

North Korean Nuclear and Missile Development: Future Challenges and Options for the Asia Pacific Security Architecture

Today the DPRK represents one of the worlds' biggest policy challenges due to its production and proliferation of nuclear weapons and missiles, the threat of attacks against South Korea, the U.S. bases in the region and, finally, the possibility that its internal problems could destabilize the whole Northeast Asia. The North Korean regime under the elder Kim proved to be remarkably resilient, and many of the forces that held it together will continue to operate even if his young successor, Kim Jong-un, remains weak. Future key to the Kim Jong-un regime's stability will be its ability to continue obtaining and distributing funds, mostly from external sources. Of particular importance will be China's willingness to provide commercial, financial, and other support for the regime. Despite the array of challenges, there are several forces that are likely to hold the regime together, particularly in the short run. While Kim Jong-un is untested, his chances of remaining in power and consolidating his base are far greater today than they were in 2008, when his father is believed to have suffered from a serious stroke that may have incapacitated him for a time. The two Kims have had more than two years to engineer Kim Jong-un's succession by eliminating potential opponents, elevating loyalists, securing his appointments to key posts, and obtaining China's blessing for the transition from father to son.

Today among Kim Jong-un's most important supporters are believed to his aunt and uncle, Kim Kyong-hui and Jang Song Taek. Both have been given important positions and Jang in particular acts as a type of regent, though some have also speculated that he could try to relegate Kim Jong-un to the role of a figurehead. Before his death, the elder Kim appears to have begun to decentralize the country's decision-making structure, which had been concentrated to a remarkable degree in his hands. Additionally, the powers of the North Korean state remain significant, as indicated by the smooth way the regime handled Kim Jong-il's death. The North Korean government delayed announcing Kim Jong-il's death for more than 50 hours. During the delay, there are reports that the government closed some markets, partially shut down the border with China, and notified members of the ruling elite. The fact that the regime was apparently able to carry out these operations, maintain secrecy, and operate the machinery of a transition without any major difficulties to date is an indication of the continued power of the state apparatus that the new leadership has inherited.

Anyway, few North Korea watchers believe North Korea's leaders will ever completely dismantle the country's nuclear weapons and long-range missile capabilities. Maintaining weapons of mass destruction program appears to have become integral to the regime's survival. Moreover, engagement risks providing North Korea with time and resources that could be used to refine its WMD capabilities, such as miniaturizing a nuclear warhead so that it is capable of being mounted on a long or medium range missile. Thus, some argue that the best, and perhaps only, way to neutralize the North Korean threat is by promoting regime change. In this line of thinking Kim's death presents an opportunity to actively seek to undermine the new regime.

So, what about the DPRK's steps to use all its nuclear and missile capabilities? Nominally, the DPRK "conducts all activities under the leadership of the Korean Workers' Party". Although the party is supposed to exert command and control of the Korean People's Army (KPA), the military has gained power and influence in state affairs since the mid-1990s. The KPA has been strongly influenced by Soviet military doctrine, Mao Zedong's concepts of guerrilla tactics and "people's war", the anti-Japanese guerrilla experience of Kim Il-sung and his partisans in the 1930s and 1940s and the devastation and stalemate of the Korean War. Two main political objectives drive military planning and doctrine: survival of the state and the Kim family regime, and Korean unification on DPRK terms. Although the DPRK has experienced a generational change in its leadership, the memory of U.S. intervention in 1950 was pervasive among policymakers. More recently, North Korea's military doctrine has been affected by Kim Jong-il's "military first politics", which was introduced to coincide with a September 1998 constitutional revision that formalized the country's dynastic succession. North Korean media described the policy as Kim's upgrade of his father's *chuch'e* ideology. Following the elder Kim's death in 1994, the country faced extraordinary economic deprivation and a famine that killed hundreds of thousands. With the capacity of the state and the party in steep decline, Kim Jong-il increasingly turned to the military to manage state affairs.

The state invokes "military first politics" ("songun") to reassure the military that it will get a first cut at scarce resources and to keep the population focused on external threats. In exchange for its privileged position, the military is expected to contribute to development and set an example for citizens as the country works hard to emerge from economic backwardness. Kim Jong-il reportedly viewed

“military first politics” as the “savior for our style of socialism”, and many North Koreans apparently believe it is necessary because the country is “standing alone in the face of imperialist aggression from the United States”. Till now the state uses the military and songun politics to indoctrinate the population, especially those too young to have experienced the Japanese colonial period or the Korean War. The government allocates tremendous resources to indoctrination and monitoring citizens’ loyalty to the Kim family regime.

