

BACKGROUND

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Enhancing South Korean–U.S. Naval Capabilities Is Critical to American Interests

Bruce Klingner

Abstract

After two North Korean attacks in 2010, South Korea began to redress its naval shortcomings, but deficiencies remain that could put allied interests at risk during the next military conflict. South Korea needs to strengthen its anti-submarine warfare, amphibious, and C4ISR capabilities. The United States needs to reverse course on its defense budget reductions, which are raising doubts among U.S. allies (and enemies) about the ability of the U.S. to keep its security commitments. Beyond putting its fiscal house in order, the U.S. needs to work to improve bilateral and trilateral defense cooperation among South Korea, Japan, and the United States.

South Korean President Park Geun-hye has pledged to reach out diplomatically to North Korea to establish a reciprocal trust-building process. She is willing to provide economic benefits to facilitate North Korean denuclearization and progress toward Korean unification. But Park always emphasizes that the most important pillar of her “trustpolitik” strategy is first to bolster South Korea’s military readiness.

President Park will respond decisively and expansively to any North Korean attack because “there should be stern punishment for reckless provocations so as to break the vicious cycle.”¹ The South Korean military subsequently warned that it would respond to a North Korean attack by striking not only at the source of the attack, but also at nearby attack and support units as well as rear-echelon command targets.

KEY POINTS

- South Korean President Park Geun-hye has pledged to respond decisively to any future North Korean provocation. A strike against South Korean maritime targets in the West Sea is the most likely attack scenario.
- After two North Korean attacks in 2010, South Korea redressed naval shortcomings and signed a joint counter-provocation contingency plan with Washington to enhance allied deterrence and defense capabilities. However, lingering deficiencies could put allied interests at risk during the next military conflict.
- South Korea should continue to strengthen its naval and amphibious forces to defend against North Korean attacks while developing capabilities to play a greater role in regional and global security.
- Although the primary responsibility lies with Seoul, the Obama Administration should provide sufficient military funding to enable the United States to fulfill its pledges to protect its critical ally.
- Massive U.S. defense budget cuts have already raised allied concerns about American resolve and security commitments.

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North Korea twice attacked South Korea in 2010, killing 50 citizens. This year, the danger remains high. Pyongyang has threatened nuclear attacks against Seoul and the United States and against South Korean islands near a disputed maritime border. The most likely scenario would be a tactical-level attack against South Korean targets in the West Sea, but that could quickly escalate into a broader military clash.

In response to the 2010 attacks, South Korea implemented several improvements in its naval forces. Seoul and Washington enacted a joint counter-provocation contingency plan to enhance allied deterrence and defense capabilities and to establish procedures for U.S. forces to respond to North Korean provocations.

However, deficiencies remain in allied naval capabilities, and failure to address these shortcomings could put allied interests at risk during the next military conflict. Although the primary responsibility lies with Seoul, the Obama Administration needs to provide sufficient military funding to enable the United States to fulfill its pledges to protect its critical ally. Massive cuts in the U.S. defense budget have already raised allied concerns about American resolve and security commitments.

North Korea's Conventional Forces Remain a Threat

It had become a widely accepted military truism that Pyongyang's conventional forces were a steadily decreasing threat. This was particularly true, it was argued, of the North Korean navy and air force, which were not expected to survive initial contact with the far more capable allied counterparts.

However, the sinking of the naval corvette *Cheonan* and the artillery attack on Yeonpyeong Island in 2010 were deadly reminders that Pyongyang retains a significant ability and inclination to attack South Korea with conventional weapons. In July 2010, U.S. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper warned:

The most important lesson...is to realize that we may be entering a dangerous new period when

North Korea will once again attempt to advance its internal and external political goals through direct attacks on our allies in the Republic of Korea. Coupled with this is a renewed realization that North Korea's military forces still pose a threat that cannot be taken lightly.²

Although the attack on the *Cheonan* showed the need for greater emphasis on anti-submarine warfare (ASW), it did not reflect unique shortfalls in South Korea's navy. U.S. Navy officers have stressed that the West Sea is a highly complex and difficult ASW environment, perhaps the worst conditions possible due to shallow depth, salinity, high commercial traffic, and trawler bottom nets disturbing emplaced sensors. These conditions degrade the capability of both active and passive sonars.

