

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MMM-YYYY) 13 Feb 2006		2. REPORT TYPE Final		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Military Exercises in Korea: A Provocation or a Deterrent to War?				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) John S. Chu, MAJOR, US Army Paper Advisor (if Any): Thomas Gibbons, COLONEL, US Army				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT The 53-year alliance between the U.S. and the Republic of Korea deterred against the Stalinist North Korean state along the most heavily militarized zone remaining of the Cold War era. For over 31 years, both U.S. and ROK military forces, under the mantle of the UN and the Combined Forces Command (CFC), have conducted a warfighting exercise called Ulchi Focus Lens to evaluate and improve joint and combined procedures, plans, and systems used in the event of conflict with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Although this is only one of several major joint exercises staged annually in order to deter or defend against an attack, North Korea insists that all exercises on the Korean Peninsula are gross violations of the half-century armistice. Moreover, she claims that the exercises are not defensive, but rather a preparation for a preemptive attack. As a part of the new global U.S. policy and South Korea's drive for self-reliance, the U.S. position towards Korea has changed. The role of USFK forces has changed from a supported to a supporting role. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to evaluate the effects of major joint and combined military exercises as a means to deter North Korean aggression and to examine their value in light of current U.S. interests and the Northeast Asia security environment. Furthermore, the author will evaluate potential ways that the Commanders of Pacific Command and United States Forces Korea can influence strategic-level diplomacy by recommending ways to improve or maintain the readiness of the CFC without compromising its own security.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Korea; Korean Reunification; US-ROK Alliance; Military Exercises; UFL; USFK/CFC					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 32	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Chairman, JMO Dept
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 401-841-3556

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Military Exercises in Korea: A Provocation or a Deterrent to War?

By

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract

The 53-year alliance between the United States (U.S.) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) has deterred against the Stalinist North Korean state along the most heavily militarized zone remaining of the Cold War era. For over 31 years, both U.S. and ROK military forces, under the mantle of the United Nations and the Combined Forces Command (CFC), have conducted a warfighting exercise called Ulchi Focus Lens (UFL) to evaluate and improve joint and combined procedures, plans, and systems used in the event of conflict with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Although this is only one of several major joint exercises staged annually in order to deter or defend against an attack, North Korea insists that all exercises on the Korean Peninsula are gross violations of the half-century armistice. Moreover, she claims that the exercises are not defensive, but rather a preparation for a preemptive attack.

As a part of the new global U.S. policy and South Korea's drive for self-reliance, the U.S. position towards Korea has changed. The role of USFK forces has changed from a supported to a supporting one. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to evaluate the effects of major joint and combined military exercises as a means to deter North Korean aggression and to examine their value in light of current U.S. interests and the Northeast Asia security environment. Furthermore, the author will evaluate potential ways that the Commanders of Pacific Command (PACOM) and United States Forces Korea (USFK) can influence strategic-level diplomacy by recommending ways to improve or maintain the readiness of the CFC without compromising its own security.

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Introduction

The 53-year alliance between the United States (U.S.) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) has successfully deterred war against the Stalinist North Korean state along the most heavily militarized zone remaining of the Cold War era.¹ For over 31 years, both U.S. and ROK military forces, under the mantle of the United Nations and the Combined Forces Command (CFC), have conducted a warfighting exercise called Ulchi Focus Lens (UFL) to evaluate and improve joint and combined procedures, plans, and systems used in the event of conflict with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).² Although this is only one of several major joint exercises staged annually in order to deter or defend against an attack, North Korea insists that all exercises on the Korean Peninsula are gross violations of the half-century armistice. Moreover, she claims that the exercises are not defensive, but rather a preparation for a preemptive attack.³

Military exercises have, in fact, adversely strained diplomatic relations with North Korea. On numerous occasions, the leadership of DPRK has blamed war exercises for reasons to halt peaceful negotiations or progress toward reunification. Furthermore, both North and South Korean citizens alike have expressed concern that the military exercises supported anti-nationalism and countered reunification efforts.⁴ In addition, the increase in anti-American sentiments in South Korea has also been blamed on military exercises. More importantly, military exercises have influenced the escalation of military tension in the Korean Peninsula.

As a part of the new global U.S. policy and South Korea's drive for self-reliance, the U.S. position towards Korea has changed. The role of U.S. forces in Korea has changed from a supported to a supporting one.⁵ Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to

evaluate the effects of major joint and combined military exercises as a means to deter North Korean aggression and to examine their value in light of current U.S. interests and the Northeast Asia security environment. Furthermore, the author will evaluate potential ways that the Commanders of U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) and United States Forces Korea (USFK) can influence strategic-level diplomacy by recommending ways to improve or maintain the readiness of the CFC without compromising its own security. By revising and/or updating the role of military exercises on the Korean Peninsula, the operational commanders will be able to minimize the perception of threat to North Korea, support strategic diplomacy and policy in negotiations, and improve Korean relations without any major concessions on its part.

