

Sept. 24, 2013 NO. 71



# Budget Driven Defense: Implications of Potential Shifts in US Defense Posture for the Korean Peninsula and the Asia-Pacific in the Coming Decade

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Two years since the passage of the Budget Control Act (BCA) and less than one year into the implementation of the automatic across the board spending cuts deemed "the sequester," the United States is facing some hard choices on its national defense policy. Critics have long warned that sequestration would "severely damage military readiness" or even "hollow out the force."<sup>2</sup> The latest study by the Department of Defense (DoD) paints an ominous future for the US military with significant administrative and planned force reductions in the coming decade.<sup>3</sup> However, there are those who view these projections as grossly overstating the impact of a much-needed drawdown in US defense spending.<sup>4</sup> Fact or fiction, the defense spending cut is a reality and how the stakeholders prepare for this changing tide is a choice. The purpose of this brief is to outline the latest projected estimates of DoD spending and explore potential options available for one of the key stakeholders in the region, namely South Korea.

#### Worst Case Scenario: Strategic Choices and Management Review (SCMR)

Contextual understanding of the current drawdown in US defense spending is useful in providing a perspective on its magnitude and impact. From a historical standpoint, current reduction is the fifth of its kind since the end of World War II and will likely be one of the deepest (if the full impact of BCA is realized) (See Figure 1).





Source: US DoD

On its face, the BCA imposes a US\$487 billion reduction in DoD spending over a ten-year period in addition to the US\$500 billion sequester-level caps and US\$150 billion reduction in defense spending that the President's budget imposes over the same period.<sup>5</sup> Barring any changes to the budget, these measures add up to about US\$1 trillion of reduction over the next decade.<sup>6</sup> Accounting, of course, can be elusive depending on how one goes about counting her beans. There are competing estimates—some more conservative (or liberal) than others. Michael O'Hanlon, for instance, estimates the BCA imposed reduction as US\$350 billion rather than US\$487

billion—making the total drawdown to be a lot less than what the DoD claims.<sup>7</sup> Mackenzie Eaglen, on the other hand, claims that the three year spending reduction imposed by the Obama administration pre-sequestration amounts to as much as US\$1 trillion already.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of the numbers, everyone agrees that the cuts are a lot deeper and wider than they would like. While most analysts expect some type of grand bargain or an economic turnaround before these austerity measures are fully implemented, the immediate impact is a US\$52 billion cut for Fiscal Year 2014 and similarly sized cuts in subsequent years thereafter.

The numbers are certainly telling, but what does this all mean? That is, exactly how will the reduction be implemented and what impact will it have on the strategic priorities of the United States? The DoD has released the results of its latest study, which addresses these questions in detail. In keeping with the Obama administration's 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance,9 the DoD's Strategic Choices and Management Review (SCMR) frames the future of US defense strategy as a choice between capacity (i.e. number of Army brigades, Navy ships, Air Force battalions, and Marine battalions), *capability* (i.e. ability to modernize weapons systems and defense technology), and *readiness*. The two options outlined by the DoD necessarily pits the first two of these three dimensions against each other whereby an emphasis on capability would mean that the US military will be "smaller and able to go to fewer places and do fewer things, especially if crisis occurred at the same time in different regions of the world;" while emphasis on capacity would make the US military "less effective against more technologically advanced adversaries."10 Although the DoD has not been open about the exact impact that either of these approaches will have for its civilian workforce, the Secretary of Defense has already announced plans to reduce the headquarters budgets by 20 percent as well as implement reforms that will streamline intelligence gathering and report activities. The actual balance between capacity, capability, and readiness still remains to be seen, but the emerging consensus in Washington seems to favor capability over capacity. In a set of parallel independent exercises led by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) in collaboration with the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the Center for New American Security (CNAS), and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the preferred approach was to emphasize investment in new technologies and accept deeper cuts to readiness as well as DoD

