

CAN NORTH KOREAN AIRBORNE SPECIAL PURPOSE FORCES
SUCCESSFULLY CONDUCT MILITARY OPERATIONS
AGAINST THE UNITED STATES AND
SOUTH KOREA?

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by

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ABSTRACT

CAN NORTH KOREAN AIRBORNE SPECIAL PURPOSE FORCES SUCCESSFULLY CONDUCT MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST THE UNITED STATES AND SOUTH KOREA?, by MAJ Samuel M. Allmond, 63 pages.

Lacking the technological resources to compete with Combined Forces Command (CFC) conventional forces, the NKPA has compensated for their technological weaknesses by greatly increasing the number of forward-deployed conventional units, cannon and rocket artillery; and secondly by producing the world's largest SPF. North Korea (NK) has built the world's largest SPF in the world with more than 100,000 men to support surprise attacks to disrupt CFC combat buildup and operations. These elite SPF forces would be employed to create a "two-front war," attacking along US CFC forward line of troops and simultaneously attacking into the CFC rear areas creating a "second front." To facilitate this strategy, NK has dedicated more than 400 fixed and rotary wing aircraft and the world's largest submarine fleet. It is important to note that NK airborne SPF will not act alone; however, when coupled with other NK SPF elements, they constitute a significant component of the NK operational and strategic "second front" effort and will directly impact upon the overall success of the NKPA conventional forces. This thesis will explain *why* and *how* North Korea plans to integrate NK Airborne SPF against CFC Forces. Additionally the research assesses NKPA Airborne SPF training, capabilities, strengths, vulnerabilities, and the *implications* to CFC Forces.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is our supreme task of struggle for the [n]KPA to expel American aggressive forces from the southern half, to liberate our compatriots and to achieve the reunification of Korea.¹

Kulloia

Statement of the Research Question and Significance of Study

In February 2003, after numerous Department of Defense intelligence community assessments and warnings, Combined Forces Command (CFC) military planners announced their plans to revise OPLAN 5027-02 and place a much higher priority on the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) Special Purpose Forces (SPF) threat. To further facilitate the US-ROK counter-SOF efforts, CFC military planners will also assess US and 2nd ROK (SROKA) rear-echelon shortfalls. These CFC operational and rear-area shortfall have long since been identified as a key weakness in the US-ROK counter-SOF effort. In addition, last year, for the first time in over fifty years, the Okinawa Japan based, US 353rd Special Operations Group (SOG) began conducting joint and combined training exercises with South Korea based US and ROK Special Forces elements--Special Operational Command--Korea (SOCKOR). ROK, US and Japanese Special Forces elements along with 2nd ROK Army (SROKA) will have to work closely together to defend against the NK SPF threat.² The recent, sharp rise in political tensions between the United States and NK's President Kim Chung Il (KCI) has catapulted the threat of renewed military conflict and nuclear concerns on the Korean Peninsula into the media forefront.

The unclassified focus of this thesis is: Can North Korean (NK) Airborne and Airmobile Special Purpose Forces (SPF) successfully conduct military operations against the Republic of Korea (ROK), the United States? This analytical research has strategic, operational and tactical analytical value to operational and intelligence senior leaders and their subordinate staff elements. This research is also applicable within such organizations as the Department of Defense's (DOD) Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Pacific Command (PACOM), United Nations Command/Combined Forces Command/United States Forces Korea (UNC/CFC/USFK) and the Second Infantry Division (2ID). The research will specifically focus on *how* and *why* NK airborne special operations units would be employed to support both NK strategic and operational level operations. Based on this extensive research and analytical analysis, the research will assess *how successfully* North Korean (NK) Airborne Special Purpose Forces (SPF) can conduct Military Operations against the CFC Forces and allies.

The research will thoroughly examine and discuss the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) "grand strategy," directly examining the NK "two-front strategy" and the *means* to achieve NK strategic goals and objectives. This research effort will also explore and specifically answer the question *why* the DPRK must rely on military might as their only instrument of power. Finally the research engages the question of *how* the DPRK would likely employ airborne and airmobile NKPA SPF against the ROK and her allies. To answer these questions, the research will thoroughly examine the *NK Airborne and Airmobile SPF threat and capability*. Specifically, it will provide analysis on the NK Airborne SPF unit mission, training regimen, means of employment and capabilities relating the information back to the primary research

question: Can North Korean Airborne and Airmobile Special Purpose Forces (SPF) successfully conduct Military Operations against the ROK and her allies? Finally the research will identify the implications of successful employment of NK airborne and airmobile SPF on CFC forces. One important note, this research effort makes no delineation between NK airborne and airmobile SPF units. No distinction is made because there appears to be no direct or habitual relationship between NK airborne and airmobile SPF units, to any specific fixed-wing aircraft, rotary-wing aircraft elements. Therefore, for the purposes of this research effort, reference to North Korean airborne and airmobile SPF will be collectively identified as NK airborne SPF.

Background

The Special Operation Forces “. . . is the strongest elite force of the entire Korean People's Army and is the unique vanguard force of the Armed Forces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.”

Kim Il-Chong (The Great Leader)

NKPA--North Korean's Instrument of Power

Modern political strategy generally recognizes four instruments of national political power. These instruments of power are: diplomatic, informational, military, and economic, commonly referred to as the DIME. Foreign policy makers generally acknowledge that NK possesses only *one* of the four major recognized instruments of national political power--*military*. NK, both domestically and internationally leverages its military power to maintain regime survival. Understanding this point, establishes the critical concept of *why* NK *must* rely on its military power to achieve its political goals

and objectives. North Korea represents one of the last vestiges of communism and poses a significant threat to stability within Southeast Asia.

On 14 March 2002, General Thomas A. Schwartz then Combatant Commander of United Nations Command (UNC), Combined Forces Command (CFC) and United States Forces Korea (USFK), testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) and presented the USFK “Bigger, Better, Closer and Deadlier” brief. The author had the unique privilege to facilitate General Schwartz by providing intelligence support during the preparation of that testimony. During his testimony, General Schwartz stated:

North Korea has yet to discuss or implement any meaningful confidence-building measures beyond [the] agreement of opening a railroad corridor through the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Seventy percent of the North’s Army--7,000,000 troops, over 8,000 artillery systems and 2,000 tanks--are based within 90 miles of the DMZ and are being reinforced. Without moving any of its more than 12,000 artillery pieces, Pyongyang could sustain up to 500,000 rounds per hour on Combined Forces Command defenses and Seoul for several hours. . . . The North has the world’s third largest ground force with 1 million active-duty soldiers, an air force of more than 1,700, and an 800-ship navy that includes the largest submarine fleet in the world. . . . The North’s special operations forces are the largest in the world with more than 100,000 men. During wartime, these forces would fight on two fronts simultaneously attacking both our forward and rear forces.³

With respect to CFC threat and warning interests, the NKPA posture changes poses a significant challenge to USFK, PACOM and other US Department of Defense and National Intelligence Organizations which provide 72 hour unambiguous threat warning of an impending enemy attack.

General Schwartz’s congressional testimony helped to illustrate that over the past 20 years, in spite of struggling through a nearly collapsed economy, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) has relentlessly continued to restructure, reequip, and redeploy the North Korean People’s Army (NKPA).⁴ These DPRK military

initiatives directly support North Korea's national objectives to: (1) Reunify the Korean peninsula under Communism, (2) apply military force to achieve reunification, and (3) ensure DPRK regime survival. By 1992, the NKPA had increased their army to approximately one million active duty personnel, and as the world witnessed the fall of NK's once powerful ally, the former Soviet Union (FSU); the NKPA diligently continued its initiatives to reposition 10 CORPS, 70 percent of their active duty ground forces, to within ninety miles of the demilitarized zone (DMZ). During this same time-period, the NKPA restructured their Special Purpose Forces (SPF) into the largest special operations force in the world.

“The Two Front War Concept”--DPRK SPF and Their Employment

What exactly is the NK “Two Front War ” concept and how is it defined? Written below is the Department of Defense (DOD) North Korea Country Handbook description of the NK “second front” operations: As the attack against the forward defense along the demilitarized zone (DMZ) begins, DPRK forces will initiate SCUD and FROG Missile attacks with high explosives, smoke and possible nonpersistent chemical warheads against airfields, lines of communication, command and communications (C2) and logistical facilities. Additionally, the DPRK [conventional] attacks will be supported by the opening of a “second front” in the CFC rear areas by teams of SOF units. These soldiers, dressed in ROK army uniforms and carrying ROK weapons and equipment, will infiltrate into the south [South Korea] by air, sea, and through tunnels under the DMZ to attack CFC airfields, command, control and communication (C3) and other key targets.⁵

The late NK founder, Kim Il Chong made the decision to adopt the “two front war” strategy in the mid 1960s. He began to rethink NK military doctrine after several

failed attempts to recruit ROK sympathizers. He decided what he considered “combined arms operations.” However, unlike our U.S. concept of “combined arms,” Kim’s doctrinal concept of combined arms was different. Kim’s concept of “combined arms” meant a combination of conventional operations occurring simultaneously with unconventional or guerrilla warfare attacks. This is the concept behind the NK “second front.” To truly understand the NK “second front” doctrinal concept in correlation to overall strategic and operational objectives, one must understand that, first, Kim Chung Il (KCI) recognizes that his only instrument of power is his strong military to include the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) arsenal. He also fully recognizes ROK and US military technological advantages in comparison to NK. The “second front” doctrinal concept is his operational plan to mitigate those advantages. By employing SPF forces in lieu of a technologically inferior NKAF, KCI hopes to destroy key CFC high pay-off targets and achieve some of the same objectives a strong Air Force would provide. Finally, he fully understands that NK must use the element of *surprise* and concept of *total annihilation* to secure a swift victory. Because economically nor technologically KCI knows, NK cannot afford to sustain a prolonged campaign.

Thus, the NK threat must be taken seriously because KCI recognizes that his NK SPF “second front” effort *must succeed* in order to: (1) Support a technologically inferior conventional force attack, (2) destroy ROK and US military technologies and system capabilities prior to their integration into combat, and (3) to harass, attrite, and destroy CFC forces in the rear and disrupt the CFC military force buildup, the time-phased force and deployment data (TPFFD) flow. As a part of this effort, Japan becomes an important

military target because of the US plans to use Japan as a staging base in preparation for combat on the Korean peninsula.

In the event of a NK attack, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) will face the largest Special Purpose Force in the world. SPF will be employed prior to hostilities.⁶ These units are trained to infiltrate into South Korean rear areas via land, sea, and air to seize or destroy high value targets and to create havoc in the rear ROK-US. This sets the conditions for a successful North Korean Peoples' Army (NKPA) conventional force invasion. NK SPF are also trained to act with extreme violence and ruthlessness, and will use this capability to ensure their conventional forces can maintain the optempo necessary for operational success. Another consideration is that these highly trained airborne forces will likely be employed where less tactically astute US CS and CSS units operate. This is in no way meant to belittle SROKA forces, also operating within these areas. However, while the destruction of NK SPF will be a joint and combined priority, CFC joint and combined efforts will likely not be fully synchronized. This is a potential advantage for the NK SPF success. Estimates as high as 15,000 SPF would likely be air inserted by airborne parachute or air-mobile operations. Air insertion constitutes the second major means of SOF infiltration into the ROK. Thirty percent of the NKAF is dedicated to transporting Airborne SPF into Korea and Japan. The primary airframe to execute this task is the AN-2 Colt. The AN-2 Colt is a 1940s propeller-driven transport plane which has been upgraded with 1970s technology. The AN-2 Colt is difficult to detect by air defense radar because of its canvas body, wooden frame and extremely low heat signature. The AN-2 Colt airframe is capable of carrying 8-12 SPF per aircraft. The Korean People's Air Force (KPAF)

currently has about 300 of these airframes in their inventory, which will enable an initial lift of approximately 3,500 SPF. In addition to the AN-2 Colt, NKAF support air assets include: the MD-500 helicopter, and small numbers of the Mi-2--Hoplite; the Mi-4--Hound; the Mi-8--Colt; the Mi-17--Hip, and the AN-24--Coke. Once inserted, airborne SPF will specifically target U.S./ROK air bases, air defense, C3I assets and targeting for WMD. Additionally, in the recent years, the NKPA has also created a significantly large helicopter force to provide additional airmobile SPF support. This thesis will also assess and evaluate these capabilities, limitations.

Limitations and Delimitations

It is important to acknowledge that NK Airborne SPF, the focus of this thesis, *do not* constitute the total NK SPF threat spectrum. In fact, NK Airborne SPF constitutes only approximately 15 percent of the total estimated NK SPF population. However, from a holistic perspective, NK Airborne SPF *does* comprise the significant SPF strategic and operational level spectrum of operations. Thus, based on research limitations and research time constraints, the focus of this thesis has been narrowed to purposefully focus on *NK Airborne SPF and their employment in operational level and strategic level operations*.