Why Korea - Still at War

Although the 1953 Armistice Agreement brought an end to combat operations, the threat of war is still real and alive today on the Korean Peninsula. The DPRK has never renounced its goal of reunifying Korea under the Kim family's control, and never deviated from its strategy of doing so by military means.⁶ Therefore, the nightmarish scenario of a surprise attack by the North in an attempt to settle the Korean issue by force cannot be dismissed. Worse yet, if such an attack takes place, it will almost certainly include the threat or actual use of nuclear weapons.⁷

North Korea continues to be a regional threat to security and stability in Northeast Asia and in the Korean Peninsula. By spending nearly a third of its Gross National Product on its military⁸, "North Korea now possesses the world's [third⁹] largest Army and by far the largest artillery, submarine and special operations forces."¹⁰ Furthermore, activities of continued tunneling under the DMZ, movement of large portions of its conventional forces

closer to South Korea, resumption of training and exercises after a period of economically related respite, and enhancement of its conventional military capabilities all exhibit an offensive posture.¹¹ Finally, North Korea has continuously sought to break up the U.S.-ROK alliance and to weaken South Korea's status politically, militarily and economically.¹² Failing to do so, North Korea is now seeking regime security by raising dialogue with South Korea to reduce tension and demanding a non-aggression treaty from America to remove U.S. troops.¹³ Short of a political peace treaty or reunification, the military must respond in kind to the menace of an over-militarized, totalitarian, and aggressive North Korea.

U.S.-ROK Exercises – Main Deterrent

“The soldiers of USFK, as part of United Nations Command (UNC) and CFC, maintain 24/7 vigilance and ‘fight tonight’ readiness, demonstrating unwavering resolve to protect the security of the ROK, preserve peace on the Peninsula and promote stability in Northeast Asia.”¹⁴ They serve as the immediate deterrent to war with North Korea. In 2003, “37,000 American troops were stationed in 96 South Korean bases, with a large number positioned up against the 155-mile long De-Militarized Zone (DMZ)” to serve as the first line of defense in the event of a North Korean attack.¹⁵ In addition, 3,690,000 active and reserve service members¹⁶ of the ROK maintain a strong combined defense readiness that will keep North Korea in check as she continually tries to exploit any advantage to create tension and undermine the U.S.-ROK alliance. “CFC’s military power resides collectively in the ROK Armed Forces, U.S. Forces in Korea, and U.S. augmentation from the Pacific and the United States.”¹⁷

Underneath the sheer number of combat strength lies the true prowess of the military. CFC has been effective in deterring war on the Peninsula by participating in joint and

combined operations and training exercises to maintain “fight tonight” readiness. CFC has conducted combined exercises with both U.S. and ROK forces since 1976, although war exercises began as early as 1969 with the ROK and 1968 by USFK forces. Since then, there have been four primary exercises conducted on the Korean Peninsula with the ultimate goal of deterring war, and if necessary, to fight and win.

The basis of readiness is a combined and joint exercise program that includes events designed to train joint and combined commanders and staffs on warfighting skills, exercise campaign plans, and practice various contingencies in case of renewed hostilities. It also enables complex staff organizations to practice new processes, coordinate with each other, and refine CFC standard operating procedures. Moreover, exercises permit [the CFC] to share new concepts, practice tactics, techniques, and procedures, and experiment with emerging technologies. The keystone exercise for CFC is UFL, the largest simulation supported, theater-wide joint and combined command post exercise [CPX].¹⁸

UFL is also the oldest of the four exercises. UFL has progressively taken on various forms, from a War Game model in 1988 to a Computer-Based Simulation model in 1992. After integrating the crisis management exercise of the ROK government in 1994, it is now a US-ROK CPX.¹⁹ It utilizes computer-based simulation involving a ROK national mobilization exercise and a warfighting CPX conducted in late summer of every year.²⁰

Unlike UFL, the inactive Team Spirit (TS) exercise involved large-scale field maneuver and deployment of forces. The suspension of TS eased military tension on the Peninsula in 1994 and gave rise to the Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (RSOI) exercise in 1995. To compensate for the lack of actual field maneuver training during RSOI and demonstrate continued military resolve despite the suspension of TS, the Foal Eagle (FE) exercise was expanded and eventually took the form of TS.²¹ Today, FE is a comprehensive FTX that involves most of the ROK Armed Forces to include the reserve forces and local governmental officers, USFK military, and special forces as well as a significant portion of the U.S. augmentation force.²² Although each of the exercises are

different in scope, mission, and goal, all the major exercises are “designed to evaluate and improve combined and joint coordination, procedures, plans, and systems for conducting contingency operations between the U.S. and ROK forces.”²³

The U.S. military has and will continue to be instrumental in deterring another war by maintaining strong combined defense readiness.²⁴ Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld reiterated to South Korea during the 37th annual Security Consultative meeting in October 2005 the need to maintain U.S. military presence in the Peninsula. Moreover, he recognized the importance of the UNC and the USFK to the commitment of regional security.²⁵ While Washington continues to resolve regional tensions through diplomacy and peace-time engagement, Secretary Rumsfeld reaffirmed the strategic flexibility of U.S. military forces to deter conflict.²⁶ However, while joint military exercises are one of the ways to prepare for such a conflict, they have become a hindrance to the achievement of the political objective.²⁷ The adverse effects from military exercises have become just as threatening as the escalation of nuclear weapons itself.

