

Military Review

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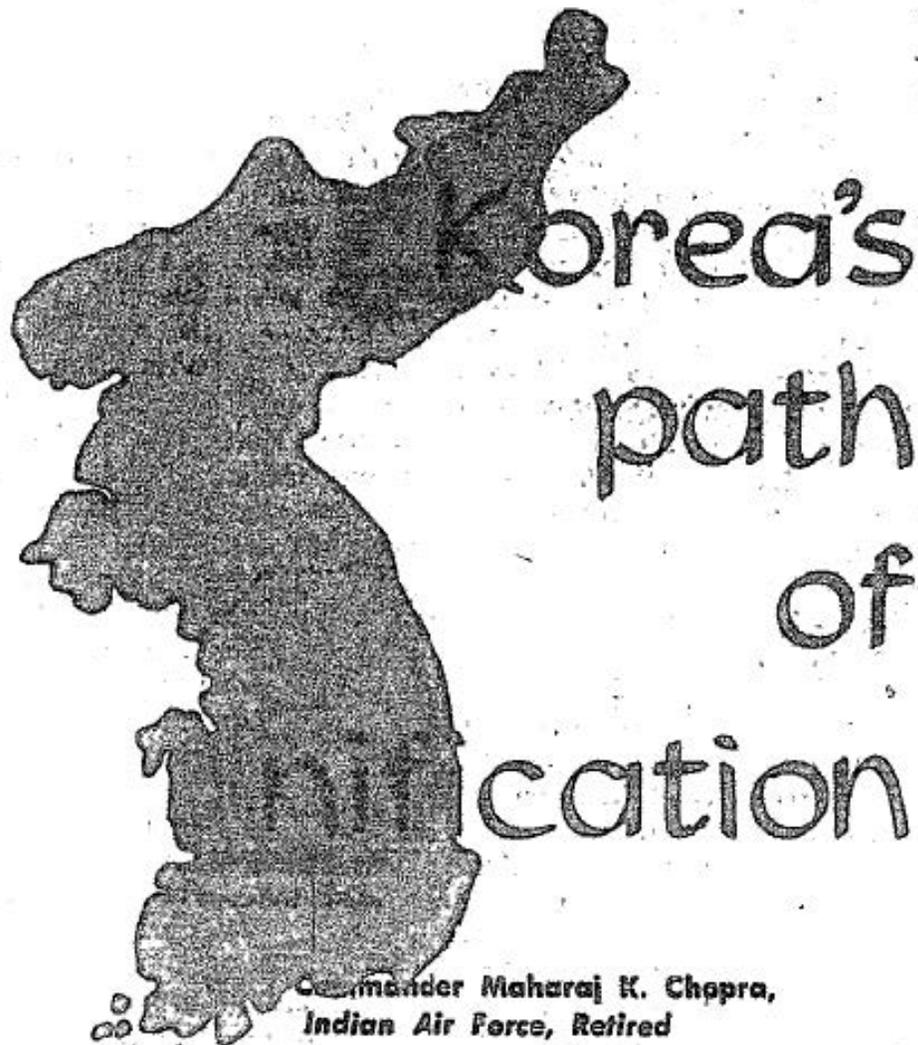
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COVER

Militiamen of the Swiss Army during a training period maneuver. The young lady at right appears to recognize her brother or cousin or perhaps neighbor. This photograph captures the very central part the Swiss Army plays in national life and its complete acceptance as a natural part thereof.

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Korea's path of unification

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IN THE history of modern Korea, 4 July 1972 will be a landmark. On that date, a joint communiqué was issued by the governments of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Korean People's Democratic Republic (North Korea) signifying their decision to discuss the problem of "unifying the divided Fatherland." I happened to be in Seoul then and witnessed the electrifying effect of this pronouncement. On the one hand, an emotional wave arose from the prospect of unification. On the other hand, almost everyone I met said gloomily that the prospect was too

good to be true. That mood persists at this writing. Nonetheless, events have been set in motion.

Until recently, Korea was in fact one country. As far back as 668 A.D., three earlier kingdoms had merged and formed a distinctive state. The people, bearing diverse Mongolian, East Siberian, and even Aryan strains, became truly Korean. They developed common traditions and formed a common language. For 200 years, ending only in the last quarter of the 19th century, they even sought to insulate themselves from the rest of the world.