***Cheonan* Attack Caused Sea Change in Priorities**

In response to the attacks, South Korea shifted its defense planning away from preparing for a large-scale invasion and focused instead on flexible, customized responses to localized military attacks. Defense planners increased emphasis on the navy's and air force's roles in retaliating against North Korean infiltrations and tactical provocations, particularly in the West Sea where the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong attacks occurred.

This was a reversal from previous plans to prioritize naval and air force missions away from the Korean Peninsula. Following the *Cheonan* attack, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Kim Sung-chan redirected the navy's focus away from a decade-long emphasis on blue-water operations toward increased readiness against North Korean attacks. To emphasize this shift, the naval chief of staff even banned the use of "blue-water navy" and "cutting-edge maritime force" as descriptors of the navy's missions.³

Seoul directed the armed forces to focus more on enhancing military readiness against imminent North Korean asymmetric threats. Defense Minister Kim Kwan-jin commented that the South

1. Yonhap News Agency, "Park Calls for 'Stern Punishment' for N. Korean Provocations," February 22, 2012, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2013/02/22/37/0301000000AEN20130222004951315F.HTML> (accessed June 19, 2013).

2. BBC, "US Spy Chief Nominee Warns of N Korea 'Direct Attacks,'" July 20, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-10707396> (accessed June 19, 2013).

3. Editorial, "Changing Course?" *The Korea Herald*, September 24, 2010.

Korean military mission was to “proactively deter current threats posed by the enemy rather than cope with potential threats in the future.”⁴

The Need for Maritime Deterrence

As a small peninsular nation surrounded by threats and water, the Republic of Korea (ROK) needs a strong navy to attain and protect its national interests. Maritime missions include defending the homeland; protecting its “near abroad” contested islands; securing Korean overseas maritime interests, such as sealines of communication (SLOCs) and freedom of navigation; and engaging in the regional and global cooperative security responsibilities of a middle-power nation, such as U.N. operations, counterpiracy, and counterproliferation.

However, Seoul does not bear its security burden alone. Its alliance with the United States will continue to play an irreplaceable role in the defense of South Korea. That said, it behooves Seoul to augment its naval capabilities because of:

- The dangerous threat environment of the Korean Peninsula, made all too clear by the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong Island attacks and China’s growing military presence and assertiveness;
- 78 percent of all North Korean provocations since 1990⁵ have occurred at sea;
- South Korea’s assumption of greater responsibility for its defense after the transfer of wartime operational command (OPCON)⁶ in 2015;
- The new “Asian pivot” security strategy of the United States, which calls on allies to increase their security contributions;
- Growing concerns about declining U.S. military capabilities after draconian cuts in the U.S. defense budget; and

- The ability and need for South Korea to assume a larger global security role that is commensurate with its economic and military power.

South Korea and its navy find themselves pulled by both centrifugal and centripetal forces, outward toward greater regional and global responsibilities and inward toward the center to defend the homeland. Seoul’s plan to develop a blue-water navy reflects the country’s growing international influence, but this expansive strategy was offset by a reflexive need to improve homeland defenses after North Korea’s deadly acts of war in 2010. The challenge for South Korea’s leaders is to balance these competing requirements by devising a comprehensive naval strategy and force structure and fully funding the country’s security needs.

As a small peninsular nation surrounded by threats and water, the Republic of Korea needs a strong navy to attain and protect its national interests.

For its part, the United States should work with its ally to ensure that South Korea can deter, defend, and if necessary respond to any future attack by maintaining a robust forward-deployed military presence in the Western Pacific. Washington should also affirm its unequivocal extended deterrence commitment composed of conventional forces, missile defense, and the nuclear umbrella.