Hence, this research does not include NK Amphibious SPF, a very significant NK maritime threat. Nor will NK SPF Light Infantry Brigades be addressed in the research effort. Light Infantry Brigades are a significant tactical--level threat. NK Light Infantry Brigades are attached to conventional NKPA units and will operate forward of their attached units in the close battle area. Another fascinating point with regard to NK Light Infantry Brigades is that they will be integrated into the battlefield via secret underground

tunnels along the DMZ. An in-depth research effort could be dedicated to the study of either NK SPF Light Infantry Brigades or NK Amphibious SPF, but such a study would constitute a separate research effort. Additionally, research only briefly examines the NKAF fixed-wing lift and NKPA airmobile rotary wing lift capability. This research effort will focus on NKAF and NKPA aviation asset analysis only as it pertains to NK airborne SPF support operations. Discussions of NKAF or NKPA tactical aviation operations are not included. What is thoroughly researched, analytically assessed, and provided are the NK airborne SPF strategic and operational missions, capabilities, training, equipment, limitations and the implications to CFC Forces.

From the Soldier Perspective

Throughout this research effort continually think and refer back to what the researcher identified as the lowest common denominator--the individual NKPA airborne SPF soldier. As the research reveals the national and strategic objectives, training, and tactical capabilities, understand the concepts, but continually refer back to the perspective of the individual airborne soldier. Although all of these factors are relevant, it is not the focus of the individual soldier. The NK airborne soldier does not possess superhuman strength nor any significant technologically advanced capability. Quite the contrary, their mission and purpose are relatively simple. These soldiers utilize simple, low-technological equipment and are deployed by a simple-insertion means. Their objectives are clear-cut and simple: Infiltrate into the objective area wrought with widespread panic, devastation, and confusion; blend in with this frenzied populace; and conduct actions to disrupt and preclude CFC operations. It is even possible that NK airborne SPF elements

could be provided assistance and safe haven by NK clandestine “sleeper agents” believed to be already operating the ROK.

Upon successful infiltration, whether ten NK airborne SPF, a single aircraft load, or ten thousand, their mission remains clear and simple: commence operations to *disrupt and destroy CFC key targets* and to *harass and attrite* CFC forces and their allies. And unlike commander-led conventional forces, these extensively trained SF operatives are trained to operate both in small teams and even individually; they are trained to pick the time and the means to destroy their assigned targets. Once their initial missions are complete, they will likely continue to *pick random targets of opportunity*, and eventually conduct link-up with conventional units operating in the area. In any case, their mission is clear and concise, and they understand the critical importance of *providing intelligence* on areas of perceived CFC strength and vulnerability.

Above all, the airborne SPF will rely on their training, remember their loyalty to father Kim and their country--they will likely fight to the death, because they understand the motherland is at stake. This is the perspective from which to begin to analyze--Can Korean Airborne Special Purpose Forces (SPF) be effective in achieving their objectives in the NK doctrinal two-front war against CFC forces and their allies?

Key Terms and Definitions – See Glossary, p 66.

¹Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., *North Korean Special Forces* (Maryland: Naval Press Institute, March 1998), 2.

²Richard Halloran, “U.S.-South Korean War Plan Targets North’s Commandos,” *The Washington Times*, 25 February 2003, np.

³Jim Lea, “N. Korea’s military is ‘bigger, better, closer and deadlier’ says Gen. Schwartz,” *Stars and Stripes*, 1 April 2001 [article on-line]; available from <http://ww2.pstripes.osd.mil/01/apr01/ed40101b.html>; Internet; accessed 11 August 2002.

⁴ Federation of American Scientists (FAS), “Part 3, Special Operations Forces,” URL: <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/dprk/agency/army.htm>; Internet; accessed on 201737 August 2002.

⁵United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, *North Korea Country Handbook* (Quantico, Virginia: Department of Defense Intelligence Production Program, 1997).

⁶Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., *North Korean Special Forces* (Maryland: Naval Press Institute, March 1998).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The combination of guerilla tactics and modern warfare tactics, and the integration of guerilla activities and people's resistance is intended to mobilize the entire nation, organize all the people into combat forces reinforcing the main standing regular forces and have them strike and annihilate the enemy everywhere. This is an excellent strategic and tactical policy which will make it possible to liberate the whole fatherland.¹

Kim Il Sung

This chapter reviews and highlights critical research literature, introducing the reader to the most pertinent NKPA airborne SPF research data available. While this review does not include all research works cited within the bibliography, the specific material was chosen to extend the reader's baseline of knowledge and to review and integrate the most essential literature relative to NK airborne SPF.

Joseph S. Bermudez's book *North Korean Special Forces* establishes an invaluable unclassified baseline of the relevant NKPA SPF research material. Bermudez, is a world-renowned author and freelance writer, and is considered a leading subject matter expert on Asian political and military issues. In addition to several published works on NK topics, Bermudez writes extensively for Jane's Defense Publications, a long-time, trusted, military reference source within the Department of Defense community. Adding to Bermudez's credibility is the fact that, much of the information provided in *North Korean Special Forces* was derived from previously classified government documents. Although the book provided an outstanding NK SPF reference, numerous classified and unclassified sources were researched to further corroborate the

facts and information within *NK SF*. Additionally, adding to the author's credibility, while conducting the research effort for this thesis, it was discovered that *North Korean Special Forces* and other Bermudez works, are the research cornerstones for several other NKPA related thesis efforts.

What Is the NK Two-Front War Doctrinal Concept?

The book *North Korean Special Forces* provided a solid foundation on the *origin and influences of current NKPA SPF doctrine*. Within the book, *Chapter II* provided the evolution and history of the NK SPF. It *defined and described the current two-front war as a strategy*. As a concept, Kim Il Chong first initiated the two-front war strategy in November 1970. The two most influential countries on NK's SPF doctrine were the Former Soviet Union and to a lesser extent China. Specifically, NK SPF guerrilla tactics were derived from two distinct schools, the Yenan style--Chinese of Mao ZeDong and the Soviet--Caspian style.

Historical research revealed that, at the onset of the Korean War, there was a political split in the NKPA, between followers of Kim Il-Sung and followers of Pak Hon-yong. However, since Kim Il-Sung, with the help of the Soviet Union, eventually sustained power over Pak Hon-yong the NKPA adopted the Soviet or Caspian doctrinal style, based on Kim Il-Sung's personal preference. This became the origin of the NKPA SPF NK guerrilla style. The two-front war doctrine was adopted to mitigate perceived ROK-US military strengths.¹ Bermudez's research information and description of the NK two-front War doctrine provided great depth and background in order to answer this research question. Moreover, it was clearly corroborated by numerous research sources.

¹ Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., *North Korean Special Forces* (Maryland: Naval Press Institute, March 1998).

However *North Korean Special Forces* clearly provided the best information expansion on this research question.

Corroborating research sources included several DOD unclassified intelligence sources to include both of the Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) most widely known NKPA source--*The Foundations for Military Strength*, first published in 1991. Because of its tremendous analytical value to the intelligence community it was updated and republished in 1996 as *The Foundations for Military Strength--Update 1995*. Andrea Savada's *North Korea: A Country Study*, 4th ed., considered the single-source point of reference for NK country study, and the United States Marine Corps, Intelligence Activity, *North Korea Country Handbook*, all resources cited very similar descriptions of the basic concepts of NK two-front war doctrine. The two political-military studies done by RAND Corporation's Charles Wolf, *The Changing Balance: South and North Korean Capabilities for Long-Term Military Competition*, and Norman D. Levin, *Security Trends and the U.S.-ROK. Military Planning in the 1990s*, provided excellent comparative insight on current international political, economic, and military dispositions of the US, the former Soviet Union, China, and several Asian Pacific nations, including South and North Korea. These studies highlighted significant economic and military shifts within the Pacific region that could become variables affecting the decision-process of both Koreas.

Finally, with regards to classified research, there were two especially valuable analytical sources concerning NK two-front war doctrine. The first was an article in DIA's, *Military Intelligence Digest (MID)* entitled *North Korea: Military First Policy* and the National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC), contained in their *Foreign Ground*

Forces Journal entitled “The Origins and Evolution of North Korean Military Strategy,” produced the second article. These two research sources not only *defined* the NK two-front war doctrine, as a means on which North Korea has tailored their armed forces to fight to fulfill specific peninsular goals, but also *provided insight* as to *why* the DPRK must weld and rely on the military its only instrument of power.

What Are the NK Airborne and Airmobile SPF Mission and Capabilities?

Joseph S. Bermudez’s book *North Korean Special Forces* provided invaluable facts, figures, and information that helped to establish the research baseline on NK airborne SPF mission and capabilities. Specifically, Chapter I directly identified NKPA SPF missions and capabilities as well as the NKPA SPF organizational structure and strength. NK airborne SPF infiltration and insertion methods are also outlined in Chapter 1 of NK SPF. Although the information found in *North Korean Special Forces* accounts for a considerable amount of my research effort on NK airborne and airmobile SPF primary mission and capabilities, there were a tremendous number of research resources with which to compare, cross-reference, and check information. Corroborating sources included both of the Defense Intelligence Agency’s (DIA) NKPA sources--*The Foundations for Military Strength*, first published in 1991, and *The Foundations for Military Strength--Update 199--*and the United States Marine Corps, Intelligence Activity, *North Korea Country Handbook*. Additionally, with regard to researching NK capabilities, the websites footnoted below were exceptionally good research sites.²

Surprisingly, almost immediately upon initiating research, it became apparent that the NKPA SPF organizational structure and function greatly differs from that of the United States Special Forces, or the Former Soviet Union--Spetnaz Forces. Therefore,

only loosely analogous comparisons can or should be made. For example, NKPA SPF do not define nor place the same distinctions on airborne or air-assault forces as the US SOF do. John Collins solidified this point in his book, *Green Berets, Seals and Spetnaz: U.S. and Soviet Special Military Operations*. In fact, there are significant differences between US Special Forces and the former Soviet--Spetnaz. Overall, while these organizations maintain some similarities and common threads, but direct analogous comparison between these forces distorts their scope and capabilities. Three solid, comprehensive, classified sources on NKPA SPF included: the Defense Intelligence Agency's *North Korean Force Capabilities Handbook*; the Defense Intelligence Agency's Analytical Review entitled *North Korea (NK) Military Capabilities and Readiness* and *North Korean Denial and Deception: National strategy for Victory in Combat*.

Chapter IV detailed the three primary means of infiltration: (1) *Ground*. As previously mentioned, NK SPF Sniper Brigades would infiltrate via secret DMZ tunnels, and via isolated areas such as mountains and cliffs. (2) *Air*. The focus of this thesis, air constitutes the *second major means of insertion* via 300+ NKAF AN-2 Colts and 300+ NKPA McDonnell Douglas MD-500D/E model helicopters. Both the fixed wing AN-2 Colt airframe, and the rotary wing MD-500 airframe pose a serious threat to CFC air defense detection capabilities. The AN-2 Colt, 1940s technology, primarily constructed of wood and canvas produces a very low heat source that is almost undetectable by radar. While the MD-500D/E is detectable, the airframe was purposefully purchased by the NKPA because it is identical to the ROK MD 500s. The MD-500 will cause CFC ADA a dilemma in determining "friend or foe" aircraft status and in deciding whether to shoot or not to shoot. NKPA airborne and air assault SPF have more than 400 air transport aircraft

and helicopters at their disposal.³ (3) *Sea*. Finally, minisubs and NK amphibious SPF will pose a major naval threat to CFC Naval forces. However, amphibious SPF were not researched in this thesis.

In terms of NKPA SPF training methodology, Chapter IV of the book *North Korean Special Forces* provided detailed, previously classified, information on NKPA SPF political indoctrination methods, SPF training and means of their employment. Specifically, Chapter IV provided excellent research information on individual, unit and specialized airborne SPF training (pp. 61-71). Chapter IV also reveals evidence that, prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, some NKPA SPF operatives were actually trained by Spetnaz Forces. Overall, the chapter introduces the reader to the different types of NK special purpose forces soldiers and delineates their missions, methods and means of employment.

What Are the NK SPF Strengths and Vulnerabilities?

One resource that stands out as a particularly interesting book was *A Peek into North Korea* by Chang-ha Lee. This book provided outstanding insight into the psychological impact of NK political indoctrination. Also, it illuminated the magnitude of censorship and propaganda KCI employs on closed, totalitarian-ruled state. The book explains that KCI and his government regime undertakes this effort for two reasons: (1) to employ compulsory political indoctrination--to ensure that the NK populace eternalizes the ideology that North Korea is the greatest nation in the world and that Kim Il Sung remains the nucleus of that world. (2) to maintain regime power. The two motives become cyclic, in that, one feeds on the other. This also provides some explanation as to why KCI cannot accept "Western influence" to facilitate his failed economy. Allowing

Westerner access could: (1) contaminate the NK population, allowing them to see a glimpse of the West and their culture, and (2) infer a weakness in the NK *Chuche'* ideology.