But this effort to become a "hermit

Photographs courtesy of Republic of Korea Embassy

kingdom" did not succeed, primarily because of geography. A peninsula, Korea is from 500 to 600 miles long and from 90 to 200 miles wide except for its broad northern terminus. There, the Yalu River border runs for about 400 miles west to east, and the Tumen River border with Siberia another 10 miles east. West of Korea, 125 miles across the warm waters of the Yellow Sea, lies China's strategic Liaotung Peninsula with the famed Port Arthur. To the east, a slightly shorter distance across the Sea of Japan, is Japan. Though a small country, Korea is positioned at a point where three major powers confront each other.

Consequently, neighbors have been Korea's greatest problem. It was subjected to three Mongol invasions in the 13th century, two Japanese invasions in the 16th century, and a Manchurian invasion in the 17th century. China and Japan, as well as Japan and Russia, fought over it in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Korea was also subjected to the gunboat diplomacy of the Western Powers. Finally, Japan annexed Korea in 1910 and ruled it until 1945.

Koreans have never taken foreign invasion or intervention lightly. True to form, they rose in revolt against Japanese rule, though not successfully. They were disappointed at the end of World War II when their country was placed under a four-power trusteeship but, nonetheless, divided. The United States and the Soviet Union occupied respectively the southern and northern halves of the country, and the United Nations could not bring about union. On 25 June 1950, the forces of the North invaded the South, thus unleashing the Korean War.

The Korean War lent to the division

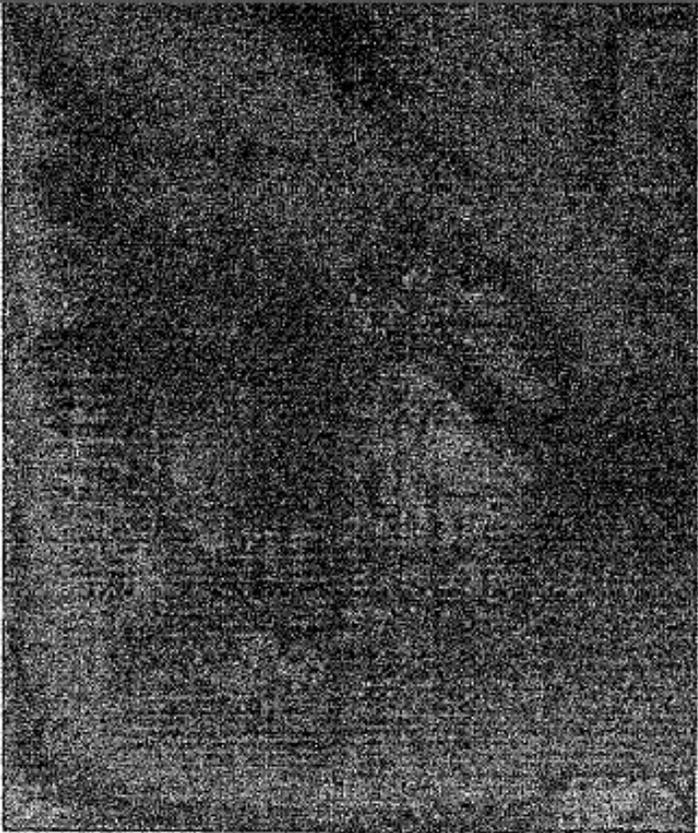
of Korea three aspects which are particularly pertinent. On its battlefields, two great powers, Communist China and the United States, fought each other for the first time. This gave rise to a tide of confrontation which swept over the Far East and Southeast Asia and has only now, after two decades, begun to subside. Korea suffered some two million casualties. Moreover, a million people became refugees. And, half a million houses were devastated, aside from other destruction.

Finally, by the truce agreement at Panmunjom, Korea was divided at the 38th parallel into two parts. A military demarcation line 255 kilometers long was drawn from east to west. Furthermore, a 4-kilometer-wide demilitarized zone, 2 kilometers north and south of the line, was established. A Military Armistice Commission was set up to observe the cease-fire, as was a Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission.

Although the UN set up the Commission for Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea, it permitted a skeleton UN command of 17 nations which had participated in the war to remain. The division of Korea was set.

Henceforth, the two halves followed their own courses. For 10 years, there was utter confusion in the South. A military revolution in 1961 led to the removal of Syngman Rhee and the coming of General Park Chung Hee to the helm. Great economic and social progress followed. In 1971, Park was re-elected as president for a third term.

