Military Options in Korea’s End Game

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by John H. Cushman

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I. Introduction

Prepared for the Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network Managed by Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development, Berkeley, California by Lieutenant General John H. Cushman, U.S. Army (Retired).

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II. Report by John H. Cushman

Military Options in Korea's End Game

On the Korean peninsula an end game is in progress. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which is an isolated economic basket case with a garrison mentality and a massive capability to invade the South, is on the way toward achievement of significant nuclear weaponry along with long range missiles that can deliver it.(1) The transcendent question is whether the United States will allow North Korea to achieve that capability, even though to deny it may require the U.S. to initiate military action.

The idea that this is an end game stems from the possibility, even the likelihood, that forces and trends are at work in and on North Korea that could destroy that society's seeming monolithic stability in a matter of years in any event. Might North Korea's demise bring all-out war, even nuclear war, to the region, or might it be a relatively calm "soft landing," or might it take a place elsewhere in the range of possibilities?

Other than the DPRK itself, the United States is the nation with the greatest potential influence on how the end game in Korea will unfold. (2) Seeking an outcome as close as possible to the "soft landing" end of the range of possibilities, the United States has only one opportunity to play right its part of the end game.

Elements of the Equation

The components of United States action will be political, economic, diplomatic, psychological, and military. Underlying all action, and most decisive in the end game, will be the military component -- or rather the psychological/military component, because the end game is also very much a mind game, with the United States aiming at the mind of Kim Il Sung, the aging North Korean dictator/demigod, and at those around him, including his heir apparent Kim Jong Il.

And Kim Il Sung, master manipulator, is aiming mostly at the mind of President Clinton and at the minds of those, foreign and domestic, with whom the President interacts as he decides at any stage what action to undertake--the leadership and body politic of the Republic of Korea being particular targets.

In the context that the military component is intertwined with all the other components of action, this paper addresses the military options of the DPRK and the United States.(3)

Exploiting a gifted yet cowed and suffering populace half that of the South's, and outbuilding the South in weaponry by two or three to one, Kim Il Sung has created and arrayed in attack formations on or near his southern border a million-man, largely mechanized, standing army that is about twice the size of the defensively deployed South's and has more than twice the South's tanks and artillery.(4) This is the key card in his hand, his "center of gravity," the main source of his strength.

The explanation for Kim Il Sung's creation of this force might once have been his dream of using it some day to reunite the Korean peninsula. In recent years, he has more likely seen the threat of its use as a way through which he can make the United States or a U.S.-led coalition wary of using

military force. His technique is, at any indication that force is being considered, to threaten drastic military action and to make invasion of the South a believable course of action. (5)

Kim and those around him must therefore have been pleased by the December 12, 1993, Washington Post front page headline: "Trepidation at Root of U.S. Korea Policy;" to see the US Air Force Chief of Staff, General Merrill McPeak, quoted as saying, "I just can't answer whether we could stop them before they get to Seoul or not;" and to note that two days later General John Shalikashvili, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said much the same. (6)

In 1976-78, when I commanded, under Generals Richard Stilwell and John Vessey in turn, the ROK/US force responsible for defending the western half of the DMZ, such statements by responsible military officers would have been out of the question. Some 25 miles from the DMZ, Seoul is the Republic of Korea's cultural and political center; in and around Seoul are one third of the ROK's population and industry. The loss of Seoul would have been devastating, and the United States and Republic of Korea were then making real a new "forward defense strategy" that said we would not evacuate Seoul, as was twice done in 1950-51, but would defend it.

A grave concern in those days was that North Korea might attack, successfully seize or surround Seoul, then call for negotiations, judging that Americans do not like long wars. We wanted North Korea's military to believe each day that the odds for that scheme's success were so small and the risk so high that they would not decide to try. Senior commanders in public words told the North that an attack would be foolhardy in the extreme and told the South that Seoul would be held. Adopting measures to ensure that we would not be surprised, we bent all efforts so that if war came we would do what we said. That US officers now openly doubt that capability announces a weakness in the face of threat that commanders on the scene in those days would simply not have shown. (7)

In addition to a massive land army in attack configuration, North Korea has built a sizeable fleet with torpedo-carrying full size and midget submarines, frigates, corvettes, missile- and torpedo-armed coastal combatants, amphibious and mine-warfare craft, and Silkworm coastal defense missiles. Its air force of some 700 combat aircraft and 50 armed helicopters (their numbers to some degree compensating for their being less modern than the fewer machines possessed by South Korea and the United States on the peninsula) and has an impressive air defense capability, both missile and gun. Skilled special operations forces, and their air and water-borne means of insertion into the South's rear areas, exist in ample strength. A body of trained terrorist cells is available for world-wide use.

