



**STRATEGY  
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**DEALING WITH KOREA: CAN THE U.S. MILITARY TAKE THE  
LEAD IN CHANGING THE PARADIGM?**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

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A combination of crises and hardships currently threatens the North Korean regime with collapse. Accompanying this threat, however, is the opportunity to gently draw North Korea into wider engagement with the international community. Halting progress toward peaceful reunification has been achieved, but more effort from external sources is necessary to accelerate the process. Among official U.S. agencies, only the military currently possesses the ability to subtly enhance the engagement process on the peninsula without any major concessions on its part.

The author summarizes the geopolitical history of the peninsula, and addresses the issues confronting North Korea. He then proposes a model with which the U.S. military could bolster North Korean confidence in the possibility of reduced tensions on the peninsula without compromising its own security or readiness in any way. He bases the model on the precedent set by NATO during the decline of the Soviet Union. Aware that discussions of troop reductions, arms reductions, and the like are beyond the exclusive purview of the military, the author recommends modification to the schedule and scope of joint/combined exercises as the appropriate tool to influence the security environment in a subtle, yet, to North Korea, highly symbolic and significant manner.



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## INTRODUCTION

Peace must be won - with sacrifice and strategy, the same kind of effort that was put into war...Peace does not automatically come...Winning the peace requires a continuous effort.

— GEN John R. Galvin, SACEUR<sup>1</sup>

The West has won the Cold War in Europe, and, arguably, has set about winning the peace there, however fitfully or unevenly. In Northeast Asia, however, and specifically on the Korean peninsula, a different paradigm prevails. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea, and the Republic of Korea (ROK), or South Korea, and its U.S. ally remain locked in ideological struggle laced with bombast and aggressive rhetoric, interspersed with periodic episodes of dangerous military and technological adventurism. It is a paradigm that has lasted for fifty years, half a century, ever since the Soviet Union and the United States divided the peninsula into ideologically incompatible territorial bastions. In view of recent developments, it may also be a paradigm that is beginning to lose its validity.

North Korea today finds itself beset by a multitude of crises. Some of these crises are self-inflicted; some are circumstantial; and some have been initiated, or at least perpetuated, by DPRK's long-standing rivalry with capitalist

society, epitomized by the U.S. and embodied locally by the ROK. The crises are disparate but interrelated.

The DPRK is experiencing desperate agricultural shortages. There exists a growing disparity between the general poverty and shrinking economy of the DPRK and the indisputable wealth of the ROK, whose economy has grown to become the eleventh largest in the world.<sup>2</sup> The DPRK's primary economic benefactor (the Soviet Union) has vanished; its traditional political benefactor (China) has not only distanced itself from the DPRK both politically and militarily, but has normalized relations with the DPRK's nemesis and has greatly expanded economic ties with the South. The North Korean threat to withdraw from the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) very nearly led to serious military conflict with the U.S. Because of the loss of its benefactors and its economic problems, the DPRK finds its military in serious decline and having to reduce dramatically its exercise schedule. The "Great Leader," Kim Il Sung, has died, and the leadership succession remains uncertain.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the DPRK finds itself still labeled a "rogue" state, still subject to trade sanctions, and thus still unable to engage in trade that would bring in the foreign currency that could help ameliorate some of its other problems.<sup>4</sup>

For over five years, analysts have considered this accumulation of crises as spelling the imminent demise of the DPRK regime.<sup>5</sup> In December 1996, John Deutch, the outgoing head of the Central Intelligence Agency, told a Senate subcommittee

that Pyongyang, within two or three years, would have to choose either to implode, make war, or make peace.<sup>6</sup> Most analysts accept both this articulation of available choices and the timeline as accurate. It is extremely important to the United States and critical to the ROK, and it is in the long-term security interest of the rest of the region, that the DPRK select peace. In order to secure peace on a reunified peninsula, the DPRK must be guided to a "soft landing."<sup>7</sup>

The Chinese symbol for "crisis" contains within it the symbols for both "threat" and "opportunity." Nowhere is this dual meaning to a term more appropriate than on the Korean peninsula. The crises confronting the DPRK are independently debilitating, and cumulatively they threaten the very survival of the regime. They also present, however, an opportunity for the first time in fifty years (and perhaps history) to achieve a lasting peace on the Korean peninsula.

It is the purpose of this paper to survey the issues impacting on the Korean situation and to suggest a subtle, progressive, precedent-based model by which the U.S. military might conceivably take the lead in changing the operational paradigm in Korea from one of mistrust, mutual recrimination, and hostility to one of cautious engagement, cooperation and long-term peace.

## GEOPOLITICAL HISTORY

...[T]here is no country of comparable significance concerning which so many people are ignorant.

