

Red Diamond

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ON THE COVER: The Arch of Reunification.

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Korea: Land of the Morning Calm Democratic People's Republic of Korea: The Hermit Kingdom

By LTC (Ret) Andrew M. Johnson, TRADOC G2



Korea is an ancient land, with shared traditions, language, and bloodlines across the peninsula. Korea has a long history of foreign conquest and rule,¹ principally by the Chinese and then by the Japanese, most recently during the first half of the 20th century (1910-1945). Since the end of the Second World War Korea has been divided politically and militarily, with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north under the influence of the Eastern communist powers of first Russia and then China, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south under the influence of the democratic West, namely the United States. Following partition in 1945, both Koreas began as authoritarian states, but the ROK gradually evolved into a capitalist democracy while the DPRK was founded as a communist state and evolved from Marxism through Maoism to “*Kimilsungism*,”² its own unique form of authoritarian collectivism. Largely as a result of these competing influences, since 1950 Korea has been engaged and then suspended in the longest ongoing armed conflict on the globe. Partition, war, and political ideology have largely isolated the DPRK from much of the world, while the ROK has become a regional power and an economic power on the world stage. As a result of the longstanding and multi-faceted relationship between the United States and the ROK, the Korean Peninsula as a whole and the DPRK specifically are OEs of vital interest. This vital interest has only intensified in recent years as the DPRK has pursued the development of nuclear weapons and inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

The DPRK OE is unique, complex, and isolated from its neighbors and the rest of the world. Due to the complexity of the DPRK OE, this overview is not exhaustive, but it is meant to be comprehensive. To accomplish this aim, the overview is organized by the Socio-Cultural Analysis Framework (SCAF), a population-centric framework for analysis developed by the Global Cultural Knowledge Network (GCKN) and based on the operational variables of PMESII-PT.¹ Due to the length of this article, each SCAF domain (Political, Security, Economic, Population, Society, Cultural, Infrastructure, Communication, and Geography) will consist of a summary, instead of the full deep dive analysis for which SCAF was developed. The intent is that this overview, together with the subsequent articles in this issue of the *Red Diamond*, should give the reader a broad picture of the DPRK OE with several points of detailed focus and provide topics and sources for further research to better inform realistic training and exercises.

Political

The DPRK is a socialist authoritarian police state. That is the simple description, but there is a lot more to the DPRK politically, which makes it unique in the world. First administered by the Soviet Union following World War II, from 1948 until 1994 the DPRK was ruled by Kim Il-sung, a Moscow-educated communist and former anti-Japanese partisan who built a cult of personality around himself that eventually fostered his own particular brand of communism. While the Kim regime had the structures and trappings of a communist state, power within the DPRK

¹As a geo-political construct, PMESII-PT is useful to describe an operational environment, but is not sufficient to explain the socio-cultural aspects of that OE. The SCAF modifies the PMESII-PT framework in four ways to better provide those socio-cultural explanations:

1. The SCAF domain 'Security' expands the PMESII-PT category 'Military' to include all armed and unarmed coercive groups in a society, including law enforcement, pro and anti-government paramilitaries and militias, criminal elements, labor, religious, and other coercive civic organizations.
2. SCAF splits the PMESII-PT category of 'Social' into three separate domains: 'Society,' 'Population' and 'Culture.' This enables the detailed examination necessary for comprehensive socio-cultural analysis of the OE.
3. SCAF expands upon the PMESII-PT category 'Information' under the domain of 'Communication' to explain how knowledge is transmitted, received, and interpreted within a culture.
4. Socio-cultural aspects of the PMESII-PT category of 'Time' is included in the SCAF Cultural Domain.

increasingly was held and wielded by Kim or at his direction by a small group of elites. Eventually, Kim took control over virtually all aspects of life in the North.

Although objectively not a noteworthy guerrilla fighter, Kim's service against the Japanese was used to build his legitimacy among his fellow Northerners, and serve as the ultimate example of a nation-wide tradition of resistance to foreigners. His communistic ideal of collectivism for the common struggle became *Juche* – a way of thought and living that embodies self-reliance and sacrifice as a state, not as an individual, and in the service of the state, which in time became synonymous with Kim Il-sung.³ The legend of Kim Il-sung continued to be built over his lifetime, and gradually incorporated his designated heir, Kim Jong-il, in the years preceding Kim Il-sung's death in 1994. The current leader, Kim Jong-un, was added into the Kim family legend after Kim Jong-il suffered a stroke in 2008 until his death in 2011.

Since its founding in 1948, the DPRK and the Kim family regime have had two primary and inter-related goals: preserving the regime and unifying the Korean peninsula under Northern control.⁴ To achieve both of these goals, the regime has employed a four-pronged strategy of coercion, extortion, subversion and force,⁵ which has been applied internally and externally.

For more information on the political culture of the DPRK, see "The Nature of the Kim Family Regime: The Guerrilla Dynasty and Gulag State," by COL (Ret) David Maxwell, on page 18. For information on indicators and warnings for Kim regime instability, see "Summary of NSI's 'Assessment to Collapse in the DPRK: A NSI Pathways Report,'" by Dr. Nicole Laster, on page 28.

Security

The DPRK is a militarized police state with one of the largest militaries in the world, mandatory military service, and an internal security apparatus that permeates most aspects of life. Communist principles of self-criticism and reporting support the security infrastructure that is meant to maintain regime control over the population and virtually all aspects of the state. As such human security is fragile in the DPRK. The regime operates a large system of political prisons/gulags, which range from re-education camps to

hard labor sites whose inmates are under virtual or actual death sentences.⁶ The DPRK has one of the largest militaries in the world, with close to one million under arms and the ability to mobilize virtually the entire population due to near-universal mandatory military service and an extensive reserve system.⁷

For more on the military organization, capacity and capabilities of the DPRK see "North Korea Threat Actor Overview," (page 11) and "North Korea's Methods to Counter Enemy Wet Gap Crossings," (page 26) by H. David Pendleton, and the links to previous Red Diamond articles on North Korea on page 32. For more information on DPRK military strategy and culture, see "The Nature of the Kim Family Regime: The Guerrilla Dynasty and Gulag State," by COL (Ret) David Maxwell, on page 18. For more details on the DPRK surveillance culture, see "Challenges to Engaging the North Korean Population through Information Operations" by William Hardy, on page 23.

Economic

The DPRK began as a command economy under the tight control of Kim Il-sung. In the early 1970's, Kim saw the opportunity to use the global capitalist system to fund his regime and established overseas front companies through which various illicit economic ventures, from weapons proliferation, to counterfeiting, to drug and human trafficking, and more, were run.⁸

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 ended Soviet subsidies for the DPRK, which had offset the outcomes of years of disastrous agricultural policies. This was followed by severe droughts and subsequent flooding that caused the state agriculture and food distribution systems to virtually collapse, resulting in extensive starvation and malnutrition. To deflect blame and ensure regime survival, Kim Jong-il invoked *Juche* in calling for 'shared' sacrifice and endurance by the population in responding to external threats of the United States and its allies through the policy of *Songun* (Military First) development. He declared this hardship period the 'Arduous March,' taking a page from Mao's Long March during the Chinese Civil War. Local market economic activity began throughout the country as a survival mechanism to fill the government vacuum, in addition to the long-standing black market.⁹

“There is very little ethnic diversity within North Korea and this is arguably the most homogenous country on earth.”

Even with increased market engagement, the economy of the DPRK remains restrained and inefficient due to policies seeking more centralized control while the regime lacks requisite economic expertise to effectively exercise that control. The regime elites' profiteering from market engagement activity further weakens the economy as a whole, and creates a considerable reliance on foreign aid. The average citizen, while participating in more market activities, is not self-sufficient and still relies heavily on state support. The foodways of the DPRK remain fragile, with a subsistence/survival economy in rural areas, and are susceptible to crisis from natural or man-made disaster as well as sanctions.¹¹

Population

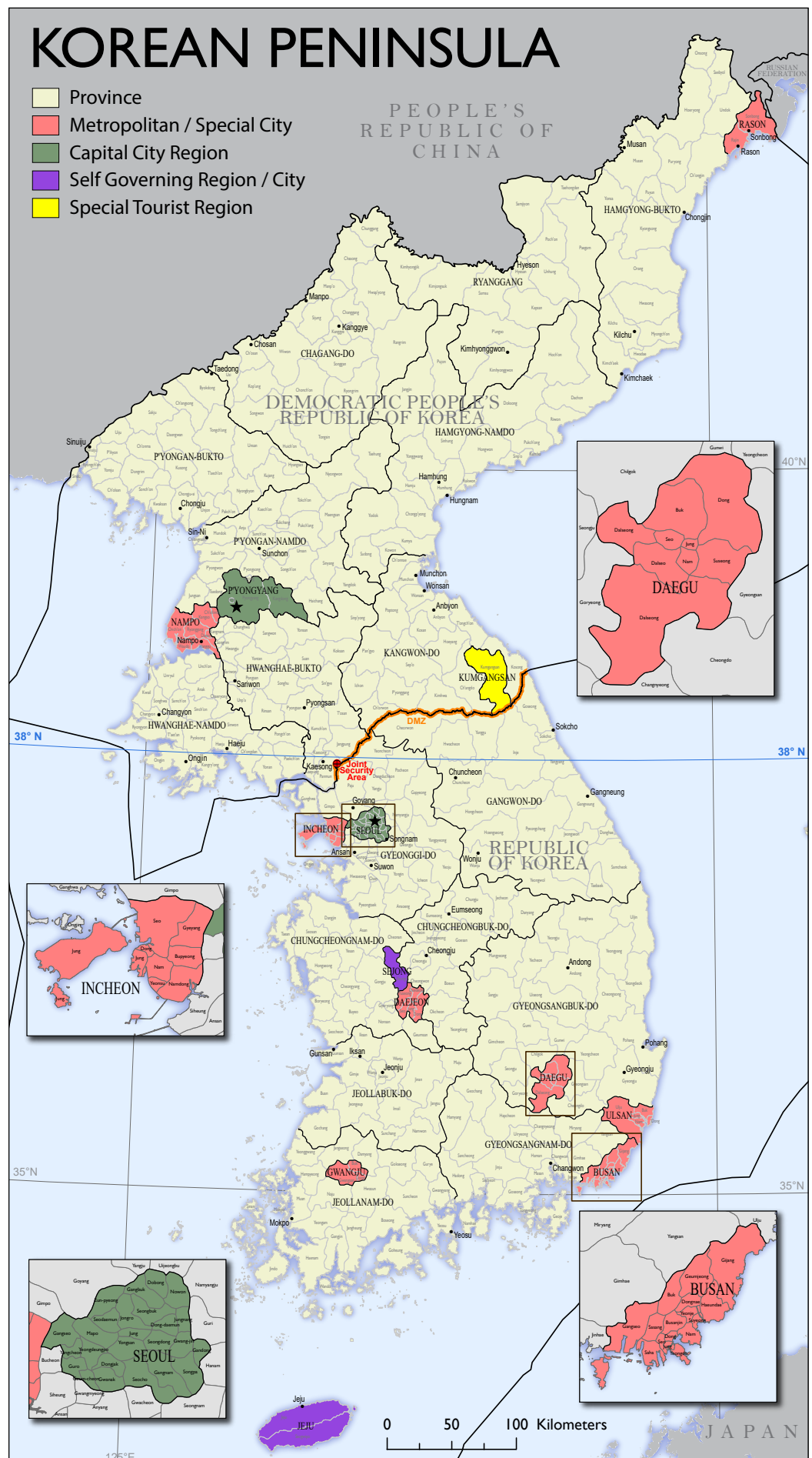
The total population in North Korea is estimated at nearly 25.7 million, with a population growth rate of only 0.5 percent annually. This ranks the DPRK among the slowest growing countries in the world.¹² North Korea's area is 120,540 square kilometers or 46,258 square miles (about the same size as Cuba or Pennsylvania). Population density averages to 208 persons per square kilometer or 541 persons per square mile. "Most North Koreans live in in [sic] the south and west of the country, which is largely made up of lowlands. The north of the country, near the border with China, is more mountainous and far less densely populated."¹³ The largest city is the capitol Pyongyang, with a population of 3.2 million at the time of the 2008 census. The next largest cities are Hamhung at 768,551 and Chongjin at 627,000.¹⁴



