

A Strategy for Dealing with North Korea's Provocations

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Abstract

This article argues that to deal with North Korean provocations, the Alliance must take a holistic strategic approach to the entire North Korean problem. As long as the Kim family regime continues a strategic approach focused on regime survival, reunification of the peninsula under its control, attaining recognition as a nuclear power and trying to remove US forces from the peninsula, it will continue to use provocations as part of its strategy while oppressing its people and conducting illicit activities around the world. The Alliance has taken a piecemeal or stovepipe approach to the complex problems posed by North Korea with various organizations and senior officials responsible for a specific portfolio with no apparent effective synchronization among them. All activities of the Alliance must be focused on achieving an overall end state that is in concert with the 2009 Joint Vision Statement emphasizing peaceful reunification and ultimately answering the so-called “Korea Question” that the 1953 Armistice said must be answered. By synchronizing ways and means toward this end, the Alliance can effectively deal with provocations while working to shape the conditions necessary for reunification. However, it must be understood that the foundation for the Alliance strategy rests upon readiness of the combined military forces.

Keywords: Korea, Reunification, Provocation, Strategy, Armistice, Human Rights, Readiness, 2009 Joint Vision Statement

There is a desire for a strategy among policy makers to break the so-called “cycle of provocation” that is perpetrated by the Kim family regime (KFR) in North Korea.¹ There can be no doubt that North Korean provocations have been many, problematic, and deadly over the past six decades. However, as this article will argue, the provocation cycle cannot be viewed in a vacuum or as a stand-alone problem. Provocations conducted by the North are a symptom of a larger problem,

namely the nature and very existence of the Kim family regime, and, thus, regardless of the course of action applied to try to deter provocations, whether through coercion or co-option, such a course of action is unlikely to achieve the desired effects unless it is part of a holistic over-arching strategy to deal with the sixty year old “Korea Question.”²

This article will briefly examine the historical background of North Korean provocations and address the rationale and objectives for North Korea. Then it will look at the provocation problem within the larger context of the Korea Question and finally propose some steps for consideration as part of an overall strategy for the Korean Peninsula that may result in effects on the cycle of provocation.

In addition, throughout the paper alliance policies, actions, and organizations will be critically examined with the objective of showing that to be effective in dealing with the Kim family regime and its threats and challenges, these must be orchestrated in such a way as to achieve strategic objectives and that stovepipe approaches to the various problems posed by the KFR will not succeed and actually may help the regime to achieve its strategic objectives at least in the near term.

There is an obvious question in regards to any claim that North Korean provocations can be deterred: Is it possible to deter North Korean provocations? Can military, diplomatic, political or economic efforts be expected to prevent further provocations and break the provocation cycle? The short answer is no. No actions by the ROK-US Alliance, China or the international community are likely to cause the north to forfeit a key pillar of its strategy, which is to conduct provocations to gain political and economic concessions. The only way to deal with North Korean provocations is as part of a larger strategy that addresses the root of the problem: as long as the Kim Family Regime is in power it will persist in conducting provocations. It just cannot afford to give them up.

The Problem

The problem on the Korean Peninsula is that the Kim Family Regime is recalcitrant and does not and will not function as member of the international community. It has not negotiated in good faith in the last sixty and is unlikely to do so in the future. The reason for this lies in its strategic view of itself and its place in the region and the world. First and foremost it has a single vital national interest: Survival of the Kim

Family Regime is paramount to all else. Every decision and action of the regime must be viewed through a lens that sees this focus on regime survival.

The strategic aim of the regime is reunification of the peninsula under the control of the north. Successful execution of its campaign plan to reunify the Peninsula is seen as the best guarantor of regime survival. The north also believes that it is threatened by the ROK, US, and Japan and therefore must develop the military capabilities that will both deter and defend while at the same time provide capabilities to support provocation and ultimately the execution of its military campaign plan to reunify the peninsula by force. This also provides the justification for its so-called “Military First” policy, which prioritizes regime support to the military, thus depriving the people of resources.

Because of its belief that it is surrounded and threatened by hostile nations and because of its Juche philosophy, which provides the ideological foundation for the regime, the KFR has a strong desire to be viewed as powerful and able to stand up to the threats from the international community. This manifests itself in the development of its nuclear and missile programs that not only support its concept of deterrence and defense but also serves to bring respect for and fear of the regime, stated simply; it relies on no one for its defense but only on the strength of its own military.³

There is one condition that the KFR seeks to achieve that it believes will provide success in realizing its strategic aim and protection of its vital national interest and that is the removal of United States forces from the Korean Peninsula. In the north’s military calculation, this will provide the north with the correlation of forces that will allow it to dominate the peninsula when it executes its military campaign, or, short of that, will provide it with the power to coerce the South to achieve regime objectives.

Historical Context for Provocations

The north has conducted provocations to gain political and economic concessions since its inception with the only interruption to its pattern from 1950-1953 when it launched its invasion of the South. Prior to and after the war, it has used provocations. The general public is familiar with many of the sensational ones such as the seizure of the *USNS Pueblo* and the attempted infiltration of Seoul to attack the Blue House (President’s residence) in the 1960’s.⁴ President Park Chung-hee’s wife

was assassinated in 1974 and in the Demilitarized Zone truce village of Panmunjom, two American Soldiers were killed in a “vicious and unprovoked murder” in 1976.⁵

In the 1980’s there were two major terrorist attacks perpetrated by the north. In 1983 the South Korean administration was attacked in a bombing in Rangoon, Burma, and then, in 1987, a Korean Airlines flight was blown up off the coast of Burma killing 115 people.⁶ Throughout the 1990s and into the 21st Century the north’s nuclear and missile programs emerged with subsequent provocations from exposure of the program and test launches and detonations.⁷

