Arms Control and ROK Relations with the DPRK

Thomas L. Wilborn

Arms control and CBMs, by their very nature, can only deal with symptoms and marginal concerns of ROK-DPRK relations. They can contribute, however, toward ROK efforts to reduce tensions on the peninsula.

Possible roles of arms control negotiations are illustrated in two hypothetical strategies. One assumes that in time the North Korean regime will go the way of East European communist regimes. Deterrence based on the US-ROK alliance and a US military presence is the major concept of the strategy, which has the objective of maintaining the status quo and placing pressure on Pyongyang. Under this strategy, arms control proposals would be designed primarily for propaganda purposes.

A second hypothetical strategy incorporates deterrence based on the ROK-US alliance also, but emphasizes Nordpolitik and tension reduction measures. Its objectives would be, rather, to change the behavior of the North Korean regime. ROK relations with the Soviet Union, former communist states of Eastern Europe, and China, would be relatively more significant than in the first hypothetical strategy. Direct discussions with the North on steps to increase intra-Korean communications would probably be the highest priority of the strategy. Arms control and CBM proposals would, in addition to propaganda, be designed to keep Pyongyang involved in as many contacts with Seoul as possible, reduce the possibilities of surprise attack, and enhance the predictability of each side’s military activities. Arms control negotiations could serve as indicators of progress (or the lack of it) in ROK-DPRK relations.

A successful strategy to reduce tensions and ultimately reunify with North Korea must be directed by the ROK and not its allies. The positions of the major powers will be important, but the responsibility and initiative for reducing tensions on the Korean peninsula, not to mention reunification, must reside in Seoul and Pyongyang.
Arms Control and ROK Relations with the DPRK

Thomas L. Wilborn*

Sporadic discussions which at times have included arms control and confidence-building measures (CBMs) have been a prominent feature of Republic of Korea (ROK)–Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) relations ever since the division of the peninsula in 1948.¹ In fact, some 284 proposals (many admittedly repetitive) were tabled between 1948 and 1988, 235 by Pyongyang and 59 by Seoul.² Although it is not clear that under existing conditions either North or South Korea wants arms control or CBM regimens to be established, it does seem certain that domestic and international pressures will insure that arms control discussions between the two Korean governments will continue throughout the 1990s.

This paper examines the possible role of arms control and arms control negotiations in strategies the ROK government might adopt toward the DPRK. Its basic hypothesis is that arms control arrangements and confidence-building measures cannot overcome the

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US Department of the Army, US Department of Defense, or other US Government agencies.

1. The author benefited from comments by Gary L. Guertner and David E. Shaver, both colleagues at the Strategic Studies Institute. Any errors of expression and analysis, however, are the responsibility of the author.

2. Young Koo Cha, “Arms Talks on the Korean Peninsula: A Korean Perspective,” paper prepared for delivery at the 18th International Conference of the KIIS, 5–7 July 1989, Seoul, Korea, p. 5. The data were compiled by the National Unification Board of the Republic of Korea.
conflicts of interests and values that separate Seoul and Pyongyang, but that arms control negotiations can usefully be incorporated into ROK strategies intended to increase contacts with the North and eventually achieve reunification. To support the hypothesis, the paper addresses some of the reasons why both governments will participate in arms control negotiations even when they do not expect to achieve agreements, and analyzes the potential and limitations of arms control and CBMs as instruments in intra-Korean relations. Then, after describing current ROK policy toward the DPRK, the paper suggests possible strategies for the ROK that utilize arms control negotiations.

The Requirement for Arms Control Negotiations

In almost all armed confrontations of the post-war era, there has been international pressure for arms control, disarmament, and other kinds of tension-reduction discussions, which recently have included CBMs. In many countries, there are also domestic groups urging that their governments adopt expansive arms control and CBM policies in order to avoid conflict or miscalculation during a crisis as well as reduce the size of military budgets. In the case of the ROK, domestic pressure in the newly democratized political system for the government to promote arms control and CBMs or other devices to lessen tensions is particularly compelling because Korea is a divided nation in which the ethos of a single national culture and identity is unusually strong. The Korean peninsula was united into a single political entity from the ninth century until 1945, and a distinguishable Korean culture can be traced back for at least 24 centuries.\footnote{The dates for the founding of a politically unified Korea and a distinguishable Korean culture are based on the consolidation of control over the peninsula by the Koryo Dynasty (932–1392) and the founding of the state of Chosen (fourth century, BC), respectively.}

The division imposed in 1945 is viewed as an unnatural arrangement unacceptably dividing a single, homogeneous nation, a situation that must be reversed. It simply is not politically permissible for any party or politician not to support reducing tensions, increasing communications and trade, and ultimately reunifying with North
Korea. While political expression is severely constrained in the North, there is no reason to assume that similar attitudes do not also support restoring contacts with the South and restoring the unity of the Korean nation. In any case, Kim Il Sung and his heir apparent, Kim Jong Il, have made the drive for reunification (and the expulsion of the US "imperialists" as a prerequisite) major components of the programs of the Korean Worker's Party (KWP). Their legitimacy as rulers depends in part on the continued campaign to force the hated invaders from the Motherland and thereby create the conditions that will permit the oppressed brothers in the South to rejoin their kinsmen in the North, eventually under the DPRK.