Less known, but equally traumatic, have been the events in the North where Prime Minister Kim Il-sung has dominated the political scene. The purge of the top military command in 1968-69 and the fact that the planned



Subway construction in downtown Seoul

congress of the Korean Party of Labor was only held in 1971 after nine years of delays show that the North, too, has not had smooth sailing. Meanwhile, cold war continued between Seoul and Pyongyang, marked now and again by incidents which threatened a shooting war—a possibility highlighted by the declaration of emergency by President Park in December 1971.

But, strikingly enough, both sides have expressed desires for reunification. South Korean agitators of the early 1960s wanted a "positive diplomacy based on the realities of Korea," meaning dialogue between the two parties on equal terms. President Park seemed to bide his time till he had done his groundwork. But by 1970 he, too, talked of unification. So, indeed, did Prime Minister Kim Il-sung. However, a gulf of suspicion lay between the two sides, and nothing seemed to bridge it. And yet one thing emerged quite clearly: both sides

viewed unification as the ultimate goal.

The reunification impulse began to take more solid form with two developments. First, in August 1971, the South Korean Red Cross proposed to its counterpart in the North that talks for the tracing of families separated for a quarter century be held. These did take place at Panmunjom and are continuing, the venue having changed to the two capitals.

I watched one session of these talks at Panmunjom in July 1972. Panmunjom has about a dozen tidy structures—a pleasant contrast from as many dilapidated hutments of 1950—lying within the so-called Joint Security Area guarded by international police. Beyond this area of about the size of a football field and the roads leading to it, life was not safe. For instance, on the "Bridge of No Return," unauthorized persons were liable to be shot by the patrols of the South or the North. Adjacent to the demarcation line, the two sides have



Girls working in an electronics parts manufacturing plant located in the outskirts of Seoul

set up their liaison offices. The line passes exactly through the middle of the three rooms used by the Military Armistice Commission and the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission. It was in one of these rooms that the delegations of the Red Cross sat, five members each. We watched them through windows.

Outside the rooms there was a sizable crowd, including over 200 representatives of the press from many parts of the world. There were North Koreans, too, whom I met for the first time. They all told me how Premier Kim Il-sung had taken the initiative in breaking the ice. Drinks were plentiful, and, under a mellow sun beating on a mountain landscape, I thought I had come to a festival.

And there was something of the spirit of a festival. It had taken 15 rounds of plenary sessions and 18 rounds of working-level, closed-door sessions to decide upon the agenda for full-dress talks. Session after session had taken place to discuss whether

there should be "free visits" or "free meetings" or "free travel" on the part of the separated families. It looked like nit-picking, and yet it was symptomatic of the deep-rooted malaise of distrust. But, on that particular day, the two delegations had an agreed agenda. This made them exude an air of bonhomie which seemed to pervade Panmunjom. Since then, it has been further wafted across the entire landscape of South-North relationships.

Of much wider impact was the second development, the détente in the Far East. It may be an accident that the Sino-US dialogue reached a climax about the same time as the proposal for the Red Cross get-together. Henry Kissinger visited China on 9 July 1971. But the significance of the coincidence of the dates should not be missed.

The détente was a clear signal that the two major adversaries were on the verge of writing a chapter characterized by negotiations instead of confrontation. In consequence, their al-

lies might have to pull themselves out of what had been hostile camps for over two decades. It became apparent that neither the South nor the North could expect support from their principals on the degree or magnitude of the past. A time had thus arrived to look inward both for strength and for settlement of differences. In Seoul, I met politicians, professors, journalists and military experts all arguing along these lines. Even though enmeshed in doubts, they all seemed to realize the political and economic advantages of opening a new chapter.

The July 1972 declaration for unification came as a result of secret meetings held between representatives of North and South Korea. They had been traveling through the demilitarized zone, a significant fact, indeed, for the zone had been virtually a sealed barrier. I noticed that the sentiment of amity underlying the declaration was not fully reflected in the statements which came in its wake. Seoul said the emergency would not be lifted, the special security laws would not be abrogated, and anti-Communist measures would not be relaxed.

And yet a spirit of give-and-take had been engendered and partisan claims had been shelved. Since then, the pall of hostility has been further lifted. There have been meetings of government officials. Furthermore, an agreement has been signed by the two sides in which they promise to take concrete steps toward joint activities.