Adverse Effects Due to Military Exercises

Military exercises have increased tensions on the Korean Peninsula. First, they have promoted a conflicting view of U.S. military presence in South Korea and created a gap in perception of the North Korean threat. Second, exercises have increased anti-American sentiment. Finally, military exercises have provoked North Korea to take additional security measures and ultimately undermined the progress toward peaceful reunification.

US vs. ROK: Conflicting Views on North Korea

The mere presence of USFK soldiers has recently increased tension in an already tenuous situation. Before the end of the Cold War, USFK soldiers were generally welcomed

as the interests of the United States and the ROK were one and the same. North Korea threatened the peace and security of the Northeast Asia region and the Peninsula; America countered that threat by providing a sense of security and comfort with its military presence. However, recent inter-Korean summits and increased dialogue between DPRK and South Korea have changed the perception of American soldiers from defenders of peace and protectors of freedom to foreign occupiers.²⁸ Even with the announcement of DPRK's nuclear weapons program, the engagement opportunities between North and South Korea have replaced fear with hopeful expectations of a full reunification of the Peninsula.²⁹ Consequently, South Koreans view any military provocation, or the mere presence of them, as a hindrance to the possible peace process.

Unlike the last 50 years, ROK now views U.S. military presence and military exercises as a threat to her security. South Koreans do not register the same level of concern as many Americans over a potential North Korean invasion, nuclear weapons development, ballistic missile testing and missile sales abroad.³⁰ In fact, most South Koreans think the Cold War is over. No longer are South Koreans faced with the invincible Kim Il Sung of the past, whose threatening actions and rhetoric often resoundingly justified South Korea's security-first mentality. South Koreans today see Kim Jong Il as a leader who smiles, makes agreements and promises, and seems to be pursuing reforms in North Korea.³¹ Moreover, South Korean citizens seem to be satisfied with Kim's promises, even though he has consistently either broken them or failed to fulfill them. They now feel a connection to what they see as poor, starving, and weak brethren in North Korea.³² South Koreans view Americans as more of a threat than the North Koreans as the United States continues to precipitate tensions on the Peninsula.³³

The United States has become a threat to the ROK because South Koreans do not see North Korea's nuclear brinkmanship as a regional and global threat to the war on terrorism in the same way as Americans view the DPRK.³⁴ The U.S. strategy has always been one of deterring the spread of communism by containing North Korea within its boundaries with a strong U.S. military presence.³⁵ The only difference now is that North Korea threatens not with Stalinist ideas but rather with nuclear weapons. As a result, the U.S. military, under the auspices of the CFC, continues to "flex her muscles" with exercises to demonstrate exceptional combined readiness and an absolutely determined resolve to prevent or win a potential war with DPRK. For example, during the "enhanced deterrence" period just before the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, 8th Army subordinate units of the USFK launched RSO&I and FE to engage in theater-specific training and readiness exercises.³⁶ While this served to display U.S.-ROK's steadfastness to deter North Korea from reengaging the South in a conventional and nuclear war, it also reminded the South Koreans that U.S. military exercises may only serve to increase the possibility of war on the Peninsula.

Anti-Americanism

Another source of tension is the decline in support for the United States in South Korea as the generation that was alive during the Korean War 50 years ago slowly dies out.³⁷ Although anti-American feelings have always existed since the presence of U.S. troops in Korea, civil-military incidents due to military exercises have had detrimental effects on the support for the U.S. military. For example, in late 2002, the single biggest issue in South Korea was not North Korea's secret nuclear weapons program but a traffic accident in which two South Korean school girls, while walking home from school, were tragically killed by a U.S. military vehicle during a training exercise.³⁸ A dramatic upsurge in anti-American

violence on the Peninsula began after the two U.S. soldiers were acquitted by the military court. The number of Koreans who sympathize with anti-Americanism continues to grow rapidly. Following this incident, a record 53% of the public indicated a negative or unfavorable perception of the U.S. due to events involving military presence and exercises.³⁹

Disrespect for the Korean culture, tradition, and society by the military personnel has also fueled anti-American sentiments. The U.S. military has 36,000 troops stationed in Korea in any given period. However, many more soldiers visit Korea from the United States as augmentation or participants of the military exercises. This influx of soldiers has caused an increase in anti-American sentiments, especially in the cities where most U.S. troops go to relax and enjoy the Korean culture. Unfortunately, the taboo topic of prostitution has caused much debate in towns and cities adjacent to or near military installations. For example, not far from Itaewon, American clients have brought business to a large red-light district. Unfortunately, they have also brought pregnancy and violence into the mix.⁴⁰ One of the greatest causes of resentment has been that the American servicemen involved in crimes have been able to seek refuge on their military bases under the protection of the Status of Forces Agreement where the Korean authorities have no jurisdiction.⁴¹

