



# **A South Korean Perspective on Dealing with North Korean Provocations: Challenges and Opportunities**

Hong Kyudok

Despite President Park Geun-hye's efforts to improve inter-Korean relations, Kim Jong-un's North Korea has never shown any willingness to give up its nuclear ambitions and continuously refuses to become a normal state.<sup>1</sup> It has made significant advances in its nuclear weapons program over the past 20 years, while continuing provocations against the United States and South Korea. The year 2015 marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the division of the Korean Peninsula and liberation from the Japanese annexation. Kim Jong-un expressed an interest in resuming dialogue with South Korea in his New Year's address;<sup>2</sup> however, his attitude totally changed in the following weeks largely because the United States flatly turned down his offer to stop the annual military exercises in return for temporarily halting nuclear tests.<sup>3</sup>

President Obama's negative remarks on the future of the Kim Jong-un regime during an interview with YouTube and stern rebuke of North Korea's hacking of Sony Pictures led to a sharper divide.<sup>4</sup> North Korea has rebuffed the president and conducted military exercises designed to attack a U.S. aircraft carrier twice on the west and east coasts with Kim Jong-un present.<sup>5</sup> On February 6, it test-fired an anti-ship cruise missile on its newly-displayed stealth fast patrol craft, and on February 8 it fired five missiles off the coast of Wonsan towards the East Sea in defiance of the United States.<sup>6</sup> On February 13, its military held a mass gathering in Pyongyang in protest against the U.S. anti-North Korea policy. The Key Resolve computer simulation exercise involving some 8,600 U.S. troops and 10,000 South Korean troops began on March 2, and Pyongyang instantly fired two short-range ballistic missiles into the East Sea in protest.<sup>7</sup> The exercises have always drawn fierce rhetoric and promises of catastrophe from the North. This year is no exception. The Foal Eagle field exercise, which involves 3,700 U.S. troops and 200,000 South Korean troops, continued through April 24. Kim Jong-un now openly mentions a nuclear attack on targets in the continental United States and ordered his military leaders to complete war preparations by October 2015.<sup>8</sup> South Korea and the United States should coordinate closely and prepare for rash action by a young leader who is unpredictable and bold enough to challenge the Obama administration's strategic patience.

This chapter first assesses the nature of security challenges raised by a leader who has held power for four years since the death of his father in 2011. Kim Jong-un has achieved strategic superiority over the South in nuclear and missile forces, and I focus on how the South has prepared for increasing threats from the North. Second, it addresses the perception gap and misunderstandings between two allies on key contentious issues, namely extended deterrence, budget constraints, and OPCON transfer. Bridging the gap is important in dealing with Kim Jong-un's bold initiatives. Addressing the questions below is meant to serve that goal. 1) What are the main concerns of ROK defense modernization efforts? 2) What is the direction of North Korea's nuclear program? 3) What is the status of current debate over nuclear weapons, regarding both indigenous capability and the reintroduction of U.S. tactical weapons? 4) What is the significance of the "Kill-Chain" and "KAMD" (Korea Air and Missile Defense) concepts? 5) How is the Park government's defense program different from that of its predecessor? 6) How do Koreans prepare for OPCON transfer, and how does a delay for the third time impact Seoul's capability to deter the North? 7) How does the ROK view the impact of U.S. budget politics on defense planning and the ROK's capacity to contribute to extended deterrence and on calculations about what else can be done to strengthen the alliance and extended deterrence?

## THE ELUSIVE QUEST FOR DEFENSE REFORM

Many question whether the defense reform introduced on March 5, 2014, will progress as planned. The Defense Reform Basic Plan 2014-2030 is the first since Park became president.<sup>9</sup> Media reaction was not positive since there was nothing new to attract public support. Critics argue that it is merely a repetition of the plan during the Lee Myung-bak government. Some belittled it by saying that it was a great setback because the Ground Operation Command, which was supposed to be established in 2017, was delayed another five years and, therefore, the First ROK Army and Third ROK Army will not be merged into it as scheduled.<sup>10</sup>

Former defense minister Kim Kwan-jin's strong drive to unite the separate commanding lines by giving service chiefs authority over operational control has been suspended due to strong opposition from members of the National Assembly and retired generals and admirals.<sup>11</sup> Prominent among the opponents was former general Kim Jang-soo, Park's first national security advisor. Despite his close relationship with Kim Kwan-jin over 40 years in uniform, he did not fully support the idea of streamlining the upper structure of the military, reducing the numbers of officers in the high command, and redistributing them to frontline units in order to strengthen the combat forces. Given that the Joint Chiefs of Staff have had heavy duties beyond commanding the chiefs of staff of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, Kim Jang-soo preferred to establish the position of commander of the operational command and did not believe that the Joint Chiefs of Staff could effectively serve as a war fighting commander operating with dual hats. Kim Kwan-jin disagreed, warning that creating another command would consume hundreds of officers and further undermine the fighting capabilities due to a lack of manpower. It would have required revision of the Constitution and would have made it highly unlikely that the defense reform bill under Lee Myung-bak would have passed in a timely manner, imposing an enormous financial burden.