In a rough order of importance the objectives of North Korea's leadership seem to be:

- To stay in power themselves.
- To preserve their state and its system.
- To be treated with great respect as an important power in the region.
- To unite the peninsula on their terms.
- To improve the lot of their people.

The second of these -- a fear-driven basic need to preserve his state and its system -- was arguably the original root of Kim Il Sung's nuclear compulsion, and simply to achieve additional deterrence toward survival in the face of its enemies may well be why the North is driving toward a nuclear and long range missile capability today. But, reinforcing the delusion of grandeur component of his paranoia, Kim may also have discovered that treatment with respect as an important power in the region has been a by-product of his nuclear program. In any event, in this end game/mind game the

United States is dealing with a brilliant enemy that is heavily armed and dangerous, that sees itself being cornered by developments at home and in the former USSR and China, that fears for its existence, and the leadership of which may have (and the population of which surely has) a badly flawed grasp of reality.

Objectives and Thrusts

The overriding objective of the United States seems to be that North Korea not become a nuclear/missile power. The specter of that nation being able to threaten its neighbors, or indeed United States territory (Guam), with nuclear attack and to provide nuclear weaponry to rogue states worldwide is indeed horrifying to contemplate. But is it a condition that the United States quite simply will not allow, even if a war is required? That is the issue.

Other U.S. objectives seem to be:

- That there be no war on the peninsula.
- That North Korea not be allowed to intimidate the South or any other U.S. ally.
- That North Korea not be allowed to engage in arms trade with rogue states.

From the United States' point of view, the goal of the end game is that North Korea abandon its aim of becoming a nuclear power, walk itself back from the nuclear brink, cease its bombast, and join the world community as a peaceful full partner.

The thrust of United States policy has been to deal with North Korea's nuclear weapons program both in low-level direct negotiations and, through the United Nations, insisting on the DPRK's compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty that it signed in 1985 and with the required safeguards agreement providing for International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections that it ratified in early 1993. When in February 1994 North Korea agreed to admit IAEA inspectors, the U.S. and South Korea announced that they would on their part not hold the 1994 Team Spirit exercises, which had long been seen by the North as a symbol of aggressive intent.

U.N. Security Council members Britain and France have been content to follow the United States' lead. Russia, preoccupied with internal problems, has not seen the United States' approach as contrary to its own interests. Japan and the Republic of Korea, nervous and increasingly alarmed, rely on United States leadership and assurance of support. (8) Other U.S. allies in Europe and the Pacific are content to have the United States lead the way. But China, whatever its uneasiness may be at North Korea's possible emergence as a regional nuclear power, has shown itself disinclined to join in a public threat to its old ally.

Using stonewalling, wedge-driving, salami-slicing, hard-line tactics the DPRK has stalled, and in March it finally blocked, meaningful IAEA inspections. The United States, compromising with China but also bringing it along, then engineered a unanimous Security Council statement that called on North Korea to allow inspectors to complete their investigation, that asked the IAEA to report in six weeks, and that obliquely raised the possibility of a trade embargo if the North did not cooperate. Saying that it had nothing further to show the IAEA North Korea condemned the statement, called for direct talks with the United States to resume, and, one should assume, continued its nuclear weapons effort. So as not to impede a resumption of talks, the U.S. and South Korea deferred a decision to reschedule 1994's Team Spirit exercises. With the North's refusal to allow IAE inspectors to take measurements of spent fuel as it replaces the Yongbyon reactor's fuel rods in May, the

standoff continues toward crisis.

On the military front, one U.S. thrust has been to try to convince North Korea that nuclear weapons would be of no practical use to that nation in any event. In South Korea in July 1993, President Clinton told Kim Il Sung that if he chose nuclear warfare it would mean the end of his country. (9) This has had no evident effect; Kim's program to build nuclear weaponry evidently continues, serving him well as a means to gain power, attention, and respect.