The Neglected ROK Navy

ROK naval and air forces have been underemphasized and underfunded due to the predominantly ground-based threat from North Korea. South Korea has relied to a greater extent on U.S. naval

4. Yonhap News Agency, “Defense Chief Unveils Plans to Reform Military, Enhance Interoperability,” March 8, 2011, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2011/03/08/69/0301000000AEN20110308011300315F.HTML> (accessed June 19, 2013).

5. Lee Dong Han, “Naval Augmentation Proposal Reemerges After 16 Years,” *Chosun Ilbo*, June 19, 2012, quoted in Jung Ho-sub, “Ways to Strengthen ROK-US Naval Cooperation to Deter Provocations by North Korea,” paper presented at the Sixth KIMS-CNA Conference, Seoul, November 8, 2012.

6. Wartime OPCON transition will shift from a command system centered on the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command to a new combined defense system led by the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff and supported by a to-be-created U.S. Korea Command. In 2006, President Roh Moo-hyun requested that the U.S. return wartime operational control of ROK forces. In 2007, the U.S. and South Korea agreed to the transfer in April 2012. The transfer was subsequently postponed to 2015.

and air support as Seoul has assumed the lead for ground combat operations. This was a result of both the manpower-intensive nature of land warfare and South Korea's inability to match U.S. high-technology air and naval weapons.

As a result, the South Korean navy is smaller than required for addressing the North Korean threat. Moreover, its ships are smaller than is well suited for over-the-horizon regional and global missions. In recent years, the South Korean navy has faced a rapid multiplication of missions without a commensurate increase in platforms and personnel. This has led to a high operational tempo that is straining the service.

The South Korean navy is smaller than required for addressing the North Korean threat.

After the OPCON transfer, South Korea will assume the role as naval component commander. However, U.S. and ROK naval officers have raised concerns about South Korean shortcomings in command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities, particularly data and command linkages between tactical and strategic levels and across military services. There are also perceptions that ROK-U.S. intelligence, tracking, and command links are insufficient for bilateral integrated naval operations to provide seamless response to North Korea contingencies.

Protecting the Korean Homeland

After the 2010 attacks, Defense Minister Kim Kwan-ji stated: "If the enemy attacks our people and territory again, I will use force to punish the enemy

to make sure it does not even dare to think about it again. The enemy should be punished thoroughly until the source of provocation is eliminated."⁷

To improve its naval capabilities against further North Korean attacks, Seoul increased procurement of anti-submarine warfare capabilities, including minesweepers, anti-submarine helicopters, and sensor systems.⁸ To boost defenses of the northwest border islands, Seoul augmented military forces and sensors, increased alliance naval and combined-arms exercises in the West Sea, and established the Northwest Islands Defense Command with authority over ground, naval, and air forces in the region.⁹

Seoul will improve Marine Corps readiness by purchasing 40 helicopters, additional amphibious ships, and light-armored vehicles. South Korea will purchase advanced counterbattery radar systems and precision-guided munitions capable of attacking North Korean artillery systems and accelerate procurement of high-altitude spy drones.

Protecting the "Near Abroad"

South Korea will augment its current three district naval fleets with a new tailored-mission task force to protect SLOCS, respond to territorial disputes with neighboring countries, conduct expeditionary naval operations, and participate in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions.¹⁰ The Ministry of Defense has recommended creating a "strategic mobile fleet" comprised of three mobile battle groups to be stationed in Busan and on Jeju Island. Each battle group would have two Aegis destroyers, two smaller destroyers, one landing platform ship, and two submarines, 16 helicopters, three aerial surveillance aircraft, and one logistics ship.¹¹

The navy will create a Submarine Command in 2015 as part of its overall submarine modernization plan. The ROK Marine Corps will activate the Jeju Unit and assume responsibility for defensive

