

## Deterrence Theories and Their Applications to the ROK

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**Abstract:** The goals of this research are to appraise the ROK's conventional deterrence posture and to find a few prerequisites in enhancing its effect. For this, I test the ROK's deterrence posture employing six independent variables. According to research results, the conflicts between the two Koreas were international conflicts rather than a kind of civil war, so, they were not usually solved by the individual nations themselves. This situation shows the complexity of any conflict between the two Koreas that originates in its geostrategic location surrounded by the four great powers. This unfavorable situation positively coincides with deterrence theory as in a state of mutual deterrence. Under this security environment, the DPRK consistently commits small scale conventional provocations. In deterring these kinds of provocations, the prerequisites for the success of the ROK's conventional deterrence are to establish the mind-set of its population, to create a new counter-provocation phase for middle intensity conflicts and to revise a practical Armistice Rules of Engagement.

**Key words:** Deterrence theory, security environment of the Korean Peninsula, operational control authority, ROK's counter-strategy, ROK's rules of engagement, DPRK's conventional provocations

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### INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) is periodically revising its conventional deterrence strategy to deter any invasions and provocations instigated by the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) in peacetime which will be managed without escalating into a general war. From one perspective, it can be said that, the conventional deterrence system has worked successfully because there has not been a full-scale war between the two Koreas. However, from the other perspective, it is difficult to accept that view, because there have been many conventional provocations including North Korea's attempt to assassinate ROK President Park Chung-Hee on January 17, 1968, the killing with axes of two US officers who were cutting down a tree in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) on August 18, 1976 and the multiple collisions in the vicinity of the Northern Limit Line (NLL).

Despite the numerous provocations, the ROK has received expressions of regret from the North Korean political regime only 5 times including a statement in August 2015, following 4 days of talks between high level negotiators representing North and South Korea (Sang-Ho, 2015). Although, the latter was represented in what was presented as a mutual statement, there were no signatures by representatives of both sides. Similarly,

among the 5 expressions of regret, only following the 1976 brutal axe incident did the leader of the DPRK, Kim Il-Sung send an official letter of apology to the United Nations Command (UNC) and he only did so to prevent the crisis from escalating into a conventional war. The letter was sent just one hour before the UNC intended to attack (Kim, 2012). From this perspective, it is not easy to say that even the deterrence strategy of the ROK-US alliance, let alone the ROK government itself has worked properly.

In this regard, the goals of this research are to appraise the ROK's conventional deterrence posture in peacetime and to find a few prerequisites in enhancing its effect. For this, I test the ROK's deterrence posture using six independent variables and address potential solutions as prerequisites for establishing the most effective conventional deterrence posture.

### Literature review

**Theoretical background and framework:** In the October 10, 2018 after math of the emergence of deterrence theories, the spectrum of such theories expanded gradually from only nuclear related to conventional and crisis matters. In particular, after the end of the Cold War, the theories became applicable to every armed conflict in international relations (Zagare and Kilgour, 2000). The basic principle of deterrence theory as

it was originally conceived is that dangerously aggressive adversaries should be punished to such an extent that they are deterred from repeating a provocation. For some time, the theory was criticized as logically inconsistent and empirically inaccurate and deficient (Zagare, 2004).

To date, war has been fundamentally discredited as an effective method of achieving national interests, at least in the developed countries where what is most highly desired is prosperity in economy and welfare. With this atmosphere inversion many scholars have interested themselves in different deterrence theories rather than the skills of waging war and they have published many articles and books. Among these (Zagare and Kilgour, 2000) perfect deterrence is remarkable. These authors correctly identified the problems and logical mistakes of previous deterrence theories and suggested better ones. Nonetheless, in my view, their theories lack viable options for how one side can successfully deter the other. The researchers seem to have overlooked the roles of military force (defense, deterrence, compellence, etc.) as well as the concept of low-intensity conflicts that occurred in the visible and manifest tension phases of the related escalations (Snyder and Diesing, 1977). In this sense, the roles of military forces in peace time and the phases of crisis management should be considered implicit background knowledge in this research.

It is not easy to find perfect conditions for deterring an adversary's provocations using existing theories. In this situation, the research by Signorino and Tarar (2006) who emphasized the factors that affect the success or failure of deterrence, is remarkable. These authors based their approach on the theoretical deterrence model for their statistical empirical analysis (Signorino and Tarar, 2006). In their research, they suggested the conditions that affect successful deterrence such as military alliances, the long-term and immediate balance of forces, nuclear weapons, military arms transfers, foreign trade and regime type. These factors are purely related to how to deter opponents in peace time before there are any real actions or threats.