The NK ideology--*Chuche'* is referred to by the author as "Kim-cult," essentially describes a population brainwashing on a national-scale. The scope of *Chuche'* ideology is comparable only to that of Germany's Adolf Hitler or, the Soviet Union's Joseph Stalin, in terms of complete ideological domination. *Chuche'*, is a cult-like phenomenon, encompasses all political, social, economic and military aspects of NK society. *Chuche'* is written and supplemented to require absolute obedience and unchallenged adherence. *Chuche'* is totally internalized and ingrained in the NK citizen's every thought and effort. What is even more remarkable is the fact that the NK government has successfully isolated their people from outside societies for over fifty years!

Finally, the book explains how the NK political elite carefully rewrote NK history via *Chuche'* (self-reliance) to portray Kim Il Sung as the greatest, most successful and charismatic political figure in the world. In many ways Kim is likened to God, while Kim Chung Il (KCI) to likened to Jesus Christ. This initiative was carefully implemented over a thirty- year period, in order to prepare the populace to accept Kim Chung Il as their successor. *A Peek into North Korea* provides invaluable analytical insight into the blind-loyalty with which the NKPA would be willing to fight. This resource places ideology and mental toughness as a potential NK strength.

Two Combatant Commander statements, the current UNC/CFC/USFK Combatant Commander, General Leon La Porte's speech presented at the Command and General Staff College Distinguished Speaker Series, and former UNC/CFC/USFK Combatant

Commander Thomas Schwartz's testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) presenting the USFK: "Bigger, Better, Closer and Deadlier" (BBCD) Brief provided excellent insight into the current CFC perspective on NK strengths and weaknesses. Corroborating these accounts were two Congressional reports--the *2000 Report to Congress* which corroborated the data, provided in chapter 1 of this thesis, from GEN Schwartz's "*Bigger, Better, Deadlier Closer*" brief to Congress in February 2001. Both reports provided a detailed inventory of the current US ground and air assets stationed in the ROK and solid, relative NKPA and NKPA SPF facts. Finally the *2000 Report to Congress* described the current military and political disposition of North Korea stating that Kim Chong Il sustains regime support by providing resources to military and security forces--a policy known as "Military first." As a result a large section of the ordinary population is poorly neglected. Politically, North Korea's most pressing concern is their declining economy for the tenth consecutive year. Three major components of the North's infrastructure is failing--power generation and distribution, communications and transportation. Shortages of food, energy, and foreign exchange cripple industry and trade. If this continues we must consider social breakdown within the country (implosion).

Another significant variable heavily influencing the NK unique fighting style is the terrain on the Korean peninsula--70 percent of Korea is mountainous. While terrain poses a distinct offensive maneuverability problem for NKPA conventional heavy forces, NKPA SPF airborne and air assault forces use this variable to their advantage, facilitating high-mobility insertion, ample maneuverability once inserted, good camouflage, and cache capability in mountainous terrain.

Corroborating research sources included several DOD unclassified intelligence sources to include both of the Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) sources--*The Foundations for Military Strength*, and as previously mentioned the republished *The Foundations for Military Strength--Update 1995*. Andrea Savada's *North Korea: A Country Study*, 4th ed., considered the single source point of reference for NK country study and the United States Marine Corps, Intelligence Activity, *North Korea Country Handbook*. Overall, speed, firepower and mobility are identified as advantages for NK airborne SPF; while vulnerabilities include: limited logistical capability and susceptibility to mechanized and armor forces.

What Are the Impacts and Implications to CFC Forces?

Two primary resources for determining NKPA SPF impacts and implications to CFC Forces are Air Command and Staff College thesis by Air Force Major Troy Krause entitled "Countering the North Korean Special Purpose Forces," and a classified DIA thesis by Army Major Jack Stern entitled "North Korean Special Operations Forces (SOF) Infiltration Capabilities: Can They Do It?" These two sources provided valuable insight in answering the impacts and implications to CFC Forces.

Additionally, the two DIA reports, *The Foundations for Military Strength* and *The Foundations for Military Strength--Update 1995*, like Joseph S. Bermudez's book, *North Korean Special Forces*, provided invaluable releasable intelligence information with specific focus on NKPA and NK Airborne SPF. The reports document the KPAs intensive force enhancement efforts; emphasizing the production, storage of ammunition and fuel; repositioning of seventy percent of conventional armor, mechanized infantry and artillery units along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Overall, the report conveys a

picture of NK as a formidable military machine coexisting in an increasingly deteriorating domestic environment and provides insight into the impact and significance of the NKPA on CFC Forces. The NK SPF organization is the world's largest Special Forces organization and believed to possess the most highly trained and motivated soldiers within the NKPA. They are trained to act with extreme violence and ruthlessness and will use this training to achieve strategic and operational success and to facilitate conventional force success. The overall impact to CFC elements is quite significant. For the NK SPF, successfully establishing the "second front" will not only impede CFC's ability to conduct conventional tactical and operational level operations, but will also adversely affect CFC reception, staging, onward movement and integration (RSOI) and time-phased force deployment data (TPFDD) flow into the theater of operations.

¹Joseph F. Bermudez, *North Korean Special Forces* (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 16.

²Special Operations: North Korean Special Operation Forces [article on-line]; available from http://www.specialoperations.com/Foreign/North_Korea/Overview.htm; Koreawatch--DPRK Special Operations Forces; http://koreawatch.bravepages.com/Reference/North_Korea/DPRK_Military/Policy/SOF/sof.htm; The Federation of American Scientist (FAS) website <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/dprk/agency/kpa-guide/index.html>.

³ Bermudez, 108.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.

In wartime, we expect some of these troops will be inserted behind the main battle area to disrupt defensive efforts as well as to attack selected tactical targets.¹

DIA Analyst

Research Methods and Techniques

Because NK remains a closed, tightly suppressed society, most of the relevant research material is derived from classified and unclassified political and military sources. This limited access in turn, placed certain limitations on research methodology options. Hence, in order to adequately engage the research question: Can North Korean (NK) Airborne (SPF) successfully conduct military operations against the CFC forces and their allies? a qualitative case study analysis using secondary resources or archival data was chosen.

While this research methodology may sound limiting, according to the book *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, the case study analysis methodology is appropriate under circumstances of limited access and control. According to author Dr. Robert K. Yin, the case study method is the most appropriate method for research when: (1) the type of research question can adequately be answered by answering “*how or why*,” (2) the investigator-researcher has *little or no control* over actual behavioral events, and (3) the degree of focus is on contemporary events as opposed to historical events.¹

¹ Bermudez, 125.

In this instance not only is there limited access to the research subject, most of the research information and subject matter expertise is derived from classified and recently unclassified political and military source. However, this source of intelligence information actually adds to the *validity* (intelligence information analyzed by regional subject matter experts), *quality* of research sources (legitimate intelligence information usually corroborated by multiple sources before presented as a fact) of the effort. For the past four years, the researcher has examined and compiled archival data on NK Special Purpose Forces (SPF) at many of the United States' premier intelligence centers and research facilities. These facilities included such locations as the Defense Intelligence Agency Center (DIA), the Joint Military Intelligence College (JMIC), the Pentagon Library and the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, as well as the Combined Arms Research Library (CARL) in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, considered an icon for military-related studies. In addition to the benefit of access to these facilities, the thesis further benefited from three years of overseas military experience in the ROK. While stationed in the ROK, the researcher had daily access to numerous US DOD civilians and South Korean intelligence experts, many with 20 or more years of experience in monitoring and examining the NK threat problem.

The combination of *four years* of concentrated *archival case study research* and *three years* of direct *military experience* while stationed in the ROK has added to the *validity, reliability* and *subject matter expertise* of this thesis effort.

Answering the Research Questions--Step by Step

In order to answer the primary thesis question, Can North Korean (NK) Airborne Special Purpose Forces (SPF) successfully conduct military operations against the

Republic of Korea (ROK) and her allies? the four critical secondary questions must be answered.

The first secondary research question, What is the NK two front-war doctrine? was addressed. What questions, when asked as part of an exploratory study is not only pertinent to case study but all research strategies. This question was first posed to establish the *second-front strategy as NK's primary strategic, operational, and tactical strategy* to achieve political and military success. The question provided a conceptual background of NK military strategy and explained *why* NK airborne SPF are such a critical component of the two-front war strategy.

Moreover the question provides segue into a concentrated study of NK airborne SPF capabilities. Finally, it confirms that NK doctrine is based on the success of the SPF in supporting an initial NK conventional attack, and establishes that the two-front strategy is one of the *stated missions* of NK airborne SPF.

In addressing the secondary research question, What is the NK two front-war doctrine? two pertinent subquestions or tertiary questions were addressed. The first is *How will SPF success or failure affect the NK two-front strategy?* Two key points helped to answer this subquestion; first, it is generally accepted that artillery, WMD and SPF comprise the NKs military center of gravity (COG). Specifically, NKPA airborne SPF, will help mitigate ROK-US technological advantages and offset the technologically inferior NKAf. NK SPF are significant contributors to the overall military capability of the DPRK and a threat on the Korean Peninsula and beyond.² Successfully answering this, establishes the direct significance of the NK airborne SPF primary mission to *establish the second front*. The second subquestion relative to the NK two-front war

doctrine is, How will NK SPF accomplish their missions and objective. This question is posed to clearly emphasize the significant investment KCI has made in NKPA SPF in order to ensure mission success. Finally, the last secondary question also establishes logical segue into the addressing NK airborne SPF capabilities.

The next secondary question addressed was concerning NK airborne SPF capabilities; this continues the logical research flow. After establishing the significance of the NKPA airborne SPF *primary mission--to establish the NK second front*, the research now focused on those *capabilities that would make this achievable*. NKPA SPF will endeavor to destroy disrupt and delay critical US–ROK forces and infrastructure. They will accomplish this thru extensive mission training, the best NK equipment and support and finally thru personal determination. In examining NK airborne and airmobile capabilities the research addresses such equipment and capabilities as *the AN-2 Colt and the MD-500D/E*. These airframes make up a *significant* part of the NK airborne SPF *lift capability*, and constitute an *advantage* for these forces based of their unique attributes. The AN-2 is most dangerous because of it being difficult to detect by US-ROK Air defense Systems. However, a Notable *vulnerability* to the AN-2 is its age, 1940s Soviet vintage. Parts are hard to come by and maintenance is difficult. The McDonnell Douglas 500D/E helicopter poses a threat because they are disguised and almost identical to the ROK Hughes Defender aircraft.

Additional considerations include: NK SPF are very excellent at camouflage, the Korean peninsula, which is comprised of 70 percent mountainous and dense vegetation which provides excellent cover, concealment and cache sites, another *advantage* for the NK SPF. SPF soldiers will either disguise themselves as ROK soldiers or ROK civilian.

They receive up to 10,000 copies of ROK uniforms per year from China. Additionally, NK receives civilian clothing donated by the ROK and other countries via aid packages. Another critical point is that SPF soldiers are better equipped, fed, educated and motivated than conventional NKPA Forces. Their training system is designed to produce tough, disciplined politically well-indoctrinated soldiers, who by dint of their superior skills, in guerrilla warfare, can defeat a numerically and technologically superior force.³ All of these facts help to illustrate the NK airborne SPF element can pose a viable CFC threat.

From a psychological perspective Chang-ha Lee's, *A Peek into North Korea*, appropriately describes *Chuche'* and the NK political indoctrination efforts. This would pose a *solid argument in explaining why NK SPF would think and act so obediently*. *Chuche'* is a cult-like phenomenon which encompasses all political, social, economic, and military concerns. *Chuche'* is written and supplemented to require absolute obedience and unchallenged adherence. *Chuche'* or Kim-Il-Sung-ism is totally internalized and permeates deeply into the NK social fiber. *Chuche'* consumes the NK's every thought and effort. However, a counterargument could be made against this idea, based on the record number of defectors over the past three years

The NK ideology--*Chuche'* is referred to by the Lee as "Kim-cult," is essentially a mass brainwashing at the national scale. Comparable only to that of Germany's Hitler or the Soviet Union's Stalin in terms of complete ideological domination. NK's are trained to believe that the U.S. corrupts South Korea, and that South Korea resembles hell and chaos. NK airborne and airmobile SPF are not likely to throw down their weapons, once in the ROK as we have seen proof of this in past NK SPF terrorist activities. Once

the point was made that NK airborne and airmobile SPF are a viable CFC threat. The research turns to secondary research question 3, What are the NK SPF strengths and vulnerabilities? Once the *strengths and vulnerabilities* were identified and analyzed the fourth and final research question, What is the impact and implication to CFC Forces?

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research Methodology

Four years of *qualitative analysis of secondary resources* and *three years of military experience* while stationed in the ROK, greatly enhanced *the validity, reliability* and the *subject matter expertise* of this effort. In spite of the limiting factors associated with the closed NK government, military and society a solid *archival data research* was performed in order to answer the research question Can North Korean (NK) Airborne Special Purpose Forces (SPF) successfully conduct military operations against the Republic of Korea (ROK), and her allies?

