

## **Stand-off with North Korea: War Scenarios and Consequences**

North Korea's military threat and somewhat peculiar approaches to international relations have been a central difficulty in dealing with the isolated regime during the past decade. In the early 1990s, North Korea, formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), was expected by many observers to collapse, just as communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union did.

However, the embattled state hung on. Despite a collapsing economy, widespread famine, and cooling relations with its previous major supporters – the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation – North Korea not only survived but also managed to bolster its conventional forces and, according to North Korean officials, covertly build a small nuclear arsenal. Its still avowed aim of reunifying the Peninsula under communist rule, and the massive military force it has built to be able to do so, present a continuing threat of war in North East Asia.

This report identifies the key scenarios for potential U.S. military conflict with North Korea, and analyzes likely military outcomes and other consequences.

### **Crisis Diplomacy**

Since 1990 and the withdrawal of Soviet support, North Korea's economy has declined sharply, though according to South Korean reports 1984 was the last time the country achieved economic self-sufficiency.<sup>1</sup> A central tool in North Korea's efforts to maintain the communist regime has been the use of weapons development in order to gain concessions, aid and favorable treaty outcomes with its prospective enemies. A first glance at North Korea's behavior might seem to show that the North is making threatening acts for no other reason than to disrupt the process of warming relations with South Korea, the United States, and its other neighbors. However, reexamination shows a careful policy of developing a threatening system or capability, and using that threat to gain attention – and hopefully concessions – from negotiating partners.

North Korea first employed this policy over its nuclear power and weapons program in the early 1990s. An indigenous nuclear program had been underway since the 1970s, but it was only in 1992 that the UN nuclear monitoring body, the International Atomic Energy Agency, was allowed to inspect all North Korea's nuclear facilities. After three inspections of the Yongbyon nuclear facility, 60 miles north of the capital Pyongyang, discrepancies in the submitted data showed that the North Koreans might have been concealing enough plutonium to

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<sup>1</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, North Korea Country Report, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 1996, p.44

build one or two nuclear weapons.<sup>2</sup> After an abortive declaration of withdrawal from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the agreement that mandated the inspections, on the condition that the United States not use force against it, the North agreed to give up its nuclear program entirely if modern light-water reactors were supplied to fulfill its energy needs. After a period of crisis, war was averted when essentially this formula was embodied in the ‘Agreed Framework’ of October 1994 between the United States and North Korea.<sup>3</sup>

Much the same result occurred after the North Korean missile development program reached the stage of flight tests at the end of August 1998. A *Taepo-Dong 1* missile was launched on a flight path over Japan on Aug. 31. Though there were initial negative reactions, almost a year later, when the long-awaited Perry Report on U.S. policy toward North Korea was released, U.S. sanctions on North Korea were lifted. The surrounding package included lifting of U.S. sanctions on the condition that the North not conduct a second missile test and suspend any other future tests.<sup>4</sup>

The current confrontation between the United States and North Korea flared after North Korea was named as one of the three countries in the ‘Axis of Evil’ by President George W. Bush in his annual State of the Union speech in January 2002. It seems probable now that this was the by-product of a speech intended to justify a war with Iraq.<sup>5</sup> However, when publicly labeled an ‘evil’ state by the world’s only superpower, tensions apparently heightened within the North Korean government. In any case, when James Kelly, U.S. assistant secretary of state, confronted the North Koreans with evidence of a uranium enrichment program in October 2002, they admitted the existence of the program. North Korea then proceeded to first remove seals on the reprocessing plant at Yongbyon just before Christmas, and declared its withdrawal from the NPT on Jan. 10, 2003.<sup>6</sup>

Pyongyang declared that its withdrawal was legal, due to its previous notification of intent to do so in 1994 – a matter that is disputed by the rest of the international community. On April 25, 2003, the United States, North Korea and China began a round of talks devoted to resolving the escalating crisis. But once again the stakes were raised, as North Korea suddenly announced that it possesses nuclear weapons. Officials further threatened to “demonstrate” such a weapon or move to export one. It remains unclear, however, whether such weapons do exist in North Korea or whether the rhetoric is designed for negotiating purposes.

### **Possible Military Scenarios**

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<sup>2</sup> Don Oberdorfer, “The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History,” Addison-Wesley, Reading, Mass., 1997, p.276

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p.357.

<sup>4</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *North Korea Country Report*, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 1999, p.43

<sup>5</sup> Hendrick Hertzberg, ‘Axis Praxis,’ *The New Yorker*, Jan. 13, 2003

<sup>6</sup> Seth Mydans, “North Korea Says it is Withdrawing From Arms Treaty,” *New York Times*, Jan. 10, 2003.

The present shaky situation on the Peninsula means that potential military scenarios should be examined, both to determine what military ‘sticks’ the United States and South Korea have available to help resolve the situation and to consider what military action North Korea might take.

The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has stated that the United States should consider war if North Korea does not stop developing nuclear weapons. Sen. Richard G. Lugar, R-Ind., said he believes that military action, no matter how risky, “always has to be there as a very strong possibility” in dealing with North Korea and its nuclear program.<sup>7</sup>

The Bush administration has, however, made several statements saying that Washington has no intentions of launching military action against North Korea, and so the political situation would have to change significantly before any action was launched.<sup>8</sup> The administration currently seems wedded to a diplomatic approach, given North Korea’s powerful military. South Korea is also adamantly opposed to any military action, as the recent election has brought a younger generation of South Korean leaders into power, one that feels much less threatened by the North. South Korea, until very recently, has even disagreed with the United States on whether the DPRK has nuclear weapons: South Korean Prime Minister Kim Suk Soo said on Feb. 10, 2003, that there was “no evidence” North Korea had such devices.<sup>9</sup> Pyongyang’s declaration to the contrary may, however, end this debate.

Despite the Bush administration’s current stance, Adm. Thomas B. Fargo, commander United States Pacific Command, has in place numerous Op Plans and contingencies for military action against North Korea – plans that continue to be updated and refined. These plans are flexible and can be tailored to an unfolding situation as necessary. Further, knowledge about the latest military capabilities and lessons learned from Operating Enduring Freedom and Operation Liberate Iraq are being applied to these strike plans.

Although a conflict with North Korea will bear little resemblance to what was seen in Afghanistan or Iraq, what worked in those two conflicts – such as the heavy use of Special Forces, precision-guided munitions, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), a very robust Intelligence, Reconnaissance and Surveillance (ISR) network and the ability to react quickly to unfolding battle conditions – will be exploited to the fullest.

North Korea is now probably the “most watched” country in the world by U.S. surveillance assets. The high-value target list is kept current and is supplied to forces in the area, as well as to the Cruise Missile Support agencies that update Tomahawk mission routes from ships in the region.

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<sup>7</sup> Joyce Howard Price, “Lugar Says N. Korea Nukes Beg War Option,” *Washington Times*, April 21, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas M. Horrock, “Complexities of Bush’s World Redoubled,” *Washington Times*, Oct. 20, 2002

<sup>9</sup> Doug Struck, “Japan Assents To US View on Korea,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 13, 2003.