In addition to the above, there is a work regarding the peace period after the end of a dispute. Senese and Quackenbush (2003) found that peace periods following imposed settlements in the form of unilateral deterrence were usually longer than those following negotiated settlements and they demonstrated this finding by analyzing 2,536 dyadic militarized interstate conflict settlements between 1816 and 1992. Furthermore, for the longer peace periods, the researchers highlighted the importance of imposed settlements in unilateral deterrence situations compared with other factors, e.g., regime type, relative capability, shifts in relative capability, contiguity,

decisive outcomes and war. In other words, they empirically concluded that the best method for achieving the most effective deterrence result against provocation, though not a panacea, is proper punishment using military force.

In this sense, it is necessary to examine the deterrence theories regarding punishment for provocation. The debate that physical punishment using armed forces could be justified has been a long-standing one throughout history of mankind under the theory of Just War in the contemporary ear, Just War is only possible in the form of self-defense under the authority of the UN Charter. Stated differently, punishing a potential offender before real damage using armed forces is not readily accepted as a justified action.

An additional matter is the retaliation procedures and strength when a provocation occurs. Ellis (2003) divided authorization into three types: suspected (the offense was completed), real aggressor (the offender had fully committed himself to his course of action) and administering punishment. He concluded that "one's self-defensive strategy would be optimized within the restraining considerations" (Ellis, 2003). However, Ellis (2003) is criticized by Sprague (2004) using the point that Ellis "makes punishment 'semi-automatic' rather than automatic like M-punishment" (Sprague, 2004). In my view, this criticism might have resulted from the case Ellis used about the criminal justice system. In the deterrence theories (Quinn, 1985) suggested the notion of automatic retaliation to prevent armed conflict. He posited that one will automatically execute retaliatory harm against another who violates one's rights under the name of 'M-punishment' (Quinn, 1985).

The debate between Ellis and Sprague implies the importance of policy decision-maker's wills and statements by explaining the differences in punishment procedures between legislators and others. In Ellis's response article to Sprague, he emphasizes the actor's behaviors specifically that they perform their own missions with justification in legitimate self-defense without asking whether or how much the offender is to be punished (Ellis, 2005). This is, according to Ellis, a fairly automated system.

Whereas Ellis (2005) referred to the system horizontally by examining the actions of same-level functional agents in a government, the wills of decision makers on vertical military command channels should be hierarchically analyzed in deciding on physical punishment for an offender's provocation. It is true that, a reaction by the defender should be automatically applied to the offender's provocation in real time. There is however, a possibility that the final decision can be delayed based on the propensity of a specific decision maker. This delay can lessen the effects of punitive

measures for deterrence in terms of the subsequent peace period and the offender's additional threat, unlike with Ellis's automatic system.

From the careful theoretical examination on deterrence theories, I extracted the following four points: deterrence theory became one of the most useful theories among not only the scholars but also the policy makers of divided states such as the ROK in the post-Cold War era, for the success of deterrence policy and for evaluating a state's deterrence posture, it is necessary to examine all conditions that affect deterrence, to increase the effect of deterrence, it is better to impose an amount of physical punishment than to negotiate for settlement. Paradoxically, deterrence systems work properly with credible physical sanctions as Ellis, Quinn and Sprague's theories implied, the wills, statements and decisions of the policy makers are very important in the process implementing deterrence.

Judging from the standpoints of Signorino and Tarar (2006) it is inevitable to investigate the specific security environment to examine the ROK's conventional deterrence posture. I would say, as conceived, that the situation on the Korean Peninsula is unique compared with those in other countries. As implied in the current cease-fire agreement between the UN Command (UNC) in Korea and the representatives of the PRC (People's Republic of China) and the DPRK from 1953, the 6.25 Korean War of the 1950's is not completely over.

As an influence of the cease-fire, the operational command system of the ROK armed forces is separated into two categories: the US-ROK Alliance in wartime and the ROK itself in peacetime. More specifically, when the Defense Condition (DEFCON) III which is divided into five phases, is issued most of the ROK military are commanded by the Commander of the Combined Forces Command (CFC).

In addition, the ROK Ministry of National Defense (MND) established the Rules of Engagement (ROE) to provide retaliation guidelines for its subordinate military troops. The main purpose of the ROE is to prevent a small provocation from escalating into a major war, however, its real usage is to ensure that the military forces automatically react against all armed actions from North Korea. From this perspective, the utility of the ROE is, at first glance, to regulate an appropriate level of punishment as a threat of retaliation for deterrence as posited by Anthony Ellis. However, upon careful examination, the concept of the ROE is slightly different from that of Ellis's deterrence theory of punishment and is closer to that of Quinn.