However, the journey down the road to reunification can be expected to be long. It seems appropriate to take a look at some of the factors likely to bear on its progress. To begin, let us examine conditions: How have the two Koreas fared during the last couple of decades?

After chaotic conditions in the 1950s, South Korea showed an upswing in material progress during the 1960s under two economic plans. Industrialization and agricultural development were hastened. Exports were increased. As the third plan for 1972-76 gets underway, the significant indicators of economic growth are: a rise in annual gross national product from \$7 billion to \$13 billion, in per capita income from \$260 to \$390, and in exports from \$1.5 billion to \$4 billion. Exploration for minerals, heretofore rather scarce in the South, is afoot. These are needed to sustain the oil refining, steel, fertilizer, petrochemical and cement industries.

South Korea is a prolific manufacturer of textiles. It is well on the way to self-reliance in major grains. Almost 100 percent of the school-age children are in school. Nevertheless, it does have its problems. For instance, it must substitute internal resources for foreign aid which is likely to grow less. But its economic performance has been outstanding. This is readily reflected in its affluent department stores, expressways, flourishing countryside, well-dressed and well-fed people and the exuberant youth.

Comparable statistics about North Korea are not available, but glimpses of the prevailing conditions are not lacking. Statements made recently in the Fifth Congress of the Korean Party of Labor show that the North has established a cement factory, a textile mill, an oil refinery, a fertilizer factory and a steel mill. Under a nine-year polytechnical education course, a very large percentage of the youth is well on the way to learning professional crafts. Pyongyang has launched a six-year development plan for 1971-76.

The upshot is that both the Koreas

have been doing well on the material plane, and neither can say, while contemplating unification, that the other is a poor relation. Their combined efforts would, indeed, be complementary and add to a mutual economy.

A similar conclusion, however, cannot be drawn with respect to two other crucial sectors of Korean life—political systems and the armed forces.

South Korea is governed by a constitution framed in 1948. It is based upon the principle of dignity of the individual, under which the state is not overpowering. It lays down a democratic form of government, established as a result of free discussion and elections. The government, in turn, follows the pattern of balance between the judicial, legislative and executive functions.

The constitution has undergone a half-dozen amendments, while now and again the country has been rocked by internal shocks and collisions. On occasions, indeed, the executive has functioned in what appears to outsiders to be an authoritarian manner. A recent example is the declaration of martial law in October 1972. And yet, liberal thought may be said to have become the mainspring of South Korean life.

A strong contrast with the system in the North is only too apparent. There, society is conceived as locked in struggle between factions—the working class pitted against the bourgeoisie. In 1971, the Fifth Congress of the party reiterated its faith in Marxism-Leninism and in a form of reconstruction in which the state owns all property. The North has adopted the usual Communist pattern of governance, in which a single party headed by a politburo and a central committee controls the state apparatus. Democracy, freedom, rights and

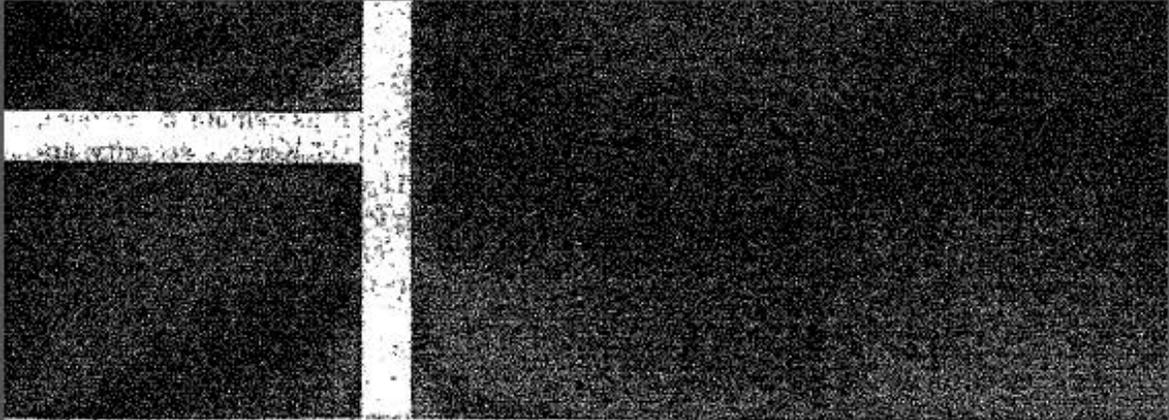
obligations all have very different connotations than those to which the South is accustomed.

