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# NATIONAL POLICY PAPER

## THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Annex to Part Two

Nuclear Strategy



August, 1965

Group I

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Annex to Part Two

National Policy Paper on the Republic of Korea

NUCLEAR STRATEGY

1. Purpose, Scope, and Assumptions

1. This annex elaborates on the factors bearing on United States policy with respect to the use of nuclear weapons for the deterrence of, or defense against, attack by the combined military forces of North Korea (DPRK) and Communist China (CPR) solely on the Republic of Korea. (See Part I, paragraphs 52-56, for a discussion of our overall defense strategy for Korea.)

2. An attack by North Korean forces alone could unquestionably be adequately met without use of nuclear weapons, so long as the United Nations Command (UNC) force levels set forth in the NPP are maintained. Hostilities covering a wider territory than Korea would have to be considered in a regional or global context.

3. It is assumed, for the purpose of this analysis, that nuclear weapons will not have been used in combat since World War II by the US or any other power, and that US nuclear capabilities remain greatly superior to those of the CPR and the USSR.

4. It is also assumed that there will continue to be a valid and distinguishable dividing line between conventional and nuclear warfare, and that it will remain in the US interest to maintain this dividing line.

5. Other assumptions, and the description of the situation and threat, are as set forth in the body of the National Policy Paper. The NPP holds that UNC forces (including the ROK forces under UNC operational control) at the force levels set forth in the NPP, with

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scheduled augmentation, could hold against attack by combined DPRK/CPR forces at least for a considerable period.

2. Discussion

A. General

6. US strategy as stated in the NPP is to organize and equip US/UN/ROK forces in Korea to deter an attack by the DPRK alone or in combination with the CPR; and with augmentation successfully to defend against such an attack if made, without the use of nuclear weapons; but not to foreclose the possibility of using nuclear weapons. In the following paragraphs, the rationale for not relying in the first instance upon nuclear weapons, and their residual role in respect to Korea, are considered.

7. The above strategy is one of four plausible alternative mixes of conventional and nuclear capabilities in the defensive posture of US/UN/ROK forces in Korea:

a. Exclusive reliance upon prompt use of nuclear weapons, with a small "trip-wire" conventional force to establish the fact of the outbreak of hostilities;

b. Primary reliance upon nuclear weapons, but with capability for sufficient conventional defense to provide time in which to decide whether to utilize nuclear weapons or to withdraw;

c. Basic reliance upon capability for successful conventional defense, but prepared to use nuclear weapons when vital US interests cannot be defended at the non-nuclear level;

d. Exclusive reliance upon conventional defense, adjuring the use of nuclear weapons.

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8. Nuclear weapons, as they enter into the above alternatives, must be considered from the standpoint both of their military utility and their psychological-political effect, both for deterrence and in the event of actual use. They must also be considered with regard to implications affecting not only Korea and the Far East but US interests world-wide. In military terms, deterrent value derives from utility of the weapons in defending against attack, including retaliatory action not necessarily restricted to the enemy's attacking forces. Psychological-political considerations must be considered separately for deterrence and for actual use.

B. Military Implications

9. From the military standpoint, in the event of actual attack by combined DPRK/CPR forces, use of nuclear weapons could (a) compensate for an insufficiency of conventional UNC defensive force present in Korea, (b) reduce the requirement for conventional augmentation of UNC forces, or (c) afford an extra margin of safety to a basically conventional defense. These advantages would be reduced, however, if the USSR or Communist China provided nuclear support for the North Koreans (see paragraph 12).

10. Because of the importance of holding Seoul, the decision whether to use nuclear weapons might have to be faced soon after a Communist attack began. Almost all national affairs in the Republic of Korea are centered in Seoul, to a greater degree than in most other countries. The city was taken twice by the Communists in the Korean war, and its early loss in a new aggression might, depending upon military and political circumstances, be of critical importance. Our defensive positions near the Demilitarized Zone are quite strong, and the two US divisions are situated on the main approaches to Seoul. The present forces probably would be able to hold north of Seoul until planned reinforcements arrived to bring the forces into even balance.

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Less than 30 miles, however, separate Seoul from the front lines, and reinforcement from Okinawa, Hawaii, and the Continental US would take time. Any substantial delay could prove decisive.

