South Korea's Military Reform In the Aftermath of the Cheonan Incident

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Introduction

Recent years tension between North Korea (DPRK) and South Korea has risen sharply and finally this year North Korea began to stage unprovoked military attacks against South Korea. On March 26, 2010, a North Korean submarine torpedoed a South Korean naval combatant, the Cheonan, in South Korea's territorial water. The 1,200 ton corvette sank immediately and 46 sailors were killed.[2] Eight months later on November 23rd more seriously North Korea using MLRS (Multiple-Launch Rocket Systems) and long-range howitzers bombarded 170 shells on Yeonpyong Island near Incheon, killing two marines and two civilians and leaving 14 wounded. This action was an open violation of the Armistice Treaty signed in 1953, and a war against South Korea.

Since the Armistice Treaty was signed, North Korea has continuously committed 470 separate provocations in the air, on the sea and ground. North Korea even attempted to assassinate President Park Chung-Hee and Chun Doo-Hwan. North Korean attacks were not limited to military targets or to political leaders. They aimed to harm civilians, too. In 1988 North Korean agents planted a bomb on board a Korean Air civilian passenger jet that was destroyed above the Gulf of Thailand killing all on board. Additionally North Korea staged countless kidnappings and even assassinated First Lady in 1974.[3]

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[1] President, NARI.

[2] In the wake of the sinking of Cheonan, the Ministry of National Defense organized a civilian-military Joint Investigation Group (JIG) and commenced an investigation in order to find the cause of the sinking. The JIG consisted of 73 experts (49 Koreans and 24 foreign experts from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Sweden). After thorough investigation the JIG announced the findings on May 20th. The JIG Report was published on September 10th. The JIG assessed that "ROKS Cheonan was split and sunk due to a strong underwater explosion of an influence torpedo manufactured by North Korea.

[3] North Korea kidnapped a total of 3,832 civilians since the end of the Korean War. Among them 514 men and women are still retained in North Korea. Military provocations include two noticeable deadly naval engagements which took place on the South Korean territorial water south of the Yeonpyong Island in 1999 and 2002 respectively. In the latter case, South Koran gunboat Chamsuri 357 was sunk and six sailors were killed and 19 were wounded.

South Koreans had been extremely patient in the face of such North Korean incursions. They restrained themselves from taking any retaliatory measures. They have rather put more effort to curb possible deteriorating effects on maintenance of amicable North-South Korean relation. After the Cheonan and Yeonpyong Island attacks, however, South Koreans' 'tolerance' reached the limit. The public will no longer tolerate such provocations by the North. A recent survey shows that more than 70% of the surveyed demand that the government should take stronger retaliatory measures against North Korea in case it makes similar attack.

Alarmed South Korean government is now beefing up its defense posture against North Korea. Reacting to strong popular outcry, President Lee Myung-Bak ordered the formation of a Presidential National Security Review Board to evaluate overall defense system in May. The Board after three months investigation recommended to President Lee to take a more assertive and proactive military stance against North Korean provocations and to renovate South Korean armed forces to meet further North Korean military provocations.[4]

Based on the recommendation President Lee instructed Presidential Committee for Military Reform (PCMR) and Ministry of National Defense (MND) to implement broad military reforms that would enable the armed forces to enhance ROK's deterrence and defense postures towards the North and to better meet the challenges of the early 21st century combat environment. Responding to President's instruction, the PCMR and MND speeded up their work and on December 6th, 2010, the PCMR submitted its report on military reform plan to President Lee and now MND is busy working on the implementing programs for the proposed plan. The plan includes the reformulation of strategic doctrines, redesigning command and control systems, restructuring force structure, and resetting weapon procurement priorities. The reform will start in 2011.

In this paper I will present outline sketch of the announced reform plan and will add my personal views on the plan.

Doctrine of Proactive Deterrence

The most significant change is likely to be focused on doctrinal change. For

[4] The Presidential National Security Review Board consisted of 15 experts. It reviewed all aspects of defense readiness and submitted final report to President on September 3rd, 2010, which recommended doctrinal change from a status-quo oriented posture to a proactive stance and strengthening strike capabilities to deter anticipating North Korea's increasing military provocations.

sixty years, South Korea has maintained a doctrine that was based on the concept of "Defense by Denial." For example, if North Korea launched a significant military attack, South Korean forces would repel the attack immediately but only to restore the *status quo ante*. In addition, prevailing rules of engagement meant that even when North Korean armed forces crossed the border but did not fire upon South Korean targets, retaliations were not allowed. In the case of naval engagement, only shouldering and ramming by ROK ships were allowed unless North Korean forces opened fire.[5] This kind of passive doctrine was retained in order to prevent rapid escalation into a possible major conflict which will develop into a total war.