The above provocations are just some of the more notable ones. There have been many more, and these range from the fiery rhetoric of the propagandists threatening to turn Seoul into a “sea of fire” to overland and maritime infiltrations to direct fire engagements on the Demilitarized Zone and naval battles in the West Sea. Although the 2010 artillery shelling of Yeonpyeong Island and the sinking by torpedo from a North Korean submarine of the ROK Navy vessel Choenan seem unusual to those unfamiliar with the history of the Korean security situation they are really simply a continuation of the pattern of six decades of provocations. Even the latest threats against South Korean press outlets are not new. Similar threats have been issued in the 1990’s and 2000 with the television station KBS (1997) and the newspaper Choson Ibo threatened (1997 and 2000).⁸

Moreover, North Korea has conducted provocations on a global scale. In addition to the 1983 Rangoon bombing they have conducted assassinations and kidnappings in Japan, Hong Kong, Canada, in Africa and Europe. It is important to be aware of the global operations capability of the Kim Family Regime as this present an obvious threat but also an opportunity for the alliance and the international community as well as the global network can be targeted using host nation intelligence and law enforcement to neutralize these capabilities.

Furthermore, what a survey of provocations shows is that while there appear to be a wide range of types of provocations the same general categories of provocations are often repeated over time though specific tactics and techniques may be adjusted. A study of the history of provocations can provide some idea of the types of provocations that can be expected in the future.

As an example, the regime’s provocation strategy has evolved and will continue to evolve even as lessons of the past provide a prologue for

the future. The north is employing cyber capabilities that of course did not exist when Kim Il-sung was alive, and these include various forms of computer network attack as evidenced by the recent attack against the Jong Ang Ilbo newspaper.⁹ These types of attacks as well as variations on them should be expected. Another recent development is the attack on the global positioning system capabilities at Incheon Airport. As technology evolves the regime can be expected to exploit as it seeks out vulnerabilities in the ROK as well as around the world. It may only be a matter of time before the regime begins to attacks infrastructure such as power generation and financial systems both in the ROK and internationally.

Lastly and perhaps counter-intuitively to some, the north uses the suffering and starvation of its own people as form of provocation. The regime will exploit the non-governmental organizations and donor nations who seek to relieve suffering. The suffering is real and ongoing and caused by the policy and political choices made by the Kim Family Regime. However, they exploit the knowledge by NGOs of this suffering in the hopes that the international community will pressure the ROK and others to provide food aid which is often at least partially diverted for other regime needs or at least allows the regime to divert internal resources as external support is provided to marginal population areas.

Why Does North Korea Conduct Provocations?

Although it is difficult to ascertain definitively why the north conducts specific types of provocations when they do it is likely that there are three main objectives for conducting provocations. As already stated the overarching reason is to gain political and economic concessions. At its most basic level provocations have been used to influence negotiations, to both bring parties to the table or as an excuse to scrap agreements the regime does not like. At the same time, they have been used to influence organizations and nations both to start and stop food aid. Before, during, and after negotiations the regime has the provocation tool ready to employ if it believes it will influence the situation in its favor.

The second reason for provocations is to ensure tensions remain high so that it can continue to justify its “military first” policy. Some may question the wisdom of deliberately increasing the potential of external threats by these actions; however, it is these threats that mobilize the

people and keep them united behind the military and the party in the name of protecting the great Socialist Workers paradise. The external threats enhance the legitimacy of the regime particularly as it gives the appearance of standing up to the superpowers of the world in defense of the party and the nation.

The third reason that may be viewed as related to the second is for maintaining the loyal support of the elite members in the core of the regime to include the senior military leadership. The employment of the military and intelligence services in provocations provide the elite leaders with enhanced credibility and the opportunity to demonstrate loyalty to the Kim Family Regime.

These three broad objectives for provocations are critically important to the regime and its survival. It is unlikely that they could be achieved without the use of provocations therefore it is unlikely that any actions short of direct military action by the ROK-US alliance or other actions by the Chinese and the international community to include diplomatic and economic sanctions will cause the regime to give up this very useful tool which again, remains a key tool contributing to regime survival.

There is a fourth use for provocations that is especially important for 2012 and that is to attempt to influence the elections in the South. The April failed ballistic missile test launch could be interpreted to not only break the February 29, 2012 so called “Leap Day” agreement in which the north was to receive relatively minor food aid (240,000 tons of nutritional biscuits for children) but also as an attempt to influence the South Korean legislative elections. Surely the regime desires a ROK government dominated by a progressive party that would return to a Sunshine Policy like posture that would provide aid to the north without a required quid pro quo. An argument could be made that the food aid provided during the decade of the Sunshine Policy actually sustained the north by providing it with the resources that it could not provide its people. While the Sunshine Policy can be judged a success for the north, it should be considered an abject failure for the South because during the entire time, the north not only developed its nuclear and missile capabilities it continued to conduct provocations to include missile launches, a nuclear test and naval engagements in the West Sea. The recent threats to reveal information about conservative ROK candidates for president illustrate the north’s intent to influence the elections.¹⁰

However, the April missile test may have backfired for the north as the conservative party maintained a slim majority in the legislature. The

question is how will the north use provocations to influence the outcome of the December 2012 ROK Presidential election because it is in the regime's interest that a progressive leader be elected.

The Other Problems

While the popular media and many political figures focus on provocations because they make news, there are other problems that stem from North Korea and they must be considered as well when dealing with developing plans for deterring and responding to provocations.

The first of these is the worst-case scenario of the resumption of hostilities by the north and the devastation in Seoul and the surrounding areas that would be caused by the North Korean People's Army (NKPA). This is the number one threat that the ROK-US alliance faces and one for which South Korean and U.S. military forces must prepare. Deterrence has been successful for sixty years but it could fail at any time and therefore defense of the Republic of Korea must be the number one mission for the military instrument of power. Any use of alliance military forces for anything other than deterrence and defense must be carefully considered.