The KPA is the largest mass organization and ideally positioned to disseminate political propaganda to young people who might be questioning the legitimacy of the government. Foreign analysts debate whether a shift in the conventional military balance against North Korea has forced the DPRK political leadership to rely on its asymmetric military capabilities for deterrence, national survival and maintaining the status quo, or if Pyongyang remains wedded to “completing the revolution in the South” and with force if necessary or possible. According to its by-laws, the Korean Workers’ Party is committed to “achieving a complete socialist victory in the northern half of the republic and to completing a people’s revolution to liberate all Korean people throughout the nation”. Pyongyang nominally is committed to unifying Korea, but the DPRK leaders are preoccupied with the survival of the state and the Kim family regime; therefore, they are not likely to launch an unprovoked war that they would lose.

Nevertheless, the KPA’s war-fighting doctrine is based on two main objectives: achieving a swift victory through overwhelming offensive attacks and deterring the U.S. from intervening effectively. North Korea almost certainly would have to use its ballistic missiles and possibly its nuclear weapons to achieve these objectives, but with no guarantee of success.

Given North Korea’s weakness and threat perceptions, its leaders probably feel they have no choice but to strengthen the country’s military capabilities, but their conventional options are limited. They acknowledge the North cannot compete with Washington or Seoul in an arms race, so DPRK military planners believe they must have asymmetric capabilities for deterrence. Pyongyang consistently says Washington might invade the DPRK at any moment. North Koreans apparently believe the DPRK is an innocent victim that somehow has become the target of Washington’s wrath. They view their formidable military capabilities as all that prevents a U.S. attack, even a nuclear one. Very few North Koreans have the opportunity to meet foreigners, but those who do often ask: “Why does the United States threaten to attack our country with nuclear weapons? Why does the United States dislike Koreans so much?” However, senior DPRK government and KWP officials do not believe the U.S. has any intention of attacking North Korea, but that DPRK media disseminate his message to help the regime maintain power and social control.

KPA personnel are taught that ROK and U.S. chemical weapons would be used in a war, even though Seoul and Washington are both parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Geneva Protocol, which prohibit the possession or use of such weapons. North Korean media nevertheless cite this supposed threat as a justification for Pyongyang’s nuclear arsenal. While the country suffers from extreme shortages of food and consumer goods, the defense industry produces protective suits that must be replaced after every CW defense exercise. “Military first” means these factories and training centers do not experience the same shortages that are ubiquitous in the civilian economy. Despite the opportunity cost and hardship, civilians are forced to accept the allocation of resources to the military as “necessary to protect the people from foreign aggression”.

But in fact there are a lot of problem in practical use of nuclear and missile capabilities. For North Korea to use its nuclear weapons, the Supreme Commander of the Korean People’s Army must first issue the order to transfer custody of the nuclear warheads to the KPA, that probably would take one or two days. This delay indicates that the North has followed China’s example of storing its bombs and missiles separately for safety purposes, but at the cost of less operational readiness. Furthermore, it means North Korea lacks sophisticated nuclear safety devices, which increases the likelihood of an accidental nuclear explosion if the weapons are placed on alert. In the case of conventional military assets, the Supreme Commander issues directives to the chief of the general staff of the KPA, who issues operational orders in wartime. But this level is probably bypassed for nuclear weapons. The Missile Guidance Bureau to mate the warheads with the missiles and deploy to their launch sites. The Bureau is an independent, corps-level unit directly under the general staff, headquartered in Sŏngch’ŏn-kun, South P’yŏng’an Province.

According to an intelligence source, nuclear weapons probably are stored at the following locations: Yongjŏng-dong, Namp’o City, South P’yŏng’an Province; near Kap’hyŏn-dong, Hŭich’ŏn City, Chagang Province; and Kong’in-dong, Kanggye City, Chagang Province.

The proximity of the two facilities would make it easier for warhead designers and missile engineers to collaborate, but separate storage facilities would be better for safety and security. Once the devices were certified reliable in Namp'o, they could have been transferred to Kap'hyōn-dong, Hūich'ōn City, and/or Kong'in-dong, Kanggye City. DPRK military planners might prefer to store the warheads at two locations to increase survivability during hostilities. Both cities are industrial centers linked to transport networks and near Nodong missile bases.

