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BACKGROUNDER

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The U.S. and South Korea Should Focus on Improving Alliance Capabilities Rather Than the OPCON Transition

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Abstract

Washington and Seoul have so fixated on the deadline for transferring wartime operational command of South Korean forces as to be distracted from ensuring robust combined and integrated allied capabilities to deter and defeat the North Korean military threat. Moreover, the current plan to dissolve Combined Forces Command is ill-advised and potentially dangerous during hostilities. For maximum deterrent and warfighting capabilities, the U.S. and South Korea should instead retain the combined command structure, although with Seoul assuming command upon OPCON transition. South Korea should commit to acquiring necessary defense capabilities, including a more effective missile defense system.

If hostilities break out between North Korea and South Korea (ROK), the current agreement between Washington and Seoul would put all ROK forces under control of the bilateral Combined Forces Command (CFC), which is led by a U.S. general. During armistice,[1] the government of South Korea controls its military forces, while the U.S. controls all U.S. and international forces on the Korean Peninsula.

In April 2014, President Barack Obama and President Park Geunhye preliminarily agreed for a second time to postpone the planned dissolution of the CFC and return of the wartime operational control (OPCON) of South Korean military forces to Seoul.[2] Washington acquiesced to Seoul's request to reassure an ally nervous of its defense capabilities in the face of the growing North Korean threat and a perceived weakening of U.S. resolve.

Key Points

- Washington and Seoul currently plan to dissolve the Combined Forces Command and return the wartime operational control (OPCON) of South Korean military forces to Seoul in December 2015.
- In the face of a growing North Korean military threat, disbanding the CFC and creating two parallel commands is ill-advised and potentially dangerous during hostilities. The United States and South Korea should instead retain the combined command structure to provide the most synergistic and effective defense of South Korea.
- After OPCON transition, South Korea should assume command of the CFC with the United States shifting to the deputy commander position, while Washington retains command of United Nations Command.
- A potentially contentious issue for the American public and the U.S. Congress would be placing U.S. troops under a foreign commander, but policymakers should emphasize that U.S. troops would be under foreign operational control, but not foreign command.

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A delay beyond the December 2015 deadline would provide additional time to decide on the requisite command structure and operational plans and to procure the necessary equipment to improve allied capabilities. However, Washington and Seoul should not be complacent. The two postponements were necessitated by insufficient progress in achieving requirements and by North Korean refusal to eliminate its nuclear weapons.

Washington and Seoul should not establish a new arbitrary date for the OPCON transition. Instead, they should time the transition based on a conditions-based approach that assesses both the North Korean threat and allied military capabilities.

However, the manner of the transition is more important than its timing. The planned dissolution of the existing combined command structure into two, separate, parallel commands is ill-advised and potentially dangerous during hostilities.[3]

Washington and Seoul should instead retain the Combined Forces Command for maximum allied deterrent and warfighting capabilities. Upon regaining wartime OPCON, South Korea should assume command of the CFC with the United States shifting to the deputy commander position, while Washington retains command of United Nations Command (UNC).

Such a dramatic reversal will require extensive bilateral planning, training, and validation. South Korea will also need to increase its procurement, particularly of requisite command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities.

For its part, the United States will need to address congressional and public concerns arising from appearing to place American troops under foreign operational control. U.S. military leaders should emphasize that U.S. forces would actually be under alliance operational control, as exercised in NATO.

In many ways, fixating on the OPCON transition has been a distraction. Washington and Seoul should instead focus on ensuring robust combined and integrated allied capabilities to deter and defeat the multifaceted North Korean military threat.

Control of South Korean Military Forces

Following the 1950 invasion by North Korean forces, South Korean President Syngman Rhee handed operational control of the South Korean military to the United Nations Command. Although the 1953 armistice ended the Korean War, the UNC retained OPCON until 1978, when it was transferred to the newly established Combined Forces Command. The CFC returned peacetime OPCON of South Korean forces to Seoul in 1994.[4]

The Armistice Roles of the UNC, the CFC, and USFK. The senior U.S. general on the Korean Peninsula, currently General Curtis Scaparrotti, concurrently serves as the commander of the UNC, the CFC, and U.S. Forces Korea (USFK). The UNC commander leads an 18-nation coalition responsible for maintaining the 1953 armistice agreement.