It is not only urban areas that have been affected by U.S. military presence and joint exercises. In Maehyang-Ri, a small fishing village on the western coast of the country, residents have lived with the largest bombing range in Asia on their doorstep for five decades. They claim that several villagers have been killed or injured by ammunition, that the constant roar of fighter planes overhead has damaged their property, and that villagers suffer psychological stress because of the noise and concerns about their safety.⁴² Since the range opened in 1952, 10 deaths and 8 injuries have officially been recorded.⁴³ The most

recent incident occurred in the summer of 2000 when an American jet jettisoned six 230-kg bombs that exploded without any harm to life.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, this event has attracted media attention and further advanced anti-America sentiments against the U.S. military.

North Korean Reaction

Finally, and most importantly, the joint exercises conducted by the U.S.-ROK forces have had nothing but negative reaction among the North Korean leaders. Although the primary reason for having such exercises is to strengthen U.S.-ROK readiness against the threat to freedom on the peninsula, they have had exactly the opposite effect. Instead of reminding the North Koreans of the firm Allied resolve to deter war, the annual exercises have given the Communists all the reasons to prepare for a preemptive attack with nothing else to convince them otherwise. Every year, instead of reducing tension and confrontation, the exercises have been blamed as the chief reason for its adverse effects on the peace in the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁵

Inter-Korean relations, in particular, have been degraded as a result of the exercises, starting back even during the inception of inter-Korean dialogue in 1982. The dialogue stalled and was eventually suspended with little progress as a result of the TS exercise.⁴⁶ North Korea, after establishing historical agreements during eight inter-Korean meeting talks in 1992, threatened again to cease talks if the TS military exercise continued. This, too, caused the inter-Korean relations to stalemate.⁴⁷ In 2000, South Korea canceled all maneuver training and joint military exercises with the United States and focused on domestic preparedness in order to reflect the mood of reconciliation of the inter-Korean summit.⁴⁸ Most recently, in 2005, the UFL exercise has threatened the progress of the Six-Party Talks. North Korea criticized the exercise as a means to escalate tension and provoke

conflict during peaceful negotiations.⁴⁹ North Korean leaders believed that the exercise was staged to coincide with the resumption of the Six-Party Talks and accused the United States and the ROK of blackmailing them with external pressures. "It is unimaginable for us to sit at the negotiating table with the United States while the air is filled with dust from a war game opposing us," said a DPRK foreign ministry spokesman.⁵⁰

"The stable conventional deterrence that has long marked the armistice period is now at risk by the North's assertion...that in the absence of security assurances from the United States, [DPRK] has both the need and the right to acquire nuclear weapons."⁵¹ North Korea is using the military exercises and U.S. antagonism as a means of justifying the nuclear weapons program. Furthermore, DPRK maintains that it will give up its nuclear program if the U.S. gives up its hostile policy.⁵² In response, President Bush has repeatedly guaranteed that he will not attack North Korea under full compliance of international directives.⁵³ While North Korea's true intentions will never be known, Kim Jong-II's participation in the inter-Korean summit of 2000 and agreement to reduce tension and bring permanent peace in the Korean Peninsula is the proof of North Korea's recent strategic policy change.⁵⁴ Moreover, Pyongyang's willingness to participate in the recent Six-Party Talks also symbolizes North Korea's eagerness to accept outside economic assistance and security assurances in spite of the nuclear program being a legitimate reaction to what she perceives to be a threat to her security.⁵⁵ However, despite the reference to a peaceful resolution, DPRK continues to perceive U.S. military exercises as a possible reference for an attack on North Korea.⁵⁶

Military Exercises: Operational Options and Counterarguments

Although North Korea has gained the attention of diplomatic leaders around the world with the resumption of its nuclear weapons program, the United States must recognize

that the tension of the U.S.-ROK alliance, the anti-American sentiments in the ROK, and the provocative actions of North Korea are all related to the presence of USFK forces and the associated military exercises of the CFC. Of the four U.S. instruments of national power available to solve these issues, the military has the flexibility to exercise new initiatives and make quick operational changes while maintaining an effective deterrent to North Korean threats. Perhaps military acts of conciliation by the operational commander will gain the trust of the North Koreans and show that America “has no intentions to attack or invade North Korea with nuclear or conventional weapons.”⁵⁷

If nothing else, changes in military exercises can serve to send subtle signals to the leaders of DPRK that the United States is willing to reduce military tension. Such acts may yield positive rewards beyond the operational level, such as minimizing the perception of threat to North Korea, supporting strategic diplomacy and policy in negotiations, and improving relations with our South Korean ally.