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7. Rhee Sand-woo, "From Defense to Deterrence: The Core of Defense Reform Plan 307," Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 7, 2011, <http://csis.org/publication/defense-deterrence-core-defense-reform-plan-307> (accessed June 20, 2013).
 8. Jung Sunk-ki, "Navy to Focus on Littoral Warfare," *The Korea Times*, September 15, 2010, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/09/205_73102.html (accessed June 20, 2013).
 9. Republic of Korea, Ministry of National Defense, "Defense Ministry Unveils New Defense Reform," March 9, 2011, <http://www.mnd.go.kr/webmodule/htsboard/template/read/engbdread.jsp?typeID=16&boardid=88&seqno=1076> (accessed June 20, 2013).
 10. Sukjoon Yoon, "Formulating Korean Maritime Middle-Power Strategy," *IFANS Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (June 2012), p. 108.
 11. "Military Proposes 'Strategic Mobile Fleet' to Protect Territory," *Donga Ilbo*, August 31, 2012, and "Korea to Boost Naval Capacity amid Regional Arms Race," *Chosun Ilbo*, October 19, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/10/19/2012101901215.html (accessed June 20, 2013).
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operations near Jeju Island from the Navy's current Jeju Defense Command.

Maintaining a Global Focus

The attacks on the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong Island underscored the need to improve homeland defense. North Korea remains the most dangerous near-term threat, the wolf closest to the sled. However, the reactive reorientation of defense priorities after the *Cheonan* attack should not obscure South Korea's other longer-term challenges and responsibilities. These include the need to look beyond Korea's shores to both regional and global threats.

In 2008, President Lee Myung-bak declared that South Korea must "build a state-of-the-art [naval] force that can protect our maritime sovereignty. With a vision for an advanced, deep-sea Navy, our Navy should become a force that can ensure the security of maritime transportation lines, and contribute to the peace of the world."¹²

The ROK Navy has been an active participant in Combined Task Force 151, an international naval task force combating pirate attacks in shipping lanes off the coast of Somalia. In January 2011, South Korean SEALs conducted their first-ever operation in international waters by successfully rescuing all 21 hostages held aboard the South Korean freighter *Samho Jewelry* 800 miles off the Somali coast. Eight pirates were killed and five wounded, and none escaped.

The daring rescue against heavily armed opponents was fraught with risk. Its flawless execution is a testament to the professionalism, dedication, and bravery of the South Korean SEALs. South Korean President Lee Myung-bak vowed to protect Koreans abroad, declaring, "We will not tolerate any behavior that threatens the lives and safety of our people in the future."¹³

The recent resurgence of maritime territorial disputes with Japan and China has highlighted the need for South Korea to look beyond just the North Korean threat. The construction of a naval base on Jeju Island is a good initiative to extend Korean influence into the South China Sea in response to Chinese expansionism.

South Korea needs to juggle resource requirements for its brown-water, green-water, and blue-water navies. As part of its comprehensive Global Korea strategy, a blue-water navy enables Korea to punch above its weight in international relations. President Park Geun-hye has not yet indicated to what degree she will maintain or alter the defense strategy, deployments, and procurement plans of her predecessor.

A blue-water navy enables Korea to punch above its weight in international relations.

Assessing South Korea's Vulnerabilities

The South Korean military has several significant vulnerabilities.

Communications and Command Connectivity. A critical South Korean military deficiency is insufficient inter-connectivity among the various service branches. The military lacks necessary tactical C4ISR and training to conduct cross-service operations. The Combined Forces Command (CFC), which will cease after the transfer of wartime OPCON authority in 2015, provides cross-integration and jointness at subordinate levels. All South Korean units are tied into the CFC, which serves as the overall coordinating body for Seoul's military.

With cessation of the CFC looming, South Korea needs to put in place agile command and control structures that enable the rapid application of appropriate joint military power at the tactical level with control at the operational or even strategic level.

Anti-Submarine Warfare. The greatest South Korean vulnerability continues to be to North Korean submarines. Despite post-*Cheonan* efforts, ROK ASW capabilities remain limited due to low manning, insufficient sonobuoys, outdated sensors and weapons, and insufficient C4I capabilities, particularly interoperability with U.S. forces.

To improve tactical ASW capability, South Korea needs search, detection, tracking, identification, and targeting capabilities to provide actionable queuing intelligence. Seoul also needs to acquire Romeo

12. GlobalSecurity.org, "ROK: Navy," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/rok/navy.htm> (accessed June 20, 2013).

