international inspections of suspected nuclear weapons sites. Should these talks break down, the Clinton Administration will find itself where it was in June, before former President Jimmy Carter's visit to Pyongyang: seeking international economic sanctions and preparing for possible war.

A war on the Korean peninsula would place great demands on U.S. naval forces. In addition to supplying most of the air power early in the conflict, Navy planes and ships would have to support U.S. ground forces with heavy gunfire until Air Force aircraft and Army artillery arrived. American Marines launched from Navy ships would be among the first U.S. ground troops to join the 36,000 U.S. troops already stationed in South Korea. But because of ill-advised budget cuts, the Navy today would be hard-pressed to perform these and other missions necessary to win a war with North Korea because it lacks the ships and aircraft to project adequate firepower from ship to shore.<sup>2</sup>

### WHAT CAN BE DONE

This decline in combat capability could be reversed by Congress as it begins the fiscal year 1995 defense appropriations bill conference next week. Congress should require that the Pentagon:

**Stop Phasing Out the A-6E *Intruder*.** The Navy plans to phase out the A-6E *Intruder* over the next four years.

So far no plans exist for replacing the A-6E. This carrier-based aircraft, which attacks enemy targets on land, would be critical to winning a war in Korea. It can carry over 30,000 pounds of weapons and fly nearly 700 miles fully loaded. Most important, the A-6E is equipped with electronic systems that enable it to perform its bombing missions at night and in bad weather. While a replacement for the A-6E may be produced in the future, it is years—perhaps more than a decade—away.

In the meantime, this aircraft's capabilities will be needed if a war breaks in Korea or anywhere else. Combat does not stop when the sun goes down or when the clouds roll in. U.S. forces must be able to call on around-the-clock fire support from the air. Until the Korean crisis is resolved, the A-6E *Intruder* should be retained in the Navy's inventory in sufficient numbers to support American troops on the ground. The Navy plans to de-activate 122 A-6 aircraft in fiscal 1995. These plans should be halted. Each plane will cost approximately \$2.7 million to operate, so the additional cost to the Navy of maintaining these aircraft in fiscal 1995 would be \$330 million.

See Richard D. Fisher, Jr., "Fixing Jimmy Carter's Mistakes: Regaining the Initiative Against North Korea," Heritage Foundation Asian Studies Center *Backgrounders* No. 131, July 8, 1994.

2 For a discussion of Navy issues, see John Luddy, "Charting a Course for the Navy in the 21st Century," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounders* No. 979, March 9, 1994.

**Bring Back Two Battleships.** The last U.S. battleship was decommissioned in 1992. However, against a North Korean invasion, U.S. and South Korean forces would need the firepower supplied by American battleships. If the North were to invade the South, Pyongyang's forces probably would overrun U.S. forces early in the war, possibly taking the seaports of Inchon and Pusan in South Korea. If this were to happen, the U.S. would have to land troops to retake these ports from the North Koreans. To force their way ashore, U.S. ground troops would rely on the Navy's ships and aircraft to prepare the way for a landing. Until recently, the Navy's primary gunnery platform was the battleship, which could fire 1,000 tons of shells in an hour, reaching targets 23 miles away and penetrating 27 feet of reinforced concrete.

According to a June 1993 study by the Congressional Budget Office: "If a near-term increase in the capability to provide naval fire support is desired, reactivating battleships may be the only solution." Until new gun technology now being tested reaches the fleet, the Navy should restore two battleships for possible service in Korea. According to the CBO, it will cost approximately \$52 million to re-activate each battleship; operating costs for each ship will be approximately \$42 million annually. The total cost of re-commissioning two battleships and operating them in fiscal 1995 thus will be approximately \$188 million.

**Keep an Adequate Number of Large Assault Ships in the Fleet.** If the Navy were forced to make an amphibious landing in Korea, as was done at Inchon in the Korean War, it would not have enough ships to deliver troops and equipment from ship to shore. The centerpiece of the Marine Corps power projection capability is the Navy's fleet of amphibious assault ships. These "big-deck" ships are over 800 feet long and carry about 2,000 Marines, plus the equipment and supplies to sustain them for 15 days of combat. Equipped with flight decks for helicopters and AV-8B *Harrier* "jump-jets," these ships can launch smaller, troop-carrying vessels, including amphibious assault vehicles (AAV) and Air-Cushioned Landing Craft (LCAC).

The Pentagon's wartime requirements—including plans for a "major regional conflict" in Korea—call for an amphibious fleet of 12 "big deck" ships. But the Navy has only 11 such ships today. This shortage will persist until 2007, when the last of the older *Iwo Jima*-class ships are retired and the final planned *Wasp*-class ship enters the fleet. To give the Marines the immediate 12-ship fleet they need, the scheduled retirement of the USS *Guadalcanal* (LPH-7) should be postponed until the crisis in Korea is completely resolved. The costs of operating the ship in 1995, including personnel, fuel, training, repairs, and maintenance, will be approximately \$35 million.

**Putting Preparedness Ahead of Pork.** The total 1995 cost of this naval preparedness for a potential Korean conflict will be \$553 million. By comparison, the Department of Defense is forced by Congress to spend more than \$4 billion annually on domestic projects which have nothing to do with defending America. For example, the Pentagon in 1993 funded World Cup soccer (\$9 million), breast cancer research (\$210 million), and a Hawaiian volcano observatory (\$500,000). Since 1986, spending on non-defense "pork" in the defense budget has risen over 200 percent even as overall defense budgets have shrunk by 40 percent. Regardless of the value of such domestic programs, they will not help the Navy or the other services to fight and win the next war.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the \$553 million needed to keep the Navy in top fighting condition should come from these non-defense items in the defense budget.

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, American troops were mauled because the defense budget had been drastically cut in the post-World War II rush to disarm. In the Clinton Administration's haste to disarm after the Cold War, similar conditions are beginning to appear. It would be both tragic and ironic if the Administration learned the lesson of Korea in 1950 all over again in 1995. Small steps taken now to correct the growing deficiencies in the Navy could save American lives if there should ever be another Korean War.

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3 See John Luddy, "This Is Defense?: Non-Defense Spending in the Defense Budget," Heritage Foundation *F.Y.I.*, March 30, 1994.