Aspects of Israeli Deterrence With a View to South Korean Applicability

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Abstract: The situation on the Korean peninsula has shown to be in a stalemate, despite new levels of hostility and threats between both nations. It would seem that the North Korean regime has successfully gone through another power transition with Kim Jong Un. The issue of nuclear proliferation in the Korean Peninsula remains unresolved and tensions rise as the North Korean rhetoric increases, along with their efforts to develop new nuclear capabilities. South Korea has to consider alternative methods of nuclear deterrence, as the assurance of the nuclear umbrella from the United States has not stopped the North Korean intentions to become a nuclear country.

This essay considers South Korea's applicability of Israeli deterrence measures, their contexts are very different from one another but they also can provide insight as to how nuclear countries assert their power and substantiate their threats.

Keywords: Nuclear Deterrence; Israel; North Korea; South Korea; Iran; Risk Awareness.

Introduction: Where Do We Stand?

As the signing of the Korean Armistice nears its 58th anniversary, the situation on the Korean peninsula has shown to be in a stalemate, despite new levels of hostility and threats between both nations. At a glance, it would seem that the North Korean regime has successfully gone through another power transition with Kim Jong Un, the third of the Kim dynasty to take power. However, the situation of isolation is still palpable, as the North Korean leader has yet to meet any other foreign leader. Yet, as information technologies filter through the black market into North Korea, the containment and isolation of its population is beginning to break down. Nevertheless, threats of attacks have been made by North Korea, including the non-direct exchanges of ammunition between the DMZ. Meanwhile, the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) was reopened after a surge in hostile dialogue by the North Korean leaders in 2013. At the same time, south of the 38th parallel, the Sewol ferry tragedy has shown a disconcerting image of South Korea's preparation towards human provoked disasters. The profile of such a tragedy and its political repercussions have had a direct effect on the heads of

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government, even provoking the resignation of the Prime Minister because of the handling of the rescue operations.

The US Command of South Korean military forces in case of armed conflict was effectively pushed beyond the December 2015 deadline, and there is a growing mistrust in Japan and its intentions for a stronger role for its defense forces. Moreover, as an additional source of concern, there are China's recent claims over the East and South China Sea.

Humanitarian concerns over the situation in North Korea are globally shared, as exemplified by the general support for the UN commission of inquiry to Human Rights in the DPRK. This growing impasse, with no clear path nor negotiations towards a stable peace, and de-escalation of the conflict and denuclearization of North Korea, has led South Korean scholars and policy makers to seek alternative ways to form and enact an effective nuclear deterrence policy. It is here that the Israeli experience comes into play.

As a nation with a bellicose history and confrontation with neighboring countries ever since its foundation in May 1948, Israel has had to enforce and actively defend its security. Because of the scope of this paper, the situation in the Middle East will be seen only in relation to specific actions by Israel regarding the other Arab nations and the United States. This is an exploratory approach to Israeli deterrence mechanisms in relation to the inter-Korean relations.

Israeli Measures and Response to Threats: Considerations for South Korea

Israel is widely believed to have strong nuclear capabilities; it is a non-confirmed fact, since the Israeli leadership has chosen a path of neither confirming nor denying the existence of a nuclear arsenal. The reasons for its existence and the Israeli belief that it is a necessary cost to its security, have to be analyzed from the perspective of a nation that already has had to repel invasions and attacks from other nations in conventional warfare. Even though it did show superior capabilities during the Six Day and the Yom Kippur wars, Israel deals now mostly in an asymmetric war with hostile groups that are militarized and funded by other states, yet not directly an army against army scenario. The clear exception to this position has been Iran. With Mahmoud Ahmadinejad having a hostile approach to the mere existence of Israel, and supporting with weapons groups like Hizbollah. The moment that their nuclear research program was not certain to be for peaceful purposes only, Israel's security was again compromised. Recent changes in leadership have been met with skepticism by the Israeli leadership.[1]

To a greater extent, South Korea has also to deal with repelling hostile and destructive

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1   Isabel Kershner, "Israel Skeptical About New Nuclear Talks with Iran," The New York Times, last modified March 8, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/07/world/middleeast/israel-iran-nuclear-deal.html?_r=0.

rhetoric from North Korea on a regular basis. During the early part of 2013, the levels of hostility and threats of nuclear attacks reached such a point that the international media started focusing intensely on the subject, whilst in South Korea nothing really changed from their ordinary routine. This is a specific point related to the nature of both countries that has to be stressed: the level of violence and reaction in times of hostile remarks are actually opposing in both the Middle East and the Korean Peninsula. When rhetoric is at its highest point of hostilities from North Korea, the actions amount to non-violent shows of resolve by the North Korean nation. Their strategy includes threats, scrapping of peace accords and suspension of the shared economic complex of KIC. All of this without actually incurring into full fledged hostilities. After years of such rhetoric (intensified by the closeness to the date of the birth of Kim Il Sung), the population of South Korea has chosen to ignore and simply coexist with its belligerent neighboring country, impervious to some of the threats. This even has led to a state where the reaction to threats has been severely questioned, as the delayed response to the sinking of the ROKS Cheonan navy corvette in 2010.