The fact that most of the unclassified resource material relative to NKPA airborne SPF was corroborated by reviewed classified intelligence sources provides this thesis both unique strengths as well as some weaknesses. The *reliability* of the political-military resources and data are considered a *strength*. And while the research methodology limits the capacity to “measure” the data, the *analysis of the secondary resources* was objectively and fairly analyzed from a holistic perspective. Another consideration is that, while not infallible, considerable resource, expense, and risk were taken in order to gain the information. The multi-source intelligence information was corroborated and synthesized into a comprehensive analytical perspective, *shared throughout the DOD* intelligence community. Thus, it is possible to repeat the *qualitative analysis of secondary resources* and arrive at the same or similar conclusion.

Strong *validity* should also be given to the thesis because not only was the information obtained from multiple, reliable intelligence sources; corroborated; and synthesized into a comprehensive analytical perspective. The research method – primary and secondary research questions, reflects a *reasonable, logical, and realistic approach* to answering the primary research question.

However, because the *analysis of secondary resource* information was somewhat limited, certain practical limitations on the research must be addressed. First, although non-empirical research was conducted, the *reliability* of the sources was high. Nonetheless, such sources are always subject to interpretation objectivity. Therefore, to maximize objectivity, multiple sources of information were sought to corroborate key analytical points from the widest scope perspective available. Secondly, although *validity* of secondary resource analysis is always subject to skepticism, as the research model outline shows, the research questions were very logically assembled and tightly nested within the established resource facts. The result is credible research effort firmly grounded in reliable facts and intelligence. Overall, the research objective is to identify recurring assessments and analysis on the potential capability and effectiveness of NK airborne SPF. These recurring assessments help to establish an overall NK airborne SPF theme that will be analyzed, assessed and more importantly corroborated for potential strengths and vulnerabilities. The researcher will minimize personal bias and sentiment by corroborating multiple research sources and objectively articulating the collective perspective of those sources, thereby, maximizing objectivity.

¹Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Designs and Methods*, Applied Research Methods Series, vol. 5 (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 5 November 1991), 16-17.

²Joseph F. Bermudez, *North Korean Special Forces* (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 12.

³*Ibid*, 61.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Oh they'll come alright, and they'll be coming air.¹

ROKA Officer

The NK Two-Front War Doctrine

In chapter 4 analysis, the researcher fuses extensive research, subject matter expertise, and professional analytical insight to adequately and ultimately answer the primary research question. The researcher must successfully build and pose a feasible, plausible, and credible argument for the position that they hold. Within this chapter the research effort will focus on answering the following secondary questions: What is the NK two-front doctrine? What are the NK national strategy and military goals and their linkage to the two-front doctrine? Next the NKPA SPF infrastructure will be examined and how NKPA airborne SPF relate to NKs strategic and operational strategy will be determined.

Once the linkage between these strategic and operational concepts is made. The research extensively examines NK airborne SPF capabilities, strengths, vulnerabilities and their impact and implication to CFC forces. Lastly, the researcher will briefly examine potential CFC vulnerabilities that could actually facilitate NK airborne SPF operations. After successfully addressing these secondary questions and establishing a strong foundation toward answering primary question, the researcher will provide an

¹ Bermudez, 103.

answer to the primary research question --Can North Korean (NK) Airborne and Airmobile Special Purpose Forces (SPF) successfully conduct military operations against CFC Forces and their allies?

The Origin of the NK Two-Front War Doctrine

The origin of NK SPF guerrilla-style fighting derives from two distinct schools: the Yen-an style, derived from the Chinese under Mao Tse-Tung, and the Kaspen style derived from the former Soviet Union. The Yen-an style was based on Mao's doctrine as stated in the Chinese pamphlet "Guerrilla Warfare." His style emphasized political goals, stressed political indoctrination and mobilization of the peasant class. Mao insisted: "We must patiently explain, persuade, discuss and convince."¹ While this is not to infer the Yen-an style did not engage in direct-action or guerrilla-style fighting. However, Mao and the Yen-an style emphasized political indoctrination and insurgency over active guerrilla-warfare. In contrast, the Soviet, Kaspen style emphasized more direct-action, military-style operations as a means to achieve intended political goals.

At the onset of the Korean War, there was an internal political struggle within NKPA. Specifically, the power struggle was between Kim Il-Sung and Pak Hon-yong. Followers of Pak Hon-yong preferred the Chinese Yen-an style, while Kim and his followers favored the more militaristic Kaspen style. Because Kim sustained power over Pak, Kim adopted and eventually adapted the Soviet style to the Korean peninsula. Kim adopted the Soviet style for several reasons: first, because of Kim's background and military training with the Soviets, he was more familiar with the Soviet style. Secondly, the Soviets helped to place Kim into power, and militarily and monetarily sustained his regime. This is a synopsis of the origin behind the NK guerrilla-fighting style.

In the late 1960s, after several failed NK SPF clandestine hostile actions including the January 1968, Blue House Raid attempt, and the October 1968 East Coast insurgency infiltration incident, Kim Il Chong abandoned his belief that the ROK populace was ready for subversion and partisan warfare. Kim recognized that he had miscalculated the ROK population's acceptance of communism. Although Kim understood that the ROK populace did not desire communism, he nonetheless, maintained his strategic goal for peninsula reunification. It was during this period that Kim Il Chong began to rethink his NK military approach as well. He realized that although the NK war effort had failed to achieve his ultimate goal of reunification, he did recognize the early effectiveness of the NKPA and Chinese Volunteer Army (CVA) guerrilla elements operating in the United Nations Command's (UNC) rear. Therefore he decided to integrate guerrilla warfare into his overall military strategy. Over the ensuing years, he developed a NK doctrine of "combined operations" which called for both a swift, decisive conventional main force attack, and a simultaneous unconventional guerrilla deep attack in the ROK rear area. This was the initial concept behind NK the "Second Front" military doctrine.

Modern Influences on the NK Two-Front War Doctrine

Two additional factors helped to shape and define Kim's Two-Front War doctrine. The first was the unique Korean Peninsula terrain or topography. The second reason arose primarily from military necessity. Because the Korean Peninsula is 70 percent mountainous, conventional forces mobility within the narrow valley corridors is difficult. Indeed, even today, ROK and US military planners balk at the mobility and battle-space difficulties of planning conventional force operations. Korea primarily has two major mountain ranges--the Taebaek Mountain Range, located along the Korean

eastern coastal area and the Sobaek Mountain Range, a series of mountains characterized by sharp jagged crests located in central South Korea. Compounding the mobility problem is the narrow road network and the mobility inhibitive rice paddies (terrace), potential collateral damage civilian and refugee traffic that would further reduce mobility. For this reason, the all-terrain, light infantry oriented are a relatively low-cost asset especially suited for the Korean terrain. Not only can NKPA Airborne and Airmobile SPF infiltrate more easily than conventional forces, they can effectively disburse into the mountainous terrain, cache weapons and supplies, forage from nearby cities and effectively disrupt, destroy and attrite CFC targets using the terrain network. This goes directly in line with the NK guerrilla style. Thus, the terrain within the Korean Peninsula actually favors the employment NK Airborne and Airmobile SPF. In fact, the terrain could enhance their effectiveness.

Over the years as the NK economy continued to fail under Chuche' (self-reliance), NK found itself economically and technologically falling further behind the flourishing ROK and US. For Kim, however, militarily he still held some diplomatic cards. This left the military as NK's only instrument of power--their only alternative bargaining chip. As formerly mentioned, key points to consider are that, KCI recognizes that his NK SPF "second front" concept must succeed in order to: (1) support a technologically inferior conventional force attack, (2) destroy ROK and US military technologies and system capabilities prior to their integration into combat, and (3) harass, attrite, and destroy CFC forces in the rear and disrupt the CFC combat buildup through time-phased force deployment data (TPFDD) flow. As a part of this effort, Japan becomes an important NK military target because of the US plans to use Japan as a

staging base, in preparation for combat on the Korean peninsula. The core US Defense policy toward Northeast Asia is to deter North Korean nuclear and missile development while maintaining bilateral relationships with South Korea and Japan. However, within the past decade, increased diplomatic relations with China and the Former Soviet Union have compelled the US to factor these powers into the Northeast Asian regional stability balance. United States forces stationed in Northeast Asia have three major missions: Maintain regional stability, support the national defense of South Korea and Japan, and securing the sea lines of communications (SLOCs) in the Pacific Ocean.

The NK both domestically and internationally must leverage their military, their only source of political military power to maintain regime survival. Thus a tremendously powerful, but antiquated ground force and the threat of nuclear technology are the only tools the NK regime possesses to survive. Understanding these critical points, establishes a clear concept of why NK must rely on their military power to achieve their political goals and objectives and why they have chosen the two-front war as their strategy. NKPA Airborne SPF are essential in establishing this second front.

The NK National Strategy and Military Goals

To understand the recent history, nature and direction of North Korea, it is paramount to understand the political psyche of this isolated government is intrinsically intertwined with the thinking of North Korea's Supreme Leader, the late Kim Il Sung. Unlike other countries that change political leaders, leadership styles, administrations and shift national focus, NK has had only two leaders that have concentrated their thoughts on their reunification strategy. As such, from a strategic perspective, peninsula reunification under communism is the NK national goal and focus. To achieve this goal,

Kim has established a three goal National Security Strategy (NSS) to: (1) isolate the ROK and gain foreign support; (2) weaken ROK defense and create social disorder--drive a wedge between the ROK-US alliance, and (3) strengthen NK leadership and war capacity--military modernization. From a military perspective, NK has three military primary objectives to: (1) reunify the peninsula in under thirty days, (2) establish the two-front war, and (3) defend NK. Establishing this second front and defending the DPRK are two of the primary mission of the NKPA Airborne SPF. To KCI, conflict and reunification under Communism is inevitable. This was the mindset passed down and internalized from Kim's father--Kim Il Sung. He understands that reunification under communism will only occur as a result of armed conflict. As such, KCI maintains the steadfast policy of "military first," that is, allocating scarce resource and commodities to the armed forces over the general population.

North Korea's military strategy *is* a component of its national strategy and directly reflects the long-term objective of peninsula reunification under Communism. To fully grasp the importance of the nk SPF airborne mission, one must understand the NK strategic and operational goals. Pyongyang's only true instrument of power is the Korean People's Army (NKPA). The NKPA military doctrine has essentially *adopted* the *Soviet military model*, but *adapted* its concepts *to the rugged terrain* and the narrow Korean peninsula corridors. The employment of North Korean SPF as the "second front," is a critical pillar of North Korean military operations. The primary objective of North Korean military is to reunite the Korean Peninsula under North Korean control within 30 days of beginning hostilities. This operation will be closely coordinated with the opening of a "second front" consisting of airborne SPF units conducting raids and disruptive

attacks in CFC's rear areas. North Korean leaders realize that they could never reach technological parity with the ROK and the US. Instead they focus on attaining overall combat superiority by the use of surprise, shock-effect, speed, overwhelming quantities of troops and artillery coupled with second front well-trained SPF.²

The *Soviet doctrinal concept* of deep operations hinges upon achieving *air superiority* to facilitate air deliverable ground forces. KCI, recognized he *lacked the air capability and technology*, thus he restructured his ground forces to compensate for his air vulnerabilities. Kim attempted to mitigate CFC technological strengths and NKPA vulnerabilities by integrating a massive offensive artillery capability, with intricate web of air defense artillery and the deploying the world's largest SPF to attrite and destroy CFC technological capability. To understand just how critical the SPF are to KCI, consider that during the mid-1980s through 1990s while other military hardware production virtually ceased, production of minisubmarines, hovercraft, and transport aircraft continued. In fact, throughout the 1980s as the major restructure and reorganization effort continued. SPF grew from 40,000 to 81,000 by 1982. Additionally, during this timeframe, the NK acquired 87 Hughes 500 D/E helicopters. Specifically, in 1985, North Korea circumvented US export control laws and purchased 87 US-manufactured McDonnell-Douglas MD-500 Helicopters. This equipment along with the 300 AN-2 Colts were purchased or manufactured to directly support SPF insertion operations. Because *of logistical and equipment restraints*, North Korea is ideologically, physically and logistically *poised to fight a short, fierce war*. Their current strategies intend to capitalize on perceived CFC weaknesses. Kim has made artillery, augmented by SOF, the NK center-of-gravity to fight a "two-front," asymmetric war against an enemy

he fully understands to be technologically superior. NK airborne SPF are a significant pillar of that center of gravity, enabling KCI to establish and extend his second front strategy to the CFC rear area.