North Korea has also watched and learned from the recent U.S. conflict in Iraq. “The Iraqi war teaches a lesson that in order to prevent a war and defend the security of a country and the sovereignty of a nation, it is necessary to have a powerful physical deterrent,” the North Korean government said in a statement.<sup>10</sup>

U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has called North Korea the “single largest proliferator of ballistic missile technology on the face of the earth.”<sup>11</sup> It is fair to say that the Department of Defense views the country as a significant threat. Recent polls across America show that the public views North Korea as *the most* significant threat when compared to Syria or Iran. The country has been isolated for more than 50 years and is one of the poorest, most secretive, repressive totalitarian states in the world. It has few friends and no loyalties, and has lied about most international agreements. It is viewed by many as a failed state that is disintegrating.

More than 11,000 DPRK artillery weapons are pointed at over 10 million citizens in Seoul. North Korea’s 1.2 million-man Army is the world’s fourth largest fighting force. Two-thirds of those soldiers are stationed within 60 miles of the De-Militarized Zone (DMZ), along with thousands of tanks and armored personnel carriers.

Fargo and the PACOM war planners have studied North Korea in detail. It is their job. For all the above reasons, PACOM will have to consider the response by North Korea to *any* U.S. military action as totally unpredictable and thus be aware that any action would carry tremendous risk. A small “surgical” strike could be viewed by an acutely paranoid Kim Jong Il as the first phase of a war for regime change. Therefore, any U.S. military contingencies have to include the option of immediately being able to respond to a full-scale war on the Korean Peninsula. This would include any perceived escalation by U.S. forces serving as a possible tripwire to a preemptive North Korean strike of enormous magnitude on the South.

Based upon previous studies and North Korea actions during the 1990s, a number of military scenarios can be imagined, some far more likely than others. This report will list and examine the more likely scenarios first, and then the less likely possibilities will be covered. These include, among others:

- I.** North Korea has already launched ‘demonstration’ cruise missiles into the Sea of Japan, and infringed South Korean airspace with incursions by fighter aircraft, and Pyongyang may attempt to repeat this pattern.
- II.** A ‘surgical’ air strike to preemptively destroy the North Korean nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, or other sites, has been much discussed in the United States.
- III.** The DPRK might test-launch one of its ballistic missiles under development.

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<sup>10</sup> David Sanger, “Administration Divided Over North Korea,” *New York Times*, April 21, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Barry McCaffrey, “North Korea’s Global Threat,” *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 12, 2002.

- IV.** North Korea has for the past few years been building up specific elements of its military forces in order to present as much of an artillery and rocket threat to Seoul, the South Korean capital and largest city, as possible. This threat must be taken seriously because Seoul is only 25 miles in a straight line from the DMZ separating the two Koreas.
- V.** A full-scale conflict on the ground is another possibility, either launched by the United States and South Korea to remove the North Korean regime, or by North Korea against the South. North Korea might try to gain diplomatic bargaining power through a limited operation intended to seize Seoul and adjacent areas, or the regime might still attempt a full-scale campaign intended to reunify the Peninsula by force under DPRK rule.

In view of such possibilities, Rumsfeld established in February 2003 the requirement for an aircraft carrier battle group to be on station in the Pacific, directing the USS *Carl Vinson* to be on station until further notice.<sup>12</sup> The embarked tactical aircraft on the carrier and the Tomahawk cruise-missile ships in the battle group are to serve as an immediate response to any needed contingency operations. In March 2003, F-117 stealth aircraft, B-1 and B-52 heavy bombers moved into the region.

### **I. Military Action North Korea Has Already Taken**

Over the past months, the DPRK has mounted a series of military actions seemingly designed to force the pace of negotiations over the crisis and to draw U.S. attention to itself, in an effort to achieve a more favorable final agreement.

On Feb. 20, 2003, a 1960s-vintage North Korean MiG-19 fighter intruded into South Korean airspace over the Yellow Sea west of the Peninsula, but was deterred by South Korean fighter aircraft. Four days later, a short-range cruise missile was fired into the Sea of Japan, which breached none of the DPRK's international agreements, but upstaged the inauguration of the new South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun. On March 2, a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft, an RC-135S Cobra Ball – the Air Force's most sophisticated optical intelligence collection platform that employs sensitive monitoring devices, advanced optics and in-frared sensors – was intercepted by four armed North Korean MiG-29 and MiG-23 fighter aircraft over the Sea of Japan. According to U.S. military sources, the aircraft was 150 miles from the North Korean coast. The fighters used their targeting radar to lock on the unarmed aircraft and closed within 50 feet.<sup>13</sup> This was the first encounter between U.S. reconnaissance aircraft and a North Korean fighter since 1969, when the North Koreans shot down an EC-121 reconnaissance aircraft over the Sea of Japan, killing 31 U.S. aviators.

Events such as this underscore the “powder-keg” environment that currently exists in the region.

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<sup>12</sup> Greg Tyler, “USS Carl Vinson May Stay In Far East After Kitty Hawk’s Return,” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, April 20, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Burns, “Pentagon says North Korean fighter jets intercepted U.S. spy plane; first incident since 1969,” *Associated Press*, March 3, 2003.

If the RC-135S had been shot down, it is very likely that the United States would have directed an immediate response by the USS *Carl Vinson* and stealth bombers in the region, landing a devastating blow on the air base at which the MiGs were based.

Eight days later on March 10, North Korea test-fired another cruise missile into the Sea of Japan.

It is likely that the DPRK will continue a series of military demonstration moves, including possibly the test launch of a *Ro-dong* medium-range missile.<sup>14</sup> The North Korean aim appears to be to force the United States to negotiate an agreement which would legitimize its possession of nuclear weapons. In the DPRK's view, this would probably provide the ultimate assurance that its regime will not be toppled by U.S. military force.

The overwhelming military success of Operation Liberate Iraq may have had an impact on Kim Jong Il. North Korea met in Beijing on April 22, 2003, with U.S. and Chinese diplomats to talk about ending the North's nuclear weapons program. South Korean President Roh Moo Ryun, talking about the possibility of preemptive strikes against North Korea, stated that he thinks, "North Korea can't help but to feel very nervous and afraid. Especially watching the recent Iraqi war I'm sure they are very much terrified...petrified by the Iraqi war."<sup>15</sup>

The United States, not any longer engaged in heavy combat with Iraq, may raise the bar of urgency for the North to give up its nuclear ambitions. Some intelligence analysts have been predicting that North Korea could make one nuclear weapon per month by late summer, adding to the fear that surplus bomb fuel could be sold to countries like Iran, already a certified North Korean weapons customer. Asia is still digesting the magnitude of the threat presented by North Korea's nuclear program, but current positions could rapidly change – perhaps even starting an arms race involving Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Japan is said to be planning to defend itself with Patriot Advanced Capability-2 missiles, which it believes can intercept North Korea's *Ro-dong* missiles in their descent phase.<sup>16</sup>

The ongoing negotiations will not be easy. If the United States decides to play diplomatic hardball with North Korea, Washington could demand a permanent halt in long-range missile construction, as well as re-adherence to the NPT with intrusive verification to confirm Pyongyang's compliance.

