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# Nuclear Security 2012

**: Challenges of Proliferation and  
Implication for the Korean Peninsula**

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Korea Institute for  
National Unification



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# **Nuclear Security 2012**

## **: Challenges of Proliferation and Implication for the Korean Peninsula**

The analyses, comments and other opinions contained in the this monograph are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Korea Institute for National Unification.



# IV. Combating North Korea's Nuclear Blackmail: Proactive Deterrence and the Triad System

Taewoo Kim  
(Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, KIDA)

# 1. Introduction

The sinking of the ROK naval corvette *Cheonan* on 26 March, 2010, which cost the lives of 46 crew members, and the indiscriminate shelling of North Korean forces on the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong on 23 November, in which two ROK marines and two civilians were killed and many other civilians and soldiers were injured, have become part of South Korea's poignant history, not only marking a humiliation for the ROK military but also vividly confirming North Korea's asymmetric threat. Most significantly, these events compelled the South Korean public to reassess their sense of national security. For South Korea, the possibility of an all-out war has been by far the most serious threat in terms of intensity among all the threats posed by North Korea. Yet, as a result of these two incidents, regional limited provocations have emerged as the most serious threat in terms of frequency and repercussions for peace-time South Korean society. These incidents shockingly reminded South Koreans of the stark fact that North Korea can jolt everything in South Korea merely by perpetrating limited provocations. While "asymmetric threat" is not an unfamiliar term to the security community, these two incidents strongly imprinted the concept in the minds of ordinary South Koreans.

With this background, this paper revisits the nuclear threat as the most substantial symbolic asymmetric threat posed by North Korea, illuminates the military and political dilemmas forced by the asymmetric threats at three different levels, and suggests what South Korea can



do to combat them.

Right after the *Cheonan* incident, some South Korean teenaged netizens hotly debated the numerical asymmetry in the two Korea's submarine forces, citing this as the fundamental factor that made the provocation possible. They asked: "Why do we have only a dozen of submarines while they have more than 70?" Similarly, these young netizens inquired after shelling of the Yeonpyeong Island: "Why do we have only six K-9 guns on the island while they deploy some 1,000 artillery pieces on the opposite coast?" However, the problems are not limited to the sheer numerical asymmetry of particular weapons in specific areas. A more serious problem is that unilateral superiority in many areas makes North Korea intrepid enough to torpedo a South Korean corvette within South Korean territorial waters and bombard its territory. In fact, North Korea now enjoys asymmetry in various areas: weapons of mass destruction(WMDs), a large standing army, well-trained special operation forces, artillery forces deployed along the truce line, etc. Nuclear capability is by far the most substantial asymmetric threat leading the North's leadership to believe that South Korea cannot respond in kind. Without such an asymmetric threat, a torpedo attack on a South Korean naval ship in South Korean territorial waters or the shelling of a peaceful island might not have been conceivable.

So far South Korean society has not been ready to fully absorb the socio-political repercussions which the North's bold provocations have brought, while military concerns have centered on military vulnerabilities. It is understandable that South Koreans' awareness of nuclear insecurity has

been diluted by the twenty-year-long history of the North's nuclear programs, the persistent rivalry between the idealistic optimist camp and the realistic pessimist camp concerning North Korean issues has prevented national consensus, and that political leaders have therefore easily dismissed the nuclear threat as a solely military matter. Nevertheless, the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong Island incidents prove that the North's bold provocations can scare ordinary South Koreans, manipulate public opinion, distort the political process in South Korea, and eventually devastate inter-Korean relations. In this sense, deterring the North's provocations is not just a military matter, but also a socio-political conundrum which both government and the people should grapple with together. This is why South Korea needs to refocus attention on the dilemmas posed by North Korea's never-ending nuclear adventurism and explore optimal solutions.



## 2. Asymmetric Threats

Currently, North Korea enjoys a superior position in a wide array of military forces. In addition to its increasingly formidable WMD capability, North Korea has some 1,200,000 regular army troops supported by 7,000,000 reserve forces, overwhelming the South's 650,000, deploys thousands of field artillery pieces along the truce line capable of firing a maximum of 500,000 shells per hour into Seoul and the vicinity of the DMZ, and operates some 200,000 special operations forces(SOF), the single largest SOF in the world. Its more than 70 submarines dwarf the South's submarine fleet, and

its hackers infiltrate and disturb South Korea's cyber systems. Unlike South Korean soldiers who serve less than two years,<sup>1</sup> North Korean soldiers serve at least seven years, during which time they undergo notorious brainwashing and intensive training. This in turn produces an asymmetry of spiritual strength between the two military forces.