Another U.S. line of action on the military front has been to improve the ability of the ROK/US coalition to defend should the North attack. These measures include the movement of one, possibly two, Patriot battalions to South Korea, the shipment of MLRS (multiple launched rocket systems) artillery, a buildup of air munitions and repair parts, replacement of older U.S. Army helicopters with new Apache attack helicopters, and, according to Secretary of Defense Perry, "to take every step we can take so that our tactical air could be applied in a matter of a day or two rather than a week or two or three." (10)

Options and Responses

Now, let's look at what might be the North Korean military response to a United States-led increase of pressure on that nation through the political/diplomatic channel. Possible actions, with a plausible to likely DPRK response, might include:

- The U.S. continues to press for action in the United Nations Security Council, the General Assembly, and the IAEA that will maintain pressure on the DPRK to permit meaningful inspections. Because China will not currently go along, this approach cannot now threaten explicitly the use of military force.
  DPRK military response: Continue current line of threat and bombast, relying on China to help thwart any mention of possible sanctions. Continue the development of a nuclear/missile capability.
- The U.S. takes action outside the United Nations but with the cooperation of the Republic of Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, NATO allies such as France and Great Britain, and perhaps Russia. This might include serious discussion of sanctions, to be enforced by blockade. DPRK military response (all of them feasible) (11):
- Continue the development of a nuclear/missile capability.
- At the first indication that blockade is being seriously considered, call such action an act of war. Threaten to challenge at sea any use of naval force to enforce a blockade. Should a blockade be instituted, carry out that threat.
- Threaten reprisals by terrorists or special agents in the capitals and homelands of the nations that engage in the blockade. Carry out that threat.
- Engage in provocations in the Demilitarized Zone and/or in the Joint Security Area established near Panmunjom.
- Attempt to unnerve the Republic of Korea, Japan, China, and the world at large with a threat, implied or expressed, to attack South when or before the blockade begins, letting it be known that the first stage of attack would seize or surround Seoul and the second stage would conquer all of Korea.
- Prepare in secret to attack. (North Korea being the world's most secure country with much of its military might underground, preparations for attack are difficult indeed to detect.)

- When firing takes place at sea, when the U.S. begins to reinforce its troops in South Korea, or at some other decision point, attack south with massive force.

What Would Happen?

This scenario raises the fundamental question: What would be the outcome of a DPRK offensive to seize or surround Seoul and to continue the attack to seize all of Korea?

Generals Shalikashvili and McPeak (page 3) have given their assessment: the security of Seoul is in doubt. General Shalikashvili has also said that, even so, the North will be denied a conquest of the full peninsula. (12)

In 1976-78, while commanding I Corps (ROK/US) Group in its mission to defend the Western Sector of Korea's DMZ, I laid out a simple concept for our conduct of the defense:

- Deny the enemy total surprise. (13)
- Be ready, on position, barriers installed, and reserves in good order, at the time the enemy attacks.
- Master in advance the tactics, the logistics, and the command and control methods which the conditions of battle will demand.
- When the war starts...

- See the battlefield.
- Determine the enemy main attack.
- Rapidly concentrate maneuver units, artillery, tactical air, and logistics.
- Conduct an active offensive-defense to defeat the enemy well forward.

I used two-sided free play air/land warfare simulation to train and exercise my force in this concept. Although these were rudimentary "board games" in which we rolled dice for firepower effects and company-level battle outcomes, they were adequate for our purposes. A series of seven corps and division wargames, culminating in a two corps game with full air participation, players to regimental level, and realistic logistics play, was invaluable in revealing our deficiencies and improving our readiness. Our wargames also shed light on the likely outcome of a war's first days and on the balance of forces on the peninsula.

Upon his inauguration in January 1977, President Carter told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he intended to withdraw U.S. ground forces from Korea within five years (he was speaking specifically of the U.S. Army's partially mechanized 2d Infantry Division deployed on and immediately behind the DMZ), and he asked the JCS for a plan that would do that. This alarmed senior commanders in Korea, who believed that such an action would increase the risk of war.

