

A REPORT OF THE CSIS  
KOREA CHAIR

# The ROK-U.S. Joint Political and Military Response to North Korean Armed Provocations

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Sung-Chool Lee

*Foreword by*

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INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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Center for Strategic and International Studies  
1800 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006  
Tel: (202) 887-0200  
Fax: (202) 775-3199  
Web: [www.csis.org](http://www.csis.org)



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## FOREWORD

The security situation on the Korean peninsula remains complex and difficult. Last year, North Korean forces twice attacked South Korea, in one instance sinking a ship and killing 47 sailors and, in another, bombing civilians on a South Korean island in an unprovoked artillery barrage. The Korean military was criticized at the time for a weak response. A closer analysis of the circumstances in each instance produces a far more nuanced perspective. Nonetheless, both instances revealed significant areas where improvement is needed.

The United States has a clear interest in how South Korea responds to these circumstances. We retain a significant number of forces in Korea, informing our 60-plus-year commitment to the security and independence of the Republic of Korea. In the early days of our alliance, the United States carried a large share of the defense burden. Over the years, the Korean military has grown in sophistication and competence and now shoulders the overwhelming burden for Korean defense. Yet U.S. resources are still vital in selected areas, and our political commitment to Korea remains undiminished.

The developments of 2010 require action on behalf of Korea. And that action needs to be coordinated between Korea and the United States. That is the thrust of General Sung-Chool Lee's extended essay. General Lee outlines in a clear and concise way how Korea is reassessing its security situation, as well as the steps that need to be taken by the Korean defense establishment to deter more effectively threatening actions by North Korea. General Lee also examines the changing nature of the operational security partnership between the ROK and U.S. military organizations and what should be considered as next steps to coordinate more effectively our shared operations.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has been gratified to have General Lee with us as a senior fellow this past year. This essay makes a substantial contribution to improving the operation of our security alliance.

John J. Hamre  
*President and CEO*  
CSIS



## PREFACE

This report on the joint political and military response of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States to North Korean armed provocations is based on the knowledge, experience, and insight gained from my military career. As such, this study focuses on elaborating my personal perspective on the subject matter rather than outlining some conceptual ideas based on detailed analysis and is not written in the usual scholarly fashion, which may cite or refer to other academic articles or data.

In writing this report, I have also paid particular attention to avoiding discussions of confidential military material. Moreover, this paper may contain ideas that differ from political or military conventions and may not mirror the policies of the government of the Republic of Korea. This, however, does not discredit this report as being an accurate and genuine assessment of the current situation in the Korean peninsula and, more broadly, Northeast Asia.

I am very thankful to John Hamre, president of CSIS, and Victor Cha, CSIS Korea Chair, whose encouragement and support made my visiting fellowship at CSIS invaluable. I offer my regards and blessings to all of those who supported me during my research.





# THE ROK-U.S. JOINT POLITICAL AND MILITARY RESPONSE TO NORTH KOREAN ARMED PROVOCATIONS

## Introduction

In the spring of 2011, a series of so-called Jasmine Revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa uprooted the very foundation of long-entrenched regimes in the region. Needless to say, such sudden change has brought unexpected confusion and shock to those Arab states and their leaders. Amid this time of uncertainty and unpredictability in how the regional political climate will unfold, the person who would be most receptive to and disconcerted by the current exigencies experienced by the affected political leaders may be the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il.

The hereditary dictatorship of the Kim family—from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il and now possibly to his youngest son, Kim Jong Un—has ruled North Korea for the past six decades in a way that turned the North Korean populace into religious fanatics who idolize the “Dear Leader.” As a result of this long-lasting system, a system that is both abnormal and perverse in nature, North Korea suffers from serious political, economic, and social problems, not to mention widespread famine. From 1990 onward, further economic downturns, food shortages, and diplomatic isolation have only worsened living conditions in the North and aggravated the people’s general discontent.

In an effort to prevent these vulnerabilities from affecting North Korea’s political system, the North Korean regime militarized the entire country, and it has been actively using its military to maintain the stability of Kim Jong Il’s regime’s and transfer power to Kim Jong Un. In North Korea, the traditional relationship between politics and the military has been reversed under the banner of the “Military First” policy, which can be best characterized as subordinating governance to the military to attain the ruler’s specific political objectives. In such circumstances, Kim Jong Il has pursued an aggressive security strategy to mitigate internal instability by creating external tension, while enhancing his military forces—in particular, his asymmetric forces, including North Korea’s nuclear capabilities—and using those forces to continue sustained armed provocations.

In Northeast Asia, the regional balance of power has been gradually moving away from the status quo as China achieves rapid economic growth and Japan suffers a setback following the triple disasters of March 11 (the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant). This shift in regional power, in turn, has strengthened China’s bid for regional hegemony. Along with its dramatic economic and military rise, China has emerged as a significant power in the international arena with its G2—the United States and China—status. With regard to the two Koreas, China has been actively engaging in the matters affecting the Korean peninsula, and it holds decisive keys to solving some, if not most, of the problems there.

Considering that China is North Korea's only ally, it is now imperative that both Washington and Seoul cooperate and coordinate with Beijing to solve the issues concerning North Korea. Yet, in response to the recent North Korean armed provocations, it appeared that Beijing did not condemn or punish but, rather, sided with Pyongyang. That decision demonstrates not only that China can position itself as a possible counterpoise to the ROK-U.S.-Japan relationship, which would pose major hurdles in dealing with North Korea, but also that there is a need to closely scrutinize the security implications of China's rise from a broader perspective.

The Republic of Korea and the United States, on the other hand, have further enhanced their strategic alliance to a new degree. The ROK-U.S. alliance has broadened the scope of cooperation and coordination to global economic, environmental, and climate-related issues as well as regional and military issues. . Moreover, both Washington and Seoul have agreed to suspend all food and financial aid to North Korea except for minimum humanitarian aid until the North demonstrates substantial changes in its policies, while at the same time exerting pressure on Pyongyang to give up its nuclear program and improve its human rights record.

Considering these security challenges in Northeast Asia, additional factors that may affect North Korea's internal problems include North Korea's future succession, economic problems, and food shortages; China's support for North Korea and its engagement policy toward the Korean peninsula; and the ROK-U.S. common demand to North Korea for denuclearization and their suspension of further economic aid.

Faced with political, economic, and social difficulties, North Korea is most likely to resort to armed provocations in order to turn domestic attention away from internal problems, maintain the current regime's stability, and transfer power successfully to the next leader to sustain the regime's survival. This report will examine how the ROK-U.S. alliance should react to potential North Korean armed provocations from political and military perspectives.

## **Strategic Value of the Korean Peninsula to the United States and China**

### **Comparison of State Capacities between South Korea and North Korea**

South Korea is the only country among those that gained independence following World War II to have successfully achieved both a free market economy and a liberal democracy. Its government is one of the world's most respected democracies and its people enjoy full freedoms of speech, press, and religion. South Koreans' zeal for education—often referred to as “education fever”—has changed South Korea from a nation where the majority of the adult population had no formal schooling to one of the most literate and well-educated nations in the world. The substantial size of private education expenses almost matches expenditures for public education. About 85 percent of high school graduates in South Korea attend college, and of those who study abroad, the largest numbers attend schools in the United States and China.