— Cornelius Osgood, Yale Professor, 1951<sup>8</sup>

Though written nearly half a century ago, Dr. Osgood's remonstrance remains as valid today as when it was originally written. The literature on Korea still represents the most underdeveloped body of research regarding a major culture, despite significant recent growth in the field (particularly since the nuclear issue arose in the early 1990s). Not until after World War II did any American university teach a Korean language course, or any course in Korean history or culture.<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding the millions of American service members who have served in Korea since the Korean War, the U.S. military is not immune to a certain near-sightedness, either, focusing narrowly (and certainly understandably) on the North Korean military threat, and moving from crisis to crisis. At least through 1995, the Korea Desk Officer at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) in Clarendon, Virginia was actually a China Desk Officer and China Foreign Area Officer (FAO) with Korea as an adjunct responsibility. The current U.S. Defense Attaché to the ROK is a Japan FAO. Rumors abound that one U.S. officer, upon arriving in the ROK, distributed business cards bearing the North Korean equivalent for his rank, rather than the South Korean

equivalent. Whether this tale is true or apocryphal, its circulation indicates a growing realization that something is not quite right with our current method of dealing with Korea, and it indicates that our understanding of Korea is incomplete.

We have traditionally viewed Korea through an "Asian" lens, rather than through a "Korean" one. Much of our understanding of the Korean peninsula has been colored by viewing the area from a Japanese or Chinese perspective, thereby denying ourselves a true understanding of the unique national entity that is Korea.<sup>10</sup> This is not an approach that lends itself to a long-term vision for the peninsula.

To understand Korea, one must understand its geopolitical situation and history. It is Korea's misfortune to be located directly at the center of an unstable triangular confluence of major regional powers (Russia, China, and Japan), none of which has proved able to establish a clear, lasting power advantage. The power paradigm in East Asia historically has consisted of long periods of political hegemony (usually centered in north China), with a single dominant central power surrounded by a hierarchy of lesser powers. The varying relationships of these three powers has played out on the Korean peninsula for over two millennia, with United States involvement largely superimposed over Japan's for the last half-century.<sup>11</sup>

Control of Korea, or at least predominant influence there, has always been seen as central to regional dominance. Occupying

a land area of 221,000 sq. km. (or, at 85,000 sq. mi., roughly the size of Minnesota), the Korean peninsula shares a border with China of about 1300 km., and, with Russia, about 16 km.. Mainland China lies only 150 km. across the Yellow Sea, and Honshu, Japan lies 180 km. across the Tsushima Strait. Adjacent as it is to two great continental powers, Russia and China, and contingent to a great maritime power, Japan, Korea has thus long served as a bridge for transmission of ideas, culture, belligerence, and imperial bloodlines.<sup>12</sup>

Located centrally as it is, Korea has evoked ambiguous feelings in its neighbors, depending on who exercised greater influence there at any given time. Japan has declared Korea to be a "dagger pointed at the heart of Japan" when China was predominant in Korea, but has also viewed the peninsula as a convenient land bridge to invasion routes. In fact, the Japanese experience in the Imjin Wars presaged the American experience in the Korean War by some 350 years: the Japanese began their invasion at Pusan, and later staged a landing at Inchon. The Chinese portrayal of Korea has fluctuated also, between that of a "hammer hovering over the Chinese dragon's head," and of the protective "lips covering the Chinese teeth...when the lips are not present the teeth ache from the cold." Russia, for its part, has always seen Korea as a potential base for an attack on Siberia. The United States, until the end of World War II, considered Korea to be a "possession," or at least within the

sphere of influence of, either China or Japan, depending on which was the ascendant or predominant power in the region at a given time. The first treaty ever concluded by the United States regarding Korea was the Treaty of Chemulpo (Inchon) in 1882, a treaty actually negotiated with China as the sovereign political entity.<sup>13</sup>

These perceptions of Korea as a buffer/threat/ally/tributary state/colony have meant nearly perpetual turmoil on the peninsula. Following a weakened China's expulsion as a major actor on the peninsula, Japan and Russia competed for predominance. The Russian refusal to accept Japan's proposal to divide the peninsula into spheres of influence (using the thirty-eighth parallel as the dividing line) led to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.

In 1905, the United States committed what many Koreans still see as the first American betrayal of Korea: the secret Taft-Katsura agreement, which recognized Japanese preeminence in Korea in exchange for unimpeded American preeminence in the Philippines. The formal agreement ending the Russo-Japanese War, the Treaty of Portsmouth (New Hampshire), negotiated later the same year at a conference sponsored by President Theodore Roosevelt (and for which he received the Nobel Prize), codified Russian acceptance of Japanese dominance in Korea. The United States had been the first Western nation to conclude a treaty specifically with Korea, to engage in widespread commerce, or to

exchange envoys, and American missionaries had replaced the Jesuits as the dominant Christian proselytizers on the peninsula. America's refusal to act as the guarantor of Korean independence surprised Koreans, and came to be regarded as treacherous. Japan would go on to annex Korea, establishing a formal colonial regime in 1910 that would last until the end of World War II.<sup>14</sup>

Korea was not blameless in these misperceptions regarding its national character; throughout its existence it had chosen isolation as its primary protection from nettlesome foreign affairs (a sort of precursor to North Korea's concept of "juche," or "self-sufficiency" and "self-containment"). Rather than engage in international activity, Korea, particularly when in tributary status to China, elected to refer all foreign policy decisions to China. Westerners, unfamiliar with the tributary concept, saw this deferral of responsibility as a ceding of sovereignty.<sup>15</sup>

