

**WHO IS STRONGER?
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON THE READINESS
AND CAPABILITIES OF THE NORTH
AND SOUTH KOREAN MILITARIES**

Bruce Bechtol Jr.

This paper reports the results of a methodology that conducts an analysis on the readiness and capabilities of the two Korean militaries. The methodology uses a framework for analysis that compares and contrasts key factors that evaluate the effectiveness of militaries and the governments that support them. This methodology was used to reach an assessment on which military - North or South Korea - is most likely to win in a force on force conflict. Results of the analysis suggest that the South Korean military is far more ready to conduct a successful large-scale conflict than the military of North Korea. In addition, regarding readiness and capabilities for using weapons of mass destruction, analysis results suggest that the strength of the US-ROK alliance makes it unlikely that Pyongyang would ever attempt to use these weapons during a conflict.

Introduction

Korea is a country many Americans are hearing more and more about in the press and one that few understand. The cold war ended in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet empire, but many of the formulations of that empire still remain and continue to threaten the security of United States interests abroad. In Asia, the key remnant of those bad old days is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.¹

The U.S. foreign policy, national security and defense communities are faced with an interesting dilemma. Looking at North Korea, we see what most defense analysts will agree is the world's fifth largest military.² In fact, as articulated in the November 1999 *Report to the Speaker. U.S. House of Representatives by the North Korean Advisory Group*, and shown as a graphic on page two, this military has not decreased in size at all in an era of shrinking militaries all over the world.³ Dove-tailed with that is the fact that the North Korean economy has been a basket case for at least seven years and the government is dependent on foreign aid just for survival.

The threat of war on the Korean peninsula remains a legitimate, albeit unlikely prospect. North Korea remains a formidable enemy capable of wielding significant military might, yet one, which stands alone, and would probably lose a war fought with the U.S. and Korea in every possible scenario envisioned by the ROK and U.S. planners.⁴

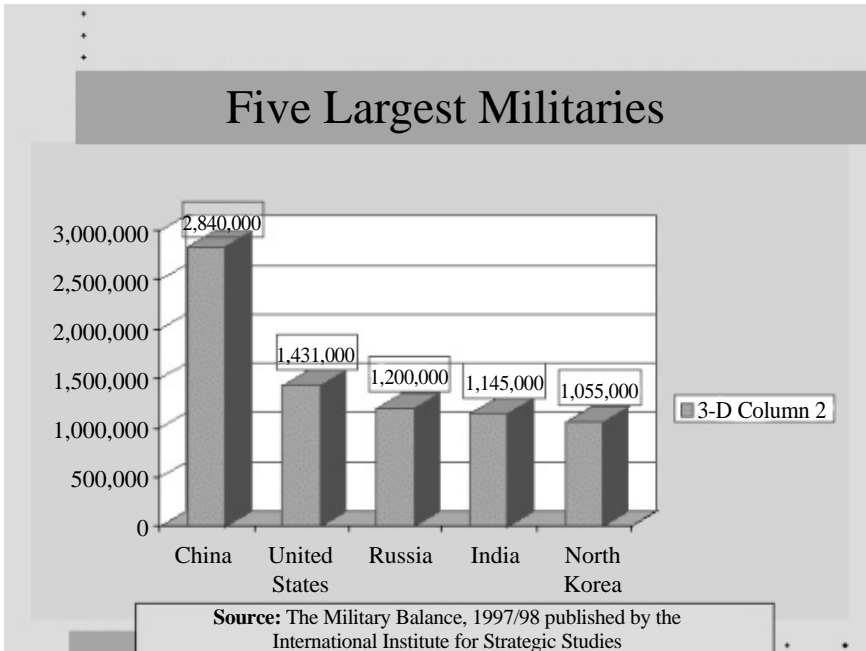
1 Edward A. Olsen, "The End of the Cold War and Northeast Asia Security," *Change, Interdependence and Security in the Pacific Basin*, Dora Alves (ed.) (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1991), pp. 188-189.

2 Edward A. Olsen, *The Military Balance 1997/98*, The Institute for National Strategic Studies (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1999), p. 27.

3 US Congress, North Korean Advisory Group, *Report to the House of Representatives*, 107th Cong, 2nd session, Washington DC, October 29, 1999.

4 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. 147.

Graph One



This issue is one which will be important to the security of all of Northeast Asia well into the 21st century. The implications of a resolved or unresolved conflict on the Korean peninsula have an effect on not only the militaries of all the nations in Northeast Asia, but on the economies and social structures as well. This paper will attempt to offer an outline that will show why the situation there is changing and what the ultimate results will be.

Background

There have been many books written on the subject of just how dangerous the North Korean threat is. This is a subject which has been

debated among policy makers, academics and defense analysts since the end of the Korean war in 1953. To exacerbate the process, the condition of both the North and South Korean militaries has been in a constant state of flux since the end of the Korean war. In addition, the political and international situations relating to the two Koreas have also been constantly changing. A key example of the ongoing debate relating to the North Korean threat is the controversy that occurred in the late 1970s. In 1976, one of the components of Jimmy Carter's campaign was the promise to begin troop withdrawing from the Korean peninsula. Despite objections from South Korea, military leaders and intelligence analysts at the Defense Intelligence Agency (among others), President Carter was determined to move troops off the peninsula. Eventually, Congress and public opinion held Carter back. Strong evidence existed that the North Korean military of the time was both qualitatively and quantitatively superior to that of the South. By the time Carter's presidency had ended, less than one battalion had been pulled out of Korea.⁵

The above example illustrates a something very important about the role of the two Korean militaries. Not only are the readiness and capabilities of the two militaries important, but the perceptions held on both sides of the Pacific, by all countries with national security interests on the Korean peninsula, are key as well.