Unfortunately, many of these asymmetries are structural and unavoidable. For example, unlike North Korea, which walked out of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty(NPT) and desperately pursued nuclear capabilities, South Korea, as a responsible member of the international community, must live up to its non-nuclear obligations and therefore has no way of correcting the nuclear asymmetry as long as the North clings to its nuclear ambitions. Cyber threats are another example. South Korean hackers, even if so inclined, would hardly find any worthy targets in the North, whereas North Korean hackers can easily find targets in South Korea where all kinds of cyber systems abound. Likewise, South Korea's artillery forces have a very limited number of targets, while South Korea's economic prosperity has provided the North's artillery forces with abundant targets of strategic significance, including Seoul. The numerical asymmetry in artillery forces, therefore, can be considered a structural asymmetry

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<sup>1</sup>- In 2007 the Roh Moo-hyun government decided to reduce the military service term from 24 months to 18. However, in 2010 this author raised the issue of restoration of the service term through the Presidential Commission for Defense Reform of which he is a member. The issue had been debated in the government, the military, and the National Assembly, and the government finally decided to reduce the term to 21 months, instead of 18 months. For more discussion, see: Taewoo Kim, "Byeong Bokmugigan 24gaewollo Hwaneondoeoya Handa (Military service term should be restored to 24 months)," *The Monthly Chosun* (July 2010).



compelled by geographic conditions and differences in economic development.

One may argue that asymmetry in amounts of military manpower, special operation forces, submarines, etc. should not be a structural problem since South Korea can quickly fill the gaps once it decides to do so. This is not true. North Korea's overall military strategy against the South is intrinsically offensive and invasive, while that of South Korea should remain defensive. The irrational magnitude of the North's military manpower, special operation forces, submarines fleet, etc. reflects its offensive strategy and is possible only under an irrational dictatorial government. In contrast, these things are unthinkable in democratic South Korea, where economic growth and prosperity are at the top of the national agenda.

Under its defensive strategy, the ROK navy has preferred surface ships for patrol and control of its territorial waters, while North Korea has continued to invest intensively in the construction of submarine forces for offensive purposes. Likewise, the ROK navy has built large ships for use in international actions, such as peacekeeping operations, as a responsible stakeholder of the international community, whereas North Korea has built many smaller naval vessels such as torpedo boats, submersibles, hovercrafts, etc. tailored for ambush and infiltration operations. Therefore, the 800–180 numerical gap in numbers of total naval vessels and the gap in numbers of submarines must also be considered a structural asymmetry necessitated by intrinsic differences in military strategy. Such asymmetric capabilities embolden North Korea.



### 3. Dilemmas at Three Levels

Since the inauguration of the Lee Myung-Bak government, North Korea has constantly threatened South Korea with aggressive rhetorical references to “a sea of fire”, “turning Seoul into debris”, “flaming thunder”, and “merciless punishment to traitors”, obviously using its nuclear weapons for blackmail or boasting of the enormous fire power of its artillery forces. The North Korean leaders must be well aware that the extended deterrence promised by the U.S. will be activated only by actual use of nuclear weapons, not by threatening rhetoric. The bottom line is that North Korea can create “nuclear fear” among South Koreans irrespective of the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Put differently, extended deterrence deters only the North’s use of nuclear weapons, not its nuclear blackmail and its bold provocations supported by nuclear blackmail. Such nuclear blackmail alone is powerful enough to give many South Koreans nightmares and lead them to judge a war with nuclear-armed North Korea as unthinkable.

Under this situation the first problem for the Seoul government is the lack of ways to respond to provocations. Right after the *Cheonan* incident, not a few citizens were afraid of war, while many South Koreans filled with resentment demanded firm punishment. North Korea sympathizers and leftists criticized the Seoul government for its “hard-line” policy, and some opposition political leaders loudly demanded an immediate return to the “Sunshine Policy.” On the internet, claims that the government had fabricated the *Cheonan* incident were rampant, seriously distorting public opinion. Of course, some of the malicious posts must have originated from



or been instigated by North Korea. In a democratic country like South Korea, when facing such acute split in public opinion, the government cannot easily decide to enact a firm response in kind, when doing so may precipitate an escalation of the crisis. This left only two other options for South Korea: to blame its own military or to take the matter to the United Nations. However, the Seoul government got an exasperating result from the UN. The UN Security Council(UNSC) chairman's statement adopted on 9 July defined the incident as "a sinking by an attack" and "deplored and condemned" it, but neglected to identify the attacker due to China's opposition. Moreover, the statement said the council would "take note of North Korea's position."<sup>2</sup> This clearly showed that the UNSC can do very little to control the dangerous brinkmanship on the Korean peninsula as long as China values the traditional China-DPRK alliance.<sup>3</sup>