“There is very little ethnic diversity within North Korea and this is arguably the most homogenous country on earth. There are a few small clusters of Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, Vietnamese and European communities here but the political atmosphere in the country isn’t one that lends itself to mass immigration.”¹⁵

The last known national census in 2008 showed average life expectancy at just over 65 for males and nearly 73 for females, both of which are 11 years below the ROK. Almost the entire population is listed as literate, with over 75 percent of all North Koreans having finished secondary school. Additionally, employment was over 74 percent and unemployment was just over four percent.¹⁶

The health security of the population varies according to class (see Society, below). The health system is widespread and the regime often advertises vaccination campaigns, but distribution of health care is extremely uneven, with elites receiving the most advanced care while the majority of the population receives little care. Compounded with repeated droughts, natural disasters, and poor government food production and services, the overall health of the majority of the population is poor by global standards, frequently featuring endemic stunted growth and parasites.



Society

DPRK society is dominated by *Juche* thought (initially explained in the Political section above) and *Songbun*, its social class system. Within *Songbun*, all DPRK citizens are divided into three large class categories at birth: the ‘core’ or loyal class (which mainly consists of the regime elite); the ‘wavering’ class, and the ‘hostile’ class. “This party-directed ‘caste system’ guarantees that there is no level playing field in North Korea-politically, economically, or socially.” The caste system is not static, but upward mobility is much more difficult to achieve than being downgraded. Caste is determined by a citizen’s socio-political/economic origins and by their socio-political/economic behavior and performance. *Songbun* is the basis for the distribution of all goods, services, employment, and rights.¹⁷

For more information on DPRK society, see “The Nature of the Kim Family Regime: The Guerrilla Dynasty and Gulag State,” by COL (Ret) David Maxwell, on page 18. For more details on *Juche*, see “Challenges to Engaging the North Korean Population through Information Operations” by William Hardy, on page 23.

Cultural

Juche is inculcated into Koreans in the North from birth. Integrated into *Juche* is the idea of ‘Koreaness,’ or Korean ‘purity,’ which is a form of xenophobic race-based nationalism. In spite of the Korean peninsula being invaded and conquered numerous times over its more than 5,000 year history, Koreans, especially those in the DPRK, believe that they remain superior to all others. This is included in the myth created about the Kim family that places them as the heart of *Juche* and the DPRK. Koreans in the North feel shared ‘Koreaness’ with those in the South, but see South Koreans as ‘wayward siblings’ tainted by Western influence. This is a manufactured narrative by the Kim regime to support its goal of reunification of the peninsula under Northern influence. However, despite the marked differences that exist today, the shared history, culture, and identities of the two Koreas inescapably links their past, present, and future.¹⁸

For more information on cultural aspects of the DPRK, see “The Nature of the Kim Family Regime:

The Guerrilla Dynasty and Gulag State,” by COL (Ret) David Maxwell, on page 18. For more details on *Juche*, see “Challenges to Engaging the North Korean Population through Information Operations” By William Hardy, on page 23.

Infrastructure

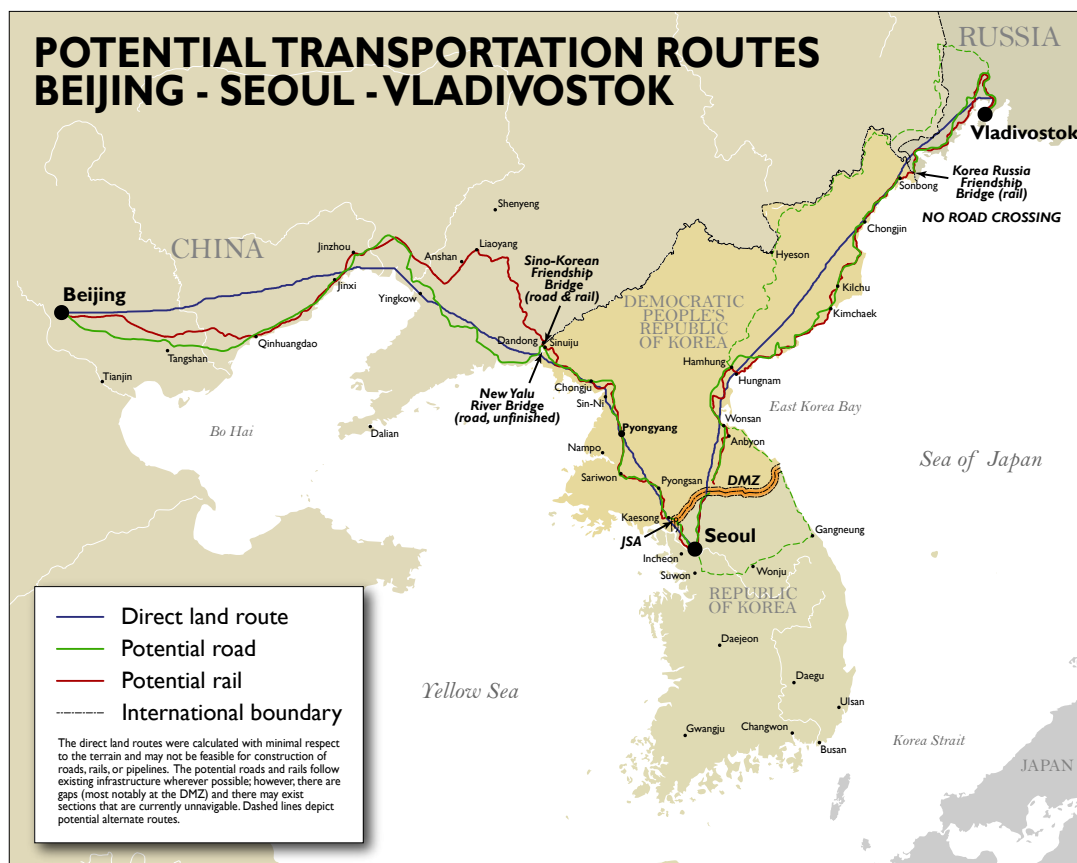
Developed road and rail networks are limited, located mostly along the two coasts, and in varying states of repair. Rail is the main transportation system, with roads in a secondary role to link the railways. The rail network, outdated and in disrepair in many places, consists of 60 main and local rail lines covering over 5,300 kilometers. 4,200 kilometers of railway is electrified, but most is single-track. Less than 7 percent of roads are paved, with the only multi-lane roads in Pyongyang and between Pyongyang and the east coast resort town and port of Wonsan, which is unofficially understood to be the birthplace of Kim Jong-un.¹⁹

Most of the DPRK’s trade occurs overland with China, Russia and the ROK, and so port development has not been a priority. The main ports are located on the east coast at Wonsan and Hungnam, but overall the DPRK’s port capacity is among the lowest of any coastal country.

There are only 10 airports accessible to civilian aircraft, the largest of which are in Pyongyang and Wonsan.

Hydroelectric power accounts for approximately 76 percent of electricity generated in the DPRK, with the remaining 24 percent generated from coal and oil. The North has significant coal deposits, but has outdated and inefficient mining infrastructure. All oil must be imported, mostly from Russia, China and Iran, although that supply is scarce due to sanctions. Overall, the DPRK electrical power network is outdated and deteriorating, resulting in frequent power shortages and blackouts. Priority for power goes to the regime (the ‘core’ class) in Pyongyang and Wonsan.²⁰

Running water and sanitation is available to most households in urban centers, but becomes more austere rurally with distance from built up areas. Urban water and sewage systems are modern in larger cities, and are generally outdated and deteriorating in smaller population centers.



Transportation routes on the Korean Peninsula

An extensive cellular telephone network, strictly restricted and monitored by the Kim regime, has been installed throughout the North since 2008 by *Orascom*, an Egyptian telecommunications company. Since Kim Jong-un assumed leadership in 2011, a wholly North Korean owned mobile service provider, *Star*, has emerged,ⁱⁱ leading to speculation that the Kim regime plans to assume full control of all cellular service in the North, and access to cell phones has become widespread across the DPRK population.²¹

For information on the health system, see Population, above. For more details on the Information Communications Technology system in the DPRK, see “Challenges to Engaging the North Korean Population through Information Operations” by William Hardy, on page 23.

Communication

The information environment in the DPRK is strictly controlled by the Kim Regime. Although modern technology and black market activities have created cracks in the once total control over information, the

regime continues to control the narrative of all aspects of life in the North. This is a survival mechanism in support of the primary political and security goal: to maintain regime power, as discussed in the Political section, above.

The Koreans share a single language, however decades of separation have created linguistic differences beyond accents. The ROK’s engagement with the world has resulted in the adaptation of foreign words while technological and social advancement has created new words and slang that are

not in use in the North. This does not present much of communication difficulty, but does pose a problem for seamless assimilation.

For more details on the DPRK Information Environment, see “Challenges to Engaging the North Korean Population through Information Operations” By William Hardy, on page 23, and the section on cellular networks under Infrastructure, above.

Geography

“The poetic interpretation of the word Korea—‘Land of High Mountains and Sparkling Streams’—derives from the word Koryo, the name of an ancient kingdom on the peninsula. Mountains and streams are indeed the dominant characteristics of Korean terrain.”²²

The DPRK covers 120,540 square kilometers or 46,258 square miles (about the same size as Cuba or Pennsylvania), and is mostly mountainous, with only 14 percent arable land. The highest mountain on the Korean peninsula is Mount Paektu,²³ which according to the Kim regime legend is the mythical birthplace of Kim Il-sung and the Kim family line.

ⁱⁱ*Orascom* and *Star* together make up the *Koryolink* cellular network. SOURCE: Scott Thomas Bruce, “A Double-Edged Sword: Information Technology in North Korea,” *East-West Center No. 105*, (2012): 2.

