The North Korea Instability Project

A New Approach to Eliminating North Korean Weapons of Mass Destruction Is Needed

Robert Peters

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SAIS Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies | USKI

Robert J. Peters, now a Senior Research Fellow, joined the Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction as a Research Associate in August 2005. Mr. Peters' research focuses on WMD rollback policies, WMD elimination, nuclear attribution, loose nuclear weapons, and managing escalation and deterrence crises. From March-November 2009, Mr. Peters was detailed to the Office of the Secretary of Defense-Policy as Special Assistant to the DASD for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction, where he led the counter-WMD analysis for the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review. Prior to joining National Defense University, Mr. Peters worked as a Technical Analyst for the Northrop Grumman Corp., and as a Research Associate for the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, focusing on WMD detection capabilities and nonproliferation policy.

Mr. Peters received an MA from Georgetown University in National Security Studies in 2001, and a BA in Political Science and History from Miami University in 1999. Publications include "China, Democracy, and the Internet" in Information Technology and World Politics; "Promoting Science and Technology to Serve National Security" in Science and Technology Policies for the Anti-Terrorism Era; and "Nuclear U-Turns: Learning from South Korean and Taiwanese Rollback" in Nonproliferation Review.

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New Approach to Eliminating North Korean Weapons of Mass Destruction Is Needed

Preventing the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against the United States and its allies has long been a paramount security objective for Washington with increased urgency since 9/11.[1] When it comes to mitigating the threats posed by North Korean WMD, the United States has long followed a multi-pronged approach that has incorporated, among other elements, increasing resiliency and capacity among our allies in Japan and Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea); multilateral diplomacy in the form of the Six Party Talks; various types of active and passive defense measures; deterrence; and planning for the use of special technical teams to secure adversary programs in semi-permissive or non-permissive environments.

This last effort, for a long time known as WMD-elimination, was a military mission that emphasized the use of special technical forces trained in nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. While the *Department of Defense Strategy for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction* ended elimination as a formal doctrinal military mission earlier this decade, the Department of Defense (DoD) has continued to plan for and organize, train and equip forces so that it may be prepared to respond to a crisis in which US and ROK forces must secure WMD in North Korean territory.[2] As many in the DoD counter-WMD community still refer to the elimination mission, particularly when it comes to neutralizing North Korean WMD, this paper will use the former doctrinal definition of WMD-elimination as the effort to locate, isolate, secure, exploit, disable, disrupt and destroy WMD and related program materials in non- or semi-permissive environments .

As will be detailed later in this paper, such an effort would require an enormous amount of manpower, resources and planning and would present significant risk to the United States, the Republic of Korea, and the coalition forces engaged in such efforts. Moreover, due to the expanding size of the North Korean WMD arsenal, combined with a greater appreciation of the role that China might play in various contingencies, this paper suggests that the DoD's old approach to WMD-elimination is flawed, and, should it ever be implemented, would likely fail. Ultimately, this paper argues that the planning process and underlying assumptions with the WMD-elimination mission has serious deficiencies that need to be addressed and corrected. Therefore, the counter-WMD community must reevaluate key operational and planning assumptions to identify a better way to neutralize the threat—one that identifies a number of diplomatic, defensive, deterrent and military

1 President George W. Bush, West Point Commencement, (speech, West Point, NY, June 1, 2002), The White House, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html

2 U.S. Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Strategy for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction*, June 2014, http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/DoD_Strategy_for_Countering_Weapons_of_Mass_Destruction_dated_June_2014.pdf.

tools that could be used to neutralize the North Korean WMD threat, should the Kim regime ever collapse.

I. Operational WMD Tasks in North Korea

The United States and its coalition allies need to be prepared to engage in a number of simultaneous counter-WMD operational tasks should the North Korean government collapse.[3] These include, *inter alia*: defending against missile launches from the Korean People's Army (KPA); managing the consequences of possible WMD events or attacks; locating, seizing and securing the WMD program-related facilities to include weapons; rendering nuclear weapons safe through dismantlement of the warhead; conducting air and sea interdiction operations to prevent the movement of people and materials of concern; and controlling land borders to prevent the movement of people and materials related to WMD programs.

