

**March 16, 1949**

**National Security Council Report, NSC 8/1, 'The  
Position of the United States with Respect to Korea'**

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**Summary:**

Report by the National Security Council to the President on US policy objectives regarding Korea.

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A REPORT



TO THE

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

by

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

on

THE POSITION OF THE UNITED STATES WITH RESPECT TO KOREA

March 16, 1949

WASHINGTON

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March 16, 1949

## NOTE BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

to the

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

on

### THE POSITION OF THE UNITED STATES WITH RESPECT TO KOREA

- References: A. Memo for NSC from Executive Secretary, subject "Re-appraisal by NSC of U. S. Policy with Respect to Korea", dated January 17, 1949.  
B. NSC 8.

The enclosed report, prepared in the Department of State and constituting a re-appraisal of NSC 8 on the subject, is submitted herewith for consideration by the National Security Council and, at the request of the Secretary of State, is scheduled as an additional item on the agenda for the next Council meeting on Tuesday, March 22, 1949, at 2:30 p.m.

It is recommended that, if the Council adopts the enclosed report, it be submitted to the President for consideration with the recommendation that he approve the Conclusions contained therein and direct their implementation by all appropriate executive departments and agencies of the U. S. Government under the coordination of the Secretary of State.

SIDNEY W. SOUERS  
Executive Secretary



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NSC 8/1  
MAR 16 1949  
Re NSC 8/1, MAR 16 1949

REPORT BY THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

on

THE POSITION OF THE UNITED STATES WITH RESPECT TO KOREA

THE PROBLEM

1. To re-assess and re-appraise the position of the U. S. with respect to Korea as defined in NSC 8 of April 2, 1948, in the light of developments since the adoption of that position.

ANALYSIS

2. a. Objectives of U. S. policy in Korea as defined by NSC 8:

(1) The broad objectives of U. S. policy with respect to Korea are:

(a) to establish a united, self-governing, and sovereign Korea as soon as possible, independent of foreign control and eligible for membership in the UN;

(b) to ensure that the government so established shall be fully representative of the freely expressed will of the Korean people;

(c) to assist the Korean people in establishing a sound economy and educational system as essential bases of an independent and democratic state.

A more immediate objective is the withdrawal of

remaining U. S. occupation forces from Korea as early as practicable consistent with the foregoing objectives.

(2) In NSC 8 it was concluded that "it should be the effort of the U. S. Government through all proper means to effect a settlement of the Korean problem which would enable the U. S. to withdraw from Korea as soon as possible with the minimum of bad effects". As a means to that end, it was further concluded in that Paper that, following the anticipated establishment of a government in south Korea, the U. S. should undertake "within practicable and feasible limits" a program of support of that government, including the extension of economic aid and the training and equipping of native armed forces "capable of protecting the security of south Korea against any but an overt act of aggression by north Korean or other forces". With respect to the withdrawal of occupation forces, NSC 8 stipulated that the U. S. should be prepared to proceed with the implementation of withdrawal following the formation of a government in south Korea, and that such withdrawal should be phased in consonance with the accomplishment of the broad objectives of the U. S. in Korea and with the relevant commitments of the U. S. vis-a-vis the UN, every effort being made, however, to create conditions for the withdrawal of such forces by December 31, 1948.

b. Developments since the adoption of NSC 8 which

must be taken into account in re-appraising the position of the U. S. with respect to Korea:

(1) As anticipated in NSC 8, elections were held under UN observation in U. S.-occupied south Korea on May 10, 1948 in accordance with the provisions of the General Assembly Resolution of November 14, 1947, the USSR having refused to permit the UN Temporary Commission on Korea established under that Resolution to observe elections in its zone of occupation in north Korea. These elections were subsequently declared by the Temporary Commission to have been "a valid expression of the free will of the electorate in those parts of Korea which were accessible to the Commission and in which the inhabitants constitute approximately two-thirds of the people of the whole of Korea". On May 31 the elected Korean representatives, further pursuance of the GA Resolution, constituted themselves as a National Assembly and promptly set about the task of organizing a government. Following the adoption of a Constitution and the election of a President by the National Assembly, the formation of the Government of the Republic of Korea was completed and the Temporary Commission so informed on August 6, 1948. In an official statement issued on August 12 the U. S. Government expressed the view that "the