Kim Kwan-jin reassured Lee that streamlining the upper structure of the military would reduce the large numbers of generals from 444 to 380 and contribute to preparations for the upcoming OPCON transfer. He persuaded Lee that ROK forces should be made more agile to respond to provocations by reducing the commanding echelon and many duplicate positions in the military. He emphasized that simplicity, slimness, quick decision-making, and maximum jointness are the guiding directives of his reform. Lee firmly supported this structural change, and Kim Kwan-jin continues to argue that the Joint Chiefs of Staff can lead if they can be integrated into the commanding lines.

Kim Kwan-jin, who formerly served as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, thinks that the army chief of staff should be integrated into the commanding lines in order to transform the bureaucratized armed forces into a more robust, combat-oriented fighting force and that unifying the command structure would be beneficial to the ROK-U.S. alliance, increasing the level of jointness and inter-operability. Kim Jang-soo, former army chief of staff, does not see the problem in the same way, arguing that the army chief of staff should remain independent, and the service chiefs should concentrate on education and strengthening capabilities. Most members of the Committee of National Defense did not understand the difference and relied heavily on Kim Jang-soo, who had served as deputy commander of the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command and minister of national defense. Lee Myung-bak as well as Kim Kwan-jin had failed to persuade new National Assembly member Kim Jang-soo.<sup>12</sup>

Another key factor was strong opposition from retired navy admirals and air force generals, who see Kim Kwan-jin's reform as depriving their services of independence and destroying the spirit of cooperation among the three services. Critics accused Kim Kwan-jin of failing to understand why cross-domain synergy is needed in network centric modern warfare by sticking to the old concept of army dominance. They criticized the Lee Myung-bak government's approach to reform and lobbied heavily against the bill to the members of the National Assembly. Instead, they demanded application of a 2:1:1 ratio of army, navy, and air force personnel in the Joint Chiefs of Staff more strictly, while proposing the postponement of scheduled OPCON transfer, which Lee and Obama had approved. Most retired generals of the Veterans Society expressed concern that reorganization of commanding lines would bring unnecessary confusion, and the ROK forces would not be ready for taking the lead after OPCON transfer within several years.

As soon as Park Geun-hye appointed Kim Jang-soo chairman of the national defense and security sub-committee of the presidential preparation committee, Kim Kwan-jin and the officials in his ministry knew that the idea of reforming the upper defense structure would soon become a thing of the past. Park has never mentioned defense reform and has distanced herself from the heated debate. There is a perception that reform of the military is politically too sensitive and could harm her without yielding appropriate results. It is ironic that Kim Kwan-jin survived the change of government to become her second national security advisor after serving another year as her first minister of national defense after Park's pick for the post failed to pass the nomination hearing and she had no other option but to choose him. Kim Kwan-jin not only survived but succeeded Kim Jang-soo as national security advisor. However, he was no longer a point man driving defense reform as he previously was in the past. In contrast, Kim Jang-soo, after stepping down due to the unfortunate ferry boat incident in May 2014, returned to the center of power when Park nominated him as ambassador to China.<sup>13</sup>

## WHAT ARE THE KEY CONCERNS GOING FORWARD?

A key concern among security planners is that a 3.5 percent increase in the defense budget is not sufficient for the Korean military to carry out defense modernization as planned. The ROK's budget is currently about 20 percent of China's and half of Japan's. A *Dong-A Ilbo* editorial argued that the Park government failed to recognize the urgency arising from the challenges of shifting power in the security environment of Northeast Asia.<sup>14</sup> The new defense plan emphasizes reorganizing frontline corp-level units into central players in military operations with a greater command role. To accomplish that goal, an air support operations center will be attached to each corps to allow its commanders to easily mobilize aerial firepower during ground combat operations. The plan also aims to increase the capability of the corps by providing advanced high-tech military equipment and predicts that operational areas covered by the corps will more than triple. According to the plan, the numbers of army corps need to be reduced to six from eight and the number of divisions to 31 from 42, while downsizing the number of mechanized infantry brigades to 16 from 23. This would cut troop numbers by more than 110,000 by 2022: the army from 498,000 to 387,000, while the navy, air force and marines will remain unchanged at 41,000, 65,000, and 29,000, respectively. To maintain combat capabilities, the ministry plans to increase the proportion of experienced

senior-level officers including NCOs to 42.5 percent from 29.5 percent. However, observers point out that these increases are unachievable without making more funds available.<sup>15</sup>

The ROK military wants to modernize before realignment and downsizing take place. However, the schedule of force improvements was delayed due to defense budget shortfalls, causing frustration among military leaders and officials in charge of defense planning. The loss of interest among key advisors to the Blue House resulted in a minimal response from the ministry and the services. *Chosun Ilbo* editorialized about such an atmosphere when it stressed that the new defense plan misses how to strengthen the joint operational war fighting capability.<sup>16</sup> Debates on how to unify the command structure failed to win consensus among members of the National Assembly and opinion makers during the previous government. The Park government has not explained how it is going to handle the issue. Downsizing the number of generals was the key issue, but the Park government has never mentioned this sensitive matter. Recently, Han Min-koo, minister of national defense, announced that his ministry would supplement reform efforts in a framework of “creative defense,” a new slogan for 2015.<sup>17</sup> It remains to be seen how it can carry out a reform agenda without arousing severe opposition.