In March 1977 I told General Vessey, commander in chief of the ROK/US command, that the outcomes of our first three wargames made clear that the 2d Division was essential to the defense of Korea. General Vessey arranged a visit by experts from the United States to verify the validity of our wargaming methods and, upon being informed that those methods were valid, sent me to Washington in April to brief the Joint Chiefs of Staff on our findings.

After briefing to the JCS our I Corps (ROK/US) Group operational concept and reviewing in detail our wargames to that date, I gave my outcome estimate. I told the JCS that, while any outcome was a one-time event depending on quantitative factors and imponderables, the likely outcome, April 1977, was that without the 2d Division we could probably not keep the enemy out of Seoul. I said that with the 2d Division to stop the enemy short of Seoul would be most difficult, with no margin for mistakes. I said that removal of the 2d Division should not take place until a host of compensating measures in Korea was carried out, requiring many years.

The Joint Chiefs listened soberly. General George Brown, Chairman, observed that the President had already made up his mind. I do not know what action the JCS took, but I gave the same briefing to Admiral Stansfield Turner, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and to senior officials in the State Department. I am satisfied that this series of briefings contributed to the delaying action waged by General Vessey and others that in due course held the troop withdrawal under President Carter to about a battalion. Upon his inauguration, President Reagan rescinded the withdrawal plan.

General Gary Luck, today's Commander in Chief of Korea's ROK/US Combined Forces Command, has a different situation; for one thing, the 2d Division is not the critical issue. While General Luck's mission is essentially the same, his enemy is more formidable, the makeup of his own force has changed, and he has a different operational plan. (14) I surmise that if General Luck were to present a briefing like the one General Vessey approved for me to give, he might conclude in part with words something like this:

- Our operational plan in the event of North Korean attack is to stop the enemy short of Seoul and quickly to take the offensive into North Korea, destroy its armed forces, and seize Pyongyang and the nuclear facilities in that vicinity. We aim to gain air superiority within hours of a North Korean attack and air supremacy within a day and a half. (15)
- The outcome of a North Korean offensive versus our defense will depend on quantitative factors, including the enemy's (and our) strength, logistics, and operational plan, and on imponderables, among which are of course how well we fight and, very importantly, the amount of warning that we get.
- Given strategic warning of X days, and operational warning of Y hours, (16) we (will) (will not) be able to keep the enemy out of Seoul. [Based only on what I know from news reports and on my thought and experience, I surmise that if X is "two" and Y is "six," General Luck would today use the words "will not." (17) JHC]
- We may have, as the Secretary of Defense has stated, (18) a few months before we are tested, but I do not want to count on that. Beginning now I want to increase my forces on the ground and to improve the readiness of reinforcements to arrive within days of their being called for. Specifically... (Here General Luck can be expected to ask for more intelligence, logistic, and airpower assets on the scene, and for immediate reinforcement of airpower within hours or days of being called for.)
- In addition, the Republic of Korea must strengthen its forces. Specifically...(19)
- I urge that any threat of specific military action not be made to the DPRK until I can state, credibly enough for Kim Il Sung's military to conclude that now is not the time to attack, that my command is in a position without the use of nuclear weapons to keep the enemy out of Seoul.
- While I abhor the use of nuclear weapons, I want measures to be taken now that will enable me to use not more than eight, of approximately 100 kiloton yield, against selected troop and other military targets north of the DMZ, should Seoul be in danger of seizure or of being surrounded, and when the President authorizes their use. I cannot state too strongly how urgent it is to reinforce my command so that the need to confront the President with that decision will be remote.

(20)

- It is not my call, but I urge that the American public be prepared for war, including nuclear war. (21) The Congressional debate and the resolutions that resulted therefrom in the weeks before the launching of 1991's Desert Storm are an example of the kind of public understanding and approval before the fact that I have in mind. (22)
- This would be a violent war; military casualties on both sides will be heavy. There may be time before the DPRK attacks to begin civilian evacuation to the south of the Han River from the region from the DMZ to Seoul and its outskirts. Nonetheless that region is largely urban/suburban and civilian casualties there in even a short war will be in the tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands. Obviously, the longer the war the greater will be the casualties.
- However, I am satisfied that, should the Secretary of Defense and the President carry out this line of action, including preparing the American people for war, there is no likelihood that the DPRK, however unbalanced Kim Il Sung may be personally, will attack south under any circumstances. The DPRK's military men are realists. (23)

Without action along the lines of that laid out in these hypothetical views of the commander in chief of the Korea command, it would seem foolhardy for the United States and its allies to undertake military action to enforce a trade embargo on a North Korea which has in its hands a viable option to attack to the south and seize or surround Seoul. (24)

Circumstances other than a threatened blockade may cause Kim Il Sung to consider an invasion of the South. One, for example, might be political instability in North Korea with a pro-South faction trying to draw the ROK into a civil war to turn the tide.