The DPRK shares land borders with the ROK, China, and Russia. The DMZ border with the ROK (151 miles) stretches from the Yellow Sea (Korea Bay to DPRK) to the Sea of Japan (East Sea to Koreans).²⁴ The borders with China (640 miles) and Russia (10 miles) are “formed by the diverging flows of the Amnok (Yalu) and Tuman Rivers from their sources near Paektu Mountain.” The Amnok “is navigable for 678 of its 790 kilometers. The Tuman River, one of the few major rivers to flow into the Sea of Japan, is the second longest at 521 kilometers but is navigable for only 85 kilometers because of the mountainous topography. The third longest river, the Taedong River, flows through P’yongyang and is navigable for 245 of its 397 kilometers.”²⁵

The DPRK has 2,495 kilometers of coastline along the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan.²⁶ Most urban areas, including the capitol Pyongyang, are located on or near the west coast, “where there are numerous fishing villages and vast tidal flats. In contrast to the serrated Yellow Sea coastline... the peninsula’s eastern seaboard is generally uniform with extensive unprotected coastlines. Except for the extreme northeast and... river valleys, the [Sea of Japan] coastal plains are narrow and relatively unpopulated. Although [Sea of Japan] coastal waters are much deeper than those of the Yellow Sea, there are few natural deepwater ports.” The harbor of Wonsan is “more engineering miracle than gift of nature.”²⁷

The DPRK “claims territorial waters extending twelve nautical miles from shore,” and “an exclusive economic zone 200 nautical miles from shore.” Additionally, the DPRK has declared a maritime exclusionary zone out to 50 nautical miles in the Sea of Japan and 200 nautical miles in the Yellow Sea, which foreign ships and aircraft cannot enter without permission.²⁸

North Korea boasts a diverse climate with four distinct seasons. The short spring is characterized by harsh March winds and sudden warming that causes the snow to quickly melt and turn the landscape green. Summer is a typically hot and wet monsoonal East Asian climate as “drifting masses of moist air move inland from the Pacific Ocean toward Russian Siberia.” The rainy season begins in late June/early July and is followed by late summer typhoons, which “can bring torrential rains and powerful winds,

causing floods, landslides, and extensive damage to property and crops.” The short fall is a reverse monsoon where cool, dry air masses out of Russian Siberia drive the moist air back out to sea. The long Korean winter is characterized by bitter cold winds, increased overcast and snow.²⁹

The DPRK has a wealth of mineral resources, including an abundance of coal and iron. Other minerals are present in quantity, including lead, tungsten, zinc, graphite, magnetite, copper, gold, pyrites, salt and fluorspar. The remaining forests on the Korean Peninsula are mostly located in the northern remote mountainous areas of the DPRK. As stated in the infrastructure section, above, the DPRK has no oil or gas resources.³⁰

“The isolation of the DPRK is as problematic as its uniqueness, as there is little primary source information to create an accurate picture of many aspects of the OE.”

For more on the geographic scale of the illicit economy of the DPRK, see “Jangmadang: Case Study of the Development of a Black Market-Driven Economy and Implications of Similar Phenomena for Training Scenario Development,” by Kevin Freese, on page 14.

Conclusion

The DPRK is a unique, complex, and isolated OE. Replicating the conditions for realistic training and exercises is extremely difficult, as is planning for operations there. The isolation of the DPRK is as problematic as its uniqueness, as there is little primary source information to create an accurate picture of many aspects of the OE. The best approach to the challenges presented by the DPRK OE is to study a diverse array of sources and then base preparation and decisions on triangulated information, while keeping in mind that even single source information may be accurate and include details critical to success in that OE. The TRADOC G-2 Operational Environment Integration Directorate intends the information presented in this issue of the Red Diamond to start or augment that triangulation of information to make the reader’s preparation, training, exercises, and planning as realistic as possible. ♦

Notes

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North Korea Threat Actor Overview

By H. David Pendleton, TRADOC G2

The Korean Peninsula is a location of strategic interest for the US in the Indo-Pacific Command due to its proximity to China, South Korea's historical relationship with the US over the past eight decades, and the booming South Korean economy that makes it an important US trading partner.¹ The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, commonly known as North Korea, remains one of the United States' most critical security challenges for many reasons.² These include the country's provocative and destabilizing behavior such as unprovoked attacks on the Republic of Korea (South Korea); its pursuit of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles; and its willingness to proliferate weapons in contravention of international treaties.³ For over 50 years, North Korea has sporadically conducted operations directed against its foes, especially South Korea.⁴ These actions include:

- numerous armed incursions into South Korea
- the capture of a US ship in international waters and detention of its crew for months
- attacks on South Korean naval and fishing vessels
- hijacking of a passenger airplane and detonating a bomb on one in midair
- electronic warfare against South Korean signals, including global positioning satellites
- cyberattacks against multiple countries
- artillery bombardment of South Korean islands
- actual or attempted assassinations of South Korean officials and North Korean leaders⁵

North Korea is run by an oligarchy led by Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un.⁶ The Kim family has ruled the country since the end of World War II, and most military and civilian leadership consists of second- and third-generation leaders who are family or close friends of the country's late founder, Kim Il-sung; his late son, Kim Jong-il; or his grandson, Kim Jong-un.⁷ North Korean history has been full of conflict.⁸ Outsiders from China, Mongolia, and—most recently—Japan have repeatedly invaded the peninsula throughout its history.⁹ Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 brought great hardship to the Korean people, and independence was not returned until the conclusion of World War II in 1945.¹⁰ The US and the Soviet Union agreed to divide Korea along the 38th parallel to prevent the possibility of friendly fire between the two sides.¹¹ The intent was not to divide the country permanently, but for security and control prior to free elections, in which North Korea chose not to participate.¹²

In June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea in an attempt to unify the peninsula under Kim Il-sung.¹³ With the intervention of the United Nations (UN) after the Soviet Union boycotted a UN Security Council meeting, an international coalition led by the US pushed the North Korean military back across the 1945 boundary between North and South Korea in September 1950.¹⁴ US General Douglas MacArthur then led the UN forces all the way to the Yalu River where China, feeling threatened by anti-communist forces, interceded on behalf of its ally with organized Chinese forces.¹⁵ The Chinese-led counterattacks pushed the US military and its allies back and the

combined Chinese/North Korean forces recaptured Seoul, the South Korean capital city.¹⁶ The UN forces then counterattacked again, pushing the Chinese/North Korean forces to approximately the 38th parallel, the original dividing line between the two Koreas.¹⁷ Over the following two years a stalemate ensued with only minor changes of territory between the warring sides.¹⁸ In late July 1953, the military commanders of North Korea's Korean People's Army (KPA), the Chinese People's Volunteers, and the UN Command signed an armistice that ended the fighting and created a 2,000-meter-wide demilitarized zone (DMZ) on either side of the then-current unit disposition, also known as the military demarcation line.¹⁹ Over 60 years after the armistice, no formal peace treaty has been signed, and the MDL and the 4,000-meter-wide DMZ still exist from the peninsula's east coast to its west coast as well as extending into the oceans on either side of the peninsula.²⁰ Furthermore, North Korea has never renounced its ultimate goal, which is to unify all of Korea under its control.²¹

The presence of US/UN military forces in South Korea likely deters North Korea from crossing the border to reunite the two countries by force.²² Since the armistice was signed, North Korea has broken it many times with incursions into the DMZ and South Korea by land, sea, air, and even underground by tunnel.²³ Today, the country faces off against the Combined Forces Command, Korea—composed of South Korea and the United States—with a conventional regular force backed by nuclear weapons.²⁴ The UN Command is also still present, primarily in the joint security area at Panmunjom, where periodic talks take place between the two sides.²⁵

Today, the KPA also emphasizes special-purpose forces (SPF) units that primarily use unconventional warfare tactics.²⁶ The KPA uses conventional and unconventional tactics based on former Soviet or current Russian doctrine, Chinese developments, lessons learned from the Korean War, and observation of recent military actions.²⁷ Many times since 1953, North Korea has initiated provocative actions against South Korea, Japan, and the US in defiance of the armistice's terms.²⁸ Publicly, the North Korean Government claims that its country lives in fear of an invasion from the South or an attempt by extra-regional forces to instigate a regime change in North Korea with the removal of Kim Jong-un.²⁹ In June



The Korean Peninsula

Source: GCKN.

2018, North Korean and US leaders met in Singapore and agreed to an eventual denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.³⁰ No timeline, however, was set to achieve this goal.³¹ The two countries' leaders met a second time in Vietnam in February 2019, but still did not reach an agreement to denuclearize North Korea.

While North Korea maintains large amounts of military equipment, much of it is outdated making it quantitatively superior to most armies but qualitatively inferior to almost any modern army.³² Due to the high cost of modern military equipment and the lack of funds for and access to the same from years of economic sanctions and poor economic policies, the KPA retains obsolete hardware, as evidenced by the presence of the T-34/85—a World War II-era tank—in some of its lower-priority armor units.³³ The age and variety of weapon systems from the former Soviet Union, Russia, and China, and its own internally produced equipment generate major logistical issues for the KPA to effectively keep the assortment

of weapons fully functional.³⁴ The various ammunition types required by so many different weapon systems that date from the 1940s to the present also places additional strain on the KPA's logistical units.³⁵ Out of a population of 24 million, approximately 1.2 million serve on active duty with KPA with another 7.7 million in the various reserves and para-military organizations making it one of the largest armies in the world.³⁶ Approximately 70% of all KPA ground force units are forward deployed within 100 km of the DMZ including some artillery and missile systems that could target Seoul, the South Korean capital

city.³⁷ Despite a technological advantage, any conflict on the Korean Peninsula will be difficult for South Korea and its allies due to the sheer amount of equipment fielded by the KPA and North Korea's ability to place about a third of its citizenry in uniform for any conflict.³⁸ For more information on North Korea, see previous Red Diamond articles (table of them elsewhere in this Red Diamond) or the 2015 Threat Tactics Report on ATN at <https://atn.army.mil/tradoc-g2/operational-environment-opfor-publications/threat-tactics-reports> or APAN at <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/ace-threats-integration/>. ♦

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Jangmadang 장마당

Case Study of the Development of a Black Market-Driven Economy and Implications of Similar Phenomena for Training Scenario Development

By Kevin Freese, TRADOC G2

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea, or DPRK) remains the most isolated and rigid communist regime in the world, with strict controls of nearly every aspect of life, particularly economic life. However, over the past 30 years, a robust, dynamic, yet still technically unlawful market economy has developed. With roots in the Kim Jong-il administration, it has grown even more rapidly under Kim Jong-un. It reaches across the international border and, despite official government prohibition, has become integral to the DPRK's economy. There is even a word for the new, unofficial, non-state markets that drive this shadow economy: *Jangmadang* (장마당). An appreciation of the DPRK's evolving non-state market economy and the implications of the changes it is fostering is essential to understanding the complexities of the Korean Peninsula Operational Environment (OE). Exercises, trainings and simulations would benefit from incorporating aspects of the non-state market into scenarios, whether set in the Korean peninsula or the rest of the world. This article examines the non-state market phenomenon as it has emerged in North Korea as a case study, then extrapolates potential training scenarios that could emerge from it or from similar phenomena that might emerge elsewhere in the strategic environment.

What is the DPRK non-state market economy?

The DPRK remains a closed society, and non-state markets are by their nature unofficial, so precise, reliable information about the non-state market is difficult to acquire. Scholars, journalists, think-tanks, and researchers from diverse governments have conducted various studies, some of which are cited in this document directly and some cited by the secondary sources. These studies have used innovated non-traditional research and analysis methodologies that include

interviews with defectors, unattributed surveys and interviews with North Koreans, and even commercial overhead imagery analysis. What they consistently report is that the DPRK has a robust, dynamic, and growing unofficial economic sector that is driving changes in North Korean society.