Another concern in downsizing is how to efficiently eliminate WMDs in North Korea if a contingency should take place and whether ROK forces with limited manpower are alone capable of a potential stabilization operation. According to Bruce Bennett, ROK forces would need at least 460,000 persons in order to deal with such an operation. Another study is more optimistic estimating that around 360,000 forces would be required to complete the mission.<sup>18</sup> However, forces need to be reduced by 110,000 by 2022 to reach a total of 387,000 in the army. This is in line with the low birth rate in Korea, but it poses a huge challenge for the ROK military. In 2014, 380,000 males entered the military but only 170,000 boys were born. When they become 18, the military will be in trouble in filling the vacancies. It is highly unlikely that the United States will dispatch a large number of ground forces to Korea because it will only have ten plus army brigades with the limited budget available.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the ROK needs to strengthen its own capabilities.

## WHAT IS THE DIRECTION OF NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM?

Pyongyang launched a satellite into orbit on December 12, 2012, and conducted its third nuclear test on February 12, 2013, prompting condemnations by the international community along with additional sanctions in UN Security Council Resolution 2094. The unanimous demands of international society provoked an unprecedented level of threats directed at the United States and South Korea, which conducted annual military exercises in March 2013. It was quite a shock to Seoul when KCNA (Korean Central News Agency) and *Rodong Shinmun* stated that Pyongyang had decided to pursue the so-called parallel policy of economic development and nuclear development to protect the country from the hostile forces of the United States. Pyongyang's official newspaper clearly stated that it had succeeded in making nuclear weapons “smaller, lighter, and diversified,” enhancing its nuclear capabilities.<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting that Pyongyang provided ten guidelines to strengthen the position of a nuclear power state in which its effort to increase the capacity of striking back to the origin of the aggressor is very much emphasized.<sup>21</sup>

Two years have barely passed, and Li Soo-yong, North Korea's minister of foreign affairs, expressed an intention to launch a preemptive nuclear strike against the United States when he made an address at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 3, 2015.<sup>22</sup> Although North Korea is notorious for using such rhetoric, what he suggested is certainly beyond the scope of deterrence, and this statement has been regarded as a game changer for policy makers and strategists in both Seoul and Washington. Considering that North Korea has successfully had two nuclear tests since 2009, continuously carried out more than 100 high explosive tests since the late 1980s, and likely obtained nuclear weapon design information through secret networks with Pakistan and Iran, experts generally agreed that it has made substantial progress in making nuclear weapons smaller and lighter.<sup>23</sup>

The Defense White Paper 2014 stated that North Korea has achieved miniaturization and estimated that these nuclear bombs can be loaded onto missiles.<sup>24</sup> Han Min-koo, minister of national defense, told members of the national defense committee on October 27, 2014, that North Korea is believed to possess the technology of miniaturizing the weapons.<sup>25</sup> Whether North Korea used highly enriched uranium (HEU) in nuclear weapons has also been contested. Experts generally believe that it has already obtained the necessary skills and the Defense White Paper 2014 acknowledged this possibility, pointing to the uranium facilities revealed in November 2010. The Park government assesses that the Kim Jong-un regime has put an operational nuclear weapons production system in place, produced a large quantity of nuclear warheads, and attempted to develop effective command and control systems for its nuclear forces. Although North Korea does not possess nuclear deterrence capabilities that can intimidate the United States, it has sufficient nuclear deterrence to threaten South Korea without additional measures.

North Korea amended its constitution in December 2012 to include an article that it is a nuclear state. It further laid out the legal basis for a nuclear state by passing a decree on consolidation of the self-defense nuclear power state at the seventh session of the 12th Supreme People's Assembly on April 1, 2013. Pyongyang has continued to step up its level of provocations, denouncing the U.S. plan to conduct annual military exercises as a prelude to an invasion of its territory. It fired 111 missiles on 19 occasions in 2014 and continued to fire them in 2015. Now it is beginning to mention targeting U.S. aircraft carriers and key objectives on the continental United States, signifying its willingness to stay the course as it continuously improves its nuclear capabilities and adds a maximum number of warheads to its arsenal.<sup>26</sup> It is developing mobile launchers, submarine missile launchers (SLBM), and ICBMs to improve the survivability of its nuclear force and the force's deterrence value.<sup>27</sup>

The North Korean military also increased its conventional artillery power that can easily reach Pyongtaik, 80 km south of Seoul, where U.S. forces will be stationed after 2018. Since 2014, North Korea has displayed 300 mm MRL (Multiple Rocket Launchers) and recently held military exercises in preparation for chemical warfare to show the world its resilience and invincibility.<sup>28</sup> Its young leader has kept insisting that it will not give up the nuclear option unless the United States recognizes the DPRK as a nuclear power state and opens nuclear disarmament negotiations one on one. On February 6, 2015, Kim Jong-un participated in a test drill of a ship-to-ship cruise missile modeled after the Russian Kh-35, which can fly at a low altitude above the surface of the sea. Pyongyang also introduced a newly made stealth-type fast patrol craft. A KCNA report warned that its Navy can seriously

damage the U.S. fleet, including the USS *George Washington*, if the ship joins in the annual military exercise in the East Sea.