Another might be Kim Il Sung's willingness to risk an invasion in order to preempt an anti-Kim coup, or as a final deluded effort to achieve personal greatness. Whatever the reason to consider an invasion, the fact that it would in all likelihood quickly fail and that the North would be destroyed would be sufficient for Kim's military to rule it out.

The Pre-emptive Strike Option

A final option available to the United States and its allies (26) is an air and missile attack on the DPRK nuclear facilities at Yongbyon and on similar facilities under construction elsewhere. This option's sole aim would be to eliminate the DPRK's plutonium generating capability before it has generated plutonium for more than the one or two nuclear weapons now estimated, thus ending any dream that the DPRK might have of becoming a nuclear power. The U.S. could then reasonably cope with the one or two weaponized warheads still possible. Targets for this attack would not include places, presumably all underground, where the product of these nuclear facilities is made into weapons.

Desert Storm's air operations made clear that the United States knows how to carry out such an operation. Its essential features:

- Accurate targeting.
- Careful timing.
- Effective command and control.
- Simultaneous precision attack by stealth air and cruise missiles in sufficient mass to assure full

success.

The window for this option -- namely the attack of Yongbyon and its like alone -- may be closing; the option must be undertaken before the DPRK has built and deployed in hardened and concealed sites, say, four or five nuclear-tipped missiles that can reach the South and possibly beyond and can then exploit their deterrent effect. If possible, this attack should be executed during a downtime at the Yongbyon facility so that the effects of radiation can be minimized. (27)

A grave danger in embarking on such an option is that the DPRK, either believing it to be imminent or immediately upon its execution, would attack to the south. The option should therefore not be undertaken without the preparations laid out in General Luck's hypothetical assessment beginning on page 8.

Further, the debate preceding any resolution that the Congress passes to authorize the President to use military force in the Korea end game must make clear that the resolution's terms of reference include this kind of an action. To surprise the American people with such an act of war in order to surprise the enemy might be advantageous operationally but it would not be the American way.

* * * * * * *

This paper on Korea's end game's military options has explored the mind of Kim Il Sung. It is important also to consider the mind of President Clinton; Kim Il Sung is certainly doing so.

In his campaign for the presidency and in his time in office in both domestic and foreign affairs, the outlines of President Clinton's approach to life have begun to emerge. There may be reason to ponder if he is up to the challenges implied in this paper's military options; he may back down in a crisis, or he may seek to avoid an emerging one, or he may undertake an approach far less confrontational than these pages lay out. It could turn out that a fundamental assumption of this paper -- that the United States must not permit North Korea to achieve a significant nuclear weaponry along with the long range missiles that can deliver it, and that a DPRK bent on achieving that capability cannot be tolerated -- will not be realized. In that case, an end-game situation of another sort may come to pass in later years.

III. Notes

1. I hold "significant nuclear weaponry" to be five to eight, or six to ten, warheads of 100 kiloton range, deliverable without being wildly inaccurate. An April 3, 1994, story by The New York Times' Michael Gordon (p. 6) indicates that North Korea is increasing in steps its capacity to produce the necessary plutonium. Gordon writes that, according to American officials, "North Korea is expanding the potential of its nuclear installation to separate plutonium... as part of a long-term plan to expand its nuclear program... [It is] installing a second production line... and is building a second, larger reactor that is scheduled to be completed in 1995." Acknowledging that North Korea has tested a missile with 620 mile range, CIA Director R. James Woolsey has said that missiles of 1,250 and 2,190 mile range, sufficient to reach Guam, are in early stages of development. (Los Angeles Times, March 18, 1994, p. 5) Janes Defence Weekly, March 12, 1994, cites Japanese sources as saying that "both... missiles are likely to fly in 1998."

2. China's potential to influence the endgame toward a favorable outcome is also great, providing that nation is willing to assume a responsibility for constructively developing a solution.