The CFC commander is responsible for deterring North Korean aggression and organizing, planning, and exercising U.S. and South Korean forces. During armistice, the Chairman of the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff has day-to-day responsibility for defending the country, but the CFC plans, trains, and stands ready to assume operational control in time of war.[5]

The USFK commander leads the 28,500 U.S troops in Korea. These troops do not patrol the Demilitarized Zone or conduct air or sea patrols. The

1. Since the Korean War ended with an armistice rather than a peace treaty, the allies technically remain at war with North Korea but in a (decades long) pause of hostilities.
2. Wartime OPCON transition was originally scheduled for April 2012, but was postponed to December 2015.
3. For decades, the United States insisted to South Korea that unity of command was necessary. Washington's willingness to renege on a fundamental U.S. doctrinal principle undermined South Korean confidence in U.S. security guarantees.
4. Young S. Hwang, "Wartime OPCON Transition and the ROK–U.S. Alliance," U.S. Army War College, March 2013, http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA589521 (accessed July 11, 2014).
5. Lieutenant General Curtis M. Scaparrotti, statement before the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, March 25, 2014, http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Scaparrotti_03-25-14.pdf (accessed July 15, 2014); Lieutenant General Curtis M. Scaparrotti, answers to "Advance Questions for Lieutenant General Curtis M. Scaparrotti, USA, Nominee to be Commander, United Nations Command, Commander, Republic of Korea–United States Combined Forces Command, and Commander, United States Forces Korea," Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, July 30, 2013, http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Scaparrotti_07-30-13.pdf (accessed July 15, 2014); and General Walter Sharp (ret.), "OPCON Transition in Korea," Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2, 2013, http://csis.org/files/publication/131216_OPCON_Transition_in_Korea.pdf (accessed July 15, 2014).

USFK is not a warfighting headquarters. Its main function is to train U.S. troops in Korea, to evacuate all U.S. civilians if directed by the U.S. ambassador, and to facilitate the reception of the hundreds of thousands of troops that would come from the U.S. in case of war.[6]

During armistice, South Korean forces remain under the command and operational control of the Chairman of the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and the individual military service chiefs of staff. However, both the USFK and South Korean troops are temporarily assigned to the CFC to participate in exercises, such as Key Resolve, Foal Eagle, and Ulchi Freedom Guardian.

In 2007, President Roh requested that the United States return wartime OPCON as a means of regaining South Korean national sovereignty and pride by "overcoming the nation's psychological dependence on the United States."

Transition to Wartime. If war became imminent, the presidents of both countries would approve placing their military forces under the CFC, which would then become the alliance's warfighting headquarters. The CFC commander would lead combined U.S.–South Korean forces to defend South Korea and defeat the threat, but the U.S. commander of the CFC remains "under the firm direction and guidance of both nations' political and military leaders in a consultative manner."[7]

Although under the operational *control* of the CFC commander, both U.S. and South Korean forces would remain under the *command* of their respective presidents. The CFC commander receives strategic guidance from military authorities of both countries (the Chairman of the U.S. JCS and U.S Secretary of Defense for the United States and the South Korean JCS Chairman and Minister of Defense).

The UNC transitions to a headquarters that receives forces from other countries that are deployed to help defend Korea.[8] The UNC commander is responsible for the operational control and combat operations of UNC member-nation forces.[9]

Roh's Request for OPCON

During the 2002 South Korean presidential campaign, Roh Moo-hyun capitalized on prevalent anti-American public sentiment due, in part, to the tragic deaths of two schoolgirls caused by a U.S. military vehicle. As a candidate, Roh declared, "What's wrong with being anti-American?"[10] As president, Roh told Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld that the U.S. and Japan—not North Korea—were the largest security threats to Asia.[11]

In 2007, President Roh requested that the United States return wartime OPCON as a means of regaining South Korean national sovereignty and pride by "overcoming the nation's psychological dependence on the United States." The U.S. accepted Roh's appeal, and both nations agreed on a transition plan that would dissolve the CFC and replace it with two separate, parallel commands. After transition of wartime OPCON, the Chairman of the South Korean JCS would command all South Korean forces and be responsible for the country's defense during both peace and war.