These perceptions of Korea's lack of independent ability persisted through the end of World War II. At the Cairo Conference of December 1943, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Chiang Kai-shek agreed on unity and independence for Korea "in due course," when Japan was defeated. In fact, Roosevelt had already decided that Korea would require a decades-long "trusteeship" before enjoying full independence. In August 1945, Moscow, following its entry into the war against Japan, also subscribed to the Cairo Declaration. The Soviets and the United States

agreed to occupy the country jointly. Around midnight on the night of 10-11 August, at an all-night meeting at the Executive Office Building next to the White House, John J. McCloy of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) directed two lieutenant colonels, Dean Rusk (the future Secretary of State) and Charles H. Bonesteel (future U.S. military commander in Korea), to select a dividing line for Korea. The U.S. concern was that, with Japan suing for peace, the Soviets might move quickly to occupy the entire Korean peninsula en route to Japan. Within thirty minutes or so, and using a National Geographic map, Rusk and Bonesteel selected the thirty-eighth parallel, because it placed the capital city, Seoul, in the proposed American-occupied zone; there was no other political, historical, economic, or geographic reason for its selection. Furthermore, at the time of its selection as the dividing line, the thirty-eighth parallel was beyond the reach of American troops if the Soviets chose to reject the proposal. Thus occurred, almost accidentally, the "second American betrayal—the division of Korea." When Russia surprisingly accepted the "temporary" line, the stage was set for a division that has lasted for fifty-three years.<sup>16</sup>

The Soviets and Americans controlled their respective occupation zones with military troops until 1948. On 15 August 1948, the official proclamation establishing the Republic of Korea accompanied the termination of the United States Military

Government in Korea, and action began to withdraw American troops from the peninsula. In the North, the Soviets and their protégés followed suit on 9 September by announcing the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Shortly thereafter, the Soviet troops withdrew from the peninsula. American troops completed their withdrawal by June of 1949, leaving behind just 500 advisors. Thus a nation, homogeneous genetically, culturally, and linguistically, saw itself divided into two countries, with mutually exclusive agendas and incompatible ideologies and sponsors.<sup>17</sup>

As the peninsula entered 1950, war, whether fought as a genuine civil war of reunification or as a microcosm of the growing Cold War, became inevitable. Recently released evidence indicates that Kim Il Sung staged an intense effort to secure both Soviet and Chinese support for his plan to attack the South. The South, for its part, was equally provocative under President Syngman Rhee. On 25 June 1950, North Korea launched a massive invasion of the South. Over a period of weeks, Kim Il Sung very nearly achieved his objective of presenting the United States with a *fait accompli*, a reunited Korea under Communist control. Eventually the U.S., the ROK, and their U.N. allies would defeat the DPRK, suffer a surprise attack by some 200,000 Chinese who had infiltrated the peninsula, and ultimately settle into somewhat of a stalemate slightly north of the thirty-eighth parallel.<sup>18</sup>

By the time the armistice was signed on 27 July 1953, some 4.4 million men, women, and children had suffered death or injury in the war. Americans had suffered 54,246 dead (33,629 killed in battle; 20,617 dead from other causes), 103,284 wounded, and 3,597 POWs. Total U.N. forces killed, wounded, or missing totaled 996,937, of whom 850,000 were ROK soldiers and 17,000 were other non-Americans. There were also 9,176 surviving U.N. POWs. The Communists suffered some 1,420,000 total casualties, of whom 520,000 were North Korean soldiers. Among the Communist dead was Mao Tse Tung's son.<sup>19</sup> Thus, what had begun as a civil war (albeit with Cold War overtones and Major Power sponsorship of the opponents), quickly escalated into a direct Cold War confrontation that has continued to simmer, periodically boiling over into crisis, confrontation, and violence until the present.

#### **NORTH KOREA IN CRISIS: THREAT OR OPPORTUNITY?**

None of us would be surprised if we woke up the next morning and found that North Korea was in the process of implosion.

— Ted Warner, Assistant U.S. Secretary of Defense<sup>20</sup>

The DPRK today finds itself locked in a descending spiral of largely mutually reinforcing crises. Its principal economic supporter, the Soviet Union, collapsed and disappeared in 1991. The DPRK has experienced a growing coolness in its relations with China, its economic role model and principal military sponsor.

China has normalized relations with the Republic of Korea (exchanging diplomatic missions with Seoul on 24 August 1992), and greatly expanded economic relations with the ROK. Recognizing the DPRK's ultimate military inferiority to the U.S.-supported ROK, China has also refused to countenance any serious military adventurism by the DPRK. Finally, China has made clear its opposition to a nuclear-armed DPRK.

The "Great Leader," Kim Il Sung, died on 8 July 1994, creating a leadership vacuum that his son and designated heir, the "Dear Leader," Kim Jong Il, may or may not be able to fill. Lacking economic support from other socialist nations, the DPRK lacks sufficient fuel for either its steadily shrinking economy or its 1.2 million-member armed forces. Thus, even as the ROK military steadily improves, the DPRK military is forced to reduce its own exercise schedule dramatically.