Option 1: No Change

The first option is not to change anything. Regardless of the impact of the exercises on diplomacy in Korea, the U.S.-ROK forces must maintain their resolve to defend the Peninsula against any Communist aggression, whether they are minor incidents or total war. Although DPRK is quick to attack the exercises as preemptive and provocative, North Korea too has exhibited aggression and has taken extensive offensive preparation. Unfortunately, the current situation on the Korean Peninsula and the escalation of tension among the United States, the ROK, and the DRPK is reason enough to make a change. While a stalemate has been the answer for the last 50 years, it is no longer a valid one today.

Option 2: Change name of exercises

The names of the joint military exercises have been around for many years. These names have become synonymous with terrible incidents and bad memories, more so than the peace and stability that they have symbolized to the rest of the world. It is doubtful that there are any Koreans left, both North and South, who do not recognize the names of the exercises. Although older Koreans still remember these exercises as the main deterrent to war, the new generation of Koreans is blaming them to what they believe as the main deterrent to reunification. Changing the names would allow the new generation of Koreans to equate the exercises to something more positive.

On the other hand, changing the names of the exercises will not have any impact on the current state of affairs on the Korean Peninsula. All of the exercises are of such scale and size that they cannot escape visibility. In addition, changing the names will not conceal the footprint of military maneuver and movement of forces during these exercises. While it can be argued that the cancellation of TS in 1992 and permanently in 1994 and replacing it with RSOI had positive political implications, it did not prevent Koreans from associating TS with other joint exercises like FE and RSOI. The purpose and nature of these joint exercises were so similar to TS that the removal of it did not eliminate the negative attributes of it.⁵⁸ Changing the name of the exercises will only strengthen the hatred for what has already been considered an obstacle to reunification.

Option 3: Reduce or eliminate U.S. footprint of exercises on South Korea

Due to the increase in technology and digitization of the current battlefield, and the transfer from threat-based to capabilities-based military, the size of U.S. troop deployment to the ROK during exercises is of little value.⁵⁹ As such, there are several ways to reduce the

footprint of U.S. military personnel in the exercises. First, it can be accomplished by simply decreasing the number of participants from the United States. As ROK forces continue to take the lead on defense missions, they too should take the lead on exercises, to include providing the majority of the participants to the exercise. This allows the United States to send only key and critical U.S. military personnel to facilitate and augment the U.S. forces as a supporting coalition partner.

Second, CFC could reduce the footprint of the exercises by focusing more on division and below exercises. Although it is just as important to exercise the commanders and staff of the CFC to win wars, it is more imperative for the tactical level commanders, staffs, and soldiers to train and win the battles. Rather than focusing on major theater-level exercises, focusing more on division and below exercises will allow the number of participants at the theater-level to be reduced.⁶⁰ Furthermore, focusing more on division and brigade-level warfighters and CPXs consisting of “gunnery, maneuver live fire exercises, field training exercises and virtual training opportunities” would reduce the visibility of a theater-level exercise, yet maintain a high operational and training tempo.⁶¹

Lastly, U.S. augmentation forces could be present virtually by internet and communication connectivity from outside the Peninsula. Since most of the exercises are computer-simulated, the exercises would be executed with little impact to the value of the training. It would be as though the U.S. forces were present in Korea sitting next to their Korean counterparts. The advances of modern technologies to include weapons, communication, and intelligence programs provide the United States the capability to have less military forces on the Peninsula during military exercises.⁶²

Option 4: Change location of exercises outside the ROK

CFC training exercises currently take place in the Korean countryside. This has caused much of the anti-American sentiments. It is also clearly visible to the North Koreans looking across the DMZ. As a result, alternatives to these physically and politically risky exercises would be to move the exercises to an underdeveloped part of the ROK in the south, or even somewhere outside the country. Much of what occurs in the exercises, with some exceptions, can be reproduced at other locations. A special training area can be established in some area where specific physical attributes would be constructed to replicate parts of the Korean Peninsula. Whenever necessary, Korean troops could be flown over to conduct joint exercises. In addition to reducing the footprint altogether for exercises, off-peninsula scenario training could dramatically reduce the deployment of U.S. troops to Korea and prevent the problems caused by the influx of military personnel.

Unfortunately, this option cannot be taken without the involvement of diplomatic leaders and national-level interest. Finding a large area suitable for the military and compatible to the physical attributes of the Korean Peninsula and obtaining the funds to establish a new training location is a huge political challenge. However, PACOM declared during the 2005 symposium that it plans to perform its usual robust exercise schedule and intends to have them at new or nontraditional locations. This option of off-peninsula training maintains PACOM's vision of conducting smaller scale exercises in support of U.S. force realignment in the theater.⁶³

Option 5: Change or update exercise

There are a couple of ways to change and update the exercise to meet the current needs of the Korean stand-off. First, in accordance with the changes initiated by the Future

of Alliance Policy Initiative (FAPI) of reducing and realigning the U.S. forces and transferring defensive security missions over to the ROK forces,⁶⁴ transfer full operational control over the exercises to the ROK as well. Rather than relying on the U.S. forces to provide command and control and subject matter expertise, transfer the authority over to South Korea and allow her to update and change the exercises in accordance to the needs of her country. Based on South Korea's overwhelming combat force compared to the U.S. Army strength on the Peninsula⁶⁵ and the increase in ROK defense capabilities, the power of deterrence should rest solely on the ROK military. Therefore, she should be allowed to influence and dictate the specific needs and requirements of the military exercises.