The goal of this paper will be to conduct an examination of the readiness and capabilities of the two Korean militaries. Two key goals will be to compare and contrast the two militaries, and to reach an assessment on which military is most likely to win a large-scale conflict. At the conclusion of the paper, hopefully, the reader will have a solid understanding of the factors that are important to making a military effective and ready to go to combat, the role the government plays

5 William E. Berry Jr., *The Invitation to Struggle: Executive and Legislative Competition over the Military Presence on the Korean Peninsula*, Strategic Studies Institute Monograph (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, 1996), pp. 8-12.

in that readiness, and how these two militaries stack up against one another.

Method

The method is based on a model developed the Defense Intelligence Agency. This methodology was originally used to evaluate the effectiveness of insurgent movements against governments in Latin America but was considered to be such a sound, simple and effective one, which began to be used in other areas throughout the Defense Intelligence Agency.⁶ The model is now utilized as a lecture at conferences and symposia throughout the intelligence and military analysis communities. Instead of using this model to compare insurgencies to government forces, I will use it to analyze, compare and contrast the two Korean militaries.

The State

Political History - Political Culture - Social Geography - Ethnic Groups

The Threat

Political Roots - History - Leadership

Goals and Objectives - Capabilities

The Military: Preparation for War

The Soldier - The Leaders - Training

Organization, Equipment and Resources

Execution of War

National Will - National Military Strategy

Levels of War

Strategic Level-Operational Level-Tactical Level

6 Defense Intelligence Agency, "*Irregular Warfare Analysis: A Methodology*," lecture presented at the Interagency Military Analysis Course (Langley, VA), March 21, 1999.

The data used in this examination will be based on information obtained through conference and symposium attendance, analysis of speeches, press releases and press conferences, U.S. and South Korean government reports, white papers, legislative testimony, and the study of papers, reports and special releases by important think tanks, government agencies, public policy institutes and important universities. This model is used with the expressed written consent of the Defense Intelligence Agency. An outline of the model that will be used is presented above.

Before one can examine the military itself in detail, an examination of the supporting establishment must be made. Thus, it is important to understand the political history and political culture behind the military of the two countries being compared and contrasted. Social geography and ethnic groups are always an important part of any examination of *the state*. Korea is no exception. The social geography and the ethnicity of the two Koreas will be examined as it relates to the radically different political cultures and political histories of the two countries and how that applies to the readiness and capabilities of the forces they field.

The threat will be examined once again beginning with political roots, and then moving into the history of the military being examined. Nearly every war ever fought has proved that the leadership at all levels of an army is in many ways its most important asset. Political leadership as it relates to military leadership will be examined in this portion of the model. Goals and objectives of both North and South Korea will also be examined. How well the capabilities of the leadership in these two countries function, or the *national will*, relating to military capabilities will also be examined in this portion of the model.

Preparation for war is something that has been ongoing in Korea for 48 years now. The war has been over for that long, so analysts focus on the military preparations for war of the two Koreas. In this portion of the model, I will examine the troops, the military leaders and the train-

ing that the two militaries have undergone in the 1990s. I will also compare and contrast the organization, equipment and resources of the two Koreas since it impacts heavily on the readiness and capabilities.

The ability of the two militaries in Korea to *execute a war* will be examined from two perspectives. The first perspective will be national will. How capable is the government and the people of each country of executing a war? How strongly does the government control the ability in each country to fully mobilize in case of war? Will a war or a smaller violent action cause stability problems for the governments in these two countries? These are key questions that address issues important to national will, and will be addressed in the methodology utilized to examine the militaries of the two Koreas. National military strategy is also a key component of the execution of war. How has the national military strategy of the two Koreas changed in the 1990s? How do the two national military strategies differ? How realistic are the two national military strategies? Finally, do the publicly announced military strategies (based on data that will be examined and analyzed) differ from what the assessed real national military strategies are? These issues will be examined in a careful manner.

Finally, the readiness and capabilities of the two Korean militaries will be examined as it relates to their ability to carry out actual combat operations at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. High level exercises will be compared and contrasted at the operational level along with other data to determine the readiness and capabilities. At the strategic level, information available on planning, support and logistical concerns will be examined to analyze and compare the two militaries. Finally, at the tactical level, recent events involving violent clashes between the two forces and their tactical units will be examined and analyzed to determine their current readiness and capabilities.

Results of the Study

The results of the methodology will be shown below. These results will show what came of a detailed examination that evaluated the forces' capabilities and readiness of North and South Korea, using the model shown and described earlier. By comparing and contrasting the two militaries using the model, I was able to make an assessment on which one was most capable of winning a second war between Pyongyang and Seoul.

The State

Because Korea is really one nation split into two pieces, the political history and culture, the social geography and the ethnic groups will be looked at in this model only since 1945. For the purposes of this study, an examination of the items mentioned earlier in this paragraph will occur - from 1945 until the writing of this dissertation.