In addition to provocations is the problem of the north's nuclear and missile delivery programs. Although tests of each constitute provocations they pose problems beyond that due to their obvious use in wartime. These programs are also a source of hard currency for the regime as they are proliferated to other regimes seeking these capabilities. Therefore nuclear and missile programs constitute not only a provocation threat but also a wartime problem, a proliferation problem and they make a contribution to regime survival.

The NKPA asymmetric warfare capabilities are also problematic. The largest special operations force in the world is in the north, which seems logical since the legitimacy of the regime rests on the myth of anti-Japanese partisan warfare with Kim Il-sung as the great guerrilla fighter who liberated the peninsula. Other investments in asymmetric capabilities include but are not limited to the full range of missile capabilities, weapons of mass destruction to include chemical and biological agents, and infiltration capabilities (air and maritime surface and sub-surface) and cyber warfare. These capabilities are clearly dual use – many are effective for provocations and they have direct application to the wartime campaign plan to reunify the peninsula.

Proliferation alone is a significant problem, so much so the U.S. took the lead in establishing the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) to counter this threat.¹¹ However, combined with and somewhat related to proliferation are the myriad illicit activities that the north conducts around the world, from money laundering and counterfeiting to the manufacture and distribution of illegal drugs, as well as the counterfeiting of other things as drugs and cigarettes. These activities not only affect national currencies (primarily the US) but can also impact economies as well.

There are two other problems that concern the ROK-US alliance and the international community in North Korea. These are the massive human rights violations that have been perpetrated against its population for decades. Arguably with its Songbun structure¹² and its massive prison system, an unbelievable amount of suffering has been inflicted on the North Korean people most likely on a scale that far surpasses anything that has happened under Nazi domination in Europe, in the Balkans, or in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge reign. At the same time, the rank and file population has suffered immensely from lack of adequate food with starvation occurring on a nationwide basis since the famine of the 1990's. The international community has worked to mitigate the food shortages as well as call attention to the human rights violations but these problems persist and will likely continue as long as the Kim Family Regime remains in power.

The purpose of looking at the other problems in addition to provocation is to show that strategists and policy makers must take a holistic view of the problems and cannot look at one problem without consider its relationship to others. If the dots were to be analyzed in detailed and connected one would find that all lead to one organization in North Korea – the Kim Family Regime. Every problem that exists in North Korea is a result of how the regime views and protects its vital interests. The decisions that has made have resulted in the provocation and other problems that the ROK-US alliance and international community face.

However, rarely has a holistic policy and strategic approach been applied, rather approaches have been piecemeal, with courses of action developed to address problems singly. Nowhere is this more evident than in the desire to stop the provocation cycle, but it applies just as well to the other problems outlined above, particularly the nuclear program, humanitarian assistance, and proliferation.

Piecemeal and Stovepipe Approaches to Provocations and Other Problems

Certainly each of the problems outlined above are difficult and dangerous. Taken as a single and whole problem it is extremely complex. Normally when dealing with such complexity it makes sense to break the problem down into manageable parts. This brings to mind the old adage: “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” The approach to North Korea taken by the ROK-US Alliance and the international community has been to try to solve each part alone. This is evident in the myriad organizations and initiatives that have developed over time that deal with different aspects of the “Korean Question.” The following short survey will illustrate some of the more prominent agencies and activities.

The combined military forces of the alliance oversee the security situation. The Military Committee, which essentially consists of the military half of the National Command Authority for both nations, provides the strategic direction and guidance for planning and employment of the Combined Forces Command. The mission of the CFC is to deter aggression and if deterrence fails to defend the ROK and defeat the NKPA.

The United Nations Command (UNC) and the Military Armistice Commission are responsible for maintaining the demilitarized zone and for investigating violations of the 1953 Armistice Agreement by either side. The UNC also has a war fighting function as well as the sixteen contributing or other nations will commit troops to the defense of the ROK in the event of a resumption of hostilities.

The most notable organization and initiative is the Six Party Talks consisting of the ROK, China, Russia, Japan, the U.S. and North Korea. A U.S. Special Envoy has responsibility for the American participation in these talks and the coordination that surrounds them. Its primary focus is on the north’s nuclear program though it has not met in six party session since 2009 because of the north’s continue provocative actions and unwillingness to negotiate in good faith.

There are myriad international organizations that look at the food crisis in the north from the UN and the World Food Program to individual donor nations and their aid agencies. However, the long running food shortages that are a result of the regime’s poor economic decisions over time that are exacerbated by climate conditions and

weather have resulted in what is known as donor fatigue. The lack of transparency and cooperation in food distribution by the north also contributes to donor fatigue. In the United States, the U.S. Agency for International Development is the lead for providing humanitarian assistance and food aid when a decision is made to make contributions.

The human rights problem in the north is severe and well documented. Again, there are multiple international organizations that focus on the human rights atrocities that are being perpetrated in the north every day and have been for the past six decades. In the U. S. an office of the Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights has been established with the responsibility to work these issues with international community and to engage with North Korea to try to solve these problems.

From an economic perspective the ROK and U.S. have recently concluded a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) for which the U.S. Trade Representative has overall responsibility.

The United Nations has also established a panel of experts to monitor and assess the effectiveness sanctions implemented by UN Security council resolutions on North Korea in response to the north's nuclear and missile programs and proliferation activities.