The DPRK non-state market economy includes widespread, unofficial market-based economic activity that transcends almost every economic sector in the country. Its tendrils even reach overseas, particularly into China, but also into South Korea, Russia, and elsewhere. The non-state markets are rooted in the local market economy. They are accepted if not officially sanctioned by the state – akin to what elsewhere would be considered a combination of gray market and legitimate market activity. The non-state markets include trade for the entire gamut of what would be licit goods and services in other countries, ranging from food and fertilizer to vehicles and restaurants. Although all non-state market activity is technically unlawful,¹ there is also a large sector of the market devoted to inherently illicit goods and services, what is traditionally considered to be the black market in other countries. Some studies distinguish between unofficial market activity that is technically illegal in North Korea but would not be elsewhere and inherently unlawful activity. Other studies make no such distinction. In North Korea, they are really all part of the greater black market.

Emergence of the Jangmadang

The central concept of DPRK's national vision is *Juche* (주체), which literally translates as “self-reliance.” *Juche*, along with robust welfare programs, reinforced the legitimacy of the authoritarian Kim dynasty and set a tone for defiant resistance to outside pressure by the successive administrations. Inherent

to self-reliance is isolation which, along with integral communist concepts and even a Confucian cultural legacy,² yielded extreme governmental control of everyday life and economic activity.

For most of its history, the DPRK government had only three commercial systems, all of which were centrally controlled by the state: (1) The National Distribution System that controlled most domestic wholesale products and set national prices, (2) the Cooperative Distribution Association that managed regional commerce, particularly agriculture and other types of food production, and (3) the Farmers Distribution Commerce that supplemented the other two systems for small scale trade in excess production. State-directed industries produced and delivered commodities and the state distribution structures rationed goods and services to the people.³ However, in reality, the DPRK since the 1960s had been heavily but unofficially dependent upon foreign aid from the Soviet Union and China. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the new Russian Federation became less willing and less capable of subsidizing the DPRK's economy. Trade and assistance from China also diminished, although less dramatically than they did from Russia. Moreover, natural disasters in the form of severe flooding destroyed much of the country's agricultural production. The DPRK government was unable to provide basic subsistence to the populace and massive famine ensued. Centrally-managed industries halted production, but workers still were expected, under jeopardy of arrest, to report to work, even though they were not being utilized or paid.⁴

Facing famine, and with men unable to provide for their families, women began to provide gray-market goods and services to supplement their family needs. Over the course of just a few years, women became the primary breadwinners in most DPRK families. Men continued to work for state-run industries, but without receiving compensation, at least of any significance. The end result was both social transformation of traditional North Korean family roles and the emergence of a robust shadow economy that effectively sustained the country.⁵

This emerging, unofficial commercial activity started out locally and at small-scale, but in addition to mitigating the food crisis, had the large-scale effect of introducing free market principles. Critically the new

markets brought the concepts of profit and individual preferences to a society that previously relied upon monolithic, collective rationing systems.⁶ They also brought corruption, which had been almost non-existent previously. Enforcement officials faced the same challenges to survival as anyone else, so they were vulnerable to bribery in exchange for ignoring illegal market activity. In fact, since government enforcement was omnipresent for virtually any movement of people or goods in North Korea, corruption became endemic and integral to the system. This resulted in the widespread complicity of government officials in smuggling activities at all levels.⁷

DPRK Government Responses

From its development in the 1990s to the early 2000s, although still illegal, the non-state market economy was officially tolerated and even encouraged because it generated potential revenue for the government and prevented the complete collapse of the country. The DPRK government has gone through alternating periods of tolerance and resistance, particularly during the late 2000s, when the Kim Jong-il administration attempted to reign in encroaching capitalism and the emergence of new power brokers in North Korean society. Specific policies included disastrous currency reform, the goals of which included literally taking money out of the hands of the emerging businesses. However, the state pushback against the markets under Kim Jong-il was episodic, inconsistent and, ultimately, unsuccessful. Participation in the informal service sector experienced continuous growth, even during the intermittent periods of government crackdown.⁸

The Kim Jong-il administration's inconsistent response to the emergence of non-state markets reflects a dialectic of the competing interests in North Korea. On the one hand, the markets presented a subversive infiltration of foreign capitalism in opposition to the DPRK's *Juche* vision and the communist system. However, they also prevented total economic collapse and reduced the effects of famine. They even generated revenue for the government. Indeed, they offered resources that the government would find useful in circumventing international pressure against development of weapons technology.⁹ For example, the Kim Jong-un administration apparently used black market smuggling channels to acquire liquid propellant

rocket engines, which could provide a delivery mechanism for ballistic missiles, including nuclear weapons.¹⁰

The Kim Jong-un administration has followed a strategy of pursuing economic development alongside security development, or *byungjin*, an approach that is rooted in policies of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. However, compared to its predecessors, the Kim Jong-un administration seems to have made comprehensive economic development a greater priority, including increases in economic development spending. In addition, there seems to have been some decentralization of control over agricultural planning and production.¹¹ Rather than eliminate the non-state markets or implement currency reforms, as was the policy of the Kim Jong-il administration, the Kim Jong-un administration has gone beyond even ignoring them. The markets are now quasi-institutionalized, with the DPRK government going so far as to coopting portions of the proceeds as tax revenue, even though the markets remain officially illegal.¹² The new DPRK policy is in line with Kim's goal of developing a constrained, state-controlled capitalism. It more closely resembles the Chinese model than a pure *Juche* strategy.

Geographic and Financial Scale of the Jangmadang

Non-state markets started out small-scale but, since the 1990s, they have grown in size, reach, and importance. As of 2018, there were as many as 436 sanctioned markets in the DPRK, with heavily-populated areas having a greater-than-average number of markets. Markets are located in all DPRK provinces,¹³ but participation is heavily concentrated in key locations. Hamgyong Province, presumably because of its location near the borders of both China and Russia in the northeast, hosts the preponderance of unofficial market share at nearly 70%. It is distantly followed by Pyongyang and South Pyongan province in the west at about 15%. The remaining market activity is dispersed across the other provinces.¹⁴

Although officially outlawed, markets with unofficial sanction by the government generate nearly \$(USD) 57 million per year in revenue for the state through various fees and taxes. More than 70% of the population receives most of their household goods through

the non-state markets.¹⁵ Women constitute the majority (>60%) of participants. The majority of non-state commercial activity takes place in the service sector, followed by the agricultural sector, with the manufacturing sector trailing. The government retains a much more rigid control of factories and industrial production infrastructure,¹⁶ so this trend is unsurprising.

Implications for stability in the OE

The DPRK non-state market offers both challenges and opportunities for stability in the OE. While markets are contributing to increased prosperity, the benefits of new wealth are so far restricted to a minority nouveau-riche class of society, the *donju* or "money-masters." Concentrated in Pyongyang, the *donju* have exclusive access to currency and many of them are embedded in the government.¹⁷ The majority population, particularly in rural areas, remains in extreme poverty. The economic divide between the rich and poor is therefore growing rather than shrinking. Although this system is not uncommon in developing countries, the trend is at odds with the state's historic claim of standing apart from the economic divides of the rest of the world. This potentially undermines the administration's legitimacy and could serve as a grievance that contributes to unrest.¹⁸ Moreover, emergence of a new class decentralizes wealth and thus power. It also offers opportunities for alternate narratives to the *Juche* to spread. Potential rivals to the Kim dynasty increasingly have resources and contacts. An attempt by a rival to seize power or an attempt to preemptively thwart a rival could destabilize the country and the peninsula.

Conversely, the DPRK non-state market also offers opportunities to promote regional stability. Historically, international interactions with the DPRK have been primarily conducted officially, via direct state-to-state contacts. The non-state market economy offers opportunities to develop vested interest in international cooperation among DPRK power brokers that profit from non-state market commercial activity.¹⁹ Moreover, if prosperity spreads as well as increases, the potential for trade disruption will make conflict more distasteful.

Implications and Recommendations for the Training Environment:

The DPRK non-state market is a phenomenon in the operational environment that could have repercussions for the Army and the Joint Force in any real-world contingency. Although it is an exaggerated phenomenon in the case of North Korea, variations of it could emerge elsewhere and are thus applicable to training exercises set anywhere in any real or notional country. Exercise planners should account for the black market and incorporate it as a variable to ensure realism and relevance in exercise scenarios worldwide. Assuming some sort of notional conflict involving a US-involved operation or intervention, possible scenarios or red/green courses of action might include:

(1) Undermine the Coalition Scenario. Criminal networks may be the only actors capable of providing humanitarian and essential trade goods among the civilian population, necessitating US Army, joint, and coalition forces to intentionally or unintentionally partner with illicit groups to prevent or mitigate humanitarian crises. Regime remnants or other adversaries could exploit these partnerships with information operations undermining the legitimacy of US-led coalition and provisional authorities and turning the civilian population against the US effort.

(2) Smugglers Support or Become Insurgents. Criminal networks will provide capabilities to enable insurgent forces with weapons and equipment and, in some cases, may partner with and/or merge with insurgent organizations resisting the US-led coalition. The black market becomes the logistic network of the insurgency. Some government officials are already working with smuggling networks, making them prepositioned to exploit the networks.

(3) Exploitation of Markets by Third Party Actors. Goods moving on the black market primarily originate abroad, so the source nation, if opposed to US intervention in the region, could exploit illicit networks to counter US-led operations by supporting insurgents and undermining support of provisional authorities. A third-party may not be interested in defeating or replacing US-sponsored authorities, merely in prolonging US commitment in order to gain leverage in a different part of the world.

(4) Criminals Emerge as the Real Power. While the US may have other, more democratically-minded provisional authorities in mind, illicit networks that have managed the black market are the real economic experts, and emerge as a new oligarch class, rivalling US-supported forces and seizing power for themselves, possibly in a kleptocratic regime that is more problematic than its predecessors.

(5) Civil War. A conflict in the peninsula might not be an international conflict, but a civil war within the country fueled by economic disparity grievances or rival, emerging elites attempting to take power would still have the potential to spill over into neighboring countries. ♦

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The Nature of The Kim Family Regime: The Guerrilla Dynasty and Gulag State

By David Maxwell, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies

While all desire an end to hostilities on the Korean peninsula, denuclearization of North Korea, a reduction of the conventional military threat, and an end to the human rights abuses against the Korean people living in the North, achieving those objectives requires understanding the nature of the Kim family regime (KFR) and what are its strategy, aims, and objectives. Without such understanding it is difficult to discern effective ways and means of a strategy to achieve an acceptable durable political arrangement on the Korean peninsula that will serve, protect, and advance US interests in Korea and Northeast Asia.

As Australian author Adrian Buzo wrote in his book of the same name, North Korea is a “Guerrilla Dynasty.” Its legitimacy is sustained by the myth of anti-Japanese partisan warfare with the “Great Leader” Kim Il-sung as the liberator of Korea. During World War II Kim commanded the 88th Special Independent Sniper Brigade of about 200 Korean men in the Soviet Army and he built this into a legend of himself and his guerrilla band as great revolutionaries. Kim founded a revolutionary nation and its constitution compels those in the North to complete the revolution by liberating all of Korea. Today the core of the elite are all descendants of, or related to, these guerrillas.