As witnessed in the hacking incident against Sony Films, cyber warfare is another area in which Pyongyang has been increasingly active. Seoul found that out when a breakdown of the computer system of major banks and broadcasting companies turned out to be done by North Korean hackers. Vulnerabilities were also found in Seoul when white powder and a letter to threaten Kim Kwan-jin were delivered to the mailroom of the ministry. The terrorist attack against the U.S. ambassador clearly shows that North Korea can easily endanger key targets of the alliance.<sup>29</sup>

Seoul considers it impossible that North Korea could build a large-scale nuclear force; however, the North seeks strategic gains by making Japan and South Korea nuclear hostages by developing small-scale nuclear forces and a delivery system, to prove it can survive initial and second strikes from the United States and still seriously damage South Korean targets. Kim Jong-un firmly believes that holding South Korea as a nuclear hostage would not only serve its interest best but also attract the attention of the Obama administration and have a deterrent effect against potential U.S. preemptive strikes against the North Korean regime and its nuclear facilities.

### **What is the Status of the Current Debate over Nuclear Weapons, Regarding Both Indigenous Capability and the Reintroduction of U.S. Tactical Weapons?**

On April 26, 2014, Park touched on the potential danger of a nuclear domino effect in Northeast Asia in an interview with local media after her summit with Obama, emphasizing that all concerned states must coordinate to prevent North Korea from a fourth nuclear test.

However, members of the National Assembly, particularly Won Yoo-chul, chairman of the Committee for Formulating Strategy Against North Korea's Nuclear Weapons, and Chung Mong-joon, the longest serving member, expressed concern and called for developing an indigenous nuclear capability to deter North Korea from using nuclear weapons against Seoul.<sup>30</sup> Some pundits argue that introducing non-strategic weapons such as the Tomahawk cruise missile could effectively deter the North.<sup>31</sup> The Park government denied that it would develop an indigenous capability and discredited the utility of bringing U.S. nuclear tactical weapons back to Korea. Park made clear her strong desire to make Korea nuclear free when she was asked to comment on Obama's call for a "nuclear free world."

Most Koreans believe U.S. reassurances, but do not know what extended deterrence means and how it would be achieved. Only 13.1 percent said that they are fully aware of extended deterrence, and 45 percent said they have heard but do not know very well what it means, while 39.4 percent said they do not know anything about it. Another 46.6 percent said that the United States would employ all possible measures including nuclear weapons in order to deter the North Korean threat, while 45 percent answered that the United States may not be able to use the nuclear weapons in a future North Korean contingency.<sup>32</sup> Many observers in Korea are concerned that tailored extended deterrence may not prevent further provocations and that there is a high possibility of the situation escalating in the process of countering conventional armed provocations. What if North Korea preemptively uses its nuclear weapons after Seoul counters an armed provocation? North Korea has tried hard to

convince the people in South Korea that extended deterrence cannot be a viable option by increasing tensions. Both Seoul and Washington are keenly aware that it is difficult to keep the North from crossing a red line. Providing the people with a detailed explanation on how the extended deterrence actually works, under what conditions nuclear weapons would be acceptable, and how does the U.S. ballistic missile defense fits into future contingencies, would open a Pandora's Box, inviting heated debates.

### **What is the Meaning and Significance of the “Kill-Chain” and “KAMD” Concepts?**

It was Kim Kwan-jin's idea to explain to Lee and other cabinet members how crucial it was to build South Korea's own missile system to deter North Korean provocations effectively at the time of the financial strategy meeting in May 2011. Cabinet members, including Deputy Prime Minister Yoon, fully understood the missile gap and promised to support enhancing the missile capability in the defense budget for the next fiscal year. Building the country's own missile system was the main focus of the Defense Reform Basic Plan 2012-2030. Kim Kwan-jin worked hard to make progress, especially in countering North Korea's missile capabilities. After the unprovoked shelling of Yeonpyong Islands in November 2010, the ministry had to focus more on improving counter artillery and missile capabilities as part of facilitating defense reform.

South Korea also finds it necessary to extend its ballistic missile range to hit North Korean strategic targets within 800-1,000 km.<sup>33</sup> Minister Kim believes that the most suitable deterrence is to show that the ROK is strong and able to hit any target within North Korea.<sup>34</sup> North Korea has been developing a road-mobile, inter-continental ballistic missile system much more difficult to detect and solid fueled so that it can be fired more quickly than liquid fueled counterparts. Therefore, the defense reform plan calls for closing the missile gap by reinforcing South Korea's Missile Command. Building Kill-Chain to preempt long-range missile and artillery attacks has become the priority. This refers to a detection-strike system designed to preemptively attack mobile missile launchers when a launch sequence is detected by an advanced reconnaissance system.<sup>35</sup> Seoul estimates that North Korea currently has more than 1,000 missiles and 100 mobile rocket launchers. As the Kill-Chain cannot destroy all missiles before they are fired, it will target the remaining missiles and combat aircraft at a range of 10 to 30 km.<sup>36</sup>