Finally there is the ROK-US Extended Deterrence Policy Committee (EDPC) established in 2010 to develop concrete and effective measures to deter North Korea.¹³

What this short survey shows is that there are a number of organizations that deal with various parts of the challenges on the Korean Peninsula, some that are led by very high ranking professionals (e.g. Ambassadors and General Officers) with specific portfolios. Given the complex nature of the very important and dangerous problems posed by North Korea, it appears to make sense to address these separately in order to simplify understanding of the problems and facilitate execution. However, from the perspective of an integrated strategic approach this may be counterproductive and play to one of the only strengths of the Kim Family Regime and that is its ability to play various international actors against each other in order to gain political and economic concessions. Rather than a piecemeal and stovepipe approach to the problems perhaps there needs to be a unifying strategic vision to orchestrate the development, integration and execution of a coherent holistic strategy. Such a vision would provide focus for the agencies and allow them to assess the efficacy their actions with the question: Does

this course of action support attainment of the end state established in the unifying strategic vision.

Foundation for Strategy and Policy

Fortunately there does exist such a strategic vision for the alliance. In June 2009 Presidents Lee and Obama established the Joint Vision Statement and included in it is this key paragraph, which provides the essence of the vision the two nations have for the outcome on the Korean peninsula.

Through our Alliance we aim to build a better future for all people on the Korean Peninsula, establishing a durable peace on the Peninsula and *leading to peaceful reunification on the principles of free democracy and a market economy*. We will work together to achieve the complete and verifiable elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, as well as ballistic missile programs, and to promote respect for the fundamental human rights of the North Korean people. (emphasis added)

Of course the desire is for *peaceful* reunification. However, while Korea can and will eventually achieve reunification, whether it is through peaceful means is really a function of how the Kim Family Regime evolves or how it faces future crises such as the threat of collapse. But the words of vision statement are really key for organizing the policy and strategy for solving the long standing “Korea Question” once and for all. It provides the vision for the organizing principle that should shape all negotiations, plans, and actions concerning the Korean peninsula by both nations with the following question being continually asked of each organization and action that is focused on or contributes to Korea:

How does this organization or action support achieving the joint vision of a reunified Korean Peninsula?

If there is not a positive answer to that question then the organization or activity or policy must be considered in light of that. An organization or activity that does not make a positive contribution to reunification may still of course have value for other functions but when it comes to dealing with Korea this question must guide organizations and activities.

From the 2009 Joint Vision Statement an end state may be crafted that could provide the foundation for both policy development and the end state for a strategy. Such an end state could be described this way:

A stable, secure, peaceful, economically vibrant, non-nuclear peninsula, reunified under a liberal constitutional form of government determined by the Korean people.¹⁴

An overarching end state is useful for ensuring that all agencies actions are synchronized to directly or indirectly support its attainment. However, as already stated, different agencies have different focus in their portfolios and this can lead to disjointed efforts, confusing policy, and plans that are at odds with others and sometimes counterproductive. Just two examples of the lack of support for the two President's joint vision can illustrate the lack of coherent Korea policy and strategy.

On January 5, 2012 the President signed the Defense Strategic Guidance document to provide guidance for DOD planning and ultimately budgeting. Despite the emphasis of this document as well as follow-up documents and amplifying speeches on a rebalance of strategy to focus more on Asia, Korea receives little mention. In fact Korea is mentioned in one sentence:

Furthermore, we will maintain peace on the Korean Peninsula by effectively working with allies and other regional states to deter and defend against provocation from North Korea, which is actively pursuing a nuclear weapons program.¹⁵

The counter to this is that the Defense Strategic Guidance is focused on broader issues than just the Korean Peninsula but an interpretation of this sentence can be that the U.S. of the US is solely on provocations and the nuclear programs and success in those two areas will result in peace on the Korean Peninsula. Unfortunately as has been discussed there are additional serious problems that need to be addressed as well. Since this document functions to provide strategic guidance for defense planning and given that Korea warrants a mention already, the guidance should reiterate what has already been stated in the Joint Vision Statement of 2009 which provides the end state that will resolve the Korea Question once and for all, e.g., reunification of the Korean Peninsula. The failure to emphasize this important point can confuse planners and allow the U.S. half of the alliance to lose focus on what has been directed by the two Presidents.

Although the guidance stresses that “we will maintain peace on the Korea Peninsula” the specific verbiage of deterrence and defense is solely focused on provocations and not on North Korea’s threat of attack. Clearly it is the desire of the alliance not to be on the receiving end of provocations both for security and political reasons. However, it must be remembered that provocations are a tool of the regime and while there has been loss of blood and treasure due to the north’s provocations, they are not the most dangerous threat. The focus of the alliance security forces must first and foremost be on deterring attack from the north and if deterrence fails be capable of destroying the NKPA and defeating the regime. Provocations cannot be the main effort for deterrence and defense otherwise the alliance could become vulnerable to the worst-case threat.

The second example occurred in June 2012 with the recent 2+2 talks with the leaders of the diplomatic and defense establishments of both Korea and the U.S. The Joint Statement on June 14, 2012 made no mention of reunification of the Korean Peninsula. The leaders of both nations’ diplomatic and military instruments of power discussed nearly all the critical issues concerning the alliance, the full range of the threats posed by North Korea, as well as global cooperation between the two partners.¹⁶ Again, the lack of emphasis on reunification undercuts the 2009 Joint Vision Statement and can confuse planners and lead to inconsistent, unsynchronized actions among various agencies.

Although the respective National Security Staffs that work for each President are charged with orchestrating and synchronizing policy and strategy for the U.S. the appointment of ambassador level special envoys (Six Party Talks and Human Rights) as well as the establishment of committees and working groups for separate issues serve to hinder the development and execution of unified policies and strategies that transcend the issues.