Korean Government so established is entitled to be regarded as the Government of the Republic of Korea envisaged by the GA Resolution of November 14, 1947". That statement further make it clear that, pending consideration by the GA of the Temporary Commission's report, the U. S., pursuant to its responsibility as an occupying Power, intended to carry on negotiations with the Korean Government, in consultation with the Temporary Commission, relating to the further provisions of the GA Resolution concerning the constitution by the new Government of its own security forces, the transfer of governmental functions to that Government, and the withdrawal of occupation forces. Pursuant to its announced intention, the U. S. on August 15, 1948 terminated Military Government and commenced the transfer of the functions of government to the Government of the Republic of Korea, which was formally inaugurated on that date. The assumption of these functions by the new Government was completed in December 1948.

(2) Although the reduction of U. S. military forces in Korea through the implementation of existing withdrawal plans was begun on September 15, 1948, subsequent developments in the Korean situation forced a revision of the plan to complete the withdrawal of such forces by December 31, 1948. This revision was necessitated

in the first instance by the fact that the GA did not complete its consideration of the Korean problem until December 12, 1948. Of equal importance, however, was the fact that in the meantime there were other developments which served to underline the grave risks which the U. S. would incur in completing the withdrawal of its forces from Korea as originally scheduled. On November 12, 1948 the U. S. Special Representative in Korea recommended the postponement of final troop withdrawal for "several months" on the basis of his belief that "under existing conditions only Army presence guarantees minimum Korean external and internal security which is indispensable for any attack [on] basic policy and economic problems and for successful economic rehabilitation". Concurrently, official representations were received from the Korean Government requesting that the U. S. retain an occupation force in Korea "for the time being". Implicit in both of these developments was a recognition of the fact that conditions of stability and public order in south Korea were still not such as to give assurance that the Government of the Republic of Korea, with the means available to it, could withstand on its own a serious and sustained challenge to its authority through external aggression or externally-inspired insurrection.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, a U. S. Army force of approximately 7,500 men has been

retained in Korea pending a definitive decision with respect to final troop withdrawal.

(3) Concurrently with the foregoing developments, Soviet occupation authorities in north Korea, after refusing to permit the UN Temporary Commission on Korea to visit that area, conducted "elections" and established and accorded recognition to a puppet "Democratic People's Republic", all in flagrant disregard of the clearly expressed will of the GA as expressed in the Resolution of November 14, 1947. On December 25, 1948 the Soviet Government announced that it had completed the withdrawal of its occupation forces from north Korea.

(4) During the third session of the GA the U. S. co-sponsored (together with Australia and China) a resolution, adopted on December 12, 1948 over the opposition of the Soviet bloc, which approved the report of the Temporary Commission and declared "that there has been established a lawful government (the Government of the Republic of Korea), having effective control and jurisdiction over that part of Korea where the Temporary Commission was able to observe and consult and in which the great majority of the people of all Korea reside; that this Government is based on elections which were a valid expression of the free will of the electorate of that part of Korea and which were observed by the Temporary Commission; and that this is the only such Government

in Korea". This Resolution made provision for the establishment of a reconstituted seven-nation UN Commission on Korea whose principal functions would be to work for the unification of Korea and the further development of representative government in that country and otherwise to promote "the full accomplishment of the objectives set forth in the Resolution of November 14, 1947". On the question of troop withdrawal the Resolution of December 12 recommended "that the occupying Powers withdraw their occupation forces from Korea as early as practicable".

On January 1, 1949 the U. S., taking into account the December 12 Resolution and the facts set forth in its own statement of August 12, 1948, extended full recognition to the Government of the Republic of Korea.