Second, change the focus of the exercises from full-scale warfare to meet other security challenges and ultimately build trust on the Peninsula.⁶⁶ This can be accomplished by exhibiting cooperation and transparency through Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). Peaceful coexistence could be achieved through CBMs, allowing both sides to develop trust to overcome the years of hatred, secrecy, and distrust. Emergent trust and friendship can then lead to a cooperative spirit, which in time can create predictability and stability in the region.⁶⁷

[Some ways to accomplish this goal are to invite North Korea] to observe combined ROK and U.S. military exercises on a reciprocal basis, [initiate] naval port-calls, [conduct] combined humanitarian projects, [invite] NK to participate in PACOMs multinational military conferences, and [establish and plan] regional military conferences to meet periodically to exchange transparent military information. Other measures could include establishing a security assistance program to support the conferences and the training needs of the participating nations and establishing a "hot-line" communications system for mutual notification of pending military exercises or other actions which may impact or alarm the other government...Furthermore, the U.S. could [plan a] military-to-military exchange program, [conduct] combined military exercises focused on such operations as...humanitarian missions, and [expand] a security assistance program.⁶⁸

While these activities sound reasonable and achievable, employing CBMs to increase transparency, verification, and communication has been incorporated partially and selectively in the past, but has not been successful. The reason is trust. “Under current conditions, there is no trust.”⁶⁹ North Korea will continue to see America as an impediment to Korean reunification regardless of the minor changes it makes to build confidence. Furthermore, DPRK may see the use of FAPI as preparation for preemptive war. The North Koreans argue that the realignment and reduction in U.S. forces is a first step by the United States to move American troops out of danger as she prepares for a preemptive attack. The new position would give America a better second strike capacity as the troops in the DMZ or in Seoul would face substantial losses in the first strike. Similarly, FAPI measures may be seen as a weakness in the U.S.-ROK resolve and could have negative effects on the on-going negotiations with DPRK over nuclear proliferation and stability in the region.

Option 6: Cancel major theater-level exercises

Finally, the last option is to suspend all major theater-level exercises. Exercises have been suspended in the past without reducing readiness. The cancellation and subsequent suspension of TS has had little to no impact on the readiness posture of the U.S.-ROK alliance today. More importantly, it demonstrated the U.S and ROK willingness to appeal to the needs of the enemy. With the future of the Six-Party Talks still yet to be determined, the cancellation of the exercises may “prevent the danger of a war and achieve solid peace on the Korean Peninsula.”⁷⁰

The U.S. and ROK could also take steps beyond permanently cancelling these exercises. They could announce the cancellation of them in any given year, or change them into biannual alternating events, with only one or the other being conducted each year.

However, short of the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Korean Peninsula, North Korea will not care if the exercises are cancelled. After the cancellation of TS in 1992, North Korea threatened to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty. After TS was permanently suspended in 1994 following the signing of the Geneva nuclear accord, North Korea resumed nuclear production some years later. Based on DPRK's uncooperative history, cancelling any exercises will only put CFC readiness at risk.

Recommendation

The current situation on the Korean peninsula in many respects parallels the situation that confronted NATO in Europe in 1989. The NATO allies, to include large forward-deployed U.S. troops, faced a large Soviet military threat under the Warsaw Pact. As a means to reduce tension in the theater, then Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General John Galvin decided to modify the exercise schedule and scope in order to send a clear signal to the Soviets of NATO's desire for de-escalation. The result was troop and arms reduction in Eastern Europe and the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union.⁷¹

Although the situation in Korea today is not exactly the same as what NATO faced during the Cold War, it certainly substantiates the recommendation to change the current military exercises on the Korean Peninsula in an effort to send positive signals to DPRK. Based on the merit and assessment of each option, the best selection for the Commanders of USFK and PACOM is to employ all options in a very deliberate order. For example, first do nothing and allow the Korean military to completely take over the defense mission on the Peninsula and increase their defense capabilities with military upgrades. Second, continue to upgrade the communication system until the United States is able to conduct the exercise from a remote location. Once this capability is in place, cancel the existing exercises for a

period of time to allow both South and North Koreans to forget the negative publicity of the old exercises. After sufficient time, introduce the new set of ROK-controlled remote exercises and give them new names. Simultaneously, establish a new exercise training site outside of the ROK and incorporate a periodic training exercise at that location with U.S.-ROK forces while no exercises are conducted in Korea. Finally, continue to incorporate CBMs and other military initiatives into the exercise program to show transparency in what U.S.-ROK forces are doing.