On the opposite side of the spectrum (at least when comparing social response) we have Israel, where even mild rhetorical threats by their foes are usually accompanied with missile strikes or even bombings in Israeli cities. This has led to a population living under constant stress of violent attacks, but also a more prepared one in emergency responses. Also, this constant state of alert has made it necessary for Israel to quickly mobilize their civilian population in case of conflicts. Israeli Defense Forces have seen active confrontations in recent years, with the incursion towards Lebanon in 2006 and the Gaza offensive in 2012. It is with these opposing backdrops of social response and attitude towards conflict that the measures of Israel and its deterrence must be reviewed if South Korea seeks to effectively place such measures.

Placing Foe Against Foe: Partnering With Iran Against Iraq

Iran has not always been perceived as a threat to Israel, their partnership worked (with a remarkable rate of success) in a manner that was discreet but did in fact turn to be close. Iran gave de facto recognition to Israel from as early as 1950 and de jure in 1960. Provisions at the time went with Israel assisting Iran with intelligence, weapons and guidance with the United States in exchange for oil.[2] Their strategic partnership rested on the aim to counter the Arab influence, even going as far as providing enough weapons to maintain Iraq weak. This briefly shows the complexity within the middle east and the different factions that fight for power. Israel deliberately supported Iran with weapons as a method for keeping Iraq at bay. With the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the policy of western countries with Iran had to be re examined, yet even though Iran had a clear anti-

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2   Donald Neff, "The Us, Iraq, Israel, and Iran: Backdrop to War," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (1991).

zionist agenda, the partnership with Israel continued. Israel had come to view Iraq as a primary threat, even destroying their Osirak nuclear facility in an unprovoked attack on June 1981. The Iran-Contra affair was meant to provide weapons to Iran through Israel, funding the Contras fight against Nicaragua.

   South Korea does not have such an opportunity of having other players be the direct target of North Korean hostility as focus of its conflict. Whereas North Korea does include in its hostile remarks the United States, one of the main pillars of South Korean deterrence has been its alliance with the United States. Russia has recently foregone part of the historical debt from the Soviet Era[3], and China is the main protector of North Korea. Japan has been placed at the sidelines recently by South Korea due to its own territorial conflict over the Liancourt rocks (Dokdo-Takeshima islets). It has recently begun to establish dialogues with North Korea related to their abducted citizens in the 1970s and 1980s, yet these issues are being handled without the involvement of South Korea. Japan's relations with the DPRK are still at a stalemate as it has extended it's sanctions on the regime.

Israeli Shift to an Asymmetric War

The 2006 conflict with Lebanon started as a show of military superiority and resolve by the Israeli leadership in retaliation for the kidnapping of two of their soldiers. The purpose was to strike and nullify the leadership of Hizbollah after their increase in violence and apparent relation to the Palestinian Liberation Army.[4] This war had a much different outcome, problems like overconfidence in their air force and delays in the mobilization of their armored units made the goals of the incursion harder to accomplish.[5] The Israeli offense was slow in the way that their objectives were not reached before the security council resolved the ceasefire resolution.

   Hizbollah had also received ample weapons from Syria and Iran, leading to a stronger distrust with the other regional states. Hizbollah managed to strike a number of tanks during Israel's retreat from Lebanon, which was perceived as a win for the resistance to Israeli forces.[6] Exhaustion has been a problem in Israeli forces and society now that their opponents have found violence to be a method for reaching deals, after a certain human cost to both sides. This means that Israel has had to shift their military abilities towards one of asymmetric war, where the enemy is more atomized and able to create sporadic separate attacks seeking maximum visibility at a minimal cost. Fighting this kind of enemy means that conventional warfare is replaced for measures of containment and specific targeting. The immediate idea of an enemy has shifted within Israel, where this new level of defense also demands a different type of defense systems. South Korea

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3   Miriam Elder, "Russia Writes Off $10bn of North Korean Debt.," The Guardian 2012.