South Korea's GDP is ranked 12th in the world, The country is the seventh-largest exporter and tenth-largest importer of goods. Today, it is also the fifth-biggest trading partner with the United States and the third-biggest trading partner with China. South Korea has achieved rapid

economic growth, driven primarily by its talented human capital. Heavily involved in international trade, South Korean industrialists have specialized in the production of specific goods—especially those for sale in foreign markets. These include semiconductors, ships, automobiles, steel, and electronic equipment, all of which are world-class quality.

In military aspects, South Korea maintains the seventh-largest military force in the world, and dispatched its troops to wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan following the Korean War. Consisting of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, the Republic of Korea Armed Forces is equipped with high-tech weapons, many of which are developed with Korean technologies, while others, such as fighter jets and missiles, are managed with imported systems.

While the wartime operational control of its forces currently lies with the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC), ROK Armed Forces controls its own forces in the areas of military development, organization and structure, military maintenance and management, budget planning, and exercise and training. Since the Korean War in 1950, the ROK military has developed in a way that suits the purpose of its combined operations with the United States Forces Korea (USFK). Thanks to the high level of education of its service members, the ROK military has successfully managed to apply U.S. operation protocols and has adopted advanced intelligence capabilities. Moreover, South Korea's open conscription system has enabled the military to operate at a relatively low cost. Considering that more than 80 percent of those conscripted have some college education, ROK troops are highly capable of operating high-tech systems effectively.

Additionally, South Korean culture—ranging from arts and literature to entertainment and films—has become increasingly popular across China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. On a global stage, South Korea increasingly plays a central role in facilitating international dialogue and cooperation.

The remarkable economic growth of South Korea has served as a viable model for developing countries. Many of its high-tech products are immensely popular in the global market, and South Korea's dispatch of its troops to various conflict regions has also attracted global attention.

North Korea has maintained the sixth-largest military in the world and continues to build up its military with the development of strategic and tactical means despite the collapse of its economy. Pyongyang has developed and uses its nuclear capabilities, missiles, chemical and biological weapons, long-range artillery (LRA), and special operations forces as a means for flexing its political muscles. Regarding its nuclear development, North Korea is at the stage of developing enriched uranium, presumably to further enhance its nuclear weapons proliferation.

Since the 1990s, widespread famine and diplomatic isolation have impoverished North Korea's economy, evidenced by its meager GDP, inability to provide basic goods or social welfare to its own people, and deterioration of many industrial facilities. Annually, more than one-third of the North Korean population suffers from food shortages.

Yet, North Korea can potentially achieve sustained economic growth if it makes effective use of its abundant natural resources and cheap labor force. South Korea's economic strength, rich human capital, and technological advancements, alongside North Korea's nuclear capabilities, abundance of human labor, and underdeveloped natural resources, are all important for evaluating the strategic value, economy, and geopolitical risks of the Korean peninsula. Going forward, a unified Korea following a North Korean regime change will attract not only regional but also global attention.

## Geopolitical Significance of the Korean Peninsula

The Korean peninsula is at the heart of Northeast Asia. It shares its northern border with China and Russia, western border with China across the Yellow Sea, and eastern border with Japan across the East Sea.

Northeast Asia comprises three of the largest economies in the world, namely Japan, China, and Russia, as well as the two Koreas. In this region, the Korean peninsula acts as a bridgehead for transportation and trade and has played a strategic role for major maritime powers such as the United States and Japan. Furthermore, the Korean peninsula, being the easternmost tip of Eurasia, has served as a hub for various global networks.

From a military perspective, the Korean peninsula is located at an intersection of land and sea with significant military potential. It can work either as a forward base or as a stepping stone for China, which looks to expand its sphere of influence across the Pacific Ocean. For Japan and the United States, the Korean peninsula is a key strategic beachhead and bridge that enables them to maintain their maritime influence in Northeast Asia and beyond.

Due to its geographical location and its potential to both catalyze and prevent sudden transformations, the Korean peninsula has been an area where the interests of land and sea powers can collide or converge. The division of the Korean peninsula was a subject of discussion between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, but its actual implementation, a result of differing U.S. and Soviet ideologies following the Korean War, lends weight to the notion that this area will continue to be an area of competition among different forces. Because exercising total control over the Korean peninsula can potentially disrupt the regional balance of power among the world's superpowers, the struggle for power surrounding the Korean peninsula will likely continue and, in turn, the situation in the Korean peninsula will continue to be affected by the power relations among competing countries.

Owing to the dual role that the Korean peninsula plays for Northeast Asia—as both a buffer zone and a last line of defense for major powers—the side whose influence the peninsula falls under can shift the power balance among regional countries to a significant degree.

## How the United States and China Evaluate the Strategic Value of the Korean Peninsula

More than one-quarter of the world's population live in Northeast Asia. Economically, the region is responsible for more than 22 percent of global production. In addition, four of the six largest military powers are located there. In this context, the Korean peninsula plays a critical role in facilitating regional peace, prosperity, and cooperation. Due to the Korean peninsula's unique geographical position and political significance, both the United States and China have treated this area with great caution and interest.

The United States' strategy toward the Korean peninsula is built primarily on the need to maintain the balance of power by keeping China and Russia in check, and to preserve and defend Japan. By establishing a democratic government in South Korea and supporting South Korea during the Korean War, the United States achieved its objectives of preventing the southward expansion of Communism and preventing any single country from asserting regional hegemony.

In the post-Cold War era, unlike the Soviet Union, which tried to exert its influence as a super power with its military might, China has been using its economic success to challenge the world order led by the United States. Seen in this light, the United States can check China's rise by using the Korean peninsula as its frontline military base. Because of the Korean peninsula's strategic location, South Korea can almost be seen as an important U.S. aircraft carrier, stationed at the center of Northeast Asia. Considering that the military standoff between Pyongyang and Seoul necessitates a greater U.S. military future presence in the region, the United States is able to use the tension in Korea as a pretext for flexing its muscles vis-à-vis China. During joint maritime exercises with South Korea, for example, the United States sent its aircraft carrier to the Yellow Sea following the sinking of the South Korean Navy ship *Cheonan* last March.

The Korean peninsula's potential capacities are not only beneficial to U.S. national interests, but also compatible with U.S. values; namely, South Korea has embraced democratic development and successfully implemented a market economy. South Korea is often cited as one of the most successful cases of U.S. military intervention and nation building following WWII, and it has now become the United States' fifth-largest trading partner.

North Korea, on the contrary, poses a great challenge to the United States, second only to the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. In particular, the denuclearization and nonproliferation commitment of the United States will most likely be tested by how it deals with North Korea. If Pyongyang were to develop a long-range nuclear weapons delivery system that could reach the continental United States, it would carry far-reaching implications for U.S. policymakers. In addition to the nuclear threat, the high likelihood of sudden change following abrupt regime change or social instability in North Korea could force both China and South Korea to face serious security challenges. In such situations, the end result could also be catastrophic to the United States, especially if North Korea's nuclear capabilities were to get out of control, or worse, fall into the hands of rogue terrorist groups.

North Korea understands the high stakes surrounding its provocations. As a result, it carefully selects its timing and means in testing the strength of the ROK-U.S. joint response. In this sensitive security environment, North Korea's denuclearization, the prevention of further provocations, and the enhanced strength of the ROK-U.S. alliance will all play a key role in protecting American interests.