Kim Il-sung developed a system to perpetuate dynastic rule. The single vital national interest of the North is survival of the Kim Family Regime or what the late Stephen Bradner described as a mafia-like crime family cult. It is not survival of the nation-state nor the survival of the Korean people living in the North but only the regime. Kim designed the system of *Songbun* – a social classification system that divides society into fifty one social classes in three broad categories of the elite loyal class, the wavering classes, and the disloyal classes. Robert Collins has described



Songbun as a process that systematically denies human rights to ensure social control to prevent any threats to the regime’s survival.

The *Juche* ideology is the guiding light of the North. It permeates everything to include the national calendar which is based on the birthday of Kim Il-sung. From the guerrilla ethos described by Buzo comes Kim Il-sung’s unique philosophy of *Juche* or so-called “self reliance” which has taken the Confucian ethic upon which Korean society has traditionally been based and turned it into a method for controlling the entire population of the North. *Juche* has been raised to a religious stature in which it even is taught that to give one’s life for the fatherland will bring immortality. In the *Juche* philosophy, the KFR has, in effect, been deified. *Juche*’s basic concept is this: “Man rules all things; man decides all things.” “The Kim Il-sung *Juche* ideology is based on these precepts: In ideology *Juche* (autonomy); in politics, self-reliance; in economics, independence; and in National Security: self-defense.”

The KFR has built a strategy over the past seven decades that seeks to ensure survival. The strategic aim is to reunify the peninsula under Northern domination. This not only will complete the revolution but will also eliminate the biggest threat to the regime:

The Republic of Korea (ROK). It is the example of the ROK, with its economic, political, and cultural success that threatens to undermine the legitimacy of the regime and if allowed to influence the population could result in domestic unrest if the regime's security apparatus is weakened.

The strategy is built on three lines of effort. The first is subversion of South Korea: both its political system and its culture. Subversion is the undermining of the power and authority of an established system or institution, in the Korean case "the ruthless subversion of democracy." The United Front Department and the 225th Bureau are tasked with fomenting unrest and establishing political organizations favorable and sympathetic to the North. This effort is important if President Moon and Kim Jong-un embark on the peaceful unification path of a federation with one country and two systems that will gradually integrate both into a reunified Korea. The regime's subversive efforts are designed to ensure that the North will dominate the process with the help of sympathizers, fellow travelers, or at least "useful idiots" in the South.

The dominant line of effort has been coercion and extortion. The regime has long tried to coerce the ROK into providing economic aid and handouts. The "blackmail diplomacy" has been especially effective in the use of provocations to extort political and economic concessions from the ROK and international community.

The final line of effort is the use of force to achieve unification. The North has a campaign plan to attack the South and rapidly occupy it before the US can reinforce it. The North will attack with devastating artillery fire to create penetrations in the frontline defense to allow armored and infantry units to rapidly advance to the East of Seoul to seize bridges and crossing sites of the Han River to be able to then move to Pusan. It will use weapons of mass destruction, to include nuclear weapons against air and sea ports of debarkation in Korea as well as the seven UN designated bases in Japan upon which US forces depend for reinforcing and supporting operations. It will not want to make the same mistake as in 1950 when the US was able to maintain the Pusan Perimeter and then conduct the amphibious landing at Inchon.

The conditions for executing the campaign plan have not been reached. When the highest ranking North Korean defector the late Hwang Jong Yop came to the South he was asked why the North has not attacked and executed its campaign plan despite building the fourth largest Army in the world. He said simply it is the presence of US forces and the nuclear weapons that the US could bring to bear on the North. The regime knows that a war with US forces will not be successful.

This is the reason why a major supporting objective of the regime is to split the ROK/US Alliance. "Divide and conquer" – divide the alliance to conquer the ROK. When analyzing North Korean actions it is important to assess how such actions contribute to undermining the alliance. From the three North-South summits of 2018, the Comprehensive Military Agreement in Pyongyang in September 2018, and even the Olympics we can see how the North seeks to separate the ROK and the US.

Given the vital interest of regime survival and the strategic aim to unify the peninsula to ensure regime survival we must take into account the system that the KFR has designed to remain in power, control the population, and execute its strategy.

In addition to the foundational ideology *Juche* and the social classification system of *Songbun*, there are some additional key concepts that must be understood. First is *Songun* or "military first politics." This was developed under Kim Jong-il but remains a foundational concept because the military is the most important and best functioning institution in North Korea. After Kim Jong-un and the Kim family regime the priority in all decisions goes to ensuring the regime's military strength to execute its war plans and maintain loyalty to Kim Jong-un.

While the US and most militaries practice the concept of command and control – leadership and methods to effectively employ military forces, the North uses the concept of "control and command" "with the priority being on control of not only the forces but also the ideology and loyalty of the officers and soldiers. There are three chains of control: the traditional military chain from general to private, a political commissar chain common to most communist militaries, and then a security chain of control unique to

North Korea. All three chains must be in synch for units to operate but all three have different functions and priorities. While effective military units are built on trust of leadership and the soldier on your right and left, the military, like the entire society, is suspicious of the intentions and actions of everyone around them. This does not allow initiative and creative leadership that is so necessary on a complex battlefield.

Byungjin was believed to have replaced *Songun* and reduce the influence of the military but that is not the case. Kim Jong-un added the concept of simultaneous development of nuclear weapons and the economy. There was speculation that Kim Jong-un would gradually liberalize the economy. While there are some 400 “markets” throughout North Korea *Byungjin* has not led to Chinese style economic reforms or opening to the outside. This concept has helped to sustain the support and loyalty of the military with the focus on nuclear weapons while providing those who believe in engagement with the regime the rationale for doing so because of the appearance of liberalization.

The most important concept to keep in mind that applies to all Koreans in the North and guides their lives is what Hwang Jong Yop called, “Dear Leader Absolutism.” He says it is the fundamental reason that there can be no human rights in the North because “for the people in North Korea where the greatest morality and absolute law is giving one’s mind and body to the Dear Leader; and living as a slave who obeys completely and unconditionally the Dear Leader. It is the only life permitted for the North Korean people.”

The North Korean strategy of subversion of the South illustrates the fundamental conflict on the peninsula that is often overlooked: ideology. The Korean people in the North and South should have a choice to accept the values they believe in. South Koreans and Americans share a set of values: freedom and individual liberty, liberal democracy, free market economy, and human rights. In the so-called Social Workers Paradise of the North the “values” are *Songun*, *Songbun*, *Byungjin*, *Juche* or “*Kimilsungism*,” and the denial of human rights to sustain the control by and power of the regime.

The ideological orientation of the North and South has resulted in a zero sum standoff on the peninsula. The current Moon administration is working hard pursuing peace and reconciliation. The “year of Korean diplomacy” might characterize 2018. Yet it does not appear Kim Jong-un shares Moon’s vision. He has continued development of fissile material and missiles and in fact said that his programs were ready for mass production. South Korea has provided a number of confidence building measures along the DMZ though there has been no reduction in the North’s offensive capability with more than 70% of its military forward deployed in an offensive posture. Policy makers and strategists must consider the question of whether Kim Jong-un has abandoned his strategy based on subversion, coercion/extortion, and use of force to unify the peninsula under Northern domination to ensure regime survival. A second question is whether Kim has abandoned his objective of splitting the ROK/US alliance – divide and conquer – divide the alliance to conquer the ROK.

The answers to these questions cannot be determined with certainty. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the five major strategic issues of the peninsula: war, regime collapse, human rights, asymmetric threats, and unification.

The ROK/US Combined Forces Command is charged by the governments of the ROK and US through the Military Committee with deterrence of war and if attacked to fight and win and defeat North Korea. Extensive planning and exercising for the defense of the ROK has been on going for nearly seven decades. Based on defector testimony, to include the highest ranking North Korean defector, Hwang Jong Yop, the presence of US forces and the nuclear umbrella has served as an effective deterrent. The decision to go to war will likely occur if there is a withdrawal of US troops and Kim has set the conditions through coercion of the ROK such that he believes he has the superior capability to attack and win. The other condition will be if Kim Jong-un determines an internal or external threat to the regime that he cannot suppress or defend against. He may believe his only option will be to execute his campaign plan as the only way to try to ensure regime survival. While this may seem highly unlikely to those who understand the balance of power and correlation of forces Kim may not be using the same rationale.

Regime collapse is often mentioned as a solution to the problem and an end to the regime. Policy makers and strategists should understand that regime collapse will likely be a process that may or may not end with decisive action. There are numerous possible scenarios so it is necessary to group them into two broad categories. First is implosion which means the effects of regime collapse remain internal to North Korea. Second, is “explosion” where the effects spill outside and affect the region if not beyond. Both categories have contingencies for humanitarian assistance, refugees, weapons of mass destruction, resistance to outside interference, and the worst case: civil war. All of these are possible when the regime (through the party) loses its ability to rule from Pyongyang and there is a loss of coherency and support among the military. Collapse in North Korea could be the mother of all interventions in the modern era but at present there are few indicators that collapse will occur in the near future. But North Korea has surprised the international community many times in the past.

Human rights are denied in the North to ensure regime survival. The regime cannot survive if it normalizes its society and treats Koreans with the dignity they deserve. The *Songbun* system of social classification sentences all North Koreans to a place in society from which there is no social mobility. The regime operates a system of political prisons and gulags that incarcerates entire families if one member is found to act disloyal to the regime. The 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry determined that Kim Jong-un has committed crimes against humanity and should be referred to the International Criminal Court. This has an impact on the regime as evidence by their intense propaganda efforts whenever human rights are addressed. While regime legitimacy is enhanced when the international community discusses the North’s nuclear threat it is undermined when human rights are addressed. Not only is human rights a moral imperative, it is a national security issue and should be part of not only negotiations with the North but of any policy and strategy addressing security on the Korean peninsula.

North Korea possess myriad asymmetric threats to not only overcome military weaknesses but also to mitigate the effects of isolation and sanctions. It has developed the largest artillery and special operations forces in the world. The full spectrum of its WMD

capabilities including nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons combined with missile delivery capabilities provide not only warfighting functions but the threat of these weapons also supports coercion/extortion otherwise known as blackmail diplomacy. It conducts illicit activities around the world to include counterfeiting, (dollars, cigarettes, medicine), drug trafficking, and the use of slave labor overseas to gain hard currency for the regime. The regime has developed extensive cyber capabilities to conduct espionage, attack infrastructure, and most importantly to steal money from financial institutions. In addition, the North proliferates not only missile technology but also conventional weapons and training particularly to the Middle East and Africa. All of this makes North Korea a global threat.

Finally, the Korean peninsula was unnaturally divided in 1945 in attempt to prevent Soviet occupation and communist domination of the entire peninsula. The security challenges in Korea are directly tied to this action. North Korea tried to rectify this by going to war in 1950 and attacking the South which resulted in some 1.2 million deaths in the three year war. In 1953 the Korean Armistice was signed temporarily suspending hostilities. Paragraph 60 of the agreement stated the military commanders’ recommendations that political leaders should come together within 90 days to solve the “Korea question” which can be described as the unnatural division of the peninsula. This is at one both the most important challenge in Korea and also the solution.