All of these tasks will require units and individuals with specialized capabilities and skills relevant to WMD. However, individuals with such expertise are a rarity and allied forces will likely be unable to execute all these missions simultaneously. This could create situations in which key or critical missions cannot be executed, due to manpower shortages. In an effort to locate, isolate, secure and disable North Korean WMD facilities, such manpower shortages, as will be examined later in this paper, will be acute.

In addition, these operations likely will occur in conjunction with other conventional missions, such as providing humanitarian assistance/disaster response; defeating KPA remnants; conducting force protection efforts; or conducting non-combatant evacuation operations—potentially all while wearing personal protective equipment if they are operating in chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) contaminated environments. Consequently, during the crisis, US and ROK coalition forces will be faced with near simultaneous execution of numerous tasks, many of which will require the expertise of units trained in neutralizing WMD threats.

II. What Might a WMD-Elimination Operation in North Korea Look Like?

As noted earlier, WMD-elimination operations in North Korea would likely take place in semi- or non-permissive environments such as what might be found following a collapse of the Kim regime.[4] In such contingencies, coalition forces likely would attempt to secure WMD facilities as quickly as possible.[5] Failure to do so could provide North Korean elements the time and space to use these dangerous capabilities against Korean population centers or coalition forces or transfer

3 As other papers have covered North Korea's WMD arsenals and programs, this paper will not go into detail on this topic.

4 WMD elimination operations does not fall under Cooperative Threat Reduction, which is done in conjunction with a host/partner nation in permissive environments. WMD elimination operations take place during Phases II-IV of military operational plan phases.

5 This scenario is based upon the assumption that DOD is leading the elimination mission. It is entirely plausible that the president could assign a different entity, person, or organization to be in charge of the WMD hunt. In this alternative scenario, the president, acting in his role of commander in chief, could designate an individual to lead the hunt for WMD (as President George W. Bush did in 2003 when he assigned Dr. David Kay as head of the Iraq Survey Group) or could turn the entire mission over the intelligence community. Presumably, this would depend on a permissive or semi-permissive environment.

the weapons or capabilities to hostile actors, as central control of the weapons will deteriorate in times of crisis (as might be the case in a collapse scenario). Further, the need for a fully verified accounting of the WMD programs will be necessary after the crisis is over to understand if any material, weapons, knowledge or people were proliferated to third parties and if they pose a threat to US or allied interests.

Following the 2003 Iraq War, the United States developed a concept of operations for how such a mission in Korea would unfold. Generally speaking, the US 8th Army stationed in the ROK likely would stand up a Combined Joint Task Force-Elimination (CJTF-E). It would include technical forces from the US Army (primarily from the US Army's 20th CBRNE Command) experienced in dealing with chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons as well as high-yield explosives. In particular, units capable of examining CBRN facilities and specialized counter-WMD planners from across the Department of Defense would be sent to Korea to become part of this Task Force.[6] WMD subject matter experts from across the US government as well as specialized ROK Army units and other coalition technical specialists would augment the CJTF-E on an as needed basis.[7] Special operations forces could also support a CJTF-E, to include securing or neutralizing high value targets, such as high level political leaders, key figures involved in the nuclear program, or senior military officers.

Before specific sites could be exploited, they would have to be located, secured, and entered, none of which are simple tasks. While the United States and the Republic of Korea have some sense of where many WMD-related sites are located, the number of uncharacterized sites and facilities will present intelligence analysts and operational planners with a daunting task. Gaining access could also present significant challenges. While it is difficult to know specific levels of security at sensitive North Korean WMD sites, it may be days or even weeks before the CJTF-E could gain access to all sites.[8]

The most time consuming and manpower intensive operational task would be site exploitation and characterization. This would require general purpose forces to secure suspected WMD sites, while they wait for specialized teams to arrive and begin the exploitation process. Once these specialized forces arrived, they would enter a suspected WMD site, detain any personnel encountered, search the site for documents or electronic media, and complete a physical survey of the facility to inventory WMD-related equipment or materials. Teams would debrief, analyze and review any personnel, media and documents seized at the sites in order to determine the nature of the site and to identify the location of additional WMD sites and facilities of concern.