4   Eyal Zisser, "Is Anyone Afraid of Israel?" Middle East Quarterly (2001).

5   Ze'ev Schiff, "Israel's War with Iran," Foreign Affairs 85, no. 6 (2006).

6   Ibid.

faces no such dilemmas nor active violence against its nationals or its interests. Its enemy is a single militarized state unlike the plurality of threats against Israel. There have been no terrorist attacks within South Korea since the turn of the century, excluding cyber terrorism claims, as Israel has experienced although in the past North Korea did manage to assassinate a South Korean president. There is no active cell of North Korean terrorists destabilizing South Korea since their actions could quickly lead to escalation of the conflict.

The possession of nuclear weapons by states has, including the unconfirmed case of Israel, generally led to the perception that if a nation becomes a nuclear armed power it is also considered a nuclear target.[7] Where right now Israel has invested heavily in modern missile defense systems, the cost of the offensive missile can be a fraction of what the defensive mechanism costs. This cost relation is not even perceived within South Korea since there is no active exchange of munitions between nations.

Targeting of Weapons Shipments

In the matter of unilateral attacks on other nations, Israel has been clear that national sovereignty is not an impediment to strike weapons shipments directed to their enemies. The recent case of a shipment of missiles in the Lebanon-Syria border thought to be for Hizbollah, and the bombing of a Russian shipment of missiles within a Syrian government compound are other examples of the mechanisms to assert Israeli military power as well as containment capabilities within the region. Besides this being a clear show of force and a preemptive strike, it shows the reach and level of specification of Israeli intelligence. Something that has previously been recommended for South Korea.[8]

South Korea can not risk a preemptive attack on shipments of weapons to North Korea (even if they were identified and certain of the nature of the shipment) since they would very likely be Chinese weapons and a strike would have to be done either in Chinese or North Korean territory. The evident risk here is escalation and the reprisals that can come from such an attack are enough to be a deterrent for both nations, since the providing country is not another semi-periphery or peripheral country[9] but one of the two main hegemonic powers in the world and the region.

Nuclear Deterrence Through Nondisclosure

Whereas Iranian authorities across the political spectrum have never been seen openly pushing for a weaponized military program, the International Atomic Energy Agency has

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7   *Barry R. Posen, Nuclear-Armed Iran: A Difficult but Not Impossible Policy Problem* (New York: Century Foundation, 2006).

8   Jang Ji-Hyang and Peter Lee, "Re-Thinking Seoul's North Korea Policy: Lessons from the Israeli Model,"(South Korea: Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2013).

9   Greg Cashman, What Causes War?: An Introduction to Theories of International Conflict (Rowman Littlefield Publishers, 2013).

not been able to verify its exclusivity of peaceful purposes. The question of proliferation within the Middle East is closely related to Israel's situation as an unverified nuclear power.

The fear of a nuclear-armed Iran is also placed to the fear behind a first strike by Israel in case of an armed conflict. When discussing the nuclear alternatives, the risk of volatility or an eventual implementation of a Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) doctrine involves all other countries in the region. Right now the Israeli nuclear arsenal can be thought to be the principal deterrent of conventional warfare, yet since this has not stopped weapons shipments in the asymmetric confrontation with Hizbollah and the PLA, Israel has been pushed to escalate its nuclear deterrence. Even the forging of alliances is criticized in relation of its efficacy by Huth who speculates that:

> security strategy in which states rely largely on promises of military support from allies is an ineffective- or at least, inefficient- way of deterring adversaries in non crisis situations. [10]

Huth later extends his thesis, but asserts that alliances strengthen extended deterrence measures. This example of forging alliances and their role within nuclear deterrence is an important consideration for South Korea and its assumed protection under the nuclear umbrella defense of the United States.

North Korea is the nation that developed their own nuclear arsenal, withdrawing from the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty. Instead of using such weapons to gain a significant position in the region, its nuclear power has been used as a tool to sustain the status quo for as long as possible, in order to resist their growing international isolation. At this point, the measures for enforcing non-proliferation by the Six Party Talks have been met with stark opposition by the North Korean regime which pulled out of the process and hasn't returned to the negotiations, and the pressure is now starting to mount on China, whose tolerance is being tested more and more by the North Korean Regime, to pressure the DPRK to resume talks and start a real denuclearization process.

Israeli Lobby Efficacy

The international pressure and lobbying campaign that Israel has can be considered as an active method of deterrence from conventional conflicts. The Israeli lobby within the United States political scenario is marked by strong support from both parties. Even during presidential elections in the United States, the complexity of Israeli security is strongly discussed.