Indeed, there is a complete contrast in the North in regard to outlook on human and social relationships, aims and objectives, and the role of the citizen. This has colored the entire spectrum of national life, embracing education, political institutions and economic structures.

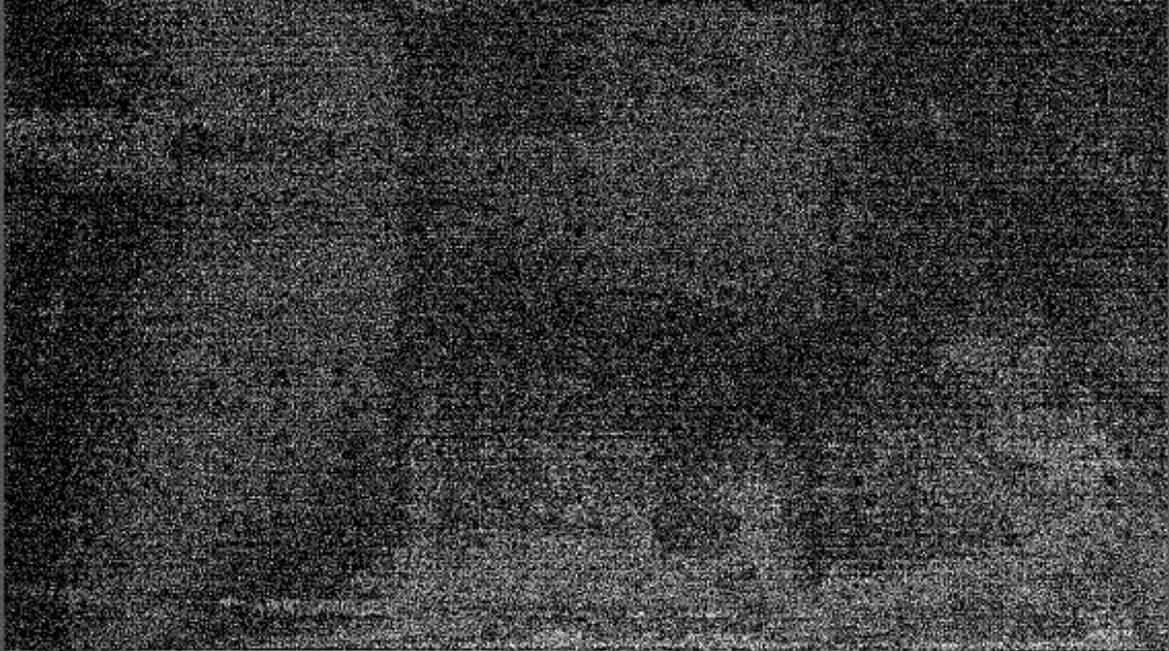
The armed forces, constituting a distinctive piece in the national mosaic, are the second sector where differences are major. Over the years, the two Koreas have created armed forces of half a million each. A military establishment of one million in a country of 50 million people is ruinously excessive. To cut it down to a reasonable size of about one-third is going to pose a great variety of problems.

Besides, the rivalry of the forces, inspired by the mutual animosity of a quarter century, would have to be eradicated. The role and organization of the military would have to change. The South, for instance, has no parallel to those armed battalions of the North which are set up in the industrial plants. Glancing at arms and equipment, one notices that the weaponry of the North is from Communist sources—*MIG21s*, *W* class submarines, *T54* tanks, self-propelled *ZSU* guns and *SAM2s*. The South has depended upon the United States for its weapons—*F5s* and *F86Fs*, *M48* tanks, 155mm guns and the *HAWK* and *Nike-Hercules* battalions. There would be a plethora of arms, some of which—in the navy, for instance—would be of a complementary nature. But drastic choices will have to be made about the kind of weapons the Korean armed forces would have on unification.

Looking at external relationships,



CAPTURED NORTH KOREAN EQUIPMENT



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KOREA

one notices that South Korea has treaties with Japan and the United States, while North Korea has one with China and another with the Soviet Union.