The DPRK's flirtation with nuclear issues, played out from 1993 to 1995, brought the DPRK and the U.S. to the brink of military confrontation. In January 1993, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), during routine inspections in the DPRK, discovered discrepancies between the amounts of plutonium the DPRK claimed to have extracted and the actual amounts that the inspection revealed to be missing. The IAEA then requested inspections of two undeclared waste storage sites. The DPRK refused to grant permission, and in March announced that it was providing the required 90-day notice that it was withdrawing from

the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In June, the DPRK finally achieved a long-sought goal: a high-level, one-on-one meeting with the U.S. The U.S. arrived with no restrictions to the agenda; they were ready to discuss any substantive security issue. Following an extremely arduous negotiating process spread intermittently over fifteen months, the U.S. and DPRK finally produced the Agreed Framework on 21 October 1994.

By June 1994, the peninsula was near a state of war; the U.S. was pressing for U.N. sanctions, GEN Gary Luck, the U.S. commander in Korea had requested additional troops, and the Clinton administration was quickly approaching a decision point. Only an eleventh hour visit by former President Jimmy Carter convinced the North Koreans to resume "good faith" negotiations.

Ultimately, the Agreed Framework stipulated that, in exchange for freezing its indigenous nuclear program, the DPRK would receive light-water reactors (LWRs) to replace its graphite-moderated reactors, it would receive 500,000 tons of interim fuel oil each year until the reactors were on line, the DPRK would return to full compliance with IAEA protocols, the U.S. and DPRK would exchange diplomatic liaison offices, the DPRK would resume a dialogue with the ROK, and both parties would reduce barriers to trade. The process is not complete, trade sanctions remain in place, liaison offices have still not been established, the South Koreans are balking at paying their share of the light-water project due to their own economic turmoil of the last two years,

and the DPRK is once again threatening to renew its own nuclear program because of slow progress on the LWRs.<sup>21</sup>

As with its economy and its electric power infrastructure, the DPRK agricultural production system is near total collapse. A year of severe drought in 1994 followed by two years of flooding, combined with decades of mismanagement, centralized planning, and single-crop agriculture, has devastated food production in the DPRK. Widespread malnutrition and even starvation have resulted from the food production problems. A U.S. task force estimated that at least 1 million North Koreans starved to death in 1996-97, equaling in scope the recent famine deaths in Ethiopia and Somalia. People have been reduced to eating tree bark, leaves, grass, seed grain, and seaweed to survive. Even international generosity has not solved the problem, because the DPRK lacks the transport to distribute food contributions; there is a lack of fuel, vehicles, and electricity to move trains. The U.S. has donated 200,000 tons of grain, and has promised more assistance. Even a lack of fertilizer is so critical in the DPRK that the North included it as a primary agenda item for its first talks with South Korea in four years.

The North Korean economy is caught in the same whirlpool as the rest of the DPRK infrastructure. The overall economy allegedly has shrunk by more than 25 percent in the 1990s. If a population growth of 14 percent is factored in, the per capita

income has shrunk by over 33 percent. Foreign trade declined by 7.3 percent in 1996 alone.

Finally, the CIA has once again included the DPRK on its list of states sponsoring terrorism (even though the DPRK was not associated with any terrorist activity in 1997), thus virtually ensuring that current trade sanctions will remain in place, putting still more pressure on a collapsing economy. The outlook for the future of the regime is bleak. Current trends preclude the survival of the DPRK in its present form. Change is inevitable; the only unresolved issue is what form the change will take.

The most common concern is whether the DPRK will implode, or, in a last defiant act of spite, explode as its systems continue to deteriorate. Any explosion would devastate the peninsula. Although most analysts see very little possibility that the DPRK today could ultimately defeat the ROK, the DPRK nevertheless still represents the world's most militaristic state. It commits roughly 25 percent of its GDP, or about \$6 billion annually, to military spending, fielding an active duty military force of over 1.2 million personnel. Of these personnel, some 1,066,000 comprise the ground forces, and 65 percent of these, as well as 80 percent of the DPRK's aggregate firepower, are located within 100 kilometers of the DMZ. This disposition provides the DPRK the potential to launch a no-warning attack should they choose to do so, but, more importantly, it helps to protect them from the

American nuclear umbrella should conflict erupt. By "hugging the enemy," the DPRK makes a nuclear option much less likely, since friendly troops would also be threatened. This forward deployment also reportedly places over 250 of the DPRK's approximately 10,000 artillery tubes within range of Seoul. An artillery barrage would cause horrific casualties among the roughly 12,000,000 inhabitants of metropolitan Seoul.<sup>22</sup>

Facing the DPRK forces across the 4-kilometer-wide DMZ, the ROK armed forces consist of 660,000 personnel, of which 560,000 are Army troops. Annual defense expenditures average 3 to 5 percent of GDP, or \$15.5 billion in 1996. The vast majority of South Korean troops are also deployed very near the DMZ. Aligned with the ROK troops are some 37,000 U.S. troops. Overall, the DPRK holds about a 1.6 to 1 numerical advantage in troop strength over the ROK, and about a 2 to 1 advantage in artillery. The ROK holds a large advantage in helicopters of all types, and particularly in attack helicopters. The ROK is also qualitatively superior to the DPRK military, enjoying clear technological superiority in most areas.<sup>23</sup>