While it may be true that the major powers influencing the two Korean governments are satisfied with the division of Korea and do not strenuously support reunification,\(^4\) there is no doubt that they place the highest priority on avoiding conflict on the peninsula and each would urge its ally to work toward some accommodation, which likely would include arms control arrangements and CBMs, with the other Korean government. Moreover, both Korean governments desire the international approbation implicit in a positive policy on arms control and CBMs. For Seoul, arms control and CBM negotiations with Pyongyang are an integral part of President Roh's Nordpolitik, the policy of initiating steps toward reconciliation with the North while expanding contacts with the DPRK's allies: the Soviet Union, the PRC, and the countries that used to be called members of the Soviet bloc.\(^5\) Seoul's success in opening and broadening cultural and commercial contacts with the socialist and former socialist states, Roh's major foreign policy achievement, probably would not have been possible if efforts to ease tensions with Pyongyang had not also been sustained.

\(^4\) None of the governments of the major powers in East Asia officially supports the status quo, but many analysts—particularly Koreans—impute to them the preference for division. Colonel Hyon Kim, "Arms Control in the Korean Peninsula," *Air War College Research Report*, May 1986, pp. 9-10, and the judgment of many Korean scholars and officials expressed orally to the author. Peter Polomka, "The Two Koreas: Catalyst for Conflict in East Asia?" *Adelphi Papers* 208, Summer 1986, p. 13, believes the Northern leadership holds this position.

\(^5\) For analysis of this policy, see *Korea and World Affairs*, Volume XIII, Number 4 (Winter 1989), which is entirely devoted to the ROK's policy toward North Korea.
In spite of the compelling pressures for arms control and CBMs influencing both governments, few arms control and CBM agreements between the two governments are likely to be adopted; unless revolutionary changes occur in Seoul or, more likely, Pyongyang, the provisions of any agreements that are made are unlikely to be significant. This is not because of the perverseness of policymakers in either capital so much as the fact that, while both agree on the desirability of reunification and the lessening of tensions, neither accepts the process or form of unification proposed by the other, and because the survival of each regime is involved in the outcome. Much of the explanation for this reality is found in the nature of arms control and CBMs.

The concept of arms control

Arms control is defined here as "changes in the numbers, types, and qualities of weapons; changes in their configurations; and other modifications that affect their use or effectiveness in order to reduce the chances of war..." and also to reduce the potential damage of conflict and the cost of security. In the literature of arms control, most of which deals with NATO and WTO, virtually all attention has been focused on the first objective. In the context of the Korean peninsula, however, the last two objectives could assume relatively higher salience. Although the avoidance of conflict would presumably always be the primary focus of arms control activities, either Korean government might also place relatively greater importance than the members of NATO or the WTO on insuring that a future conflict in Korea did not involve nuclear weapons, and thus the potential for greater damage, if conflict were to occur. The current or future rulers of North Korea, burdened by 25 percent of GNP devoted to military purposes and presiding over a stagnant economy vastly inferior to that in the South, might believe that the reduction of the military costs is much more important than would the leaders

in European states which contribute three percent or less to maintain security.

Three other considerations implicit in this definition should be noted. First, arms control is conceptually distinct from disarmament. Reducing armaments does not always reduce the chances of war: reductions in armaments may produce vulnerabilities that invite attack, and increases in armaments may improve deterrence and thereby meet the main criterion for an arms control measure. However, arms control and disarmament are frequently confused in public discourse, and many arms control proposals imply reductions in armaments. Large reductions in military personnel have been prominent in many of the DPRK’s proposals for peace on the peninsula, and Seoul’s editorial writers frequently urge the government to seek disarmament. But if deterrence is to be maintained, arms control policy paradoxically would require constraints on disarmament to preserve a credible deterrent force.

Second, arms control does not necessarily require formal agreements, or even negotiations. Unilateral actions may be effective arms control measures, and reciprocal arms control steps may be adopted in the absence of direct communications about them. According to some observers, there was a tacit arms control agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union not to provide the most sophisticated weapons to South Korea or North Korea respectively until 1984, when the Reagan Administration authorized the sale of F-16s to Seoul and the Soviets subsequently provided MiG-23s, MiG-29s, and first generation air defense weapons to Pyongyang. If so (and US officials challenge such an interpretation), it was achieved without formal acquiescence by Washington or Moscow. George Segal, a highly respected British observer of Asian security affairs, has concluded that for cultural reasons, informal unwritten agreements on arms control would be more effective for most of Asia than formal agreements in which contentious issues must be dealt with directly and publicly. In the Korean case,

however, where the confrontation along the DMZ is overt and dangerous, and partly conditioned by an existing formal agreement (the Armistice Agreement of 1953), at least some aspects of any arms control regime may have to be formalized into a binding, written agreement.