China, on the other hand, is exercising its military influence by citing its historical background and geographical proximity to the Korean peninsula, while reiterating the importance of this region to its national interest and stability. China has steadfastly held the position that it will take steps to prevent hegemonic or heavy-handed measures in the Korean peninsula.

Amid its power struggle with the United States, China believes the Korean peninsula, with its geographical value, can function as a barrier and a buffer zone against further expansion of U.S. influence in Northeast Asia. Economic growth has been the main driving force behind China's rapid international rise, its internal political stability, and its expansion of influence in Northeast Asia. Therefore, maintaining that economic vitality has been China's core national interest, an approach reflected in its political and diplomatic policies. In this context, South Korea's market, technology, and industrial facilities and tourist industries have been invaluable to China's economic rise.

North Korea's inherent political system and socioeconomic structure is a double-edged sword for China. Even though stabilization in North Korea would reduce its military and diplomatic threat and contribute to China's economic development, China would be deprived of its crucial role as a necessary diplomatic intermediary if Pyongyang were to independently decide to give up its nuclear program or improve relations with the United States. The resulting diminished diplomatic role could potentially weaken China's stature in the international arena. Moreover, from China's standpoint, the opening and reform of North Korea's economy will sharply increase the likelihood of unification, which, in turn, would not only eliminate the buffer zone but also signal the beginning of significant refugee and ethnic minority problems.

As North Korea's politics, economy, and society become more unstable, and Pyongyang seeks more desperately to develop its nuclear capabilities, China will gain more leverage over its North Korean counterparts. China can use this leverage to exercise exclusive authority over North Korea's economy and natural resources. In addition, the ongoing tension between the two Koreas will only strengthen China's diplomatic position due to its influence over the North.

Yet, North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and its worrisome military-focused system have also led neighboring countries to increase their defense spending, and have even generated nuclear proliferation in other countries. This scenario may hamper China's national strategic pursuit of regional stability.

China is most anxious about North Korea's social unrest leading quickly to a breakdown of the Kim regime. This could cause a large influx of North Korean refugees across the Chinese border and signal the beginning of serious ROK-U.S. combined military operations, even the unification of the two Koreas, all of which are serious concerns to China. Therefore, China will seek to maintain a situation that is beneficial to its national interest—a situation where the Korean peninsula remains divided, the two Koreas remain in critical tension, and the North Korea regime is pro-Chinese.

One must not forget that the United States and China share common ground in wanting to avoid an all-out war and denuclearize the Korean peninsula, thereby achieving regional stability. Yet even though North Korea's provocations counter national interests of both the United States and China, the two countries' desired goals for North Korea are by no means identical. The United States pursues absolute stability, as it believes that increased stability in the Korean peninsula will allow less room there for a secure Chinese foothold; China, on the other hand, believes it has nothing to lose as long as it can exploit the tension between the two Koreas to its advantage and North Korea's occasional provocations do not escalate to a total war. China's attitude was openly apparent after the sinking of *Cheonan* and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island.

Therefore, it is necessary that the ROK-U.S. alliance respond to North Korea's provocations by considering China's strategy, finding commonalities in their own strategies, and strengthening efforts to consolidate the available military diplomatic and political tools.

# The Evolving Nature of North Korean Armed Provocations

## The Real State of Affairs in North Korea

North Korea's political system is dominated by the Juche ideology, an ideology with religious overtones that dogmatized the single-party dictatorship of the Communist Korean Workers' Party and is broadly applied to the nation's political, economic, social, and military affairs. Under the pretext of independence and anti-foreign nationalism, North Koreans have isolated themselves from the rest of the world. The result, predictably, has been catastrophic. While ordinary North Koreans suffer from chronic food shortages, a handful of close peers surrounding the Kim family have led extravagant lives. Regrettably, this totalitarian system has distorted information in such a way that ordinary North Koreans unknowingly have their basic human rights suppressed. This Juche ideology has discouraged North Korea from engaging in outside competition, resulting in a dysfunctional state system as well as a backward economy.

Another notable characteristic of North Korea is its "Military First" system. By placing the military at the forefront of the country, North Korea allocates state resources to soldiers before civilians. The military has been used to coerce ordinary North Koreans into complete submission through false information, deception, fear, and violations of human rights.

Due to excessive investment in the military industry and the country's closed economy, the North Korean economy is on the verge of collapse. Economic failure has drained the foreign exchange reserves that provided the means for governance. In a desperate effort to overcome the shortage of foreign currency, North Korean leaders have often resorted to arms sales, drug trafficking, and counterfeiting of money. Such dubious economic decisions have only further isolated North Korea from the international community.

Although the opening and reform of North Korea is essential for its economic recovery, the fear of collapse has discouraged elite party members from implementing economic reforms. Faced with this dilemma, North Korea has chosen to continue down its original path of political coercion and repression. These political and economic circumstances have transformed North Korean society into a body of indoctrinated fanatics, with the regime pushing its third transfer of power amid suppression of individual liberty and civil rights.

Since severe recession and famine struck North Korea in 1990, civilian life has become increasingly difficult, resulting in greater numbers of defectors and greater social unrest.

## The Likelihood of North Korean Armed Provocations

Amid great economic difficulty, North Korea has spent between \$300 million and \$500 million on nuclear tests. Military spending absorbs more than 30 percent of North Korea's GDP; at the same time, North Korea has taken steps to carry out a third hereditary power transfer. It is an unusual country, concerned solely with preserving its government and current system to prolong the rule of the Kim family.

North Korea has slowly acknowledged that its political system has failed in comparison to that of South Korea, but it has also realized that the only way it can attract attention is through its

military power. As a result, a systematic pattern has emerged where North Korea has built up its military and then engaged in provocations in pursuit of a specific political objective. In particular, North Korea has an advantage over South Korea in asymmetric warfare capabilities. Due to its extensive arsenal of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), LRA, large special operations forces, and submarines, Pyongyang is prepared to provoke Seoul through various means when it deems it necessary.

Despite its diplomatic isolation and economic failure, North Korea takes advantage of its military superiority over South Korea. By adopting brinkmanship tactics, North Korea continues to test the strength of the alliance of the Republic of Korea and the United States, believing that South Korea will cave in because it has more to lose in the event of total war. In past provocations, North Korea has witnessed South Korea's lukewarm response, amplified dissent within the South, and a decline in South Korean troops' morale. That experience has further motivated North Korea to disturb the stability in the peninsula in order to negotiate benefits from others.

In other words, North Korea's perception of its external environment has further increased the possibility of future provocations. The North believes China will be on its side, regardless of whether it engages in provocations short of an all-out war. It has taken its relationship with China, South Korea, and the United States into its strategic planning and has concluded that those countries will not confront it militarily. Rather than give in to U.S. sanctions, North Korea has used economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation as a way of consolidating its internal unity.

Still, North Korea is aggrieved by South Korea's hard-line policy and the various international sanctions and regulations imposed upon it. As South Korea improves its international status—by, for example, hosting the 2010 G20 Summit and the Nuclear Security Summit—it is possible that the North will be tempted to create an atmosphere of tension in an effort to expand its influence. South Korea's inner political conflict and its increasingly lax attitude to national security have also provided North Korean sympathizers in the South with more room for maneuvering.