Korea was really "on the back-burner" during Allied talks that occurred during World War II. At the Cairo summit, Roosevelt, Churchill and Chaing Kai-shek were present - and not Stalin, because the USSR was not yet officially at war with Japan. It was at these talks that Roosevelt suggested (and the others agreed) that a "free and independent" Korea should come into existence after a "short time period" during which the four super powers would run the country in a trusteeship.⁷ There was little talk of Korea after that, even when it became obvious that it would be a free state following the defeat of the Japanese. When the Soviet Union finally officially declared war against Japan in the summer of 1945, two junior officers (for the task they were given) were assigned the task of demarcating US and Soviet occupa-

7 Robert Schaeffer, *Warpaths: The Politics of Partition* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), pp. 121-122.

tion zones, Colonels Charles Bonesteel and Dean Rusk. The two men hastily divided the country into two roughly even parts, split at the 38th parallel, with the capital in Seoul.⁸ The boundary remained until the eruption of the Korean War and then became the boundary again following the end of that conflict.

The political history and culture of the two Koreas become a very polarized thing at the point of history where they become dominated by two separate and completely different types of governments - the North by the USSR and the South by the US. This has led to a political culture that continues to be dominated by a Korean hybrid version of the "Communist Paradise" known as "Chuje" (self-reliance) in the North, which continues even after the demise of the Iron Curtain.⁹ In Seoul, the eventual result (after several military dominated dictatorships) has turned out to be a democratic capitalist society and political culture in the South.¹⁰

While the political history and culture have been significantly different between the two Koreas since 1945, they have remained relatively unaffected by social geography or ethnic groups. The Korean people have remained as they were for thousands of years before the artificial partition of the country in 1945 - a nation (albeit artificially divided) of one ethnic group, relatively unchanged culturally by social geography or an influx of other ethnic groups into their culture.¹¹

8 John Sullivan, *Two Koreas: One Future?* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1987), p. 7.

9 *op. cit.*, North Korean Advisory Group, *Report to the House of Representatives*, p. 51.

10 Chon, Shi-yong, "Chong Wa Dae Aide Defends Kim's Remarks on Kim Jong-il," *Korea Herald*, 15 Feb., 2000, Sec B7.

11 David S. Maxwell, *Catastrophic Collapse of North Korea: Implications for the United States Military* (Fort Leavenworth Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and Staff College, 1996), p. 16.

The Threat

The threat, as used in this model, is comprised of political roots, history, leadership goals and objectives, and capabilities. As articulated earlier, the political roots of the government in North Korea are Stalinist Communism. The leadership has not changed since 1945, though Kim Jong-il has some style differences from his father that will be addressed later. The goals and objectives of the regime in Pyongyang now appear to have changed since they proved in 1950 that their ultimate goal was reunification of the peninsula. Evidence now suggests that North Korea's ultimate goal is simply regime survival. The government in Pyongyang apparently believes that its food crisis can and will be solved by international aid. Meanwhile, Pyongyang strives to obtain economic assistance without giving up its ability to control domestic stability.¹²

The capability of the government in Pyongyang to exercise control now appears to be strongly rooted in the military. The enhanced status of the military was highlighted by the results of the 10th Supreme Peoples Assembly held in September of 1998. At that session, three things came out that were very important¹³:

- The National Defense Commission (with Kim Jong-il as Chairman) became the declared, highest policy making organization in the country, replacing the Politburo and making its Chairman the real leader of the country;
- Out of 687 delegates elected to the Supreme Peoples Assembly, 101 were military officials, a huge jump from the 57 elected in 1990 and the highest in the country's history;

12 National Security Affairs Conference, *Summary of the International Game '98 Conference* (Honolulu, HI: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies), 27-30 April, 1998, p. 2.

13 Choi, Jinwook, *Changing Relations Between Party, Military, and Their Impact on Policy Direction*, an Asia/Pacific Research Center Paper (Asia/Pacific Research Center, Stanford University: July 1999), pp. 7-8.

- All 10 National Defense Commission members were ranked within the top 20 of the Supreme Peoples Assembly, making military members the de facto leaders at the highest levels of government in North Korea.

This shows a move in style from that of his father. Kim Jong-il likely feels that his only reliable power base is many officers he has promoted personally in the military, the long time vice party members who came to power under his father. These military officers now dominate the power structure at all levels in North Korea and are assessed to be the dominant force running the country - making many of the party functions nothing more than rubber stamp activities.¹⁴

Further evidence that the capability of the government in Pyongyang is exercised through the military is seen when examining the two-day meeting of the political officers of the Peoples Army held on February 26, 2000. The meeting was attended by all the top army leaders including Cho Myong-rok, first vice chairman of the National Defense Commission mentioned earlier. Kim Jong-il's role as leader of the military was emphasized, but very interestingly, there was also emphasis on a "decisive improvement" in the army servicemen's relations with government officials and civilians.¹⁵ This move may indicate that Kim has goals of continuing to use the military as his power base, but wants other powerful entities in the country to be placated, thus the desire to have the military "get along" with civilians.

The government in South Korea could not be more different than the one described in Pyongyang. Kim Dae-jung is now the third President freely elected by the people. The political roots in the system now running South Korea were democratic - though the US encouraged military strongmen into running the country from 1945 until the first

14 Bureau of Asian Research, *North Korea's Most Influential Leaders* (Washington DC: The Bureau of Asian Research, 1998), pp. 1-14.