(5) By a confidential executive order dated January 1, 1949 the President, declaring the occupation of Korea terminated within the meaning of Public Law 793, directed the Economic Cooperation Administrator to assume from the Secretary of the Army responsibility for the administration of funds appropriated by Congress to the Army for FY 1949 covering relief and rehabilitation expenditures in Korea, the Administrator having been previously instructed by the President to designate a date after which he would be responsible for the administration of existing and contemplated economic aid programs for Korea. In pursuance of the latter responsibility, and

on the basis of the belief that a maximum degree of economic self-sufficiency would serve the long-run interests of the U. S. in Korea, the ECA is presently contemplating a program of expenditures for Korea of approximately \$192 million for FY 1950, and a total of \$410 million for the period ending June 30, 1952, the presently authorized term of life of the ECA. An agreement establishing the basis for U. S. economic aid to Korea was signed by representatives of the two Governments on December 10, 1948, and approved by the Korean National Assembly three days later.

Even with U. S. economic assistance there is no assurance that south Korea can be made economically self-sufficient so long as the peninsula remains truncated.

(6) The approximate present total strength of the U. S.-trained and -equipped security forces of the Republic of Korea is 114,000, divided as follows: 65,000 Army (formerly Constabulary), 45,000 Police, and 4,000 Navy (formerly Coast Guard). The Army is presently fully equipped to a level of 50,000 with U. S. infantry type materiel. Approximately one-half of the Police and Navy personnel are equipped with U. S. side arms or carbines of various types, while the remainder have Japanese equipment of similar types. These units also have a limited number of U. S. and Japanese machine guns. The Navy particularly is lacking in such essential equipment

as patrol boats and other craft necessary to enable it to prevent infiltration by sea along the extensive Korean coastline, or to provide water transport for the movement of security forces into troubled areas. Although the Korean Government is eager to build an air force, U. S. supplies for this purpose have been limited to twelve observation type aircraft. The present Army training schedule calls for the completion of training up to the regimental level by June 1, 1949.

The effective maintenance of these security forces is and will continue for the foreseeable future to be wholly dependent upon military, economic, and technical assistance from the U. S.

(7) Although Soviet occupation forces as such are believed in fact to have been withdrawn from north Korea as announced by the Soviet Government, they have left behind a well-organized "People's Army", officered in part by Soviet-citizen Koreans who formerly served in the Red Army, and advised by Red Army personnel attached to the Soviet "Embassy" in north Korea. The strength of the north Korean Army and security forces is estimated at from 75,000 to 95,000. The most recent (February 3) estimate of the hard core of these forces, the North Korean People's Army, fixes its strength as 56,040. Special border constabulary, police, railway guards, and other security forces are estimated to total at least

another 30,000. In Manchuria, furthermore, there are reported to be other Korean units in service with Chinese Communist forces or in training that equal or exceed the combined army and security forces now in north Korea. The North Korean People's Army is reported to be equipped principally with Soviet weapons and materiel, with emphasis on infantry mortars and automatic weapons. Small numbers of fighter and reconnaissance aircraft were reportedly transferred to north Korea early in 1948 by Soviet forces.

c. Effect of Soviet aims on determination of U. S. policy in Korea:

(1) The persistent refusal of the USSR to cooperate in good faith with the U. S. in formulating a just and mutually acceptable solution to the Korean problem, and its further refusal to collaborate with the UN in its efforts to bring about the creation of a united and independent Korea, have made inescapable the conclusion that the predominant aim of Soviet policy in Korea is to achieve eventual Soviet domination of the entire country. A derivative objective of Soviet policy has been to establish in the Soviet zone of occupation a politically "dependable" puppet government which can be used as a vehicle for the eventual extension of Soviet control throughout the Korean peninsula. As

noted above, the Soviet occupation authorities, in pursuance of these objectives and in flagrant disregard of the will of the UN, have established and recognized a puppet "Democratic People's Republic" in north Korea, supported by a Soviet-trained and -equipped "People's Army". Despite reports of divergences among the north Korean leadership, it is the opinion of the American Mission in Korea that the "Soviets have fashioned their north Korean creature in typical Communist monolithic disciplined mould and in the circumstances there is virtually no scope for deviations from Soviet desiderata, however, minute these may be". The USSR has been assisted in its efforts in north Korea by the natural advantages which accrue from geographical proximity, as well as by the added advantage of having available the services of a considerable number of Sovietized Koreans who, by virtue of years spent during the Japanese occupation of Korea in political exile in the Soviet Union, have emerged as a ready-made fifth column.