### **How is the Park Government's Defense Program Different from its Predecessor's?**

The Park government is following the force improvement agenda that the Lee government established, notably a proactive deterrence strategy. Previously, many of Park's advisors cautioned that the word “proactive deterrence” might escalate the situation in the face of an increasingly provocative Pyongyang. However, a new defense plan entails preemptive measures, which include all military and non-military procedures to be taken in self-defense when there are signs of an imminent all-out war. This position was reiterated by Minister Han Min-koo on July 20, 2014, when he made it clear that the ROK forces would firmly and immediately respond to a North Korean provocation by striking its origin, its supporting forces, and the commanding headquarters responsible. His statement exactly echoed what



his predecessor had said. Han also emphasized the strategic value of “Kill-Chain” in his interview, explaining that acquiring the system is crucial to preemption when the North enters the stage of using nuclear weapons. He maintained that KAMD would be completed by the early 2020s.

### **How Do Koreans Prepare for OPCON Transfer? How Does Delaying it for the Third Time Impact Seoul’s Capacity to Deter the North?**

Although the U.S. government and many opinion makers, including former USFK commanders, respect Park’s request for a condition-based transition, there has been much debate about why Seoul has to demand again to delay the transition and whether it is appropriate for the United States to agree for the third time, reflecting a gap in perceptions, understanding, and expectations among Korean watchers in the United States. Many retired generals consistently objected to the dismantlement of the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command. They also called for delaying indefinitely the OPCON transfer unless the North gives up its nuclear option. Park has taken their advice seriously and has asked the United States to adjust the scheduled transfer again. She and her advisors firmly believe that a condition-based transition sends a strong message that the American military presence will be guaranteed as long as the threat from the North remains unchanged. Yet, it would be a huge mistake to delay the transition indefinitely, as many critics argue in the United States. Most Korean men and women in uniform believe that they can do the job even though they will not be 100 percent ready by December 2015.

The South Korean military worked hard to be ready for the planned transition in 2015. They developed an essential mission task list, which specifies detailed goals to be accomplished, according to the road map jointly made with the United States Forces. Contrary to the high level of confidence expressed by uniformed officers, however, retired generals and admirals of the Korean Veteran’s Society raised their voices against the planned transition. As they have increased their political influence in campaigns and elections, their perceptions were reflected in the new government, but the condition-based transition does not necessarily mean permanent delay until the North Korean nuclear issue is resolved or unification happens. The ROK military promises to fulfill the requirements spelled out in the Strategic Alliance 2015. At the same time, the United States offers assurance that changing the wartime OPCON does not reduce its strong commitment. Both agreed at the Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) in 2013 that future command must remain a combined structure where the ROK takes the driver’s seat leading the war fighting command while the United States bridges the gap, providing the ROK JCS with its enduring capability.

The ROK needs to increase its capabilities to prove that moral hazard would never occur. It has already successfully demonstrated a complete set of command and control standards, as certified by the CFC commander as scheduled. These standards cut across all elements of the ROK JCS staff and subordinate commands. They have been evaluated periodically, and reports were sent to both governments following every theater exercise since early 2010. The most important future task is completing the ROK’s structural change and finalizing the combined structure before finishing the Full Mission Capability stage originally scheduled for December 2015. The transition process would be examined and the recently formed team would look at conditions in North Korea and see how they affect the decision. It is the Park

government's consistent position that OPCON transfer will only be delayed until the ROK's critical capability as well as its command structure demonstrate its ability to take charge, and Seoul believes that this will be done by the early 2020s.<sup>37</sup>

### **How Do U.S. Budget Politics Impact Defense Planning and Readiness and the ROK's Ability to Contribute to Extended Deterrence?**

Critics have long warned that sequestration would severely damage U.S. military readiness or even hollow out the U.S. force; however, some view these projections as grossly overstating the impact of a much-needed drawdown in spending.<sup>38</sup> How the stakeholders in the Asia-Pacific region prepare for this challenge has become a critical issue. South Korea naturally questions how the reduction will be implemented and its impact on U.S. strategic priorities.

The latest set of independent and internal assessments commissioned by the Department of Defense confirms that the current U.S. defense posture is adequate in deterring and defending against potential threats in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>39</sup> The security commitment to the Korean Peninsula has repeatedly been confirmed, e.g. by the Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter in July 2013 and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel on October 2, 2013. They made it clear that DoD exempted critical functions from sequestration when the threat is related to nuclear deterrence and the U.S. ability to respond immediately to crises on the peninsula.