Signed in 1965, the Japan-South Korean Treaty on Basic Relations is a normalization arrangement, resulting in the establishment of diplomatic relations and an inflow of Japanese economic assistance. This has helped Seoul in many fields, including defense in an indirect way. At the same time, Japan has been saying—in the Nixon-Sato communiqué of 1969, for instance—that South Korea “is essential to Japan’s security.” Nonetheless, Japan has not been taking an active military role in Korea owing to its reliance upon the United States in this respect, its own limited defense capabilities and constitutional restrictions, and susceptibilities to international opinion.

This pattern of relationships will now undergo change. The United States would like to reduce its presence, particularly in a way that would show that it no longer regards Communist China to be the threat that it was in the past. Japan will, under the Third Defense Plan, 1972-76, considerably augment its defense, making it a regional power in its own right. Interestingly enough, a dialogue between Tokyo and Pyongyang has also begun. Significantly, a high-level Japanese trade delegation is scheduled to visit North Korea in early 1978. Japan, indeed, seems to be moving closer to the entire Korean Peninsula. Its actions might well become another factor in Korea’s unification.

The Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea was signed in 1953. Korea has given bases while the US has stationed troops (presently cut down

to one combat division), provided close-in as well as remote deterrence, and helped build Korea’s security apparatus. The Nixon Doctrine of low profile strategy in the Far East will affect this arrangement, but to what extent will depend upon the internal conditions on the peninsula and the way détente there unfolds. Having been in this part of the world for more than a century, with heavy investment of money and blood, the US will not jettison its interests in Korea altogether even after it moves out physically.

Much more categorical than the US-South Korean treaty is the China-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance signed in July 1961, and a similar Soviet-North Korean treaty signed the same year. Both Moscow and Peking have contributed to the buildup of Pyongyang’s military machine. Peking has, at the same time, stationed more land and air power in the adjoining Shenyang Military Region than in any other military region. Pyongyang’s relations with Moscow and Peking have had marked ups and downs as a result of the two giant neighbors competing for influence in the strategic peninsula. This situation is not likely to alter basically even if its nuances vary.

On the whole, alliances are on the wane and are hardly likely to operate with their former vigor even if they are not actually scrapped. The trend today seems to be toward self-reliance, not dependence.

To carry the spirit of détente to its logical conclusion, the division of Korea will no longer be tenable as this would keep the pot of tension at a rolling boil. Furthermore, a unified Korea will be but a small country, posing no particular threat to any of



Koels are laid for constructing new vessels in a Pusan shipyard

the major powers. This notwithstanding, it seems that every one of them will continue to regard Korea as an area of consequence with respect to its security interests.

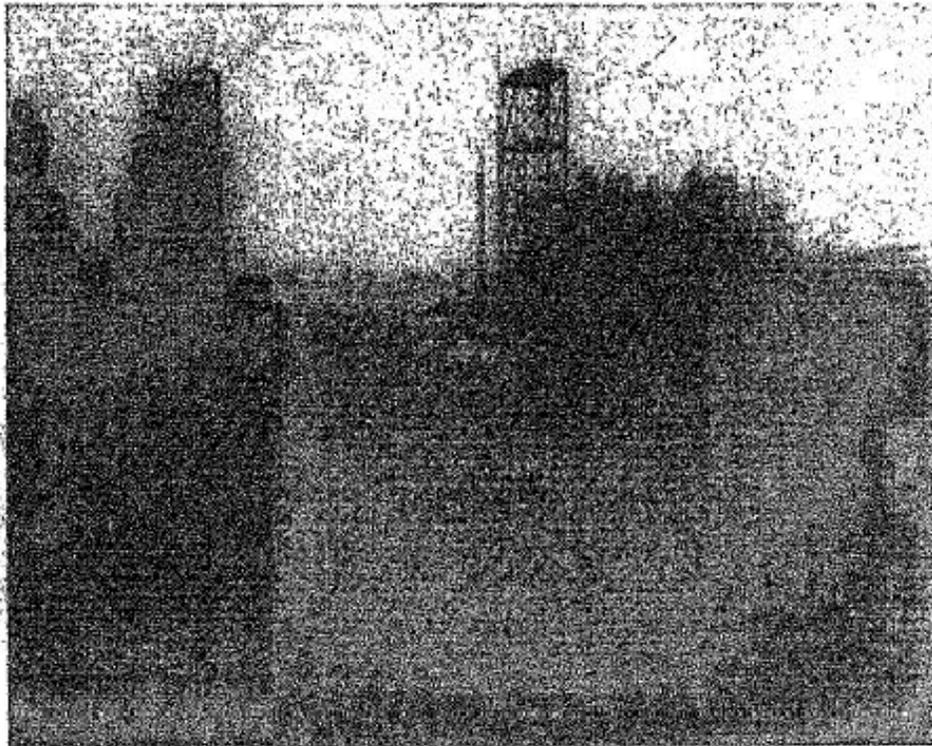
Within this framework of internal and external forces, one may now search for the instruments that might be used for assisting unification. The United Nations comes to mind first. It has been involved with the Korean question since 1947 when it set up a temporary commission to hold elections. However, these were held only in the South. The UN recognized the Republic of Korea as "the only lawful government," but has not accorded it admission to its fold. During the Korean War, it approved establishment of the UN Command and later of the UN Commission for the Unification and Reconstruction of Korea.