Another way to organize the U.S. policy making and strategic decision making process could be to appoint a single official of Ambassador rank with a staff to form a North Korea Strategy Group in order to integrate and synchronize US strategy across the issues that have been identified in this paper. Furthermore if the Korea President would appoint a similar official and form a like group together these two could form a Combined North Korea Strategy Group that would work to orchestrate the alliance policies, plans and actions.¹⁷ Rather than having separate stovepipe organizations reporting to various agencies and

departments within the executive branch, these strategy groups would report to and work for the Presidents through their respective National Security Staffs. It is critical that there be an organization established to provide unity of effort and to be able to analyze and assess the effects of policies and actions across the spectrum of challenges from North Korea. Most importantly it would have the mandate to work to resolve the “Korea Question” and in all its work would be able to assess the value of plans and policies by asking the key question:

How does this organization or action support achieving the joint vision of a reunified Korean Peninsula?

Dealing with Provocations as part of an Overall Alliance Strategy

As noted, the focus of the US is mainly on the Kim Family Regime’s nuclear program and its provocations. These are just two of the complex challenges faced by the alliance. The remainder of this paper will outline some considerations for a strategic approach to the complex and dangerous challenges posed by the Kim Family Regime by looking first at the long term desired end state and then at some of the ways that will assist in resolving the “Korea Question” and reaching the end state envisioned by the two Presidents.

In any strategic approach there must be an understanding of the problem. Even though it has only touched on some of the highlights, this paper has identified the major problems posed by the north and sought to lay the foundation for situational understanding. From this understanding a number of assumptions can be made to assist in planning and to take the place of facts that cannot be proven.

Assumptions

The first assumption is that the Kim Family Regime will not peacefully reunify with the ROK. Despite multiple proposals over the years from north and South to form a confederated government and work toward gradual peaceful reunification, it has demonstrated no willingness to do so and given that the vital national interest is survival of the Kim Family Regime it is unlikely to ever work in good faith with the South to achieve reunification. This is one assumption every planner would like to be proven false because if it is then there will be no need for a continued strategic plan.

The second assumption is relevant to this paper and a strategic approach is that the regime will not give up its nuclear program. It has

proven too valuable in supporting its diplomatic blackmail strategy and furthermore the regime believes its deterrent value is a key to regime survival. Should this assumption prove false it is likely to first lead to a de-escalation of tension in the region but ultimately to the collapse of the regime and the resulting complex security issues that collapse will cause.

The third assumption is that the regime will not discontinue conducting provocations. Again, like the nuclear program, provocations have proven too beneficial to supporting its vital national interest. As long as the Kim Family Regime remains in power, it will use provocations to gain political and economic concessions as well as for domestic political purpose to raise external tensions in order to justify its Military First Policy. So far there has been no cost to the regime that has been high enough to cause it to forgo provocations. A related assumption is that although the north may not conduct provocations for a period of time, particularly if it deems the short term costs of its actions to be too high, it will likely resume them at the time and in a way that best supports their future strategy.

The organization necessary to take on the effort to develop and orchestrate the execution of policy and strategy for the alliance would be the Combined North Korea Strategy Group. It would develop and oversee implementation of the ways and means to resolve the “Korea Question” and achieve the ultimate end state:

A stable, secure, peaceful, economically vibrant, non-nuclear peninsula, reunified under a liberal constitutional form of government determined by the Korean people.

As an example, given the Joint Vision of the two Presidents to work toward reunification it would establish the overarching security tasks for the alliance. In priority order these could be:

1. Deter and defend against an attack by the north and maintain the Armistice.
2. Prepare for War *and* Regime Collapse and Support the Reunification process led by the ROK Government
3. Sustain the strength of the Alliance.
4. Conduct transformation and military modernization.

In addition to the key question identified to be answered to assess the policies and actions in support of reunification, security plans and actions would be judged with this prioritized list and the ultimate end state to be

achieved.

Way and Means Overview

The following is an overview of some of the ways and means that could be considered by the Combined North Korea Strategy Group. The focus is on the security aspects with the military and informational instruments of national power. This is by no means a comprehensive list but meant to illustrate some of the actions and desired effects of those actions to support a comprehensive strategy.

The most critical task is to organize all the agencies that deal with North Korea and establish a process to integrate and orchestrate activities. To be effective, this requires a mandate from both Presidents to ensure their respective National Security Staffs, departments, ministries, and agencies support this process.

The key to dealing with the Kim Family Regime is to be able to attack its strategy on multiple levels. The Strategy Group must have its highest priority the development of an attack strategy that undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of the regime and supports an influence campaign that exposes the regime's strategy and actions both to the international community and also exposes it to the Korean people.

An influence campaign such as this would begin to prepare the North Korean people for ultimate reunification and maintain international and domestic political support for the alliance when the north conducts the provocations it can be expected to conduct. Alliance support can be sustained if the north's strategy is understood. Although tactical surprise may be achieved by the regime when they conduct provocations, an understanding of the strategy will prevent the political surprise that currently leads to domestic political tensions. Attacking the regime's strategy and exposing it is the foundation for all other actions.

The north must pay a price for its provocations. The costs of provocation however need not be in the form of direct military action in response. Despite the recent statements by President Lee that the ROK will respond against the regime's key commands, there are other ways to make the regime pay for its actions.¹⁸ These other ways are opportunities to undermine the regime and to support efforts leading to reunification.

Although overt military responses may be appropriate in a given circumstance and could exact a high cost to the north there are other actions that could be as if not more effective in some cases. As an example, the north would have paid a high price if it had lost one or more

submarines while they were deployed in the West or East Seas after it had attacked and sunk the ROK Navy frigate Cheonan. Employment of ROK and US anti-submarine warfare capabilities to cause the loss of one or more North Korean submarines would send a powerful message and help to degrade one of their key asymmetric capabilities which would of course contribute to achieving the long term end state by weakening their military capabilities. Such actions would not have to be publicized and in fact might be better left unpublicized to allow the north to question the effectiveness of their own submarine fleet.

