

Disguised Peace and North Korea's Strategic Avoidance on the Korean Peninsula¹⁾

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Abstract

A recent study on the effect of the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Korean Peninsula argues that it will not cause instability in the country by showing that no North Korean military provocation is anticipated after the withdrawal. However, I theorize that U.S. forces reduction will, rather, create relatively more peaceful circumstances because North Korea strategically will see to avoid any instability that may stop the withdrawal, which is not North Korea's real intention. Based on this concept of strategic avoidance, this paper hypothesizes a negative relationship between U.S. force reduction and North Korean military provocation, and between the actual size of the U.S. forces and the peaceful behavior of North Korea. The result indicates that peace after force reduction can be explained by strategic avoidance, which means that temporary peace is not North Korea's genuine intention but a byproduct of its devious tactics that aim to have fewer U.S. boots on the ground.

Keywords: *Strategic avoidance, North Korean local military provocations, Forward deployed U.S. forces, US grand strategy, and Force reduction and withdrawal.*

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I. Background and Research Question

Although the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan was planned for a while, Washington did not expect Taliban military operations to regain control of the country so quickly. This incident makes both Americans and the international community worry about the stability in the region and the American role in the world society.²⁾ This incident raises questions regarding the roles of the forward-deployed U.S. military forces in terms of regional stability and its impact on the overall international status of the United States. The presence of U.S. troops is perceived as helping establish regional stability; thus, in the Afghanistan case, chaos was expected upon the withdrawal of U.S. forces. However, some argue that this may not always be the case. The relationship between the withdrawal of U.S. forces and regional stability may not be significantly strong and there may be no systematical effect on the degree of stability affected by the level of U.S. forces.³⁾ This debate also concerns the question of whether or not the forward-deployed U.S. troops may contribute to the strategy of sustained primacy – particularly after the U.S. executive powers were assumed by former U.S. President Donald Trump. As widely acknowledged, President Trump, a political outsider, celebrity, and CEO of real estate, pursued his own political agenda as opposed to those who preceded him.⁴⁾ The Trump administration seemed to be pursuing U.S. national interests first at the expense of global concerns by popularizing the ‘America First and Make America Great Again’ slogan. This may reflect the fact that the supremacy of US international status is in decline and, thus, building up its own strength is in need.

Two distinct approaches account for the downfall of American hegemony: too much or too little engagement. The former pays more attention to unexpected outcomes that the active engagement of U.S. forces has produced while seeking to enhance the status of the United States. This is the so-called ‘restraint approach’ that is supported by the concept of principled realism that the U.S. National Security Strategy of 2017 was based on. It emphasizes a selective engagement that can maximize U.S. national interests. Over-expansion of American power produced aversion among Americans towards the pursuit of a policy of liberal hegemony that aimed at remaking the world in America’s image.⁵⁾ In a similar vein, Stephen Walt

2) Leo Blanken and Stephen Rodriguez, “The Strategic Logic of a Forever War,” *The Foreign Policy* (September 8, 2021); The Japan Times Editorial Board, “As the U.S. withdraws, Afghanistan’s neighbors must step up (July 9, 2021),” <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2021/07/09/editorials/afghanistan-brink-collapse/> (accessed on July 15, 2021).

3) Paul C. Avey, Jonathan N. Markowitz, and Robert J. Reardon, 2018, “Do U.S. Troop Withdrawals Cause Instability? Evidence from Two Exogenous Shocks on the Korean Peninsula,” *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 3(1), 2018, p. 72.