North Korean nuclear weapons would likely be launched from Nodong missile division, headquartered in Yongnim-ūp, Yongnim-kun, Chagang Province. There are three Nodong missile regiments in the division. The first is headquartered in Sino-ri, Unjōn-kun, North P'yōng'an Province; the second is headquartered in Yōngjō-ri, Kimhyōngjik-kun, Yanggang Province; the third is located along with the Nodong missile division in Yongnim-ūp. The second or third Nodong regiments would likely be tasked with launching nuclear missiles, because they are close to the suspected warhead storage sites and less susceptible to air or cruise missile attacks than the first regiment in Sino-ri. According to U.S. intelligence, there are indications North Korea has been building new Nodong bases near the Chinese border to take advantage of a reported 40-km buffer zone at that border that is "off limits to U.S. bombing".

In March 2008, the new chairman of the South's joint chiefs of staff told the ROK National Assembly that the military is prepared to carry out pre-emptive strikes against DPRK nuclear facilities if necessary, but China would certainly react negatively to any such development. Another possibility, although unlikely, is that North Korea would use the untested Musudan as a delivery platform. Its advantage is that it could potentially strike Guam, but it cannot be viewed as reliable without flight testing. North Korea's suspected nuclear weapons storage sites are also much closer to the second and third Nodong regiment bases. The Musudan missile division has three regiments and is headquartered in Yangdōk-kun, South P'yōng'an Province, about 80km east of Pyongyang. The first regiment is believed to be in Pakch'on, Yullyun-kun, South Hwanghae Province, on the west coast, about 80km south west of Pyongyang. The second and third are on the east coast, probably at Chunghūng-ri, Hong'wōn-kun, South Hamgyōng Province; and Sangnam-ri, Hōch'ōn-kun, South Hamgyōng Province. The distance and terrain between the warhead storage sites and the Musudan missile bases make the Musudan an unlikely delivery system at present. Intentions are impossible to assess, but there seems to be little military utility for North Korea's nuclear weapons other than deterrence, which Pyongyang repeatedly has stated is its objective. For many years prior to its nuclear breakout, the regime's military efforts apparently focused on internal stability and deterrence against a pre-emptive U.S. attack. However, a major pillar of DPRK military strategy is to exclude or deter the U.S. from intervening on the Korean Peninsula. If it were able to do so, an effort to overturn the status quo in North East Asia by threat or use of force would be more promising. Moreover, if U.S. alliance commitments in the region lost credibility, Japan and South Korea might be forced to take measures that could trigger the beginning of an arms race.

A "North Korean war plan" prepared in 2003 and obtained by a South Korea detailed mobilization procedures in time of war. It was issued under Kim Jong-il's signature as Central Military Commission Chairman, when Kim had gone into seclusion after the U.S.-led coalition had begun its war in Iraq. It was defensive in tone, not a plan for offensive strikes. There were no details for missile units other than to "strike enemy targets according to the instructions of the supreme headquarters". It emphasized the need to report to "supreme headquarters" any detection of nuclear, chemical weapons or biological weapons having been used against the DPRK but did not explain how the DPRK would respond.

North Korea's nuclear development efforts have arguably served as a principal impetus for expanded security cooperation in Northeast Asia, catalyzing diplomatic efforts to create a regional mechanism for addressing the nuclear issue in the form of the Six Party Talks since 2003. But after almost a decade of erratic progress, the Six Party Talks have failed to lead the way to a broader, formal framework for regional cooperation as envisioned for the proposed Northeast Asian Peace and Security Mechanism in 2007. The failure to make practical progress in implementing the goal of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula has impeded the advancement, coordination, and integration of the six party mechanism within the broader process of regional community building in East Asia. At the same time, the Korean peninsula has historically served as a breeding ground for strategic rivalry and mistrust among the major Northeast Asian players. The regional response to North Korean military provocations in 2010 dramatically revealed a resurgence of mistrust as an obstacle to cooperation among major powers. The current stalemate on the peninsula, including the apparent failure of the six party framework to sustain continued dialogue on North Korean denuclearization or other issues, underscores the North Korean

security challenge as a principal obstacle to community building in East Asia at the same time that the need to nurture regional cooperation on a wide range of traditional and non-traditional security issues constitutes an increasingly compelling need, especially in light of increasing tensions over conflicting territorial claims, among other issues.