Critics will argue that the North and South have diverged to the point where they are so different that unification is not achievable and even if achieved by force there would be catastrophic levels of resistance. While that belief should give policy makers pause (and in many ways has created a kind of strategic planning paralysis) we should keep two things in mind. First is that both Constitutions in the North and South call for unification, but obviously on their terms. Second for more than a decade, three Korean presidents and two US presidents have stated that peaceful unification is the vision for the ROK/US alliance. This is what all elements of alliance power should be focused.

The second is an anecdote related to me by a retired Korean admiral. He said that there are two miracles

in Korea. Of course we all know the Miracle on the Han – South Korea rose from the ashes of the Korean War going from a major aid recipient to a major donor nation in the 21st Century. It developed a democratic political system, its culture, exemplified by the “Korean wave,” is known throughout the world, and has developed an economy that is between the eighth and 11th largest in the world. In effect the ROK has become a respected Middle Power. In short, the Miracle of the Han is the development of a thriving South Korea.

So what is the second miracle? The Admiral said it is the Miracle on the Taedong (which is the river that flows through Pyongyang like the Han flows through Seoul). He said that despite the totalitarian dictatorship that has enslaved 25 million people who have suffered some of the most horrendous human rights abuses and crimes against humanity they continue to survive.

Korean history is one of conflict and suffering. The last experience that is common to all Koreans is the period of Japanese occupation and colonization from 1910 to 1945. During the time the Japanese tried to eradicate the Korean language, Korean names, and

Korean culture but the Korean people resisted. After the end of World War II the two Koreas embarked on divergent paths, politically, ideological, and economically. Yet there is a common underlying “Koreaness” that is common to the people in the North and South. If given the opportunity Koreans can thrive and when faced with hardship Koreans can survive. This idea should provide the foundation for the answer to the “Korea question” or the unification of Korea and a return to the natural order.

The only way we are likely to see an end to the North Korean nuclear program as well as an end to the crimes against humanity be committed against the Korean people living in the North is through the fall of the Guerrilla Dynasty and Gulag State and the establishment of a United Republic of Korea (UROC). This will result in a secure, stable, non-nuclear, economically vibrant Korea unified under a liberal constitutional form of government determined by the Korean people. While denuclearization of North Korea is an important objective and an interim goal, the only acceptable durable political arrangement that will secure, sustain, and advance US and ROK/US alliance interests is the achievement of a unified Korea. ♦



Mansudae Grand Monument in Pyongyang, North Korea

Source: Bjørn Christian Tørrissen; <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mansudae-Monument-Bow-2014.jpg>

Challenges to Engaging North Korea's Population through Information Operations

By William Hardy, TRADOC G2

The Democratic People's Republic of North Korea (DPRK) presents a uniquely complex information environment due to decades of draconian methods of controlling its population and self-imposed isolation. Whether the US Army is training for a humanitarian mission or combat operations in North Korea, the ability to shape and influence the information environment will be of critical concern. Successful information operations (IO) will depend upon the US Army's ability to engage and build trust with a population that is profoundly segmented and has been conditioned to be wary of Americans.

In the best case scenario, a large percentage of the North Korean population will likely distrust any information they are exposed to that comes from an American source; in the worst case scenario the North Korean population may be actively hostile toward US efforts to shape the information environment. Either way, the US Army would be starting from a deficit of trust that could hinder its ability to provide information to and exert influence within the North Korean population.

This article discusses three challenges to information operations in North Korea that should be accounted for and replicated during training. The challenges are:

1. North Korea's population has been conditioned to be suspicious of Americans.
2. North Korea's surveillance culture has created a wary and partitioned society.
3. North Korea's Information Communication Technology infrastructure and networks.



A tiled mosaic depicting North Korean unity, national pride, and service to nation from a young age.

Source: Mark Fahey, "North Korean Propaganda." Wikimedia Commons. 11 August 2011.

Challenge to IO: Population is preconditioned to be Suspicious of Americans

The Kim Regime's narrative of self-reliance (*Juche*) has created a cult of personality that depicts the Kim dynasty as the guardians of the Korean people against American hostility and corrosive western influences.¹ By anointing itself as the protector of the Korean people against the United States, the Kim dynasty has been able to legitimize its claim to power, and has characterized itself as the utmost "embodiment of Korean virtues."² As a result, the population has been inundated with anti-American propaganda, and taught from a very young age that Americans are a national enemy who are not to be trusted and people who associate with them are "liars attempting to destabilize the government."³

By fomenting anti-American sentiment and using the US as a scapegoat, the Kim regime has been able to explain away the hardships that the people have endured.⁴ The demonization of the US enables the Kim



North Korean propaganda poster in a primary school.

Source: Unknown. "Propaganda Poster in Primary School." Wikimedia Commons. 10 June 2008.

Regime to unify the North Korean population against an external foe, and further justify its actions as efforts to protect the people.⁵ The efforts to manipulate the truth and maintain the narrative extend so far as portraying humanitarian aid from the US as a submissive gesture to the Kim regime.⁶

Challenge to IO: Surveillance Culture has created a Wary and Partitioned Society

North Korea's domestic security apparatus consists of many layers of bureaucracy focused on the maintenance and exertion of control over the population.⁷ The *inminban*, which translates to 'neighborhood group,' is one of the unique components of the government's efforts to control the populace and is almost entirely infused into the social fabric of the population.⁸ The government appoints a leader for each *inminban* who is responsible for roughly 20 to 40 households.⁹ Participation is "both compulsory and universal," and the government uses the *inminban* system as a way to ensure that the population adheres to the ideology and beliefs of the Kim regime, and as a mechanism for identifying and reporting dissent.¹⁰ The *inminban* serves a social function, a surveillance function, and a mobilization function.¹¹ Despite being part of the internal security apparatus, the *inminban* lacks the authority to actually solve issues or concerns within the community, and instead "it can only report problems up the chain of command."¹²

In order to provide the government with as much information on their communities as possible, the *inminban* often turn to using informants as a way to extend their eyes and ears. This, in turn, can create an environment of distrust amongst a community and lead to individuals keeping their social network as small as possible. Individuals and households are subject to searches by *inminban* at any time, and if an individual is travelling, they must register with the local *inminban* before they spend the night in a given community.¹³ *Inminban* must carefully

balance the needs of the government with the needs of their communities. They risk being ostracized by their neighbors if they report too much activity, and they risk bringing more attention from the government if they underreport problems.¹⁴ Over the last decade North Korean defectors have reported that the *inminban* system may have begun to weaken as North Korea has begun to allow more privatization into its economy, leading to some *inminban* leaders accepting bribes to turn a blind eye toward transgressions that would have previously been reported.¹⁵

Challenge to IO: North Korean Information Communication Technology

Despite decades of effort spent to isolate and control its own population, North Korea has not been completely immune to the advances of technology or the pressures of an increasingly interrelated global economy. By and large, the average North Korean citizen has "greater access to outside information than they did twenty years ago."¹⁶ Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have slowly penetrated the Hermit Kingdom.ⁱ Rather than resisting the global trend, evidence suggests that the DPRK has increasingly embraced ICTs in a unique and highly controlled manner.

The Kim Regime's acceptance of ICTs encompasses both how North Koreans access information and what information they have access to. It has achieved this by banning the use of unsanctioned devices and

ⁱThe United Nations defines Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) as the "Diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information." Examples of ICTs include computers, the internet, mobile phones, and broadcasting technology.

making any attempts to access outside information without authorization a crime against the state that carries severe punishments.¹⁷ The government also attempts to jam all Chinese and South Korean cellular signals that reach across the borders.¹⁸

In order to balance the economic benefits that accompany ICTs with its desire to limit the potential negative impact and influence of external information, the Kim regime has created its own domestic intranet known as *Kwangmyong*, and a domestic cellular network known as *Koryolink*.¹⁹ By having its own ICT infrastructure and networks, the North Korean government is able to regulate who has access to information, what information is available, and how that information can be accessed. Despite this heavy regulation and high costs placed on the user, government approved ICTs have become an increasingly important tool in the day to day lives of North Koreans.²⁰ In addition to using mobile phones to conduct business, North Koreans are often sent official state messages and news stories through mass SMS text messages.²¹

Nevertheless, even though ICTs have become more prevalent in the daily lives of North Koreans, there still exists a fear that the government is monitoring their conversations. Consequently, “word of mouth is the most important source of information” for North Koreans, particularly if the information they are discussing concerns a prohibited topic.²² Greater exposure to outside information has been shown to have a significant impact on changing North Korean perceptions of the outside world, however, access to outside perspectives has done little to change how North Koreans feel about their own government.²³

Conclusion and Implications for Training

Whether providing humanitarian aid or conducting combat operations, the US Army will need to be able to engage the population through information operations. North Korea’s unique information environment can present numerous challenges. The three topics discussed here highlight just a few of the challenges concerning the North Korea’s information environment that the US Army should account for during training. ♦



North Korean men use mobile phones to record the proceedings of Kim Il-sung’s 100th birthday in 2012

Source: Joseph Ferris. “North Korea Cell Phone Revolution.” Wikimedia Commons. Wikimedia Commons. 13 April 2012.

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North Korea's Methods to Counter Enemy Wet Gap Crossings