4) Steven Hook, *U.S. Foreign Policy: The Paradox of World Power* (5th Edition) (Washington D.C.:SAGE Publications, 2017), pp.338~339.

argues that the reasons for which U.S. foreign policy repeatedly fails, especially its grand strategy after the Cold War, are attributable to institutional inertia generated by the foreign policy community, the so-called ‘Blob’.⁶⁾

On the other hand, the latter line of argument presumes that the peaceful economic development that has taken place since the end of WWII is not normal but abnormal. It argues that this kind of relative peace and advancement is the outcome of active American involvement by saying that “[t]he present world order has favored liberalism, democracy, and capitalism not only because they are right and better – presumably they were right and better in the world in the 1930s, too – but because the most powerful nation in the world since 1945 has been a liberal democratic capitalist nation.”⁷⁾

The debate between the two sides seems to have its own logic and it is very challenging to determine which side is more plausible in explaining the failure of U.S. foreign policy. Therefore, exploration of the narrow question that applies to both lines of argument may help explain the underlying cause of U.S. decline more thoroughly. I assume that the difference between the two side lies in the role of U.S. military forces. The retrenchment line of argument places suspicion on the use of the military and the forward deployment of U.S. forces while the Neocon side is fully supportive of the role of front line U.S. ‘freedom fighters for global stability.’

Therefore, the article suggesting that forward-stationed U.S. forces may not have any utility in offering regional stability by demonstrating that U.S. troop withdrawal would not cause instability on the Korean peninsula attracted more attention.⁸⁾ This assertion seems to be very important in finding a link that indicates whether or not forward-based U.S. troops produce any positive outcomes. Based on South Korea’s case, Avey et al. concluded that “US troop withdrawal does not cause greater conflict, but withdrawals are at times associated with other behaviors, such as conventional arming, nuclear proliferation, and diplomatic initiatives that could affect the future likelihood of war.”⁹⁾ With an additive and constructive debate for this argument, this study investigates the effects of U.S. troop reduction on the Korean peninsula in a quantitative way while controlling other factors influencing regional stability, such as North Korean internal problems related to economic downturns, political instability, and so on. This paper will show that the argument

5) John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Heaven: Yale University, 2018), pp. 4~5.

6) Stephen Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: American Foreign Policy Elite and The Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), pp. 91~136; Patrick Porter, “Why America’s Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit, and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment,” *International Security*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Spring 2018), p. 11.

7) Robert Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2018), p.9.

8) Avey et al. (2018), p. 72.

9) Avey et al. (2018), pp. 72~73.

that Avey et al. suggested is explained by the concept of strategic avoidance which means that North Korea intentionally creates peaceful circumstances in order not to stop the withdrawal of U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula. Therefore, veiled peace during U.S. force reduction is not sustainable but temporary.

To that end, this paper surveys current literature on the subjects and constructs hypotheses on the role of U.S. forces. Then, it will present a research design and statistical model that will test the hypotheses. The final section will discuss the results of the models and their implications on the effect of U.S. troop withdrawal from South Korea on regional stability.

II. The Debate between US Forces Forward Deployed and Regional Stability

There were several attempts to examine the effects of U.S. troops on host nations with respect to economic growth, crime, relationship, and regional stability. Heo and Ye test the hypothesis that U.S. deployments help economic growth directly and indirectly, although the United States deploys troops for regional security purposes.¹⁰⁾ Similar to Jones and Kane's research, they showed a statistical result arguing that "the positive effectiveness of U.S. troop presence on investment and trade ... may be possible thanks to the improved security provided by U.S. troop deployment in the region."¹¹⁾ Tim Kane also offers the general trend of U.S. forces deployment by demonstrating that "data shows an outright decline that runs counter to conventional wisdom ... [n]ot only is America's global footprint growing smaller in raw and per capita terms, but the size of the worldwide force is trending lower as well."¹²⁾ The decline in force deployment of the U.S. also invites the debate as to whether there was either a positive or negative effect during the force's presence. Michael Allen and Michael E. Flynn devote their attention to the effect of U.S. forward deployments on the crime rate of the host nation and suggested a statistical outcome showing that "[i]n aggregate, the mere presence of troops does not increase the criminal activity in a state; however, there is a conditional effect when we account for a difference in culture between the host-state and the U.S."¹³⁾

Using spatial theory, Michael E. Flynn, Michael Allen and Julie

10) Uk Heo and Min Ye, "U.S. Military Deployment and Host-Nation Economic Growth," *Armed Forces & Society* XX(X, 2017), p. 1.

