



Soldiers demonstrate how to integrate maneuver forces with enablers for countering weapons of mass destruction operations in an underground facility in South Korea. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. John Che)

A Denuclearized Korean Peninsula

By Command Sgt. Maj. Mark A. Millare

41st Brigade Engineer Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division

The progress of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic weapons development program poses a grave threat to global security and international stability. American efforts to isolate and pressure the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to abandon its nuclear ambitions has slowed the DPRK's nuclear weapons program, but has not stopped the advancement of its ballistic missile programs with several tests recently reported (Tong-Hyung, 2019). The long-term solution is to hold steady on the economic sanctions placed on the DPRK until mutually agreed upon mechanics and timelines for their denuclearization are finalized and delivered.

History

For North Korea's Kim Jong Un, achieving a nuclear capability is the only solution to his perpetual insecurity against his enemies, especially the perceived threat from the alliance between the U.S. and the Republic

of Korea (ROK) ("North Korea Fires Ballistic Missiles Again," 2019). This paranoia has been a theme since Kim Il Sung (Kim Jong Un's grandfather) ruled the country from 1948 to 1994 and adopted its *juche* (self-reliance) and *songun* (military first) philosophies that promote the country's strength above all other things, including the survival or quality of life of its citizens (Pollack, 2008). According to *Time*, "The Korean War convinced Kim Il Sung...that the country needed to protect itself from the U.S., and the Soviet Union helped its fellow communist nation get the resources to do just that" (Waxman, 2017, para. 3).

As tense as things are right now between North Korea and the rest of the world, it hasn't always been so. In the early 2000s, the relationship between North and South Korea improved when South Korea offered aid to the DPRK to help them recover from the flooding and famine of the 1990s, as well as the collapse of the Soviet Union —

North Korea's largest trading partner. During this time, North Korea even came close to establishing peace with the U.S. and hosted then-U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. But this fragile peace crumbled when Kim Jong Il (Kim Jong Un's father) pulled out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, kicked out all weapons inspectors, and resumed nuclear testing in his attempt to become a nuclear super power ("North Korea," 2017).

Once Kim Jong Il died in 2011, the world thought Kim Jong Un would bring about much-needed economic and social reform to the country, but instead he immediately began executing those who questioned him, including senior high-ranking officials, and even his own uncle (Lee & Kim, 2016). Then, in 2012, North Korea pledged to stop testing its nuclear capabilities in exchange for food from the U.S., but just months later they began testing rockets and performing underground nuclear tests (Lee, Lew, Hahn, Lee, & Yu, 2019). Since he's been in power, Kim has conducted four nuclear tests and more than 90 missile tests ("The CNS North Korea Missile Test Database," 2019).

Implications of a Nuclear DPRK

U.S. officials estimate that North Korea currently possesses a nuclear arsenal of around 60 nuclear weapons (Snyder, 2018). They also have the ability to reach the continental U.S. According to Eleanor Albert at the *Council on Foreign Relations*:

“The regime successfully tested intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), each capable of carrying a large nuclear warhead, in July and November 2017. Pyongyang said that in its November testing of the new Hwasong-15 ICBM, the missile hit an altitude of 4,475 kilometers (2,780 miles), far above the International Space Station, and flew about 1,000 kilometers (590 miles) before landing in the sea off Japan's coast. Analysts estimate the Hwasong-15 has a potential range of 13,000 kilometers (8,100 miles) and, if fired on a flatter trajectory, could reach anywhere on the U.S. mainland. (Albert, 2019, para. 4)”

The range of this missile transforms the DPRK from a regional threat to a global one. However, experts have differing theories regarding how a nuclear DPRK could influence the stability and security in North Asia.

One theory ignites a shift in focus in the region where a nuclear DPRK could trigger a regional arms race (Kim & Yang, 2017; Austin, 2017). Under this theory, the US-ROK alliance could reintroduce tactical nuclear weapons back into South Korea after a 26-year hiatus (Austin, 2017).