A response to artillery shelling such as happened in 2010 on Yoengpyong Island with counter-fire is entirely appropriate. The destruction of firing systems and command and control facilities with rapid and accurate fire would not only cause the obvious loss of military capabilities but would demonstrate the superiority of the alliance artillery and counter-fire.

In addition to military responses there are two actions that can have profound effects on the regime both from a cost perspective as well as long term regime survival. It is well known that the financial actions against Banco Delta Asia had a significant influence on Kim Jong-il and his money laundering and other illicit activities.¹⁹ This was a very small action on the part of the U.S. and international community but it should be a lesson in how to make the regime suffer costs for its hostile activities.

Related to the Banco Delta Asia action, something that has never been pursued is to target the global network of the so-called Department 39, which is the organization responsible for the regime's global illicit activities. The members of this network conduct illegal activities and break host nation laws on a routine basis but they are rarely if ever arrested and prosecuted because they often hide diplomatic credentials. An aggressive program to enlist the support of nations around the world could shut down this network. One effect of such actions would be to cut off the flow of luxury goods to the regime because in addition to trafficking in illicit drugs, counterfeit money, cigarettes, medicine, and the proliferation of weapons and missile technology in order to gain hard currency for the regime, Department 39 ensures that the Kim Family Regime receives the luxury items it requires to sustain the loyalty of the elite. A sustained interruption of this flow could in effect strangle the regime; cause the loss of support among the elite, and likely lead to regime collapse.

In addition, this organization must be targeted early so as to prevent it from being exploited by potential emerging leaders from the second tier following regime collapse. Such an organization would be critical to fueling a resistance movement to counter the ROK government efforts to reunify the Peninsula following collapse or war. Finally, targeting the members would provide not only intelligence opportunities but also potential key communicators that could be employed in North Korea following conflict or collapse.

The regime's provocations can cost it in other ways as well. One is the strengthening of relations between the ROK and other nations. As an example the increasing threats have led to improved cooperation among the ROK, Japanese, and US military. During the build-up to the failed ballistic missile launch in April 2012, the ROK, Japanese, and US Navies collaborated on ballistic missile tracking and defense. In June 2012 it was announced that these three navies would conduct operations in the West Sea.²⁰ The cost to the north is due to provocations military cooperation among allies and friends in the region is enhanced and this further reduces the regime's chances of launching a successful attack on the South.

One of the keys to the KFR's provocation strategy is to conduct provocations when it can achieve surprise and when it perceives weakness in the alliance relationship or military readiness. The case of the Pyeongyang Island artillery attack is a case in point. It is very likely the north's decision was based on the knowledge from its intelligence network that the ROK artillery were conducting a training exercise on the southern part of the island and were not in a position to rapidly respond. The north took advantage of this and killed innocent South Korean citizens. The ROK military response was slow and hardly effective in defending the island.

A consideration for planners of military exercises is how to prevent North Korea from taking advantage of ROK or Alliance exercises in order to exploit vulnerabilities as military forces are diverted from a direct deterrence mission. It is well known that the north conducts extensive intelligence gathering in the South and it should be assumed it can easily obtain exercise details such as timing and location and units involved. This information is easily exposed because exercises are scheduled, planned, and coordinated in a very deliberate manner with initial, mid, and final planning conferences, site surveys and coordination with local governments and civilians. This is a necessity because the

ROK is an advanced country and ROK and US military forces can operate and train at will. In modern Korea in an information-dominated society there is no way to keep information based on deliberate planning secret. In an ideal situation, the military would be able to conduct no-notice training events; however this would likely have a civilian cost that is too high for the ROK to absorb. Therefore, when conducting exercise planning, the potential for North Korean provocations should be considered. A “red team” might be useful in analyzing the exercise plans and the correct political situation and determining possible provocations. With a red team assessment the planning team may be able to make adjustments to the exercise plan or recommend other measures to mitigate provocations. It is important to understand that the north seeks to exploit opportunities that can be created if the focus of the units is narrowly on the training exercise without consideration of what the north might execute.

However, very visible exercises are also very important in influencing the regime. As an example, the June 2012 exercises in the Pocheon that were billed as the largest live fire exercise in Korea had the effect of causing a significant response from the regime that included statements denouncing it and saying it would increase its own military capabilities.²¹ Although it is impossible to prevent provocations because that decision is made in Pyongyang, actions such as this actually illustrate the potential costs to the Kim Family Regime.

Readiness is not a Cliché

Although it is thought by many to be a cliché, readiness is the key to almost everything on the Peninsula and dealing with the “Korea Question” – readiness reduces the opportunities for the north to conduct successful provocations – readiness also prepares the force to deal with the complex challenges of war and collapse. As counterintuitive as it may seem, military readiness, with demonstrated strength and will, is also the most important condition that will contribute to diplomacy. Readiness, particularly when viewed through North Korea eyes, reduces the options for the regime and provides a visible indicator of the potential cost to the regime when it conducts provocations. As stated, although there is no strategy that can completely prevent provocations by the Kim Family Regime, evidence of potential costs and reduced opportunities through readiness can decrease the possibility of provocations and may influence the regime to commit to dialogue with the ROK and U.S. The

foundation for all Alliance diplomatic actions as well as the resolution of the "Korean Question" rests on the readiness of the Alliance. Readiness is a win-win for the Alliance. The north cannot afford to "beef up" their forces much more as they claim they will do in response to the June 2012 Pocheon live fire exercise.²² In attempting to do so they provide important intelligence reads of their activities for the alliance and through the diversion and expenditure of resources they further weaken themselves in the long run. The rhetoric should not be allowed to negatively influence our decision makers because it indicates positive effects for the alliance.