13. Associated Press, "SKorea Storms Somali Pirates to Rescue Ship Crew," Fox News, January 21, 2011, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/01/20/somali-pirates-seize-ship-vietnamese-crew/> (accessed June 21, 2013).

helicopters with dipping sonar and the Hawk Link system linking P-3 aircraft, ships, and helicopters in a comprehensive anti-submarine network.

A strong ASW capability is critical not only for homeland defense, but also for protecting SLOCs and is a “prerequisite for combined operations under the ROK–U.S. alliance with the American carrier strike groups that would be deployed in a contingency on the Korean Peninsula.”¹⁴ During a Korean conflict, the ROK navy would have the critical mission of engaging North Korean submarines to protect U.S. carrier groups deployed near the peninsula.

South Korea is devoting resources to defeating submarines *after* they depart their bases and enter South Korean waters, but Seoul also needs to consider attacking North Korean submarine bases *before* the submarines depart. Such attacks could be conducted with organic navy assets (submarines and mines) or in a joint operation (ballistic or cruise missiles or air strikes).

This approach would be consistent with Seoul’s new proactive (or preemptive) deterrence strategy, which replaced the previous passive defense posture. A South Korean presidential committee on military reforms proposed that Seoul adopt an operational plan that allows preemptive strikes on North Korean bases if South Korea sees signs of impending aggression.

What the Allies Should Do

South Korea and the U.S. can take a number of steps to increase their combined naval operational capabilities.

Increase the scope and frequency of combined naval exercises. After the *Cheonan* attack, U.S. carrier deployments to the West Sea decreased due to a strong Chinese response. In 2010, the USS *George Washington* was scheduled for exercises in the West Sea, but the training was shifted to South Korea’s East Sea. A senior ROK defense official commented that Seoul had hoped for a stronger U.S. deployment in the face of Chinese protests.¹⁵ A senior ROK naval officer privately stated that, despite Seoul’s request, the United States did not send the carrier because of

China’s reaction.¹⁶ A U.S. defense official remarked that “potential Chinese response” is now included in U.S. deployment decisions.¹⁷

A U.S. carrier strike group provides strategic capabilities to the defense of Korea. If deployments are inhibited by Chinese political or military considerations—or if North Korea *perceives* that such deployments are limited—the result will be significantly decreased allied capabilities.

Enhance U.S.–ROK submarine operations. ROK defense officials comment that the U.S. and ROK navies have conducted significant training in joint surface warfare, which has led to strong bilateral coordination. However, they also claim that, because of excessive U.S. secrecy with respect to submarine operations and ASW, the same is not true for the submarine fleets.

Although South Korea has operated submarines for 20 years, it feels that it could learn a lot more from U.S. counterparts and advocates that Washington increase information sharing on tactical operations. U.S. officials respond that there is some justification for limited information and technical sharing with Korea, given several cases of unauthorized disclosure of classified information and attempts at reverse engineering of defense technology.

- The U.S. and ROK navies should conduct joint anti-submarine operations and mine warfare training in Korean littoral waters as well as near-by SLOCs.

Augment ROK Marine Corps capabilities. The ROK Marine Corps is a strategic military asset because it enhances defense against North Korean threats, particularly for the northwest islands; can inflict a full spectrum of attacks against the North; and provides global force projection capabilities that enable participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations and other international security missions.

In response to a full-scale attack by North Korea or a collapse scenario, the United States and South Korea would implement Operation Plans 5027 or 5029, respectively. Both plans call for amphibious

14. Vice Admiral Yoji Koda, “The Emerging Republic of Korea Navy: A Japanese Perspective,” *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Spring 2010), p. 28, <http://www.usnwc.edu/Publications/Naval-War-College-Review/2010---Spring.aspx> (accessed June 20, 2013).