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6 See Gerard Vavrina and John Greaves, "Nuclear Disablement Team Operations in Operation Iraqi Freedom," Parts 1 and 2," *NBC Report* (Fall/Winter 2003), pp. 7–10, <www.hsdl.org/?view&did=481846>; Gerard Vavrina and John Greaves, "Nuclear Disablement Team Operations in Operation Iraq Freedom, Part II," *NBC Report* (Spring/Summer 2004), pp. 27-32, <www.hsdl.org/?view&did=481844>. Currently, the United States has two nuclear disablement teams ready to be deployed. Note, too, that nuclear disablement teams do not do "render safe." They examine program-related sites and sensitive materials. The mission to render safe constituted weapons is owned by another entity.

7 See U.S. Department of Defense, *Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Joint Publication 3-40, October 2014, <www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_40.pdf>, Chapter III, Section 4.

8 See Bruce Bennett, "Preparing for the Possibility of a North Korean Collapse," The Rand Corporation, 2013, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR300/RR331/RAND_RR331.pdf

This exploitation process requires both technical expertise and North Korean language skills. Detained North Korean personnel with specialized knowledge would be transferred to another location in theater for further debriefing to get a better accounting of the program and identify other sites of interest.[9] Once coalition forces had completed exploitation of a site, they would secure WMD-related materials and disable/destroy sensitive program-related equipment.

III. Challenges to Eliminating North Korean WMD

The above scenario describes how the mission is supposed to work and how the United States and the Republic of Korea have postured themselves to neutralize the North Korean WMD threat. However, there are a number of strategic challenges associated with this approach.

1. North Korean Capabilities

The evolution and maturation of the North Korean program has presented new challenges over the past ten years. While the Kim regime likely had only a handful of nuclear weapons in 2006, they are today building an arsenal that could provide them with an operational capability, particularly if these weapons can be miniaturized and successfully mated to ballistic missiles or artillery rounds.[10] Should North Korea, in fact, achieve an operational, battlefield nuclear capability, the United States and the Republic of Korea would have less freedom of action to carry out strikes on North Korean soil without incurring the risk of provoking a nuclear-armed response by the North Korean regime or regime remnants. A North Korean capability to employ nuclear weapons on the battlefield, particularly if they have the ability to launch multiple weapons and or maintain a second-strike capability, will force the United States, South Korea and other regional actors to consider seriously the consequences of any kinetic action undertaken against the North.

2. Chinese Intervention

China could pose a very significant challenge to a successful WMD-elimination operation. China's specific objectives in a Korea crisis would depend on the scenario, but its overall strategic goals likely would center on ensuring regional stability, denuclearizing the peninsula, maintaining a friendly buffer state between China and a pro-Western ROK, and perhaps permanently removing US forces from the peninsula.

A high priority for China would be to stabilize the flow of refugees and prevent large numbers of North Koreans from crossing into China. Beijing could justify moving into North Korean territory on humanitarian grounds during or following a collapse, particularly by establishing displaced persons camps where it could provide food, clothing and shelter to millions of Koreans. It might

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9 For a more thorough treatment of possible command relationships on the peninsula for a WMD elimination operation, see Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Lind "The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements", *International Security* 36 (Fall 2011), pp. 84-119.

10 See David Albright's assessments: David Albright, "Challenges Posed by North Korea's Weapon-Grade Uranium and Weapon-Grade Plutonium: Current and Projected Stocks," at http://38north.org/2012/10/dalbright102312/; David Albright, "Future Directions in the DPRK's Nuclear Weapons Program: Three Scenarios for 2020,"February 2015, http://38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/NKNF_Future-Directions-2020.pdf; David Albright, "North Korea's Nuclear Capabilities: A Fresh Look," Institute for Science and International Security, April 28, 2017, http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/North_Korea_Nuclear_Capability_Estimates_Summary_28Apr2017_Final.pdf.

do this by creating a zone south of the North Korean/Chinese border, which would not only provide space for refugee camps, but could also serve as a forward operating base for Chinese military forces. Conceivably, these forces could be directed to seize key components of North Korean infrastructure, such as military command and control nodes, bridges, highways, airports and possibly government centers in Pyongyang outside of a Chinese-established humanitarian zone, in an attempt to establish control and reduce or manage the instability that could stem from a collapse of the Kim regime. They could also be tasked to secure WMD-related sites in or around the humanitarian zone.