In short, in 2012 North Korea will continue to pursue its goal of building a “strong and prosperous state” by continuing its nuclear weapons program and taking steps to carry out the transfer of power. In addition, based on its superiority over South Korea in asymmetric warfare capabilities, it will carry out different types of provocations in order to gain U.S. acceptance of North Korea as a nuclear state.

## **The Changing Nature of North Korean Armed Provocations**

Since the signing of the Armistice Agreement in 1953, North Korea has threatened the stability and peace of the Korean peninsula by initiating armed provocations of different degree at least 30 times. As a result, the Korean peninsula remains a living relic of the Cold War.

Until the 1990s, North Korea blatantly used its military power to shake the stability of the two Koreas. The Korean People's Army sent its special forces and spies on various occasions, the most notorious examples being the Blue House raid in 1968, the axe murders at the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in 1976, and the bombing of the South Korean presidential delegation in Rangoon in 1983. At the time, the dual purpose of North Korea's acts of terrorism was to increase the pro-Communist voice in South Korea and create the tension that could facilitate reunification of the two Koreas under Communist rule and based on North Korean military and economic superiority.

After 2000, North Korean provocations manifested much more diversity as Pyongyang began using both military and nonmilitary means. The current provocations have been unexpected, extensive, and lethal. The first and second naval battle near Yeonpyeong Island, the sinking of the *Cheonan*, the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, nuclear tests, and missile launches all demonstrate North Korea's new offensive pattern. Amid these provocations, Pyongyang also strongly demanded nullification of the 1953 armistice and the Northern Limit Line (NLL), which acts as the de facto maritime boundary between North and South Korea. Using this pattern of sudden aggression with simultaneous and persistent demands for the invalidation of the 1953 Armistice, Pyongyang sets favorable grounds not only for negotiations with Washington but also for its hopes to receive food aid and attain internal stability.

Facing serious internal threats, the North Korean regime has blamed its internal problems on external pressures. Amid much domestic uncertainty, Pyongyang has repeatedly directed extremely confrontational rhetoric toward Seoul and Washington, which provided some legitimacy for future provocation and made it difficult for the ROK military to estimate the timing of such offensive measures. Furthermore, the North has utilized means of surprise beyond imagination for its provocations—, by disclosing its nuclear and highly enriched uranium (HEU) facilities, conducting missile tests, dispatching submarines, and launching LRA attacks. Yet, immediately after a provocation, North Korea has often ended the ensuing conflict so quickly that it has managed to not only avoid international sanctions but also shift the blame onto South Korea for its disproportionate response.

In the foreseeable future, the Kim regime will continue to adopt brinkmanship tactics to prolong its rule. To pursue this course of action, North Korean leaders will use extreme, coercive, and violent measures to attain a set of specific political objectives. They could use such armed provocation measures even as they try to set up a more favorable negotiation environment with South Korea and the United States, as Pyongyang believes its ties with Beijing can discourage both Seoul and Washington from engaging in acts that can threaten the survival of the Kim regime.

## Possible Patterns of North Korean Armed Provocations

North Korea has the military power capable of initiating both low-intensive and high-intensive provocations. It uses its superiority over the ROK Army in asymmetric warfare capabilities—including WMDs, missiles, special operations forces, LRA, and submarines—to stage new provocations.

The possibility of a surprise provocation with various means and methods along with simultaneous demands for dialogue has steadily increased and complicated ROK efforts to predict future North Korean actions. While a full-scale war is not impossible, the North Korean regime is more likely to engage in limited local provocations by using its asymmetric forces or nonmilitary provocations, considering the economic failure, imminent power succession, and internal instability within North Korean society, and it will use nuclear and conventional weapons in hopes of deterring Seoul and Washington from overly escalating the conflict. In short, while trying to avoid an escalation of tension, North Korea will not sacrifice its bargaining power in negotiations and will try to retain higher ground. Also, it will likely adjust the intensity of a future provocation based upon its internal and external needs.

Based on these observations, possible North Korean armed provocations include the following possibilities: (1) an attack on ROK vessels in the nearby sea, (2) an attack on ROK vessels by

submarine, (3) shelling of the Republic of Korea's Northwestern Islands in the Yellow Sea, (4) carrying out surprise landing operations on the Republic of Korea's western islands, (5) an attack on ROK reconnaissance aircraft by missile, and (6) surprise attacks on ROK troops within the DMZ. North Korea can also provoke South Korea by nonmilitary means, including (1) cyber warfare, (2) terrorist attacks, (3) taking South Korean workers and/or visitors in North Korea as hostages, (4) nuclear or missile tests, and (5) kidnapping or assassination of key South Korean officials.

Pyongyang will limit its provocations to South Korea's military targets as much as possible. Yet, it will seek to deliver as much damage and shock to Seoul and Washington as it desires. Its attack will be carefully planned and secretly implemented in order to complicate South Korea's efforts to track down the attack's origin, thereby delaying the possibility for an immediate response.

## Guidelines for Improving the ROK-U.S. Joint Response

### Mapping Out the ROK-U.S. Joint Response

In the event of future North Korean armed provocations, it is imperative that South Korea and the United States carefully coordinate their response, because a disjointed response would only reveal the vulnerabilities of the ROK-U.S. alliance to North Korea. Because South Korea's tepid response to North Korean provocations can aggravate a situation, if not lead to further provocation, South Korea and the United States should take strong punitive measures against the North. In taking retaliatory measures, both countries should not take their own course but rather coordinate with one another based on mutual trust and solid preparation.

#### ■ *Definition of North Korean Armed Provocations*

If North Korea were to provoke with its military, South Korea and the United States should first identify common ground and then determine to what extent North Korea's action can be considered provocative. Because the ROK-U.S. joint response would take place only after North Korean provocation, defining what action constitutes provocation is important for South Korea and the United States, as this question is directly related to the steps both countries should take in response.

How can we define North Korean armed provocation? In other words, what kind of North Korean action constitutes as armed provocation? To answer this requires taking the following factors into account: intention, the means and methods of provocation, breach of sovereignty and international law, and extent of damage.

Here, we define a North Korean armed provocation as *an intentional military action by North Korea that breaches the sovereignty of South Korea or the United States and violates international law for the attainment of specific political, military, or diplomatic objectives.*

Based on this definition, South Korea and the United States should distinguish different types of provocation and respond accordingly. Under the provided definition, for example, if North Korea intentionally used military measures to breach the sovereignty of South Korea or the United States and cause loss of life and property, its action would be categorized as a "direct armed provocation." In this case, a strong military reprisal from the ROK-U.S. alliance should be the priority,

and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island on November 23, 2010, is a case in point. However, if North Korea violated international law and exacerbated tension in Northeast Asia, but did not breach another country's sovereignty or cause loss of life or property, that action would be categorized as "threatening armed provocation." In this case, Seoul and Washington would be advised to pursue diplomatic solutions. Relevant cases are North Korea's nuclear development, missile tests, confrontational rhetoric, and large-scale military maneuvers in the nearby Yellow Sea.

Three types of North Korean threats jeopardize peace and stability in the Korean peninsula, and more broadly, Northeast Asia and global affairs. First, North Korea can use military means to aggravate South Korea, thereby encroaching on South Korea's sovereignty and inflicting damage. Second, a sudden collapse of North Korea or general revolt can occur, carrying profound implications and possibly quickly spiraling out of control. Third, North Korea's continued pursuit of its nuclear program and ultimate production of deliverable nuclear warheads pose a grave threat to regional security.