11) Heo and Ye (2017), p.25.

12) Tim Kane, "The Decline of American Engagement: Patterns in U.S. Troop Deployment," Hoover Institution Economic Working Papers (January 1, 2016), p. 11.

13) Michael A Allen and Michael E Flynn, "Putting our best boots forward: US military deployments and host-country crime," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* Vol. 30, No. 3 (July 2013)), p. 263.

VanDusky-Allen demonstrate how a host nation's foreign policy could be affected by U.S. troop deployment. They argue that "[m]ost states will not decrease their defense burdens in exchange for more US troops if internal hierarchy is strong but external hierarchy is weak. However, as external hierarchy increases in size, the host-state will decrease its defense burden in exchange for more troops."¹⁴ This finding illustrates the dynamics of interactions between Washington and host nations for burden-sharing, suggesting that the host nation's degree of dependence on the United States will, in turn, be dependent on American's commitment to neighboring states. The recent study on public opinion in host states regarding US forward bases by Michael A. Allen, Michael E. Flynn, Carla Martinez Machain, and Andrew Stravers delivers the finding that "contact with U.S. military personnel or the receipt of economic benefits from the U.S. presence correlates with stronger support for the U.S. presence, people and government."¹⁵ Jo Jakobsen and Tor G Jakobsen's research on the willingness of host-country citizens to fight for their country being affected by U.S. troop presence presents some interesting conclusions. The authors showed a statistical result that "once U.S. troop levels reach a certain threshold (between 100 and 500 troops), citizens' willingness to fight drops significantly."¹⁶ Based on this argument, people in host nations are more likely to be influenced by a non-material free-riding incentive rather than their own willingness to bear the burden.

Although it is unfeasible to survey all existing literature, there appears to be enough research to conclude that the effect of the forward-deployed U.S. forces sometimes yields positive or negative outcomes.¹⁷ However, the effect of withdrawal or reduction of U.S troops received relatively little attention although it is very important for the U.S. grand strategy. The presence of U.S. troops may not make any difference but perhaps not always so. The article published by Avey et al. drew attention to this perspective. They argue that the withdrawal of U.S. forces may not be related to immediate regional instability but negative factors causing

14) Michael A. Allen, Michael E. Flynn and Julie VanDusky-Allen, "Regions of Hierarchy and Regional Security: US Troop Deployments, Spatial Relations, and Defense Burdens," *International Interactions* Vol. 43, No. 3 (2017), p. 18.

15) Michael A. Allen, Michael E. Flynn, Carla Martinez Machain, and Andrew Stravers, "Outside the Wire: U.S. Military Deployments and Public Opinion in Host States," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 114, No. 2 (2020), p. 326.

16) Jo Jakobsen and Tor G. Jakobsen, "Tripwires and free-rider: Do forward-deployed U.S. troops reduce the willingness of host-country citizens to fight their country?" *Contemporary Security Policy* Vol. 40, No. 2 (2019), p. 135.

17) There was a debate on how to stabilize Iraq in June 2007. The Korean Model was preferred to the Vietnam Model because the former produced economic prosperity and political stability by the US presence while the latter produced an utterly opposite outcome including losing South Vietnam after U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam War. Glenn P. Hastedt, *American Foreign Policy: Past, Present, and Future* 12thEd.(Maryland:Rowman&Littlefield,2020),p.98.

instability from a long-term perspective. This counterintuitive argument could be misunderstood as though it suggested that a reduction of U.S. forces in the Korean Peninsula does not affect the strategic calculation of active players in the region such as North Korea and South Korea, and the long-term effect may be minimal if negative factors are well-controlled. To reduce unexpected outcomes and to solidify the argument, I will use the concept of strategic avoidance that will help explain temporary peace during a U.S. withdrawal. North Korea might welcome U.S. troop reductions from the Korean Peninsula; thus, it may intentionally avoid any provocations that can stop a withdrawal. Therefore, this short-term effect may be an outcome of North Korean strategic calculations.