The under-institutionalization of security cooperation in Northeast Asia is striking when compared to both the development of other regional multilateral security frameworks – such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1949), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (1973), and even the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (2001) – as well as the remarkable achievements in trade and economic cooperation among Northeast Asian neighbors over the past few decades. The limits of the ASEAN Regional Forum (1994) in dealing with Northeast Asian security issues underscore the challenge of building multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia. The most significant constraints to the emergence of a formal security structure in Northeast Asia include deep-rooted historical legacies, great power rivalries, ideological differences, and divergent visions for the long-term regional security architecture.

The evolution of regional approaches to North Korea ironically reveals North Korea as the primary source of insecurity and as a catalyst for enhanced security cooperation among Northeast Asian players over the past two decades. The outbreak of the first North Korean nuclear crisis in the early 1990s necessitated the creation of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization in 1995 as the multilateral body tasked with implementing the Agreed Framework. In the late 1990s, the four party talks between the United States, China, and the two Koreas were established with the objective of promoting the transition from an armistice to a permanent peace regime on the Korean peninsula. The U.S.-Japan-ROK Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group in 1998 promoted U.S. allied coordination in support of the Perry process and Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy. The Six Party Talks that emerged with the renewal of crisis in 2003 in response to North Korea's continued nuclear weapons development efforts represents the latest and most complete multilateral mechanism for addressing Korean peninsula and regional security. The Six Party Talks produced the September 2005 Joint Statement, which embodies a rhetorical consensus among all the parties concerned regarding the necessity of denuclearization, normalization, economic development, and peace as essential ingredients of a solution longstanding security challenges on the Korean peninsula; NEAPSM was the blueprint for a long-term regional security structure identified as part of the February 2007 implementing agreement of the Six Party Talks.

But, anyway one can see there is a general consensus regarding the lack of multilateral institutional mechanisms in the region, and especially in the Northeast Asia/North Pacific subregion, and that existing institutions are incapable or unwilling to address the key political, security, economic, and environmental challenges facing their members. Similar concerns are expressed about the deficiencies at the global/systemic level. The UNSC is blamed for lack of action in humanitarian crises such as Darfur, the NPT and IAEA are seen as failing to thwart aspiring nuclear states, and the Kyoto Accord has accomplished little.

The question must be asked as to whether the creation of new institutional mechanisms themselves will provide remedies to these deficiencies. The answer at present is no. The failings of the Six Party Talks will not be resolved by their institutional reconfiguration, as experience has demonstrated. Combining the ARF and APEC may achieve some efficiencies; it might clarify what some see as the confusion of mandates as APEC leaders wander to increasingly speak less about economics and more about political/security matters. But, these architectural re-drawings will not yield improved institutional performance on either security or economic dimensions. Similarly, reforming the UNSC will not result in more proactive action to address human security crises. The real issues to be addressed are those of political will, in the short term, and attention in the longer-term to evolution of the normative underpinnings of regional and global institutional forms.

This is borne out by examination of the details of proposed new regional institutions. Debates about any new Northeast Asia/North Pacific institution, apart from marginal concerns about the membership of Mongolia or Canada, continue to hinge upon the question of North Korea. Those who argue for a Northeast Asian institution going forward, without North Korean participation, i.e., a Northeast Asian institutional mandate that goes beyond resolution of the Korean Peninsula security crisis, fail to consider what has prevented such institutional arrangements from proceeding to date. Institutional fine tuning is not the fault or remedy, rather what must be addressed are the normative foundations on which states found and participate in multilateral fora.

Existing regional institutions, ASEAN and its associated institutional family and the ARF, are grounded on what are commonly referred to the Westphalian norms: sovereignty protection, non-

interference, inclusive membership, and consensus decision making. Here is where one locates the crux of moving forward on any new regional or global architectural developments. Given the nature of the current international state system – the historical legacies of many states, the recent behavior of major powers, etc. – the abandonment of these normative principles cannot be contemplated. However, absolutist interpretations of these norms in conceptual terms and rigid insistence upon their implementation in practice doom prospects for institutional innovation. On the one hand, one sees the positive results achieved by limited relaxation of these norms, certainly in the broad scale of the European Union but more narrowly in the compromises required in the operation of defense alliances and free-trade agreements.