If an urgent security crisis exists for the United States, and diplomatic efforts result in an unacceptable situation, then certainly military action will be seriously considered. The precedent for such action has already been established this year in Iraq. Conflict could very well break out,

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<sup>14</sup> *Associated Press*, "Japanese Government deploys destroyer as North Korea tests missile;" *Pakistan Daily Times*, March 14, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Doug Struck, "S. Korean Leader Says North is 'Petrified' By U.S. Success In Iraq," *Washington Post*, April 11, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Shane Green, "Japan Plans Patriot Shield To Down N Korean Missiles," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 15, 2003.

especially if the United States decides to destroy the DPRK's nuclear ambitions by force.

## II. Surgical Air Strike on Nuclear Facilities

U.S. air strikes upon the North Korean nuclear facilities at Yongbyon were under consideration during the 1993-1994 crises and again the last few months. At the present time, the main objective of such an attack would probably be to stop DPRK use of the plutonium-using reactor at the site, and to prevent its capability to reprocess into weapons grade material the large number of spent plutonium fuel rods stored there. U.S. officials, citing satellite photographs, said on Feb. 26, 2003, that North Korea had restarted the Yongbyon reactor, though there was no evidence the DPRK was reprocessing spent fuel rods. A surgical air strike on the reactor or re-processing facilities would be possible with a high likelihood of success. It is less certain what the long-term consequences of the attack in terms of possible radiation release would be. There is a concern that hitting the reprocessing facility and spent fuel rods could create radioactive fallout over China, Japan, Russia or the Korean Peninsula itself.<sup>17</sup>

Lockheed Martin F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighters and Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit stealth bombers, using Korean or Japanese staging bases and Andersen Air Force Base in Guam to launch the aircraft, would probably mount the attacks. (Both types are normally stationed only in the continental United States.) If the F-117 were used, staging areas in Korea would be required, as the aircraft only has a 650-mile un-refueled radius of action.<sup>18</sup> Six F-117s were deployed by the U.S. Air Force to Kunsan Air Base in South Korea on March 13, 2003. This move was viewed by Pyongyang as a major escalation and a rehearsal for invasion.<sup>19</sup>

Another possibility, given the F-117s' relatively limited weapons load – two 2,000-lb (907-kg) precision-guided or unguided bombs – and short range, is the B-2 Spirit bomber. However, given the successful B-2 and F-117 forward deployments directed against Iraq, stealth aircraft could play a key role for any mission in North Korea. The B-2s have an average range over 5,000 miles, with a 16-weapon load out of precision-guided 2,000-lb bombs, and so could operate either from their home base in the United States or from Guam for the mission. The key advantage given by stealth aircraft is that they can penetrate almost any air defense without the electronic warfare jamming and surface-to-air-missile suppression support that would be otherwise required, involving the use of up to 50 other aircraft in some alternative plans. Therefore, it is likely that stealth aircraft and cruise missiles would be a significant part of any initial military confrontation with North Korea.

*Note: The Air Force recently modified the capability of the B-2 internal smart racks. The smart racks now allow the B-2 to carry 80 Mk 82 Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs,) designated GBU-38. The Mk 82 500-lb "lightweight" version of the GPS/inertial-guided JDAM The lightweight JDAM is the newest version of a family of weapons that include the Mk 83 1,000-lb, Mk 84 2,000-lb bombs and BLU-109 2,000-lb penetrator bombs.*

<sup>17</sup> Doug Bandow, "N. Korea Is No Place To Apply Iraq 'Lessons,'" *Los Angeles Times*, April 22, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Lambert, (ed.), *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1994-95*, Jane's Information Group, Coulsdon, Surrey, 1994, p.565.

<sup>19</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, March 13, 2003.

North Korea's air defenses around the Yongbyon site include 22 anti-aircraft gun batteries, and North Korea has its most advanced MiG-29 fighters, a total of 16 aircraft, stationed at the Onchon airbase within the same province.<sup>20</sup> However given the overwhelming advantages that U.S. aircrews possess in training, equipment, flying time and experience, it is extremely unlikely that the North Korean military could hinder an attack to any great extent.

Attacking a nuclear site where radioactive material might be spread in the course of the bombing is an inherently risky process. However, William Perry, U.S defense secretary during the earlier 1994 crisis, said plans produced at that time for an attack on the Yongbyon facility would have seen the plant destroyed without releasing radiation into the air through the use of precision-guided bombs.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the plutonium reprocessing plant, where reactor fuel was converted into weapons material, would have been destroyed as well. If radiation were released during a strike, the prevailing winds from the north and north-west during the winter would push it and any fall-out toward the North Korea capital and largest city, Pyongyang, only 60 miles to the south.<sup>22</sup> Pyongyang has a population of over 2.5 million people.

However, an attack on the Yongbyon site would not remove the whole North Korean nuclear threat. This is because the plutonium activities at the Yongbyon site represent only part of the problem. Just as Pyongyang recently asserted, U.S. intelligence judged in the mid-1990s that North Korea had fabricated one to two nuclear weapons from Yongbyon material, and that there is also the highly enriched uranium program.<sup>23</sup> The location of the postulated nuclear weapons is not publicly known; they are unlikely to be stored at a location the United States might well attack anyway. Bombing the uranium enrichment facilities that make building uranium-based nuclear weapons possible might stop the production of further weapons, but will not remove any currently available weapons from the equation. The United States may not be entirely certain of the location of the uranium enrichment facilities, as Secretary of State Colin Powell said in late December 2002 that the site "had not been determined yet."<sup>24</sup> Even if it has been, all the DPRK's suspected uranium enrichment facilities likely are buried underground, which would make such an attack more difficult.<sup>25</sup>

## Escalatory Pressures

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., *The Armed Forces of North Korea*, I.B. Tauris, 2001, p.137-39, 149. The figure of 22 AA gun posts is from [globalsecurity.org](http://globalsecurity.org).

<sup>21</sup> Ashton Carter and William Perry, "Back to the Brink," *Washington Post*, Oct. 20, 2002, p. B1

<sup>22</sup> Data on prevailing winds is from <http://www.thewoodexchange.info/Country%20Data/Korea-North/home.html>. The winds during the summer however, are mostly in the other direction, from the south and south-east. Radiation released from an attack during the summer would push contamination toward China.

<sup>23</sup> Unclassified Summary of a National Intelligence Estimate, Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat through 2015, National Intelligence Council, December 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Rowan Scarborough, "Strike on North Korea viewed as too risky," *Washington Times*, Jan. 1, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Nuclear Threat Initiative, North Korea Nuclear Profile, [http://www.nti.org/db/profiles/dprk/nuc/nuc\\_overview.html](http://www.nti.org/db/profiles/dprk/nuc/nuc_overview.html)

The United States would almost certainly wish to eliminate the long-range artillery and rocket threat to Seoul at the same time it undertook any air strike. This would necessitate destruction of several hundred well protected revetments using precision-guided munitions. Unguided 'dumb' bombs would not be able to precisely fly through the narrow apertures available. The United States has been working upon this problem for some years, and an Advanced Concept Technology Demonstration (ACTD) was mounted on the Peninsula in 1996-97 for this very purpose. The Precision/Rapid Counter – Multiple Rocket Launch ACTD, completed in 1997, apparently successfully developed and demonstrated all weather, day/night "precision deep strike capability" to neutralize the rocket launchers and heavy artillery deployed north of the DMZ.