With regard to these North Korean threats, South Korea, the United States, and China view these situations through different lenses. South Korea has focused on preventing another North Korean provocation and urging North Korea to surrender its nuclear weapons. However, considering that dismantling Pyongyang's nuclear program requires international coordination and sanctions, South Korea's immediate concern should be preventing future North Korean provocations.

Ironically, from China's perspective, although North Korea's provocation and nuclear proliferation are sensitive international issues, these problems strengthen its role in the region. China, therefore, will likely keep its time-honored Communist alliance with the ailing North Korean regime to preserve the status quo. Beijing defends Pyongyang on the grounds that, were North Korea to collapse, it would have to contend with large numbers of North Korean refugees crossing the Chinese border. Moreover, as such collapse could reasonably be related to the likelihood of ROK-led unification of the Koreas, the Chinese are deeply concerned about any scenarios involving sudden change in the North.

On the other hand, the United States fully acknowledges that North Korean provocations and the possibility of a sudden North Korean collapse threaten stability in the Korean peninsula and are adverse to U.S. national interests. Therefore, the United States has been acting as a balancing force in Northeast Asia, trying to discourage North Korean provocations by deploying strong responsive forces on the peninsula. For Washington, however, North Korea's denuclearization is considered the top priority in its Korea policy, as it poses the most immediate threat to U.S. security.

In sum, South Korea, the United States, and China share common ground in their belief that North Korean threats need to be properly managed, yet their evaluations, outlooks, and responses to North Korean threats diverge.

#### ■ *North Korea's Objectives and Intention Behind its Provocations*

Although North Korea has frequently resorted to armed military threats, it does not desire an escalated inter-Korean conflict, as its economy and military spending have fallen far behind those of South Korea and the country has been suffering from severe economic depression since 1990.

Here, it appears that North Korea's objective behind its provocations has changed from the original goal of "the Communist unification of the two Koreas" to a more modest goal of "preservation and stability of the Kim regime."

With this new objective, North Korea seems to intentionally build up tension in the Korean peninsula in order to achieve internal stability, successfully complete a hereditary transfer of power, improve its negotiating leverage over the United States, obtain economic aid, and attract China's attention to enhance its legitimacy. In addition, by strongly pushing for nullification of the 1953 Armistice and by developing nuclear weapons, North Korea apparently intends to continue confronting South Korea militarily.

It comes as no surprise, then, that North Korea's objectives and intentions are closely linked to its methods of provocation. On one hand, when the North launches a surprise attack on the South causing loss of life and property, the North has the following motivations: polarizing South Korea's public opinion, instigating decline in ROK troops' morale, attracting international attention, and strengthening the military's role in North Korea. North Korea will pay close attention to creating political, economic, and military tension in South Korea by making South Koreans fully aware of the North Korean threat.

On the other hand, when North Korea engages in nuclear or missile tests that violate international law but do not cause damage or encroach on South Korea's sovereignty, it is attempting to leverage its negotiating position vis-à-vis the United States, attract China's attention, and boost national confidence. Moreover, North Korea's breaches of the 1953 Armistice along the NLL and DMZ in addition to its threatening rhetoric toward the South are aimed at instigating fear within South Korea and reinforcing the Kim family's rule in North Korea.

Regardless of the kind of provocation it carries out, Pyongyang's overarching objectives will be to strengthen its negotiating power with the United States, preserve internal stability, produce tensions within South Korea, and use the outcomes as grounds to press for demands of economic aid.

In particular, North Korea's incursions across the NLL have become more frequent since the end of 1990s. The North persistently tried to invalidate the NLL and weaken the ROK-U.S. alliance by exploiting the varying opinions between South Korea and the United States on the NLL issue. Surprisingly, even some South Korean politicians have advocated the renegotiation of the NLL, citing the murky historical and legal background of the NLL's establishment. However, the renegotiation of the NLL and concession of the maritime border in the Yellow Sea could be seriously harmful to security for the South. If Seoul were to cave in to Pyongyang's demands, not only would its national pride be permanently damaged; such concessions would also render South Korea's defense of its western islands virtually impossible. Accepting Pyongyang's demands would not guarantee an end to North Korean provocation in the area. In the worst-case scenario, South Korea's concession would give North Korea further incentive to provoke South Korea in pursuit of extracting more rewards.

As such, to prevent North Korea from exploiting the divergence of opinions between the Republic of Korea and United States, the two countries must firmly establish a common position. If the threat of inter-Korean war becomes completely obsolete and a solid and peaceful system is established in the peninsula, then the status of the NLL can be revisited as needed. In the meantime, only when NLL is clearly established and commonly accepted will it be possible to deter North Korean provocations and allow freedom of maneuver in the Northwestern Islands.

- *Laying the Groundwork for the ROK-U.S. Joint Response to North Korean Armed Provocations*

The ROK-U.S. joint response to North Korean provocations should incorporate both military and nonmilitary means. South Korea and the United States should be well-prepared to retaliate accordingly immediately following a North Korean provocation and to use force if necessary. *Military means* involve taking appropriate military retribution to prevent North Korea from attaining a political objective, whereas *nonmilitary means* involve delivering tangible and direct damage to North Korea's governance through economic and diplomatic measures, such as the sanction on North Korea's Banco Delta Asia accounts. The ROK-U.S. combined military action for joint military response should especially assess and agree upon certain measures, including the degree of the response, possible consequences, and the assigned responsibilities between the two countries.

Because the degree of military response determines the means and methods, this should be decided after much deliberation. Here, we distinguish responses aimed at deterrence from responses aimed at punishment: A response aimed at deterrence focuses on preventing the escalation of conflict, repelling North Korea's attack, and restoring the status quo, while a response aimed at punishment emphasizes striking some of North Korea's key military targets and destroying the enemy's will to fight, even at the risk of escalating the conflict. Such a hard-line response can also have a positive effect on North Korean policymakers' strategic decisionmaking by casting fear and doubt on a course of retribution..

Conventionally, according to the provisions of international law, a response aimed at deterrence would be regarded as an appropriate course of action. Therefore, the armistice rules of engagement have constrained the scope of the ROK-U.S. joint response. Nevertheless, the recent North Korean provocations have occurred so unexpectedly and quickly that the current armistice rules of engagement, with their limits on available options and hindrance of a prompt response, have proven almost useless for deterrence against follow-up provocations by the North. Therefore, in the near future if North Korea were to provoke South Korea, South Korea and the United States should reconsider the time constraints and contemplate a wider array of policy options including punitive measures. Seoul's and Washington's assertive stance will go a long way to protecting state sovereignty and promoting national pride.

Until now, South Korea and the United States have preferred cautious to assertive and passive to active responses to North Korean provocations while abiding by the Armistice Agreement and expecting the North to change its behavior by its own volition. However, as the recent North Korean provocations, including the torpedoing of the *Cheonan* and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island have demonstrated, these past efforts have proven fruitless. China's lukewarm response and the instability in North Korea only make future provocations more likely. In the face of increasingly bold North Korean provocations, South Korea should no longer tolerate threats to its security. Now is the time to break the cycle of North Korean provocations by a show of force.

