

Senate Statement of
Senator Bob Dole
Friday, May 27, 1977

MILITARY CONCERN DISCLOSES WEAKNESS OF
ADMINISTRATION'S KOREAN POLICY

Mr. President, I am seriously disturbed by the President's decision on May 21 to dismiss Major General John K. Singlaub as Chief of Staff of the 8th U.S. Army in South Korea. I believe the President's action in firing this outstanding veteran officer of three wars was a glaring over-reaction to the circumstances at hand. President Carter's decision clearly sheds doubt on his willingness and ability to accept responsible questioning of his foreign policy program, and reflects a rather thin-skinned reaction to criticism. It is for this reason that I have already requested that the Senate Armed Services Committee conduct open hearings on the situation, in order to accept testimony from Major General Singlaub, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, and General John W. Vessey, Jr., head of United Nations forces in South Korea.

A Muzzle on the Military

Whether intended or not, the President's decision to dismiss General Singlaub will have the effect of placing a muzzle on military officers who have first-hand knowledge of strategic circumstances in critical areas throughout the world. It is counterproductive to U.S. policy and security interests to effectively stifle informed input in this way. In his interview with The Washington Post in Tokyo, General Singlaub advised that "an intensive intelligence effort over the last twelve months has discovered North Korea to be much, much stronger than we thought." This is vital information which should bear on American policy in South Korea and, in my opinion, the President should have summoned the General to the White House to request further information about those intelligence reports.

General Singlaub's comments regarding the risks involved in U.S. troop withdrawals are not unique among those military personnel most familiar with the strategic situation in Korea. Three weeks ago, General John W. Vessey, Jr., head of United Nations forces in South Korea, said essentially the same thing about the risk of withdrawal, when he stated, "in my view, the withdrawal of all the American ground troops would raise the possibility of war in Korea." The Deputy to the Commander of U.N. and U.S. forces in Korea has also emphasized the importance of retaining American ground troops in Korea. According to some reports, most U.S. military officers feel that the President's announced intention of withdrawing U.S. ground troops from South Korea within four to five years is a mistake that can only lead to a North Korean invasion of the South. In the future, however, military leaders will likely be reluctant to express their personal views on such matters for fear they will suffer a fate similar to that of Singlaub.

Under our constitutional system, civilians are responsible for the determination of U.S. foreign policy, and that is as it should be. Active duty military officers should not ordinarily be taking personal positions in public on national defense policies which they are sworn to execute. This does not mean, however, that military officers should be prevented from expressing their considered professional judgments, through properly constituted channels, to their superiors in the Defense Department or to the Committees of Congress. I would not want to see this form of policy advice curtailed or inhibited.

As much as President Carter might like to draw a parallel between the present situation and President Truman's dismissal of General Douglas MacArthur in 1951, the scenarios are entirely different. General MacArthur openly defied direct orders from the White House in the midst of Korean warfare. Major General Singlaub, in a much different context, expressed personal concern about a policy decision, but pledged to "execute it with enthusiasm and a high level of professional skill" if implemented.

Korean Withdrawal Should Be Reconsidered

In view of widespread concern among U.S. military officers about the impending withdrawal of 42,000 American ground troops from South Korea, and in light of recent intelligence reports that support such concern, the President should carefully reconsider his pronounced military policy in Korea. Clearly, North Korean aggression has not subsided. Only last August, North Korean troops stationed along the demilitarized zone brutally attacked and murdered two American officers stationed in the area with U.N. forces. That attack, instigated by North Koreans, was in clear violation of United Nations peace-keeping efforts in the demilitarized area between North and South Korea. Currently, there is no military or strategic logic for withdrawal of U.S. troops from the United Nations peace-keeping force, which continues to provide overall stability on the Korean

peninsula. The withdrawal of about 40,000 U.S. troops within five years will unquestionably create a power vacuum in the South that North Korean aggressors cannot ignore. The military situation in Korea today is essentially stable; if U.S. ground troops are withdrawn, I fear we will have another Saigon on our hands.

It is not only a question of military stability, but one of American credibility and resolve as well. The significant reduction of U.S. troops from South Korea will be interpreted by our allies and foes alike as a disengagement of U.S. interests in the area. It will throw into question the whole matter of U.S. Defense of the South Pacific region. There is no question that it will be interpreted by the North Koreans as a lessening of our commitment to South Korean sovereignty.

Japanese leaders have already expressed serious concern about the erosion of a U.S. defensive posture in the South Pacific, which has served to counterbalance Soviet and Communist Chinese power. There can, indeed, be no question that the withdrawal of tens of thousands of American troops from Korea will shed doubt on the role of the United States as a trusted ally and as a force for peace in the Pacific. It will most likely require the involuntary remilitarization of Japan as the sole counterbalancing force to Soviet and Chinese expansion in the area, and it may well lead to aggressive initiatives by North Korean troops. The President must be prepared to bear the responsibility for the consequences of American troop withdrawals.

Hearings Would Be Useful

In the wake of Major General Singlaub's dismissal, I believe it would be extremely useful for the Senate Armed Services Committee to schedule hearings and request relevant testimony from the General himself, from his own commanding officer, General John W. Vessey, Jr., and from Secretaries Cyrus Vance and Harold Brown. Such testimony should address itself to the question of U.S. strategic interests in the South Pacific, the future security of South Korea, the consensus of military attitudes about U.S. Korean policy, and the appropriateness of public statements about that policy by military personnel. The President's decision, beyond having an immediate negative impact on the outstanding military career of Major General Singlaub, has certain implications for the future foreign policy advisory role of U. S. military officers.

It is distressing to me that our President, who has championed the concept of broad public input into national policy decisions, should react so adversely to expressions of concern about his Korean policy. Instead of offering a receptive ear to advice from those who are most directly familiar with the military situation in Korea and elsewhere, the President has taken action that will only serve to intimidate those who would question his policy plans. Major General Singlaub and his colleagues have something to say and they should be heard. If military officers on the scene believe troop withdrawals will lead to war, our nation's policymakers should know about it.

The Undersecretary of State and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as the President's special representatives, held discussions with South Korean officials earlier this week on the scheduled withdrawal of U.S. troops. I believe it would be best for Congress to carefully examine the President's proposed disengagement of U.S. ground forces before any irreversible plans are made to initiate the policy. Time is short and we must direct our attention to this matter without delay.

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