(2) The extension of Soviet-backed Communist control throughout all of Korea would enhance the political and strategic position of the USSR with respect to both China and Japan and adversely affect the position of the U. S. in those areas and

throughout the Far East. In the light of the disruptive pressures, both internal and external, to which the new Korean Government is subjected at present, abrupt and complete U. S. disengagement could be expected to lead directly to that result. Such disengagement would be interpreted as a betrayal by the U. S. of its friends and allies in the Far East and might contribute substantially to a fundamental realignment of forces in favor of the USSR throughout that part of the world. The overthrow by Soviet-dominated forces of a government established in south Korea under the aegis of the UN would, moreover, constitute a severe blow to the prestige and influence of the latter; in this respect the interests of the U. S. must be regarded as parallel to, if not identical with, those of the UN.

(3) In the face of this situation, the U. S. has been presented with three possible courses of action: (a) to abandon Korea to Communist domination, a course of action which, as indicated above, would do violence to the spirit of every international commitment undertaken by the U. S. during and since the war with respect to Korea and which might damage irreparably American prestige and influence throughout the Far East; (b) to go to the other extreme and guarantee unconditionally the

political independence and territorial integrity of south Korea, by force of arms if necessary, a course of action which would commit the U. S. to continued direct political, economic and military responsibility in Korea, even to the extent of risking involvement in a major war in an area in which virtually all of the natural advantages would accrue to the USSR; or (c) as a middle course, to establish within practicable and feasible limits conditions of support of the Government of the Republic of Korea as a means of facilitating the reduction of the U. S. commitment of men and money in Korea, while at the same time minimizing to the greatest practicable extent the chances of south Korea's being brought under Communist domination as a consequence of the withdrawal of U. S. armed forces. Taking into consideration all factors, including the judgment of the responsible military authorities that "the U. S. has little strategic interest in maintaining its present troops and bases in Korea" (JCS opinion--see SANACC 176/38), the U. S., as indicated in the conclusions of NSC 8, has embarked upon the middle course.

d. Bases for determination of future U. S. policy in Korea:

- (1) There is no course open to the U. S. in

Korea which will entirely eliminate the risk of a serious breakdown in the Korean situation from the point of view of the interests of the U. S.

(2) It is clearly evident, however, that if the significant gains made thus far, in terms both of the welfare and aspirations of the Korean people and of the national interest of the U. S., are to be consolidated, the U. S. must continue to give political support and economic, technical, military, and other assistance to the Government of the Republic of Korea.

(3) In as much as the early withdrawal of U. S. occupation forces from Korea was established as an objective of U. S. policy in Korea in NSC 8 and as an international commitment of the U. S. in the GA Resolution of December 12, 1948, it is considered desirable that such assistance not be dependent upon the continued presence of those forces in Korea.

(4) On the basis of presently available data, including the judgment of the responsible U. S. political and military representatives in the field, it is believed that the effectiveness of continuing U. S. support of the Government of the Republic of Korea need not be dependent upon the further retention of U. S. occupation forces in Korea provided

such support embraces the following measures:

(a) The implementation of present and projected programs of training, equipping, and supplying the security forces of the Republic of Korea, both during the remainder of the present fiscal year and in FY 1950, to ensure that such forces are capable of serving effectively as a deterrent to external aggression and a guarantor of internal order in south Korea.

(b) The implementation of existing plans for economic and technical assistance to Korea through fiscal year 1950 and, subject to future developments, for the ensuing two years as well.

(c) Continued political support of the Government of the Republic of Korea both within and without the framework of the UN.