In the long run, in order to analyze the ROK's conventional deterrence posture, the general factors initiated by the theorists and the specific variables that directly influence to the decisions for reaction produced

by relevant decision makers must be considered. Therefore, in this research, I test the ROK's conventional deterrence posture using a total of six independent variables at two levels: general variables, the security environment, the balance of forces and military alliance relations and specific variables (selected purely from the ROK military operational system), counter-strategy, rules of engagement and decision-maker's guidance. The criteria for this level separation is whether each variable is controlled by the ROK itself or not.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**General independent variables:** A. Security Environment During the Cold War era, the Korean Peninsula was one of the most important zones globally. The four super powers of the time (The US, The USSR, The PRC and Japan) faced each other where their borders and security interests intersected (Trofimenko, 1989). However, the dynamic balance of superpowers in the post-Cold War era has slightly narrowed to the influence of the US and the PRC. This balance became particularly vital following the shift in US Foreign policy's main interest from the Middle East to the Asia Pacific region, what we call, the pivot to Asia, at the beginning of 2012 (Panetta, 2012).

A good example of these power dynamics is the six-party talks which aimed to find a peaceful resolution for North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The first round started from August 27 to 29, 2003 and six rounds were held by 2007. After that, the talks could not continue owing to the DPRK's satellite launch on April 5, 2009, following its third nuclear test. In addition, the interests of the four superpowers toward North Korea were slightly different in terms of the strength of sanctions. As shown in the four United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions including resolution 2270 in March 2016, China played a key role in the sanctions as a member of both the six-party talks and the Security Council. Despite the efforts of the ROK and the US in close cooperation based on the norm of the nonproliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) for stronger sanctions, the main impediment remained China (Kim and Chun, 2016).

On the contrary, the general balance of power in terms of diplomatic relationships and treaties ratified in the Cold War era has changed, the ROK ratified diplomatic relations with Russia and the PRC in the early 1990's. As a result, the concept arose of a de facto alliance between the DPRK and the PRC and/or Russia that charged that if one party faced a war situation, the other party would immediately support it. This was clearly stated in the bilateral Amicable Cooperation and Mutual Assistant Treaties between the DPRK and the PRC and

the DPRK and USSR that were ratified in the early 1960's. However, today, the concept is almost regarded as dead. This means that the possibility of a general conventional war between the ROK-US and the DPRK-PRC and/or Russia is significantly obsolete.

Put simply, the balance of power in the Far East is becoming more dynamic, autonomous and less predictable than it was during the Cold War. This occurred because whenever North Korea increases the security uncertainty by testing its nuclear and missile capabilities, China helps it by limiting the effects of the UNSC sanctions rather than controlling or dictating the PRC's behaviors. China continues its fundamental economic assistance to North Korea despite the fact that the interests of both regarding North Korea's nuclear weapons are incompatible (Twomey, 2008). China regards North Korea as more of a burden than a benefit, nonetheless, it wants to preserve the country's stability simultaneously (Nanto and Manyin, 2010). This demonstrates China's increased influence in the field of regional security, not just the economy (Jeong, 2012).

**The balance of forces:** The military confrontation between South and North Korea is not simple. Despite South Korea's very considerable military power, it always feels insecure because of the DPRK's periodic tests of nuclear and long-range missiles as well as its frequent conventional provocations. Moreover, North Korea's national goal, "unification of the two Koreas under communist control," supported by the Military First Policy on the basis of the Juche ideology has not yet changed and will continue at least under the Kim Jong-Un regime (MND., 2006). Thus, in order to examine the balance between the forces, it is necessary to compare the nuclear and conventional capabilities not only of the two Koreas but also of the allied military forces, particularly the military reinforcement that the US plans to deploy long term under future war conditions.

**Nuclear capability:** In January 2003, North Korea withdrew from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and as such, it does not officially hold the status of a nuclear power, nonetheless, all states recognize that the DPRK holds a nuclear arsenal similar to those of Israel, Pakistan and India. In the ROK's 2016 Defense White Paper, it is estimated that North Korea possesses about 50kg of plutonium and the paper concludes that a highly enriched uranium program is underway (MND., 2006).

On the contrary, the ROK has not attempted to hold a nuclear arsenal regardless of its tactical or strategic observations of the NPT regime. Hence, to defend against an outside nuclear attack, South Korea must depend on

the nuclear capability of the US under extended nuclear deterrence commitments. Put simply, it is clear that the ROK's deterrence posture against North Korea's nuclear threat depends solely on the nuclear and conventional capabilities of the US.