15 "Meeting of Army Political Officers Focuses on Loyalty to Kim Jong-il," *Yonhap News Agency*, No. 75, Section One, 2 March, 2000.

real election took place in 1988, when Roh Tae-woo was elected President. The capitalist values inherent in a free market system eventually took hold and the country now stands as arguably the most democratic in all of Northeast Asia.¹⁶

In his address to the country in 1998, Kim Dae-jung stated that the goals and objectives of his government were as follows¹⁷:

- Establishing two-way political communication between the people and the government by achieving a great transformation from authoritarian rule to participatory democracy;
- Doing the utmost in undertaking structural reform to enhance the market mechanism in the economy by eliminating government controls;
- Establishing a new value system based on universalism and globalism, shedding the self-righteous nationalism and anachronistic ideas;
- Reinventing the economic system to build a knowledge and information based economy;
- Understanding that historic crossroads existed where a constructive labor-management relationship conducive to a new age of harmony and cooperation must occur;
- A promotion of a new relationship of exchanges and cooperation between the South and North based on a firm national security posture, overcoming the 50 year confrontation on the Korean peninsula.

These goals and objectives contrast with those of the North Korean

16 John A. Wickham, *Korea on the Brink: From the 12/12 Incident to the Kwangju Uprising* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1999), pp. 176-188.

17 Kim Dae Jung, "Let Us Open a New Era: Overcoming National Crisis and Taking A New Leap Forward," Inaugural address by President Kim Dae Jung, Seoul, Korea, 25 February, 1998.

government. The goals of that government continue to be regime survival (mixed with occasional paranoid bursts of brinkmanship). Seoul appears ready and willing to take the lead in moving the peninsula peacefully closer together. The capability of Kim's government to carry out his goals and to run the country is very similar to that of the President of the United States. It is limited by his ability to manipulate the senior legislative body in his country through the power of his political party, and by his ability to move the people through popular initiatives brought forth from the "bully pulpit."

Kim's leadership goals and objectives - and the way he carries them out, are likely often confusing to Pyongyang. In the first four years of his Presidency, Kim met with both allies and adversaries of Pyongyang, easing tension and promoting engagement between Northeast Asia. This has reduced Pyongyang's ability to divide its neighbors, and has given Kim's policy of engagement and the popularity that gives him the capability to carry it out an important boost in South Korea.¹⁸ Finally, Kim's capability and the government of South Korea to carry out its policy are strengthened by the fact that any serious debate about the US military presence in Korea has subsided since the early 1990s, much of it because of the brinkmanship Pyongyang has engaged in.¹⁹

The Military: Preparation for War

The two militaries on the Korean peninsula have been preparing for war since the last war ended in 1953. In the model I am using, the role of the soldier, his leaders and the training, organization equipment and resources of the two militaries will be examined in order to make an assessment. The North Korean military is quantitatively superior to that of the South in every aspect. North Korea has 930,000 men in its

18 Independent Task Force Report. U.S. Policy Toward North Korea: A Second Look, *Council on Foreign Relations* (Washington DC: February 2000), pp. 8-11.

19 *op. cit.*, Berry, p. 7.

army compared to 575,000 for the South. The North's air force numbers 82,000 personnel compared to 53,000 in the South. And the navy number is 60,000 to 46,000.²⁰

In the case of these two countries, this is a time where truly "size does not matter." While the North has an advantage in tanks (3,700 to 1,900), armored personnel carriers (3,500 to 2,300), self-propelled artillery (4,500 to 900), aircraft (770 to 447) and naval surface forces (based on higher numbers of personnel), the South is qualitatively far superior to the North.²¹ The North has been unable to make any significant improvements to its armed forces since the collapse of the Soviet Union. China, Pyongyang's primary benefactor since that time, has done very little to help North Korea militarily since the late 1980s.²² In sharp contrast, South Korea has updated its modern force by building and importing new F-16's, modern tanks, new and modern fighting ships, attack and transport helicopters, and other innovations.²³ In a news release issued in early October of 1999, the Ministry of National Defense also addressed the issues of leadership, training, organization and equipment. In the document, it was stated that the North Korean army "lacks in the ability to run a battle compared to the South Korean army, in physical build, national strength, and combined defense preparedness."²⁴ This is significant because it is the first time since the end of the Korean War that the South Korean Ministry of National Defense has stated publicly that they are more ready to fight than the

20 Library of Congress, *North Korea: A Country Study*, Library of Congress web page, www.lcweb.gov, 1993, pp. 10-12.

21 William Drennan and James Goodby, *Koreapolitik (Strategic Forum Paper 29)*, Institute For National Strategic Studies, Washington DC: 1995), p. 2.

22 Karl W. Eikenberry, *Explaining and Influencing Chinese Arms Transfers (McNair Paper 36)*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, Washington DC: 1995), p. 12.

23 The Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, *Mid-Term Defense Program and 1999 Defense Budget* (Office of the Defense Minister, Seoul, Korea: 1999), p. 3.