Readiness is not only for provocations. However, some have become so focused on provocations that the important words of deterrence and defense are routinely misapplied only to provocations as in the January 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance. Readiness is not only the foundation that supports effective diplomacy and helps to reduce the opportunities for provocation; it is key to the ultimate challenges to the alliance war and regime collapse. The real focus of readiness of the Alliance has to be first on deterring war and if deterrence fails or collapse occurs, defeating the NKPA in whatever form it exists and helping the ROK government on the path to reunification.

There are numerous areas that require attention especially as the alliance moves through the transformation process to the OPCON transfer and dissolution of the Combined Forces Command (CFC) in 2015. The remainder of the transition period is a vulnerable time for the alliance as independent war fighting capabilities must be established, facilities constructed at new locations and U.S. forces relocated south of Seoul. Transformation of Alliance military forces is being conducted in the face of the complex threat to the north. Over the next three years there is much to be done requiring large amounts of funding. Some of the critical areas include advanced Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence and Ballistic Missile Defense and new operational concepts for integrating U.S. forces in a supporting role to the ROK forces. Both governments, but the ROK in particular are going to have to make large investments in their capabilities and in the case of the ROK developing new ones to compensate for the dissolution of CFC.

There are some areas that may need to be reconsidered from a readiness perspective given the North Korean threat. In a June 2012 article the Chosun Ilbo speculated on a discussion between ROK and U.S. military officials about the feasibility of not dissolving CFC as

currently envisioned, keeping it intact and altering the commanding general from a U.S. commander to a ROK commander. While there are certainly political considerations in the ROK and U.S. an assessment of the North Korean view of the dissolution should be considered.²³ One such assessment may be that the north sees this as a successful culmination of its strategy to split the alliance and weaken its military capabilities so that it achieves the correlation of forces it requires for successful execution of its campaign plan to reunify the peninsula on its terms. It may see vulnerabilities for exploitation during the transition process as it considers how sufficient readiness can be maintained during the period. It is likely planning provocations even now as it expects to find these vulnerabilities in the coming years.

The alliance has taken some measures to mitigate these vulnerabilities and increase readiness during this critical period. The ROK and U.S. are working to improve combined missile defense,²⁴ though there is one shortfall not addressed. The ROK needs to purchase the PAC 3 and SM 3 missiles to have a true ballistic missile defense capability. Additionally, halting the movement of the US 210th Fire Brigade from moving south will significantly increase the counter-fire capability and defense of Seoul.²⁵ Finally, the command has requested redeployment of US attack helicopters to the peninsula.²⁶ These are all actions that enhance readiness and send a powerful message to the KFR that can aid in deterring provocations as well as provide capabilities to win the war or successfully negotiate the complexities of regime collapse.

While the above show the possibility of redeploying U.S. assets to the peninsula it is recognized that the U.S. is facing severe fiscal constraints that will impact its military. One of the ways under discussion to potentially reduce costs is to reduce the numbers of permanently stationed overseas troops and move to a more rotational construct such as what is underway with the U.S. Marines in Australia. The U.S. could deploy ground maneuver forces on a rotational basis while leaving other assets permanently stationed such as artillery and Army and Air Force aircraft.

Rotating ground combat forces could provide a number of benefits if they are employed creatively. Although not related directly to rotational forces there is one initiative that could benefit from both rotational units and a new mission focus for U.S. forces. Discussions are underway to form more integrated or combined ROK-US frontline units.²⁷ If US

ground combat forces were rotated on a 6 month or 1 year basis they could be integrated with frontline ROK ground combat units for training and also for a new mission which would be a variation on a US traditional mission that ended in 1993: US combat patrols in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Up until 1993 there was a U.S. sector of the DMZ around the truce village of Panmunjom that was patrolled by U.S. combat forces from the 2d Infantry Division. However, in order to improve interoperability, build relationships among ROK and US forces, as well as send a powerful message of alliance resolve to the Kim Family Regime, rotating U.S. forces could be integrated with the frontline ROK divisions in various alternating locations. This would provide U.S. forces with a combat mission focus and small unit operational experience that is being lost with the end of the Iraq war and the drawdown in Afghanistan. Such a mission would be good for morale of U.S. troops and would sustain the small unit combat skills necessary to operate across the spectrum of conflict.

Conclusion

The problem on the Korean peninsula has little chance of being resolved as long as the Kim Family Regime remains in power. It is unlikely to change due to the nature of the regime and is even more unlikely to seek peaceful reunification that would threaten its existence. It has continually demonstrated that it will not negotiate in good faith and it will never give up its nuclear program. If those assumptions are proved wrong then there is a chance that there could be peaceful reunification and the Joint Vision of Presidents Lee and Obama could be realized.

However, if the assumptions become fact then the Alliance faces a daunting challenge in the future because some form of conflict is likely, from a high intensity war through the complex challenges of collapse resistance to reunification. Before peaceful reunification, war or regime collapse occurs it is likely that the north will continue to conduct provocations to gain political and economic concessions in order to attempt to ensure regime survival.

To deal with the complex situation on the Peninsula there is one overriding condition that is necessary for diplomatic as well as military success and the ability to reach the desire end state of reunification: A strong ROK-U.S. Alliance. The strength Alliance must be sustained in order to deter war, defend against, provocation or attack, and overcome

the resistance and the humanitarian crisis that will occur as the ROK government ultimately resolves the “Korea Question.”

Furthermore, the ROK and U.S. governments cannot become preoccupied with stovepipe or single issues. It has to look at the interrelationship of all problems that emanate from North Korea from the nuclear and missile programs and proliferation, illicit activities, provocations and propaganda, starvation and human rights and deal with the entire problem and orchestrate all activities so as to remain focus on the end state. To do this it needs an overarching structure that allows orchestration, provides strategic and unified policy focus and then develops and implements way and means that can be effectively employed. This organization must maintain the Joint Vision of reunification and ask the key question to assess all actions:

How does this organization or action support achieving the joint vision of a reunified Korean Peninsula?