In a nutshell, so long as the South Korean government and military have no way to punish the culprit, and so long as the North Korean leadership believes that nuclear fears in the South compel the Seoul government to remain sandwiched between competing public opinions, they will think they can repeat such provocations with impunity and will not stop their dangerous brinkmanship. The next time, they may even attempt a military occupation of South Korea's northernmost

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<sup>2</sup>- Upon seeing that the UNSC chairman's statement included no reference to either North Korea or sanctions, North Korean Ambassador to the UN Sun-ho Shin claimed "North Korea's diplomatic victory."

<sup>3</sup>- In his statement to the nation on November 29 after the Yeonpyeong Island incident, President Lee Myung-Bak emphasized "national unity" and "a firm response," but never mentioned the UN, obviously reflecting his disappointment over China's role in the UNSC with regard to the *Cheonan* incident.

island of Baekryeong.

At the second level, nuclear fears and distortions of public opinion may one day lead to the North's domination of South Korean politics. In the past, South Korean voters tended to support so-called "conservative" political forces whenever major security crises occurred. However, if an increasing number of voters feel frightened by the North's nuclear blackmail, as they did in the wake of the *Cheonan* incident, and favor appeasement, and if this change in voting attitudes is coupled by leftists within South Korea aided by the North's effective cyber attacks to manipulate public opinion, then South Korean politics will become increasingly subject to North Korean manipulation, and some day Pyongyang may have the power to determine the government in Seoul.<sup>4</sup> Now the North's signature brinkmanship can complicate South Korean politics and rock the nation's democracy as a whole.

The final problem, at the third level, is the inevitability of the destruction of all progress in inter-Korean relations. The vicious circle of brinkmanship, if allowed to continue, will surely cause inter-Korean relations to deteriorate until they resemble the become like coexistence of "cow and wolf" or "herbivore-predator." Despite South Korea's economic dominance, North Korea will try to force South Korea into

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<sup>4</sup>- Right after the *Cheonan* incident, it was reported that some ROK soldiers telephoned their parents expressing fears of war, and their parents then called their military commanders pleading to avoid war. Citing this story, some newspapers analyzed that fear of war escalation in the wake of the *Cheonan* incident contributed to the opposition party's sweeping victory in the local government elections in June 2010.

submission over all important issues. While the North can choose carrots or sticks without any restraint, South Korea will have to try to buy a humiliating peace, leaving the destiny of the peninsula to the benevolence of the Pyongyang government. In sum, the North's nuclear blackmail and continued unhampered provocations will eventually ruin the relations between the two Koreas, exasperating all Koreans on both sides of the truce line who have long yearned for mutually reciprocal relations.

#### 4. The Nuclear Solution as a Mirage

While the nuclear threat is the centerpiece of the asymmetric threats against South Korea, what makes South Koreans even more depressed is the dark cloud cast over the future by North Korea's nuclear endgame. For those who remember the 1994 Agreed Framework, the 2·13 Agreement of 2007, or the demolition of the cooling tower annexed to the 5MW Yongbyon reactor in 2008, the twenty-year-long history of the North Korean nuclear issue may look like a mixture of successes and failures. For those who can see the whole picture, it must look like a total failure. For them, it is not difficult to see that every bit of "progress" in the negotiations has been outweighed by the subsequent "retreat," that every moment of relief has been overwhelmed by the subsequent frustration, and that previous nuclear dialogues including the Six-Party Talks have only bought time for North Korea. In the early 1990s, the international community was concerned about the possibility of plutonium production by North