Israeli lobbying practices are used both in an offensive and defensive manner. Israel is always on the offense where it does not flinch to hostile declarations against its sovereignty

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10   Gerald L. Sorokin, "Alliance Formation and General Deterrence: A Game-Theoretic Model and the Case of Israel," The Journal of Conflict Resolution 38, no. 2 (1994).

and integrity, making it seem that they are always ready if confrontations were to reach a higher level. The appearance of a prepared nation for a possible escalation has been a stance forged not only with words but also by the decisive action of the Israeli Defense Forces.

On the defensive side, Israel is also highly criticized on humanitarian grounds with its situation with Palestine and the occupied territories. This has lead to a constant flux in the diplomatic sphere, where Israel has managed to secure a role of relevance over the years. Its interests in the nuclear dilemma of Iran for example, are constantly expressed and safeguarded by Israel and even other nations, while at the same time it receives criticism for humanitarian reasons in relation to Palestine.

For South Korea, its rapid development in the technology industry has given new sources of income for its companies and the country. The increasing amount of aid and bilateral cooperation from the South Korean government, through strategic partnerships or through their aid agency KOICA are symbols of a growing power that can also be augmented through strategic lobbying. This is one of the main points that Ji-Hang and Lee discuss as one of the actions for South Korea to assume.

> South Korea should thus follow the Israeli example of lobbying multiple levels and branches of the US and, to a lesser extent Chinese governments to make its own opinions heard. [11]

Conclusion: is South Korea Able to Adapt Israeli Deterrence?

Deterrence from aggression is a complex issue that can not be seen as a simple list of measures to implement universally to all cases. The reality of Israeli deterrence is different from the one experienced in the Korean peninsula. Whilst Israel has had to fight before to legitimize its own existence and recognition (whilst also going beyond the same treaties that formed it in the beginning), the region has also been, in comparison to the Korean Peninsula, more unstable in a sense that the region where Israel is has long been a source for confrontations of economic, historical and religious conflict. If we were to characterize Israeli deterrence as one of containment, the Korean deterrence could be then determined as one deflection of conflict. It is also worth mentioning that even though both countries claim to have an ultimate goal to reunify, their actions and deterrence mechanisms have led to a perpetuation of the current impasse. Even the Sunshine policy of the early 2000s has been source of debate, without a clear consensus of the efficacy of such engagement.[12]

This lack of tangible change in the situation over the past five decades has to be contemplated under a scope that considers several crucial factors, the disappearance of the Soviet bloc (not to mention Russia's forgiveness of debt to North Korea) and

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11   Jang Ji-Hyang and Peter Lee, "Re-Thinking Seoul's North Korea Policy: Lessons from the Israeli Model."

12   Stuart Smallwood, "Toward North Korean Engagement: The South Korean Sunshine Policy and West German Ostpolitik," *East Asia: Comparative Perspective* 11, no. 2 (2013).

South Korea's rapid development. Also, the recent Chinese assertiveness in the region by extending their claims over airspace identification zones and territorial claims in southeast Asia comes at the same time as the "Asian Pivot" of the United States is starting to take shape, including the plans to relocate the majority of their naval fleet in the Pacific and reinforcing the commitment of the United States in the region.

Asia is clearly marked to be the scenario where the world powers will come into play, and the Korean peninsula is the scenario that holds the highest risks of confrontation and possibility for escalation. Measures of deterrence have to be put in place for a coordinated de-escalation of the conflict, in order to prevent being a 21st century proxy for a world power confrontation between China and the United States. Making a simple comparative review, there are certain elements of Israeli posture that, it could be argued, are used more by North Korea instead of its southern neighbor. Israel and South Korea have a strategic partnership with the United States, with South Korea having a much bigger display of military closeness, troops deployed and shared military exercises than Israel. But if such a measure is to have a strategic partnership with a world power, North Korea has one with China in a fashion more in line with the Israeli-US alliance. What matters in this simple comparison is not the players involved in each action, but the nature of the action itself.

Israeli Population Has a High Risk Awareness and Preparation

South Korean population remains generally unprepared for conflict as it has become accustomed to the risk and rhetoric of North Korea, this can lead to a misperception of risk and a higher risk of ineffective responses. Whereas the South Korean military does have a high level of involvement with the U.S. forces with military exercises and chain of command, problems still surface like shortness of time for reserve troops to train and maintain updated knowledge in case of conflict, the high regulation of live ammo drills. The population largely ignores evacuation drills and other measures of preparedness in case of conflict. North Korea on the other side, has a general population living with food shortages and dangerous humanitarian conditions yet its whole organizational system is one of military first, where military deployment and measures are enforced with little consideration to the civilian population. This concerning factor can also lead to a better preparation and risk awareness than South Korea.