VIII Corps Organizational Structure

The VIII Special Purpose Corps provides the organizational linkage between the strategic and operational levels. The VIII Special Purpose Corps organization was formed during the late 1960s, after the failed Blue House Raid and East Coast Infiltration effort. Kim Il Chong disbanded the former 124th Army Unit because he held the unit responsible for the failed operations. He reorganized NK SPF activity under the VIII Special Purpose Corps organizational configuration. The VIII Special Purpose Corps serves a roughly similar mission to the United States Special Operation Forces Command (USSOCOM), which is to train and prepare SOF to carry out its assigned missions.³ With minor exception, the VIII Special Purpose Corps organizational structure formed in the late sixties, has remained the same NK SPF organizational structure of today (see figure 1).⁴

Kim Il Chung, serves as both the Commander-in-chief and the Chairman of the Korean Worker's Party (KWP)--NK's political regime. He controls all political, military and social activity. Figure 2, Special Purpose Command and Control, outlines the command and control mechanism from KCI down to the operational SPF units. Admittedly, the strategic level command and control structure to nk SPF is not entirely clear. What is clear is that, at the strategic level, KCI maintains ultimate command and control of the VIII Special Purpose Corps.

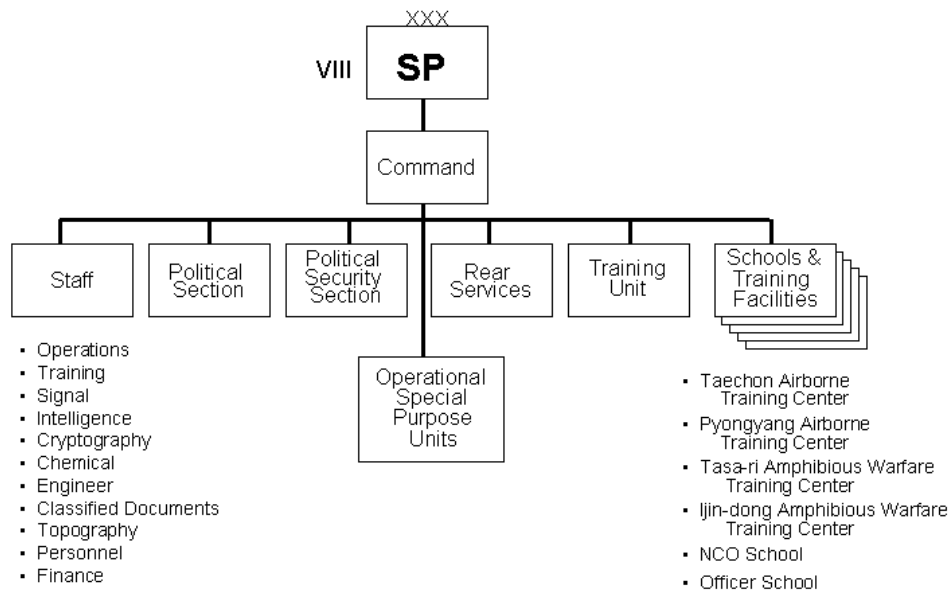


Figure 1. VIII Special Purpose Corps.

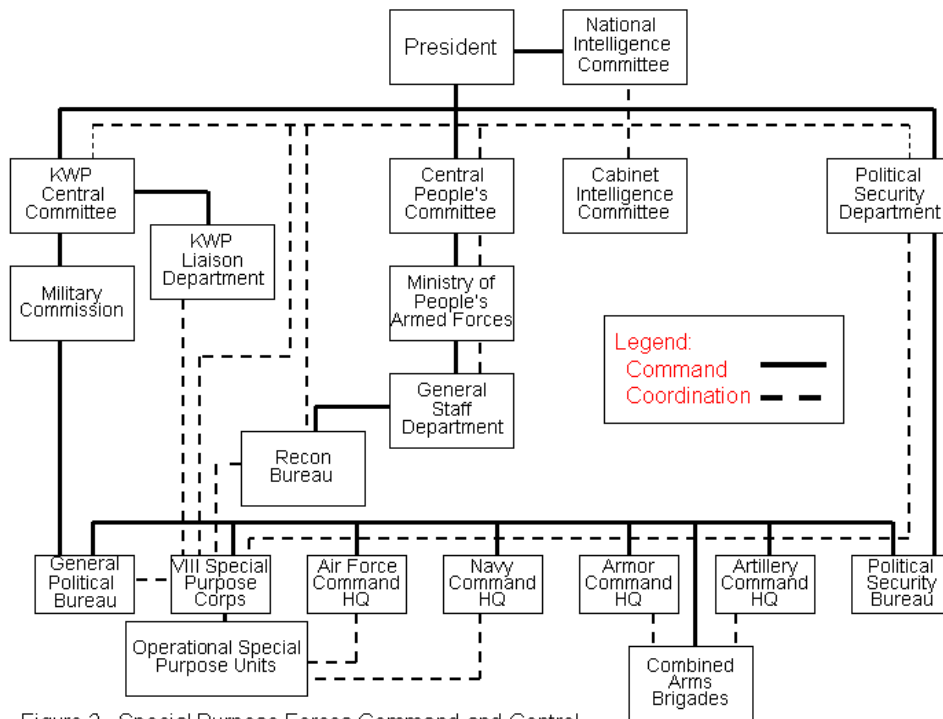


Figure 2. Special Purpose Forces Command and Control.

NKPA Airborne and Airmobile SPF Mission

Thus far, **we** have researched the *why*, in answering the question, Can NK Airborne SPF successfully conduct military operations against the ROK and her allies? Now **we** research the *how* NK Airborne SPF can successfully conduct military operations against the ROK and her allies. As **we** began to research and dissect the physical, mental and ideological training attributes of the NK SPF soldier, remember to reflect back to the lowest common denominator--the individual soldier and their determination to complete their mission.

According to available research information, NK parachutist training began during the early 1960s, by 1968 at least two airborne units were activated. North Korean airborne SPF are elite, highly trained, highly skilled and highly adaptable light-infantry oriented forces. NK Airborne SPF train for both medium altitude and low-altitude jumps behind enemy lines.⁵

Korean terrain and weather are key factors that potentially facilitate successful SPF employment; in fact, according to author George Bermudez, the hilly and mountainous terrain with restrictive slopes found on the Korean peninsula is favorable to a conventional force defense. In other words, the terrain favors irregular or guerrilla-type offensive operations; the type of operations NK SPF are extensively trained for and are best qualified to carryout. These along with other factors, which that will be covered will facilitate a feasible premise that NK SPF *could* successfully conduct military operations against the ROK and her allies.

The mission of NK Airborne SPF is to: (1) degrade CFC military and civilian infrastructure on the Korean Peninsula and (2) force the Combined Forces Command

(CFC) to divert the focus and attention of critical resources away from the forward battle to combat the "Second Front." From this perspective, NK SPF become a center of gravity for conventional force success. In other words, in order for conventional NKPA forces to be successful, NK airborne SPF must successfully establish a "second front" in order to divert the focus from the conventional forces. In order to successfully establish that "second front" in the CFC rear, they must successfully employ airborne, airmobile as well as amphibious SPF. Strategic reconnaissance will ascertain CFC efforts, initiatives and intentions, develop targeting information, conduct post-strike assessments and assess South Korean reaction to NK activity. NK Airborne SPF will conduct sniper missions against key civilian and military personnel, as well as conduct attacks against strategic-level critical nodes, airfields, supply points and storage facilities.

The nk SPF population is the largest Special Operation Forces (SOF) element in the world. They are believed to have between 120,000 and 140,000 of these elite soldiers, constituting approximately 15 percent NKPA's total peacetime strength.⁶ The NKPA has eight light airborne infantry brigades with an estimated strength of between 29,000 and 30,000 per brigade.⁷ Within the NK SPF population, estimates are, that approximately 15,000 SPF would be air inserted by parachute operations.⁸ This figure of 15,000 is roughly half of the estimated 29,000 to 30,000 NK airborne population. These figures are based on aircraft availability assessments as well as the fact that NK airborne SPF, in addition to establishing the "second front" are also tasked to provide homeland security defense. Although somewhat ironic, actual fear of foreign invasion is deeply embedded into the NK psyche. Therefore in keeping with the NK goal of making NK an impregnable fortress, tremendous provisions have been made to protect the homeland via

an elaborate air defense belt, and the deliberate dedication of active duty forces assigned to protect the homeland. Research also determined that while NK airborne SPF are trained to air assault into objective area. Recognizing their airpower vulnerability, if necessary, NK airborne SPF will assume the role of traditional ground light infantry.

Specifically, the NK airborne SPF missions are to seize and disrupt or destroy key installations and infrastructure such as command, control, communications, and intelligence (C3I) assets, nuclear and chemical facilities. Key infrastructure also includes military installations, airfields, missile sites, naval facilities, ports, and POL storage facilities; establish the “second front” in CFC strategic rear area to harass, attrite and destroy CFC forces in the rear, disrupt the CFC combat build-up thru time-phased force deployment data (TPFDD) flow; along these same lines deception operations; assist in the advance of conventional ground forces; to facilitate conventional ground forces by seizing or denying key terrain; assist conventional forces during bridge and river crossing operations; conduct reconnaissance, intelligence and special operations; support of amphibious landings, deception operations and homeland security and defense operations.

Recognizing the crucial mission of SPF, the NKPA, through the VIII Special Purpose Corps, trains and makes every provision available for these elite forces. A mind-set and practice very similar to that of the United States in relation to our Special Forces and elite, special purpose units. This is done to create the conditions for success. NKPA SPF are well disciplined, well conditioned, well trained, and well equipped; other NK conventional units lack funding and logistics to maintain their training edge. One of the KPAs top priorities for NK airborne SPF are CFC airfields and ports. Destruction or

denial of these airfields and ports will not only degrade the CFCs ability to build up air power, but also degrade their ability to increase ground troop and equipment strength, by denying the ability to stage assets at the airfields and ports.

NKPA Airborne and Airmobile SPF Organizational Structure.

The NK Airborne SPF Brigade is composed of an estimated 3900 men and is organized into a headquarters element, nine airborne light infantry battalions, a signal company and an engineer platoon (see figure 3).⁹ Personnel from the rear services element provide the necessary logistical and parachute rigging. However, research discovered that unlike the United States military practice of forming a habitual working relationship with Air Force support elements, there appears to be no direct relationship between NKAF units or NKAF support elements or airfields; nor does there appear to be any distinct relationship between Airborne SPF units and fixed-wing aircraft, rotary-wing aircraft, sailplane, ultra-light or hot air-balloon unit elements. This point may or may not be true, but it would seem advantageous for special units to form habitual working relationships.

The NK Airborne SPF Company is composed of an estimated 400 men. The Company is composed of a Headquarters element, four Airborne Light Infantry SPF platoons, a signals platoon and a rear services element. While the battalion is the most common tactical unit usually employed for independent operations, companies, platoons and even squads are equally capable of conducting independent operations but lack the support capability of the battalion.¹⁰

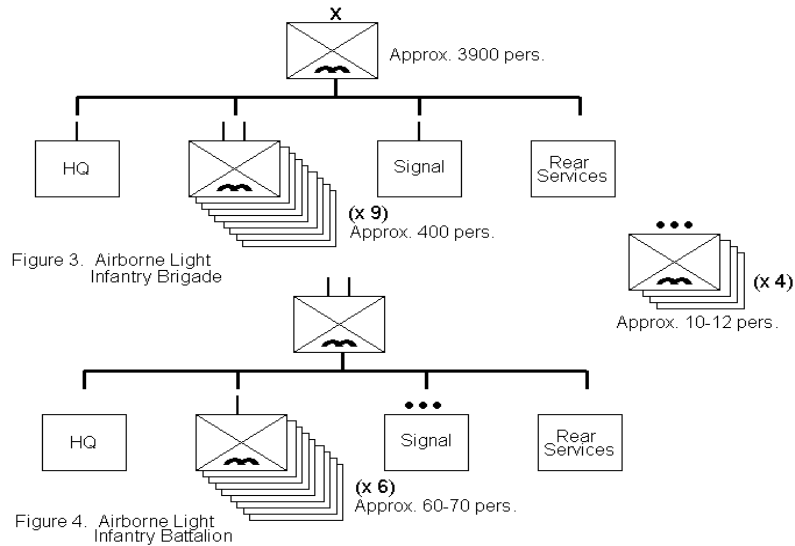


Figure 3. Airborne Light Infantry Brigade and Company Organization

Because NK Airborne SPF are primarily highly trained, light infantry-oriented fighters, one of their vulnerabilities is that they possess a limited load-carrying capacity. As such, they lack heavy firepower, making them extremely vulnerable to armor or mechanized infantry attacks. Some commonly carried weapons include: crew served weapons such as the 76.2/85-millimeter ZU-23, ZPU-2/4, 120-millimeter mortars, RPD or RP-46 7.62-millimeter machine guns, AGS-17 grenade launchers. Load configurations are based on mission and airlift capability. Individual weapons include: AK-47, 7.62-millimeter variant rifles, SA-7/14/16, Stinger SAMs, hand grenades, explosives, and mines. In spite of the limited NK Airborne SPF load carrying capacity, SPF are extensively trained in foreign weapons operation to include ROK and US weapons.