Establishing control over a portion of North Korean soil, its associated infrastructure, and co-located WMD assets could help to stabilize the overall situation and even reduce some WMD threats. It would also give China a bargaining chip in post-collapse negotiations involving the United States and Korea, where Beijing could be expected to press for an end to the US-ROK military alliance and a neutral, denuclearized Korean state. This is a scenario that Washington and Seoul may need to contemplate.

Given Chinese concerns about regional instability and their natural tendency to oppose American military exercises or actions near their borders, it is unlikely that China would welcome coalition forces conducting operations on the Korean peninsula absent significant Chinese involvement or input. What then might such involvement look like? It is possible that Chinese forces could engage in low-level operational deconfliction of operations with coalition forces. This is not to say that PLA forces would engage in joint strikes or operations or provide other forms of assistance to coalition forces —but Chinese authorities could inform coalition authorities that Chinese forces were going to strike or occupy specific targets or facilities or territories, and request that coalition forces steer clear of those zones.

This, however, would be a relative "best-case" scenario for Chinese involvement. Chinese forces may be far less benign and perhaps would not coordinate at all. Alternatively, in the course of coordination, China could attempt to veto certain coalition actions. For instance, if coalition forces indicated to their Chinese counterparts that they would seize a certain high-value facility associated with the North Korea nuclear program, what would the coalition response be if the Chinese reply was "no, Chinese forces will secure this site"? While in some cases, coalition forces might welcome Chinese assistance, in others, the United States and its allies may need the information contained at such sites to identify the location of other critical nuclear weapons sites or facilities. In such a case, what might the United States and its allies do? Would they accept Chinese dictates of where coalition forces can and cannot operate and hope that Beijing will share intelligence in a timely fashion (or at all)? Or would coalition forces continue to operate according to their plans?

In addition, China could be far more belligerent and not coordinate at all, for example, by declaring a Maritime Exclusion Zone (MEZ) in the West Sea or a No-Fly Zone (NFZ) north of the DMZ. It is difficult to conduct deep penetrating maneuvers without support from the sea and coalition forces would be unlikely to conduct elimination operations—or any other type of significant military operations—absent the ability to do medical evacuation by the air. Thus, a Chinese-declared NFZ or MEZ would present the United States and its allies with a choice: accept Chinese dictates on how they will (and most likely, will not) operate, or ignore Chinese dictates and challenge Chinese-imposed exclusion zones.

While it makes sense to discuss possible coordination or deconfliction of operations following

a North Korean collapse, especially on issues related to eliminating North Korean WMD, such a discussion must take place at a trilateral context that includes American, Chinese and South Korean participation. There has been little indication to date that China is willing to engage in such a meaningful, trilateral dialogue, particularly given their attempts to pressure the South Korean government into abandoning the terminal high-altitude area defense (THAAD) missile defense system.

3. Conflicting Priorities

Competing values will impact and likely complicate military operations and political outcomes on the Korean peninsula. As previously noted, regional stability and an end to the US-ROK military alliance would be at the top of a Chinese value hierarchy. In contrast, there may be conflicting priorities within South Korea, with some factions favoring unification as the highest priority, while others believing that reducing the physical risk to the country would be of paramount importance. For the United States, the top interests almost certainly will be protection of the American homeland and interests, along with the defense of the Republic of Korea. Accordingly, the neutralization of North Korean WMD will be the most important operational goal and preventing a conflict with China will almost certainly be the most important strategic goal for the United States. Trying to find outcomes that are acceptable to the Republic of Korea, China, and the United States during a time of instability in Korea would be extraordinarily challenging.