24 Yoo, Yong-won, "MND Says the ROK Army Stronger than NK," *Chosun Ilbo*, 13 October, 1999, Sec. A4.

adversary they face to the North. The military problem that North Korea faces when confronting a qualitatively superior force such as the one manned by South Korea is exacerbated by the fact that the Soviet Union no longer exists and as mentioned earlier, Communist China has edged closer to South Korea diplomatically since the early 1990s. In sharp contrast to the fact that the South Korea-US alliance is as rock solid as ever, the South Korea-US Combined Forces Command has been called “the most effective alliance in the world.”²⁵

The recently announced and publicly acknowledged superiority of the South Korean military can be best summed up when examining the battle of the Northern Limit Line that occurred between North and South Korean ships in June of 1999. During the battle, the South Korean navy, though outnumbered, showed superior command and control, training and technological capabilities. In the words of a South Korean naval officer who was on the scene,

The DPRK ships could not fire their larger cannons; they could not even aim at a fast moving ROK ships because their guns, like WW II-era ground artillery, were manually operated, compared with the radar-targeted, computer operated guns of the ROK naval ships. You could see North Korean sailors exposed on the deck, because they had to handle the guns manually, while our sailors were inside watching radar screens and computer monitors.²⁶

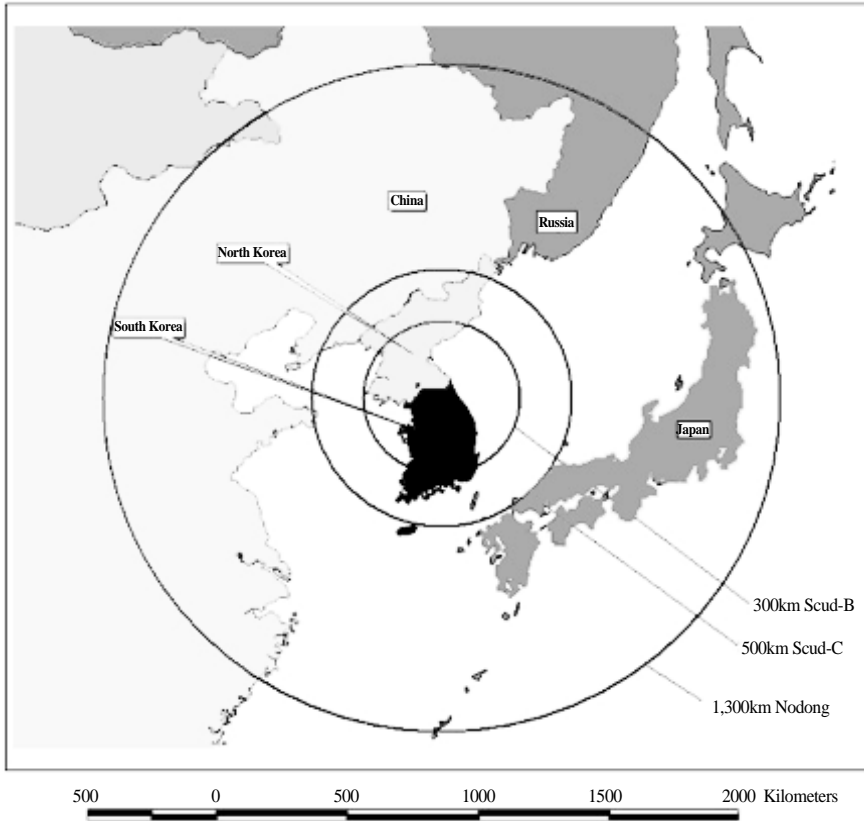
Despite the decline in North Korea’s conventional capabilities, Pyongyang still maintains the ability to threaten South Korea with unconventional weapons, particularly (when speaking of threats for just the Korean peninsula) chemical and biological weapons. According to recent reports, North Korea may have stockpiled as much as 5,000 tons of chemical and biological weapons. South Korea has initiat-

25 Conference Report: International Workshop on the ROK-US Alliance, 11 March, 1996 (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1996), p. 10.

26 Lee, Sung-yol, “Antique North Korean Naval Boats No Match for South’s New Warships,” *Korea Herald*, Section A1, 7 July, 1999.

Graph Two

North Korean Short and Medium Range Missile Capabilities
(Launched from areas near the demilitarized zone)



Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division
October 1999

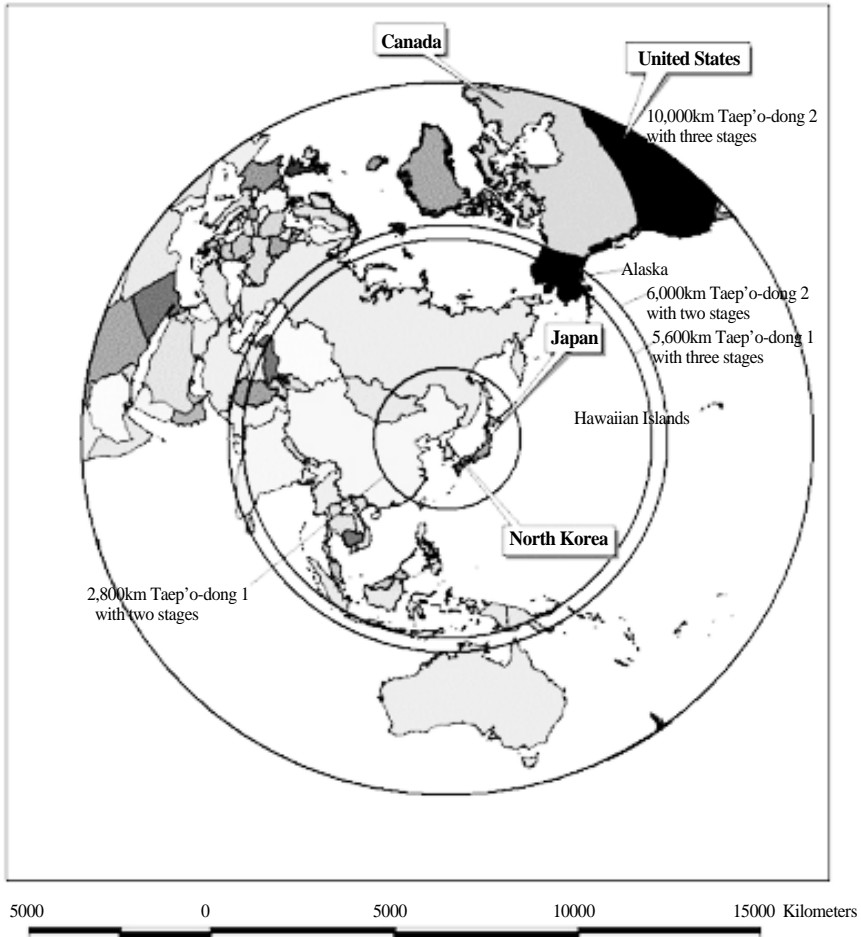
* Projection Point

ed a five-year \$300 million program to counter the threat.²⁷ But there is more that North Korea can do to threaten South Korea, and ultimately all of Northeast Asia - missiles.²⁸

27 Michael Baker, "Despite Appearances, North Korea Still a Security Concern," *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 December, 1999, p. 1.

Graph Three

Potential North Korean Long-Range Missile Capabilities



Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division
October 1999

As shown on the graphs contained on the two previous pages,

28 *op. cit.*, North Korea Advisory Group, Report to the House of Representatives, pp. 24-33.

North Korea has the capability of hitting targets all over Asia, and perhaps even the United States. This capability is the wrench thrown in the works of the evaluation of the two militaries on the Korean peninsula. While the North is sadly deficient in being able to fight the South with conventional forces, clearly, weapons of mass destruction bypass all other factors in many ways. I will address the effect they have on the capabilities and readiness of the two militaries to fight when I discuss levels of war later in this section.

Execution of War

Execution of war as addressed using this methodology will examine the national will and the national military strategy. The primary objective of the North remains regime survival. The government there now appears to be using all means at its disposal to hang on, striving to obtain international assistance without giving up its ability to control domestic stability. The national military strategy of Kim Dae-jung and the South Korean government as articulated in references addressed earlier can best be described as “containment with a release valve.” At a recent war game set in the 2001 on the Korean peninsula, this had not changed. In fact, the South Korean players in the war game articulated South Korean national strategy in the scenario as follows: “South Korea’s national strategy was to emphasize the notion that comprehensive security must include political, economic, and cultural issues to be effective, the importance of maintaining a strong US-Korea alliance, and the importance of outside forces in facilitating inter-Korean dialogue. South Korea underscored throughout the simulation that ultimately, peace must be reached through direct interaction between the North and South. Unlike other countries, South Korea’s approach was not focused on reconciliation *per se*, but prevention of war or implosion.”²⁹

Given the evidence described above, it appears that North Korea's stated strategy of violent reunification of the peninsula is a facade. Further, Kim Jong-il seems to be using his large, outdated military for survival, not conquest. Thus, he continues to have a "military first" commitment to ensure both internal and external security and maximize Pyongyang's leverage for dealing with the United States and South Korea.³⁰ Given the national strategies of the two Koreas, the evidence suggests that another war on the peninsula would serve the interests of neither country. It would likely mean the end of North Korea as a country, and it would mean countless civilian and military casualties for the South.³¹

Levels of War

For the purposes of this methodology and of the United States national security strategy, I will address the capabilities of the two Koreas at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. As addressed earlier, North Korea has weapons of mass destruction. One of the key concerns for South Korean leaders is the threat of chemical attack by North Korea during war. But just how much of a threat are those chemical weapons? According to respected scholar Michael O'Hanlon, not as bad as it would seem on the surface. He states,

South Korea could lose some troops in the very early stages of a chemical attack, if they were surprised. But most troops keep their

29 *op. cit.*, National Security Affairs Conference, *Summary of the International Game '98 Conference*, p. 3.

30 Kim Jong-il's "military first revolutionary leadership" is described in detail in the 1 January 1999 editorial issued jointly by the ruling party, the Peoples Army and the Youth League. It was broadcast and released on the Internet on "Pyongyang, Korean Central Broadcasting Network" in Korean from Japan on January 1, 1999.