However, this task faces a number of difficult challenges. U.S. and South Korean commanders on the Peninsula would undoubtedly certainly want the number of precision-guided munition delivery platforms increased, either in the form of aircraft or additional artillery.

Apart from shortages of platforms and weapons, tying together the command, control and communications network required to destroy, on the first try, all the North Korean rocket launchers and heavy artillery without heavy damage to Seoul potentially could be very difficult. Orchestrating all the weapons and sensors involved, without mutual interference among weapons being delivered, could pose major difficulties. Previous attempts to tie together remotely sited weapon systems, such as the U.S. Navy's Cooperative Engagement Capability, faced drawn out teething problems. The command and control network would have to work the first time to save Seoul from tremendous damage.

Further, following any U.S. air strike pressures to mount a more comprehensive attack against North Korea would be strong. The first phase of war could be a massive air and ground artillery campaign to strike all artillery positions along the DMZ, as well as key nodes of command, control and communication. Critical to success would be achieving immediate, overwhelming destruction of the threat at the DMZ. In addition, the North Korean air forces and airfields, integrated air defense zones, command and control facilities, surface-to-air missile sites and anti-aircraft batteries would likely be on the target list the first night. The accuracy and lethality of the current weapon inventory would enable the United States to destroy a considerable number of the high-value targets throughout the country from the air. This strike would be devastatingly lethal and very intense. The goal would be to very quickly take away North Korea's will to fight and to stagger and isolate remaining DPRK formations, rendering them incapable of resisting.

Another key factor in such ensuring a successful strike would be achieving air dominance within the first 48 to 72 hours. A very robust network of intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance assets to maintain a continuous presence over the battle space would be needed to support the offensive.

One specific scenario could unfold as follows:

Six B-2s each armed with 80 500-lb JDAMs sequentially launch from Guam. The strike is coordinated with several divisions of B-1s with 12 JDAMs per aircraft and F-117s with two laser-guided precision-guided weapons per aircraft, taking off from other bases in the region. These strikes would be deconflicted with the launch of more than 300 Tomahawk cruise missiles from the various cruisers and submarines positioned in the Pacific. Six additional B-2s, flying out of their home base in Missouri, time their arrival closely behind – loaded with 24 1,000-lb JDAMs or 16 2,000-lb JDAMs. One thousand targets could be destroyed prior to sunrise. This would prepare the battleground for ground forces to rapidly sweep to the North under a protective close air support umbrella of tactical aircraft from two carrier battle groups and other aircraft and assault helicopters in the South.

The United States does have the capability to preemptively destroy the artillery and rocket launchers threatening Seoul. However, given the number of North Korean weapons and their protection, such an attempt might well be only partially successful – potentially threatening great harm to the South Korean capital as the DPRK reacts. Moreover, the distinct possibility exists that North Korea would attack first, anticipating a U.S. strike against its artillery and rocket formations near the DMZ. Section IV below considers a North Korean preemptive attack on Seoul. Further analysis of full-scale conventional war and possible consequences appears in Section V below.

### **III. North Korean Ballistic Missile Launch**

North Korea used its ballistic missile program to put pressure upon the United States and South Korea during the 1990s, and these efforts culminated, as described above, in August 1998 when a *Taepo-Dong 1* medium-range missile was launched on a flight path over Japan, drawing U.S., Japanese and South Korean criticism. The tested missile, a much-modified Scud with two stages and an additional space-launch stage, was assessed to have travelled approximately 4,000 kilometers while attempting to place a satellite into orbit.<sup>26</sup> When used as a missile instead of a space-launch vehicle, its range was initially assessed at 1,500-2,200 kilometers, but 2000-2001 South Korean Ministry of Defense estimates upgraded that range to 2,500 kilometers.<sup>27</sup> This range, and the demonstrated launch, means North Korea could reach every part of Japan with such missiles, as well as all of South Korea.

The threat that North Korean missiles pose to the United States itself is unclear. A July 1998 report produced by a specially appointed Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat, headed by Rumsfeld prior to his appointment as defense secretary, stated that the two-stage *Taepo-Dong 2* could reach major cities and military bases in Alaska and some of the minor Hawaiian islands. This estimate implied the *Taepo-Dong 2*, an improved version of the *Taepo-*

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<sup>26</sup> Bermudez, op. cit., p.277

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

*Dong 1*, had a range of some 4,000-6,000 kilometers.<sup>28</sup> At the time, the commission also reported that light-weight versions of the *Taepo-Dong 2* could fly as far as 10,000 kilometers, which would thus place at risk western U.S. territory in an arc extending from Phoenix, Ariz., to Madison, Wis. However, some caution must be attached to these longer-range estimates, as it seems they are based on theoretical mathematical modelling that can overestimate a missile's actual range in the absence of real test flight data. As the *Taepo-Dong 2* employs a new, untried, solid-fuelled third stage on top of its two liquid-fuelled stages which were part of the earlier *Taepo-Dong 1* design, and the *Taepo-Dong 2* has not been tested, it would be very hard for even the DPRK itself to determine exactly what the capabilities of the missile are.

In December 2001, a new unclassified CIA report said that a three-stage version of the *Taepo-Dong 2*, capable of carrying a nuclear weapon-sized payload, might be ready for flight-testing. While the two-stage variant was capable only of reaching parts of the United States, the report said the three-stage version could strike all of North America with a nuclear warhead, meaning a range of up to 15,000 kilometers.<sup>29</sup> In a joint appearance before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Feb. 12, 2003, Vice Adm. Lowell Jacoby, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, and CIA Director George Tenet, reiterated the existence of the missile while saying it had still not been flight-tested. Further comment from unnamed U.S. intelligence officials after the directors' testimony said the comments of the two officials had been based upon the material that gave rise to the December 2001 report, and that the DPRK had demonstrated no new missile capabilities in the last year.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the DPRK may have the ability to hit part or all of the United States, as well as Korea and Japan, with a missile potentially capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. At least, that is the U.S. government's publicized conclusion; very little other data is available.

The question is whether such an attack would be something the North Korean leadership would consider making during this, or any other, crisis. In the absence of prior U.S. military action, this is not likely. While the North Korean regime has previously launched infiltration efforts into South Korea, both by sea and through tunnels, as well as fighting over contested fishery resources during the ceasefire period that has remained in place since the 1953 armistice, it has never deliberately initiated an overt, outright military attack on South Korea, Japan or the U.S. forces it has had within its reach.

Despite the mid-January 2003 end of a self-imposed moratorium on missile tests, the North has far more to lose than to gain by using a missile to attack a U.S. or allied target.

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.256, 276-77, and (Rumsfeld) Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat, <http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/missile/rumsfeld/execsum.htm>

<sup>29</sup> Unclassified Summary of a National Intelligence Estimate, Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat through 2015, National Intelligence Council, December 2001.