Historically, demonstrations of force have succeeded in various incidents. First, the U.S. show of force after the USS *Pueblo* kidnapping resulted in North Korea releasing the remaining crewmembers. Second, the U.S. military's Operation Paul Bunyan and move to Defense Readiness Condition (DEFCON) status following the DMZ axe murders in 1976 led to North Korean leader Kim Il-sung expressing regret. Third, North Korea, sensing an imminent U.S. military response following the first North Korean nuclear crisis, met with the United States to resume the second round of talks in Geneva in 1993. Lastly, U.S. economic sanctions on North Korea's Banco Delta Asia bank account were a major driving force behind the February 13 Agreement in 2007. These four examples illustrate that North Korea has made concessions when South Korea and the United States were willing to use force.

If South Korea and the United States were to take military self-defense measures, they should also closely communicate with one another to agree on the desired end-state of their actions. When North Korea intentionally violates South Korea's sovereignty or harms civilians, the level of the ROK-U.S. joint response should be strong enough to instill disorder and fear in North Korea. Also, depending on the manner of the North Korean provocation, the response of South Korea and the United States should emphasize neutralizing North Korea's high-value military targets. These targets include units and headquarters that were involved in the provocation, facilities that are significant and whose targeting would send a strong message to the North Korean leadership, and core strategic capabilities, including nuclear and missile facilities. To elaborate, these would include the unit from which the provocation originated, its higher command posts of regiment or divisions, battalion-level artillery and mechanized units, air-defense facilities, and symbols related to the Kim family. The ROK-U.S. self-defense measures should inflict damage to these key military points comparable to at least 10 percent to 20 percent of the received battle damage. Should South Korea and the United States consider retaliatory measures, they must have national support and execute the military operation successfully. Moreover, the action plans should be not only transparent and legitimate but also acknowledged as an inevitable act of self-defense.

Clearly setting out how to delegate authority in the event of an ROK-U.S. joint response is the key to success. Here, a range of factors—from operational control (OPCON) in wartime and peacetime, crisis management measures, the characteristics of weapons systems, and international relations—can all have a certain bearing on the specific authority delegated to South Korea and the United States. Also, operational control of ROK forces is divided between the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) of ROK Armed Forces in *peacetime* and the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) commander in *wartime*. Therefore, both sides should take steps to minimize the gap in command, control, and coordination that could possibly arise from this dichotomized operational control. Currently, to narrow this gap, the CFC commander also exercises Combined Delegated Authority (CODA), which allows him to exercise authority over units of the ROK forces placed under wartime OPCON during peacetime.

In the case of the response aimed at punishment, one cannot exclude the possibility that a strong ROK-U.S. response could quickly escalate the conflict and trigger all-out war, depending on North Korea's reaction. In this scenario, consistency of operational control is essential. However, because operational control of ROK forces will remain divided until 2015, it is inevitable that the chairman of the ROK JCS will lead the initial response and the United States Forces Korea commander will be in a supporting role. Because such an initial response aimed at punishment will require ROK-U.S. combined forces and, in particular, U.S. surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, it will be invaluable to possess guided weapons and a stealth-equipped air force and it is advised that both South Korea and the United States be sufficiently prepared for deployment and employment of such forces.

Stakes are extremely high; if an initial response from South Korea is aimed at punishment and the United States is reluctant to escalate the conflict, this disjointed communication can heighten anxiety and concern in South Korea. Hence, an active and timely deployment of U.S. bridging capabilities is critical in this initial response.

If North Korea were to then respond by further escalating the conflict and react by using its military, the Republic of Korea and the United States would have to retaliate likewise. In this situation, the United States would most likely declare a crisis, elevate the DEFCON level, strengthen its

defensive posture, and prepare to transfer wartime operational control from the ROK JCS to the CFC commander.

On the other hand, South Korea, though it would partially agree to the U.S. measures, will want to continue responsive operations controlled by the chairman of ROK JCS, based on the assessment that the escalation to an all-out war is unlikely, considering North Korean military capabilities and their intent.

After all, Seoul must also concern itself with the potentially devastating effects on South Korea's politics, economy, and society of a U.S. declaration of crisis and elevation of DEFCON. As a result, it will want to continue peacetime operational control under the chairman of the ROK JCS while maintaining the autonomy to pursue strong and rapid measures.

To resolve these discrepancies, it may be useful to classify North Korea's reactions into several categories and establish a "red line" for each category. Should North Korea cross this "red line," appropriate countermeasures such as the declaration of combined crisis and the elevation of the DEFCON level would follow. In this situation, the command relationship should be transformed, with the CFC commander operating as supported commander. An example of crossing the "red line" is North Korea's use of its artillery, missiles, or aircraft to attack the capital region or two separate regions resulting in not only military but also civilian casualties.

In sum, U.S. support of ROK JCS-led responsive operations is critical in demonstrating that the response of the ROK-U.S. alliance is not merely diplomatic or rhetorical in nature, but is an active politico-military pact that puts words into action.

#### ■ *Steps for Pressuring the North Korean Nuclear System*

North Korea has persistently pursued nuclear development since the 1960s for the purpose of unifying the two Koreas under Communist rule. North Korea considered the United States and the ROK-U.S. alliance to be the biggest obstacle to unification and persuaded itself that only nuclear weapons could be a means decisive enough to hold off a possible U.S. invasion. Thereafter, North Korea has regarded nuclear weapons as a means of survival and as a symbol of bold leadership to help strengthen internal stability. It firmly believes its nuclear program not only prevents the South from absorbing the North, but also helps North Korean authorities tighten their grip on the population. Especially, against the backdrop of economic depression and domestic discontent in the early 1990s, the North Korean regime suspects that any hint at reform or opening of its economy could quickly lead to its demise. Therefore, it has clung more strongly to the development of nuclear capabilities in order to preserve its rule.

Moreover, the North Korean regime has used nuclear weapons as a means of extorting benefits from the United States, Japan, Russia, and China. Over the past 20 years, North Korea has learned that other countries cannot force North Korea's hand so long as it possesses nuclear weapons.

Meantime, as it prefers the North Korean regime to stay in place rather than endure a regime collapse, China will not abandon North Korea over the issue of denuclearization. Therefore, the more strongly Washington pressures Pyongyang to denuclearize, the closer China will be drawn to North Korea. Beijing remains reluctant to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis with any physical means.

Based on the observations highlighted above, North Korea's denuclearization will be highly unlikely unless the North Korean regime risks its own survival by voluntarily making radical political and economic changes and withdrawing its aggressive stance on South Korea.

North Korea's nuclear weapons development not only poses an existential military threat to South Korea but also tilts the balance of power to it, which in turn creates the situation where South Korea is held almost as North Korea's hostage. Though South Korea has built advanced military capabilities to offset North Korea's conventional force superiority, thereby providing some deterrence, North Korea's nuclear weapons give it an advantage in military competition over South Korea. Furthermore, nuclear weapons also enhance North Korea's bargaining power in coercing concessions from the South. Continuation of the current military standoff, therefore, will only increase the tension in the Korean peninsula and accelerate the arms race in the Northeast Asian region.

As of now, North Korea is estimated to possess approximately 40 kilograms of plutonium stock and six to eight nuclear warheads, and is suspected of pursuing an HEU program. It has already flaunted its nuclear capabilities through two nuclear tests, and recently the possibility of a third nuclear test has surfaced. Assuming North Korea continues its nuclear program, it will eventually advance to a stage where it possesses a small, lightweight nuclear arsenal. In other words, the level of North Korean nuclear development has already reached a serious and critical stage. Therefore, it is time for the Republic of Korea and the United States to devise more practical means that will yield tangible results to resolve the North Korean nuclear problem.