Korea. In the early 2000s, it tried to prevent the Communist state from showing off its nuclear weapon capability. Today, it worries about the nation's third nuclear test. Today, South Korea faces a direct threat from a nuclear-armed neighbor that has already conducted two nuclear tests.<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime, the U.S. red line has retreated from “no plutonium production” in 1990s and “no nuclear test” in the early 2000s to “no proliferation of nuclear weapons and material” now. Since the start of the Obama administration, the U.S. nuclear strategy has revolved around “nonproliferation of nuclear material” and “prevention of nuclear terrorism” under the slogan of a “nuclear weapon-free world(NWFW).” President Obama’s NWFW scheme seems overly idealistic, if not futile, in theory and dangerously unrealistic in practice. Put differently, while the final goal is invaluable and unimpeachable, the process is too rocky and dangerous since it can benefit violators like North Korea. In practice, the NWFW initiative is most likely to be misused in Northeast Asia. To North Korea, the nuclear peace initiative can give it more leeway to evade international accusations and help the Pyongyang regime to sustain its time-wasting, muddling-through tactics while pursuing the status of a nuclear weapon state as an international *fait accompli*. A key question

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<sup>5</sup>- The author has insisted that one should see the forest, not the trees, to properly understand the reality of the North Korean nuclear issue. See: Taewoo Kim, “*Bukhaek 6jahoedam Pyeonggawa Hanguk-ui Jeollyakjeok Seontaek* (The Six Party Talk and South Korea’s Policy Choice),” in Chang-kwon Park, *et al.*, 2009 *Hangukui Anbowa Gukbang: Jeollyakgwa Jeongchaek* (Security and Defense of Korea: Strategy and Tactics) (Seoul: KIDA Press, 2009). pp. 229–267.



in this regard is: Can the NFWF initiative simultaneously dissuade North Korea and reassure South Korea? For China, so eager to fill the “nuclear gap” with the U.S., President Obama’s initiative offers time to narrow the gap, thus making it more difficult to find reasons to press North Korea. Unsophisticated implementation of the NFWF initiative could put South Korea and Japan in a more difficult position as those nations must both abide by non-nuclear obligations and combat North Korea’s nuclear ambitions.<sup>6</sup>

Today, an important aspect of the North Korean nuclear issue drawing the attention of the Western press is whether North Korea has succeeded in achieving weaponization. A question frequently asked is whether or not North Korea has developed a way of miniaturizing nuclear bombs and mounting them on missiles. This question has nothing to do with inducing North Korea to give up its bombs, reflecting Western indifference to South Korea’s nuclear insecurity. It should be noted that North Korea has many ways to attack South Korean cities without miniaturization capability. It can simply use an aircraft as a delivery platform or deploy a special force to penetrate into South Korea territory and detonate the bomb. Even a primitive ‘radiological dispersal device(RDD)’ or “dirty-bomb” can send a South Korean city into a panic.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>- For more analyses on the Obama initiative, see: Taewoo Kim, “Security, Deterrence and Extended Deterrence in Northeast Asia: A South Korean Perspective,” presented at the ROK-U.S.-Japan Trilateral Dialogue (Tokyo, 7–8 September, 2010) co-hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies(CSIS) and the Japan Institute of International Affairs(JIIA).

<sup>7</sup>- For more details on South Korea’s vulnerability, see: Taewoo Kim and Hyungpil

A fundamental dilemma for the international community is that it cannot provide North Korea with an incentive powerful enough to induce the Pyongyang regime to give up its nuclear option. For the leadership and military of the Communist state, which have ruled the nation with an iron-fist for 60 years and witnessed the tragic collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe in the 1990s, nuclear weapons are considered the ultimate means to safeguard their political system as well as their lives. This is why any incentive short of a complete guarantee of their regime and system, which is not available anywhere in the world, is destined to fail to persuade them. For the U.S., guaranteeing the survival of the North Korean political system, which will continue to abuse human rights even after denuclearization, would conflict with public opinion and the nation's founding principles.

International sanctions are not a sufficient tool, either. Unlike many democratic countries in which government must respond to the suffering of the public, the hereditary dictatorship of the Kim family has no reason to worry about re-election. Rather, the ordinary North Korean people are held hostage by the regime. For the regime, the suffering of the people caused by international economic sanctions and isolation has always been a secondary concern. This is why the UN resolutions 1695, 1718, 1874 and other sanctions have failed to change the nation's nuclear path. They will continue in this way unless the nation becomes more open and democratic.

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Hahm, "*Bukhaekwihyeop Daeung Hangukui Gunsa Anbo Jeollyak* (South Korea's Security and Defense Strategy in Response to North Korean Nuclear Threat)," 2007 Research Paper at Korea Institute for Defense Analyses (KIDA).