<sup>30</sup> *Associated Press*, "North Korean Rocket Can Hit U.S., CIA Says," Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2003, via [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

The launch of a ballistic missile would be evidence of an overt intention to attack the entirety of one or another of the three countries in a far more explicit way than previous terrorist attacks or the 1976 DMZ confrontation over the pruning of an obstructive tree.<sup>31</sup> It would be extremely difficult to explain away as the unordered action of a junior officer. Furthermore, it would gain the DPRK little, while the consequences of an overt, unprovoked attack would be severe in the extreme, possibly leading to a U.S. nuclear counter-strike or an outright war that the DPRK would lose.

If a missile attack by the North did eventuate however, casualties could be severe. Potential casualties would range from a handful, if a conventional warhead went off course and landed in a lightly populated area, to hundreds of thousands killed and injured if a nuclear warhead was properly steered to hit a city target.

In any case, the United States is unlikely to let such an attack eventuate given the current circumstances. Satellite reconnaissance would detect preparations for a launch from the above-ground launch pads the DPRK uses, and such preparations would likely result in a U.S. air strike on the facility. Thus, it seems unlikely that the DPRK would launch an attack by one (or several) long-range ballistic missiles at the height of a severe crisis when a missile attack upon the U.S. or its allies would probably bring near instant and overwhelming military retaliation.

If a ballistic missile is launched during the current crisis, it is far more likely to mean the DPRK's leadership is attempting to boost the morale of its population or, in its eyes, North Korea's status in the world, either by the demonstration of a long-range missile capability or by another satellite launch attempt. It is useful to remember here that a space-launch program, using the *Taepo-Dong 1* as a space-launch vehicle, was apparently initiated because Kim Jong-Il wished to emulate the achievements of a successful South Korean research satellite launch in September 1993, and that the only launch of a long-range vehicle so far has been in the form of a space launch. Even after the failure of the attempted satellite orbital insertion, the DPRK claimed that the satellite was circling the planet and transmitting North Korean revolutionary anthems.<sup>32</sup> Clearly, there was a significant propaganda component to the first missile launch test. This makes it quite possible that any future launches may be of this type.

#### **IV. North Korea Artillery and Rocket Attack on Seoul**

While Perry and his advisers believed in 1994 that any attack on Yongbyon would have limited physical effects, they also believed that any attack on the North's flagship nuclear facility would probably have triggered the North to attack South Korea across the DMZ. North Korea has maintained much of its large standing Army in positions north of the DMZ, poised to attack the South, since the armistice that ended the Korean War in 1953. Seventy percent of DPRK

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<sup>31</sup> For the details of the 1976 incident, see Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, op. cit., p.74-83, or [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/paul\\_bunyan.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/paul_bunyan.htm)

<sup>32</sup> Bermudez, op. cit., p.279, 281.

ground forces are deployed south of a line between Pyongyang and Wonsan, an estimated 645,000 personnel.<sup>33</sup> These personnel are so arranged that an attack could be made upon South Korea with little warning and no advance troop movements. There might be less than 24-hours' warning.

However, an option short of a full attack, but still incredibly damaging to South Korea, is open to the DPRK: an artillery and rocket attack upon those areas of South Korea within range of the vast arsenal of artillery pieces, multiple rocket launchers, and missiles that North Korea maintains in the border area. The devastation caused in Seoul would be immense, with untold thousands losing their lives. In the event of an attack on a highly significant DPRK target, such as a nuclear facility, by U.S. or South Korean forces, such a counter-attack might be considered by the DPRK government. During negotiations between the North and South in March 1994, a senior DPRK negotiator publicly threatened his South Korean counterpart by mentioning such an attack, and telling him in the event of war his survival was unlikely as Seoul would become a "sea of fire."<sup>34</sup>

Joseph Bermudez, the foremost Western non-governmental expert on the North Korean armed forces, noted in 2001 that over the past 15 years North Korea had undertaken a comprehensive program to increase its forces capabilities.<sup>35</sup> Included are a number of enhancements to Seoul-threatening artillery. Indeed, since the 1994 crisis, the DPRK has been placing a priority upon deploying weapons systems that can damage South Korea without an invasion.<sup>36</sup> Since the 1980s, North Korea has built up its forces within 60 miles of the DMZ to roughly 65 percent of its total units and 80 percent of its total estimated firepower, a 1998 assessment judged. This compares to 45 percent of its total units in 1984.<sup>37</sup>

The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency said in December 1995 that the 'most significant' development in North Korea's ground forces since 1991 had been the continuing deployment of 240mm multiple rocket launchers and 170mm self-propelled guns near the DMZ. At that time, the DPRK was continuing to produce these weapons, the M-1989 170mm gun and M-1985/M-1991 rocket launcher, indigenously through the efforts of the Third Machine Industry Bureau.<sup>38</sup> The 200-250 rocket launchers are deployed northwest of Seoul apparently by the 620th Artillery Corps, while the 170mm self-propelled guns are reportedly with an independent heavy artillery brigade.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, many of the artillery pieces are in shelters that may allow

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<sup>33</sup> Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., *The Armed Forces of North Korea*, I.B. Tauris, 2001, p.3, and International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2002-03*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p.153

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.304

<sup>35</sup> Bermudez, *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Michael Drennan, USIP, Jan. 13, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Michael O'Hanlon, "Stopping a North Korean Invasion: Why Defending South Korea is Easier than the Pentagon Thinks," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No.4, Spring 1998, p.140, and Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, Mass., 1997, p.313

<sup>38</sup> Defense Intelligence Agency, *North Korea: The Foundations for Military Strength – Update 1995*, p.13, and Bermudez, 2001, *op. cit.*, p.51

<sup>39</sup> Bermudez, 2001, *op. cit.*, p.59-60, 74-76.

them to fire and then retreat into a protected position; some may even be able to fire from such hidden positions. U.S. military estimates in 1994 were that those artillery pieces could bombard Seoul with 5,000 rounds in the first 24 hours of any attack.<sup>40</sup> Such an attack could mean tens or hundreds of thousands of casualties and billions of dollars of damage in Seoul. U.S. and South Korean artillery and air forces could silence those guns, but not before much damage had been done, primarily because of the short distance to Seoul from the DMZ and the extensive hardening of the DPRK positions.

The political implications of such an artillery bombardment across the DMZ would be tremendous, and there would be little way of avoiding a full-scale war. Thus, such an attack seems unlikely unless the DPRK was already committed to a war.

If the DPRK has the nuclear weapons ascribed to it by U.S. intelligence agencies, in extremis it might be motivated to use that option to try to deter a feared or actual U.S. attack. Potentially, it could attempt to secretly emplace a bomb in Seoul or another major South Korean city. Seoul has a population of 10.3 million within its city limits, as of mid-2002. It is difficult to make assumptions about a nuclear ground burst within a city, as no tests of this type have ever taken place, but one has to assume that casualties would be in the millions, with deaths in the hundreds of thousands or more. Radiation damage would claim thousands more additional lives in the years following.