III. Research Design

A. Theory and Hypothesis

The concept of strategic conflict avoidance was developed for explaining diversionary war theory. When leaders have incentives to divert internal instability, these circumstances offer information to a potential target state such that they keep a low profile by cooperative means. Using quantitative data, Benjamin Fordham and David Clark corroborate the argument that strategic conflict avoidance accounts for the target state's behavior.¹⁸⁾ Although applying this logic to the Korean Peninsula is not without problems, North Korean behavior can be interpreted as strategic avoidance. The meaning of 'strategic' implies temporary or un-candid intentions in regards to its behavior and 'avoidance' stands for cooperative behavior in this research. Based on this argument, possible hypotheses are as follows:

1. North Korea is less likely to be aggressive when the U.S. force withdrawal is ongoing.
2. The aggressiveness of North Korea is negatively related to the number of U.S. troops.

If we find an observable regularity that peaceful behaviors are statistically significantly related to the periods of U.S. force reduction, not with normal periods, the existence of strategic avoidance behavior can be identified. In addition, if North Korean cooperative behaviors and U.S. troop size are negatively associated, which means North Korea acts more aggressively when there are smaller numbers of forces

18) David H. Clark, "Can Strategic Interaction Divert Diversionary Behavior? A Model of U.S. Conflict Propensity," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Nov., 2003), p.1013; Benjamin O. Fordham, "Strategic Conflict Avoidance and the Diversionary Use of Force," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 67, No.1 (Feb., 2005), p. 131.

stationed on the Korean Peninsula, this strategic avoidance argument can be verified.

B. Model and Dependent Variables

To test these hypotheses, a statistical model is introduced:

$$CB_i = \alpha_i + \beta_1(NK \text{ Domestic Factors})_i + \beta_2(Outside \text{ Factors})_i + \varepsilon_i$$

North Korea's cooperative behaviors (CB) are affected by both internal and external factors over a certain period of time. They are measured by local military provocations committed by North Korea. How aggressive or cooperative North Korea has been can be well-expressed by these local provocations that have occurred on land, sea, and air, as well as in cyberspace. The military provocation data was collected on a monthly basis from defense-related documents.¹⁹⁾ The presence of any provocation in a certain month is coded '1'; otherwise, it is '0.'²⁰⁾ A military local provocation is chosen as a dependent variable because North Korea usually utilized these incidents to deliver political signals to South Korea and the United States. Therefore, the presence or absence of such an event is a reasonable way to capture its cooperative intention, which is difficult to be operationalized and measured.

C. Independent Variables

In this research, the main cause of temporary peace is US force withdrawal from the Korean Peninsula. The U.S. military deployed forces during the Korean War to defend South Korea from North Korea's invasion, supported by the Soviet Union initially and China subsequently, and kept them stationed even after the Military Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953. Over the years, five significant changes to the US forces troop levels downsized from 325,000 in 1953 to 28,500 at present. Based on the hypotheses, the period of force reduction will be identified and coded '1' during the period of reduction but '0' when there is no reduction. Whether a negation period should be included or not was contemplated, and it was excluded because in some instances the dialog lasted for an extended period with no agreement in some cases and, thus, without an actual reduction in forces. Therefore, this study includes only the period of force reduction. The size of US forces stationed in Korea fluctuates in number each year based on the global posture plan of the United States without official negotiation with South Korea. The Institute of Military History of

19) Sangbeom Yoo and Sangjin Kim, "The pattern of North Korea's Local Military Provocations," *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, Vol 15, No. 1 (April 2017), p. 75.

20) One of referees suggested that this research design does not explain the unstable situation on the Korean Peninsula and North Korea's frequent provocations that occurred during the time when the US considered troop reduction without actually implementing the proposed plan.

the Republic of Korea recorded these changes and the actual number of troops is coded based on these figures.