The "Defense by Denial" doctrine is a typical passive military strategy. Maximum success will guarantee restoration of the *status-quo ante*. But such an approach constrains the ability of South Korean forces to shape a more favorable battlefield environment. This doctrine also allows enemy forces to enjoy operational freedom by choosing the location and timing of attacks. The defending forces can be drawn into combat not only against its will, but also at a strategic disadvantage.

Now South Korea will discard this passive doctrine for a more active one. After the Yeonpyong Island shelling, President Lee announce that South Korea from now on will not abide with passive 'Rules of Engagement' which do not allow the retaliation and will take positive measures to deter further attack. Just after the incident, President Lee called on the ROK armed forces to take a resolute counteraction and to be prepared to the utmost level of counterattacks strong enough to present anymore provocations. General (ret) Kim Kwan-Jin, newly appointed Minister of National Defense reiterated President Lee's determination, saying that "if the enemy attacks our people and territory again, I will use force to punish the enemy to make sure it doesn't even dare to think about it again." Minister Kim added that "the enemy must be punished thoroughly until the source of hostility is eliminated." (The global edition of *New York Times*, December 4-5, 2010, p.3) The Yeonpyong attack is for South Koreans as the 9/11 was for Americans. The attack hardened South Korean policy stance against North Korea.

A shift towards a doctrine of "Proactive Deterrence" will improve situation. When North Korea is preparing an attack, South Korea will preemptively nullify the North Korea's command structure and associated weapons systems through

[5] The rules of engagement(ROE) was modified on November 25th to deter similar North Korean provocation. According to the new ROE, ROK armed forces are ordered to destroy all the weapon systems used for an attack, utilizing all available means.

the use of precision-guided munition (PGMs) and other counterattack measures for pinpoint attacks. Such a shift will deter North Korea from considering an attack or provocations in the first place. Therefore, a primary condition for the successful implementation of such a doctrine is the ability to possess reliable strike capabilities and determination to use force when deemed necessary. Theoretically, the doctrine precludes actual war engagement. Rather, the aim of the new doctrine lies in dissuading the adversary's war plan decision-making before it is put into action. Credible intimidation lies at the core of a "Proactive Deterrence" concept. As Sun Tzu (孫子) emphasized, preventing war without fighting is the most desirable military strategy.[6]

Acquisition of Critical Weapons Systems

To decapitate the enemy's command structure and means of provocation, it is critical to possess and to maintain reliable intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. To locate dispersed targets in order to nullify them, a twenty-four hour real-time ISR capabilities is crucial. Such capabilities must be augmented by sufficient PGMs to destroy multiple targets. Surface-to-surface, air-to-surface, and sea-to-surface missiles including both cruise and ballistic missiles will be key options. Depending on the situation, we may need to operate special combat units like navy SEALs and commando-type forces.

It should be emphasized, however, that key platforms and munitions will be carefully selected so that neighboring states will not be threatened and to ensure that South Korea's deterrent forces are poised solely for use in contingencies involving North Korean forces.[7] At the same time, ensuring a very high level of precision is most important in order not to incur collateral damage, particularly as it relates to civilians casualties and non-military facilities. It goes without saying that only conventional munitions will be considered since South Korea will completely adhere to its non-nuclear policy. In 1992, South Korea and North Korea signed a joint statement which prohibits both sides to possess and produce nuclear weapons. South Korea has faithfully abide by the treaty, while North Korea ignored it from

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[6] 不戰而屈人之兵 善之善。

[7] South Korea currently keeps self-imposed restriction on its missile ranges not to exceed 300km. Since some of the targets are beyond that range, now South Korea is considering to extend it to 1,000km.

the beginning.

Credible intimidation also requires effective defense capability against North Korean offensive weapons which will evade South Korea's preemptive strikes. Reliable anti-missiles and anti-aircraft defense network should be installed.[8] To deter North Korea from provocation we should convince North Korean decision makers that they cannot incur any damage to us. Considering backwardness of North Korean weapon technology, it will not be so difficult for South Korea to acquire necessary hardwares to support its new doctrine of "Proactive Deterrence." It is not a matter of ability, but a matter of the governmental decision.

Restructuring Command and Force Structure

Entering 21st century we are moving into an age of the so-called "Fourth Generation" of warfare. Whereas previous major conflicts resulted in massive casualties and mass destruction, the objective of the 4th generation war is on taking out the enemy's war-fighting capabilities through key precision and surgical strikes. In this regard, diversity and mobility are prominent features of the 4th generation warfare. Diverse functional units will be mobilized simultaneously in a united theater of operations. All mobilized elements will be united and linked with each other through a network-centric warfare (NCW) system which is the hallmark of the 4th generation warfare.

Utilizing advanced C4ISR systems, both tactical and strategic intelligence and information will be instantly shared between the various fighting units (horizontal integration) and also within a unified and integrated command structure (vertical integration). In order to guarantee agility and effective coordination amongst diverse units, the command and control structure should be "slim and simple." Such a transition requires a shift from a traditional command and control and matching force structures that resembled a pyramid to a modular-type structure. Like the U.S. Marine Expeditionary Force, various functional units should be easily mobilized in a single "battle space" through a modular form.