Despite its current numerical superiority, the DPRK is encountering difficulty maintaining its large force. Pyongyang has reduced fuel and ammunition allotments for training in order to conserve dwindling resources. The food shortages that have affected the rest of the country have also affected some segments of the military. Military pilots are flying less, much DPRK

equipment is obsolete, or at least obsolescent, and some motorized troops are now on foot. The DPRK allegedly has even gone so far as to prohibit contraception or abortion (although it is highly unlikely that either was a common practice in the impoverished North<sup>24</sup>) in an attempt to increase the North Korean population in order to be able to sustain the current military force structure.<sup>25</sup>

Kim Il Sung, the only leader North Korea has ever known, died in July 1994. His son, Kim Jong Il, identified decades ago as Kim Il Sung's heir to power, reportedly will assume the leadership mantle this September. Whether he will be able to muster the leadership skills to overcome these many problems or whether he will be sacrificed as a scapegoat to accommodate necessary change remains to be seen. The Western and South Korean media have for years portrayed Kim Jong Il as a drunk, insane, incurably ill, the target of murder attempts, or feuding with his father. Most of these myths have since been debunked as hostile propaganda, but similar characterizations continue to arise. The South Korean military views Kim Jong Il rather more realistically as an astute political figure, solidly grounded in Communist ideology, who has been very careful to cultivate loyalty among the military, even at the expense of some civilian issues.<sup>26</sup>

As threatening as all these issues are, they have provided some openings in the North-South dialogue, and some opportunities

may finally be developing to move the peace process forward. Desperation has driven the DPRK to open its regime more widely to outside influence than at any time in its history. In however limited a fashion, the U.S. and South Korea have responded. The overarching national desire to reunify the peninsula has also contributed much to this initial rapprochement.

The nuclear issue has served to focus world attention on Korea just when North Korea most needed such attention. It has also sparked multilateral reassessments of the long-term security requirements on the peninsula and in the region. The food crisis has forced the country to open up to humanitarian groups on an unprecedented scale. In late 1994, the U.S. partially lifted restrictions on business transactions with North Korea, and in early 1995 the first direct U.S. telephone service opened in Pyongyang. North Korea has indicated its desire to join the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and South Korea has said it would welcome such a move. South Korea is hopeful that its thirty or so ADB employees will be able to travel freely to the North, thus opening more contacts between North and South. Daewoo automobile company has opened a joint-venture plant in the North, and on 28 March 1997, South Korea relaxed its regulations governing trade with the North. Finally, the DPRK and ROK are engaging in two-party talks as well as participating in the Four-Party Talks involving the U.S. and China. Thus, some movement in the direction of a lasting peace has occurred, but only in fits and

starts, and the ultimate outcome remains in doubt. The opportunity to facilitate a lasting peace may be fleeting and fragile, requiring an approach of subtle boldness.

### **A FAMILIAR MODEL**

Communication with a nation doesn't mean just sending a message from the head of state to the other head of state. It means societies go and visit each other as tourists come and go. People with special interests visit the people with the same special interests in the other place, and so on...It's not a single path. It's a whole network of paths that have to be put together...

— GEN John R. Galvin, SACEUR<sup>27</sup>

Both the U.S. and the ROK remain suspicious of DPRK motives, and thus are hesitant to engage North Korea fully. Both allies, moreover, have been distracted by their own problems, the U.S. by an intermittent series of domestic political crises and international and foreign policy crises in the Middle East and the Balkans, and the ROK by the near-collapse of its economy and the subsequent increase in domestic political disturbances, as well as by the continuing transition to full democracy and the concomitant problems and insecurities.

The Clinton administration, distracted by domestic political issues and other regional crises, is unlikely to seize the initiative in dealing with North Korea, awaiting instead some move or indicator from the DPRK that they are at long last ready

to become a fully incorporated member of the world community. The U.S. State Department has already adopted a "wait and see" approach, establishing contact with the DPRK only over specific issues. Currently, the primary issues from the State Department perspective are the Agreed Framework of 21 October 1994; the Four-Party Peace Talks involving the U.S., DPRK, ROK, and PRC; and the humanitarian response to the North Korean food crisis.<sup>28</sup> The U.S. Congress is likewise unlikely, and, since the nuclear crisis of 1994, largely unwilling, to undertake any serious initiatives on its own. Furthermore, the human rights environment under the current DPRK is extremely unlikely ever to meet U.S. Congressional standards for deep engagement. The Republic of Korea has undertaken its own initiatives, and the DPRK has responded surprisingly favorably, but the process is far from complete. The U.S., ROK, PRC, and Japan have undertaken several economic, political, military and humanitarian measures to help alleviate the DPRK's most serious crises, but problems persist, and the DPRK's future direction remains uncertain.