While the South Korean Army will supply the vast majority of ground forces required for elimination operations (perhaps up to 90 percent), it will also perform a variety of previously identified missions, to include providing security in captured territory or humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to potentially millions of North Korean brethren. South Korean forces likely would have the technical know-how to destroy North Korean chemical and biological weapons (CBW) stockpiles safely and in an environmentally sound way that conforms with the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC). But the number of other missions the Korean Army will likely be called upon to execute may delay their ability to eliminate the chemical and biological weapons programs, which will require significant amount of time, money and effort.

Moreover, as a non-nuclear weapon state under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), South Korea is prohibited from acquiring nuclear weapons or gaining access to critical nuclear weapon design information, which would limit its ability to participate in nuclear elimination operations, although it would be able to participate in certain aspects of securing nuclear facilities, providing site security and other tasks.

4. ROK and US Manpower Limitations

If South Korea becomes the legal inheritor of these programs, they will be treaty-obligated to destroy all North Korean WMD and associated programmatic material given that they are signatories of the NPT, CWC and the BWC. However, how they do so will raise several serious questions: Who will conduct the programmatic and weapons destruction? Who will pay for it and where will this destruction take place? How much technical and scientific information will the Koreans be allowed to handle, without constituting a violation of their treaty obligations?

In addition to the above challenges, the United States may not have the required elimination or general purpose forces in theater to secure the North Korean WMD program in a timely fashion, should North Korea collapse quickly. This could delay the coalition's ability to begin location and elimination operations.

There are further limitations posed by the finite number of teams and units capable of conducting such elimination operations and the small number of Americans among them who are conversant in technical Korean. Additionally, suspected WMD sites will require a large commitment of infantry forces to provide site security, transportation, logistics, communications and other support functions for the duration of the exploitation and site characterization phase, when special technical units examine suspected WMD sites for further intelligence. Since even a small site might require as much as a battalion to provide persistent physical security, coalition forces may be unable to furnish the manpower needed to secure all sites of concern.

Building an Army force structure so that US forces could adequately locate, seize, secure, exploit and neutralize adversary WMD programs is almost certainly an infeasible option; the significant force requirement would require diverting Army assets from other critically important missions—including counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance, special operations and major combat operations—to such a degree that the Army's ability to execute those missions could be compromised.

As two scholars who have written on this subject point out, a collapse of North Korea would require upwards of 400,000 infantryman to provide security, conduct stability operations, locate and secure WMD and provide humanitarian assistance. Specialized units capable of conducting elimination operations would be in the five-figure range alone.[11] In short, the manpower requirements for a traditional operation effectively would change the US Army into a counter-North Korean WMD Service, which is not a realistic development.

If coalition forces spend significant manpower and time conducting exploitation operations at sites of concern, while also stationing personnel needed to protect these sites—particularly if coalition forces come across large-scale chemical weapons depots north of the demilitarized zone— ground maneuver forces could suffer from a reduction in combat effectiveness. Such a reduction in combat effectiveness could impede their freedom and speed of movement, thereby potentially providing adversary or rogue elements time to transfer WMD out of the country. Given that it may take hours, days or weeks to exploit a site, these specialized counter-WMD units might be unable to move to other, high priority sites for an extended period. This delay could give the North Korean regime (or regime elements) time to use WMD against coalition forces or interests, with potentially catastrophic impacts. A failure to secure North Korean WMD in a timely fashion, particularly if high-priority sites are in areas beyond coalition forces areas of control, also could enable regime elements to trade WMD technologies, know-how, materials or even constituted weapons to third parties in exchange for safe passage out of theater. Such a potential for WMD proliferation could trigger an additional crisis.

To prevent such a potential, the United States and its allies may have to make trade-offs between

11 Ibid.

maneuver operations, force protection and securing high priority sites. Put another way, coalition forces may need to assume greater operational risk to general purpose and WMD-specialized forces to get to high-priority sites in highly unstable or hostile security environments that may contain constituted weapons of mass destruction, in order to reduce the risk that weapons may be employed or proliferated.

It seems, then, that this mission may require more manpower to enable successful WMD elimination operations. If this is not possible, the coalition must consider how best to prioritize the mission in light of these constraints, not only in terms of *military* manpower, but with respect to technical and intelligence specialists who would be required to assist in an elimination operation.