The United States would replace the USFK with the Korea Command (KORCOM), which would become the supporting command to the South Korean command. KORCOM would exercise OPCON of U.S. forces operating in support of South Korea through mutually agreed upon war plans and opera-

6. Sharp, "OPCON Transition in Korea."
7. General B. B. Bell (ret.), "The Evolution of Combined Forces Command," Brookings Institution, June 8–11, 2012, http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/events/2012/6/08%20korea%20foundation%20global%20seminar/69%20bell%20evolution%20of%20combined%20forces%20command.
8. Sharp, "OPCON Transition in Korea."
9. Scaparrotti, statement before the Committee on the Armed Services.
10. Choe Sang-hun, "Despair Overwhelmed Former South Korean Leader Embroiled in Scandal," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/24/world/asia/24roh.html (accessed July 15, 2014).
11. Lee Chi-dong, "In Memoir, Gates Calls Ex-Korean President Roh 'Crazy,'" Yonhap, January 15, 2014, http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2014/01/15/13/0301000000AEN20140115000100315F.html (accessed July 15, 2014).

tions. The UNC's roles and responsibilities would not change greatly after the OPCON transition.[12] The date for South Korea to assume wartime OPCON was originally scheduled for April 2012.

Korean Backlash Against the OPCON Transition. Roh's decision triggered widespread and harsh criticism by all living former South Korean ministers of national defense and hundreds of retired generals who accused the president of sacrificing the country's security. South Korean critics of the original decision assert that it was driven by President Roh Moo-hyun's ideological agenda to fundamentally alter South Korea's relationship with the United States and was not based on security considerations.

Delaying or overturning the transition became a quest for conservative South Korean legislators and former military officials, as well as both the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations. The Lee Myung-bak administration characterized Roh's demand as a naive, ideologically driven political decision that ignored military realities.

Many South Koreans worried that transitioning OPCON and disbanding the CFC would reduce America's commitment to defending its ally, eventually lead to an unzipping of the alliance, and embolden North Korea to further provocations and attacks. The transition plan exacerbated South Korean fears of abandonment, particularly in light of the increasing North Korean threat and the U.S. policy of strategic flexibility in which USFK units could be redeployed off-peninsula. It is the presence of 28,500 U.S. forces that reassures South Koreans of the U.S. commitment to the alliance.

More recently, perceptions of declining U.S. defense capabilities and resolve have exacerbated these concerns. South Korea and Japan watched with growing dismay as the Obama Administration cut $480 billion from the military budget, and then warned that an additional $500 billion in sequestration-mandated cuts over 10 years would have catastrophic consequences on U.S. armed forces. Yet when sequestration hit, the Administration claimed it could still fulfill American security commitments though admittedly with "additional but acceptable risk."

Seoul and Tokyo were flummoxed by Obama's refusal to live up to his pledged military response when Syrian President Assad crossed the U.S. red line by using chemical weapons against civilians a year ago. South Korean and Japanese officials privately comment that they now fear that Obama might similarly abandon America's defense commitments to them if North Korea or China were to attack.

The Bush and Obama Administrations sought to maintain the original OPCON plan and to review the situation closer to the deadline. The transition plan included an integrated assessment and certification process to ensure South Korean security was not jeopardized. To allay Korean concerns, Washington pledged that its military capabilities, including air combat and strategic intelligence assets, would remain after the OPCON transition.

U.S. Eventually Agreed to Delays. In April 2009, North Korea conducted its second nuclear test, and in March 2010, it attacked and sank the South Korean corvette *Cheonan* in South Korean waters, raising tensions and fears of additional attacks. In June 2010, President Lee Myung-bak appealed to the United States to delay the transition of wartime OPCON until December 2015, and President Obama agreed. In November 2010, Pyongyang attacked South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island, killing four citizens, adding impetus to the decision to delay the OPCON transition.

North Korea's successful test of a long-range missile in December 2012 and nuclear test in February 2013 again raised South Korean concerns, triggering an effort to postpone the OPCON transition again. Many U.S. and South Korean experts have concluded that North Korea will not give up its nuclear weapons, and Pyongyang's perceived willingness to abandon its nuclear arsenal was a key assumption behind President Roh's request for the OPCON transition.