31 *op. cit.*, North Korea Advisory Group, *Report to the House of Representatives*, p. 5.

masks nearby at all times. Even if nothing else did, the flight of artillery shells (the preferred method of use for chemical weapons) would provide a reasonable amount of initial warning. On the whole, the chemical threat against frontline dig-in troops appears modest in magnitude.³²

The threat of chemical weapons (and of biological ones as well) is still significant. The civilian populace would likely not fare as well as frontline South Korean troops. Nevertheless, the threat would likely be done away with quickly and would probably not affect the outcome of a war. The threat of medium and long-range missiles is a different matter. After the testing of the Taepo-Dong 1 in 1998, Kim Dae-jung proposed talks to serve as a “useful channel for inter-Korean dialogue.”³³ As shown on the charts earlier in this chapter, these missiles can now threaten all of Korea and Asia, as well as parts of the United States. The likelihood of these missiles ever being used is remote at best. Rather, the evidence suggests that Pyongyang will use them as a bargaining tool to gain more concessions from the US, Japan and South Korea, as evidenced by actions taken since 1998.

The operational level of war really involves the movement and coordination (known as command and control or “C2”) of forces at the corps and division level. At this level, South Korea is fully integrated with US forces and uses modern C2 systems rivaled only by Japan in Asia. On the other hand, North Korea has done nothing to advance its C2 since the mid 1980s. It therefore is likely that North Korea’s C2 would suffer a similar fate as the C2 networks of Iraq and Serbia respectively at the operational level of combat.

The lack of training, antiquation of equipment and poor resources mentioned earlier would all have an adverse effect on North Korean forces at the tactical level in combat. The Northern Limit Line battle discussed earlier is probably just a small piece of a much larger picture.

32 *op. cit.*, O’Hanlon, p. 165.

33 “S. Korea Proposes New Dialogue with N. Korea,” *Reuters*, 14 August, 1999.

The inferior systems and training the North exhibited during the battle are seen throughout the North Korean military. Thus, the quality of the South Korean tactical forces would likely defeat the quantitatively superior yet poorly trained and equipped North Korean tactical forces.

Conclusions on the Readiness and Capabilities of the Korean Militaries

The examination I made of the two North Korean militaries and their ability to go to war provided me with what I consider to be a strong assessment of the ability these two countries have to fight each other. As shown earlier, the North Korean military is one that is using antiquated 1950s and 1960s vintage weapons while the South Korean military continues to strengthen itself with dynamic new programs such as the building of brand new F-16s.³⁴ In addition, the South is superior in other key aspects of military readiness, such as command and control and training. Dr. William Perry, when filing his report on Findings and Policy Recommendations regarding North Korea in 1999, said, "The United States and its allies would swiftly and surely win a second war on the Korean peninsula, but the destruction of life and property would far surpass anything in recent American experience."³⁵ Clearly, it is now obvious to most observers based on evidence provided by both South Korean and American sources that the South Korean military is the superior one on the Korean peninsula.

An interesting development since the fall of 1999 has been the fact

34 Choe, Seung-chul, "KAI Delivers KF-16 2000; Fighter Jet Force to Air Force," *Korea Herald*, Section B3, April 20, 2000.

35 William J. Perry, *Review of United States Policy Toward North Korea: Findings And Recommendations*, Unclassified Report by Dr. Perry, U.S. North Korean Policy Coordinator and Special Advisor to the President and Secretary of State (Washington DC: United States Department of State, 12 October, 1999), p. 5.

that the North Korean military, while dealing with the South Koreans on the diplomatic front, has made moves attempting to slow the decline in readiness and capabilities which have been ongoing since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The purchase of 40 MiG-21 fighters in 1999, and a reorganization of existing forces which has put a higher number of long-range artillery pieces and multiple rocket launchers along the DMZ, coupled with an increase in training between 1999 and 2000, shows that Pyongyang is not yet willing to give up the façade of a military that can be used as a bargaining tool with Seoul and Washington.³⁶ The actions taken since 1999, while not being trivial, do nothing to raise any real capabilities of the North Korean military. Though the United States still considers North Korea as a main threat to stability and security in Northeast Asia, Pyongyang is still assessed to place regime survival as its main goal, using the “military first” policy as a means to retain the government currently in power rather than building towards any kind of violent means to unify the peninsula.³⁷

Despite all of the facts discussed above, both South Korea and the United States remain fully dedicated to a continuing policy of a strong US military presence on the Korean peninsula. I would make the argument that this presence is more for stability in Northeast Asia than it is to prevent the South from being conquered by the North. The methodology I used to determine the readiness and capabilities of the two militaries strongly infers that the South is superior in every military way - except strategic weapons of mass destruction. As long as there is a strong US military presence on the Korean peninsula - one which is willing to sacrifice the blood of its men and women to fight for important national security interests, North Korea is probably very

36 “N. Korea Boosts Border Defences,” *BBC World News*, London, England Broadcast, 4 December, 2000.

37 Department of Defense, “2000 Report to Congress: Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula,” *Report by the Secretary of Defense* (Washington DC: Department of Defense), 12 September, 2000.

unlikely to use any of these weapons. To do so would likely mean the end of North Korea as an independent nation in the resulting war. Thus, the impact of the strong bi-lateral relationship between South Korea and the US has an impact on the readiness and capabilities of the two militaries. Maintaining these weapons of mass destruction is the only way Pyongyang feels they have an edge, and yet, this factor keeps the conventional forces' readiness and capabilities of UN forces at a high level.

The strength of the South Korean military may also be a factor in relationships with Japan, Russia and North Korea. Russia is now closer in many ways to South Korea than to the North. South Korea that is strong both economically and militarily offers a potential market for weapons. In Japan, a strengthened South Korean military means that they now often come into bi-lateral relationships perceived as an equal. For North Korea, it is in Pyongyang's best interest to play down military confrontation in an environment where high-ranking South Korean military officials are now publicly discussing the weaknesses of the North Korean military.