Confidence-building measures

Finally, confidence-building measures, which often are discussed together with arms control, most often do not fit the criteria of the arms control definition because they rarely pertain to the deployment of military capabilities. But CBMs are designed to reduce tensions between adversaries, and are frequently discussed as potentially fruitful initiatives for negotiations between North and South Korea. They are therefore included in the analysis that follows.

There is no widely shared definition of CBMs in the literature.

To some, they are the specific measures outlined in the formal agreements developed at Helsinki and Stockholm, or now being discussed in the CSCE negotiations at Vienna. Others apparently would include any measure, especially the ad hoc diplomatic moves that any nation may develop in a crisis, which tend to give confidence to an adversary that conflict can be avoided without surrender of important interests. For this paper, the term is used, as it is in most of the literature, with a relatively narrow meaning, as military measures for inducing an assurance of mind and firm beliefs in the trustworthiness of the announced intentions of other states in respect of their security policies.


and the facts with regard to military activities and capacities which are designed to further the objectives of a nation’s security policy.¹¹

In other words, when applied to Korea, CBMs would be military measures designed to allow South Korea to develop trust in the intentions of North Korea as they relate to the security of South Korea, and in the descriptions of military activities and capacities as furnished by North Korea; correspondingly, they also would be crafted to allow North Korea to develop trust in the intentions of South Korea and the United States as they relate to the security of North Korea, and in the descriptions of military activities and capacities as furnished by South Korea and the United States. They tend to focus on voluntary or mandatory exchanges of information, notifications of maneuvers and other large-scale movements, and sometimes visits or other procedures to verify information.

**Limitations of arms control and confidence-building measures**

As critics of arms control as a central focus of strategy frequently point out, arms control is a process designed to deal with the symptoms of international conflict, the military capabilities governments maintain and deploy, and not with the political disputes that are the basis of the conflicts.¹² Armaments do not start wars, they say, sovereign states operating in an anarchistic international system do. Governments develop arsenals because of disputes over values and interests, fears, distrust, and misunderstandings. But armaments do not themselves cause the disputes, fears, distrust, or misunderstandings (although most admit that large military capabilities tend to heighten already existing tensions). CBMs, on the other hand, are supposed to get at the root causes of crises, but only those that are outgrowths of misunderstandings and uncertainty or perhaps

incidents that accidentally unfold.\textsuperscript{13} That is to say, CBMs have potential in the case of situations that responsible leaders would prevent from developing into conflict even if CBMs did not exist. In the most dangerous situations, those in which fundamental national interests of all parties are involved and none are prepared to surrender, CBMs are irrelevant, or by fostering the transmission of accurate information may exacerbate tensions by demonstrating how irreconcilable opposing positions actually are.

Moreover, arms control arrangements and CBMs typically (but not always, because unilateral action is possible and often easier than cooperative action) entail cooperation with potential adversaries—in the case of the two Koreas, actual adversaries, who fought a devastating war within the lifetimes of the present leaders of both governments. According to the principles of arms control, this cooperation should be possible, even in a framework of partial information, when it is to the mutual advantage of both parties. But given the distrust and fear implicit in adversary relationships, particularly pronounced in the intranational confrontation on the Korean peninsula, cooperation concerning constraints on military capabilities that have been deployed to protect the most critical values and interests of what have become very different societies is extremely difficult—some say impossible—to establish. When an agreement could dictate sharing military information with an adversary and imply believing and acting on information provided by an adversary, even the acceptance of CBMs, which are often considered the most restricted of possible tension reduction measures, requires leaders with unusual political courage. Even if the mutual benefits of an arms control or confidence-building measure might be self-evident to an “objective” observer, the distrust shared by long-time antagonists could very easily prevent agreement. Furthermore, the technical provisions that make up most arms control proposals and CBMs sometimes have broad political implications. For instance, a proposal that no artillery be permitted within a zone on either side of the DMZ, which might be considered valuable as a way to reduce the possibility of a surprise attack, could be interpreted—would be by the North Korean regime—as recognition of the legitimacy of the DMZ as an interna-

\textsuperscript{13} Lewis and Lovell, pp. 303–304.
tional boundary. For North Korea, even the low-level CBMs of notifying the CFC of impending military exercises, a measure that entails only limited if any military risks, implies recognition of the legitimacy of US forces participating in the defense of South Korea, and therefore clashes with one of the most fundamental and tenaciously held DPRK positions on relations with the ROK.\(^\text{14}\)

Given these realities, there appears to be little reason to expect that conventional arms control or CBMs, which had a dismal record in Europe until the 1980s and now hold promise only because of dramatic changes in the atmosphere of East-West relations, should by themselves be effective instruments to reduce significantly the seemingly intractable differences between Seoul and Pyongyang until there are substantive and significant political changes that affect at least one of the participants. If and when changes begin to occur, the potential for the adoption of increasingly useful arms control and CBM agreements will improve.