<Table 1> U.S. Force Reduction in Korean peninsula²¹⁾

1954.3 ~ 1956.12	After Korean War	325,000 => 70,000
1970.10 ~ 1971.3	Nixon Doctrine	=> 43,000
1977.6 ~ 1978.12	Carter Doctrine	=> 40,000
1992.12	End of Cold War Effect	=> 37,000
2004.8 ~ 2006.12	Global Posture Review	=> 28,500

D. Control Variables

To avoid a spurious relationship, several control variables should be included. The factors influencing North Korea's military provocations can be divided into internal and external variables based on the literature review of provocation studies. This means that sometimes assertive or cooperative behaviors can be motivated by incentives other than U.S. troop-related purposes; therefore, control variables should be taken into account. According to provocation research, a Regime Instability Period, Purge and After the Purge, Economic Conditions, Arduous March period,²²⁾ and Nuclear Tests and Missile Test²³⁾ variables are included as domestic factors. International factors include ROK-US military exercises, South Korean Elections (presidential and local), the Cold War period, and the Political Party of the US and South Korean presidents selected.

During the regime instability period, which is operationalized as the time period when a new leader of North Korea seeks to build up his political base, leaders tend to take some time to solidify their position. During this period, there should be less

21) Institute of Military History, *The 60 Year History of ROK-US Alliance* (Seoul: MND Press, 2013), 315. Though there is a concern that different size of reduction may affect the calculation of North Korea, in this paper, author assumes that actual withdrawal is sending a potential political will signaling further action should be followed.

22) Ministry of Unification, "North Korean Information-Arduous March," <https://nkinfo.unikorea.go.kr/nkp/term/viewNkKnwldgDicary.do?dicaryId=4> (accessed on March 19, 2021). A participant of MPSA 2021 suggested the inclusion of this period and natural disaster seasons. The former was included in this model, but the latter is not because of the availability of data fitting to this research.

23) These strategic provocations are included as independent variables because there could be a complementary effect between local military and strategic provocations. Sangbeom Yoo, "The Trend of North Korean Local Military Provocations and Alliance Cooperation," *The Journal of Defense Studies*, Vol. 57, No.1 (March, 2014), p.66.

assertive behaviors. In Kim Il-Sung's case, this variable is coded "1" from the end of the Korean War in July 1953 to March 1958 when the First Conference of the Workers' Party of Korea was held. The Kim Jong-Il era starts in July 1994 when the first leader Kim Il-Sung died and ends in September 1998 when Kim Jong-Il assumed the position of Chairman of the National Defense Commission. The period under Kim Jong-Un was coded "1" from the death of Kim Jong-Il in December 2011 to July 2012 when he was named Premier of North Korea. The other control variables were coded in the same manner as Kim and Yoo's 2015 work. The summary statistics of all variables are shown in Table 2.

<Table 2> Summary Statistics of Variables

Type	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Provocations	750	0.49	0.63	0	1
Regime Building Period	750	0.15	0.36	0	1
Purge	750	0.04	0.19	0	1
After Purge	750	0.09	0.28	0	1
GDP per Capita	743	833.6	126.8	627.8	1093.4
Missile Test	750	0.03	0.17	0	1
Nuclear Test	750	0.08	0.27	0	1
Arduous March	750	0.08	0.27	0	1
U.S. Force Reduction Period	750	0.13	0.34	0	1
ROK-U.S. Combined Exercise	750	0.152	0.36	0	1
Presidential Election (SK)	750	0.04	0.19		
National Assembly Election(SK)		0.04	0.2		
Cold War		0.62	0.49		
U.S. Party		0.57	0.49	0	1
SK Party		0.8	0.4	0	1
U.S. Troop numbers		48,232	35,804	28,500	32,500

IV. Outcomes and Analysis

As mentioned above, three models were developed to test two hypotheses.²⁴⁾ Model I includes North Korean domestic factors and provocations while Model II contains international factors. Model III includes all variables of this research. The outcomes are reported in Table 3.