Of all the various U.S. actors involved, only the military (with support and concurrence from the ROK military) currently appears to enjoy the flexibility to exercise new initiatives designed to prod the peace process while maintaining an effective deterrent to North Korean recklessness. Such initiatives would involve minimal initial risk, but ultimately, by hastening the disappearance of a major identifiable threat, could accelerate

the transition of the U.S. military from a threat-based force structure to a capabilities-based one, an unendearing concept to many senior leaders.

The current situation on the Korean peninsula in many respects parallels the situation that confronted NATO in Europe in 1989. The NATO allies faced a huge military threat that was postured for short-notice offensive operations. The Warsaw Pact economies were in serious decline. Since at least 1984, the leadership situation inside the Soviet Union had been confusing, if not outright volatile. U.S. troops were forward-deployed, and withdrawing them would entail crossing a large ocean should redeployment become necessary. A U.S. nuclear umbrella constituted much of the deterrent value of NATO's strategy. The U.S. had to consider what impact force withdrawals would have on its own credibility within the alliance and on the overall security environment in the theater. Finally, the United States had to find some way to encourage the Soviets to continue their force reduction measures in Europe, again without compromising NATO security in any way. NATO leaders remained suspicious of Soviet motives but decided to send some subtle, yet overt signals of encouragement to the Warsaw Pact.

NATO found these signals in the only arena of control that was principally a military prerogative (though, as in Korea, certainly not immune to a process of politicization): the military exercise schedule and scope. General John Galvin,

SACEUR, developed a four-point exercise modification strategy: (1) reduce troops involved, (2) reduce the number of exercises, (3) increase the use of automation in exercises, and (4) change the nature or scope of the exercise.<sup>29</sup> To implement this approach, NATO first dropped Exercise Autumn Edge from the exercise list in 1989. Then, the emphasis of Exercise Active Edge was changed to emphasize readiness, and the deployment phase was dropped. The mission focus of the exercise became to deter and defend.<sup>30</sup> Finally, the major exercise in Europe, Reforger, was canceled altogether in 1989, and when scheduled to resume in 1990, it was programmed to include 45 percent less heavy equipment.<sup>31</sup> One additional signal that NATO sent was to create an Arms Control Staff "out of hide." Eventually, this staff grew to include thirty members headed by a general.

The Soviets did not miss the significance of these signals. Troop and, more significantly, arms reductions in Eastern Europe continued apace. As the withdrawals progressed, other confidence-building measures were developed and implemented. These appeared to have an accelerating effect on the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact as an offensive threat. They included reciprocal, albeit proportional, troop withdrawals by NATO forces, reorganization toward a defensive posture and a consequent reduced forward presence of military forces, dramatic reductions in the levels of theater nuclear weapons, and, finally, cross-border communications.

The situation in Korea today is similar to what NATO faced, though it is certainly not exactly duplicative. The U.S. and the ROK face a huge, threatening military force postured to conduct offensive operations with little or no warning. The North Korean economy is near a point of collapse. The leadership situation in the DPRK is even more confusing, and potentially more volatile than it was in the Soviet Union. Once again, U.S. troops are forward-deployed, with an even larger ocean to cross to either reinforce or replace troops. The U.S. nuclear umbrella again plays a deterrent role. U.S. troop withdrawals would pose a particularly difficult problem. Given our past history, it is understandable that South Korea begins to doubt our commitment to regional security whenever the issue of troop withdrawals arises. Other regional actors, notably China and Japan, are also concerned that a U.S. withdrawal from the ROK would trigger a regional arms race. Significantly, even North Korea has come to appreciate the U.S. as a stabilizing influence in the region, and has explicitly dropped its long-standing demand for a complete U.S. withdrawal prior to any substantive peace talks (notwithstanding periodic rhetoric to the contrary). And once again, the U.S. finds itself having to balance potential troop withdrawals with uncompromised regional security.

Fortunately, some similarities with the NATO confidence-building regime are also in place, or are easily available. As part of the negotiations leading up to the Agreed Framework, the

U.S. agreed to cancel Exercise Team Spirit, an exercise considered particularly threatening by the DPRK, and a major bargaining point with them. The U.S. and ROK still conduct three major joint/combined exercises annually on the peninsula: Ulchi Focus Lens, Foal Eagle, and RSO&I (Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration).

Ulchi Focus Lens is already a highly automated Command Post Exercise (CPX) and essentially defensive in nature. It probably requires no modification other than to increase the automation still further, allowing more U.S. participants to remain at home station.

Foal Eagle has supplanted Team Spirit as the exercise most rankling to the DPRK. Although it, too, principally exercises defensive capabilities, it is of such a scale that it cannot escape visibility. Foal Eagle invites modification from both U.S. and DPRK perspectives. It is hardly the equivalent of the old European exercises in which NATO troops occupied the actual fortified defensive positions that would be their responsibility in wartime. In Korea, except for troops permanently based there, this does not happen on nearly the same scale during Foal Eagle. Much of what occurs in Foal Eagle can be replicated in other locales, or automated. In an era of declining resources, the size of the U.S. troop deployment to the ROK is of questionable value, except as a deliberate political statement. To the DPRK, it is downright offensive. Increased automation and off-

peninsula scenario training could dramatically reduce the deployment level for U.S. troops, thereby reducing cost and visibility (thus also reducing North Korean anxiety levels), without compromising readiness.