**Potential benefits of arms control negotiations**

The utility of arms control negotiations will not necessarily be low, however, even as the current level of confrontation continues. Benefits may accrue to either side from the negotiating process itself.

At one level, intra-Korean negotiations on arms control (or on almost anything else) provide a forum for propaganda targeted against special segments of or all of the international community, against the population subject to each government, and against that portion of the population of the opposing government who can be reached through such procedures. Because of the relatively free and numerous information outlets in South Korea, Pyongyang can place its message, albeit often in a distorted form, before most of the South’s literate population through reports of negotiations. Seoul may not be able to reach a large portion of North Korean society because of the regime’s control of the channels of communication,

but the small number who will learn of the proceedings through reading official reports, word of mouth, or accounts in foreign media are influential members of North Korea's political elite. Both governments also incorporate the negotiating process into the continuing contest for international acceptance and influence. Many proposals tabled by Pyongyang and Seoul may primarily be designed to influence the perceptions of other governments or segments of the populations of other nations—the Bush and Gorbachev Administrations, Third World governments, or various elites in influential states, for instance. And, of course, both Korean governments' arms control and disarmament proposals are partly structured to win and sustain public support among their own populations.

When arms control negotiations are accompanied by extensive public statements by both sides, propaganda objectives probably stand high in the governments' priorities.

At another level, arms control negotiations might provide for Seoul a useful strand in a mosaic of diplomatic and political-military measures which together could move the peninsula closer to its vision of the future. That vision would presumably involve a territorially enlarged Republic of Korea with a market economy and a democratic political system. The vision for Pyongyang would be different (presumably a juche regime featuring a command economy and Leninist political system), and possibly also could be advanced through arms control negotiations. However, most of the subsequent analysis, while not ignoring Pyongyang, will focus on strategies incorporating arms control proposals that South Korea's policymakers might adopt.

Arms control negotiations can also provide a useful channel for either government to signal changes in policy, and for the two governments together to register new patterns of relationships. In Sino-American relations, the detente of the late 1980s, expected to extend into the 1990s and perhaps beyond, was ratified partly through arms control activity—INF and the CFE negotiations—as the detente of the 1970s was ratified by SALT. In a world in which official pronouncements are typically treated with suspicion, concrete

15. This point is made by Albrecht A. C. von Muller in "Has Arms Control Worked?" p. 44.
ways to signal initiatives and adjustments of relationships are critical. That is especially true when relations have historically been marked by suspicion, as in the case of the two Korean governments.

**ROK Strategies and Arms Control Initiatives**

**Seoul’s current approach**

Historically, the ROK infrequently attempted to integrate arms control into its strategy for dealing with its northern neighbor. Instead, the leaders of the ROK adopted a relatively passive approach to North Korea, with emphasis on deterrence of a North Korean attack through the alliance with the United States and the capabilities of the ROK/US Combined Forces Command (CFC). On the other hand, the DPRK, with larger armed forces and the primary immediate objective of expelling the US military presence from the peninsula, retained the arms control initiative by repeatedly offering disarmament and arms control proposals, albeit proposals that were on their face unacceptable to the ROK. At the least, its arms control activity allowed the North Korean regime to mask its massive military buildup along the DMZ.

Since the 1988 Olympic Games, Seoul’s policy toward North Korea and North Korean allies has become considerably more active. Deterrence partly achieved through the alliance with the United States is still a central feature of the approach, but it is no longer the only one. The Games were almost universally recognized, within and outside South Korea, as the symbol of the ROK’s international legitimacy and domestic economic and political maturity, and were the source of pride for South Koreans. With their successful completion, the Roh Tae Woo administration could confidently explore a bold policy of opening economic, social, and political ties with North Korea’s Communist allies at the same time it adopted a more conciliatory stance toward Pyongyang. The purpose of this policy, in addition to its direct economic benefits, apparently was (and is) to

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weaken the ties between Pyongyang and its traditional allies and to create incentives for Kim’s regime to accept some accommodations with Seoul. If Pyongyang were not to respond positively, it would become even more isolated, and presumably economically weaker. This policy, commonly referred to as Nordpolitik because of its similarities to Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik for the FRG, has achieved most, if not all, of its immediate objectives much sooner than South Korean policymakers and outside observers thought possible. Even before the dramatic political events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union of 1989, economic relations had been established with all Council on Economic Mutual Aid members (including the Soviet Union), and formal diplomatic relations had been established with Hungary. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the rapid political transformation in the Soviet Union has allowed the processes of Nordpolitik to be accelerated: all Eastern European nations except Albania and East Germany (a government shortly expected to be merged with the FRG) now have full diplomatic relations with Seoul. Diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union remain to be established, but something close to consular relations are in place, and a wide range of economic activities (trade, investment, joint ventures) are being developed. Some observers believe that Moscow may accede to the exchange of ambassadors with Seoul in 1990 or early 1991.