To make things worse, the power succession to the third generation, which emerged through the Worker's Party Conference of 28 September, is another looming obstacle. Kim Jong Il is ill, but the successor Kim Jong-Eun lacks in power base, policy ability, and charisma. Attempts to idolize a 27-year-old man will surely face resistance, making the longevity of his father the most critical variable in the stability of the power succession structure. This being the case, the Pyongyang regime is more likely to cling to nuclear weapons<sup>8</sup> and use external crises to maintain internal unity. In this situation, expecting the Six-Party Talks, once resumed, to achieve the denuclearization of North Korea is like grasping a mirage or chasing *ignis fatuus*. This is why Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo's sudden visit to Seoul on 27 December and his ill-timed proposal for a resumption of the stalled Six-Party Talks received a cool reception in South Korea.

North Korea will continue to employ its two-track diplomacy, both continuing nuclear weapon development and pursuing dialogue whenever deemed necessary. North Korea might return to the Six-Party Talks and engage actively in dialogue, yet what they will offer will be the same dazzling brinkmanship diplomacy and negotiation tactics we have seen for the past twenty years: crisis creation, abrupt reconciliation, agenda additions, agenda slicing, salami tactics, muddling through, etc. At best, one will see another round of malign confessional

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<sup>8</sup> For more analyses on the prospects for the nuclear issue after the emergence of the power succession structure in North Korea, see: Taewoo Kim, "Kim Jong-Eun Hoogyaja Deungeukgwa Hanbando Jeongse (The Successor Kim Jong-Eun and Political Environment of the Korean Peninsula)," *The Heonjeong* (November 2010).

diplomacy.<sup>9</sup>

To untie the nuclear knot is by no means an easy job. Thus, at least for the time being, it will be impossible for South Korea to remove the asymmetric WMD threat. Anyone who examines the dilemmas imposed on South Korea at various levels by this threat will understand why South Korea needs to do something to break the vicious circle of dilemmas forced on it by North Korea.

## 5. Proactive Deterrence and the Triad System

Theoretically speaking, not all asymmetric threats are dangerous. Many of them are controllable if South Korea develops proper counter-asymmetric measures. For instance, the North's numerical superiority in tanks is not a real danger if South Korea can deploy tank-killing air power. Likewise, numerical superiority in military forces may mean little if properly countered by qualitative superiority. After all, not every North Korean asymmetric threat is an undefeatable danger. Nevertheless, the aggregate asymmetric threat is certainly a heavy military and psychological burden to South Korea, while the North's nuclear threat surpasses all other threats combined. It behooves

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<sup>9</sup>- This term refers to the tactic of making a false confession in negotiations to maximize the returns while giving up the minimum cost. For example, North Korea agreed to give up reprocessing and enrichment when it signed the Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in 1991. And it reaffirmed this pledge by signing the 1994 Agreed Framework. But it did not comply with it. In 2007 and 2008, North Korea took such appeasement gestures as opening its nuclear facility and dismantling the cooling tower, but this did not lead to denuclearization. Later, it was revealed that North Korea was working on an enrichment program.

South Korea to find ways to offset the North's nuclear blackmail tactics. This should start from a precise recognition of what extended deterrence can and cannot do.

### *Limits of Extended Deterrence*

Contrary to what many South Koreans expect, extended deterrence is not a cure-all. While it deters the actual use of nuclear weapons, it does not deter North Korea's regional provocations perpetrated under the umbrella of nuclear blackmail. In this regard, it is necessary to heed the subtle difference between the 2002 Nuclear Posture Review(NPR) published by the Bush administration and the one released in 2010 by the Obama administration. In the previous NPR, the Bush administration explicitly specified North Korea as a target of possible nuclear retaliation and affirmed its political will to use nuclear weapons against bio-chemical as well as nuclear attacks by North Korea against the South. It also introduced the "new triad" concept, which included state-of-art conventional weapons integrated into the retaliatory forces, thus making the retaliation more credible. Though the 2002 NPR was internationally criticized for being too unilateral and aggressive, it reflected a strong will to protect non-nuclear allies.