Conclusion

The military exercises are not the only obstacles to reconciliation and reunification. Koreans blame President Bush's principled stance against the North for slow process in inter-Korean rapprochement and the break in dialogue with Pyongyang. This perception was exacerbated when President Bush rejected South Korean President Kim Doe Jung's "sunshine policy" of engagement with North Korea during a joint news conference in 2001 and named North Korea as part of "the axis of evil" in his State of the Union address in January 2002.⁷² While diplomatic reactions to President Bush may have undermined the peace stability in the region, they have also solidified the U.S. resolve to contain the North Korean threat through military means.

The best way to avoid the nightmare of war remains the same as it has been for 53 years: to maintain a formidable CFC military supported by a strong U.S.-ROK alliance. Anti-American sentiments will continue to be felt and North Korea will always see the U.S. military as an impediment to Korean reunification. Short of complete withdrawal of USFK forces, anti-American sentiments will continue to hinder the U.S.-ROK alliance; short of unilateral security assurances from the U.S., the DPRK will continue to threaten peace on the

Peninsula. However, recurring signals from subtle signs to obvious statements⁷³ by North Korea suggest that a peaceful resolution is possible through military means.

Although any changes to the current military structure is a risk to security, acknowledgement of the signals from DPRK and moreover actions responding in kind to them may be sufficient to begin de-escalation and reduction of tension on the Korean Peninsula. Such a gesture would not escape the attention of the DPRK. They have actively tried to disrupt exercises in the past, and its cancellation or dramatic reduction in scale would have to be considered a major conciliatory step. The value of such a step is that it would be easily reversible should the DPRK not reciprocate suitably within a reasonable period. No troops would have to be withdrawn, no weapons displaced, and the overall security posture on the Peninsula would remain unchanged. The U.S. military would have made a major gesture while remaining operationally unaffected.

Trying to outwait North Korea is not the answer. DPRK's resolve is clear and unmistakable. Rather than focusing exclusively on North Korea's denuclearization, the U.S. can improve its position in Northeast Asia, solidify its alliance with South Korea, and reduce military escalation with North Korea.⁷⁴ But in order to achieve Korean reunification and peace on the peninsula, the U.S. should consider removing key obstacles first, to include perceptions by both Koreas, which hinder the process.⁷⁵ The only option to remove key obstacles, short of complete withdrawal and further realignment or reduction of U.S. forces, is to make changes to the military exercises. What may appear as minor changes to the United States could mean renewed trust and the possibility for cooperation and dialogue to North Korea. The military has the capacity and the capability to make a difference. Is the U.S. military ready to take that risk?

NOTES

¹ Leon J. LaPorte, “Enhanced Deterrence to Guarantee Peace and Stability on the Korean Peninsula,” Army 53, No. 10 (Oct 2003): 77.

² “Ulchi-Focus Lens,” Global Security, 27 Apr 2005 <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military_ops/ulchi-focus-lens.htm> [2 Dec 2005].

³ “South Korea, U.S. Conduct War Games,” Defensenews.com, 22 Aug 2005, <<http://defensenews.com/story.php?F=1049031&C=landwar&P=true>> [2 Dec 2005].

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ James Kitfield, “Asian Anchors Shift,” National Journal 37, No. 46 (Nov 2005): 3535.

⁶ David S. Maxwell, “A Strategy for the Korean Peninsula: Beyond the Nuclear Crisis,” Military Review 84, No. 5 (Sep/Oct 2004): 105; Jinwung Kim, “Ambivalent Allies: Recent South Korean Perceptions of the USFK,” Asian Affairs: An American Review 30, No. 4 (Winter 2004): 280-282.

⁷ General Ri Chan Bok, a DPRK military leader, said during an interview with 60 Minutes correspondent Dan Rather that DPRK is ready to use the ultimate weapon. “What we can say to you definitely right now is that we currently have nuclear weapons.” 60 Minutes, “North Korea: The Hermit Kingdom,” CBS News, Correspondent Dan Rather, 15 Jan 2006.

⁸ Rajan Menon, “The End of the Alliances,” World Policy Journal 20, No. 2 (Summer 2003): 9.

⁹ Leon J. LaPorte, “Transforming an Alliance While Deterring Aggression,” Army 55, No. 10 (Oct 2005): 89-90.

¹⁰ Leon J. LaPorte, “U.S. Army Korea – Ready to Fight Tonight and Win,” Army 54, No. 10 (Oct 2004): 82.

¹¹ Robert Wall, “North Korea Promises to Be a Formidable Foe,” Aviation Week & Space Technology 152, No. 21 (May 2000): 60-61.

¹² Maxwell, 105-106.

¹³ U.S. Institute of Peace, A Comprehensive Resolution of the Korean War, Special Report 106, (Washington, DC: May 2003): 5.

¹⁴ LaPorte, “Transforming an Alliance While Deterring Aggression,” 89-90.