By H. David Pendleton, TRADOC G2

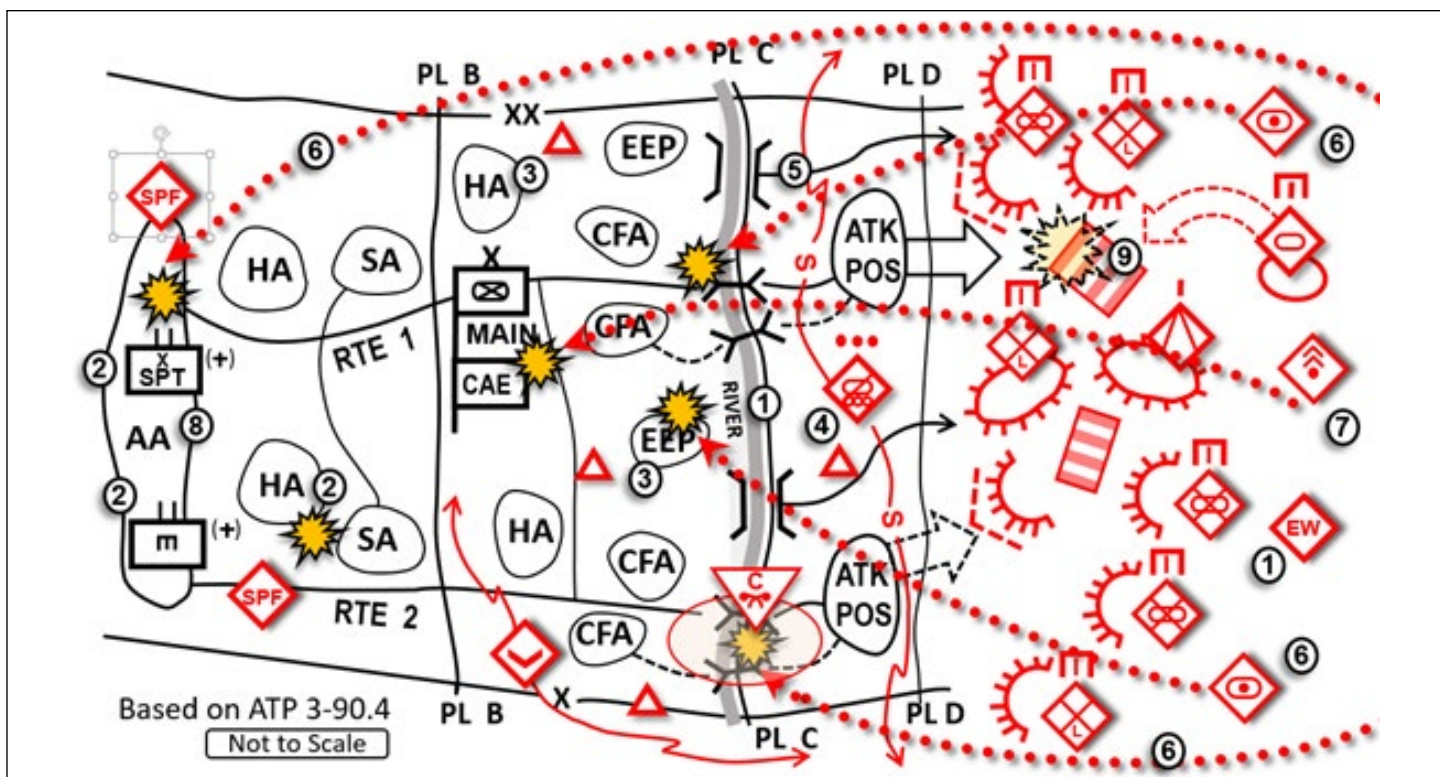
In the last several months, the US Army Training and Doctrine Command G-2's Operational Environment Integration Directorate Analysis and Control Element-Threat Integration Branch (TRADOC ACE-TI) has been working with the US Army's Command and General Staff College providing threat considerations for the Army Senior Leader Education Program. ACE-TI provided the threat perspective for several key actions for combat on the Korean peninsula to create a discussion between US Army senior commanders for possible responses. One of those actions was the Korea People's Army (KPA) trying to prevent coalition forces from conducting a wet gap crossing. The Korean Peninsula has many rivers that any offensive military force must cross to continue a campaign. The other military force would need to stop these wet cross gap crossings to achieve battlefield success. The following is one possible way that the KPA may attempt to prevent an enemy from crossing a major river and defeating it. (Numbers in the parenthesis correspond to the numbers in the graphic.)

The KPA will prepare to destroy an enemy wet gap crossing by using deliberate plans and actions. The KPA will use cover, camouflage, concealment, and deception in an attempt to mislead the enemy on the best location to conduct a deliberate river crossing. The KPA will attempt to time its attack on the wet gap crossing when the enemy units crossing the river are most vulnerable. It is likely that the KPA will allow a small number of the lead enemy units (battalion) to stage and cross the obstacle, then close passage points/crossing sites, and then defeat the isolated enemy units on the near bank, destroy designated points/sites, and finish the enemy units grouped on the near and far bank areas.

The KPA will distribute its forces in the defense to destroy enemy river crossing operations in the first defensive zone of its (1) near bank. KPA ground forces (KPAGF) on the near and far river banks report on enemy movements while defending their own positions. KPA Special-Purpose Forces (SPF) and unmanned aircraft (2) will conduct surveillance and track the enemy's logistics areas and engineering capabilities in the KPA security zone. On order, the KPA will attack selected high value targets (HVTs) with the intent of destroying key enemy assets such as counter rocket, artillery, and mortar systems before these units are deployed and fully integrated into the defense of the crossing sites. KPAGF observation posts on the river's far bank monitor the build-up of the enemy's bridging and assault crossing materiel in (3) engineer equipment parks and unit holding areas. The KPA may detain local citizens among its battle positions as a shielding technique to preclude enemy massed fires.

The KPAGF counterreconnaissance detachment will attempt to defeat enemy ground and low altitude reconnaissance attempts. KPAGF security elements screen (4) the river's near bank and replace mines in areas (5) previously cleared by enemy reconnaissance engineer parties. KPA indirect fires (6) will attempt to disrupt the far bank enemy actions to establish bridges, but purposely do not prevent the emplacement of some limited bridging assets and a few units from crossing the wet gap.

Long-range fires suppress support areas with observation by the SPF making the calls for fire. Once lead enemy units have crossed the river and are forming to continue their attack, designated KPA precision fires will shift to other HVTs while crossing sites continue to receive massed indirect fires. KPA EW and signals



Pictorial representation of a North Korean defense of a wet gap crossing

reconnaissance units will attempt to locate the enemy's main command post or targeting it with multiple rocket fires (7) to temporarily neutralize command and control of the crossing areas and support units. KPA indirect fires may also hit passage lanes and far bank entry areas with (8) chemical munitions to close some of the bridge crossing sites. Enemy assault boat crossings may stall when dismounted soldiers enter the re-mined areas on the near bank.

The KPA electronic information warfare campaign will attempt to portray a gap in its defenses and convince the enemy to reinforce the attacking forces on the near bank in what appears first as a successful crossing. The enemy main effort attacks into the first KPAGF defensive array and attempts to envelop the defensive force as other enemy forces continue their assaults. The KPA assumes risk that the deception campaign has been effective and will lure the enemy along the desire route. The KPAGF commander will attempt to keep his reserve uncommitted. KPA EW, reconnaissance, SPF, and the deception campaign will attempt to suppress the enemy's situational understanding of the river crossing site and support timely KPA tactical decisions.

The KPAGF will use lightly defended security outposts, simple battle positions, decoy battle positions, and conduct a planned delay by combined arms

elements to falsely indicate limited enemy maneuver success. Designated KPAGF forces will not engage the attacking ground forces that reached the near bank, remain undetected, and allow enemy lead forces to bypass their units into designated KPAGF kill zones in the first defensive array. As more enemy force commit to this fight from the near bank exit points, the first echelon defensive array isolates and destroys lead enemy forces (9) in kill zones. Other enemy forces supporting at the near bank are destroyed in detail.

The KPA commander's intent is to make the attempted enemy wet gap crossing fail and force the enemy to return to the far side of the river and possibly even retreat further in order to avoid observation by the KPAGF reconnaissance and SPF elements as well as harassment by KPA indirect fire weapons. The KPAGF commander will continue to improve its defensive position in preparation for the next river crossing or to lead a counterattack against the enemy. ♦

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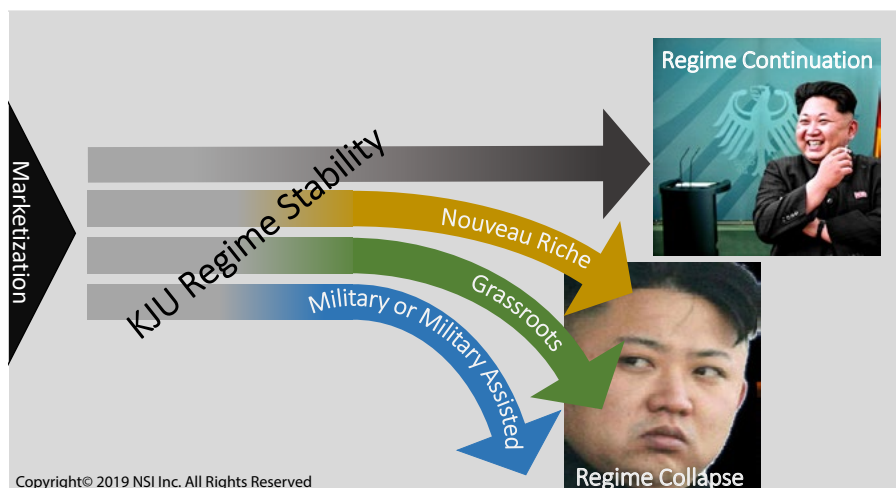
Summary of NSI's "Assessment to Collapse in the DPRK: A NSI Pathways™ Report"

By **Nicole Laster, PhD**, TRADOC G2 and **Sabrina Pagano, PhD**, NSI

Following the collapse of the North Korean economy and disastrous famine of the mid-1990s, the regime adapted its centrally-planned economy, allowing limited and small-scale private entrepreneurship among a starving population that the government's Public Distribution System could no longer support. As a result, the North Koreans turned to informal markets for sustenance in order to survive.¹ Although Kim Jong-un's own statements have highlighted the need for economic development in North Korea,² he remains suspicious of further economic liberalization and broad marketization viewing this as a strong threat to the security and survival of his regime.³ Nonetheless, the informal economy remains and represents a substantial sector of the total economy, fostering a new stratum of wealthy North Koreans, unattached to the military or the traditional elite.⁴ Observers and scholars have questioned whether there is in fact an insurmountable tension between economic reform and marketization on the one hand, and stability of the Kim family political control on the other. A research team at NSIⁱ tackles this question in a recent studyⁱⁱ by examining the impact of marketization on the potential for DPRK regime collapse.

Using the NSI Pathways™ methodology and model,ⁱⁱⁱ the NSI team addresses the following question: *Has marketization put the North Korean regime on a path to near-term collapse?* They define regime collapse as the dysfunction of a government to the point that it loses both efficacy and legitimacy and thus can no

longer maintain its functions, or even falls out of power completely.⁵ The NSI Pathways assessment explores three theoretical subpaths to collapse via marketization relevant to the DPRK. These subpaths align with three different stakeholder groups within North Korea that could conceivably exert pressure on the regime, at present or in the future. Their subpaths include: a) regime collapse as the result of pressure for reform and the frustration of the new class of entrepreneurs not directly tied to the Communist Party or the military (i.e., the “*nouveau riche*” path); b) pressure arising from the broader, mainly rural population, for example, who are frustrated with the regime's inability to distribute goods (i.e., the “*grassroots*” path), or c) a coup led by members of the military, or military support to one of the other two groups (i.e., “*military or military assisted*” path). **By applying the most critical components of regime collapse to each of the three subpaths, NSI determined there to be little evidence that the DPRK is currently on a pathway to regime collapse as a result of marketization.**



ⁱ NSI is a professional services firm specializing in multidisciplinary data-driven analytics. Our niche is helping clients better and more reliably understand people and their behaviors on critical, complex decision-making problems. Our highly diverse and experienced team of researchers and analysts apply multidisciplinary social science techniques and various analytic methods to create deeper analyses and clarifying insights enabling our clients to make more informed and better decisions.

ⁱⁱ Pagano, S. J. & Kuznar, L. A. (2018). Assessment of Pathways to Collapse in the DPRK: NSI Pathways™ Report. Arlington, VA: Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA).

ⁱⁱⁱ The NSI Pathways model is designed to provide a descriptive analysis of pathways and subpaths to a given outcome, looking for where the preponderance of evidence lies rather than deciding on a single subpath. An NSI Pathways model includes four key elements: antecedent conditions necessary for a particular path, catalysts that have the power to propel movement down a given path, markers that indicate evidence consistent with existence of the path, and buffers that serve to prohibit further progression toward a given outcome. The assessment also produces indicators and warnings (I&W) that can be used to guide subsequent analyses or updates and track progress toward an outcome, or down one or another pathway over time.