Since the Obama administration began its nuclear weapon-free world initiative, many security experts have expressed concerns that such a nuclear peace initiative should not weaken the extended deterrence guarantee provided to U.S. allies.<sup>10</sup> The 2010 NPR falls

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<sup>10</sup>- For example, see: Taewoo Kim, "ROK-U.S. Defense Cooperation against the



slightly short of this expectation in the sense that some of the expressions in the 2002 NPR providing assurances to allies have been deleted or softened. Instead, the 2010 version singles out “alliances,” “forward-deployment of U.S. forces,” and “missile defense” as the centerpiece deterrent elements, indicating a shift of focus from nuclear retaliation to a reduction in number and role of nuclear weapons and reflecting President Obama’s emphasis on “smart power” and “international harmony” in his foreign policy.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, this does not mean a loss of credibility of extended deterrence. To maintain credibility, the 2010 NPR excludes Iran and North Korea from the Negative Security Assurance(NSA).<sup>12</sup> Considering this and the unprecedentedly robust ROK-U.S. alliance under the Lee Myung-Bak government, one need not question credibility. A central

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North Korean Nuclear Threat: Strengthening Extended Deterrence,” in Jung-Ho Bae and Abraham Denmark (eds.), *The U.S.-ROK Alliance in the 21st Century* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2009); Taewoo Kim, “*Bukhan Haeksilheomgwa Hwakdaeokje Ganghwa-ui Pilyoseong* (North Korean Nuclear Tests and Reinforcement of the Extended Deterrence),” KIDA the 3<sup>rd</sup> North Korean Military Forum (12 December, 2009). In addition, this author suggested ways to maintain the strength of extended deterrence at the KIDA-Brookings Joint Seminar held in June 2009 in Washington and at the 1<sup>st</sup> ROK-U.S. Strategic Dialogue in 2009 in Hawaii sponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies(CSIS).

<sup>11</sup>– The difference between the 2002 NPR and the 2010 NPR is discussed in detail in: Taewoo Kim, “*Obama Daetongryeong-ui Haek Initiative-wa Hwak daeokje* (President Obama’s Nuclear Initiatives and the Extended Deterrence),” *Jayu* (June 2010). This author also suggested deployment of a SSBN around the Korean peninsula and U.S. military drills tailored to WMD deterrence at the 2010 NPR at the 2<sup>nd</sup> ROK-U.S. Strategic Dialogue in April 2010 in Hawaii and the Trilateral Nuclear Dialogue held 7–8 September 2010, in Tokyo.

<sup>12</sup>– To reconfirm credibility, President Obama telephoned President Lee Myung-Bak right before release of the 2010 NPR and personally explained the exclusion of North Korea from the NSA.

point here is that extended deterrence deters nuclear attacks on allies but not North Korea's nuclear blackmail-based provocations against the South, while the issue of whether and how to strengthen extended deterrence remains a separate question. It seems that this remains a "blind spot" for strategic planners in Washington. Therefore, South Korea will have to rethink its strategy, institutions, and military capabilities to fill the gap.

### *The Strategy of Proactive Deterrence*

First of all, South Korean strategic planners need to acknowledge that the existing strategy of "deterrence by denial", whatever its benefits may be, has failed to deter North Korea's series of pro-vocations backed by its asymmetric threats. It was against this backdrop that the Presidential Commission for Defense Reform suggested in December 2010 suggested a new strategy called the "strategy of proactive deterrence." This new strategy, if adopted, will place greater emphasis on the instantaneousness of punitive reprisals, flexibility in choice of reprisal weapons, the discretion of commanding officers of first-line troops, self-defensive preemptive strikes,<sup>13</sup> etc. Rules of engagement should be revised in that direction, too. For example, if North Korea's artillery batteries along the DMZ are seen preparing to fire shells southward, South Korea may strike first using jet fighters, artillery, or

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<sup>13</sup>–The right to preemptive strike for self-defense, recognized by the UN Charter, should be distinguished from a preventive strike, which is both legally and morally problematic.



missiles, rather than waiting for shelling to start. If the North's coastline artilleries begin bombardment against South Korean islands as they did in November 2010, an air strike using precision guided missiles like JDAMs, AGM-64s or SLAM-ERs is not unconceivable. A basic truth applicable to this strategic posture is: An escalation becomes more likely when one is afraid of it.

A new targeting policy may be necessary, too. The target list may need to be expanded to respond in kind in the event of indiscriminate shelling by the North like what was suffered by the civilians on Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010. If North Korean guns and missiles aim at not only military targets but strategic bases, cities, population centers, and industrial complexes, the best way to deter a real attack may be to have a similar counter-value targeting policy. If North Korea repeatedly threatens to create a "sea of fire in Seoul", a best way to protect the citizens of Seoul may be to prepare to "turn Pyongyang into debris."