Technically speaking, in the early stage of this issue it was seen that the crisis engendered by North Korea's nuclear program was a kind of conflict between American world strategy and North Korean survival strategy (Namkoong, 2003). However, the condition has shifted into a power game between the US and China, especially, after the ROK's decision to deploy a battery of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense weapon system in the country (Jun, 2017). The characteristics of this game are a good example of the dynamics of power politics and of the complexity of the strategic configuration in Northeast Asia.

**Conventional military power:** According to a report, the Korean People's Army (KPA) ranks in personnel numbers as the fourth largest in the world. Four to five percent of North Korea's population serve on active duty and a further 25-30% are assigned to a reserve or paramilitary unit (Anonymous, 2016). However, the military strength of North Korea as evaluated by the 2016 Global Firepower (GFP) ranks 25th whereas that of South Korea ranks 11th (Department of Defence Australia, 2016). The KPA is ranked so much lower despite being the fourth largest in personnel as the result of shortages in logistics, aging equipment and poor training.

Nonetheless, there is no certainty that South Korea could achieve victory in a general war between the two Koreas because the ranking does not have guarantee success. Moreover, even though South Korea's personnel strength is undeniably insufficient in numbers, it will be reinforced by the US forces under the 1954 ROK-US Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement in 1954. In particular, after the third nuclear test by North Korea and diverse provocations in the Northwest Islands area, the range of augmentation was expanded into all spectrums of local provocations and aggression types by the ROK-US Combined-Provocation Plan signed in March 2013. Consequently, the ROK and the DPRK each feel insecure against the other's military strength and cannot help hesitating to launch a general war and these recognitions are creating the best conventional deterrence conditions.

**Military alliance relations:** From the standpoint of the US-ROK alliance, its importance cannot be disregarded compared with the PRC-DPRK alliance. Despite the fact that the four states are all in the alliance, the former is a

stationed-type alliance under which US forces constantly serve in Korea but the latter is not. Thus, the role and activities of the US forces in Korea (USFK) in peacetime is very important because of the Operational Command Authority (OCA) relationship with the ROK. For this reason, the USFK has not directly engaged or participated in any kind of peace time punishments.

In the course of analyzing the lessons of the previously mentioned axe incident in 1978 the ROK and the US governments agreed to establish the ROK-US Combined Forces Command to command the USFK. Since then, the commander of the CFC has held the additional office of commander of the UNC which governs the OCA and commands and controls most of the ROK armed forces.

The ROK government continuously negotiated with the US to hand over the OCA from the CFC and with gradual effort, the ROK took the OCA during peace time on 1 December 1994. Subsequently, both governments agreed to hand over the OCA in war time by 17 April 2012, at the 38th ROK-US Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) in 2007 under the Participatory Government which was relatively progressive. However, the transfer did not occur and was delayed without a time restriction under the current government. One of the reasons was a split in public opinion; according to the results of a public survey by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, the public opinion over the debate on the US returning the OCA to the ROK is fairly even: 31.4% favored it but 32.7% opposed it Kang (2013). Progressives supported the transfer while conservatives did not and consequently, the transfer process fluctuated according to the political party in power.

In the meantime, measures to conduct future war or to deter provocation are continuously developed by improving the strategic environment, i.e., weakening the PRC-DPRK alliance, enhancing the combined command system of the ROK-US alliance (such as revising the CFC structure), establishing the combined/joint operation concept and Operations Plan 5015 (Lee, 2015). Actually, the ROK and the US agreed to make a new plan for a preemptive war against NK's WMD Weapons in 2010 and the plan was signed in June 2015. Among these, the Operational Plans (OPLANs) are divided into various categories according to the types and objectives (Yoon, 2011). As seen in the commanding structure and the numerous plans, the measures adopted by the ROK-US alliance to prevent North Korea from provoking or invading activities mainly focus on the level of general war, not contingency situations.

In addition, the two governments have agreed and continuously reconfirmed to react against an irregular or

non-conventional war. For example, the Ulchi-Focus Lens was an ROK-US combined exercise that was initiated in 1976 to address any irregular or conventional invasion and even though the name was altered to the Ulchi-Freedom Guardian in 2008, the purpose did not change at all. Moreover, the US Defense Secretary and the ROK National Defense Minister regularly announced fundamental mutual countermeasures to any kind of provocation. For example, William Perry of the US Defense Secretary and Kim Dong-jin of the ROK National Defense Minister in the 28th ROK-US Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) reconfirmed the above basic principle (Kim, 1996).