NKPA Airborne SPF Training and Capabilities

The research and analysis would indicate that the quality of NK airborne SPF training and mission preparation runs parallel with any of the top military powers in the world to include the United States, the former Soviet Union, China, and South Korea. Because of the importance of their mission, research revealed the soldier of today's NKPA are better fed, educated, motivated, and equipped than their predecessors who fought in the Fatherland Liberation War. NK SPF training lasts from 12 to 24 weeks or longer depending skills being acquired. In general, the NKPA soldier is wiry, well muscled and kept in top physical condition by constant, strenuous physical training. The KPA soldier is taught to be a revolutionary combatant. They are to be strong in ideology, combat strength and determination. Above all else, the NK SPF soldier is taught not to surrender to enemy forces under any condition. Because of their mental and physical conditioning, the NKPA soldier is noted for his stamina and capabilities in all terrain and weather. Those soldiers who excel in all aspects of their training are considered for SPF membership.¹¹ These soldiers equate to the best of the best that the NKPA has to offer. Important to note, during research it was determined that what they may lack in technical advantage, they appear to make up for in stamina, commitment, and determination. The net result of the NKPA's SPF training system is tough, intensively trained fighter who can travel farther and faster with more equipment and less food than almost any other soldier.¹²

Like the U.S. Special Forces, the NK SPF candidates average four to seven years of time in service within their respective combat branches and are carefully selected. Only under rare circumstances are civilians with special language capabilities or unique

skills occasionally selected. Something often underestimated, is the pride of being identified as the best of the best. Being chosen for SPF membership, holds significant weight in NK society. It is considered an honor to serve within the elite SPF community. NK SPF personnel appear to be retained on active duty 11-12 years as opposed to the 8-10 for conventional force personnel.¹³ However, unlike our society where economic upward mobility is within the common grasp of individual members of society NK maintain a rigid, two class system. SPF membership is considered an increase in status within the NK society and therefore, is taken all the more seriously.

The VIII SP CORPS conducts tough, realistic live-fire NK SPF training. During such training it is not uncommon for soldiers to be killed. Indeed on occasion, U.S. Special Operations Forces and conventional force soldiers are killed in training accidents, but at a substantially lower comparative rate. Although the conclusion could be drawn that U.S. soldier training is performed under better-controlled and safer circumstances, the counter argument could be made that there is nothing safe about combat. Therefore, the best training to prepare for combat is tough, realistic, near-combat-like conditions. The point to be made is that repeated exposure to such realistic training creates a truly hardened, skillful soldier. Like U.S. Special Forces training, NK SPF training builds upon the basic NKPA instruction given to all soldiers. It is designed to produce extremely well disciplined, politically well-indoctrinated and fanatical fighter capability. Specifically, NK SPF skills and training include: night infiltration training, mountaineering, night combat, martial arts, swimming, airborne proficiency demolitions, intelligence methods and again, the emphasis on physical training.¹⁴ North Korean SPF are trained to be

masters in infiltration and camouflage techniques, and are extensively trained in foreign weapons, martial arts.

Discipline with the SPF is considerably harsh and strong emphasis is placed upon intensive political and ideological indoctrination.¹⁵ This is where the fanaticism is instilled. In the book *A Peek into North Korea (1986-1988)* by Chang-ha Lee, Lee describes the NK ideology “*Chuche*” is as a mass brainwashing on a national scale. *Chuche*’ is only comparable to that of Germany’s Hitler or the Soviet Union’s Stalin in terms of complete ideological domination. *Chuche*’, the main vehicle for a cult-like phenomenon encompasses all political, social, economic, and military concerns. It is written and supplemented to require absolute obedience and unchallenged adherence. *Chuche*’ or Kim-Il-Sung-ism is totally internalized and ingrained in the NK citizen's every thought and effort. At this point, the picture of the mentally and physically hardened, well-trained and determined NK SPF soldier should emerge.

Some believe that NK soldiers will surrender once across the DMZ. Extensive research found no data to support this notion, but actually a body of evidence to refute the idea. One of the research articles entitled “Life in South [Korea] Hard for North Koreans” disputes this notion. In the article, many points were made that, because of the inherent differences in the NK closed, communist, agricultural society versus the ROK open, democratic, high-technological society, it was difficult for NK defectors to adapt to the new society. The article identified the fact that South Korean workers are familiar with the democratic concept of “more production equals more profit” resented the NK defector that was not familiar with this concept. Moreover, because of the educational differences between the two countries, some NK defectors would likely find it difficult to compete

for middle-class jobs. South Koreans, already struggling with a significant unemployment rate, would likely not only resent the added job competition, but also resent NK lack of motivation and poor job performance. Even more ironically, despite the kinsman ship between North and the South, the social rift between the two countries is significant. North Koreans unaccustomed to western culture simply cannot relate to the more westernized ROK populace. Finally, despite the overall better conditions in the ROK, NK defectors reported missing their families and friends still with the North. Thus, there is no factual evidence to support the notion that the majority of NK soldiers would surrender and defect, once across the DMZ.¹⁶ The clear perspective is, the NK SPF soldier is mentally and physically hardened and disciplined. They are ready to obey orders and to suffer privations in a conflict.¹⁷ Finally, from a historical perspective, although most previous NK SPF clandestine operations have failed; almost without exception, NK SPF agents have fought to the death or committed suicide; only a handful have lived or defected.

Specific NK Airborne SPF training begins with static line jumps and proceeds up to medium altitude free-fall jumps. Especially adept SPF soldiers may also receive high-altitude/low-opening, or HALO training. NK airborne troops are trained in both day and night jumps, in all types of weather and terrain. Some airborne troops also receive helicopter, sailplane, ultralight aircraft, and even hot air balloon training.

As previously identified, estimates are, that as many as 15,000 SPF would likely be air inserted by airborne parachute or air-mobile operations. Air insertion constitutes the second major means of SOF infiltration into the ROK. Thirty percent of the NKAF is dedicated to transporting Airborne SPF into Korea and Japan. The primary airframe to

execute this task is the AN-2 Colt. The AN-2 Colt is a 1940s propeller driven transport plane which has been upgraded with 1970s technology. The AN-2 Colt is difficult to detect by air defense radar because of its canvas body, wooden frame and extremely low heat signature. However, the “slow and low” flying AN-2 is easy to visually acquire during the day, and is easily detected by USAF attack aircraft. For this reason, AN-2 Colt insertions will likely occur during hours of limited visibility flying nap of the earth (NOE) or close to the contour of the ground. The AN-2 Colt airframe is capable of carrying 8-12 SPF per aircraft. The Korean People’s Air Force (KPAF) currently has about 300 of these airframes in their inventory, which will enable an initial lift of approximately 3,500 SPF. In addition to the AN-2 Colt, NKAF support air assets include: and estimated 100 MD-500 helicopter, and a very small number of aging Soviet aircraft such as the: Mi-2--Hoplite; the Mi-4--Hound; the Mi-8--Colt; the Mi-17--Hip, and the AN-24--Coke. Aside from the AN-2 the MD-500 is believed to be the second most utilized insertion platform. Target acquisition of the MD-500 present no particular challenge, however, the fact that the airframe is identical to currently utilized ROK airframes causes a significant potential CFC fratricide concern. NK SPF are trained to act with extreme violence and ruthlessness, and will employ these tactics in the CFC rear to facilitate the NK conventional forces. Finally another consideration is that these highly trained airborne forces will likely be employed where less tactically astute ROK and US CS and CSS units operate. This is another potential advantage for the NK SPF.

NKPA Airborne SPF Strengths and Vulnerabilities

Research suggests the success potential for NK airborne SPF to conduct military operations against the ROK and her allies is substantial. In fact, the concern is significant

enough that CFC/USFK will relook the issue of NK SPF when they revise OPLAN 5027-03 in Spring of 2003. While the effort to counter NK amphibious SPF appears to be answered through coastal surveillance by Naval assets supported by US Army AH-64s.¹⁸ The solution for combating NK Airborne SPF is not so clear. From an employment perspective, the AN-2 Colt is difficult to detect by air defense radar because of its canvas body, wooden frame and extremely low heat signature. While the MD-500 presents a target acquisition dilemma because the NK airframe is identical to ROK airframe currently used.

NK airborne SPF hold the advantage in terms of terrain. The terrain within the Korean Peninsula favors NK airborne and airmobile SPF operations. In fact, the terrain could actually enhance their effectiveness. Because the Korean Peninsula is 70 percent mountainous, conventional force mobility within the narrow valley corridors is difficult. The narrow road network, and the mobility inhibitive rice paddies and thick jungle canopy would further reduce mobility. For this reason, nk Airborne SPF are particularly suited for the Korean terrain. Not only can NKPA Airborne and Airmobile SPF infiltrate more easily than conventional forces, they can effectively disburse into the mountainous terrain, cache weapons and supplies, forage from nearby cities and effectively disrupt, destroy and attrite CFC targets using the terrain network. Bear in mind, as previously identified, NK SPF are trained to be masters in infiltration and camouflage techniques.

NK Airborne SPF may also hold the advantage in terms of weather. Many NK intelligence analysts consider the NK post-winter training cycle (late winter-early spring timeframe) as the most opportunistic window for a potential NK attack. This period is recognized as such, for three reasons: first, during this timeframe, the ground is relatively

solid with permafrost. Under these conditions the soil would likely support conventional force off-road trafficability. Secondly, the NK post-winter training is the period where the NKPA is assessed at its highest state of training and readiness. Finally, despite the frigid temperatures, visibility and trafficability through severely restrictive mountainous terrain is at its best. However, for NK airborne SPF, with the exception of wind speed for employment, can be employed virtually year-round.

NK SPF membership is considered an increase in status within an otherwise class-locked NK society. As such, NK airborne SPF are considered elite fighters, highly trained, politically indoctrinated and fearsome fighters who will not likely defect or surrender but will likely fight for their homeland. NK SPF in ROK uniforms and civilian disguises will further complicate the CFC ability to distinguish enemy forces. North Vietnamese Army (NVA) disguise and deception was a major US problem during the Vietnam War. NK SPF will likely find support and from the sleeper agent network believed to be operating in the ROK and abroad. An example would be the terrorist group the Chosen Soren that operates in Japan.

Other NK airborne advantages arise from CFC vulnerabilities. Despite the strong personal bonds and tremendous working relationship between the US and the ROK military, there is a small, but nonetheless divisive mistrust between the two organizations. This mistrust could be caused by cultural or language differences, differences in training and operational planning or intelligence sharing constraints. Regardless of the reason, although the ROK term "Kat chi Kapshida" translated in English as "We got together" is often used, it is not always the case.

Both during peace time and during conflict, the lack of coordination between Second ROK Army (SROKA) the ROK Army element responsible for the rear area and Eighth United State Army (EUSA) elements could allow for NK airborne SPF to operate undetected or unchecked. In the event of conflict, this problem quickly multiplies in the midst of the chaos, confusion, crowd, and refugee control. Still worse, from a command and communication perspective, radio communications is a challenge between CFC forces because the US SINCGARS family of radios and the ROK Spider radio are incompatible. This poses a problem for both conventional and the Combined Unconventional Warfare Task Force (CUWTF)--US and ROK Special Operations Forces. Finally, another potential advantage for the NK airborne SPF, as previously mentioned, these highly trained NK airborne SPF are trained to act with extreme violence and ruthlessness, and will likely be employed against less tactically astute SROKA and US CS and CSS units.

For these reasons, in answering the research question: Can North Korean (NK) Airborne and Airmobile Special Purpose Forces (SPF) successfully conduct military operations against the Republic of Korea (ROK), the United States? Research suggests the success potential for NK airborne SPF to conduct military operations against the ROK and her allies is substantial. The concern is significant enough that CFC/USFK will relook the issue of NK SPF when they revise OPLAN 5027 in 2003.

NKPA Airborne and Airmobile SPF Vulnerabilities

On the other hand, NK Airborne SPF will have to operate under significant vulnerabilities and limitations. The foremost question is the current operational status of the 1940 vintage AN-2 Colts. As NK Airborne SPF primary means of employment, the

maintenance disposition of these aged aircraft is the center of gravity of the NK airborne SPF employment. Moreover, since the fall of the Soviet Union, NK military sustainment and support has virtually diminished and with the crumbling NK infrastructure the NKAF is likely stretched to keep the AN-2 Colts operational in peace time. This may prove to be nearly impossible in the event of sustained operations during conflict. Moreover, if detected the AN-2 Colt is easily destroyed, thus becoming a zero-sum gain to the NKAF as supply regeneration is likely impossible.

As light fighters the NK airborne SPF are severely limited with regards to supplies. Despite a military first policy, the elite airborne SPF within 72 hours will be forced to forage for supplies and ammunition. Within 96 hours of sustained fighting, raids and spoiling missions caches of ammunition and supplies will be low. Foraging will dangerously expose their general location, subsequently because of their size and lack of firepower they could become susceptible to ambush by larger CFC Armor or Mechanized Infantry forces. As with their equipment, soldier losses will equate to a zero-sum gain after 72 hours NK airborne will not likely receive supplies or regenerate SPF personnel. In terms of equipment, NK airborne SPF will likely face significant communications challenges. Moreover, despite their ability to collect intelligence, due to their distance from friendly lines, they may not be able to communicate this intelligence back to Pyongyang. But what does this all mean to CFC forces and their allies?