During his April 2014 trip to South Korea, President Obama declared the OPCON deadline "can be reconsidered."[13] The U.S. decision signals strong support for its critical ally at a time of heightened risk and seeks to alleviate South Korean concerns that a premature OPCON transition would dangerously undermine its defense.

12. Sharp, "OPCON Transition in Korea," and Bell, "The Evolution of Combined Forces Command."
13. Press release, "The United States–Republic of Korea Alliance: A Global Partnership," The White House, April 25, 2014, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/25/joint-fact-sheet-united-states-republic-korea-alliance-global-partnershi (accessed July 15, 2014).

How More Important than *When*

The decision to delay, however, does not address the plan's underlying deficiencies. How the OPCON transition is implemented is far more important than when it occurs. Dissolving the Combined Forces Command is dangerously ill-advised because it violates the key military precept of unity of command in preparation for and during hostilities.

Replacing a single integrated command with two parallel independent commands risks seriously degrading U.S. and South Korean deterrent and warfighting capabilities. Currently, U.S. and South Korean forces are closely integrated in a seamless, effective structure to deter and defeat the North Korean threat. The ability of a single commander to direct multiservice forces from the two countries is irreplaceable in ensuring unity of mission and achievement of objectives.

Replacing a single integrated command with two parallel independent commands risks seriously degrading U.S. and South Korean deterrent and warfighting capabilities.

The CFC commander, although subordinate to the Presidents of the United States and South Korea, is the captain of the team, issuing orders on the field. The OPCON transition plan does not so much transfer OPCON as it divides it. Such a command structure is the equivalent of having two quarterbacks and two teams on the football field coordinating with each other to score a touchdown against the opposing team and potentially working at cross-purposes.

Although both commands would communicate and coordinate through an Alliance Military Coordination Center after the OPCON transition, the loss of unified command risks severely curtailing the ability of the United States and South Korea to fight in a coordinated manner. The resulting system has a greater potential for creating confusion and even tragedy in the fog of war. A bifurcated command increases the danger of mission failure and increased casualties, including friendly fire casualties.

Such a system also threatens the sense of purpose and justification for U.S. forces in Korea. Eliminating a combined command could lead to reduced U.S. congressional and public support for maintaining a U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula. In the absence of a clearly articulated mission after the transition, questions about the role of U.S. forces in Korea would increase calls for a U.S. drawdown or withdrawal.

Former CFC Commander Walter Sharp (2008–2011) recommended that the U.S. and South Korea maintain a "combined senior command structure but with a ROK general/admiral as the commander. This headquarters should be responsible for the defense of Korea in Armistice and wartime." To reassure Seoul of the U.S. commitment, General Sharp urged Washington to reaffirm that it would maintain 28,500 personnel in Korea after the OPCON transition.[14]

Former CFC Commander General B. B. Bell (2006–2008), once a strong supporter of the OPCON transition, has since reversed his position, stressing that North Korea must be "aggressively contained" under U.S leadership. General Bell recommended that the United States "offer to the South Korean government an opportunity to permanently postpone the OPCON transition." He argued that North Korea with nuclear weapons "will possess a capability that will put the South at a significant disadvantage on any future battlefield, or in any future negotiations."[15]

Indeed, such a development would likely exacerbate ROK concerns about the certainty of the promised U.S. nuclear umbrella and likely lead to enhanced discussion of the ROK's need for its own nuclear weapons. ROK nuclear proliferation could lead to a regional nuclear arms race and the failure of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, significantly undermining U.S. global security.

Former CFC Commander John Tilelli (1996–1999) similarly objected to the dissolution of the CFC, arguing that it "is one of the best alliance mechanisms in existence [and] should remain exactly the

14. Sharp, "OPCON Transition in Korea."
15. Song Sang-ho, "Calls Against Wartime Control Transfer Resurface amid Tension," *The Korea Herald*, April 22, 2013, http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20130422000911 (accessed July 15, 2014).

way it is today." The U.S. and South Korea should "determine what is the necessity of changing the command structure at all."[16]

Maintain the CFC—with South Korea in Charge

As the United States and South Korea strive to enhance the existing military alliance and, indeed, expand it into a regional and international context, both countries should review the decision to disband the CFC. Washington and Seoul should maintain the CFC, but with the South Korean JCS Chairman as the CFC commander and the USFK commander as the deputy CFC commander.