Even so, protracted divisions in Washington, which have even led to a government shutdown, concern South Korean security planners and foreign policy strategists. As shown at an assessment in August 2012, there are those who still argue that a significant drawdown in the region is inevitable, proposing a reduction of ground forces in Korea by 14,000 to 18,000, along with the withdrawal of 9,000 Marines from Okinawa as well as the elimination of four F-16 squadrons from Misawa and Kunsan.<sup>40</sup> One concern of Koreans is whether a budget reduction will increase pressure for more burden-sharing with respect to U.S. military bases in South Korea. As of 2012, the United States spent about \$10 billion on its overseas military presence (excluding Afghanistan and military personnel cost), of which 70 percent was used to support bases in Germany, Japan, and Korea. The amount allocated to non-personnel costs of basing 28,500 U.S. troops in South Korea was about \$1.1 billion. The U.S. share exceeded that of South Korea as of 2010; however, the cost-sharing program in place for consolidating and repositioning U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula calls for South Korea to shoulder a heavier load than the United States—about \$4 billion—by the time of the completion of the Yongsan Relocation Plan (YRP) and the Land Partnership Plan (LPP).

Seoul has its own financial difficulties sustaining the projected defense budget increases. The Park government has pledged to do its utmost to meet the increases and has agreed to do so under SA 2015. It would face a serious problem if it could not allocate enough funds for acquisition of the capabilities to take over OPCON responsibilities. The defense budget in 2014 fell short, casting doubt on reinforcing missile capabilities and upgrading forces in accord with the schedule in the Defense Reform Basic Plan 2014-2030. Further delay risks sending the wrong message to North Korea.

## How Can the Concerns of Koreans Be Addressed Regarding the Alliance and Extended Deterrence?

After North Korea's third nuclear test in February 2013, Seoul and Washington responded firmly with a "tailored deterrence strategy" that entails the use of all available military assets to launch a preemptive strike against North Korea if there are signs of an imminent nuclear attack by it. This strategy aims to counter perceived political and military advantages North Korea may try to gain from its nuclear and missile capabilities.<sup>41</sup> In addition, South Korea has attempted to develop its own air and missile defense system (KAMD) and build Kill-Chain in a way to preempt Pyongyang's long-range missile and artillery attacks, but it will be difficult to obtain such capabilities without an adequate budget.<sup>42</sup>

South Korea recognizes that relying solely on the United States is not advisable. What guarantees exist to reassure it that good policy sense will somehow prevail in Washington? As Park Geun-hye has always emphasized, South Korea should seek to maintain good relations with all of the regional powers—China, the Russian Federation, and Japan—while planning ahead for contingencies that may arise from deepened budget cuts and even possible U.S. reordering of strategic priorities. This makes it more important to fulfill the new Defense Reform Basic Plan 2014-2030 thoroughly and convince the uniformed officers that the reform agenda is back on track. The plan was regarded as a strategic improvement over its predecessor to reinforce South Korea's own capacity to respond to North Korea's provocations. However, it does not account for a possible reduction in U.S. defense spending or change in its strategic priorities. For various reasons, the budget has never exceeded the percentage of GNI set by the previous government since 1996.

## CONCLUSION

Adjusting the force enhancement plan has progressed since 2010 and acquisition priorities have focused on North Korea's asymmetric threats. Therefore, the scope of preparations for all-out war has been reduced. For instance, new capabilities to respond to North Korea's submarine provocations have been upgraded along with additional acquisitions of counter artillery radar and other detection equipment.<sup>43</sup> Yet, the JFOS-K (Joint Fire Operation System-Korea) and ground tactical C4I system need to be upgraded. The ROK also needs to enhance ISR capability such as high-altitude UAV and deep area precision strike capability along with munitions. Building a TBM defense system would always be a top priority. EMP protection capability for key facilities also needs to be enhanced. In order to enhance the initial response capability against the source of provocation, the ROK government decided on fast-track acquisition of 40 F-35 new generation fighters.<sup>44</sup> It also decided to procure additional air assets including tanker planes and attack helicopters.

To strengthen the strategic relationship with the United States in order to counter local provocations and nuclear and missile capabilities, at least two points need to be addressed. First, Washington and Seoul should work closely together with other strategic partners on disarming and sanctioning North Korea.<sup>45</sup> Second, close cooperation is also needed in sharing operational experiences of how the United States and other partners are monitoring the potential adversary and defending themselves from various types of local provocations and asymmetric warfare. Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance are the key areas

where Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul can help each other in dealing with threats, overcoming the surge of nationalist sentiments that are troubling bilateral relations between Seoul and Tokyo. The ROK anticipates that the United States will proceed as spelled out in the Strategic Alliance 2015. The Park government also needs to take timely steps to overcome its own vulnerabilities, such as modifying its doctrine, equipment, and training. Elimination or reduction of its vulnerabilities to asymmetric threats may involve changes in philosophy, tactics, and training, and possibly even modifications to the concepts of operations. All can entail substantial costs.

The defense minister asks for an annual increase of 7.2 percent in the defense budget for the five years from 2014 through 2018.<sup>46</sup> Force buildup will need to be increased annually by 10.6 percent. A defense budget of approximately 214.5 trillion *won* will be required for deterring North Korea. Considering that the next 20 years will be a significant transition period for security in the Korean Peninsula, and that a reduction in force of about 110,000 is unavoidable, required resources must be secured. The costs of not dealing with the threats are likely to be much higher. The costs of remedies can be significantly lowered by early actions and increased coordination with Seoul's strategic partners.