However, countermeasures in peace time have not been executed except in areas related to exercises, trainings and announcements. Put succinctly, whenever an irregular provocation occurred, it was not the ROK-US alliance forces that reacted but the ROK military itself under the name of JINDO-GAE. This refers to the ROK's defense against North Korea's irregular provocation and consists of three phases. In ordinary times when there is no signal or provocation at all, the condition is the third phase; the worst case, such as North Korea's bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island is the first phase. In contrast, the defense readiness conditions for regular or conventional war are the same as those of the US. The primary outcome of the JINDO-GAE proclamation may have been the previous ROK governments' decisions not to escalate provocations into general war.

### **Specific independent variables**

**ROK's counter strategy:** In this era, particularly from the 1990's to the present day, since, the OCA transition discussion has been ongoing, the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) has continuously endeavored to establish a proper military strategy to confront incidents with its own capabilities. With constant effort, the armed forces, especially, the navy and marines, succeeded in blocking and limiting North Korea's provocative actions in the northwestern islands and defending against infiltration multiple times. However, the nation's defense posture was and is always passive rather than active. Here, 'active' would entail retaliation up to the level of completely stopping any kind of provocative actions.

In numerous incidents in the past, the roles and missions of the USFK were always to prevent incidents from escalating into major war, consequently, in the armed conflicts between the two Koreas, the provocations never escalated and were always managed. In other words, whenever there was an incident, they had problems addressing it because of not only the danger of escalation but also the constraint of the OCA. Put simply, although,

the defense posture of the ROK-US alliance is effective for war time, the ROK conventional defense posture has limitations within the policy-making system for deciding on severe punishments against a wide range of offensive actions.

The ROK MND's Defense White Paper 2006 stressed an omnidirectional readiness posture that braced the country for any possible armed provocation to protect it from external military threats. It describes three kinds of readiness postures:

- Infiltrations and local provocations
- Full-scale war
- Terrorist attacks

Among them, only in the second case which includes both a full-scale war and reacting to North Korea's nuclear weapons development, the CFC will employ the combat power of the USFK and the US augmentation forces that are dispatched in war time. As mentioned above, discussions of the OCA transfer from the CFC to the ROK JCS were intensive during that period. However, despite the consensus aim to jointly deter provocations, it seems that the higher officials of the ROK MND did not take into consideration the use of the USFK in the first and third cases (MND, 2006).

Under this ROK MND policy, the JCS published the Joint Operational Concept Paper 2008-2022 in 2006 for the first time in the ROK's military history in order to outline the fighting concepts in the planning documentation. The revised Joint Operational Concept Paper 2012-2026 released in 2010 which specifies the environmental factors that would affect future joint operations, reexamines future warfare aspects by detailing the operational concepts for employing armed forces. The latter simplified the five operational phases into three: peace time, limited or local war time and full-scale war time. The peace time phase absorbed peacekeeping and enforcement operations overseas and domestic government and civil support operations.

The ROK JCS does not have any authority to command the USFK, consequently, there are continuous disjunctions between plans and their execution in using available force to counter provocations. This could be a dilemma for defense policy makers that originates from the upper independent variables, particularly geo-strategic configuration.

**Rules of engagement:** Under the above undeniable ambiguity, the most influential regulation against provocation is the ROE approved by the highest military commander, i.e., the chairman of the JCS/ Commander in

Chief of the CFC and recognized by the political leader, i.e., the national president. The ROE is defined as "the set of directives given to commanders in the field to guide them on the circumstances and manner in which force may be used" (Sagan, 1991). It is divided into two parts, the Armistice Rules of Engagement (AROE) and Wartime Rules of Engagement (WROE). The former was initially established at the end of the 6.25 Korean War under the principles of sufficiency and proportionality, the latter is described in Operational Plan 5027 in the form of an appendix for future wars. As a result, commanders can react within their unit's capabilities without specific limitations or constraints except for the regulations put in place by international laws or agreements, the UN Charter and so on.