Also, Japan, being a member of the maritime alliance known as the "Quad" with the U.S., would most likely



Republic of Korea Master Sgt. Hyo-min, Choi, native of Seoul, Republic of Korea, a member of Capital Corps, 700 Rangers, constructs and removes a training-Claymore mine during the Expert Infantryman Badge training lanes led by 4th Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment "Regulars," 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division at Camp Casey, Republic of Korea, April 10, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Alon Humphrey)

work with the U.S. to establish security in the region (Park & Silverberg, 2019). But this could cause China and both Koreas, still acutely suspicious of Japanese intentions since the end of World War II, to possibly see this move as a renewed drive towards Japanese imperialism (Kim & Lee, 2019). This scenario would put the U.S. in a complicated position, making it impossible to choose sides between Japan and South Korea, but still needing to establish security in the region. The U.S. would not only have to address DPRK's nuclear threat, but would also need to manage and mend the degrading relations of its two greatest allies in the region.

The second theory involves the possibility of a global nuclear arms proliferation. Once the DPRK perfects its nuclear weapons technology, Pyongyang will undoubtedly add nuclear weapons to its short list of exports. Countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Syria, and Myanmar have all purchased weapons and ICBMs from the DPRK (Nichols, 2018). North Korea could easily add nuclear weapons to these countries' shopping lists.

A country willing to sell nuclear weapons to anyone is a deadly combination that would reshape global security and stability. With an easily purchased nuclear weapon, extremist and terrorist organizations could destroy cities around the globe with ease. This is, again, why North Korea must be denuclearized, so it cannot directly, or indirectly, provide a nuclear threat to the world.



Republic of Korea Army soldiers stand resolute at the iconic Joint Security Area where South and North Korean soldiers stand face to face across the Korean Demilitarized Zone, June 19, 2018. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Richard Colletta)

The Current Strategy

For Kim, achieving a nuclear capability has been the only solution to the DPRK's perpetual insecurity against the U.S./Republic of Korea (ROK) alliance and a way to guarantee his regime's survival (Albert, 2019).

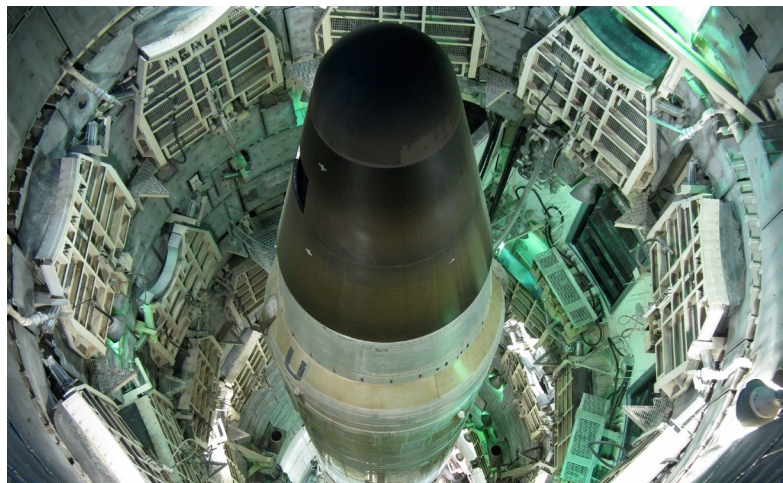
This has led to preventative measures by the U.S., U.N., and China, in the form of economic sanctions designed to pressure them to the negotiating table (Heintz, Shurkin, & Mallory, 2019). Sanctions have been in place since 2013, yet up until recently were thought to have little effect because of the DPRK's secret trade economy, its ability to ignore the welfare of its working class citizens in the name of *juche* and *songun*, and other countries not abiding by the imposed sanctions (Ma, 2017; "North Korea sanctions," 2019; Roth, 2017). In *The New York Times*, "High-end Western goods are making their way to North Korea's elite through a complex system of port transfers, secret high-seas shipping and shadowy front companies," (Wong & Koettl, 2019, para. 4).

What the world is discovering now though is that the sanctions are working. According to *Fox News*, "International sanctions and drought shrunk North Korea's economy the most in 21 years, South Korea's central bank said Friday, according to a report. North Korea's GDP in 2018 fell by 4.1 percent last year - the most since 1997" (Stimson, 2019, para. 1).