To cope with diverse modes of North Korean military provocations, the ROK MND is now preparing to transform its entire command and control and force structures into a new modular system. Given its lead in information and computer

[8] ROK armed forces considers to develop its own low-altitude missile defense system. The Cholmae system will reinforce current Patriot system.

technology, the ROK forces are poised to make this transition without much difficulty.

Since for South Korea, North Korea is the only source of military threat, it will be a uni-theater combat South Korea should prepare to cope with. Thus South Korean armed forces will be tailored to meet only limited North Korean offensive capabilities. North Korea has a small littoral-coastal navy and operates a few strategic air planes. Therefore, South Korea is relieved from burden of building large blue sea navy and long-range strategic air force.

Necessary International Support

South Korea should also seek for strong supports by surrounding nations to enhance its security, since South Korea is a relatively small country which alone cannot deter nuclear armed North Korea that is supported by one or more Super Powers

A strong military alliance with the United States will provide the ROK with additional capabilities in maintaining stability in the DMZ and ensuring the highest level of defense. South Korea and the United States share common interests in maintaining military stability on the Korean Peninsula by enhancing joint deterrence and defense capabilities. Close cooperation between the armed forces of the two nations will greatly enhance this central mission. Despite the planned transfer of operational control fully to ROK forces in 2015, the two nations decided recently to maintain robust joint operational capabilities similar to the system enshrined in the current Combined Forces Command (CFC).[9]

The Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia is marked by a unique geopolitical reality, namely, the convergence of the world's major powers. Therefore, in order to secure its independence, sovereignty, and forward-looking military capabilities, it is essential to be joined in an alliance that is based on shared values and a common ideology. The United States is the key partner through which South Korea can pursue its long-term vision of building a unified Korea that is prosperous,

[9] On October 8th, 2010, the 42nd SCM was held in Washington, D.C., and at the meeting Defense Minister Kim Tae-Young of ROK and U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates signed three agreements (Strategic Alliance 2015, Defense Cooperation Guideline, and Strategy Plan Guideline) and announced a joint statement. Among others the two ministers agreed to establish a standing consultative committee to carry out extended deterrence provided by the U.S. beyond the op-con transfer in 2015.

independent, and a liberal democracy. Until such time when a truly democratic regional community like European Union can be established in East Asia that will be able to guarantee peace and security through collective mechanisms, the ROK's comprehensive security needs can be best maintained through its alliance with the United States.

To cope with North Korea's nuclear threat and missile attacks, South Korea needs close cooperation with Japan. So far mutual animosity between Japan and South Korea which was brewed by unsettled past wrong-doings by the old Japanese colonial government has hindered military cooperation between the two nations. It will not be easily eradicated in the coming years. However considering common national interest of promoting democracy and peace in East Asia, the two nations should cooperate with each other. To fight against dangerous autocratic regime in North Korea which threatens East Asian regional security, South Korea and Japan should cooperate for common cause. At least information on North Korean military threats should be shared by the two armed forces.

The most important element to make South Korea's new deterrence policy successful is China's cooperation. So far as China directly or indirectly supports North Korea's adventurous behavior, it will not be easy to curb North Korea's continuous provocations. China can deter South Korea's proactive deterrence against North Korea by providing military aids and diplomatic support to belligerent leaders of North Korea. Thus it will be an ultimate task for South Korea to dissuade China. South Korea should convince China that Korean unification led by South Korea will not harm China's national interest. South Korea should persuade China that if South Korea achieve national unification by peaceful means, China will be bordered with more friendly neighbor than with belligerent North Korea. Korea is a small nation, and it can not be any threat to China, be it alone or unified.

Closing Remarks

South Korea envisions a peace-loving, prosperous, democratic unified Korea which pursues a peaceful East Asian Community jointly with neighboring nations. Bearing this dream in mind, South Korea is endeavoring to persuade North Korea to join us. South Korea is trying its best to induce North Korea to discard its unrealistic policy of unification by belligerent means. If North Korea gives up its nuclear weapons, and agrees to coexist with South Korea, then South Korea will

support North Korea's effort to build a prosperous democratic nation. Once North and South Korea shall be able to stabilize peaceful coexistence between the two, then unification will be negotiated sincerely.

South Korea's new military doctrine of proactive deterrence aims at induction of North Korea to the road toward non-belligerent policy option. If North Korea realize that it is not possible to achieve national unification by belligerent policy, then we believe it will sincerely consider alternative non-belligerent way. In order to induce North Korea to take right course of nation building, South Korea has to choose firm military doctrine of deterrence. The old dictum of "*si vis pacem, para bellum* (if you want peace, prepare for war)" guides us to adopt a new proactive deterrence policy.