## **V. Full-Scale Ground Conflict**

The possibility of a full-scale attack south across the DMZ, to achieve what the DPRK failed to do in 1950, has always been a possibility since the end of the Korean War in 1953. Possibly more likely today, given the DPRK's small chance for success as discussed below, is a more limited campaign by the DPRK aimed at seizing Seoul and gaining an advantage in subsequent diplomatic bargaining.<sup>41</sup>

For many years, U.S. and South Korean authorities maintained that the DPRK had the military advantage on the Peninsula.<sup>42</sup> However, over the last 15 years, the ability of South Korea to defend itself has grown, with the introduction of much advanced weaponry giving the already well-trained Republic of Korea Army greatly increased capabilities. South Korea now has military equipment fully comparable with the latest U.S. or British weapons. Estimates in 1998 by Michael O'Hanlon, a military analyst at the Brookings Institution, using the TACSFORM system for modeling land combat, developed in the early 1990s by the Analytical Sciences Corporation, gave the DPRK land forces, despite their large size, only nearly five U.S. heavy divisions-worth of capability. The estimates slated the South Korean forces as having

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<sup>40</sup> Oberdorfer, *op. cit.*, p.313-4

<sup>41</sup> Robert Karniol, "Rational 'rogue,'" *Jane's Defence Weekly*, July 10, 2002

<sup>42</sup> Chae-Ha Pak, "A Grand Strategy for Korea's Defense," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. I, No.2, Winter 1989, p.178-80, and Defense Intelligence Agency, *North Korea – The Foundations for Military Strength Update 1995*.

approximately three quarters of that, despite the difference in numbers of troops.<sup>43</sup> Based on that information, according to O'Hanlon, South Korea would have outright superiority once factors such as better training, support equipment, logistics, and their prepared defensive positions were accounted for.

Other estimates seem to confirm the U.S. and South Korean superiority on the Peninsula – with officials and experts in Washington early in 2003 expressing the same sentiment. J.J. Suh, an academic at the University of Pennsylvania, even went to the extent of attempting to calculate whether South Korea could defend itself without U.S. assistance, and concluded that indeed it could.<sup>44</sup> U.S. Defense Department computer simulations of a conflict reportedly also give the same result.<sup>45</sup> The DPRK emphasis in recent years on building up weapon systems that could severely damage Seoul without an actual invasion might well reflect a DPRK recognition of its likely inability to break through the strong South Korea-U.S. defense lines.

### **Ground Attack Routes**

Any DPRK attack, if attempted, is likely to be mounted mainly through the several restricted approach routes through the DMZ dictated by the Korean terrain, and led off by the four forward positioned infantry heavy Army corps that the DPRK has stationed along the border. There are two major avenues of approach that lead toward Seoul, via Kaesong and Munsan nearer the west coast, and Chor'won and Uijongbu further inland.

Another likely route is along the east coast from Kansong to Sokch'o as well as the Taedong mountains further inland. The advance would face the 19 infantry divisions of the South Korea Army deployed in three defense lines facing the DMZ. Only the first line, with eight divisions, is within range of the bulk of the DPRK's artillery.<sup>46</sup> The main allied operational reserve, held back behind the front, is the South Korean VII Corps that includes the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division and two of the three South Korean mechanized divisions.<sup>47</sup> The size of the South Korean mechanized divisions, twice that of the average British or U.S. division, makes this corps more capable than it might appear, with a mobile reserve force of 50,000 plus well trained and equipped South Korean and U.S. troops.

### **How A Battle Might Unfold**

The course of such a scenario is impossible to predict with any surety, but using available evidence the following seems likely. After a preparatory artillery barrage, DPRK forces would

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<sup>43</sup> O'Hanlon, op. cit., p.142-144.

<sup>44</sup> J.-J. Suh, "Blitzkrieg or Sitzkrieg? Assessing a Second Korean War," *Pacifica Review*, Vol. 11, No.2, June 1999. Both Michael O'Hanlon, in a Brookings briefing, and Robert Gallucci and James Lilley, at a congressional staff briefing on Jan. 27, 2003, drew this conclusion.

<sup>45</sup> Demilitarization for Democracy, Exploding the Landmines Myth in Korea, August 1997, p.2

<sup>46</sup> Suh, 1999, op. cit., p. 155, note 14.

<sup>47</sup> Brian Taehyun Kim, Republic of Korea Army, [www.orbat.com](http://www.orbat.com) The U.S. 2nd Division has only two-thirds the normal fighting battalions of a standard U.S. division, with the remainder of the division in the United States.

aim to drive infantry attacks supported by armor through the approach routes discussed above. Given the mass of prepared defenses, the unbroken, and amply manned, defense line across the DMZ (in stark contrast with the invasion of 1950), allied equipment superiority, superior allied knowledge of the battlefield achieved by advanced reconnaissance and surveillance equipment, and the parlous state of the North Korean military after the setbacks and famine of the 1990s, virtually all assessments made in the last few years indicate that an advance would be stopped before South Korea were overrun.<sup>48</sup> A successful DPRK advance would require breaking multiple South Korean lines even as the South Korean reserves, capable of establishing further replacement defense lines, started to arrive.<sup>49</sup> Historically, rapid successful breakthrough attacks against prepared defenses are rare. When armies in World War II tried to drive through prepared defenses, advance rates were rarely more than four to five kilometers a day, and usually less than that – sometimes only about one kilometer a day against heavily prepared defenses, such as the allied attack on the Siegfried Line.<sup>50</sup> Given the mass of combat power the U.S. and South Korea have available, both in forward stationed forces and in reserve, exposed invasion forces that became slowed or halted would be in dire straits from the defense lines in front of them and to their flanks, as well as indirect fire from artillery. Given the limited capabilities of the DPRK Air Force – larger in absolute terms than the U.S. and South Korean air forces on the Peninsula but comprised of mostly obsolete aircraft manned by ill-trained pilots – U.S. and South Korean aircraft would also soon be inflicting severe damage upon invading forces from the air without significant interference.<sup>51</sup>

The U.S. forces rushing to reinforce the defense would also be substantial. Two brigades' worth of equipment stored in and near Korea for the Army and Marines could be rapidly manned by airlifted troops. And there are already nearly 300 combat aircraft in Korea and Japan, including the air wing of the carrier usually stationed at Yokosuka in Japan. An armored battalion task force from the 1st Infantry Division's brigade at Fort Riley, Kansas, is currently in Korea, and while most of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division remains focused on the Persian Gulf, its parent brigade in Kansas stands ready to reinforce the U.S. position in Korea. A National Guard earmarked for the Korean Peninsula, the 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Mechanized) from California, is also apparently alerting elements to prepare to deploy. A U.S. bomber deployment to Guam was announced in late February 2003, and by March 10 17 B-1 and B-52 heavy bombers had arrived at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam. The nearest Marine forces, for example, are based in Okinawa, relatively close by, and at least partially sealift-able by their associated amphibious ships based in Sasebo, Japan. With the resident carrier *Kitty Hawk* now returning to homeport in Yokosuka, Japan, the carrier *Carl Vinson* from the U.S. West Coast is assigned for Korean duty and will be holding station in the area. At least one heavy division is planned to be shipped to Korea in the event of war, as well as the 25th Infantry Division (Light) based in Hawaii.