Apart from the WROE, the transitions of the AROE are significant for evaluating the ROK's deterrence posture. With continual provocations, the AROE was gradually amended on a case-by-case basis but the principles were not fundamentally modified until the bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island in 2010. For example, there was a minor alteration of the AROE in the dimension of naval maneuvers without changes to the above two principles because of the three naval conflicts in the vicinity of the NLL (it was unilaterally set by the UNC in August 1953 after the armistice agreement. Thereby, in 1973, NK began to insist that it was necessary to reset the line according to international law and further strengthened its insistence after the proclamation of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982) (Jung, 2010). During the first two, in 1999 and 2002, the naval ships' maneuver orders against the provocation by North Korea's naval ships consisted of five steps:

- Warning
- Demonstration movement
- Blocking
- Warning shot
- Destroying shot

The ROK navy did not succeed in the second naval conflict in 2002 because the leading naval warship, Chamsuri 357 was seriously damaged by North Korea's naval gunshots during the blocking step. After this conflict, the ROK navy changed its ROE by reducing the response from five steps to three, eliminating the unnecessary ones:

- Warning/demonstration
- Warning shot
- Destroying shot

With this swift amendment, the ROK navy achieved a great victory in the third naval battle at Daecheong Island in 2009. Unlike this minor amendment in the level of the navy's service, the KPA's bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island served as a momentum to intrinsically revise the AROE. It was an epoch-making provocation that required amending the AROE because of the two civilian victims as well as the method of provocation; for the first time, a direct artillery bombing occurred on the ROK's territory including a civilian residential district. Under the AROE at the time, the ROK unit was able to reshoot maximum double shells with the same kinds of weapons under the judgment of the commander and the ROK marine's counterattack with 80 shells from three K9 self-propelled howitzers was the best option. Nonetheless, criticisms of this counterattack are as follows:

Firstly, the counterattack was too weak. Regardless of the fact that the DPRK's relevant marine unit was armed with only 6 K9 self-propelled howitzers, with two damaged and one blocked, the ROK's 80 shell counterattack was less than half of the 170 shells fired by North Korea. In order to compel a change in the DPRK's actions, the ROK's reaction to an attack should be sufficient to strongly discourage North Korea from additional attacks, not only for the original source of provocation but also for higher levels of command. Put simply, the criticism focuses on the point that an inadequate response might invite further provocation.

Secondly, the readiness posture of the ROK air forces was called into question. The deployed fighters, F-15's and F-16's did not attack the enemy's hardened artillery sites because North Korea did not launch an additional attack. However, many political and military commentators opined that the ROK had clearly missed an opportunity to deter North Korea from other provocations by showing its defense readiness to fully destroy the source of provocation (Yoon, 2011).

Lastly, despite the unimaginable bombardment on Yeonpyeong Island, ROK territory, the government did not declare DEFCON III, under which the OCA for most of the ROK armed forces would be transferred to the Commander of the CFC but instead declared the highest phase, the first JINDO-GAE which is for an irregular conflict or local war. In other words, the ROK government wanted to manage the conflict under its own ability.

With the above criticisms, the ROK and the US agreed in 2010 to develop a plan for local provocation counter-operations. The chairmen of the two nation's JCS then signed a new plan on March 22, 2013, that took effect at that time. The key premise of the agreement is that the

ROK armed forces in a leading role could target North Korea's commanding power with the support of the USFK (Lee, 2012). Judging from this, the speculation that the US doubted the ROK's will to attack the enemy's higher command and cave fortifications for artillery during the Yeonpyeong Island bombardment might have been warranted given that the US accepted the ROK's proposal to employ the USFK even in peace time (Thae, 2017). Consequently, it was true that the AROE and the intensity of a counterattack would both be unimaginably strengthened.

Nonetheless, it is still questionable whether the US forces support the ROK without any limitations under the principle of sufficiency considering the geostrategic configuration of Northeast Asia. Since, the plan was established, North Korea has not provided any clues regarding direct attacks by the two nation's forces. Furthermore, it seems that the country changed its provocation methods from conventional incitement to nuclear and missile tests. In this situation, it may be difficult to implement the plan under real-world circumstances, particularly in terms of US support by the armed forces.

**Decision maker's guidance:** As indicated throughout the complex relationships between and within the above independent variables, the decision-makers' guidance was allegedly frequently unclear and the main reason for this unclear guidance might have been the fear of escalating a provocative conflict into a general war. The politician's mind-sets always vacillate between resolute response and preventing escalation and this might be an undeniable truth for all parties including the relevant US and ROK officials. In this situation, it is difficult to imagine that the basic instincts of human beings such as primordial violence and the primacy of military over political leaders posited by Clausewitz would work to retaliate against North Korea's military provocation. The other factors of the trinity are absolutely controlled by the politicians in peace time under the civilian control system.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Evaluation and solutions:** This research has so far discussed three general and three specific independent variables that derive from not only the deterrence theories but also the specific security environment of the Korean Peninsula. As Most and Starr stated, "the specification of a necessary and sufficient theory requires that all aspects of a security relationship should be accounted for" (Zagare and Kilgour, 2000) and these variables might be insufficient for examining the ROK's deterrence posture.