(5) Although the possibility is recognized that the withdrawal of U. S. occupation forces from Korea at this time, even with the compensatory measures provided herein, might be followed by a major effort on the part of the Soviet-dominated north Korean regime to overthrow the Republic of Korea through direct military aggression or inspired insurrection, it is believed that this risk will obtain equally at any time in the foreseeable future.

It is understood to be the view of the National Military Establishment that the mere further temporary postponement of withdrawal would not serve appreciably to diminish this risk, but would serve rather to perpetuate the additional risk that U. S. occupation forces remaining in Korea might be either destroyed or obliged to abandon Korea in the event of a major hostile attack, with serious damage to U. S. prestige in either case. The Commander-in-Chief, Far East, has reported that the establishment of Korean security forces within the current program is substantially complete and that the state of training and combat readiness of these forces is such as to justify a complete withdrawal of U. S. occupation forces, and has expressed the opinion that troop withdrawal from Korea at this time would not adversely affect the U. S. position in Japan.

(6) On the basis of the foregoing, it is understood to be the judgment of the National Military Establishment and of the responsible military representatives in the field that U. S. occupation forces should be withdrawn from Korea by May 10, 1949.

CONCLUSIONS

3. It is concluded that:

a. The broad objectives of the U. S. with respect to Korea should continue to be those set forth in paragraph 2-a above.

b. In pursuance of those objectives the U. S. should continue to give political support and economic, technical, military, and other assistance to the Government of the Republic of Korea.

c. Preparation should be made for the withdrawal of remaining U. S. occupation forces from Korea, such withdrawal to be completed on or about June 30, 1949, subject to consultation with the UN Commission on Korea and the Korean Government and assuming the completion by that date of the transfer of military equipment and supplies in accordance with paragraph 3-d below.

d. Prior to the final withdrawal of such U. S. forces there should be transferred to the Government of the Republic of Korea for its security forces at least a six-months stockpile of military equipment and supplies, with combat reserve, based on a Korean Army strength of 65,000 men.

e. There should be established in Korea forthwith a U. S. military advisory group, already in existence on a provisional basis, which will be responsible for the effective training of the Korean Army, coast guard (Navy), and Police, and for the effective utilization of U. S. military assistance by these forces.

f. Legislative authorization should be sought for continuing military assistance to the Government of the Republic of Korea for FY 1950, and thereafter subject to developments, designed to provide that government with:

(1) a well-trained and -equipped Army of at least 65,000 men, capable of maintaining internal order under conditions of political strife and inspired disorder and of assuring border security;

(2) a well-trained and -equipped coast guard (Navy) capable of assuring to a reasonable degree the security of the port facilities and coast lines of south Korea;

(3) a well-trained and -equipped police force capable of performing the normal police functions of law enforcement and of cooperating when necessary with the Army in the preservation of public order.

g. Legislative authorization should also be sought for the presently contemplated ECA program for Korea for FY 1950 and, subject to annual review in the light of developments, for the continuance of economic and technical assistance to Korea beyond FY 1950.

h. An effort should be made to increase the effectiveness of the informational, cultural, educational, and exchange of persons programs in Korea in accordance with the peculiar requirements of the situation existing in that country.

i. All phases of U. S. Government activity in Korea should be unified in a combined American Mission in Korea under the over-all direction of the American Ambassador.

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and participation in the Korean problem and support of the Government of the Republic of Korea by the UN and by its individual member states, and should continue to cooperate with the UN in the solution of that problem. In particular, the U. S. should lend all appropriate support to the efforts of the UN Commission on Korea established under the GA Resolution of December 12 in its efforts to help the Korean people and their lawful Government to achieve the goal of a free and united Korea.

k. In publicly announcing the withdrawal of its remaining occupation forces from Korea, the U. S. should make it unmistakably clear that this step in no way constitutes a lessening of U. S. support of the Government of the Republic of Korea, but constitutes rather another step toward the regularization by the U. S. of its relations with that Government and a fulfillment on the part of the U. S. of the relevant provision of the GA Resolution of December 12, 1948.