A reunified Korea is the only way to reach long-term peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. If it can be reached peacefully it will save tremendous amounts of blood and treasure. But if it cannot be reached without conflict it will take a strategy to get from here there.

Notes:

¹ The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) is popularly but unofficially known by its geographic designation in the north, as is the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south.

² The phrase “Korea question” is derived from the 1953 Armistice Agreement, Section IV, paragraph 60, which states: “In order to insure the peaceful settlement of the *Korean question* [emphasis added], the military Commanders of both sides hereby recommend to the governments of the countries concerned on both sides that, within three (3) months after the Armistice Agreement is signed and becomes effective, a political conference of a higher level of both sides be held by representatives appointed respectively to settle through negotiation the questions of the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea, the peaceful settlement of the Korean question, etc.” (http://www.intellnet.org/resources/korean_war_docs/armistic.htm). The Korea question refers to a final political solution as to how the people of Korea will chose to govern themselves.

³ Han S Park, ed. *North Korea: Ideology, Politics, Economy*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 15 in which Han S. Park describes Juche as theology. See also the Korea military newspaper “Kuk Pang Ilbo” editorial on

15 March 1999, p. 6. Chuje's (Juche) basic concept is this: "Man rules all things; man decides all things." "The Kim Il Song Chuche ideology is based on these precepts: In ideology Chuche (autonomy); in politics, self-reliance; in economics, independence; and in National Security: self-defense." See also Mattes Savada, ed., *North Korea: A Country Study* (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994), p. 324., "Kim Il Sung's application of Marxism-Leninism to North Korean culture and serves as a fundamental tenet of the national ideology. "Based on autonomy and self-reliance, *chuch'e* has been popularized since 1955 as an official guideline for independence in politics, economics, national defense and foreign policy."

⁴ Hannah Fischer, "North Korean Provocative Actions 1950-2007," (Congressional Research Service Report for Congress RL 30004) April 20, 2007, p. CRS-4. This report is the most comprehensive chronology of known North Korean provocations through 2007.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. CRS-6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. CRS-8 and 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. CRS-17 and 32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15 and 21.

⁹ <http://koreajoongangdaily.joinsmsn.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2954278&cloc=joongangdaily|home|newlist1>.

¹⁰ Kim Jong-un Gave Direct Orders to Interfere in S.Korean Polls," Chosun Ilbo, June 13, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/06/13/2012061301573.html

¹¹ U.S., Department of State, "Proliferation Security Initiative," <http://www.state.gov/t/isn/c10390.htm>.

¹² Robert Collins, *Marked for Life: Songbun - North Korea's Social Classification System*, The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, Washington, DC, June 2012.

¹³ Joint Communiqué, The 42d US-ROK Security Consultative Meeting, October 8, 2010, Washington, D.C., <http://www.defense.gov/news/d201010083usrok.pdf>

¹⁴ David S. Maxwell, "Beyond the Nuclear Crisis: A Strategy for the Korean Peninsula," thesis, National War College, Washington, DC, April 2004, p. 14.

¹⁵ Department of Defense, "Defense Strategic Guidance," Washington, DC, January 5, 2012, http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf

¹⁶ “Joint Statement of the 2012 United States - Republic of Korea Foreign and Defense,” Washington, DC, June 14, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/06/192333.htm>.

¹⁷ Maxwell, p. 89-94.

¹⁸ Chosun Ilbo, “Seoul Practices Striking N.Korean Command Posts,” June 12, 2012. http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/06/12/2012061201136.Html.

¹⁹ Donald Greenlees and David Lague, “Trail Led to Macao as Focus of North Korean Corruption,” New York Times, April 13, 2007 http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/13/world/asia/13macao.html?_r=5&ref=asia&pagewanted=all&oref=slogin&oref=slogin&oref=slogin&oref=slog&oref=login.

²⁰ Department of Defense, “United States, Republic of Korea and Japanese Naval Exercises Announced,” June 13, 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=15367>.

²¹ “N. Korea warns over South Korea-U.S. drill” United Press International, June 18, 2012 http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2012/06/18/N-Korea-warns-over-South-Korea-US-drill/UPI-13261340040197/#ixzz1yE9IYW4R.

²² N. Korea sees US arms buildup, vows to bolster defences,” Bangkok Post, June 18, 2012 <http://www.bangkokpost.com/lite/news/298575/n-korea-sees-us-arms-buildup-vows-to-bolster-defences>.

²³ “USFK Suggests Keeping Combined Forces Command,” Chosun Ilbo, June 14, 2012. http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/06/14/201206140652.html. OPCON transfer has always been a misnomer and this article is one of the first to allude to it. It has really all about the dissolution of the war fighting HQ, the Combined Forces Command. This transformation has been gradually taking place in the face of the continuous threat of War or Regime Collapse – both of which require an effective and unified allied response.

²⁴ “Seoul, Washington to Combine Missile Defense,” Chosun Ilbo, June 18, 2012. http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/06/18/2012061800501.Html.

²⁵ “USFK Wants to Keep Artillery Brigade North of Seoul,” Chosun Ilbo, June 18, 2012. http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/06/15/201206150652.html.

²⁶ “U.S. to deploy more attack helicopters, missile assets in S. Korea, ” Yonhap, June 12, 2012 <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2012/06/12/90/0301000000AEN20120612003000315F.HTML>.

²⁷ “S. Korea, U.S. Seek To Transform Front-Line American Unit Into Joint Forces,” Yonhap, June 15, 2012, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2012/06/15/0301000000AEN20120615001751315.HTML>,