Under the new strategy, South Korea may have to rethink how to arm and defend geographically remote and isolated regions like Baekryeong Island. South Korea may need to fortify its remote islands and deploy weapons for strategic strikes as well as short-range weapons to demonstrate its will to repel any provocation. To show even stronger will, South Korea may need to consider establishment of a separate special command in charge of defending the Northern Limit Line(NLL) and the islands of the West Sea. Nevertheless, the strategy of proactive deterrence is in essence a strategy intended to better deter provocations, rather than one intended for offensive strikes.

### *Constructing a Triad System*

However, a new strategy alone does not suffice to break the vicious circle of provocations. The new strategy will suffer from credibility problems without the means to corroborate it. This is why South Korea needs its own conventional triad system under which critical second strike forces will be deployed in the air, on the land and under the sea. This is because a water-tight defense against the North's asymmetric attacks is technically impossible and deterrence should be at the center of the new strategy. Without sovereign means to offset North Korea's signature blackmail tactics, South Korea can neither give its new strategy credibility nor stabilize its own citizens psychologically. Therefore, the triad system, if adopted, must include all sorts of strategic strike weapons ranging from powerful ballistic and cruise missiles to bunker-busters to other guided weapons with high accuracy, penetrating capability, survivability, fatality, precision, etc., mounted on fighter bombers, UACVs, mobile ground launchers, and submarines. They should outnumber the North Korean missiles targeted at the South, while the TEL-based and submarine-based missiles need 500–800km ranges so that they can threaten any target within North Korea.<sup>14</sup>

Once such a triad system is established, it will serve multiple purposes at various levels. Above all, it will help deter an all-out war or prevent accidental clashes from flaring into bloodier battles. Escalation

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<sup>14</sup>- The author believes that a maximum 800km range will not threaten any neighboring countries other than North Korea.



occurs when one side is convinced of its victory. The triad system, by frustrating such confidence, will deter an escalation of the crisis. More importantly, a triad system with unambiguous credibility will work as a central tool in cutting off the vicious circle of the North's bold provocations, preplanned and perpetrated under the aegis of its formidable asymmetric capabilities. With the transfer of war-time operational control(OPCON) coming soon, such a strong triad system in the hands of South Korea will help prevent North Korea from underestimating the will of the ROK-U.S. alliance to punish its misbehavior. Eventually, the triad system will provide assurance to the South Korean public and reduce the chances for North Korea to distort South Korean public opinion, thus helping to safeguard democratic order and values in South Korea.

Once South Korea decides to construct a triad system, there seems to be no serious technological or financial bottleneck to achieving it. While overseas purchases of advanced weapon systems and technological cooperation remain available, South Korea's advanced defense capability can play a key role. In terms of the economy, the prospects are not bad. The key of the triad system is platforms and strike weapons. The ROK air force already has plans to purchase 5th generation stealth fighters, and its navy is executing an ambitious plan to build KSS-III class submarines. These fighters and submarines will serve as platforms for the triad system. There will be no problem installing vertical launch tubes in the 3,000 ton class KSS-III submarines. Producing less precise ground-based ballistic missiles and TELs for them will be an easier and less expensive job. Given the



size of South Korea's defense budget, which totaled some \$30 billion for 2010, constructing the triad system will be a matter of prioritization rather than of financial capability.

## 6. The Triad System and the ROK–U.S. Alliance

Seoul and Washington will continue their strategic dialogue over how to strengthen extended deterrence with the OPCON transfer in 2015 in mind. At this point, they need to add the proactive deterrence strategy and triad system to the agenda. As long as the alliance remains a pillar of South Korea's national security, South Korea need not and should not bypass its U.S. ally in every important strategic decision. Bypassing its ally in pursuing proactive deterrence and a triad system will eventually result in higher costs.

In this regard, both nations should recognize that Seoul's initiative to adopt a proactive deterrence strategy and its readiness to spend more for a triad system exactly coincide with the new alliance policy of the U.S., in which Washington wants its allies to spend more and play leading roles in their own defense. This is what "strategic flexibility" is all about. South Korea has reasons to closely consult with the U.S. over how to better deter the provocations of the world's most bellicose state, and the U.S. also has reasons to cooperate. For example, the U.S., if requested by South Korea, has no reason to hesitate to provide technological cooperation on radar and precision weapons technologies or on sales of fighters and arms for submarines.