The Solution

The solution to stabilize and denuclearize the Korean peninsula can be accomplished in four ways:

1. Continue with the current sanctions, but crack down on the infractions and illegal smuggling so they can be more impactful. The U.N. is currently investigating 20 different countries on sanction violations with North Korea ("North Korea Sanctions," 2019).
2. The last summit meeting with Kim resulted in a joint statement with the goal of "complete denuclearization" but lacked any details or concrete plan (Landler, 2018). The U.S. needs to get back to the negotiation table to form a plan with hard timelines and progression goals that both parties can follow.
3. The U.S. has to help strengthen the relationship between South Korea and Japan. Showing strength through a unified front would better deter North Korea from starting a conflict. The tension between South Korea and Japan is residual from Japan's colonial period when they occupied the region and committed crimes against the Korean Peninsula (Rich, Wong, & Sang-Hun, 2019). Strengthening ties between the two nations would not only bolster defense in the region, but also improve the economic direction between the two countries.
4. The U.S. should broker an official end to the Korean War between the North and the South. Although the Korean War has been over for seven decades, it technically never ended and there is no treaty in place. If North and South Korean leadership got together to sign a peace treaty, it could pave the way for positive change in the region (Blakemore, 2019).



A view from above the silo housing a Titan II missile at the Titan Missile Museum in Green Valley, Arizona, May 14, 2018. (Photo courtesy of Katie Lange, Defense Media Activity)

Repercussions of War

War with North Korea would not be an easy cut and dry win. Their weapons are heavily entrenched in their mountains, making them hard to detect and destroy, a difficult lesson the U.S. learned in the mountains of Afghanistan (Davis, 2019). As a defensive measure, North Korea would also likely hold the civilians of South Korea hostage.

According to retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. Daniel L. Davis' (now a member of the Center for Defense Information's Military Advisory Board) prediction:

“Kim will most likely launch a massive artillery strike of limited duration on the South Korean capital of Seoul, causing enormous damage and killing tens of thousands of South Korean citizens—and then stop his attack and warn that if the United States doesn't cease its attack, then North Korea will obliterate the rest of Seoul, inflicting casualties in the hundreds of thousands. The most dangerous course of action for Kim would be to detonate a nuclear bomb on Seoul or launch a nuclear missile against Japan, killing millions—and then threatening to fire more if the U.S. does not cease-fire. (Davis, 2019, para. 8)”

If this happened, President Trump would then be faced with the impossible task of choosing to continue the attack

knowing that more civilians would die, or stopping the attacks knowing that he was giving in to Kim's demands, which would have even further implications within the global community since political opponents would surely label this strategy as one of appeasement, emboldening authoritarian regimes around the world.

Also, if the U.S. attacked North Korea first, it would activate the Sino-North Korean Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance Treaty that commits China to the DPRK's defense against foreign aggression, especially, since North Korea is China's most important ally in the region. This would essentially pit the U.S. against China, and possibly encourage other countries to take up arms as they honor their treaties and protect trade agreements, much like world wars of the past (Mizokami, 2019). But as stated in the North Korea/China treaty, and as China has stated publicly, if North Korea strikes first, China is not obligated to intervene on their behalf (Denyer & Erickson, 2017).

Furthermore, the aftermath of a Korean War would require a strong commitment from America. Even if the war ends in favor of the U.S., the cost of reconstructing the entire peninsula would cost upwards of \$2.7 trillion (“What North and South,” 2016; Kim, 2015). The cost of reconstruction would further strain the U.S. economy. And with its resources overstretched, it would make it easier for adversaries like Russia and Iran to take advantage of a weakened economy and seize opportunities in Europe and the Middle East.



A U.S. Army Soldier assigned to 718th Ordnance Company, 23d Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Battalion, 2nd Sustainment Brigade dons a bomb suit during the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team of the Year platoon evaluations Dec. 12, 2018, at Rodriguez Live Fire Complex, Yeongpyeong-ri, South Korea. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Adeline Witherspoon)



Soldiers with 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, prepare to qualify on the M240 and M249 in South Korea, Jan. 25, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Alon Humphrey)

Conclusion

The U.S. must resolve the DPRK's aggressiveness through diplomacy. While current sanctions are working by applying pressure to North Korea's economy, bankrupting the country and forcing more famine and poverty on its people is not the end goal. A solid and actionable denuclearization and peace plan will improve

the entire region, both economically and strategically. Advocating for peace and trust between North and South Korea, as well as North Korea and the U.S., will remove the DPRK's original need for nuclear weapons as protection. Doing so will strengthen the economy of the Korean Peninsula, which benefits the global economy and provides peace to a long-hostile region. ■

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Command Sgt. Maj. Mark A. Millare is a combat engineer in the United States Army. He is currently serving as the command sergeant major for the 41st Brigade Engineer Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division. He previously served as first sergeant for the 95th Engineer Company (Wolfpack), 84th Engineer Battalion. Millare has deployed three times in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, and once supporting Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

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