11. From the strictly military standpoint, nuclear weapons clearly provide a very significant advantage to the user if the adversary has no nuclear weapons. Even if the adversary has nuclear weapons, first use may in certain circumstances provide an important military advantage. If it could be assumed that the enemy forces in Korea would not have nuclear support available, then a plausible argument could be made, on purely military or on military-economic grounds, for some substitution of nuclear weapons for ready conventional forces. Similarly, it is probably less costly logistically to provide nuclear weapons than to supply conventional munitions to Korea.

12. The foregoing arguments are based upon the supposition that neither Communist China nor the USSR would provide nuclear support to North Korea. Although it is our present estimate that the USSR would not be willing to do so and that Communist China will have at most only a modest nuclear warfare capability within the period and would also be unwilling to provide nuclear support, it is necessary to examine the probably serious results of such nuclear action on their part. Nuclear intervention by the USSR would bring an immediate threat of global nuclear conflict. Nuclear intervention by Communist China could be prevented or minimized by preclusive strikes against Chinese Communist delivery vehicles and nuclear production capabilities. Such strikes would, however, extend the hostilities beyond those areas of China directly involved in operations against Korea and greatly enlarge the scope of the war. The Republic of Korea would be especially vulnerable militarily and psychologically to nuclear attack, although this could be offset by larger-scale use of such weapons by the US.

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C. Psychological-Political Considerations

13. As a psychological deterrent, the US capability to use nuclear weapons is effective in proportion to (1) the fear of these weapons, (2) enemy belief in US readiness to use them in the event of hostilities in Korea, and (3) the enemy's evaluation of the damage such nuclear weapons would do -- both to his side, and, in psychological and political as well as military terms, to the United States. Fear of nuclear weapons is widespread in Asia, although it is undoubtedly gradually declining as the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki fades, and public reminders of the nuclear threat are less dramatic since the conclusion of the limited test-ban treaty. Belief in at least the possibility of US use is sustained by the presence of a nuclear capability in East Asia (including a US missile command in Korea), by the training of UNC troops in some of the principles of nuclear warfare, by the equipment of US troops with dual-capable weapons, and by the calculated vagueness of US policy pronouncements, coupled with the commitment of US forces to the UNC. It should be noted, however, that when the Chinese Communists attain sufficient nuclear inter-continental delivery capacity to pose a significant threat to the US (which is not likely during the five-year period under consideration), the US nuclear deterrent may attenuate somewhat. The Chinese Communist massive ground force would then become a more significant threat.

14. It is likely that the US nuclear capability has sufficient psychological deterrent effect on CPR leaders so that under present conditions they would not launch an attack on Korea against forces sufficiently strong to prevent a rapid take-over of the entire peninsula, if these forces include a large enough US component to make clear the US commitment.

15. The utility of Japan as a base of military operations in Korea would be sharply diminished if the Japanese came to believe that US strategy for the

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defense of Korea is based primarily on the use of nuclear weapons, because of the extremely strong Japanese public revulsion to these weapons.

16. The psychological climate is also affected by the fear of escalation of nuclear conflict. The Koreans do not wish to see their country become a nuclear battleground; Japanese and East Asians in general would be fearful of any action which risked the spread of nuclear war by the involvement of the CPR or the USSR and by extension of hostilities to other areas. (However, the growth of CPR nuclear capability will also doubtless stimulate the desire to see a balance of nuclear as well as conventional capabilities in the areas.) Thus, for the present, any US statement of intention to use nuclear weapons in connection with renewed hostilities in Korea would provoke a very adverse reaction throughout East Asia.

17. The psychological sense of security of the people of the ROK is a subsidiary but important reason for the US/UN/ROK defense posture. From this standpoint, there are three considerations which argue for an adequate conventional defense capability, rather than a nuclear deterrent. First, conventional forces are familiar, believable, and proved in combat, while nuclear weapons are strange and unreal, despite their fearsomeness. Second, Koreans can identify themselves with their own defense forces, whereas nuclear weapons are wholly out of their control. Third, they may well sense intuitively the argument in paragraph 18 below -- that to the degree nuclear deterrence is substituted for conventional strength, the possibility of enemy miscalculation and the outbreak of hostilities are increased.

18. This paper does not consider as a feasible course of action the possibility of accepting some inferiority in conventional forces as a considered risk that it would be offset by nuclear deterrence. In this case, the greater the enemy's fear of nuclear

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weapons, and the greater his belief that the US will use them in Korea, the larger the inferiority in US/UN/ROK conventional strength can be without inviting renewal of hostilities. Conversely, the smaller the conventional disparity, the less depends upon the enemy evaluation of US nuclear intentions or the nuclear damage he would sustain. Since estimation of capabilities is usually more accurate than estimation of intentions -- and particularly more accurate than estimating the enemy's estimate of US intentions -- it follows that the risk of miscalculation diminishes, and security therefore increases, as conventional forces approach parity, unless the US effort to reduce the conventional disparity should convince the enemy that we are not prepared to use nuclear weapons.