3. This paper leaves out a range of options that might be considered under an approach that sees the DPRK as genuinely reaching out for understanding of its legitimate interests and as honestly willing to abandon its nuclear weapons program in exchange for full diplomatic recognition by and economic assistance from the United States and the larger international community. Selig Harrison of the Carnegie Endowment is an articulate exponent of this general line of thought, which differs not in its goals but in its strategy/tactics to realize those goals. Those who argue against that line of thought hold the view that, considering its essential personality as made clear by its behavior since Kim Il Sung invaded the South in 1950, the DPRK under present leadership simply cannot be trusted to live up to its side of that bargain. They believe that the way to go is, through the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to make the DPRK prove by opening itself to genuine inspection that it is not developing nuclear weapons, and that concrete evidence of good behavior will result in a flow of the rewards sought.

4. These force ratios come from data in the Institute for Strategic Studies' 1993-94 Strategic Balance. From what I know, read, and can infer, I surmise that the balance is more unfavorable to the South, that the supplies to support the North's full force for a month or more are stored forward and underground, and that North Korea has systematically built its force to fit an operation plan that it wants to believe can take or invest Seoul in the first phase, then drive to the peninsula's tip in exploitation.

5. A headline in the London Financial Times, March 22, 1994 (p. 6), reads: "North Korea's 'sea of fire' threat shakes Seoul; Pyongyang may be set on cultivating a nuclear madman image."

6. Transcript of General Shalikashvili's first press conference, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), December 14, 1993 (p. 2).

7. Commanders understand that rarely can one foretell the outcome of a battle -- in this case of the opening battle of a war. In preparing for action, the commander's obligation is to estimate honestly the probabilities of success, to take all possible measures to make the outcome favorable, to face the situation neither discouraged nor self-deluded, and to recognize that his morale building statements to his troops and the defended populace -- as well as any warning that he might give his possible opponent that disaster awaits should he attack – must not be bravado. They must have a basis in fact. Saddam Hussein, pre-Desert Storm, is an example of doing it wrong. In Korea in 1976-78 I was satisfied that, although we had much work to do to make ever more good our public posture, we commanders had it right. I believe it was unwise of Generals McPeak and Shalikashvili to have made public the estimates cited, and that it was also negligent of the responsible authorities over the years to have let that situation come to pass -- assuming that it did.

8. Among the least likely of events is that the Republic of Korea will take unilateral military action against the North. ROK military men are well aware that their nation is incapable of doing so without United States support, and its political leaders are simply not that reckless.

9. Datelined Panmunjom, Korea, a New York Times story of July 12, 1993 (p. 2, Sect A), said "President Clinton ended a six-day trip to Asia today by visiting (the DMZ)... Mr. Clinton used the occasion to address some of the 36,000 American troops stationed in South Korea... He courted the soldiers with tough talk about American security and patriotism, and then performed an impromptu riff on a saxophone borrowed from a member of the Army band... 'When you examine the nature of the American security commitment to Korea, to Japan, to this region, it is pointless for them to try to develop nuclear weapons,' Mr. Clinton said, 'Because if they ever use them, it would be the end of their country.'" One has the impression that, rather than out of conviction in the context of a coherent strategy for denying North Korea a nuclear/missile capability, the President was simply reading his lines.

10. New York Times, March 27, 1994, p. 9. A day earlier the Washington Times (p. 1) reported that "Defense Secretary Perry said yesterday he is urging South Korea to augment its armed forces with some of the same advanced weaponry the U.S. unleashed to defeat Iraq's huge army in the Persian Gulf War... He says he plans to visit South Korea next month to discuss modernizing the country's military rather than increasing its size."

11. One anonymous reviewer noted that there is a reasonable body of evidence that for all its numbers, the DPRK is woefully deficient in training and in particular in its capability to logistically support much beyond a short thrust into the ROK (which itself could create devastation, but if resisted would ultimately result in defeat for the DPRK and devastation in the North). Sustainability and combat effectiveness may be their weaknesses.

12. General Shalikashvili's press conference, op cit (p. 4).

13. I estimated that we would need at a minimum six hours from the time we went from our normal readiness condition to the next higher condition, which itself was one step short of "be ready for imminent attack." This would permit us to "be ready, on position... etc.," in the next sentence.