<Table 3> U.S. Force Reduction and North Korean Provocations

	Coefficient		
	Model I (NK Domestic)	Model II (International)	Model III (Both)
Regime Building Period	-0.19*** (-0.07)		
Purge	-0.011 (0.099)		0.014 (0.095)
After Purge	0.18*** (0.061)		0.187*** (0.065)
GDP per Capita	-0.001*** (0.0003)		-0.0004 (0.0003)
Missile Test	0.08 (0.08)		0.024 (0.089)
Nuclear Test	-0.07 (0.089)		-0.14 (0.11)
Arduous March	-0.25*** (0.096)		-0.299*** (0.11)
US Force Reduction Period	-0.11* (0.058)	-0.096* (0.05)	-0.13** (0.055)
ROK-U.S. Combined Exercise		-0.05 (0.055)	-0.04 (0.055)
Presidential Election (SK)		0.042 (0.099)	0.05 (0.091)
National Assembly Election(SK)		0.03 (0.099)	-0.016 (0.09)
Cold War		-0.3*** (0.063)	-0.36*** (0.095)
U.S. President Party		0.043 (0.042)	0.01 (0.05)

24) The numbers in the table are outcomes of OLS regression because logit and probit models represent the same directions of the coefficients.

SK President Party		0.055 (0.064)	0.07 (0.08)
U.S. Troop numbers	$-2.51e^{-06}$ *** ($1.03e^{-06}$)	$-1.15e^{-06}$ *** ($3.53e^{-07}$)	$1.66e^{-07}$ ($9.51e^{-07}$)
Constant	1.67*** (0.27)	0.69*** (0.054)	1.07*** (0.24)
N	743	741	743
R-Squared	0.066	0.061	0.089

*<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.001. Robust standard errors are in parentheses

The temporary peace that is defined as North Korea's less provocative behavior during the periods of U.S. forces reduction is observable in three models while U.S. troop numbers and North Korean provocations are statistically significant in two models. North Korea makes an effort to be cooperative while the withdrawal of U.S. forces is ongoing when domestic and international factors separately are taken into account as well as when all variables are considered. The number of U.S. soldiers is negatively associated with the presence of North Korean provocations when domestic and international factors are under consideration, separately.

Domestically, North Korea's cooperative behavior is negatively related to the size of U.S. military forces according to the results of Model 1. This is a reasonable outcome because North Korea does not want to escalate and fight against increased U.S. forces. Therefore, it tries to avoid any local provocations with which a full-fledged war might start. In addition, this calculation may be substantiated when international factors are included. When the number of U.S. military troops is downsizing, North Korea avoids engaging in military provocations not to stop withdrawal while keeping its intention to have a smaller number of U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula simultaneously.

These results tell us that there is an observable peace during the periods of U.S. troop reductions compared to other periods; Hypothesis 1 seems to be qualified as expected when international and all factors are included. The hypothesis examining general preference of North Korea toward the numbers of U.S. troops is supported only when domestic and international factors are considered separately. This result suggests that North Korea tends to have more provocative behaviors with a smaller number of U.S. troops when domestic issues and international considerations are not interrelated.

When internal and external factors are on the left side of the model, the incentive of strategic avoidance is still present while the effect of troop numbers disappears. This result from Model III implies that there is no observable trend that U.S. troop numbers affect North Korea's aggressive behavior, while a temporary peace forms and may facilitate withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Korean Peninsula. These

results suggests North Korea's preference is to have a smaller number of U.S. troops on the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, when they engage in a military provocation, they choose to do so at a time when the number of U.S. troops is smaller and restrain their hostile activity when reduction of U.S. forces is underway.