KAMD and Kill-Chain are strategic concepts that the Park government introduced for developing its own capacity to preempt North Korean missiles if Kim Jong-un decides to attack the South with nuclear warheads. However, there are many skeptics who expressed concern that Seoul may not be able to preempt Pyongyang's 100 mobile launchers.<sup>47</sup> They continue to argue that building KAMD is simply too expensive without guaranteeing its success. Pyongyang will return to the negotiating table only when its nuclear option is no longer viable. Seoul has to rely upon the tailored extended deterrence provided by the United States, but it has to increase its own capabilities and be ready for bearing the financial burden. Seoul has to show the people that North Korea's nuclear capability can surely be deterred by employing non-nuclear strategic weapons.<sup>48</sup> At the same time it has to be careful to avoid the commitment trap. South Korea and the United States signed the ROK/U.S. counter local provocation plan in 2013 and focused on various types of provocation scenarios. The decision of not sending an aircraft carrier in the 2015 Key Resolve/Foal Eagle military exercise reflects careful strategic calculations. The good news is that the mechanism to restrain a show of force is working and confidence in the joint counter capability is growing in the midst of Pyongyang's continuing threats of firing missiles and rhetoric of nuclear preemption. Paradoxically, the Park Geun-hye government's trust building efforts can only be effective when Pyongyang's strategic superiority over Seoul begins to lose its momentum.

## ENDNOTES

1. The conservative columnist Kim Dae-jung argues that it would be a diplomatic waste if Park Geun-hye's efforts for dialogue with the North fail to balance her efforts to closely cooperate with the United States and other regional partners, while Seoul's defense capabilities fall short. Kim suggests that the government must not seek a quick fix. *Chosun Ilbo*, February 3, 2015, p. A30.
2. *Kookmin Ilbo*, January 5, 2015, <http://news.kmib.co.kr/article/print.asp?arcid=0922904212>.
3. Li Yong-ho, deputy minister of foreign affairs of the DPRK, told former ambassador Stephen Bosworth that nuclear tests and miniaturization would be stopped if Washington decided not to begin annual military exercises in March when he met with the American delegation in Singapore on January 18-19, 2015. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, February 12, 2015, p. 6.

4. Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbR6iQ62v9k>; One month after the attack on Sony, the FBI officially named the DPRK as the instigator, and Obama announced that he would respond proportionately against the cyber attack. Egle Murauskaite “Talking Loud and Carrying a Small Stick: The Implications of America’s Sony Response for Extended Deterrence,” *38 North: Informed Analysis of North Korea*, <http://38north.org/2015/02/emurauskaite021615/print/> (February 16, 2015).
5. Kim Jong-un angrily responded that if the United States invaded North Korean territory, he would make it experience catastrophic consequences on its homeland. *Hangyoreh Shinmun*, February 2, 2015, p. 6.
6. Joseph S. Bermudez, Jr. “The Korean People’s Navy Tests New Anti-ship Cruise Missile,” *Military Affairs*, February 8, 2015, <http://38north.org/2015/02/jbermudez020815/>; *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, February 9, 2015, p. 8.
7. *The Korea Herald*, March 3, 2015, p. 1.
8. Kim Jong-un went ten times to military bases among 30 visits giving guidance to his people from November 2014 to early February 2015. *Dong-A Ilbo*, February 13, 2015, p. A5.
9. Ministry of National Defense, *Defense Reform Basic Plan 2014-2030*, March 4, 2014.
10. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, March 7, 2014, p. 2.
11. Lee Yang-goo, “Decision-Making Process of the ROK Defense Reform of Lee Myung-bak Administration and the Role of Dominant Power Centers,” *Military History*, December 2012, pp. 349-388.
12. Although Kim Jang-soo was a first-time National Assembly member, he was very influential on the national defense committee. His ambivalent position was largely responsible for the inaction of others on the committee. Lee Yang-goo “Decision-Making Process of the ROK Defense Reform of Lee Administration and the Role of Dominant Power Center,” *Military History*, December 2014, pp. 381-384.
13. *The Korea Herald*, February 17, 2015, p. 2.
14. *Dong-A Ilbo*, March 7, 2014, p. A31.
15. *The Korea Herald*, March 7, 2014, p. 1.
16. *Chosun Ilbo*, March 7, 2014, p. A31.
17. *Segye Ilbo*, January 29, 2015, p. 6.
18. “The Security Challenges of North Korean Collapse: A Conversation with Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Lind” <http://38north.org/2011/1/bennettlind110411>.
19. Bruce Bennett, “US Policy favoring East Asia and its Impact on U.S.-ROK Common Defense,” Draft Paper to the ROK’s Ministry of National Defense (September 2012).
20. *Rodong Shinmun*, April 2, 2014.
21. “Adopting Legal Measures that Can Strengthen the Position of Self-Defense Nuclear Power State,” KCNA, April 1, 2014.
22. *Dong-A Ilbo*, March 4, 2015, p. A06.
23. Recently, 38 north and Heritage Report acknowledged that North Korea had obtained the capability to quickly increase its nuclear arsenal. Ben Jackson also warns that North Korea will be able to have a second strike capability, which would give them false confidence to take more aggressive approaches. *Chosun Ilbo*, February 27, 2015, p. A7.
24. Ministry of National Defense, *2014 Defense White Paper* (Seoul: MND, 2014), p. 28.
25. But there is no intelligence report to prove that North Korea can make a nuclear weapon small enough and to show whether the weapon is compact enough to survive the shock, vibration, and temperature change associated with ballistic missile flight. Some cautioned that North Korea has not put together the necessary skills of miniaturizing, safe flight, and reentry vehicle that can survive the extreme heat of reentry. See Jeffrey Lewis “North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons: The Great Miniaturization Debate,” February 5, 2015, <http://38north.org/2015/02/jlewis020515/>.
26. According to Joel Wit, North Korea will have a maximum of 100 nuclear warheads in 5 years, posing a great threat to South Korea, Japan, and the United States. *Dong-A Ilbo*, February 26, 2015, p. A6.