Washington and Seoul should maintain the CFC, but with the South Korean JCS Chairman as the CFC commander.

Subordinate South Korean commanders would serve as the ground component commander and naval component commander with subordinate U.S. commanders as the air component commander and a newly created position of amphibious warfare component commander. The CFC commander would continue to report to the U.S. and South Korean presidents.

The senior U.S. general on the Korean Peninsula should continue to serve as the UNC commander. United Nations Command rear bases in Japan are critical for the defense of South Korea. However, this new command structure would require extensive study of the UNC's future role. With the senior American general wearing all three hats of commanding the UNC, the CFC, and the USFK, the division of responsibilities between the UNC and the CFC is less important. Yet if South Korea assumes the CFC command, the relationship and division of responsibilities between the UNC and the CFC becomes more uncertain and confusing.

Maintaining the CFC would provide, as exists today, a single command and control system with joint and combined forces operating in the most synergistic and effective defense of South Korea. The CFC commander would continue to be subordinate to both countries' national command authorities.

A potentially contentious issue for the American public and the U.S. Congress would be placing U.S. troops under a foreign commander, but policymakers should emphasize that U.S. troops would be under foreign operational *control*, but not foreign *command*. The difference, although seemingly slight, is significant since the presidents of both countries *always* retain command of their forces, even if they are placed under operational control of another country. Even today, South Korean forces would not be under U.S. command, but under its operational control, and the CFC commander remains subordinate to both the U.S. and South Korean National Command Authorities.

Presidential Decision Directive 25, signed by President Bill Clinton in May 1994, delineates the difference between command and operational control of U.S. forces when engaged in U.N. operations. It underscores that the "President retains and will never relinquish command authority over U.S. forces. However, as Commander-in-Chief, the President has the authority to place U.S. forces under the operational control of a foreign commander."[17] The directive explains that command "constitutes the authority to issue orders covering every aspect of military operations and administration.... The chain of command from the President to the lowest U.S. commander in the field remains inviolate."

Operational control, on the other hand, is a subset of command. It is "given for a specific time frame or mission and includes the authority to assign tasks to U.S. forces already deployed by the President, and assign tasks to U.S. units led by U.S. officers." However, the foreign commander cannot "change the mission or deploy U.S. forces outside the area of responsibility agreed to by the President, separate units, divide their supplies, administer discipline, promote anyone, or change their internal organization."[18]

U.S. forces have been placed under the operational control of foreign commanders since the Revolu-

16. Kang Seung-woo, "Ex-USFK Commander Backs OPCON Delay," *The Korea Times*, November 20, 2013, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2013/11/116_146554.html (accessed July 15, 2014).
17. Press release, "President Clinton Signs New Peacekeeping Policy," The White House, May 5, 1994, http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd25.htm (accessed July 15, 2014).
18. Bill Clinton, "U.S. Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations," Presidential Decision Directive PDD-25, May 3, 1994, http://www.clintonlibrary.gov/_previous/Documents/2010%20FOIA/Presidential%20Directives/PDD-25.pdf (accessed July 15, 2014).

tionary War, including in World War I, World War II, Operation Desert Storm, and NATO operations. In all cases, U.S. commanders "maintain[ed] the capability to report separately to higher U.S. military authorities, as well as the UN commander.... The U.S. reserves the right to terminate participation at any time and to take whatever actions it deems necessary to protect U.S. forces if they are endangered."[19]

U.S. forces have been placed under the operational control of foreign commanders since the Revolutionary War.

South Korea Needs to Address Defense Shortfalls

The transfer of full operational control of South Korean forces to Seoul during both armistice and wartime has also been delayed over concerns about Seoul's ability to adequately exercise command and control of its forces and to coordinate wartime actions with U.S. and international forces. The decision to postpone the OPCON transition would alleviate some of the near-term pressure on Seoul, but the Park Geun-hye administration needs to clearly articulate plans to redress shortages in the country's defense capabilities.