Prior to the Olympics, ROK trade with the PRC, much of it through Hong Kong, exceeded trade between the DPRK and the

18. The ROK and the Soviet Union have established “consular departments” within trade offices in each other’s capital.
PRC. Post-Olympic expansion of ROK-PRC ties may have disappointed some in Seoul, but trade has continued to increase, and much is now conducted without the inconvenience and expense of using intermediate ports. Several South Korean businesses have joint ventures in China.\textsuperscript{20}

In addition to increased Eastern European and Soviet contacts, \textit{Nordpolitik} has stimulated (or at least is associated with) significant changes in the quality of relations between those states and Pyongyang. The former Communist states of Eastern Europe, which Pyongyang could once consider allies because of their ideological affinity and their mutual dependency on the Soviet Union, now have little reason to support the North, and potential economic benefits in supporting the South. Indeed, Czechoslovakia and Poland, which are supposed to represent North Korea’s interest on the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC), the body established by the Armistice Agreement to oversee the armistice, now have more political, economic, and ideological affinity with Seoul than with Pyongyang. Even the Soviet Union, which is Pyongyang’s major source of economic and technical assistance, now applies not-too-subtle pressure on the Kim regime to increase efficiency and productivity through \textit{perestroika}, even if that would require \textit{juche} to be discarded.\textsuperscript{21} The Kim regime can expect only a broad political support from the PRC, which may also provide economic assistance but is itself too poor and undeveloped to meet many of Pyongyang’s needs. And the PRC also has a growing economic relationship with South Korea. The DPRK’s isolation is far greater than before the

\textsuperscript{20} The information on ROK foreign trade was compiled by Nancy Maslanka, who as a Dickinson College student (she now has graduated) served an internship with the Strategic Studies Institute in the Spring of 1990.

\textsuperscript{21} Soviet press descriptions of North Korea recently have become extremely unflattering. See A. Mashin, “North Korea: Legend and Reality,” \textit{Argumenty I Fakty}, Number 13, 31 March–6 April 1990, pp. 4 and 5, translated in FBIS-USSR, 3 April 1990, pp. 12–14, implies that Pyongyang’s claims of success are propaganda, and labels the country a “Kim Il Sung Museum.” “The Korean Imperative,” a contribution to the \textit{Far Eastern Economic Review}’s “5th Column,” by Marina Trigubenko and Georgi Toloraya of the Institute of the World Socialist System Economy and the Soviet Chamber of Commerce and Industry respectively, picture the North Korean economy in total disarray. The meeting between Gorbachev and Kim Young Sam, who has been condemned by Pyongyang as a traitor, was a direct affront to the Kim Il Sung regime.
initiation of Nordpolitik, whatever the causal relationship, and its external economic relations seem at least as strained as ever before.

In its direct relations with Pyongyang, Seoul has attempted to continue a set of bilateral discussions dealing with sports, Red Cross, cultural exchange, economic relations, and even preliminary talks to set up high level political meetings. These talks appear to be convened or suspended at the whim of the DPRK delegations, frequently to protest Team Spirit, the annual field training exercise of the CFC. Pyongyang’s preference is for broad political talks, alleging that Seoul’s support of limited, functional negotiations is part of a plot to perpetuate the division of Korea.²² In any case, none of the talks have produced agreements, but neither have any been abandoned. There has been no forum for arms control proposals per se, although the North’s scheme for the phased withdrawal of US forces and the mutual reduction of the Korean armed forces is frequently repeated in North Korea’s media. The CFC, reflecting agreement of both the ROK and US governments, has unilaterally executed some CBMs, including timely notice of Team Spirit exercises, and invitations to Pyongyang, China, and the members of the NNSC, to observe those maneuvers. Pyongyang has declined to recognize these CFC confidence building measures (although for the first time, Poland, as a member of NNSC, sent observers for the 1990 Team Spirit). Seoul on its part has refused to take up Pyongyang’s ambitious disarmament and arms control proposals. The US decision to reduce its complement in Korea by 7,000 personnel may also be interpreted as a unilateral arms control measure, although the motivation behind it had more to do with budget pressure from Congress than with ROK-DPRK relations.²³

The ROK has also issued a formal comprehensive plan for reunification of Korea (as Pyongyang did in 1989) under a unified (not federal or confederal) democratic republic that would have a bicameral legislature. The interim stage between the present situation and the unified state would be the creation of a Korean

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²³ The personnel reductions, 2,000 from the Air Force and 5,000 from the Army, are to take place between 1991 and 1993.
Commonwealth in which the ROK and DPRK would coexist while they together reduced and ultimately eliminated the various factors dividing the nation. Arms control, CBMs, and disarmament would be emphasized in the Commonwealth stage.24

