

From ex-US marine

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By Pete McCloskey

If there is any people in the world to whom the people of the United States owe a duty, it is the Korean people.

Twenty-five million North Koreans live under a repressive regime, believing their leader is divine, much like how the Shinto religion of Japan once believed in their emperor. Fifty million people live in South Korea, with perhaps 25 million within range of emplaced North Korean heavy artillery.

The Korean Peninsula is almost equal in size to California. Its 38th parallel runs through Marin, Solano, San Joaquin and Mono counties. Its mountains, valleys and seacoast are fully as beautiful as California's.

We owe, particularly to the South Koreans, a duty not to take any sudden military action which would result in the destruction of their major cities near the DMZ, and inflict perhaps millions of civilian casualties.

You ask why?

The answer is simple: The risks facing South Koreans today are the direct result of the United States' terrible mistakes over the past 112 years.

In 1905, brokering a peace treaty after the Japanese had routed the Russians, President Teddy Roosevelt blithely agreed to Korea's occupation by their historic enemy, Japan. No Koreans were asked for their consent.

The Japanese would use Korea as the launching pad for their 1931 invasion of Manchuria and their later invasion of China in 1937. The terribly cruel occupation of Korea lasted 40 years, until the defeat of Japan by the United States.

In 1945, another Roosevelt, FDR, at Yalta, agreed to a temporary division of the country between Russia and the United States, to be set shortly thereafter at the 38th parallel. No Koreans consented to this division of their country.

Finally, in January 1950, our distinguished secretary of state cavalierly remarked that our defense perimeter in Asia did not include South Korea, thereby inviting the North Koreans, Russian-trained and equipped, to invade South Korea six months later.

President Harry Truman asked for and got a U.N. resolution to go to the aid of the South Koreans, but then refused to consider a message from Chinese leader Mao Tse Tung that China would enter the war if U.S. troops were sent to Korea's border with China on the Yalu River. At General MacArthur's urging, the United States sent its troops to the Chinese border. China predictably entered the war.

The bitter Korean War then lasted three years, ending in July 1953 with an armistice that continued to divide the two Koreas. The Americans suffered 36,000 deaths. A million Koreans died and another million Chinese died. The dividing line that exists today is not far from the unfortunate 38th parallel.

So now we have an acknowledged unpredictable madman running North Korea and testing ICBMs, and an unstable, blustering U.S. president, saying we are through talking and will "handle" North Korea.

Luckily, there are two quiet, sound-thinking, combat veteran Marine Generals, Jim Mattis at Defense and Joe Dunford at the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who will strongly discourage any action that could get 20 million South Koreans killed.

But it has always been a Marine Corps ethic to carry out a mission ordered by their commander-in-chief, even knowing, as in the case of Lyndon Johnson in Vietnam, Bill Clinton in the Balkans, and George W. Bush in Iraq, that their commander-in-chief had dodged combat service in his youth.

It is to be devoutly hoped that the advice of the combat-experienced marine generals will be followed by President Trump.

McCloskey, like Generals Mattis, Dunford and Kelly, and Special Counsel Robert Mueller, was once a U.S. marine, leading a rifle platoon in the Korean War. — ED.