27. Ben David, Alon, "Iran Acquires Ballistic Missiles from DPRK," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, December 29, 2005, URL:www.janes.com/security/international security/news/jdw/jdw051229; Ministry of National Defense, *2014 White Defense Paper*, p. 29. On August 2014, the Washington Free Beacon reported that North Korea is developing submarines that can fire SLBM, and the Korean media posted the photo of a submarine. *Chosun Ilbo*, October 27, 2014.
28. *Chosun Ilbo*, May 20, 2013, p. A4.
29. *Joong-Ang Ilbo*, March 6, 2015, p. 7.
30. Chung Mong-joon argues that reintroduction of US tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea is a viable option to discourage North Korea from developing further its nuclear weapons, and it may pressure them to choose a negotiated approach with the United States. Opening Remarks at the Asan Nuclear Forum on February 19, 2013 in Seoul, Korea. His main argument was repeated when he made an address at the Carnegie Endowment on April 9, 2013. See also Chung Mong-joon, "Thinking the Unthinkable on the Korean Peninsula," *Issues & Insights*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (January 24, 2014).
31. *Chosun Ilbo*, April 28, 2014, p. A2.
32. Kim Kwang-sik and Hong Sook-ji, eds., "Public Opinion Poll on Extended Deterrence (III)," *KIDA Report on Contending Issues*, April 3, 2014.
33. *The Korea Herald*, March 22, 2012, p. 1.
34. *Dong-A Ilbo*, March 22, 2012, p. A2.
35. Yoo Yong-won argues that it can hardly detect the exact locations and movements of North Korea's mobile launchers and small numbers of TELs. Also it takes a significant amount of investment to upgrade Seoul's reconnaissance, surveillance, and intelligence capabilities in order to rely upon Kill-Chain. *Chosun Ilbo*, April 22, 2013, p. A30.
36. *Dong-A Ilbo*, October 2, 2014, p. A3.
37. *Hangyoreh Shinmun*, September 17, 2014, p. 6.
38. Peter W. Singer, "Separating Sequestration Facts from Fiction: Defense Sequestration and What It Would Do for American Military Power, Asia, and the Flashpoints of Korea," *Time Magazine*, September 23, 2012.
39. Michael J. Lostumbo, et al., *Overseas Basing of U.S. Military Forces: An Assessment of Relative Costs and Strategic Benefits* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013).
40. Center for Strategic & International Studies, *U.S. Forces Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment* (August 2012).
41. Karen Montague "A Review of South Korean Missile Defense Program," *Marshall Policy Outlook*, March 2014, pp. 1-10.
42. The cost of KAMD and Kill-Chain approximately requires 17 trillion won. However, it is highly unlikely that sufficient funds will be available for completing the system by the early 2020s unless the Park government sharply increases the budget. *Seoul Shinmun*, October 25, 2014, p. 3.
43. *The Korea Times*, February 13, 2015, p. 4. Seoul established its Submarine Command in 2015 and will begin joint operations with the U.S. navy to increase interoperability. South Korea and U.S. marines staged a joint maritime infiltration drill off Ganghwado in the West Sea on February 10. *Seoul Shinmun*, February 3, 2015, p. 8.
44. *The Korea Times*, February 12, 2015, p. 4.
45. Moon Duk-ho argues that North Korea has already imported specialty items and has established a far-reaching global network through which it performs business with Iran and Syria via intermediaries and multinational corporations. There is a big loophole in the area of maritime and air cargo vulnerabilities and especially in trans-shipment. Jang Ji-hyung and Peter Lee "Do Sanctions Work? The Iran Sanctions Regime and Its Implications for Korea," *Asan Proceedings*, December 6, 2013.
46. Ministry of National Defense, *Defense Reform Basic Plan 2014-2030* (Seoul: MND, 2014).
47. Yoo Yong-won points out that it is practically impossible to find all the mobile launchers before they are fired, while Shin In-kyun argues that preemption is wishful thinking; therefore the Park government must provide a reliable answer for how to protect the people from increasing threat from the North. *Chosun Ilbo*, February 26, 2015, p. A3.
48. *Chosun Ilbo*, February 26, 2015, p. A30.