Maintenance of the status quo
One possible strategy for the future, based on the assumption that the forces that transformed Eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990 must ultimately sweep the communist regimes of Asia from power also, would merely emphasize maintaining the status quo and avoiding destabilizing incidents until the North Korean system disintegrates in the fashion of the socialist republics of Eastern Europe. South Korean policymakers would expect that the collapse of communism in the North might be delayed for some time because the DPRK's population is far more isolated and insulated from Western ideas than the people of Eastern Europe were in 1989, and because the current or successor Korean Workers' Party (KWP) regime may have an advantage that Eastern European Communists did not have—the support of a powerful neighbor, that is, the conservative Communist regime in the PRC. During this potentially lengthy interim, it would be critical for the ROK to continue to expand its economic and international stature so that it would be prepared to respond to the inevitable confusion in the North when the KWP regime falls. In the meantime, it would have to deter effectively the current leadership in the North from attempting a preemptive military campaign that would cause extensive damage in the South even if it failed, and also provide continuing justification for tightening controls on its own population. In order to provide certain deterrence, an essential part of this strategy would be to maintain the alliance with the United States, and persuade the United States to deploy the largest number of combat personnel possible on the peninsula. This high dependence on the United States would imply a high degree of responsiveness to US demands for burden sharing and

24. Hongkoo Lee, "Unification through a Korean Commonwealth: Blueprint for a National Community," Korea and World Affairs, Volume XIII, Number 4 (Winter 1989); pp. 635-646. Professor Lee was Minister of National Unification, ROK, at the time he wrote the article.
greater access to South Korean markets. Nordpolitik, at least the aspect that focuses on improving relations with communist states and other North Korean allies, would be compatible with this strategy, because it would tend to further weaken North Korea's external support and thus hasten its final collapse.

For the leadership in Seoul, arms control negotiations would be a secondary, yet still important, feature of this strategy. In order to maintain adequate political support for the overall policy, which could be unpopular among nationalistic groups because of its continued dependence on the United States, Seoul would have to sponsor negotiations with North Korea over a broad range of issues (including arms control), and Pyongyang would need to appear to be responsible if the negotiations failed or were broken off. As long as ROK security policy were grounded in deterrence and the presence of US ground forces, there would be no possibility that the DPRK would permit a significant reduction in its own capabilities, even though partial disarmament might reduce Pyongyang's heavy defense burden. This strategy would have no "peace dividends" for either side until the collapse of the DPRK government. Arms control or CBMs providing for exchange of information and predictability, however, together with proposals for economic, political, and cultural exchanges, would not only have a high propaganda payoff within South Korea as well as outside, but would also support ROK objectives if the proposals were accepted by the North. Under this strategy ROK leaders would not want significantly to ease the tension under which Pyongyang operated, but they would favor steps reducing the chance of armed conflict by addressing the fear of surprise attack, or providing the ROK military with glimpses of the DPRK's military structure and operations and at the same time assuaging the fears of DPRK military planners concerning the intentions of ROK and US forces deployed south of the DMZ. More complete information about CFC capabilities would also help insure that Pyongyang did not underestimate the strength of the forces confronting them.

Probably the two most difficult arms control issues for the ROK—nuclear weapons and the presence of US forces in South Korea—could not be seriously addressed with this strategy. In order to sustain the primary strategic concept of the strategy, deterrence
through the participation of US forces in the defense of South Korea, the US military presence obviously would not be negotiable. Assuming that the United States continues to observe the "neither confirm nor deny" policy with respect to the deployment of nuclear weapons, the questions relating to them also could not be accepted as issues for discussion with North Korea. These limitations would provide some advantages to the DPRK in the propaganda competition, because its spokesmen could rail about foreign occupying forces and the danger of nuclear conflict without an effective response from the South. Being dependent on US forces, the ROK could not credibly claim that it could prevent them from using nuclear weapons. Seoul would also be inhibited from achieving propaganda benefits by calling attention to the DPRK's nuclear program.

Induce changes in DPRK policy

Another strategy the ROK might pursue (a continuation and extension of present policy) would seek changes in DPRK policy, but not necessarily the collapse—nor even the transformation—of the DPRK regime itself, while continuing to maintain an effective deterrent based partly on the alliance with the United States and the presence of US forces. The immediate objectives would be gradually to increase communications and contacts between North and South, probably with first priority on the reunification of divided families, expanding to cultural, economic and, ultimately, political relations. Simultaneous entry into the UN and cross-recognition, a ROK goal for a number of years, would advance the objectives of this strategy because the moves would lead to more extensive international contacts for Pyongyang and support the indirect approach of this strategy, discussed below. Even admission of only the ROK into the UN could support strategic objectives if the action were to goad Pyongyang into seeking wider international contacts. There would be the risk, however, that such a move would reinforce Pyongyang's isolation.