In the same context, revision of the 2001 New Missile Guidelines should be an immediate agenda item. Limiting the range of South Korea's ballistic missiles to 300km and their payloads to 500km is no longer make sense at a time when North Korea has deployed 1,000 mid- and long-range missiles targeted at South Korea and is even developing inter-continental ballistic missiles(ICBM). Restrictions on cruise missiles do not make sense, either, at a time when South Korea needs to develop the means to offset the North's asymmetric threats. Above all, such restrictions are inconsistent with Washington's new alliance policy. The New Missile Guidelines, if not revised, will widen the dangerous missile gap between the two Koreas and constitute a stumbling block to ground-to-ground ballistic missile development. Restrictions on payload for cruise missiles will hamper South Korea's development of high-altitude UAVs loaded with advanced reconnaissance and surveillance devices at a time when South Korea badly needs to upgrade its own C4ISR capabilities.

## 7. Conclusion

Selig Harrison was wrong when he argued that election of the "hard-liner" Lee Myung-Bak as the president of South Korea in December 2007 prompted North Korea's hostile responses such as the build-up of its shore artilleries and that Northern Limit Line (NLL) needs to be redrawn to prevent further disputes.<sup>15</sup> North Korea has pursued its

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<sup>15</sup>- Selig S. Harrison and John H. Cushman, "Drawing a line in the water," *International Herald Tribune* (13 December, 2010).

military build-up and southward provocations irrespective of Seoul's North Korea policy. During the period of so-called "sunshine policy" from 1998 to 2007, the North added new ground forces divisions, sharply strengthened its special operation forces, tanks and artilleries, and-most significantly-produced more plutonium, clandestinely constructed enrichment facilities, and exploded nuclear devices. It was also during this period that the North set off bloody naval battles, most notably in 1999 and 2002. While many in South Korea do not agree that the current North Korea policy is a hard-line one since it is not much different from those of previous governments except requesting the North Korea to abide by the global standards, even more South Koreans have observed that a soft or tough stand toward Pyongyang is not a significant variable affecting the identity of North Korea as a garrison state.

Right after the Yeonpyeong Island incident, some Chinese analysts argued that the North's shelling of the island was a response to the South Korean navy's shelling drills in nearby "disputed waters." They are wrong, too. At the time of the armistice agreement in 1953 North Korea thanked the United Nations Command(UNC) for drawing the NLL giving the North control of all islands under its occupation except for five tiny islands in the West Sea. Since then, the NLL had been the unequivocal line of sovereignty between the two Koreas, and life line for South Korea strategically protecting the flank of the metropolitan Seoul, Port of Incheon, and the Incheon International Airport. Such status was reconfirmed in the Basic Agreement in 1991, in which the two sides agreed to "respect the sea zones that have so far been under respective jurisdiction." Thus, the NLL is not a line that



can be redrawn or refashioned, as Harrison argues so nonchalantly. It can be redrawn only through the outcome of another all-out war.

What the Chinese watchers and Harrison ignore is the North's motive of making the NLL a "disputed sea boundary," and more importantly the factors which embolden Pyongyang to make such outrageous violations. If they really want peace in the West Sea, they have to find ways to eliminate the motives behind North Korea's provocations or remove the elements which embolden the dictatorial state to repeatedly instigate border clashes.

While the North's belligerent motives combined with its die-hard nuclear ambitions seem uncontrollable, Seoul's strategic thinkers have no other choice but to search for ways to neutralize its asymmetric threats, at least until a new peace mechanism emerges. A strategy of proactive deterrence and a triad system are ideas that South Korea should immediately consider. Of course, these do not suffice as a show of will strong enough to break the cycle of provocations. For example, South Korea may have to rethink its original plan to dismantle the army divisions deployed along its coasts or consider adding rapid-response forces to the ROK Marine Corps. Reshuffling reserve forces, reinforcing the special operations forces, building smaller submarines, establishing a new joint command to defend the NLL and the islands on the West Sea, etc. should also be included on the list of potential actions.<sup>16</sup>

All of these measures, if adopted, will of course demand greater

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<sup>16</sup>- These were also suggested to the President in December 2010 by the Presidential Commission for Defense Reform.

inputs of budgets, time, and efforts. They are worthwhile as long as they help diminish the North's asymmetric capability, block its recurrent brinkmanship and provocations, and protect the democratic order and values which South Korean citizens cherish. The U.S. ally has reasons to cooperate with any such South Korean endeavors.



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