14. In the New York Times of February 6, 1994 (p.1), reporter Michael Gordon, in what seems to be an authoritative account, spells out that plan in some detail.

15. Air superiority means the ability to dominate the air at any time and place of our choosing. Air supremacy means full freedom of air activity, except against certain short-range ground air defenses.

16. "Strategic warning" says that the enemy is believed to be preparing for an offensive within days; "operational (or tactical) warning" reflects a belief that the offensive will come within hours. Warning is the product of a comprehensive search for indications, combined with an astute and sensitive interpretation of all evidence. The history of war makes clear that the best of warning is of no value without a command decision to increase readiness.

17. Strategic warning, duly acted on, may change "will not" to "will." Warning assumptions are however risky in the extreme. The defender's nerve ends must be extraordinarily sensitive and his judgment acute; he has only one chance to not be surprised.

18. On March 28, 1994, on the McNeil-Lehrer News Hour Secretary of Defense Perry said, "Let me state very directly and very emphatically. There is no danger of a military confrontation [in Korea] anywhere in the near future... There is... no military danger in North Korea... [for] many weeks [or a] few months..." He went on to say that "We are... taking the prudent steps... to prepare ourselves in the event that the North Koreans take some action we're... not expecting to happen but we simply have to be prepared for." Secretary Perry repeated this judgment on "Meet the Press," April 3, 1994 (The Washington Post, April 4, 1944 (p. 1).

19. See footnote 10.

20. When I served in Korea in 1976-78, my overriding objective was, with our ROK partners and under General Vessey's command, to do everything I could to insure that a call for authority to use nuclear weapons would never be made. When I left, I was satisfied that the command was well on the way to achieve that goal. I am dismayed at what seems to be the situation today. I insert this paragraph knowing well that, as one reviewer of this paper has remarked, "There would be no support for the use of nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula by the United States in the absence of first use by North Korea." My purpose is to get into the open the idea that, just as the United

States considered nuclear first use an option against an overwhelming Warsaw Pact advantage in Europe, it must in all realism consider that option on the Korean peninsula today, if the alternative is the loss of Seoul and a long and costly refight of the Korean War.

21. The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which the United States has signed, says that nuclear states will hold to a policy of no first use against non-nuclear states unless they are aggressors allied with a nuclear-armed state. Thus, if the North attacks with conventional means without China's support, then adherence to the NPT requires no U.S. nuclear use; but if China is supporting North Korea's attack, U.S. first use is allowed but runs the risk of Chinese use in retaliation. These arcane calculations unduly fascinate the think tanks; the NPT's strictures as a primary consideration cannot be allowed to keep America from using the nuclear weapon in extremis to keep the enemy out of Seoul. That the possible U.S. use of nuclear weapons is fraught with such considerations simply emphasizes its complexity, and that U.S. first use of nuclear weapons in Korea is even considered confirms the situation's gravity.

22. The Congressional debate on Desert Storm followed a months- long masterful effort by President Bush and Secretary of State Baker to lead public opinion, beginning with action in the United Nations Security Council the night of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Getting equivalent public attention and support in the Korea situation, where Kim Il Sung will be careful to relax his pressure just as matters get very tense, would be an operation of a different sort. That it would surely interfere with President Clinton's accomplishment of his domestic agenda might be in his mind sufficient reason to consider the idea no further.

23. There is good reason to believe that, in the calculations of the North Korean military, reality will prevail. Peter Hayes in a confidential report of his 1991 visit to North Korea describes conversations with North Korean political, military, and nuclear authorities, including senior general staff officers of the Ministry of Defense, that illustrate outlooks that are entirely realistic, both from their own and from an objective viewpoint. North Korea's Nuclear Capabilities and Intentions; Trip Report to North and South Korea (Berkeley: Nautilus Institute, October 1991). I saw evidence of this in August 1976, after the murders of two American officers who had been leading a tree-trimming party in the Joint Security Area of the demilitarized zone. When the U.S. and ROK rapidly mobilized and reinforced their forces, and then swiftly and with surprise employed a small portion of that force to cut down the offending tree, the North Korean military and Kim Il Sung himself backed down. Objective reality left them no other option.

24. One anonymous reviewer noted that given the track record of the current administration, a positive response to these hypothetical comments by General Luck is unlikely.