#### D. US Interests

19. Up to the present, nuclear weapons have not been used in combat except for the two dropped by the US on Japan. These two bombs do not constitute a true precedent, either strategically or psychologically, for the initiation of nuclear warfare under present conditions. In a practical sense, the use of nuclear weapons has been avoided for nearly twenty years. The longer this period of self-denial lasts the larger will its symbolic meaning become. This "nuclear responsibility" on the part of the major powers is important not only for itself but also in terms of its influence on other powers as they gain access to the nuclear club. Therefore, whatever power first uses nuclear weapons hereafter will (1) take responsibility before world opinion for unleashing this new dimension of destruction, (2) greatly reduce this responsibility for all other powers, and (3) encourage nuclear arming by other powers (both nuclear and non-nuclear) as a defense measure. If the US took this step, it would greatly increase the danger that the uncommitted world and even some present US allies would be repelled into the arms of the Communists; that nuclear weapons would proliferate; and that the risk of general nuclear war would be

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considerably increased. Use of tactical or battle-field nuclear weapons might incur less reaction than larger bombs, but would nonetheless open the way to nuclear escalation. If the Chinese Communists possessed a meaningful nuclear delivery capability, and were in difficulty with their conventional forces, they might respond with nuclear weapons and blame the US for the consequences. It follows that first use of nuclear weapons by the US in Korea should be in response only to exceedingly grave risk to vital US interests. It is clear that the first use of nuclear weapons by the Chinese Communists would constitute such a risk. (For a discussion of US interests in Korea, see the basic NPP.)

20. Furthermore, US use of nuclear weapons in Korea, or even US adoption of a nuclear-oriented strategy for Korea, cannot be divorced from US problems and responsibilities elsewhere in the world. If the US again initiated nuclear operations against an Asiatic people, the probable psychological reaction throughout much of the Far East and the underdeveloped world would be almost unequivocally severely critical of the US. Paradoxically, a US adoption of a nuclear-oriented strategy for Asia could give us accentuated problems in another direction with our European allies, who have placed at least ostensible reliance on a strategy involving prompt use of nuclear weapons in Europe, despite US resistance to such a policy. If we continue to support a strategy of flexible response in Europe while advocating a more heavily nuclear posture in the Far East, our position would become politically vulnerable in both areas.

21. In the event of renewed hostilities in Korea involving the Chinese Communists, the US might find it advantageous to utilize the opportunity for neutralizing Chinese nuclear production capability. However, the long-run effects of such action, as well as the short-run benefits, would have to be assessed, especially if nuclear weapons were required to accomplish the necessary destruction.

### 3. Conclusions

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3. Conclusions

22. Reliance on nuclear weapons, as a substitute for conventional forces and augmentation sufficient for successful defense of the ROK, is not in the national interest of the US.

23. Nuclear weapons should be used in connection with Korean hostilities only if conventional defense fails and only after the most careful consideration of the circumstances and conditions prevailing at the time, in the light of over-all US interests. However, the United States should meet nuclear aggression with appropriate and probably nuclear response.

24. The US nuclear capability has a deterrent value which should be preserved, both by keeping alive the general fear of nuclear war and by continuing the present policy of vagueness on employment of nuclear weapons, backed up by continuing to demonstrate the firm US commitment to the defense of the ROK.

25. It is possible to visualize an effective deterrent in which an enemy, devoid of nuclear weapons, fears their use against him, thus compensating for his conventional superiority. However, such a deterrent might well degenerate very promptly, in the event of an outbreak of hostilities, into a choice between use of nuclear weapons and withdrawal from Korea (if conventional inferiority in US forces was great enough). A calculation of relative costs and relative risks might well demonstrate that it would be better to maintain adequate conventional forces (the third mix defined in paragraph 7) than to accept the high comparative risk involved in substituting some indeterminate degree of reliance on nuclear deterrence for part of the required conventional capability. As among the four mixes described in paragraph 7, the conclusions in the preceding analysis justify the choice of the third mix, which is the basis for the strategy in the body of the National Policy Paper.



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