On the other hand, one sees in the Asia-Pacific region the effects of current governments' unyielding insistence on their operationalization. Recent developments in ASEAN unfortunately, in my view, provide telling examples of the frustration of institutional advancement. Demands for inclusion, based on geographic logics and regional "visions" rather than on complementarity of interests and minimal sharing of principles of governance, effectively foreclose on all but limited cooperation on functional matters. Insistence on principles of equality, as in ASEAN's determination that membership contributions be equal, thus limited to what the least capable or least willing will provide, directly restrict what the organization can undertake but indirectly serve the interests of states who do not want to see institutional capacity increase. Insistence on consensus decision making has effectively hobbled ASEAN, seeing it become a hostage to its most recalcitrant and unprogressive members. Unless and until these strictures are lifted, a lowest common denominator standard will prevail and institutional architectural ambitions, as articulated at the onset of the Charter process, will see minimal to limited realization.

Much the same can be argued concerning the ARF. Despite repeated reviews and nominal approval of institutional innovations, including enhancing the role of the ARF Chair, the creation of an Expert and Eminent Persons Group, the authorization of a "friends of the Chair" mechanism, the ARF continues unchanged in its refusal to grapple proactively with the region's primary security concerns. This does not dispute the value of the information sharing achieved through the myriad of meetings of member state bureaucrats on functional issues. However, this is not what is being challenged in the calls of regional security institutional enhancement.

Today we can identify several possible scenarios for the use of North Korean nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles in Korea or elsewhere. While mutual deterrence on the Korean Peninsula is robust, deterrence could fail; in the case of transfers to other states or non-state actors, the likelihood of use increases. North Korea also does not have advanced safety mechanisms to prevent the accidental or unauthorized use of its nuclear bombs. Moreover, South Korea's population density and Seoul's proximity to the demilitarized zone separating North and South make millions of civilians vulnerable to a conventional as well as a nuclear missile attack.

The first option is deliberate, accidental, unauthorized attack. While the literature stresses the offensive nature of DPRK military doctrine, it is difficult to imagine North Korea using its ballistic missiles or nuclear weapons in an unprovoked first strike. There is always the danger of accidental or unauthorized launches, but currently that is unlikely. The North's ballistic missiles are inaccurate and relatively insignificant as military weapons unless they are armed with WMD, and most South Korean analysts believe they and the North's nuclear weapons can serve little purpose except deterrence or as bargaining chips with the U.S. in an effort to achieve broader foreign policy objectives.

A deliberate North Korean nuclear attack would be suicidal, so it is very unlikely except as a "doomsday weapon" in the event of imminent defeat in war. Today WMD assets are tightly controlled by Kim Jong-un, who by all accounts appears to be rational. North Korea does not have advanced nuclear safety devices to prevent an unauthorized or accidental nuclear detonation or missile launch when systems are on high alert. Misperceptions or miscommunications could lead to accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons if they are transferred to KPA commanders in the field.

The second option is retaliation or escalation. The Korean Peninsula is one of the world's greatest potential military flashpoints. The DPRK has the fourth largest military in the world, with one million active duty personnel, but most of its hardware is obsolete. Escalation and all-out war were avoided during periods of high tension and serious North Korean provocations in the 1960s, but there have been several close calls since the end of the Korean War. Misperception or miscalculation could lead to an escalation spiral. Deliberate or accidental incursions during a time of rising tensions can create incentives to strike first. In particular, Pyongyang does not recognize the west sea boundary, the Northern Limit Line, which has seen several deadly battles over the last decade.

Moreover, DPRK nuclear and missile programs could trigger arms races in North East Asia or elsewhere by posing direct threats or undermining non-proliferation. Japan and South Korea, countries most threatened by its arsenal, are non-nuclear weapon states, in full compliance with NPT obligations and IAEA safeguards, including the Additional Protocol. But both have extensive nuclear power industries and advanced nuclear technologies.

Japan enriches uranium for reactor fuel and reprocesses spent fuel. Any diversion of its nuclear materials would be observable, and Tokyo depends on foreign uranium, so is vulnerable to a supply suspension. Nuclear breakout would be very costly for Seoul and Tokyo, politically and economically, but the technical barriers to building a bomb are relatively low. South Korea is constrained by bilateral nuclear cooperation agreements and the 1992 “Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula”, which prohibit uranium enrichment or spent fuel reprocessing. Its natural uranium deposits are scarce, so Seoul also is dependent upon foreign reactor fuel supplies.

Japan and South Korea have forsworn nuclear weapons, relying instead upon conventional forces and credible U.S. alliances, and would face a number of political, diplomatic and legal obstacles to nuclear breakout. But a nuclear arms race in North East Asia, though very unlikely, could occur if there were a collapse of the non-proliferation regime and a restructuring of regional security architecture that undermined their security.