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<sup>48</sup> O'Hanlon, op. cit., Suh, op. cit., Nick Beldecos and Eric Higenbotham, "The Conventional Military Balance in Korea," *Breakthroughs*, Spring 1995, Vol. IV, No.1

<sup>49</sup> Beldecos and Higenbotham, op. cit., p.5

<sup>50</sup> O'Hanlon, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>51</sup> O'Hanlon, Ibid, p.151-2, Suh, op. cit., p.166-9.

### **Official U.S. Op Plans**

The official South Korean and U.S. war plan, Operations Plan 5027, currently calls for a regrouping phase after halting the initial invasion, which would probably happen amid the layered defense lines north of and around Seoul, followed by a full-scale invasion of North Korea to seize Pyongyang and abolish the DPRK as an entity, reunifying the Peninsula under South Korean control.<sup>52</sup> The DPRK would come under heavy attack from the U.S. B-1 and B-52 long-range bombers, and plans exist for the Marine Corps to use a major portion of its strength to launch amphibious assaults to cut the DPRK's narrow waist in two.

### **South Korea's Hesitation**

Given the new South Korean government's attitude to the DPRK – seeing the North as little threat and continuing the ‘sunshine’ policy of engagement – full implementation of the two allies’ invasion plan would require a marked change of heart on the South’s part.

South Korea’s hesitancy to engage in warfare with the North can justifiably partly be attributed to concern about casualties and damage to itself. Casualties in such a conflict would be in the hundreds of thousands, and damage to the infrastructure of the Peninsula in the billions of dollars. The political and economic effects of such a war would reverberate around the region for decades. When the United States was making serious preparations to go to war with the DPRK in May 1994, senior military leaders gave estimates to President Bill Clinton that predicted 52,000 U.S. military personnel killed and wounded, along with 490,000 South Korean military casualties, in the first 90 days, as well as ‘enormous’ DPRK and civilian casualties.<sup>53</sup> A month later, in June 1994, the then U.S. commander-in-chief on the Peninsula, Gen. Gary Luck, estimated in the process of preparing war plans that as many as a million people might be killed if war broke out, including 80,000-100,000 Americans; the war would cost the United States more than \$100 billion; and the destruction and interruption of business would cost a trillion dollars to the countries involved and their immediate neighbors.<sup>54</sup> These figures remain a good indicator of the possible losses if conventional weapons only were used. However, any use by the North of nuclear weapons, even unsophisticated ones, would send deaths and injuries into the millions if they were used on city targets.

Now into Spring 2003, the initial exploratory discussions with North Korea indicate that Pyongyang may have already developed and holds nuclear weapons in its arsenal. The U.S. delegation has emphasized that the Bush administration would accept *nothing less* than the complete and verifiable dismantling of North Korea’s nuclear programs, including the restoration of international inspections, before progress could be made on other areas of the U.S.-North Korean relationship. However, just like Washington, Pyongyang does not do well

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<sup>52</sup> Richard Halloran, "New Warplan calls for Invasion of North Korea," Global Beat-East Asian Security, [www.nyu.edu](http://www.nyu.edu), Nov. 14, 1998.

<sup>53</sup> Capt. Thomas Flanigan USN, letter to Don Oberdorfer, Sept. 20, 1995, cited in Oberdorfer, op. cit., p.315.

<sup>54</sup> Gen. Gary Luck, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Jan. 26, 1995, cited in Oberdorfer, op. cit., p.324.

with ultimatums. North Korea's KCNA news agency recently stated, "The situation on the Korean Peninsula is so tense that a war may break out any moment due to U.S. moves."<sup>55</sup>

Lee Jung Hoon, an analyst with Yonsei University in Seoul, said recently, "The United States will act militarily if there's hard evidence North Korea is exporting [nuclear] weapons or nuclear devices to a terrorism-sponsoring state, and if that happens, I don't think they'll give a hoot what South Korea thinks of it."<sup>56</sup>

It is clear that in any conflict with North Korea, U.S. forces will emerge victorious. The *cost* of the victory is another matter – indeed, there is a tremendous risk of loss of lives and massive destruction. Some military estimates put the civilian and military toll in the first day as high as 1 million.

PACOM has a requirement to keep the Korean War Plan up to date and viable. Fargo is in charge of executing this war plan, which is focused on neutralizing the threat from North Korea while keeping the loss of life among his forces and South Korean civilians (or those from any other country North Korea could reach) to an absolute minimum. Ruling out the horrible option of tactical nuclear weapons in the DMZ, what tactics could be used that would be the most successful and what could be a plausible estimate of casualties?

One caveat is that such estimates are always wrong. Second, Fargo is known to think that the loss of only 10 percent of the earlier (1 million) estimate would be unacceptable.

### **Escalatory Pressures for a Preemptive U.S.-South Korean Strike**

For the above reason, the tactic of a lightning, "Blitzkreig" strike by the United States and South Korea could be considered by U.S. military leaders as the best option. North Korean soldiers suffer from malnutrition and rarely train due to scarcity of fuel and ammunition. They are equipped with largely obsolete weapons with limited range that have been degrading for years. The goal would be to neutralize as much of the threat before missile batteries could be manned, rocket and artillery platforms could be rolled out of bunkers, aircraft could be wheeled out of hangars, and Scud missile launchers could be armed and set up. In other words, PACOM would want to demolish the immediate threat before fingers could reach the launch buttons.

As previously mentioned, the U.S. capability exists to hit more than 1,000 North Korean targets in a first night of attack. Specifically, the United States would want to destroy hundreds of targets in the first hour from the air, as well as relying on South Korean artillery and rocket batteries positioned along the DMZ. It would be essential to stun key DPRK units, particularly those responsible for long-range artillery and aircraft, before they could react. Patriot missile batteries in South Korea and Japan also would play a critical role in defense from any incoming missiles. There are at least 11 batteries in South Korea and 27 in various locations throughout

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<sup>55</sup> Glenn Kessler, "N. Korea Says It Has Nuclear Arms," *Washington Post*, April 25, 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Doug Struck, "U.S., Asian Allies Face Tough Choices," *Washington Post*, April 25, 2003.

Japan. (Both countries are interested in upgrading to enhanced versions with greater range and improved radar tracking capabilities.)

U.S. intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance assets already are consistently updating the high-value target list in North Korea. At the top of this list are the North Korean multiple rocket launchers and artillery and troop positions heavily concentrated along the DMZ. The United States can locate most of the North Korean underground shelters beneath the DMZ and hundreds of other military targets farther north. For example, the critical assembly facility, research reactor, graphite reactors, radiochemistry laboratory, and fuel fabrication facility at Yongbyon have all been mapped out in precise detail. Weaponeers have decided what the optimum ordnance and approach is for each target set, from caving in entrances and exits to underground artillery batteries, to destroying MiG aircraft in revetted hangers, to causing reactors to collapse upon themselves to limit radioactive release.

The 700,000-man South Korean Army, as noted above, is well trained and has modern, reliable equipment. And as mentioned, they have fortified, mined and physically blocked all routes that North Korean infantry would try to use if there were any thrust south.