RSO&I, as its name implies, exercises the U.S. ability to close effectively on the peninsula in time of crisis. Given the provocative nature of any deployment exercise in North Korean eyes, this exercise, too, could cause some concern in the DPRK. Fortunately, its high level of automation and inherent lack of actual combat replication render it largely invisible. Nonetheless, its suitability for complete automation and remote participation gives it further value as a unilateral "bargaining chip."

The U.S. and ROK could also take steps beyond simply modifying these exercises. They could announce the cancellation of either Foal Eagle or RSO&I this year, to be followed by an alternating biannual schedule for the exercises, with only one or the other being conducted each year. Such a gesture would not escape the attention of the DPRK. They have actively tried to disrupt Foal Eagle in the past, and its cancellation or dramatic reduction in scale would have to be considered a major conciliatory step. The value of such a step is that it would be easily reversible should the DPRK not reciprocate suitably within a reasonable period. No troops would have been withdrawn, no weapons displaced, and the overall security posture on the

peninsula would remain unchanged. The U.S. military would have made a major gesture while remaining operationally absolutely unaffected.

Trying to outwait North Korea is not the answer. Neither China nor the ROK welcomes the thought of the millions of refugees expected to accompany the catastrophic collapse of the DPRK. Neither China nor Japan relishes the idea of a reunified Korea with an agenda hostile to their respective interests. The United States is committed to the defense of South Korea. South Korea is as determined as North Korea to reunify the peninsula. They face a dilemma, however. Politically, the sooner the peninsula is reunified, the better. On the other hand, they are absolutely determined to avoid a repetition of the German reunification economic turmoil. It is thus unlikely that any of these powers will stand idly by and watch the DPRK collapse. Rather, they will continue to provide the minimum assistance necessary to preclude chaos. Ultimately, the Korean people must decide the conditions of their own reunification; they will be the arbiters of their own fate. In the meantime, the U.S. military has the ability to reduce pressure in the direction of desired movement. Does it have the boldness or the vision?

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> GEN John R. Galvin, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), Speech delivered to the Atlantic Treaty Association Annual Council, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), Brussels, Belgium, 11 May 1992, Special Collections, National Defense University, Ft. McNair, Washington, D.C..

<sup>2</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, "South Korea, North Korea," Country Report (2nd quarter 1997) (London: The Economist Intelligence Unit, 30 May 1997), p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> Byung-joon Ahn, "The Man Who Would Be Kim," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 73, No. 6 (November/December 1994), pp. 94-101; and U.S. Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, North Korea Handbook (Washington, D.C.: Defense Intelligence Agency, 1994), p. 1-6 [This Handbook's pagination is hyphenated, with the chapter number followed by a hyphen and the page number within the chapter].

<sup>4</sup> James T. Laney, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, Speech delivered to the Asia Society, Atlanta, Georgia, 3 May 1995. Ambassador Laney articulated most of these problems in this speech.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Cumings, Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, "South Korea, North Korea," Country Report (1st quarter 1997) (London: The Economist Intelligence Unit, 22 Jan. 1997), p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Jae Chang Kim, GEN, ROK (RET), former Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Combined Forces Command, and Commander, Ground Component Command, Republic of Korea. Personal interview conducted by the author on 3 Oct. 1997 in Washington, D.C..

<sup>8</sup> Cornelius Osgood, The Koreans and Their Culture (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1951; reprint, Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1960), p. vii.

<sup>9</sup> John Curtis Perry, Professor at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, "The United States and Northeast Asia," History 208, Medford, Massachusetts, 3 Nov. 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Denny Roy, "North Korea as an Alienated State," Survival, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Winter 1996-97), pp. 22-26.

<sup>11</sup> Ben Kremenak, Korea's Road to Unification: Potholes, Detours, and Dead Ends, CISSM Papers 5, Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland School of Public Affairs (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, May 1997), pp. 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> Kremenak, p. 16; Alexandre Mansourov, Former Soviet Diplomat with three years service in Pyongyang, currently a Professor at Harvard University and an Adjunct Professor at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, "Korean Foreign Policy and Foreign Relations," *Politics* 246, Fletcher School, 14 Jan. 1998; Perry, "The United States and Northeast Asia," *History* 208, 3 Nov. 97; and Cumings, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Jae Chang Kim, GEN, ROK (Ret), "Sun-tzu's Teaching and China's Use of Force" (Research paper, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Fall 1997), p. 28; Perry, *History* 208, 3 Nov. 97; Mansourov, *Politics* 246, 14 Jan. 1998; and Byung-joon Ahn, "North Korean Foreign Policy: An Overview," in Jae Kyu Park, Byung Chul Koh, and Tae-Hwan Kwak, eds., The Foreign Relations of North Korea: New Perspectives (Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1987), p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Mansourov, *Politics* 246, 14 Jan. 1998; Cumings, pp. 141-147; Perry, *History* 208, 3 Nov. 1997; Osgood, pp. 204-210; Satterwhite, p. 18; Frederica M. Bunge, ed., North Korea: A Country Study, 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C.: American University, 1981), pp. 11-12; and Don Oberdorfer, The Two Koreas: A Modern History (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1997), pp. 4-5.