While the United States and the Republic of Korea have many civilian private sector and government technicians and scientists with advanced understanding of chemical, biological and nuclear processes and infrastructure, it may not be possible that many of them can be deployed into a non-permissive or even semi-permissive security environment. Many non-military government personnel can be brought in to assist elimination forces, but few of these will have the requisite training to locate, exploit and disable WMD programs. This lack of manpower likely will further hinder timely elimination operations.

5. North Korean Opposition

Beyond the manpower shortfalls associated with conducting the elimination operations themselves, there are also security and environmental problems associated with a North Korean collapse that could affect elimination operations. To begin with, coalition forces could face an insurgency while attempting to conduct these operations, which would almost certainly draw its manpower from KPA remnants, which could coalesce into functioning, well-armed units that oppose coalition forces engaged in a variety of operations, include humanitarian assistance and stability operations, as well as an active WMD-elimination mission.

Such an insurgency could use improvised explosive devices (IEDs), sniper attacks, small-scale guerrilla tactics or even company-sized engagements to harass and bloody coalition forces operating north of the DMZ—potentially on a scale that dwarfed the insurgency of Iraq from 2004-2008. Some estimate that at its height, Iraqi insurgents numbered only 25,000 people.[12] The KPA and KPA Reserve force consists of over six million armed individuals. If only one percent of those under arms in North Korea were to form an insurgency, coalition forces would face 60,000 well-armed insurgents, likely trained and led by KPA special forces who are trained in irregular warfare.[13]

Further, a North Korean insurgency would have access to a much larger and diverse set of weapons than what was available in Iraq. In addition to the enormous numbers of small arms in North Korea, KPA remnants may gain access to bulk chemical agent or stockpiles of chemical-filled artillery rounds. In addition to traditional employment, insurgents could reconfigure munitions

12 Austin Long, (presentation, The North Korea Instability Project Workshop, Washington, DC, December 12, 2016).

13 Colonel William Boik, "Understanding the North Korean Problem: Why it Has Become the Land of Lousy Options," U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute, www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub1074.pdf.

into IEDs – similar to those which plagued coalition forces in Iraq – armed with chemical or even biological or radiological agents.

This ability to bring chemical weapons into an insurgency might have enormous impact. For example, upon discovery of "chemical IEDs," coalition general purpose forces would have to treat every potential IED as a chemical hazard—and therefore require the services of high-demand/low density explosive ordinance disposal technicians trained to handle chemical weapons. Such a demand for these specialized technicians could overwhelm coalition forces' capacity to provide such technicians in a timely fashion and almost certainly impact the operational tempo of the efforts to secure larger-scale chemical weapons depots or storage facilities.
Moreover, an insurgency armed with chemical weapons would mean that coalition forces would be operating in (or would have to be prepared to operate in) contaminated environments, with all the cumbersome tactics, techniques and procedures that such an environment requires, such as wearing and servicing personal protective equipment. Further, the use of CW against population centers could result in not only a catastrophic loss of life requiring an enormous medical and environmental remediation response as part of a consequence management mission. It would also require the specialized training of those forces otherwise engaged in a WMD-elimination operation or a counter-improvised explosive chemical device campaign. Such a requirement would almost assuredly cause operational delays in the larger efforts of securing North Korean chemical munitions.[14]

Another major set of operational challenges that will come to the forefront after the worst part of the security crisis is resolved will revolve around the destruction of the North Korean WMD and the associated research, production and storage facilities and other associated WMD infrastructure sites. While locating, securing and exploiting the North Korean WMD program will be a daunting task in and of itself, it will only be the first step in what is likely to be a very long process. Indeed, the destruction and redirection of constituted WMD and the associated programs that will happen after coalition forces exploit and account for the North Korean program will likely take many months or even several years.