Israel Has Played Interests to Weaken Foes and Turn Them Against Each Other

South Korea has not played an active role by exercising its power with nations whom are friendly with North Korea at the same time that the North Korean regime has a level of international isolation that makes it harder to undermine South Korea's position. Nevertheless, if they can not turn other nations against each other, or have not actively

sought so, they can try to infiltrate and undermine the structure from within. South Korean intelligence services are in need of a reform[13] that provides them a more effective approach; while at the same time, North Korean spies are believed to have a deeper level of involvement within South Korea's structure than South Korea within the Kim regime.

Israel's Shift in Military Power Towards an Asymmetric Confrontation

South Korea has not had a unilateral action of aggression towards North Korea, even after attacking islands, boats and constant threats of engulfing Seoul in a sea of fire. North Korea on the other hand is believed to be constantly on the offensive in areas like cyberterrorism,hacking into South Korean institutions and organizations. Given the disparity of adoption of technological tools for the general population between North Korea and South Korea, cyber-terror attacks present a bigger threat to South Korea, and one that the North has exploited several times before.

Israel actively targets and eliminates weapons shipments that it believes will risk its own security, even beyond it's national borders. Both South Korea and North Korea exercise no direct involvement or interference with each other's weapons programs.

Israel Has Positioned Itself as an Assumed Nuclear Power Without Actually Having Admitted to It

North Korea has already performed three nuclear tests to this day and threatens to undergo a fourth one. It is also believed that it has large stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons. South Korea acts in conjunction with the United States and depends on its nuclear arsenal as a deterrent, where it is through this strategy that the United States has prevented proliferation of nuclear weapons within its Asian allies.

Re-assessing a Deterrence Approach: New Paths to Stability, De-Escalation and Peace?

If viewed under the previous light, it could be perceived that whilst South Korea can consider Israeli deterrence measures, North Korea seems to be already on track with a more similar set of measures. Is North Korea closer to Israel? Should South Korea look to the other side for inspiration or maybe try to adapt a more conscious approach to reunification? Considering how some compromises are going to be demanded also from the South Korean society in the sense of economic support, creation of infrastructure and harboring refugees and restoring the rule of law in case of a North Korean collapse,[14] such crises would only be increased were the reunification happen after an armed

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13   Jang Ji-Hyang and Peter Lee, "Re-Thinking Seoul's North Korea Policy: Lessons from the Israeli Model."

14   Bruce W. Bennet and Jennifer Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements," International Security 36, no. 2 (2011).

confrontation.

The relation stands that the nuclear power here is North Korea, and the policy attempts come from an approach of deterrence and perhaps even towards peace. Israel's policies do not consider at any point the giving up of their nuclear capabilities. Should South Korea be taking lessons from the Arab countries in the Middle East instead?

Greg Cashman[15] argued about the role of war in modern society, in that it is starting to be viewed as an uncivilized method of conflict resolution. I believe that it is through creative diplomacy that new options and perspectives may be considered and applied. But while the aspect of nuclear peril and armed conflict conform the greater part of the debate between both Koreas, the fact that not only the North but also South Korea will have to undergo drastic changes if it wants reunification to be a reality.

Democratic systems not only allow but require this sort of questioning towards the political actions and the process of policy making and their players. These will not only enrich such discussions with diversity and a greater solidity in the arguments that are finally chosen from a conscious and informed debate, but will also influence the policy makers themselves. Such tasks can not be relegated only to the press and think-tanks of those specific subjects; even universities have an important role as harbors of academic thinking and debate. And it should also be demanded that through political watchdogs, such as the media or academic discussion, the debate is also generalized and brought forward to the general population, for its articulation and engaging.

Proposing that the Israeli measures are more similar in approach and practicality, even though the nations are not directly related amongst each other, to those of North Korea than the ones of South Korea is not a popular idea. But if we place it in the sense of how to react to such type of deterrence, such theorization can bring forward new paths towards a resolution that can be, in the ideal and most optimal scenario, peaceful and with a growth of both nations in a successful reunification.

The need of a military preparation and readiness is rational when considering the historical background and current tension in the peninsula, yet still, proposals also have to be placed on the highest ideals of pacifism and diplomacy. Even if such mechanisms are ultimately non-viable, such theorizations can also shed light on aspects for a creative defusing of this long sustained conflict.

This essay started with the intention to consider South Korea's applicability of Israeli deterrence measures, yet concluded with a consideration of North Korea as a state that has already followed similar measures. This can lead to further explorations of new perspectives on the Korean conflict and hopefully, new ways of diplomacy to attain permanent peace. **GPR**

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