Longer-term objectives would include a substantial reduction of tensions on the peninsula, and a peace or nonaggression treaty to replace the armistice. The ultimate goal, of course, would be a unified Korea. Such a strategy, which assumes the economic, political, and even moral superiority of South Korean society over
North Korean society, would be executed on two levels: directly, it would feature unilateral tension reduction measures, diplomacy, and arms control and CBM negotiations to seek agreements from Pyongyang; indirectly, while progress through direct measures was being attempted, it would be designed to reduce the isolation of the DPRK, increase the flow of information about the rest of the world, and foster the conditions that might allow leaders to attain influence in Pyongyang who are less ideologically committed to a command economy and *juche*, and presumably more willing to respond to the strategy on the direct level.

Because of its reliance on the US-ROK alliance for deterrence, this strategy also implies responsiveness to US policy and interests. It is not, however, a strategy of deterrence only, and its execution would require the decision-making focus on Seoul and not Washington. The former will have to have the freedom to assume the initiative when appropriate, even when the US-ROK alliance is involved (which presumably would be frequently). Of course, Seoul would consult closely with Washington, but leadership in the discussions with North Korea would necessarily remain with the ROK. If that is not feasible, this strategy would not be feasible.

**Domestic policy changes**

Chances that this strategy could succeed would partly depend on actions within South Korea. It would be useful for the Roh administration to remove some of the obstacles to North-South communications that appear in ROK law, particularly in the National Security statute. The administration has already accepted a commitment in principle to change some parts of that law inhibiting contacts with the DPRK. This unilateral action would, depending on the exact nature of the changes, partially meet some of the DPRK’s major demands for engaging in discussions with South Korea. An immediate result would be an increase in North Korean propaganda and ease of communications between Pyongyang and South Korea’s radical student groups and other dissidents, which implies some risk to Roh and his government. On the other hand, such a conciliatory measure would make it extremely difficult for Pyongyang to resist Seoul’s efforts to open North Korea to outside information, especially information about conditions in South Korea. And it would do much
to give credibility, within and outside the ROK, to Seoul’s claim that it really seeks to remove all barriers to contacts between the two Koreas.

**Foreign policy initiatives**

Externally, ROK policymakers could exploit the connections they had developed through *Nordpolitik* with nations having diplomatic representation in Pyongyang, especially the Soviet Union, to try to gain their support for the functional approach (as opposed to North Korea’s demand for agreement on broad political principles first) to deal with the systemic social and political differences that have developed on either side of the DMZ. The relations between the ROK and communist and former communist states, especially in their economic aspects, are deepening with the passage of time, providing a somewhat greater probability that they might lobby Pyongyang in behalf of the South Korean approach. Simultaneously, the ROK could urge its allies, primarily the United States and Japan but also other free market economy nations, to ease restrictions on—indeed, positively encourage—communications with Pyongyang. This has been part of Seoul’s declaratory policy toward Pyongyang since the inauguration of *Nordpolitik*, but it does not appear to have been enthusiastically pressed on its allies.

**Arms control activities**

As in the previous strategy, arms control negotiations would be mandatory in order to satisfy domestic and foreign constituencies, and could be utilized for propaganda purposes. For a strategy seeking to induce changes in DPRK policy, however, arms control negotiations can become more than channels of propaganda and also be used in other ways as effective instruments in attaining important strategic objectives.

The DPRK’s extensive disarmament and arms control proposals of 1987 and 1988 state principally the aims of removing US forces and nuclear weapons from the peninsula and reducing the forces of North and South Korea to less than 100,000 personnel each, all
within a short period of time.\textsuperscript{25} While Seoul would not agree to the proposals as they stand, they do contain provisions that might be the basis for discussions and eventual agreement. For instance, the latter document provides for the redeployment of US forces to the south of the ROK prior to removal.\textsuperscript{26} The timetable and geographical area for redeployment may be unacceptable, but the notion of redeployment of forces (Korean as well as American) as an approach to arms control might be worth pursuing by Seoul. Both proposals call for an active role by the NNSC in verifying compliance with arms control agreements, and the idea of international verification and inspection is also a notion that Seoul probably could accept as a part of an arms control agreement. (Since the changes in regimes in Eastern Europe, Pyongyang may have lost its enthusiasm for the NNSC.) Pyongyang’s call for the creation of a zone of peace in the DMZ probably could be reconciled with a similar proposal made by Seoul.\textsuperscript{27} These and perhaps other components of Pyongyang’s arms control proposals might provide openings for serious arms control negotiations. They might even be accomplished through tacit agreement, by which each side takes action without requiring formal documents and public positions.

As an instrument to advance the ROK’s strategic objectives, under the hypothetical strategy considered here, arms control should not destabilize deterrence and should contribute toward an environment in which increased economic and social interaction across the DMZ would be possible. The former consideration requires that Seoul be cautious concerning any reduction in US forces, but it should be possible for the ROK to coordinate with the United States so that it could bargain over aspects of US force structure if meaningful

\textsuperscript{25} The basic proposal of 1987 and “Communique on the Joint Meeting of the Central People’s Committee, Standing Committee of the Supreme People’s Assembly and Administration Council of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea” issued in 1988 are reprinted in Appendix B, \textit{Dialogue with North Korea}, pp. 47–50.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid.}, paragraph l)B., p. 48.