IV. The Way Ahead: Rethinking Assumptions and Approaches

There are a number of assumptions that the policy and planning communities have made over the years about eliminating WMD following a North Korean collapse. These assumptions are, in some cases, overly optimistic. Accordingly, planners and policymakers need to prepare themselves for the possibility that the operating environment following a North Korean collapse will be far more challenging than they assumed, particularly in the following areas:

- *WMD Use:* Planners assume that there will be little if any use of chemical or nuclear weapons in a collapse scenario. As noted above, coalition forces could easily see large-scale or episodic but persistent use of chemical weapons by insurgents. It is possible that regime elements could employ nuclear weapons prior to a total collapse. Assuming no significant WMD use is a dangerous but common assumption.

14 While North Korea also maintains nuclear weapons, it is unclear how (or where) those weapons are stored and secured, or what regime elements may have access to them. Hence, while a nuclear use on the peninsula during the course of a collapse or an elimination operation may be possible, the sheer lack of knowledge regarding the nuclear arsenal's physical disposition makes any assertions about the likelihood or impacts of nuclear use mere speculation.

- *Chinese Intervention:* The community also assumes that if China intervenes at all, it will be in a benign, or even helpful manner. This is a dangerous assumption. China, as pointed out, could mount significant opposition to coalition forces, opposing with kinetic force coalition operations in the West Sea, declaring NFZs, or seizing key installations critical to the WMD elimination mission.
- *Strategic Warning:* Planners assume that coalition forces will have strategic warning should North Korea collapse, but this is far from certain. There could be indicators of impending collapse that go unrecognized. For instance, a regime that is killing off close family members of the ruler, conducting military purges and threatening nuclear coercion may be a sign of a regime on the verge of collapse. Or it may be signs of regime consolidation. A collapse that is underway may not be recognized until the security situation degrades dramatically. In that sense, we may lack the strategic warning that we would otherwise need to flow requisite forces into theater.
- *Scenario-Based Planning:* Finally, the planning community has not taken into account the diversity of possible types of regime instability, regime collapse, civil war and post-regime insurgency. The diverse number of possible contingencies could require very different capabilities, authorities, concepts of operation and approaches to neutralizing the North Korean WMD threat.

Given the nature, scope and scale of challenges associated with WMD elimination operations, it is imperative that the US government coordinate, pre-crisis, an interagency process to prepare for a number of challenges and fundamentally re-examine how it would work to neutralize the North Korean WMD threat in any number of scenarios. The key to success will be conducting a fundamental review of key policy and operational planning assumptions regarding neutralizing the North Korean WMD problem. These include:

1. Examining various scenarios for instability and insurgency in North Korea and identifying the implications for the United States and South Korea;
2. Identifying the implications of various kinds of Chinese intervention;
3. Identifying when and where it might be possible for the United States and South Korea to change the situation from a crisis to an opportunity after the collapse of the Kim regime;
4. Identifying potential differences between US and ROK priorities and what steps can be taken to mitigate and address these differences before a crisis;
5. Considering new concepts of operation that can address the need to rapidly neutralize KPA forces, insurgents and WMD; and (i.e., striking suspected sites beyond coalition physical control; accepting greater operational risk to deployed forces to buy down strategic risk; attempting to use airborne, marine forces, or special operations forces to move beyond the forward edge of battle and secure key people and facilities in order to locate and eliminate adversary weapons; etc.); and
6. Identifying resources, capabilities, authorities and forces needed to operationalize these new concepts of operation.

These tasks are challenging. Nevertheless, they are necessary for the US-ROK coalition to better prepare for possible regime collapse in North Korea and ultimately neutralize the WMD threat posed to the United States and South Korea. Of course, having sound assumptions and a functioning planning process will only do so much. Any kind of WMD-elimination operation in North Korea,

either following a collapse or during warfighting, will likely be a bloody, protracted affair that will be plagued by setbacks, losses, possible WMD employment and the fog of war. As military planners from Von Moltke to Eisenhower have noted, plans themselves are rarely useful, but the process of planning is indispensable. It is time for the counter-WMD community to re-examine the major questions and assumptions surrounding the WMD-elimination mission in Korea, and update their plans accordingly. Such updates are necessary to prevent catastrophic failure during an elimination operation.

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US-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins SAIS
Johns Hopkins University
1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, 6th Fl
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