The approach through dialogue—primarily with the Six-Party Talks—has virtually failed, with no perceptible outcome due to the lukewarm stance of China and the brinkmanship tactics of North Korea. While the basic approach regarding North Korea's nuclear program should still be to engage North Korea through dialogue, we should also maintain a two-track approach that combines dialogue and more direct pressure. Dialogue should consistently continue being pursued through both bilateral and multilateral channels. By playing a more proactive role in the negotiation process, South Korea can strengthen the U.S. position over North Korea. If North Korea does not take substantial steps to meet its international obligations and freeze its nuclear program, South Korea and the United States should adopt additional sanctions and unequivocally state that they are willing to engage in physical measures. Both countries should also remind China of its important role in North Korea's denuclearization.

To avoid falling prey to North Korea's strategy of stalling, both the Republic of Korea and the United States should set out deadlines for each stage of denuclearization. If North Korea does not meet these deadlines, South Korea and the United States should seriously consider the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons and F-22 fighter jets to the Korean peninsula, as well as the enhancement of other necessary military means, including surveillance, reconnaissance, interception, and precision-strike assets. If necessary, South Korea should bear the financial burden of the deployment. Granted that the aggressive ROK-U.S. stance will temporarily escalate the tension between the two Koreas, this hard-lined posture will ultimately not only force North Korea to submit to the mounting pressure of the Republic of Korea and the United States, but also usher in lasting peace in the Korean peninsula.

## **Close Dialogue with China**

China is North Korea's only ally and has continuously provided political, economic, diplomatic, and military support to the North. As China and North Korea share not only their border but also their view on the national interests of the two countries, the ROK-U.S. joint response to North Korean provocations is advised to take China's possible reaction into account.

South Korea and the United States should clearly acknowledge the amount of influence China can exert over North Korea, and try to harness more cooperation from China through close dialogue while dealing with the North Korea conundrum. Such dialogue with China should focus on securing China's role in deterring future North Korean provocations and on establishing the legitimacy of the ROK-U.S. joint response. In addition, by emphasizing the gravity of North Korean provocations, the Republic of Korea and the United States must make clear to China that the tenuous status quo in the Korean peninsula can quickly spiral out of control.

During dialogue with China, South Korea and the United States should also simultaneously try to curb China's influence in resolving the North Korea issue and limit the array of diplomatic measures it could take. This can be done by pursuing dialogue but responding as necessary to North Korean provocations with strong punitive measures beyond the Chinese expectation.

Only when the Republic of Korea and the United States strongly retaliate to North Korean provocations can both countries break the vicious cycle of North Korea's provocative behavior and be less prone to rely on China for making diplomatic breakthroughs.

In regard to a strong ROK-U.S. response, China understands that all-out war would be detrimental to Chinese national interests. Therefore, China will likely make strong efforts to prevent rising tension in the region by containing and deterring North Korea from engaging in further military actions.

While engaging in close dialogue with China, it is necessary that South Korea take the lead in persistently and tenaciously communicating ROK-U.S. preliminary discussions, with the United States providing a supporting role. This will augment the Chinese perception that it must take a more engaged role and commit greater effort in Korean peninsula-related issues. This will also help enable China to accept multilateral security cooperation frameworks and a U.S.-led comprehensive alliance in the Northeast Asia region and allow China to understand the ROK-U.S. combined effort to manage the North Korean provocation and its response within the boundaries of the two Koreas.

The United States' role is to help members of the United Nations and key countries in Northeast Asia understand the strategy behind the ROK-U.S. alliance. The United States is an entity capable of building up international pressure to nudge China into the role of a responsible stakeholder regarding the North Korea dilemma.

## **Enhancement of ROK Military Preparedness**

### ■ *Proactive Deterrence: A New South Korean Approach*

In the face of North Korea's buildup of asymmetric warfare capabilities and frequent provocations, South Korea should acquire advanced military assets and ensure that the North understands the Republic of Korea's will to respond when needed to North Korean provocations. In other words, South Korea's strategy should shift to proactive deterrence, including stronger self-defense measures.

To enhance the effectiveness of this strategy of proactive deterrence, Operational Plan (OPLAN) 5027 should clearly stipulate that the United States will provide a nuclear umbrella. South Korea should also specify possible types of North Korea's asymmetric threats and plan its response accordingly.

### ■ *Integration and Expansion of Defense Information Capabilities*

Military intelligence should play the role of not only supporting operations but leading them through detailed analysis, assessment, and estimates based on the intelligence gathered by collection platforms. However, South Korea's capacity to support theater warfare in the Korean peninsula with military intelligence is severely limited, as the ROK military only possesses intelligence capabilities that can provide armistice indicators and warnings. Therefore, it is necessary that the Republic of Korea and the United States construct a common database containing target information that can directly support operations.

There is also a need to establish intelligence systems that can integrate and share military intelligence in order to enhance the coordination among intelligence agencies. Creating a combined intelligence organization that can promote common intelligence collection between the Republic of Korea and the United States, as well as improving the interoperability of Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence (C4I) systems, is also critical.

Furthermore, South Korea must be able not only to field tactical and strategic-level intelligence assets in advance; it must also devise a comprehensive plan to train a highly professional intelligence staff to prepare for transfer of wartime operational control, and enhance surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities against North Korean asymmetric forces and deep area operations.

### ■ *Improving Crisis Management Capabilities*

The efforts of South Korea's Ministry of National Defense and Joint Chiefs of Staff during crises should be unified through improved organizational and personnel systems. It is of utmost importance that greater human resources be invested in the command and control center of the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff, as it functions as the main crisis action organization that carries out a series of measures to monitor situations, disseminate information, provide estimates, and conduct courses of action. Professional public affairs personnel are also necessary and will be need to be cultivated, as effective and timely public relations will be important in the initial stage of response to a crisis. Last but not least, enhancing information sharing and coordination between South Korea and the United States for seamless and timely action in a crisis situation will be vital.

### ■ *Responding to North Korea's Cyber Threats*

Although North Korea has trained a large number of hackers to carry out cyber terrorism on South Korea, South Korea has yet to strengthen its efforts, coordination systems, and legal statutes regarding cyber attacks in government, private sector, and military organizations. New and effective legislation enacted by the South Korean government is necessary to enable coordination among government branches, private corporations, and the military.

Also, South Korea must further develop cyber warfare-related military organizations, doctrines, and operational requirements, and train experts in information protection technology.

### ■ *Preparing for a Growing North Korean Asymmetric Threat*

Since the 1990s, North Korea has been steadily developing its asymmetric warfare capabilities in order to attain military superiority against the South. If the North were to use such capabilities, which include nuclear weapons, missiles, long-range artillery, special warfare forces, and

submarines, in a simultaneous and coordinated manner, that action would greatly undermine the security of South Korea

#### ■ *Preparing for North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Threat*

The Republic of Korea and the United States should codify the concept of extended deterrence not only for North Korean nuclear, intelligence, and missile capabilities, but also for conventional forces in the OPLAN 5027, embarking on common efforts to demonstrate a denuclearization and deterrence strategy based on the network-centric forces of the ROK military. In particular, active U.S. support is needed for the establishment of target information databases and programs to acquire and analyze target intelligence. Moreover, measures are needed to both quantitatively and qualitatively upgrade continental ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and long-range precision-guided munitions, establish anti-missile defense systems, and guarantee the interoperability of the ROK's missile defense system with that of the United States. Also, a revision of the 2001 bilateral pact on ROK-U.S. missile capabilities, supported by the United States, will improve the ROK military's long-range strike capabilities.