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- ¹⁵ Menon, 7.
- ¹⁶ Jim Garamone, "In Korea, Think Capabilities, Not Numbers, General Says," Pentagon Brief, (Oct 15 2004): 8.
- ¹⁷ Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2000 Report to Congress on the Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula, 12 September 2000, <<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep2000/korea09122000.html>> [2 Dec 2005].
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- ²⁰ "Exercises," U.S. Pacific Command, 2 Dec 2005, <<http://www.pacom.mil/ops/exerlist.shtml>> [2 Dec 2005].
- ²¹ Yoon, 98-102.
- ²² RSOI focuses on strategic movement and sustainment issues for the USFK and CFC staffs and components. FE is a series of division level and below FTXs along the theme of RSOI. William F. Bither <William.F.Bither@korea.army.mil> "Combined Forces Command and US Forces Korea – Exercise Program (CFC CJ37 Briefing to 2005 PACOM Scheduling Conference)," [Email sent to John Chu <john.chu@nwc.navy.mil>] 5 Jan 2005.
- ²³ "US, South Korea Launch Two-week Military Exercise to Drill War Plans," Inside the Pentagon 21, No. 34 (Aug 2005).
- ²⁴ Robert Dujarric, ed., Korea: Security Pivot in Northeast Asia, (Indianapolis, IN: Hudson Institute, 1998), 21.
- ²⁵ "The 37th Security Consultative Meeting Joint Communique," Global Security, 21 Oct 2005, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2005/10/d20051021us_korea.1.pdf>, 2 Dec 2005.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Charles M. Perry, dir., Stability, Deterrence, & the Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance, (Cambridge, MA: The Institute of Foreign Policy Analysis, Aug 2003), 16-17.
- ²⁸ Kim, 268.

²⁹ Ministry of Unification, Republic of Korea, Peace and Cooperation: White Paper on Korean Reunification, (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2001), 75.

³⁰ Larry A. Niksch, Korea: US-South Korean Relations – Issues for Congress, CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service (Washington, DC: 22 Jan 2002), 10.

³¹ Raw video footage of the 2000 inter-Korean summit was provided by Brenda L. Connors (Senior Fellow, Strategic Research Department). The video illustrated the characteristic of Kim, Jun-Il during formal meetings and dining events. Kim was charismatic and caring; he was a very good hostess to his South Korean guests.

³² Doug Bandow, “Seoul Searching: Ending the U.S.-Korean Alliance,” The National Interest, No. 81 (Fall 2005): 115.

³³ Perry, 11.

³⁴ Seongo Sheen, “Grudging Partner: South Korea’s Response to U.S. Security Policies,” Special Assessment: Asia-Pacific Responses to U.S. Security Policies, (Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, March 2003), 10-2 thru 10-4.

³⁵ Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2000 Report to Congress on the Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula.

³⁶ LaPorte, “Enhanced Deterrence to Guarantee Peace and Stability on the Korean Peninsula,” 79.

³⁷ Sook-Jong Lee, The Transformation of South Korean Politics: Implications for U.S.-Korea Relations, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, Sep 2004), 15.

³⁸ Kim, 281-282.

³⁹ Nicole Risse, “The Evolution in Anti-Americanism in South Korea: From Ideologically Embedded to Socially Constructed,” 24 Sep 2001, <<http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/korean/ksaa/conference/papers/07NicoleRisse.pdf>> [2 Dec 2005]: 88-89; Perry, 14.

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- ⁴⁷ Ministry of Unification, Republic of Korea, Peace and Cooperation: White Paper on Korean Reunification, 19.
- ⁴⁸ Caroline Gluck, "Seoul Scales Down War Games," BBC News, 21 Aug 2000, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/889430.stm>> [2 Dec 2005].
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- ⁵⁰ "Pyongyang's Mannerisms," The Korean Herald, 31 August 2005, <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/>> [2 Dec 2005].
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- ⁵² Sang-Hyun Lee, "Bush's Second-Term Korea Policy: Prospects and Options for South Korea," East Asian Review 16, No. 4 (Winter 2004), 16.
- ⁵³ President, Proclamation, "Joint Statement between the U.S. and the ROK," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Vol. 39, No. 43 (27 Oct 2003), 1438.
- ⁵⁴ The inter-Korean summit in June 2000 was an historic, first-ever meeting in 55 years after the division of the Korean peninsular in 1945. President Kim Dae-jung and Chairman Kim Jong-il signed the June 15 Joint Declaration in which both leaders promised to develop a new inter-Korean relationship based on national reconciliation and cooperation. Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seung-Ho Joo, "North Korea's Changes and the Future of Inter-Korean Relations," The Korean Peace Process, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 46-48.
- ⁵⁵ Lee, "Bush's Second-Term Korea Policy: Prospects and Options for South Korea," 16.

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- ⁵⁷ “North Korea: U.S. Plotting Attack,” CBS News, 21 Sep 2005, <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/09/21/world/prtable875081.shtml>> [24 Jan 2006].
- ⁵⁸ Uriminjokkkiri web site in Pyongyang, “North Korea Decries ‘UFL’ Military Exercises,” BBC Worldwide Monitoring, 4 Sep 04, <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/>> [2 Dec 2005].
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