A massive, overwhelming strike could eliminate any chance for a counter-attack from the North and enable a surge forward to start the next phase of a U.S.-South Korean offensive – taking control of the key military bases and positions of the leadership in Pyongyang.

If Fargo's war plan, as envisioned above, was successful in the first days of a conflict, it is conceivable that up to 90 percent of the immediate threat to South Korea could be eliminated, and the prime objective of rendering the North ineffective and unable to militarily respond achieved. And the predictions of horrendous mass casualties would be wrong. It is as plausible that a preemptive "Blitzkrieg" could even hold down allied casualties to an acceptable minimum. But such a campaign represents a risky course and the consequences always could be far worse.

## **VI. Other Military Scenarios**

The above sections describe what military action has already occurred around the Korean Peninsula, and the most likely possibilities for further action arising from the current confrontation between the DPRK and the United States. However, there are two other less likely scenarios that might result in conflict. First, military action might occur as a result of DPRK infiltration into South Korea by land or sea; and secondly, as the middle of the year approaches, there is a possibility of confrontation over the valuable Yellow Sea blue crab fishery, as happened in June 1999 and June 2002.

Infiltration of North Korean intelligence personnel by sea into South Korea and Japan has been ongoing since the end of the Korean War in 1953, with varying success.<sup>57</sup> The two most recent well-publicized failed infiltration attempts were in September 1996 and June 1998, when in both cases an infiltrating submarine was captured. The 1996 incident was particularly embarrassing for the South Korean authorities, as a civilian taxi driver, rather than the coastal defenses, initially raised the alarm. Bermudez states in his 2001 book that two separate DPRK intelligence agencies have undoubtedly mounted successful infiltration operations into South Korea and Japan in the past few years.<sup>58</sup> It is quite possible therefore that such operations are continuing, and if so, there remains a chance that infiltrating parties may be discovered and hunted down amid the South Korean population. Given the history of such actions during the 1990s, in which the 1996 submarine incursion was discovered at a critical time during negotiations over food aid, it is not at all certain that the DPRK has suspended these operations during the current crisis. The hunt for such infiltrators in the past has led to the deaths of most of the DPRK submarines' crew (24-25 in 1996) along with South Korean military personnel and civilians (14 in 1996) in a series of fire-fights as the DPRK personnel were located and cornered.<sup>59</sup>

Military confrontation over the valuable Yellow Sea blue crab fishery, which straddles the disputed maritime boundary between the two Koreas, is also quite possible as summer, and the fishing season, approaches. A brief battle between the two Koreas' naval forces occurred on June 15, 1999, and a major clash on June 29, 2002. While such confrontations arise from the combination of a valuable resource and an ill-defined, and some would say illegitimate, maritime boundary, if the current crisis persists into the Korean summer any hostilities are bound to have an effect on the wider situation. The current maritime boundary, the Northern Limit Line, was imposed by the U.S.-led United Nations Command at the end of August 1953, just over a month after the armistice. The Limit Line does not follow international customary practice as embodied in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which prescribes equitable access to waters shared by two coastal states. Instead, the Limit Line as currently enforced by the South Korean Navy denied the DPRK an equitable share of the Yellow Sea, as it is based upon the distance between five South Korean islands and the DPRK coastline, rather than the two countries' land masses.

Casualty information from previous confrontations is incomplete, but the entire crews of numerous patrol craft on both sides are at risk, and at least 39 naval personnel of both countries were killed or injured in the June 1999 battle.<sup>60</sup> Given that neither side can agree on how the issue will even be initially discussed, it is unlikely that an boundary or fisheries agreement can be reached before the summer season resumes.

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<sup>57</sup> Bermudez, op. cit., p.184, 195.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Oberdorfer, op. cit., p.387-393.

<sup>60</sup> Mark J. Valencia and Jon Van Dyke, "Drawing A Line in the Water," *Washington Times*, Jan. 10, 2003

## Conclusion

Despite the large number of worrying possibilities and the numerous North Korean military demonstrations outlined above, the chances of immediate military conflict as a result of the current crisis between the DPRK and the United States are low. There is little political support for U.S. military action within the new South Korean government, and the United States has several times downplayed talk of military action. If Washington were to decide military action is necessary, U.S. officials would face the challenge of convincing their South Korean counterparts – while also contending with the requirements of troops in Iraq, which have drawn off great amounts of the personnel and material most critical for military action on the Korean Peninsula. Furthermore, there is the question of the DPRK's likely possession of nuclear weapons.

Given its restraint from major overt military action in the last decades, as well as the amount of international attention the United States is trying to force onto the issue, the DPRK is unlikely to initiate military action itself.

This leaves the United States in the unfortunate position of trying to determine the point at which military action must be initiated to protect what it has decided are its fundamental national interests. Currently, it seems that the United States is unwilling to use military force to stop the DPRK from its chosen path toward a nuclear capability.

The United States is seeking a diplomatic solution and talks have barely begun. The consensus view is that a negotiated solution that severely limits, if not completely dismantles, the North Korean nuclear program remains possible.

*If that opinion changes, precision strikes are the most likely U.S. military action, designed to destroy selected DPRK weapons or weapon production facilities.* However, if a wider war is to be avoided, these strikes will have to be very carefully planned and diplomatically coordinated; even then, the likelihood of escalation is high.

The better solution to the current crisis clearly involves negotiating and implementing an agreement that would remove the North Korean threat to South Korea and the wider region, while supplying the DPRK with substantial energy and food assistance. All nuclear programs would need to be ended and verifiably eliminated, as well as missile sales. North Korean conventional forces would also need to be cut. In return, fuel, as well as economic and development aid, would flow into the DPRK. Such an agreement would hold open the door to potential reforms in the longer term. However, the current U.S. administration construes the current situation as North Korean nuclear 'blackmail,' and is demanding that North Korea give up its nuclear weapon program before any deal of any sort is struck.

Looking beyond the present crisis, it is apparent that if the current political situation between the two Koreas, it will be high time for the United States to change its forward deployed military posture. If war began tomorrow, the allied military commander in chief in Korea would be an

American four-star general, despite the fact that the United States supplies only 37,000 troops to the 686,000 of the South Korea Armed Forces. The 2nd Infantry Division, while a potent force, is now hardly needed, with the Republic of Korea Army numbering a well-equipped 560,000. A smaller force, comprising primarily air capabilities the South mostly lacks – Special Operations forces, airborne battle management, air refueling, UAV reconnaissance – under a lower ranking officer would better suit the situation, giving South Koreans military command in a crisis. This would more appropriately address South Korea’s defensive needs, political sensibilities over command and the stationing of U.S. ground troops, and would free roughly a tenth of America’s Army fighting forces for other missions.

U.S. decision-makers face very difficult territory ahead. As this report has described, war on the Korean Peninsula would likely mean hundreds of thousands killed and enormous damage. It must be avoided if at all possible. A negotiated solution should be sought, and be pressed upon the North’s government by all the means available.

*Colin Robinson*  
*CDI Research Analyst*  
*crobinson@cdi.org*

*Rear Adm. (Ret.) Stephen H. Baker*  
*Senior Fellow*  
*Center for Defense Information*