Impacts and Significance to CFC Forces

For CFC Forces, it is not a question defeat. NK does not have the infrastructure to support a sustained conflict. However, barring intervention from China or the former Soviet Union, the question becomes, How much damage and loss of life will be sustained

prior to the ultimate defeat of NK? This is a feasible assumption, however, despite this assumption, NK airborne SPF nevertheless pose a significant threat to the CFC ability to generate combat power, conduct onward movement and integration operations. The chaos and confusion from renewed combat operations will most assuredly create an advantage for NK Airborne SPF operating in the CFC rear. Key missions and targets of opportunity will be plentiful. Bear in mind, NK Airborne SPF will not have to annihilate CFC Forces to be successful. Damage to C2 nodes, technology platforms, airfields and ports alone will likely upset the TPFDD flow. Despite a long-term loss, initial success in a short ferocious 30-day war is feasible for NK.

The estimated 300 AN-2 Colt aircraft are beneath the threshold of CFC radar technology and subsequently difficult to interdict. Visual acquisition from ADA and CFC Air Force elements is currently the best defense against the invading NK Airborne SPF. During research, no information to date has been provided on the MD-500 helicopters dilemma. The estimated 100 NK MD-500s will likely be disguised as ROK MD-500 helicopters and no definitive ROE plan has been identified. Finally, irregardless of NKPA's ability to fight a sustained conflict, the original research question that remains is: Can North Korean (NK) Airborne and Airmobile Special Purpose Forces (SPF) successfully conduct military operations against the CFC Forces and their allies? Four years of extensive research suggests there is a significant success potential for NK airborne SPF to conduct military operations against the ROK and her allies. In fact, the primary mission to disrupt CFC C2, tactical support and logistical support operations would likely be successful.

¹Joseph F. Bermudez, *North Korean Special Forces* (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 18.

²*Ibid.*, 44-45.

³*OS 509--Special Operations Command*, nd [article on-line]; available from <http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/7229/os509.htm>. Internet. Accessed on 15 February 2000.

⁴*Ibid.*, 75.

⁵*Ibid.*, 184.

⁶*Ibid.*, 2.

⁷*Ibid.*, 105.

⁸*Ibid.*, 75.

⁹*Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 105.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 61.

¹²*Ibid.*, 62.

¹³*Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁶Calvin Sims, "Life in South Hard for North Koreans," *New York Times*, 24 April 2000 [newspaper on-line]; available from <http://parteners.nytimes.com/library/world/asia/042400korea-summit.html>; Internet; accessed on 15 June 2000.

¹⁷Bermudez, 62.

¹⁸John H. Tilelli and William P. Gerhardt, "Solving Threat SOF Challenges," *Military Review*, March April 1998; [journal on-line]; available from <http://www-cgsc.army.mil/milrev/English/MarApr98/tilelli.htm>; Internet; accessed on 4 August 2002.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Yes, North Korea is a basket case, but Kim has put everything he has into his military, and he has the capacity to kill more people than in any conflict since World War II. *Newsweek*, 13 Jan 2003, p.30

Michael Hirsh

Analysis and Conclusion

This research effort has determined that NK airborne SPF could potentially conduct successful military operations against CFC Forces based on extensive NK SPF training, individual soldier determination, unique aviation lift advantages coupled with some inherent CFC vulnerabilities. However, one critical point to emphasize is that the research also recognizes that because of CFC's technological, economic, and logistical sustainment capabilities, NK does not have the infrastructure or economy to support a sustained conflict. Thus the question becomes, Barring Chinese or Soviet intervention, how much damage can NK could inflict upon the ROK and her allies *before* they are defeated? Nonetheless, focusing solely on the primary research question, NK airborne SPF could likely pose a significant menace to CFC's ability to build, maintain, and focus combat power as the U.S. has previously accomplished during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in Saudi Arabia and most recently during Operation Enduring Freedom in Iraq. Moreover, the resultant chaos and confusion from renewed conflict on the Korean peninsula could create additional advantages for NK Airborne SPF operating in the CFC rear areas. NK airborne SPF missions and targets of opportunity will be plentiful. An equally critical point of emphasis is that NK Airborne SPF will not have to *annihilate*

CFC Forces to be successful in their mission. Inflicting damage to C2 nodes, technology platforms, airfields and ports thereby upsetting the US planned TPFDD flow and deterring CFC combat build-up, is all that is necessary to potentially achieve operational surprise, create unbelievable devastation and possibly facilitate a successful initial campaign. Thus, despite a NK long-term defeat, initial success in a short ferocious 30-day war *is* feasible and the primary NK airborne SPF mission to disrupt CFC C2, tactical and logistical support operations could be successful. Research suggests the success potential of such an operation against the ROK is significant.

While the effort to counter NK *amphibious* SPF appears to be answered through coastal surveillance by combined Naval assets supported by US Army AH-64s.¹ The solutions for combating NK *airborne* SPF are not clearly identified and defined. Clearly from an employment perspective, the AN-2 Colt although aged, could nonetheless be difficult to detect by air defense radar and therefore facilitate potentially successful airborne insertion efforts. Moreover, the MD-500 dilemma presented by NK illegally obtaining airframes identical to the ROK rotary-wing airframes present CFC target acquisition concerns or friend or foe threat identification problems. While both concerns have long-since been identified, neither of these concerns have yet to be definitively addressed.

This research effort has also determined that NK airborne SPF will likely hold the advantage in terms of terrain and weather. Mountainous terrain within the Korean Peninsula could actually enhance NK airborne and light infantry effectiveness. Indeed, nk airborne SPF train for and are particularly well suited to operate in restrictive and severely restrictive mountainous terrain. However, the Korean Peninsula's mountainous

composition poses a significant challenge to CFC conventional mechanized and armor forces. Not could NKPA airborne and airmobile SPF infiltrate more easily than conventional forces, as trained masters in infiltration and camouflage techniques, they could utilize the mountainous terrain to their advantage, effectively establishing weapons cache to effectively disrupt, destroy and attrite CFC targets using the restrictive terrain network. Although NK airborne SPF would be logistically be at a disadvantage, traveling light and maintaining no more than 72 hours worth of food, water, and ammunition; the elite NK airborne SPF are highly trained, seasoned and fearsome fighters. They will not likely defect or surrender but will likely forage and continue to fight for their homeland. Moreover, NK SPF will be difficult to identify. NK SPF will likely be dressed in ROK uniforms provided by China or in civilian clothing unwittingly provided by ROK humanitarian donations. Such disguises will surely further complicate the CFC's ability to delineate NK airborne SPF from ROK soldiers or displaced civilians or refugees. Another potential factor that could ease the NK airborne SPF logistical burden would be support from sleeper agents believed to already be operating in the ROK.

With regard to NK airborne SPF success potential, still other advantages arise from CFC vulnerabilities. Although a relatively minute factor, mistrust and organizational rivalry between ROK and US military personnel could to be divisive. Lack of coordination and communication concerns between Second ROK Army (SROKA) and Eighth United State Army (EUSA) elements could allow for NK airborne SPF to operate unchecked. Moreover, lack of coordination and communications concerns between 2nd Infantry Division Counter-fire assets and First ROK Army (FROKA) could further impair operational efficiency between CFC elements. In the event of renewed conflict,

these problems quickly multiply in the midst of the chaos, confusion, refugee and crowd control. Command and communication will be an inherent challenge for CFC elements, as the US Army SINCGARS family of radios and the ROK Spider radios are incompatible with one another. This dilemma poses the same problem for the Combined Unconventional Warfare Task Force (CUWTF) the US and ROK Special Operations Forces charged with counter-SOF responsibilities. Finally, highly trained NK airborne SPF will likely be employed against the less tactically astute ROK and US CS and CSS units. While this observation in no way disregards or discredits the Second ROK Army (SROKA) capabilities, however, one must consider that SROKA and US rear echelon elements will likely have different mission essential vulnerable area priorities which may preclude a fully synchronized combined counter-SOF rear-area initiative. For these reasons, this research effort suggests yes, the success potential for NK airborne SPF to conduct military operations against the ROK and her allies is significant. In fact, many of these concerns will likely be examined when CFC planners begin revising OPLAN 5027 in Spring of FY 2003.

Recommendations to CFC Elements

With regard to NK strategic and operational-level SPF employment capability, the foremost CFC priority intelligence requirement (PIR) should be: What is the current operational readiness rate or status of the estimated 300 NKAF's AN-2 Colts? Answering this question will determine the status of the NK airborne SPF pre-deployment *center of gravity (COG)*. Without the AN-2, the nk airborne SPF employability could be reduced by as much as 75%; hence, NK airborne SPF would likely be unable to successfully establish a robust strategic and operationally deep second front. This would not only

change the strategic and operational success potential for NK airborne SPF, but potentially unhinge the surprise, shock and momentum of the entire NK conventional effort. As previously identified, NK airborne SPF *must* succeed to facilitate the success of the NKPA conventional ground forces. Without a successful, robust strategic and operational second front effort, Pyongyang would be rendered strategically and operationally blind. KCI would have no indications of the effects of his initial NK artillery strikes. Moreover, he would be unable to determine follow-on targets or access CFC capabilities.

For CFC elements, minimizing the NK airborne SPF threat could tremendously improve CFC combined aviation and counterfire support, as well as facilitate TPFDD flow, combat buildup and CFC transition to the offense. CFC rear echelons would be able to focus efforts on CFC damage control, counterfire and aviation support operations, CFC civilian and refugee control, trafficability as well as TPFDD flow, and combat power buildup efforts. TPFDD flow and combat power buildup efforts are have proven immeasurably critical to facilitating US success in recent military operations. Additionally, many critical CFC support infrastructures otherwise taken for granted, would remain intact. Many of these infrastructures would otherwise have been targeted for destruction by NK airborne SPF.

Combating the AN-2 Colt and MD-500

As previously discussed while the AN-2 Colt's simplistic wood and canvas airframe composition, makes radar detection of this 1940's vintage airframe is extremely difficult. This difficulty is primarily experienced when radars *are operating within the normal aircraft detection mode or sensitivity threshold*. However, although *increasing*

the radar sensitivity threshold may decrease full-spectrum aircraft detection, it significantly increases radar acuity for AN-2 Colt detection. These sensitivity adjustments could be performed on a specified percentage of dedicated radar, during hours of limited visibility. This is when AN-2 Colts would most likely be employed. This could greatly increase the likelihood for intelligence and warning (I&W) for AN-2 Colt and NK airborne SPF detection. In addition to specified increases in radar sensitivity, visual target acquisition by CFC ADA and Air Force elements is another potentially effective (I&W) defense method against an invading NK airborne SPF threat. If visually detected the AN-2 Colt can be easily destroyed. Hence, the airframe's radar detection difficulty becomes its greatest vulnerability to visual CFC ADA detection and Fixed-wing fighter acquisition. Recognizing that the AN-2 must fly "slow and low" could facilitate ADA, aviation and intelligence analysts in determining likely enemy air avenues of approach. Interdiction operations within these corridors could significantly reduce AN-2 effectiveness. In fact, even if the disposition of these aged aircraft could be determined to be partially mission capable (PMC). This would be a significant indicator to CFC elements. And could help to discern the NKAF AN-2 sustainment and support status. If NK is likely cannibalizing AN-2s to fix other AN-2s, this could indicate that any AN-2 losses would become a NKAF zero-sum gain.

Of equal concern, is the estimated 100 NK MD-500s likely to be disguised as ROK MD-500 helicopters. Currently there is no definitive ROE plan identified for this particular rotary-wing threat. However, an effective CFC combined rotary-wing threat acquisition effort would demand increased CFC airspace coordination, continuous CFC communications, and situational updates.

Is this coordination worth the effort? If a significant quantity of NK airborne SPF could be destroyed or attrited this could significantly degrade the NKPA's ability to conduct precision strategic and operational deep operations and allow CFC elements to concentrate on the NK conventional force fight and greatly increase their ability to conduct RSO&I operations and generate combat power.