<sup>15</sup> Osgood, p. vii; Kremenak, pp. 22-23; Perry, *History* 208, 3 Nov. 1997; Mansourov, *Politics* 246, 14 and 21 Jan. 1998; and David Rees, North Korea's Growth as a Subversive Centre, *Conflict Studies* No. 28 (London: The Institute for the Study of Conflict, 1972), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Osgood, pp. 299-301; Rees, p. 1; Satterwhite, 20-21; Oberdorfer, pp. 5-8; Cumings, pp. 185-191; Mansourov, *Politics* 246, 14 Jan. 1998; and Jong-Chun Baek, "North Korea's Military Capabilities," in Jae Kyu Park, Byung Chul Koh, and Tae-Hwan Kwak, eds., The Foreign Relations of North Korea: New Perspectives (Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1987), p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Cumings, pp. 237-295; Oberdorfer, pp. 5-10; Paik Sun Yup, GEN, ROK (Ret), From Pusan to Panmunjon (New York: Brassey's (US), Inc., 1992), pp. 1-127; Clay Blair, The Forgotten War (New

York: Times Books; Toronto: Random House of Canada, Ltd., 1987), pp. 633-940; and Mansourov, *Politics* 246, 21 Jan. 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Paik, pp. 178-249; Blair, pp. 941-976; and Mansourov, *Politics* 246, 21 Jan. 98.

<sup>20</sup> Ted Warner, Assistant U.S. Secretary of Defense, quoted in "Defector Predicts Decline of North Korea's Military: Lack of Food, Fuel Cited in the Ranks," The Boston Sunday Globe, 28 Sep. 1997, Sec. A, p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> Alexandre Y. Mansourov, "North Korean Decision-Making Processes Regarding the Nuclear Issue at Early Stages of the Nuclear Game," in Young Whan Kihl and Peter Hayes, eds., Peace and Security in Northeast Asia: The Nuclear Issue and the Korean Peninsula (Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 220-239; Mark Minton, Head of Office of Korean Affairs, U.S. State Department, Talk at Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Medford, MA, 15 Apr. 1998; "Text of the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework," in Kihl and Hayes, pp. 437-441; and James T. Laney, U.S. Ambassador to the ROK, Speech delivered the Asia Society, Atlanta, Georgia, 3 May 1995.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, North Korea Handbook (Washington, D.C.: Defense Intelligence Agency, 1994), pp. 3-1 - 3-3; Peter Hayes and Stephen Noerper, "The Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance," in Young Whan Kihl and Peter Hayes, eds., Peace and Security in Northeast Asia: The Nuclear Issue and the Korean Peninsula (Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 240-268; and Michael O'Hanlon, "Stopping a North Korean Invasion: Why Defending South Korea Is Easier than the Pentagon Thinks," International Security, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring 1998), pp. 135-170.

<sup>23</sup> Hayes and Noerper, pp. 240-268; O'Hanlon, pp. 135-170; and Roy, pp. 22-36.

<sup>24</sup> Alexandre Y. Mansourov, former Soviet diplomat stationed in Pyongyang, conversation with the author on 21 Jan. 1998.

<sup>25</sup> "Defector Predicts Decline of North Korea's Military: Lack of Food, Fuel Cited in the Ranks," The Boston Sunday Globe, 28 Sep. 1997, Sec. A, p. 24; and "North Korea Said to Ban Abortion," The Boston Globe, 16 Oct. 1997, Sec. A, p. 17; and Roy, pp. 26-27.

<sup>26</sup> Jae Chang Kim, GEN, ROK (Ret), former Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Combined Forces Command, and Commander, Ground Component

Command, Republic of Korea, Personal interview conducted by the author on 2 Oct. 1997 in Washington, D.C..

<sup>27</sup> GEN John R. Galvin, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR), SACEUR's address delivered to Royal College of Defence Studies, London, 17 Nov. 1989, Special Collections, National Defense University, Ft. McNair, Washington, D.C..

<sup>28</sup> Mark Minton, Head of the Office of Korean Affairs, U.S. State Department, Talk followed by Question and Answer Period, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, 15 Apr. 1998. Mr. Minton also pointed out that, since the U.S. and the DPRK still have not normalized relations, most primary contact takes place through the North Korean mission to the U.N..

<sup>29</sup> Galvin, Address delivered to Royal College of Defence Studies, London, 17 Nov. 1989.

<sup>30</sup> GEN John R. Galvin, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR), Speech delivered to the National Military Representative Echelon, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), Brussels, Belgium, 5 Dec. 1989, Special Collections, National Defense University, Ft. McNair, Washington, D.C..

<sup>31</sup> GEN John R. Galvin, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR), SACEUR's Question and Answer Period before the German/American Chamber of Commerce, Stuttgart, West Germany, 12 Dec. 1989, Special Collections, National Defense University, Ft. McNair, Washington, D.C..

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