In their study, NSI found that across the three subpaths, the majority of critical indicators are absent; ultimately, there are too few antecedents, catalysts, and markers present to tip toward collapse. NSI also explains the key to North Korea's resilience overall appears to be the significant number of buffers present, including those identified as critical buffers (e.g., unifying ideology, abiding sense of nationalism).

NSI determined that of the three subpaths, the collapse indicators present are most consistent with a nouveau riche subpath—containing several key antecedents and markers (e.g., a nouveau riche identity, government corruption). Nevertheless, two critical antecedents for this subpath still remain missing (e.g., common leadership for the new class of economic elite and a true crisis of legitimacy) and state control mechanisms continue to provide a strong buffer against collapse. However, with the introduction of additional nouveau riche subpath antecedents or catalysts and/or a removal of current buffers (see list of indicators and warnings below), there are early indications which suggest the DPRK could begin moving down that path.

The military coup subpath contained insufficient evidence for collapse. While friction among the DPRK military officials in the form of power struggles, crackdowns on “corruption,” and policy differences is present, there were far too few critical indicators to point to collapse via military coup. Although collapse via this subpath is unlikely, early warnings indicate regime conflict with the military has some potential to develop.

Furthermore, there is little evidence to suggest that the DPRK would proceed along a grassroots subpath toward collapse at this time. Antecedents, catalysts, and markers of this subpath are largely absent—most importantly there are no signs of any organizing mechanism (i.e., the lack of grassroots organization) and no access to the means for resistance. The lack of ethnic divisions and a unifying superordinate identity further mitigate any potential grassroots uprising.

NSI also identifies significant social changes that may constitute important *indicators and warnings* that the DPRK is on a pathway collapse in the future. Some of these reasons are antecedent conditions, some catalysts, and others markers. These indicators and warnings include:

- **Major policy shifts not conducive to nouveau riche or military group interests**
- **Further decrements in quality of life for the nouveau riche**
- **Emergence of common nouveau riche, grass-root, or military grievances**
- **Linkages between interest groups such as the nouveau riche and the military**
- **Disruptive responses to sanctions and financial crises**
- **Crisis of legitimacy for the regime**, likely arising from a failure to develop the economy and improve overall conditions for the population, and especially the nouveau riche
- **Acute or frequent procedural justice violations** (i.e., unfair processes, as opposed to unfair outcomes) **that are perceived by the grassroots as unjust**

Implications for Realistic Training

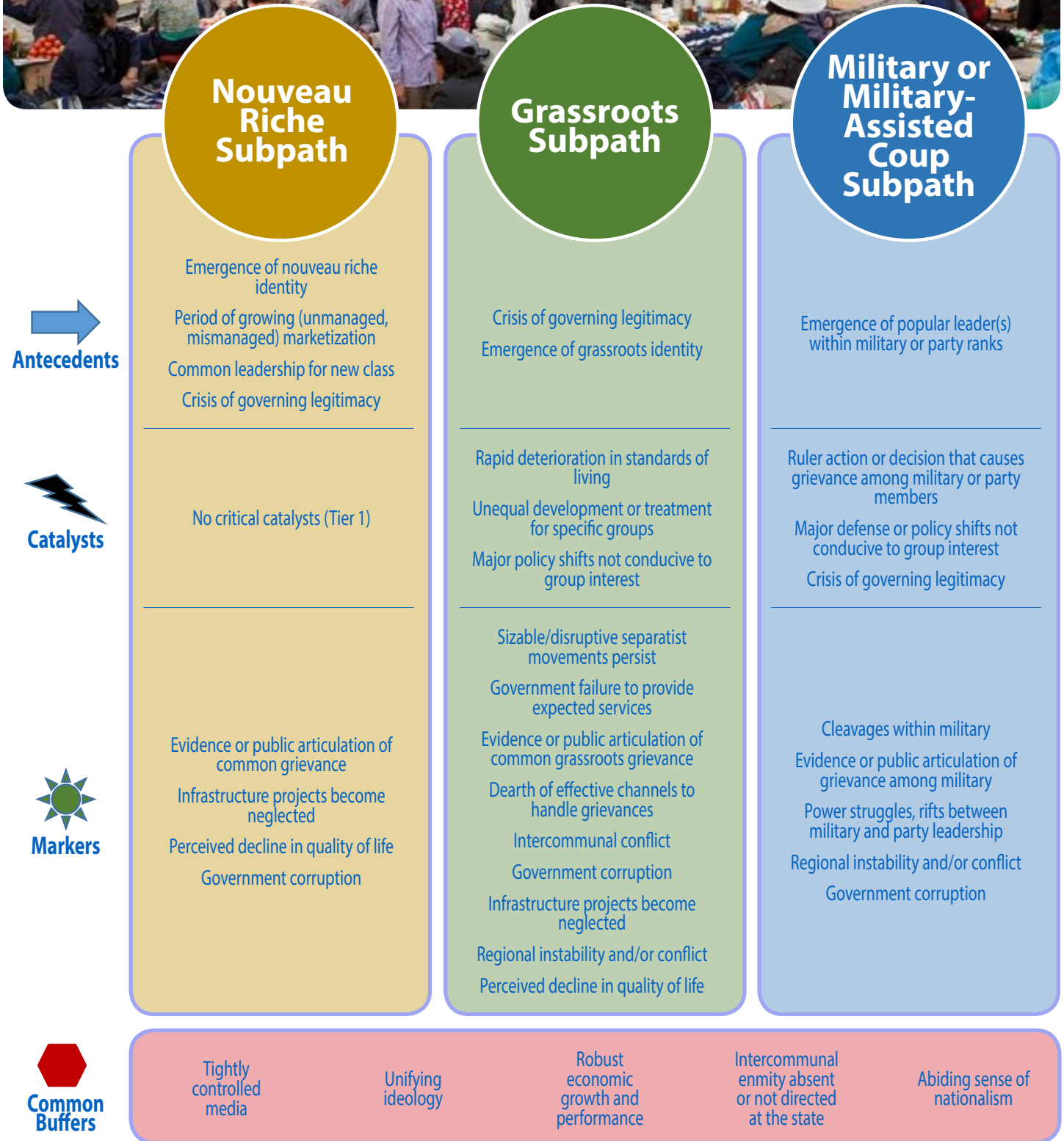
NSI's examination of the North Korean operational environment (OE) is particularly useful for generating realistic training. Even though NSI ultimately concludes that near term regime collapse as a result of marketization is unlikely, their study provides a practical platform for understanding:

- Reasons associated with DPRK regime collapse as result of marketization
- Reasons associated with DPRK regime resiliency
- Reasons associated with regime collapse or near collapse as a result of marketization for the following OEs: China, Poland, the USSR, Somalia and Yugoslavia
- A methodology for exploring marketization collapse or collapse related to other causes (e.g., warfare) for any OE

Training elements like exercise and scenario developers will be aided by the article's detailed analysis of marketization forces as well as the methodology used to identify predictive conditions. Both are beneficial in generating realistic training for soldier development.

NSI Pathways™

Assessment of Pathways to Collapse in the DPRK



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NSI generates a pathways model that outlines four key elements (or categories of ideas) related to collapse or resiliency. Three of the key elements indicate collapse (i.e., **antecedent conditions** necessary for a particular path, **catalysts** that have the power to propel movement down a given path, and **markers** that indicate evidence consistent with an existence of the path). The final element of the pathway model increases resiliency to collapse (i.e., **buffers** that serve to prohibit further progress toward a given outcome).

Conceivably exercise planners could build a regime collapse scenario around a marketization development and use the elements outlined in the DPRK to replicate a near team collapse. Notably, as indicated in the final section of the article, developers can also adjust elements in the scenario to plus up or reduce regime collapse. For example, in their study, NSI explains that within the nouveau riche subpath, there exists a crisis of governing legitimacy and the emergence of a nouveau riche identity among others. By adding any number of additional antecedent conditions (e.g., major policy shifts not conducive to the nouveau riche or military group interests, *linkages between the interest groups among the nouveau riche and military*, and *further decrements in quality of life for the nouveau riche*), the scenario could become increasingly more indicative of regime collapse which would in turn create the need for different responses. Furthermore, intelligence training could benefit by tracking of NSI's indicators and warning elements to produce analysis capable of informing leaders of an imminent collapse.

In order to develop and refine the base pathways model for the DPRK, NSI began by examining five cases of state stability impacted by marketization (China, Poland, the USSR, Somalia, and Yugoslavia). These cases, located in the appendix of the article, will be useful to scenario developers for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, scenario developers can extrapolate data provided in the country case studies to develop an exercise scenario about one of these countries. The cases were selected because they represented regimes that collapsed as well as those that were at risk but ultimately resilient to marketizing conditions. If these conditions are important to the scenario, developers have a great source to gather historical analysis about marketization in that OE (e.g., Somalia). Secondly, scenario developers will be able to replicate their

process for understanding collapse via some other cause by conducting preliminary case study analysis about that occurrence and creating a similar base model like NSI's DPRK pathways model. NSI walks the reader through the base model development outlining the step-by-step process for identifying critical components of collapse and classifying importance based on their examination of their five exemplar cases. NSI's approach—or methodology to develop the pathways model, which determines and isolates the important indicators, can be used by the Army to simulate collapse via other kind of reasons or grounds, for example, warfare, epidemics, population movements, etc. The process NSI uses to produce the indicators and warnings and ultimately to predict collapse—antecedent, catalysts, markers and buffers—can be replicated and applied in other scenarios to develop cases for collapse and have soldiers respond to “said cause” with appropriate actions.

Needless to say, NSI's study provides training professionals with specific interest in the DPRK marketization a great deal of value, but also offers exercise planners an incredibly useful tool to identify and generate realistic conditions about any OE for solid and realistic scenario development. ♦

Citation: Pagano, S. J. & Kuznar, L. A. (2018). Assessment of Pathways to Collapse in the DPRK: NSI Pathways™ Report. Arlington, VA: Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA).

Report Link: <https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NSI-Pathways%C2%81-DPRK-Collapse-Assessment-FINAL-FINAL-formatted-with-append....pdf>

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Previous North Korean Red Diamond articles

By H. David Pendleton, TRADOC G2



Since 2012, TRADOC ACE-TI has written about the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), better known as North Korea in a variety of documents. The TRADOC Red Diamond newsletter has featured articles every year on North Korea, the Korean People's Army (KPA), or KPA techniques. These articles and other North Korea/KPA topics are archived on the Army Training Network (ATN) and can be accessed by any individual with a common access card (CAC). To access the ATN Red Diamond articles, go to <https://atn.army.mil/tradoc-g2/>

[operational-environment-opfor-publications/red-diamond-newsletter](https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/ace-threats-integration/). Those without a CAC can access the Red Diamond newsletters back to 2017 from the All Partners Access Network (APAN) at <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/ace-threats-integration/>. All articles are unclassified.

The following table provides the date, title, author(s), and page numbers for all original articles written on North Korea or the KPA since June 2012 for the Red Diamond newsletter. ♦

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