

US thinning force in S Korea

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US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's visit to South Korea this past week should be seen for what it

really was, an early step in a long, gradual disengagement of US land forces from South Korea and a greater reliance on sea power to maintain an American security posture in Asia. As he flew through Northeast Asia, Rumsfeld sprinkled clues about the future of US military dispositions there even as he reaffirmed the American treaty commitments to South Korea and Japan. Other US officials explained what the hints meant.

A primary reason for pulling back from South Korea is that the US needs the 17,000 soldiers of the Second Infantry Division elsewhere. As Rumsfeld and military leaders have said repeatedly, US forces are stretched thin. The US Army has only 10 divisions and cannot afford to have one tied down in South Korea. Related to that need has been the refusal of South Korea to send a division of 12,000 soldiers to secure a sector in Iraq, as requested by the US. Instead, Seoul will post only 3,000, and that will include the 700 already there.

Moreover, anti-Americanism is so widespread that moving American troops out of Seoul and positions north of the capital will ease tensions

only slightly. In a discussion of South Korea and North Korea, an American officer said, only half joking, "Sometimes I wonder which one is really our adversary."

Despite superficial agreement, US President George W. Bush and South

combined Forces Command, which gives the US operational control over South Korean troops, will be dissolved and authority returned to the South Korean government; those controls have long irritated nationalist South Koreans.

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Korean President Roh Moo Hyun disagree on how to dissuade North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons. The US president advocates a firm approach while the

South Korean leader would be more accommodating. Thus, over the next five years the US will shift most of the 7,000 people in its headquarters in Seoul out of the city. The US will move the Second Division into posts south of Seoul near airfields. Those soldiers will prepare for swift strikes in contingencies elsewhere in Asia. The 37,000 troops in Korea today will be cut to an undecided number. Why five years? That would have changes made before the end of the second Bush administration, assuming Bush is re-elected next November. In addition, the United Nations headquarters, in South Korea since the Korean War of 1950-53, will probably be disbanded. The Com-

erally, and increase participation here.

Addressing Americans in Okinawa, the defense secretary said, "We've got to continue to pull down deployments." He said some overseas deployments would continue but added: "Once they do that job they ought not to be there any longer than they need to be there." American troops have been in South Korea since the Korean War. At a press conference in Seoul, after meeting with the defense minister of South Korea, Cho Young Kil, Rumsfeld said: "I have assured the minister that any changes to US military posture in Northeast Asia will be the product of the closest consultation with our key allies. Most important they will result in increased US capabilities in the region."

Rumsfeld said those adjustments "will reflect the new technologies that are available, the new capabilities and they will strengthen our ability to deter and if necessary defend any aggressions against allies such as South Korea." After meeting with Roh, Rumsfeld said the president had asserted that his nation "could become more self-reliant. I agree with that."

He said the same thing in a meeting with American troops at Osan Air Base. South Korea is capable of defending itself and US forces are needed elsewhere.

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