15. Interview by author, September 2010.

16. Interview by author, November 2012.

17. Interview by author, October 2010.

operations. Yet the ROK Marines are currently unable to fulfill their missions without relying on the U.S. Marines and U.S. Navy for transport, while the U.S. Marines face their own shortage of critical lift and mobility assets to fulfill their missions and privately say that the Navy shows no inclination to provide this capability.

Moreover, the Obama Administration's revised deployment plan for U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) forces in the Pacific moves Marine units further from potential conflict and humanitarian disaster zones. This makes the Marines even more vulnerable to the tyranny of distance that is endemic in the Pacific theater.

To enhance amphibious warfare capabilities, Washington and Seoul should:

- **Expand the South Korean Marine Corps.** Seoul should implement the South Korean presidential task force's recommendation that 4,000 Marines be added to the Marine Corps.
- **Give the Marines a seat at the table.** The ROK Marines still rely on the Korean navy for funding. They should be a full member of the Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff just as the U.S. Marine Commandant is a full member of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.
- **Increase Marine airlift and sealift capabilities.** Today, the ROK Marines cannot get to the fight without relying on the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marines for transport. The ROK Marines should have organic transport and attack helicopters, modern amphibious assault vehicles, and sufficient amphibious transport ships.
- **Create a Marine aviation group.** The Ministry of Defense is planning to activate a Marine aviation group to reinforce the defense of the northwestern islands. The unit will be equipped with amphibious maneuverability and attack helicopters.¹⁸
- **Purchase CH-46 helicopters for the *Dokdo* amphibious assault ship.** The *Dokdo* currently does not have any helicopters. Seoul should purchase the U.S. CH-46 helicopters displaced

by the deployment of MV-22 Osprey aircraft to Okinawa. The U.S. offer, at a cost of \$160 million, would be a quicker and cheaper augmentation of combat power than current Korean plans to produce helicopters indigenously.

- **Increase combined Marine training.** The United States should increase Marine Corps training in Korea, including the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit from Okinawa. The USMC should also host ROK Marines at U.S. facilities for combined training exercises.
- **Include South Korea in the USMC unit deployment program.** Before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States rotationally deployed three battalions of Marines to Okinawa. Under current USMC Pacific realignment plans, the program will be resurrected, with one battalion each deploying to Okinawa, Guam, and Australia. The Republic of Korea should be added to the program. Having a frequent U.S. Marine presence in Korea with pre-deployed equipment sets would offset Seoul's concerns if some of the permanently stationed 28,500 U.S. Forces Korea personnel engage in training off-peninsula.
- **Establish an amphibious warfare component commander (AWCC).** After the OPCON transfer and the dissolution of Combined Forces Command, South Korea will assume responsibilities as Ground Component Commander and Naval Component Commander, while the United States will remain as Air Component Commander. However, given the disparity in capabilities between the U.S. and South Korean Marine Corps, it would be advantageous to create a separate AWCC headed by a U.S. Marine commander.

Improve ROK–Japan–U.S. Defense Cooperation. In recent years, Seoul and Tokyo had improved bilateral security relations by exchanging observers during military exercises and engaging in trilateral naval training exercises with the United States. However, lingering historic and sovereignty disputes flared in 2012, derailing these efforts.

18. Hong Kyu-dok, "The ROK Announces Its Defense Reform Basic Plan 2012-2030," Korea Institute for Defense Analyses *ROK Angle*, Issue 74 (October 4, 2012), p. 2.

The failure by Seoul and Tokyo to implement the General Security of Military Information Agreement hinders both countries' national security objectives and impedes U.S. security objectives in Asia. The accord would have provided a legal framework for exchanging and protecting classified information on North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, potential military incursions and terrorist or cyber attacks, and China's increasing military power.