\textsuperscript{27} President Roh’s unification plan endorses “arrangements...to utilize the Demilitarized Zone for peaceful purposes.” \textit{To build a National Community through the Korean Commonwealth: A Blueprint for Korean Unification} (Seoul: National Unification Board, Republic of Korea, September 1989), p. 25. At the Military Armistice Committee meetings at Panmunjom, the UN Command has proposed that all military activities be prohibited in the DMZ.
changes in North Korea's military posture could be obtained and the changes effectively verified. Given the present level of distrust between North and South, effective verification with intrusive inspections, by the NNSC or any other body, seems implausible. In the future, as a result of changes within Pyongyang, an agreement allowing the DPRK to reduce military expenditures to meet other pressing needs might be so compelling that intrusive inspections would be acceptable. In the meantime, arms control and CBM negotiations probably should focus on arrangements that reduce the potential for surprise attack and reduce the uncertainty surrounding military activities. They could include actual demilitarization of the DMZ, redeployment of forces away from the DMZ (although this would be difficult until verification became politically acceptable), and various CBMs that would increase the transparency of each side's forces and facilitate the exchange of military information, e.g., notification of large military movements and maneuvers and observations of exercises.

The question of nuclear disarmament, which Pyongyang has repeatedly raised to Seoul's embarrassment, would continue to be a difficult issue under this kind of strategy. South Korean spokesmen could partly offset any potential damage from Pyongyang's assertions by calling attention to the alleged nuclear-weapons-capable facility in North Korea, and the unwillingness of the DPRK to permit International Atomic Energy Agency inspection of it, and by emphasizing the degree to which Koreans control ground forces in the South—including US ground forces which the North says have large numbers of nuclear weapons. In any case, the less prominent the role of US forces, the less salient will be the issue of US nuclear weapons.

Conclusion

In the preceding discussion, it has been implicitly assumed that the lowering of tensions on the Korean peninsula, not to mention reunification, is primarily a problem for Koreans, even though the current division itself resulted primarily because of superpower conflict. It is the Korean governments who must assert their
authority on this issue once dominated by the superpowers because of the general trend toward multipolarity: more specifically, the need of the United States and the Soviet Union to focus fewer resources on international affairs; the fundamental changes in the Soviet Union and international communism; and the remarkable economic and political developments in the ROK. Therefore, the forum for discussions on lowering tensions between the ROK and the DPRK must initially be bilateral.

To be sure, each side will consult closely with its allies, those allies will be able to influence the parameters and content of negotiations, and their acceptance will have to be obtained for any important substantive agreement. The ROK should enjoy several advantages over its adversary from the structure of the bargaining. It has significant relations, formal or informal, with all four major powers; the DPRK only has meaningful relations with China and the Soviet Union. On the major powers, the bargaining structure should enhance the influence of the Soviet Union, the long-time benefactor of Pyongyang and the recent economic partner with Seoul, soon apparently to have full diplomatic ties. None of the other major powers has such access to both sides.

Traditional diplomatic techniques must be depended upon for finding ways to better guarantee stability on the Korean peninsula. Arms control negotiations, which will include CBM proposals, can provide auxiliary channels that may become very important as components of a larger pattern of contacts. Arms control and CBMs, however, by their very nature, can only deal with symptoms and marginal concerns. The factors separating North and South involve diametrically opposed visions of society and distrust compounded by more than 40 years of confrontation.

Of the two hypothetical strategies suggested in this analysis as a means of examining the possible role of arms control, the second is clearly more amenable to arms control procedures. It is also more compatible with South Korean values and expectations. The first, waiting for the DPRK regime to collapse in the pattern of Eastern European governments, even if the process required a relatively long time, would be too cynical for most South Koreans. The daily human, emotional costs of a divided and forcefully separated Korea are too great and feelings about the separation are too strong for
a “wait for the fall” policy to prevail long in the democratic milieu of contemporary politics. It is more likely that a ROK regime would want not only to be ready to capitalize on any spread of the “East European” disease in North Korea, but also to try to open contacts between North and South to allow families to be at least temporarily reunited and to allow some communications and greater cultural contacts across the DMZ. Virtually all ROK politicians would consider these valuable objectives in and of themselves.

This second hypothetical strategy, however, and any real strategy similar to it, would be difficult for the ROK effectively to execute. South Korean leaders would have to display great patience, perseverance, and diplomatic skill in mobilizing the support of both the United States and the Soviet Union for ROK negotiating positions, and inducing Pyongyang to accept increased contacts with Seoul. Ultimately, however, the ROK should realize its objectives of reduced tensions and a different relationship with North Korea, and perhaps even reunification. The general trends of the international system, especially the collapse of command economies led by communist governments in Europe, are compatible with Seoul’s goals. Moreover, all the major regional powers, including both the Soviet Union and the United States, will benefit from decreased tension on the Korean Peninsula, and North and South would both incur significant risks from continued instability.

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