Missile defense systems have been deployed in North East Asia but are insufficient to intercept a full scale North Korean missile attack. The technology is expensive and unproven. It offers no defense against North Korea’s artillery, and the offence has the advantage in a missile arms race because it is cheaper to build more missiles to overwhelm defenses than it is to develop more defenses. Limited missile defense is mostly to protect military assets and offers little or no protection to civilian populations. Japan feels most threatened by North Korea’s nuclear capabilities and believes missile defense offers the only real countermeasure. Although systems are unproven and imperfect, distance and geography make it technologically feasible to intercept North Korean missiles, and the Japanese constitution, domestic laws and national defense policies proscribe the use of offensive military force. Aegis destroyers patrolling near North Korea theoretically could intercept missiles in their boost phase or in mid-flight, though decisions to engage would need to be made very rapidly. Patriot missile batteries would have a shot in the terminal phase as the Nodongs approached their targets, but again the systems are not flawless.

Japanese politicians and media have discussed preemptive strikes against North Korean ballistic missiles, but this would require actionable intelligence that would be nearly impossible to obtain, and the Japanese military does not have the capability to strike DPRK missile facilities. The rhetoric is aimed at a domestic audience and does not represent a real policy option at this time. However, while missile defense is insufficient to protect Japan completely from DPRK missile strikes, Pyongyang is deterred by U.S. counter-strike capabilities and extended deterrence through the U.S.-Japan alliance. Japan consequently will continue missile defense cooperation with the U.S. and expand deployments of MD systems.

Missile defense is more problematic for South Korea. It provides no protection against North Korean artillery rounds and it would be very expensive to maintain enough interceptors to protect against Pyongyang’s complete missile inventory. Proximity makes it difficult to shoot down all incoming missiles. Extensive missile defense deployments, especially if ROK systems were to become deeply integrated with a U.S.-Japan-South Korea regional network, would alienate China, which Seoul cannot afford to do. Beijing would especially object to any system that could nullify its own missile deterrent against the U.S. or be extended to protect Taiwan. U.S. Forces in Korea have deployed Patriot systems to protect their bases, but they offer no real protection to South Korea’s major cities. Seoul is introducing the Korean Air and Missile Defense network that includes Aegis destroyer ship-launched interceptors and modified PAC-2 Patriot systems acquired from Germany in early 2009. The ROK wants a limited capability to intercept North Korean missiles, but the military does not wish to become part of a U.S.-led global MD network. Despite U.S. requests, Seoul is reluctant to participate in a system that would be expensive and could involve it in global geopolitical tensions it would rather avoid. While the Lee Myung-bak administration is more receptive to missile defense than its predecessor, it wants to maintain independence and control of its own assets.

Deterrence and credible precision strike capabilities will be indispensable until the DPRK abandons its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. The U.S. military plays a prominent role in deterring North Korea through its bilateral alliances with Seoul and Tokyo. In 1978, the U.S. and South Korea established the Combined Forces Command to integrate their forces on the Korean Peninsula under a U.S. four-star general and a four-star ROK deputy commander in time of war. In a war, the North Korean Air

Force would be no match for its U.S. and ROK counterparts, who would be able to gain air superiority and deliver counter-strikes against DPRK targets. The U.S. could also deploy additional air assets from other bases in the Pacific. It periodically rotates advanced strike aircraft to the Pacific theatre during military exercises or at times of increased tensions in Korea to signal it is prepared to fulfill its alliance commitments if necessary. Since the end of the Korean War, the majority of U.S. ground forces have been located near the DMZ to serve as a “tripwire” in case of a North Korean attack. The stationing of U.S. troops at several small installations was considered to have a deterrent effect on Pyongyang, because it ensured that the U.S. would become involved in any fighting. However, in recent years the Pentagon has come increasingly to view these troops as vulnerable hostages who reduce its military options, and as part of its force transformation policy, U.S. ground elements are being moved further south, to get them beyond North Korean artillery range and reduce the American footprint. The U.S. Army has deployed artillery and Army Tactical Missile Systems with the Second Infantry Division near the DMZ, which has drawn North Korean criticism. In October 2006, Seoul established an integrated missile command under the ROK Army to manage counterstrike forces.

Non-proliferation, counter-proliferation, deterrence and containment policies all have to be maintained as insurance against the failure of diplomacy to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. The military option is unthinkable unless there is clear foreknowledge that the DPRK is about to initiate unprovoked military operations against its neighbors. This is very unlikely since, it would be observable and suicidal for the DPRK. Nevertheless, the international community must be prepared for all contingencies.