


South Korea Joins The Big Boy League

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If we try to figure out what the post-2010 ROK “pro-active deterrence” concept articulated and pushed hard by former Blue House national security advisor Kim Tae-hyo actually means, we end up with a propensity to fire-first, ask-questions-later (at least as far as rules-of-engagement along the western offshore front are concerned); plus sledgehammers aka the [extended range and payload missiles](#) that were announced on October along with cruise and UAV range and payloads.

Wonk analysts are having a field day parsing the [military and technical implications](#) of this shift. But

we need to stand back to see how ROK security intellectuals have approached the creation of a conventional response to the DPRK's military and nuclear threat, without going nuclear.

This "we are in big boy league now" strategic concept is spelled out clearly by Kim Tae-woo, ex-KIDA, now head of KINU. See for example, his [The need for strategic weapons capable of striking anywhere in North Korea "New Missile Guidelines"](#) must be revised, Korean Institute of National Unification (18 May 2012).

The flavor of "pro-active deterrence" is stated up front in Kim's analysis: "A "triad system" represents deployment of deterrent weapons (ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, unmanned aircraft, etc.) in the air, under the sea and on the ground. As for the platforms such weapons will be mounted on, we should prioritize the purchase of the 5th-generation combat planes and KSS-III class submarines. For deployment on the ground, we need to develop mobile launchers and expand and refurbish the existing Guided Missile Command..."

The concept did not emerge out of the 2010 attacks overnight. Rhee Sang-Woo outlines the deeper political-bureaucratic origins of the concept of pro-active deterrence in his September 7, 2011 CSIS paper, [From Defense to Deterrence: The Core of Defense Reform Plan 307](#).

The problem, as USFK and MND officials will attest, is no-one knows how this concept translates into operational practice and warplans in order to manage crises and avoid escalation before, during, or after low level overt and covert conventional attacks from the DPRK.

Abraham Denmark gives an excellent overview of the dilemmas that arise from implementing this concept in his December 2011 [Proactive Deterrence: The Challenge of Escalation Control on the Korean Peninsula](#).

As he states: "The possibility of preemption by the ROK by what it assesses to be an imminent small-scale attack from the North is especially problematic from an escalatory standpoint. Although it is unclear that preemption is an explicit element of Seoul's proactive deterrence approach, the statement by presidential spokesman Lee Dong-kwan that the principle of proactive deterrence is "to preempt further provocations and threats from the North against the South, as well as simply exercising the right of self-defense" certainly suggests as much. The danger of preemption is the potential that Pyongyang may respond with an attack more devastating and shocking than what may have been originally intended, especially if domestic North Korean politics come into play and Pyongyang sees itself as unable to back down."

- [Peter Hayes](#), NAPSNet Contributor

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