25. Because involving any allies, including the ROK, in an attack like that described here complicates the planning and execution of what will be in any event a most complex operation, the preferred course would probably be for the United States to go it alone.

26. Aside from the difficulties of target selection, of weapons selection, and of executing the attack itself, many factors argue against such a pre-emptive attack. Among the most significant is that the destruction of DPRK nuclear facilities could well produce catastrophic radioactive pollution over a wide area, intolerable for North Korea's neighbors to endure, for the American people to even consider, and hence for U.S. decision- makers, operating even in secret, to accept. A powerful counter- stroke in the hands of the North would be commando attacks on nuclear power plants in the Republic of Korea, with their Chernobyl-like consequences. (See the March 24, 1994, backgrounder of the Nuclear Control Institute, Washington, D.C., by Paul Leventhal and Steven Dolley.) The calculus of the timing of attacks on Yongbyon and other above-ground facilities involves technical considerations on which I am not well informed except to take into account one view: that

such a strike must take place almost immediately or it can be too late. Anonymous reviewers of this paper provided comments on how to respond to the potential for nuclear weapons development in the DPRK and the possibility of war on the Korean peninsula.

One reviewer believes that the North Korean nuclear program has long been in development, but attention to it has been heightened recently as the domestic economy has collapsed and other economies in the region have grown. In addition, the ascendancy of the United States as the gatekeeper of global military policy after the Cold War has made North Korea more reliant on nuclear weapons development as its biggest bargaining chip. Another reviewer argues that Kim Il Sung hopes to use the weapons program to put strain on relations between the Republic of Korea and the United States, and Washington should pay more attention during these negotations to staying in lockstep with Seoul. Additionally, the U.S. should recognize its limitations in the region and acknowledge that China might conceivably have the greatest influence on the outcome of this "endgame."

In addition to political reasons for developing a nuclear weapons program, one reviewer cited other sources of motivation, including deterrence to a possible counterattack from the South after a conventional invasion; the significant income to be gained from sales in the Middle East; and technology access and economic development to be gained from the United States and other countries by using nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip. In negotiations until now, the U.S. has worked from a weak position because while it provides no payoff to the DPRK for negotiations, it also backs off from any suggestion of war which could cause the North Koreans to regard their nuclear weapons program as ultimately dangerous to the survival of the regime. In this view, North Korea will only sacrifice its program if to do otherwise would cause irreversible damage to the survival of the regime.

Reviewers also debated the potential significance of the "psychological component" of Kim Il Sung's strategy. First, given Kim's alleged paranoia, what are the possible repercussions of General Luck's hypothetical steps? Secondly, another reviewer points out, the threat that North Korea could attack Seoul with conventional weapons is very real, as the South Korean capital lies in an accessible invasion corridor. This needs to be considered with at least as much gravity as the nuclear issue.

Even if North Korea could not hold Seoul in an extended conflict, the potential impact to South Korea and the region if Seoul were successfully invaded could be devastating. According to another reviewer, Kim Il Sung clearly has his army organized offensively with the goal of reunification by force, and he has been willing to pay a high price in cash and security to threaten attack.

Therefore, it is imperative that the U.S. and the Republic of Korea publicly emphasize their confidence in their capability to protect Seoul.

The reviewers discussed the likelihood of war and the use of nuclear weapons. According to one reviewer, any military action against North Korea could result in war. There would in no case be support for the use of nuclear weapons by the U.S. without first use by North Korea, and the use of nuclear weapons would be more devastating to the region than would the fall of Seoul.

Destroying the known nuclear facilities and defeating the Korean People's Army would not be the quick and bloodless operation the U.S. public has come to require in military operations, and the Clinton administration would have to step up its campaign in the U.S. to develop support for an armed conflict in the region. Another reviewer stated that destroying Yongbyon would not eliminate DPRK's nuclear capabilities; it would only buy time, and the U.S. should decide how it would use that time. Any future development of a nuclear weapons program in DPRK would be better concealed and harder to destroy.

IV. Nautilus invites your responses

The Nautilus Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this report. Please leave a comment below or send your response to: nautilus@nautilus.org. Comments will only be posted if they include the author's name and affiliation.

View this online at: https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/military-options-in-kores-end-game/

Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org