Greater ROK-Japanese military cooperation would improve allied security capabilities. Both South Korea and Japan have extensive, highly capable militaries. Japan has strong mine-sweeping capabilities. Countermine operations would be pivotal for coastal defense as well as securing SLOCs, including in the Tsushima Strait, "where most logistic supplies for military operations on the peninsula would be collected, stored, and transshipped. Safe navigation [would] be indispensable to the ability of both ROK and American forces to fight and sustain themselves."¹⁹

- The U.S., South Korea, and Japan should increase bilateral and trilateral military exercises. The three countries should strive for joint peace-keeping, counterterrorism, anti-submarine warfare, mine-sweeping, counterproliferation, and humanitarian assistance and disaster response operations.
- Trilateral training can occur far from the Korean Peninsula. For example, mine-sweeping exercises near the Strait of Hormuz and anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden not only serve common allied interests, but also develop skills and familiarity that could be applied in a Korean crisis.

What the ROK Should Do

The ROK should take a number of steps to increase its operational capabilities.

Fully fund defense requirements. Budget shortfalls have undermined previous attempts to reform South Korea's military. Seoul should prioritize:

- Improved C4ISR capabilities to enable integrated combat capabilities down to the tactical level. This improvement requires sensors, such

as AWACs and high-altitude UAVs, as well as integrated command and communication systems.

- The "whole package" concept when purchasing new combat systems by including funding for logistics, maintenance, supply, training, and wartime ammunition stocks.
- Enhanced long-range precision-strike capabilities, including fifth-generation fighter aircraft, attack helicopters, precision-guided munitions, extended-range surface-to-surface missiles, and counterbattery radar and artillery systems.

Improve missile defenses. South Korea should:

- **Develop and deploy a comprehensive, multilayered missile defense system.** Such a system should be integrated with a regional allied missile network to provide a more coherent and effective defense of allied military facilities and the South Korean populace. To date, Seoul has instead pursued a limited independent missile defense system.
- **Purchase and deploy PAC-3 ground-based missiles and SM-3 ship-based missiles.** South Korea should also coordinate with the United States for eventual purchase of SM-6 missiles.
- **Augment missile defense planning and exercises with U.S. forces** and initiate trilateral missile defense cooperation and exercises with the United States and Japan.

What the United States Should Do

Finally, to increase allied naval operational capabilities, the United States should:

- **Integrate Air-Sea Battle strategy with allies' missions and capabilities.** Regional uncertainties exist about the parameters of the new U.S. doctrine and whether it creates greater gaps between U.S. and ally capabilities. With allies being called upon to assume greater security responsibilities, Washington should ensure that they are suitably integrated.

19. Koda, "The Emerging Republic of Korea Navy," p. 30.

- **Augment the U.S. Navy command presence in South Korea.** The U.S. Army and Air Force have strong relationships with their Korean counterparts, but the small U.S. naval component, headed by a comparatively low-ranking commander, inhibits strong naval coordination and integration. One possibility would be to name a vice-admiral (three-star) as CFC chief of staff.
- **Increase U.S. naval ship deployments to Korea.** Washington and Seoul should explore the potential for permanently deploying elements of the U.S. 7th Fleet, such as destroyers or submarines, to Korea or home porting or rotationally deploying littoral combat ships.
- **Redeploy Apache attack helicopters to Korea.** Apaches can not only carry out ground combat missions, but also target North Korean air-cushion Special Operations Forces delivery vehicles.
- **Enhance assistance to ROK naval intelligence.** Washington should facilitate South Korean collection and analysis capabilities and linkage with U.S. naval intelligence. Seoul requires wide-area ocean-surveillance capability for both coastal defense and blue-water operations.

Conclusion

South Korea should continue to strengthen its naval and amphibious forces to enhance deterrent and defense capabilities against a likely North Korean threat. Spurred by the two West Sea attacks in 2010, Seoul has already undertaken a commendable effort to redress naval shortcomings, but several critical measures remain unfulfilled.

While North Korean naval threats must remain the predominant near-term focus, Seoul should maintain a balance by also developing capabilities that enable it to play a greater regional and global security role.

For its part, the United States needs to put its own military house in order. Sequestration and earlier cuts in the defense budget are already undermining America's ability to defend its overseas interests. Despite strong rhetoric and reassurances by the Obama Administration, both allies and opponents see the impact when one-third of U.S. Air Force planes are grounded and ships cannot leave port. Continuing on such a deleterious path could have grave consequences for peace and stability in Asia.

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