Alternative Futures for North Korea

I have shown, based on a detailed methodology, that the South Korean military is decidedly superior to that of the North in all aspects except for a capability to use weapons of mass destruction - a capability they probably do not need since their number one ally (the United States) already possesses that capability. Since it has been shown definitively that the South Korean military is superior, the important question is, what does this mean for the future of North Korea as an independent nation? Because of the fact that most in the policy and academic communities do not feel it is a matter of "if" the two Koreas will be reunited, but "when." The political and military future of North Korea

is very important and now widely discussed. Therefore, it is my goal in this section to examine some alternative futures for North Korea.

It is generally agreed in both the academic and policy communities that there are two basic types of scenarios in which the two Koreas could be united and the economic and military threat problems of North Korea solved. According to a recent paper by William Drennan, recently a fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies, the first would, of course, be a “soft landing,” where Korea is reunited by mutual agreement between the North and South. Implicit in this scenario is that unification results from decisions reached by pragmatic negotiators motivated by a common desire to end the artificial division of the nation. Unfortunately, as Drennan points out, “In Pyongyang, even the prospect of widespread famine has not been enough to induce compromise, with the elite more concerned about their future in a united Korea than they are about the suffering of the people.”³⁸ Clearly, with the leadership currently in power in Pyongyang, a “soft landing” is not an option.

The second scenario for unification is a “hard landing,” one that is generally taken to mean that unification results from the collapse of the Kim Jong-il regime, the Kim Il-song system, and/or the North Korean state, leading to the DPRK’s absorption by the ROK.³⁹ Unfortunately, because of the state of the party elite discussed above, the second scenario, at least for the present time, appears to be far more likely to occur than the first. But it is not quite so simple as these two scenarios, often accepted by policy makers in Washington, would make it seem. It is possible that the Kim Jong-il regime would collapse, or have an internal revolution and the leaders of the overthrown sue the South for peace, in exchange for being “taken care of” when unification is complete. If this were to happen, the power would likely have to come

38 William M Drennan, “Prospects and Implications of Korean Unification,” *Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network Policy Forum Online* 9 (August 22, 1997).

39 *op. cit.*, Drennan, *Koreapolitic*, p. 6.

from a region in North Korea outside of Pyongyang. As Choi Jinwook, a respected political scholar in Seoul pointed out in 1999,

North Korean cadres are often subject to close watch when they meet privately. The higher the cadre's rank, the closer the watch. Thus, high-ranking officials have few friends. North Korea has guarded strictly against factionalism since the consolidation of Kim Il-song's one-man dictatorship. North Koreans are not allowed to organize in any kind of private meeting such as alumni associations and meetings of people from the same hometown, which have traditionally been very popular in Korea. Needless to say, this is to preempt potential oppositions to the regime from growing and being organized. The inevitable result is the rigidity of North Korean decision making.⁴⁰

Due to the assessment of this paper at least for now, the most likely scenario is a "hard landing," and even the second type of hard landing mentioned would be very difficult for North and South Korea. It would likely result in a civil war in North Korea, as the party elite would not want to lose their status, power and prestige. In such a spin of the second scenario, if China were to allow it, South Korea would likely take the lead in stepping in and reuniting the peninsula - supported by UN forces led by the United States. If there is a complete collapse in North Korea (one of the more likely scenarios during a civil war), the ROK is going to have the primary responsibility for returning the peninsula to normalcy. This is likely, because at this stage of time, it would be a time for the government of South Korea not to be " beholden" to any nation.⁴¹ Seoul would likely want that situation because of all the other Northeast Asian national security concerns that would come to a head now when there was finally a unified Korea.

The information discussed above leads us to the question, how would South Korea be able to handle unification? The South Korean

40 *op. cit.*, Choi, Jinwook, p. 10.

41 *op. cit.*, Maxwell, p. 13.

economy is not nearly as powerful as that of West Germany in 1989. Germany suffered many economic hardships following unification. Goldman Sachs, a world leading financial institution, recently reported that if unification were to happen in 2000, it would cost from \$770 billion to \$3.6 trillion for 10 years due to the enormous gaps between the two economies. If Korean unification were to happen in 2005 (a scenario which now appears rather unlikely), it would cost \$3.6 trillion - just in the beginning.⁴² Given the high cost of unification, at least some of the costs would have to be paid on the backs of the US taxpayer. This has never been mentioned in any research, but it is a *fait accompli* in the eyes of the author. The United Nations would also likely pick up some of the tab. Nevertheless, in any of the scenarios discussed above, the cost will be staggering for the South Korean government - both in manpower and economically.

I have already discussed the disastrously high cost for South Korea and the United States if there was a war. Given the fact that based on the evidence articulated in this paper, Pyongyang's main goal of reunification has been replaced by regime survival and a war is extremely unlikely. Instead, the North will continue to use its large conventional army and its growing arsenal of weapons of mass destruction as bargaining chips to gain concessions from the West.

42 Kim, Hyoung-min, "South-North Unification Costs to Reach \$3 Trillion," *Korea Times*, Section B2, 21 April, 2000.