General Scaparrotti testified that, although Seoul continues to expand defense spending—this year's defense budget represents a 4 percent increase over 2013—"it still has not been able to meet the ambitious defense spending objectives of its current long-range defense plan, prompting a re-evaluation and re-prioritization of defense acquisition priorities and future force posture."[20]

The South Korean military still lacks the necessary C4ISR systems and capabilities to overcome stovepiped command structures and to enable interoperability across services. U.S. officials privately comment that at present the South Korean military is not capable of truly joint operations.

Seoul had previously committed itself to Defense Reform Plan (DRP) 12-30,[21] a wide-ranging military modernization strategy to compensate for demographically driven large reductions in manpower by upgrading to a smaller, high-technology defense force. Seoul would procure improved command and control systems and more capable weapons.[22]

Yet South Korea did not implement the JCS-centric command structure included in DRP 12-30. The ROK National Assembly refused to pass the required laws because of considerable domestic opposition, especially from retired generals. The organizational revision would have enabled a more flexible and joint military force. By augmenting real-time joint battlefield management capabilities and indigenous target warning and acquisition skills, Seoul could exercise more effective joint command.

Despite these disappointments, the South Korean military is a highly capable force that has taken a number of important steps to augment its military capabilities, including recently initiating several important procurement programs. Seoul will purchase 40 F-35 Joint Strike Fighter jets, 36 Apache AH-64 attack helicopters, the RQ-4 Global Hawk Unmanned Aerial Vehicle system, the Boeing E-737 "Peace Eye" AWACS aircraft, and the Taurus KEPD 35 air-launched cruise missile. South Korea is also procuring long-range (1,000 and 1,500 kilometer) cruise missiles and developing ballistic missiles.

Resistance to an Allied Missile Defense System

Despite the clear and present danger from North Korean missiles, Seoul insists on implementing an independent and less capable missile defense system to protect its citizens and military bases against

19. Ibid.
20. Scaparrotti, statement before the Committee on the Armed Services.
21. President Roh Moo-hyun initiated Defense Reform Plan (DRP) 2020, named for the year of its scheduled completion. It later became DRP 2025 after insufficient defense funding brought on delays. The Lee Myung-bak Administration directed changes and redesignated the plan as DRP 307, named for the date (March 7) when it was announced. The approved plan became known as DRP 12-30, for the year it was initiated (2012) and the year of its planned completion (2030).
22. Defense Reform Plan 2020 was initiated in 2005 to compensate over time for very low ROK birthrates (1.2 per woman per lifetime), which would reduce the size of the age cohort drafted for military service. However, ROK politics have favored larger increases in domestic spending rather than the planned increases in military spending. The ROK budget for military research, development, and acquisition (the "force improvement program") for 2014 is only about half of what was planned for 2014 in the original (2005) plan.

North Korean weapons equipped with nuclear, biological, chemical, and high-explosive warheads.

Seoul perceives that joining the U.S. missile defense system would antagonize China. On May 29, China's state-run Xinhua News agency threatened, "South Korea will sacrifice its fast-developing relations with China if it should be seduced into the [missile] defense network, ignoring the protests of the largest economy in Asia."[23]

South Korea resists purchasing more capable interceptors and integrating its system into the comprehensive allied system with linked sensors. South Korean Minister of Defense Kim Kwan-jin explained that the Korean Air and Missile Defense System (KAMD) is "focusing on final stage, low-altitude defense that fits the strategic atmosphere on the Korean Peninsula."[24]

Seoul insists on implementing an independent and less capable missile defense system to protect its citizens and military bases.

Adding a medium-tier missile, such as the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) or Israeli Arrow system, would provide a greater protective bubble and more reaction time. Integrating South Korean, U.S., and Japanese sensors would enable a more detailed assessment of incoming missile threats, similar to three outfielders yelling to each other to coordinate catching a fly ball.