The temporary peace during U.S. troop reduction does not last long and does not come from North Korea's genuine pursuit of peace. Rather, this kind of a less assertive posture during particular periods is a calculated action plan that aims to condition circumstances friendly towards North Korea. It is too early to conclude that the withdrawal of U.S. forces from certain areas does not produce instability. Yet, it may be conclusive to state that the temporary peace coincident with U.S. troop reductions on the Korean Peninsula may not result from genuine efforts to produce peace, but strategic avoidance of unwanted stopping of withdrawal. In addition, the direction of coefficients of control variables included in the models are very similar to other research which shows that this research's models and outcomes are credible.²⁵⁾

Consistent with former research, during the regime-building period, there are fewer provocations observed while following purges the tendency is the opposite. The coefficients of these variables keep their significance in both the model with domestic-only factors and the model with domestic and international factors combined. North Korean provocation is negatively related to the economic situation, which means there are more aggressive behaviors observed when economic conditions are getting worse. However, this effect disappears when international factors are included. The effect of economic conditions is meaningful in domestic considerations for the decision-making process of North Korean military provocations. During the Arduous Period, which started in 1996 and ended in 2001, known as the National Security Crisis of North Korea caused by the death of Kim Il-Sung, the founding father of North Korea, and natural disasters leading to famine, there were significantly fewer provocations given the domestic and international situations. This may be understandable because, under extremely difficult situations, there would be no room for the leadership to focus on tasks other than survival. The expected outcomes of all other control variables affirm the validity of these models and research.

V. Conclusion

This project started with the question about U.S. grand strategy: do forward-based American troops fulfill the role of supporting the national interest of the United States? The basic assumption about the utility of these boots on the

25) Yoo (2014), p.68.

ground is that their presence will contribute to building stability in the host nation while their withdrawal may cause instability in the region and, thus, withdrawing troops costs more than keeping bases forward-deployed. Not all agree on these assumptions. Some scholars argue that forward-deployed U.S. forces are not a solution for peace but a cause of instability and, therefore, the overreach of US power should be restrained. For them, withdrawal of U.S. forces should not trigger instability in the host nation and region. This study offers a new explanation for the temporary peace during U.S forces reduction by applying the logic of strategic avoidance to the Korean Peninsula case. The statistical analysis of the case illuminates the possibility that short-term peace during U.S. force reduction is cultivated by the strategic calculation of North Korea to avoid a cessation of withdrawal. The cooperative behaviors exhibited by North Korea are not direct results of the absence or downsizing of U.S. troops, but byproducts of North Korea's preference for fewer U.S. boots on the ground. Moreover, this peace cannot last long and there is no statistically significant association between the size of force and North Korea's cooperative behavior.

Two implications can be derived from the analysis. The first one is a theoretical contribution of the concept of strategic avoidance to understand an unobservable intention. A useful analogy is the diversionary war hypothesis that suggests potential targets tend to be peaceful in order not to be a scapegoat by a strong state with internal problems. Therefore, the actual use of force to divert attention by the strong state with difficulties is not observable. However, this kind of strategic avoidance does not happen without a history of diversionary use of force cases. In other word, this kind of strategic avoidance cannot happen without fear of being a target. Sometimes revealing non-existence is a way to prove the presence of real intentions. The strategic avoidance concept is applicable to diversionary war theory as well as other factors that we may not observe but that is hidden or disguised intentionally.

The second implication concerns the practical role of U.S. troops stationed on the Korean Peninsula. Although there have been debates and incidents that invite anti-American sentiment domestically, the extended deterrence that U.S. forces have provided against the North Korean military threat has been essential to regional stability. The very fact that North Korea's behavior can be explained by the concept of strategic avoidance demonstrates the utility of U.S. troops stationed on the Korean Peninsula. The true intentions of an adversary towards encouraging fewer numbers of US soldiers can create disguised peace. This is the true role of forward-stationed U.S. troops. Therefore, the reduction and withdrawal of U.S. forward-deployed forces sometimes produces temporary peace; however, we should pay attention to the real cause of the peace in order not to be deceived.

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