However, even though, they are not sufficient, the research results expose most of the problems and solutions in deterring a provocation instigated by North Korea.

In the early 1960's, Kenneth E. Boulding classified the possible outcomes of international conflicts into six categories: avoidance or voluntary withdrawal, violent conquest, submission or effective deterrence, compromise, award and passive settlement (Holsti, 1995). The conflicts between the two Koreas were clearly international conflicts rather than a kind of civil war because each is an independent state with its own political identity. Furthermore, even though, the conflicts took place between the two Koreas, they were not usually solved by the individual nations themselves. In my view, they were narrowly tripartite crisis games as seen in the UNSC's decisions after North Korea's provocations and nuclear tests or they regularly included the US and China and sometimes Japan and Russia. This situation shows the complexity of any conflict between the two Koreas that originates in its geostrategic location surrounded by the four great powers.

As the characteristic of conflicts suggest, it is not easy to classify the results of conflicts between the two Koreas into 6 categories. As I described in the introduction, despite the innumerable provocations by North Korea, South Korea only received an official expression of regret on one occasion that could possibly have been classified as a kind of compromise. Including this letter, most results of the previous conflicts were unsatisfactory to the ROK government and population. In other words, when North Korea provoked South Korea, moves usually ended without clear results in terms of Boulding's classifications and this lack of clarity might stem from the geostrategic configuration formed by the four superpowers and two Koreas in Northeast Asia.

The Cold War ended without any major wars between the superpowers. Nonetheless, in tandem with its national goals and military strategy, North Korea will provoke South Korea again in the near future. Through the present day, the DPRK has maintained a pattern of behavior that is designed to regularly intimate and provoke South Korea using continuously changing methods, areas and/or weapons. One piece of evidence that supports this logic is a statement by Thae Yong-ho, North Korea's former deputy ambassador to the UK, who defected to South Korea. He warned on radio on January 3, 2017, that peace in the Korean Peninsula without actively countering any North Korean provocation will not be guaranteed (Thae, 2017). It seems that North Korean leaders believe that periodic provocations contribute to reinforcing the credibility of the country's deterrence by demonstrating a willingness to risk war (McDevitt, 2011).

Under this unfavorable situation, the ROK's conventional deterrence posture is still defined as ambiguous regardless of whoever strongly denies this. As such, North Korea can create a mood of insecurity in South Korea's population and this fear would spread to other areas such as the economy, diplomacy and cultural transactions. This unsettled security environment positively coincides with deterrence theory and I would conclude that the Korean Peninsula is in a state of mutual deterrence. From this perspective, this research has its own value in that I study the ROK's conventional deterrence posture and seek potential solutions to improve the country's readiness and execution.

From the perspective of the theory posited by Senese and Quackenbush (2003), their finding that peace periods following imposed settlements in the form of unilateral deterrence were usually longer than those following negotiated settlements does not account for the naval conflicts between the two Koreas from 1999-2010. When the KPA navy was defeated in the third naval battle, on Daecheong Island in 2009, the DPRK provoked the sinking of the Cheonan naval ship and the bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island within a year, in 2010. However, when the DPRK forces won the second naval battle in 2002, the country did not provoke again for six years, until 2009. Paradoxically, this result means that the security environment of the Korean Peninsula is completely different from those of other opposing countries.

The research results by each independent variable are as follows. In terms of nuclear capability, in the event of a nuclear conflict between the two Koreas, the US will provide the ROK with extended deterrence using its full range of military capabilities including its nuclear umbrella. In reality, the ROK and the US reconfirm this extended deterrence for the ROK at the Security Consultative Meeting convened in Seoul or Washington every other year (MND., 2006). With the US security commitment, North Korea's nuclear attack will be deterred. In contrast, however, in the area of conventional military strength, it is undeniable that the KPA lacks the capability to impose huge damage on South Korea because of resource insufficiency (including fuel and food) and the decrepitude of its weapons such as aircrafts, battleships and tanks. Nevertheless, in order to achieve its national goal, the DPRK consistently commits numerous small-scale provocations and poaching such as the artillery bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island. From these perspectives, the threats are credible and real and as such, the fundamental need for deterrence equilibrium has been undeniably established.