Many South Korean military personnel want the U.S. to deploy THAAD on the peninsula, but are reluctant to purchase THAAD themselves because of the high price tag and the potential for offending China. Similarly, the ROK has been slow to acquire the U.S. Navy's SM-3 long-range interceptors because of their price.[25]

To implement a regional missile defense network, Seoul and Tokyo would need to establish new military relationships, including sharing security information. Linking sensors would improve defense capabilities against short-range ballistic missiles. Such cooperation would also augment nascent trilateral military operations among the U.S. and its allies, which, to date, have been hampered by historic animosities and unresolved political issues between South Korea and Japan.

Recommendations for an Effective Military Strategy

South Korea should affirm that it still seeks responsibility for wartime OPCON command. President Park Geun-hye should articulate plans to redress shortages in the country's defense capabilities, including critical shortages in C4ISR.

Washington and Seoul should:

- **Not establish** a new arbitrary date for the OPCON transition, but instead allow a conditions-based approach to drive the timing of the decision, based on an assessment of the North Korean threat and allied military capabilities. The dominant consideration should be ensuring robust combined and integrated allied capabilities to deter and defeat the North Korean threat.

- **Assess** the potential repercussions of the OPCON transition on North Korean and Chinese behavior; U.S. force posture in the Pacific, including Japan and Okinawa; and regional perceptions of U.S. security guarantees.

- **Abandon** the plan to abolish Combined Forces Command upon the OPCON transition. Instead, the allies should retain the CFC with the Chairman of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff becoming the CFC commander and the commander

23. Kim Oi-hyun, "Washington and Beijing's Conflict Growing over Missile Defense," *The Hankyoreh*, June 9, 2014, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/641453.html (accessed July 15, 2014).
24. Kang Seung-woo, "Korea to Upgrade Missile Defense System by 2020," *The Korea Times*, April 28, 2014, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2014/04/205_156288.html (accessed July 15, 2014), and Kim Eun-jung, "S. Korea to Deploy New Surface-to-Air Missiles for Aegis Destroyers," Yonhap, June 12, 2013, http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2013/06/12/37/0301000000AEN20130612004900315F.HTML (accessed July 15, 2014).
25. In 2013, the ROK military research, development, and acquisition budget totaled less than $10 billion, about 5 percent of U.S. spending for these purposes. See Jae Ok Paek, "2013 ROK Defense Budget: Priorities and Tasks," Korea Institute of Defense Analyses *ROK Angle* No. 84, May 2, 2013.

of U.S. Forces Korea becoming the deputy CFC commander. Washington should retain command of the UNC.

- After the OPCON transition, **South Korean officers should serve** as the subordinate ground component commander and naval component commander with U.S. officers as the air component commander and a newly created position of amphibious warfare component commander. The CFC commander would continue to report to both the U.S. and South Korean National Command Authorities.

Prior to assuming command of the CFC, South Korea should:

- **Improve** its capacity for joint operations and its C4ISR capabilities to ensure effective operations at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.
- **Continue** procurement programs to augment South Korean conventional military forces, including precision-strike capabilities, fighter aircraft, amphibious sealift, and anti-submarine warfare.
- **Integrate** its KAMD into the comprehensive allied missile defense system to provide for a more effective defense of allied military facilities and the South Korean populace against the North Korean missile threat.
- **Develop** a multilayered missile defense system by purchasing a medium-tier ground-based system, such as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, as well as SM-6 shipborne missiles.
- **Sign** a general security of military information agreement with Tokyo and reestablish military cooperation and training with Japan to improve defense of the Korean Peninsula. The United States cannot defend South Korea without access to bases in Japan and logistical support from Tokyo.

Conclusion

The U.S.–South Korean security alliance has been indispensable in defending South Korea and maintaining peace and stability in Northeast Asia. In recent years, however, an over-fixation on dates and milestones in the OPCON transition has distracted the allies from the need to improve alliance capabilities against the North Korean threat.

Instead, the U.S. and South Korea should focus on transforming the existing military relationship into a more comprehensive strategic alliance. The alliance needs to begin evolving from its singularly focused mission to a more robust values-based relationship that looks beyond the Korean Peninsula.

Without substantial and sustained involvement by the senior political and military leadership, the alliance may not adapt sufficiently to the new environment, including as a hedge against Chinese military modernization. The U.S. and South Korean administrations need to provide a clear strategic vision of the enduring need for the alliance to prevent erosion of public and legislative support.

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