None of these acts have been recog-

nized by Pyongyang which maintains that the UN has no jurisdiction in the Korean dispute. Communist-inspired resolutions have been moved in the UN which would dissolve the command as well as the commission. As late as September 1972, the 27th session of the world body witnessed a resolution to discuss the Korean question, this in spite of the fact that both the Koreas had declared their intention to negotiate a settlement bilaterally.

Rather than assisting to bring about accord, the UN has, in fact, become a forum for the cold war over Korea. It can hardly be expected to play a constructive role in the future. Incidentally, the UN Command is now composed of United States and South Korean elements only. The commission is hardly operative.

Three other bodies were set up as



A chemical fertilizer manufacturing plant in Chenje

part of the Armistice Agreement of July 1953. The Military Armistice Commission was constituted with 10 members, five from each side, and was provided with a secretariat and observer teams. Its function was to supervise implementation of the agreement and settle through negotiations any violations of it.

The Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission was composed of four members, Sweden and Switzerland on behalf of the South and Poland and Czechoslovakia on behalf of the North. It was to carry out the functions of supervision, observation, inspection and investigation. Its chief interests were that military units were not reinforced and that there would be no further introduction into Korea of combat aircraft, armored vehicles, weapons and ammunition except as legitimate replacements.

Finally, there was the Neutral Na-

tions Repatriation Commission to deal with the question of the prisoners of war.

And only that last issue was settled. The Military Armistice Commission has held many hundreds of meetings, in the course of which it has discussed a few useful things like observing the truce in the demilitarized zone. But, by and large, it has been used to let off steam. On the other hand, thanks to its restraining influence, serious truce violations have not occurred. As for the supervisory commission, it has been able to do little with respect to the introduction of arms and troops. It has been a signal failure.

And yet the two bodies still exist, and neither side has asked for their dissolution. The reason is, of course, that they have been helpful. Under their auspices, the demilitarized zone has become a barricade against any

possible collision, and Panmunjom has provided a useful neutral meeting ground and communication pipeline. But they are not, and were not meant to be, the instruments for bringing about peace. This must be sought elsewhere and by other methods.

There seems to be little doubt that, whatever help outside agencies might extend, the key to unification lies in the hands of the Koreans. The joint communiqué of July 1972 thus acquires a crucial significance.

It prescribed three principles. First, the unification would be achieved through independent Korean efforts without being subject to external imposition or interference. Second, unification would be achieved through peaceful means. And third, as a homogeneous people, a great national unity would be sought above all, "transcending differences in ideas, ideologies and systems."

Lastly, all hostile propaganda was to cease, there would be no armed provocations, and positive measures would be taken to prevent inadvertent military incidents. A direct "hot line"

would be established between Seoul and Pyongyang, and a coordinating committee set up to smooth the unification process.

Besides, there are to be exchanges in many fields. A committee to arrange these was, in fact, set up in November 1972, thereby demonstrating that both sides mean business.

This committee specified measures for acceleration of political and social contacts, economic coordination and cultural exchanges, constituting as it were the initial rungs on the ladder of unification. It is going to be a pretty high climb up a long ladder. But the sentiment of the people, leaders' attitudes, benefits visualized and international climate are all favorable factors.

One thing is certain. A divided Korea will continue to be a contentious self-eroding land of tension and conflict. But a united Korea could become a prosperous state, lending stability to a sensitive region, and setting forth an example of far-reaching consequence to the whole of East Asia.

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