From the standpoints of Lawler *et al.* (1988) South Korea's total coercive (punitive) capacity is greater than



that of North Korea particularly in terms of alliance relationships. Yet, even in this unequal condition, South Korea's military retaliation against North Korea's provocation is paradoxically limited because of the alliance relationship in terms of the OCA. In addition, the military capabilities of both countries are sufficient for each to threaten the other and thus, each side wants to deter the other with oral, physical or operational plans to the extent that incidents will not escalate into full-scale war. This is the case because each can convince the other that the costs of both war and retaliation are in fact higher than those of patience and this situation forms the basic condition of mutual deterrence (Lebow and Stein, 1989).

The characteristics of the ROK's deterrence strategy are changing from hard to soft from the perspective of Zagare and Kilgour (2000). From time to time, the balance of the credibility of deterrence in the Korean Peninsula tilts, though the threats to both sides from conventional forces in the DMZ are still ongoing. Fundamentally, as the US Department of Defense's 2015 Annual Report to Congress stated, North Korea continuously demonstrates its willingness to provoke military tension on a smaller scale in order to achieve its national goal of reunification using military force (Anonymous, 2015). In contrast to these kinds of limited provocations, it is true that a general conventional war is deterred by the strength of the ROK-US alliance.

Considering the above analyses and evaluations, the most important point for increasing the ROK's deterrence is how to successfully deter North Korea's small-scale provocations. From this perspective, it is necessary to establish the following measures to increase the credibility of South Korea's deterrence posture:

Firstly, it is necessary to reestablish the mind-sets of the country's political and military leaders and its population. The former professor Joseph Nye explained that the main reason for major wars is fear of another's prosperity or military strength in examining the Peloponnesian War (Nye, 2009). Because of fear, ROK politicians hesitate to strongly punish interference from North Korea. Consequently, as Senese and Quackenbush show, it is essential that the ROK's punishment be sufficient to prevent North Korea from provoking again. For this, the starting point would be a mental reset by the political and military decision-makers who establish the reaction strength at the initial stage of conflicts. Furthermore, it seems likely that an automatic retaliation system would affect whether the opponent's decision-makers hesitate in initiating a violation.

Secondly, reflecting on the types and natures of future wars, it is better to classify the ROK JCS's two reaction phases for conflict during peace and war time

into three: deterrence posture in peace time, counter-provocation in middle-intensity conflicts and war. As indicated in the national military strategy and the US report, North Korea's provocations will occur repeatedly with the development of new methods, tools and means. Thus, considering these factors, the best option for the ROK to counter these provocations is to react with its own military power with the potential support of the US forces within a range that prevents the provocations from escalating into general wars. To achieve this level of retaliation, it appears that creating a new operational area for medium-level conflicts is inevitable as a punitive deterrence phase between JINDO-GAE in peace time and DEFCON in war. For these conflicts, the operational authority for the ROK military forces does not transfer to the CFC and the USFK's readiness to support a military reaction is guaranteed.

Thirdly, revising the AROE is imperative, this is of utmost importance to the relevant commanders who initially react to conflicts. In the process of conflict escalation, Michael Handel's observation regarding "grant(ing) the commander enough freedom of action possible to make the best possible suitable decision under his own initiative" (Handel, 2001) is very important. One factor that makes this possible is a reasonable AROE, one that is sufficiently flexible that the commander can react without waiting for directives by upper political or military leaders. In my view, a more significant action would be AROE exercises that consider the numerous and diverse types of provocations.

## CONCLUSION

As Zagare and Kilgour wrote, there is a strong possibility that the status quo may not hold because North Korea may not be willing to provoke again judging from the results of the naval collisions in the vicinity of the NLL and the bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island. However, it is true that the policy makers are frequently accused of having no plan, specifically, no appropriate strategies to counter North Korea's continuously changing provocation methods. Accordingly, considering the geostrategic configuration and current international atmosphere, the ROK should execute counterattacks with the purpose of not retribution but deterrence and this is the main cause of the ROK defense policy-maker's dilemma and of the absence of strategic minds at the same time (Philips, 1986).

It is true that the previous provocations propelled the ROK-US alliance to engage in more integrated counter-operational planning for responses to future incidents such as establishing new operational plans and adopting

a practical AROE (Manyin, 2016). However, as long as the geostrategic environment does not change and the OCA in war time belongs to the CFC, this disoriented reaction plan and the unsettled AROE between political and military leaders will remain in place.

In order to resolve this unfavorable condition, the best possible option is to add a new counter-provocation as a middle-intensity conflict phase. With this additional phase, the ROK can pursue at least two highly meaningful benefits: reliability in terms of choosing appropriate countering means and retaliation intensity related to how much the ROK's military can participate in a counterattack without considering the CFC's authority (i.e., the US's will). The most important matter, nonetheless, is to remove the fear of escalation from the minds of political and military leaders as well as the population.

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