#### ■ *Preparing for North Korea's Long-range Artillery*

In order to launch early strikes and neutralize North Korean LRAs that threaten the greater Seoul metropolitan area, South Korea should improve its capabilities in the following areas: the multiple launch rocket system, precision-guided munitions, air assets, special operations target intelligence, and detection assets. The Republic of Korea and the United States should also establish a system that could allow them to more seamlessly share up-to-date target intelligence. To enhance target intelligence collection capabilities, the improvement of forward intelligence collection assets, namely corps-level unmanned aerial vehicles, should be considered.

In preparation against surprise attacks by North Korea on the Northwestern Islands, Seoul should dramatically increase the islands' capabilities for self-defense. Specifically, it must reinforce manpower, counter-fire forces, local air defense capabilities, and protection facilities.

#### ■ *Strengthening Joint Coordination in ROK Military Forces*

The role of the Joint Forces Command is essential in strengthening the joint coordination of the ROK forces. Currently, however, the ROK JCS bears an overwhelming burden and its organization is overly extended, as the chairman of the ROK JCS concurrently plays the role of the joint forces commander.

To ensure efficiency of operational command and improve command structure over the joint operations, the Joint Forces Command should be separated from the ROK JCS. To this end, the higher command structure of the ROK JCS needs to be dramatically reshuffled. Furthermore, for the purpose of boosting partnership strength, South Korea should significantly improve the associated training and education system as well as personnel management.

Moreover, to properly develop joint forces, the establishment of an integrated architecture should be considered along with development of scientific models that could measure joint strength, as well as a civilian-governmental-military joint committee for oversight.

As for the acquisition of ROK forces, the Republic of Korea should develop a military structure and weapons system that can be both multifunctional and efficient and focus on those

capabilities that can respond to North Korean asymmetric threats, while taking into account the ROK-U.S. alliance as well as the potential level of U.S. support.

- *Training Military Personnel and Improving ROK Military Education Systems*

While the overall educational level and intellectual capacity of ROK forces are world-class, there is still work to be done to improve the morale, discipline, and professionalism of the service members. Radical changes in the education and training institutions and their curricula are necessary to nurture better human resources and make the ROK military stronger. These measures include reshuffling components in human resources, cultivating ethics and leadership among high-ranking officers, maintaining just and consistent personnel management, and promoting greater trust and respect toward the military from politicians and the general public. To this end, acquisition of resources and increased investment will be crucial.

## Conclusion

With the rise of China and the threat from North Korea, the security landscape in Northeast Asia has become more uncertain and unstable. Therefore, South Korea and the United States should navigate this fragile security environment carefully. Recently, North Korea, being burdened with political, economic, and social instability, has believed that engaging in external provocations is the only course of action that can guarantee its internal stability and elicit economic aid.

Based on its growing power in the international arena and influence over North Korea, China has been condoning North Korean provocations with the goal of seizing the initiative to gain hegemony over the Northeast Asia region. This, in turn, has had only a negative impact on the ROK-U.S. joint efforts to prevent and deter provocations from the North.

In such a context, the ROK-U.S. joint response against two major North Korean provocations, the sinking of the *Cheonan* and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in 2010, was possibly the best course of action based on principles, but it failed to deliver a satisfactory outcome to South Korean citizens. The degree of readiness, timing, and strength of the response fell short of public expectations, and the response was concentrated mostly on pursuing a diplomatic course. Such measures only enhanced China's leverage in the diplomatic arena and failed to convince North Korea of the possibility of retaliation, therefore failing to provide deterrence against future provocations.

Instead, the response against North Korean provocation should be conducted to a degree that can prevent North Korea from attaining its goals and, possibly lead to North Korea demanding an apology from South Korea for the attack. This can be accomplished only through inflicting significant damage on the North, utilizing the superior combined forces of the Republic of Korea and the United States. Such a response will not only compel the North to abandon its strategy of armed aggression, but also help limit China's diplomatic influence in the affairs of the Korean peninsula.

Considering that China prefers to use security challenges in the Korean peninsula to its advantage rather than to seek a fundamental solution to them, relying on China to take the initiative vis-à-vis North Korea is not a viable policy.

The ROK-U.S. joint response requires close consultation and coordination from the initial stage of determining the classification of any North Korean provocation. In particular, during the

initial response operations led by the ROK JCS, the provision of U.S. bridging capabilities is critical. The response aimed at punishment requires strong military measures as it should target some of North Korea's high-value military targets and, if necessary, threaten North Korea's leadership.

During this military operation, the supported-supporting relationship between the Republic of Korea and the United States should be structured clearly. Rather than the ROK-U.S. CFC leading operations in the early stages, providing a common assessment of "red lines" on characterizing types of North Korean provocations will be more practical and effective. If the situation deteriorates and there is growing concern about all-out war, operational control should then be transferred to the CFC.

Looking back at past experiences, it is apparent that solving the North Korea dilemma solely through dialogue has inherent limits. We should therefore combine engagement through dialogue with strong pressure to intervene in response to North Korea's stalling tactics. In addition to placing high-tech F-22 fighter jets in South Korea, it is necessary to send a clear message to the North that all available means of nuclear deterrence, including the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in the Korean peninsula, will be used. As for how to handle North Korea's nuclear weapons, strong pressure and clearly defined deadlines for incremental denuclearization should be established to contain the North's proliferation.

To prevent North Korea from engaging in future provocations, enhancing the ROK military's readiness posture should be the top priority. To this end, a complete armistice readiness posture as well as a more proactive deterrence strategy should be established. Moreover, significant investment in intelligence capabilities and other areas of vulnerability is needed to prepare against North Korean asymmetric threats. Finally, reforming the ROK JCS organizational structure to achieve rapid response capabilities, nurturing highly qualified military personnel, and improving the joint coordination of the ROK military are the most immediate tasks ahead of us.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Sung-Chool Lee** began his fellowship with the Office of Korea Chair at CSIS in March 2011. A retired general in the Republic of Korea Army, General Lee served as deputy commander of ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command and commander of the Ground Component Command following his promotion to four-star general in 2008. As the commanding general, he planned and executed tasks in preparation for future transfer of wartime operational control from the United States to the Republic of Korea. He is dedicated to further strengthening the ROK-U.S. alliance and improving theater operations capabilities of the ROK Armed Forces. In 2010, General Lee served as security adviser to President Lee Myung-bak on the Presidential Special Security Review Team in the investigation of the March 29 sinking of the *Cheonan*. General Lee holds a BA from the ROK Military Academy and received an MBA from Chonbuk National University. He previously served as commander of the 5th Corps, ROK Army, and as chief director of strategy planning, J5, at ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

1800 K Street, NW | Washington, DC 20006  
Tel: (202) 887-0200 | Fax: (202) 775-3199  
E-mail: [books@csis.org](mailto:books@csis.org) | Web: [www.csis.org](http://www.csis.org)