Capitalizing on NKPA Airborne SPF Vulnerabilities

CFC should first recognize that NK airborne SPF are light fighters and severely limited in terms of logistical and fire power capabilities. Depending on initial successes NK airborne SPF will likely run low on supplies within 72 to 96 hours. After 96 hours of sustained fighting, raids, and spoiling missions, NK caches will likely run critically low. The NK SPF will be forced to forage. Foraging will dangerously expose NK SPF general locations in terms of estimated foot marching distance and limited firepower capability. Establishing mechanized and armor quick reaction force (QRF) to respond to NK SPF sightings will greatly facilitate CFC counter-SOF efforts and efficiently exploit a critical SPF vulnerability--limited defensive capability. This technique was proven effective in the 1960s when ROK military and police officials successfully thwarted NK clandestine SPF operations in the ROK by employing densely concentrated manhunts overpowering the inferior numbered NK clandestine operatives. Due to their size and lack of firepower the NK airborne SPF are extremely vulnerable to ambush by larger CFC Armor or Mechanized Infantry forces. In spite of potential rear-area CFC manpower shortages, there are creative means of utilizing: (1) incoming combat forces awaiting repairs or reconstitution and (2) reconstituted forces awaiting reintegration to facilitate a rear-area QRF effort. Utilization of these armor and mechanized crews while they await vehicle

repair or reconstitution provides a temporary but transient manpower pool to facilitate counter-SPF operations. Establishing additional security patrols for mission essential vulnerable areas or key areas where foraging or sabotage operations could be expected or anticipated. It is important to realize, the same zero-sum concept applies as with NK airborne SPF as with NK AN-2 Colts--SPF losses *also* equate to a zero-sum gain, as airborne SPF insertion will likely cease within 72 hours or less.

Controlling Fear, Combat Stress, and the Friendly Fog of War

From a leader and supervisor perspective, with regard to renewed combat operations on the Korean Peninsula it will be paramount to control fear, maintain a combat focused and positive unit mission outlook. Realistically however, our more recent twentieth and twenty-first century combat experiences have not adequately prepared our young leaders for such psychological devastation and the hideousness of sustained, high-intensity combat. Therefore, it is critical that leader recognize and to ensure soldiers understand, that despite such devastating casualties and sustained artillery and missile attacks, do not assume these attacks are necessarily being directed by NK airborne SPF. Reinforcing this mindset will help to control soldier fear, stress, and anxiety in this high intensity environment. As well as allow soldiers to understand these SPF elements are not superhuman and can be effectively neutralized and destroyed.

Soldiers must realize that SPF elements will likely face significant communications challenges. This fact is a significant enemy vulnerability. Moreover despite their ability to collect intelligence, due to their extended distances from other enemy elements, they may not be able to communication their intelligence information back to Pyongyang. Your soldiers need to know and understand these nk SPF

vulnerabilities. Psychologically replaces their fear with understanding and confidence. This allows rear-echelon soldiers to recognize they can successfully engage these forces and that NK SPF are *not superhuman*.

However, soldiers must understand that despite an assured, eventual NK defeat, initial NK combat operations will likely be devastating and ferocious. But soldiers should be reassured with equal CFC resolve and determination, NK cannot sustain the tempo of current operations. Nonetheless, they should recognize that NK airborne SPF elements pose a significant threat to CFC's ability to generate combat power, conduct RSO&I and prepare for follow-on offensive combat operations. Recognizing this fact, allows soldiers to understand the importance of force and infrastructure protection. Damage to C2 nodes, technology platforms, airfields and ports alone, will upset the TPFDD flow, and impede CFC operations. To preclude this situation CFC elements will have to effectively destroy and neutral NK SPF elements to preserve CFC high value targets (HVTs) and to sustain Reception, Staging Onward movement and Integration (RSO&I) and Combined and Joint Logistics Over the Shore (CJLOTS) capability.

Topics for Further Study

As a center of gravity (COG), for strategic and operational, deep, SPF operations, the NK AN-2 Colt merits additional research on the airframe's current operational and maintenance status. Accurately identifying AN-2 operational and maintenance dispositions would provide invaluable intelligence information and insight on the potential NK airborne threat capability. Additionally, during this research effort, it became apparent that there is no current, definitive set of rule of engagement (ROE) or target acquisition plan for the NK MD-500 aircraft. As the second largest SPF transport

airframe, a definitive MD-500 ROE should be researched and proposed to CFC planners. Finally, although this research effort briefly examined the NKAF fixed-wing lift and NKPA Airmobile rotary wing lift capability, the research primarily focused the analysis as it pertained to NKAF and NKPA aviation support to NK Airborne SPF operations. Although the NKAF is considered technologically inferior to CFC aviation elements, what is the potential impact of the NKAF operations on CFC wartime operations?

With regards to CFC vulnerabilities, CFC command and control (C2) vulnerabilities should consider a priority shortfall. Specifically, the US SINCGARS family of radios and the ROK Spider radios are incompatible creating serious CFC communications vulnerabilities for both CFC conventional and CUWTF counter-SOF elements. As such, thorough research should be accomplished to identify and to propose CFC command and communication (C2) alternatives. Although for security purposes, US may decline to share frequency-hopping technology, still, the problem remains and the potential solution must be determined to the critical CFC shortfall.

Because the significant maritime threat posed by NK amphibious SPF, additional research should be devoted to this robust and significant NK SPF threat. Although a potential joint and combined CFC amphibious SPF detection plan exists, additional research should be devoted to the potential impact of to NK amphibious SPF to ROK ports and naval facilities. Additionally, during this research topic, a significant naval shortfall in mine detection and mine clearing technology was identified. Because the sizable ROK coastline, presents a considerable vulnerability, what current naval mine detection and mine clearing technologies are available to mitigate CFC naval shortfalls and deficiencies.

A final suggested area for potential research falls within the realm of NK Light Infantry SPF Brigades. The SPF elements are attached to conventional NKPA units, operate forward of their attached units and constitute NK's close area threat. While the CFC rear is obviously a major operational concern, how would a "second front" in the close battle effect CFC operations? Another fascinating point is that NK Light Infantry Brigades will likely be integrated into battle via secret underground tunnels located along the DMZ. However, to date, only three NK tunnels have been discovered. However the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) estimates that NK has at least 18 more unidentified tunnels along the DMZ area.² Researchers may want to research what current technology CFC elements possess locate help these tunnels? What if any efforts are being taken to facilitate find these tunnel locations?

¹John H. Tilelli and William P. Gerhardt, "Solving Threat SOF Challenges," *Military Review*, March-April 1998 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www-cgsc.army.mil/milrev/English/MarApr98/tilleli.htm>; Internet; accessed on 4 August 2002.

²Joseph F. Bermudez, *North Korean Special Forces* (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 172

GLOSSARY

Military analysts must familiarize themselves with an enormous amount of terms, acronyms, and definitions that, in time, become commonplace within their fields of study or research. The same concept holds true for regionally focused military analysts, which adds additional layers of acronyms, terms, and definitions. Thus, the study and research within the NKPA SPF subject matter area carries a unique set of terms, acronyms, and definitions that must be clearly understood. In order to adequately discuss the NK Airborne and Airmobile SPF subject area, a baseline of knowledge must be established to ensure a level plane of understanding. The following list of key terms, acronyms, and definitions will provide the a baseline of relevant terminology and understanding of NKPA SPF.

ADA--Acronym referring to Air defense artillery (JP 1-02).

[NKPA SPF] Airborne and Airmobile Brigades. NKPA SPF designated to establish a new front within the ROK's strategic rear (North Korean Special Forces, 104).

Air Assault *or* Air Mobile. The movement of friendly assault forces (combat, combat support, and combat service support) by rotary-wing aircraft to engage and destroy enemy forces to seize and hold key terrain (JP 3-18).

Airborne Troops. A force composed primarily of ground and air units organized, equipped, and trained for airborne operations. Those ground units whose primary mission is to make assault landings from the air (JP 1-02).

[NKPA SPF] Amphibious Light Infantry Brigades--NKPA SPF designated to conduct offensive amphibious and special operations along the ROK coast (North Korean Special Forces, p. 86).

AN-2 Colt--The AN-2 Colt is one of the largest, most versatile, single reciprocating engine biplanes in the world. The AN-2 biplane, first designed by Oleg Antonov in Poland, was first flown on August 31, 1947. It remains in active military use by many countries some 55 years later. The North Korean Air Force (NKAF) primarily uses the AN-2 as a paratroop transport; however, it can be adapted for use as a glider tug, aerial sprayer, navigation trainer, utility transport and light bomber. An-2 Colt, despite being an adaptable machine, remains firmly rooted in 1940's technology. From a military capabilities perspective, however, this is an advantage. The large, wooden-framed, fabric-covered aircraft is difficult to detect by modern aircraft-detection radar equipment (Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum).

Centers of Gravity--Those characteristics, capabilities, or localities from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength or will to fight (JP 1-02).

CFC--Acronym referring to Combined Forces Command, Korea (JP 1-02).

Destroy--A tactical mission that physically renders an enemy force combat-ineffective until it is reconstituted. Alternatively, to destroy a combat system is to damage it

so badly that it cannot perform any function or be restored to a usable condition without being entirely rebuilt (FM 3-90).

Disrupt--A tactical mission in which the commander integrates direct and indirect fires, terrain and obstacles to upset an enemy's formation or optempo, disrupt his timetable, or cause his forces to commit prematurely or attack in a piecemeal fashion (JP 1-02).

DPRK--Acronym referring to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea.

DMZ--Acronym referring to the Demilitarized Zone, neutral area formed 1 mile on either side along the 38th parallel in Korea (*DOD Dictionary*).

Doctrine--Fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application (JP 1-02).

Employment--The strategic, operational, or tactical use of forces (JP 1-02).

Guerrilla Warfare--Military and paramilitary operations conducted in enemy-held or hostile territory by irregular, predominantly indigenous forces. Also see Unconventional Warfare (JP 1-02).

Hughes 500--The Hughes Model 500D, first flown in 1974, is similar in size and "egg-shaped" appearance to the Model 500-C; but the engine and other mechanical modifications gave rise to the ship being called by "The Quiet One." A small T-tail gave this model greater flight stability (HFI HOME PAGE © 1997, Helicopter Foundation International.)

insurgent — Member of a political party who rebels against established leadership. See also antiterrorism; counterinsurgency; insurgency (JP 3-07.2).

KCI--Acronym referring to North Korean President Kim Chung Il, son of Former NK founder and leader Kim Il Chong.

[NKPA SPF] Light Infantry Brigades--NKPA SPF assigned to forward deployed Divisions designated to deploy and operate forward of the supporting conventional Divisional units (North Korean Special Forces, p. 78).

Lines of Communication (LOC)--All routes land, water, and air which connects an operating military force with a base of operations and along which supplies and military forces move.

Mission--1. The task, together with the purpose, that clearly indicates the action to be taken and the reason therefore. 2. In common usage, especially when applied to lower military units, a duty assigned to an individual or unit; a task. 3. The dispatching of one or more aircraft to accomplish one particular task (JP 1-02).

NK--Acronym referring to North Korea

Raid--An operation, usually small scale, involving a swift penetration of hostile territory to secure information, confuse the enemy, or to destroy installations. It ends with a planned withdrawal upon completion of the assigned mission (JP 1-02).

Reconnaissance--A mission undertaken to obtain, by visual observation or other detection methods, information about the activities and resources of an enemy or potential enemy, or to secure data concerning the meteorological, hydrographic, or geographic characteristics of a particular area. Also called RECON (JP 1-02).

[NKPA SPF] Reconnaissance Brigades--These NKPA SPF are tasked to provide a wide variety of strategic global-level reconnaissance and specials operations. Specifically providing intelligence, targeting, foreign government military training and foreign internal security and defense (North Korean Special Forces, p. 126).

ROK--acronym referring to Republic of Korea (ROK)--South Korea (JP 1-02).

Seize--To employ combat forces to occupy physically and control a designated area (JP 1-02).

Special Forces Group (SOG)--A combat arms organization capable of planning, conducting, and supporting special operations activities in all operational environments in peace, conflict, and war. It consists of a group headquarters and headquarters company, a support company, and special forces battalions. The group can operate as a single unit, but normally the battalions plan and conduct operations from widely separated locations. The group provides general operational direction and synchronizes the activities of subordinate battalions. Although principally structured for unconventional warfare, special forces group units are capable of task-organizing to meet specific requirements. Also called SFG (JP 3-05).

Special Purpose Forces (SPF)--NKA definition, refers to their elite Special Forces units/teams.

Subversion. Action designed to undermine the military, economic, psychological, or political strength or morale of a regime. Also see unconventional warfare (JP 1-02).

TPFDD. Acronym referring time-phased force and deployment data. A joint, operational time-phased planning process consisting of sequentially refining force, logistic (non-unit-related personnel and sustainment), and transportation data to develop a TPFDD file that supports a specific mission or theater operation (*condensed* from JP 1-02, p. 442).

Unconventional warfare. A broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominantly conducted by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source. It includes guerrilla warfare and other direct offensive, low visibility, covert, or clandestine operations, as well as the indirect activities of subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and evasion and escape (JP 1-02).

UNC--United Nations Command (JP 1-02).

USFK--United States Forces Korea (JP 1-02).

Vulnerabilities--1. The susceptibility of a nation or military force to any action by any means through which its war potential or combat effectiveness may be reduced or its will to fight diminished. 2. The characteristics of a system that cause it to suffer a definite degradation (incapability to perform the designated mission) as a result of having been subjected to a certain level of effects in an unnatural (manmade) hostile environment. 3. In information operations, a weakness in information system security design, procedures, implementation, or internal controls that could be exploited to gain unauthorized access to information or an information system (JP 1-02).

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