Cat	egory	AEI	CNAS	CSBA	CSIS	DoD SCMR High Capability	DoD SCMR High Capacity
Army Active End Strength		412,000	417,000	420,000	327,000	380,000	420,000
US Marine Corp Active End Strength		135,000	155,000	177,000	182,000	150,000	175,000
Carriers		8	8	9	7	8	9
LHA/LHDs		9	11	11	11	8	11
TACAIR	Legacy	-630	-170	-300	-240	N/A	N/A
	Next- Generation	+60	-300	-380	-20	No Change	Elimiate JSF
Bombers	Legacy	Retire all B-1 and some B-52	No Change	Retire all B-1	Retire all B-1	Retire all B-1	Retire all B-1
	Next- Generation	Accelerate	Accelerate	Accelerate	Cancel	No Change	Cancel LRS-B
Readiness		-\$32 Billion	-\$62 Billion	-\$132 Billion	-\$36 Billion	N/A	N/A
DoD Civilians		-10%	-33%	-27%	-19%	N/A	N/A

Table 1. Comparison of Proposed US Defense Spending Reduction

Source: CSBA

civilian personnel (See Table 1).<sup>11</sup>

### Whither Strategy? Implications of Possible Shifts in US Defense Posture

Rightly or wrongly, the above assessment suggests that the US defense priorities under BCA will be constrained more by budget than strategy. That is, the US rebalance to the Pacific is not likely to look as it was originally conceived if the BCA is allowed to run its course.<sup>12</sup> The latest set of independent and internal assessments commissioned by the DoD confirms that the current US defense posture is adequate in deterring and defending against potential threats in the Asia-Pacific, but a shift in the US national security strategy will mean that alternative postures will have to be considered.<sup>13</sup> One recent independent assessment, which entertains a budget driven US defense posture, considers significant drawdowns in the region, including reduction of ground forces in Korea by 14,000 to 18,000, along with the withdrawal of 9,000 Marines from Okinawa as well as the elimination of four F-16 squadrons from Misawa and Kunsan.<sup>14</sup>

With negotiations underway to renew the terms of the bilateral Special Measures Agreement (SMA), there is an increasing call in Washington for burden sharing with respect to US military basing in South Korea. As of 2012, the United States spent about US\$10 billion on overseas military presence (excluding Afghanistan and military personnel costs) of which 70 percent of this amount was used to support military bases in Germany, Japan, and South Korea. The total amount allocated to non-personnel related cost of basing 28,500 US troops in South Korea was about US\$1.1 billion.<sup>15</sup> Historical trends in relative contributions towards US military presence in Korea shows that the US share has exceeded that of South Korea as of 2010 (See Figure 2). However, the cost sharing program in place for consolidating and repositioning US forces on the Korean Peninsula calls for South Korea shouldering a heavier load than the United States—in the range of about US\$4 billion—by the comple-



Figure 2. Funding Support for US Military Presence in South Korea, 2008 - 2012

Source: US Senate Committee on Armed Services

tion of the Yongsan Relocation Plan (YRP) and the Land Partnership Plan (LPP).<sup>16</sup>

Could reduction in spending lead to a significant drawdown on the Korean Peninsula? Not likely. If anything, there are stronger arguments for a build-up.<sup>17</sup> But if cuts have to be made, there are at least three arguments for why these cuts should not come from US Forces Korea (USFK). First of all, the amount of spending set aside for USFK, though not insignificant, is too small to make a serious dent on the DoD's overall spending. If overseas presence needs to be curtailed in the Pacific, cutting forces stationed in other places, such as Japan, would allow for more significant savings. Secondly, the geostrategic importance of USFK has never been greater since the end of the Korean War given the frequency and magnitude of North Korean provocations in recent years.<sup>18</sup> While North Korea fields an aging force with Soviet/Chinese designed legacy hardware, they have a sizable forward deployed presence with an evolving nuclear program as well as an emerging cyberwarfare and ballistic missile capabilities (See Table 2 and Figure 3).<sup>19</sup> History also teaches us that tech



Figure 3. North Korean Ballistic Missile Capabilities

Source: US DoD

Force	Туре	Estimate	
	Korean People's Army	960K - 1.2 million	
Ground	Tanks	4100	
	Armored Vehicles	2100	
	Field Artillery	8500	
	MRLs	5100	
	Personnel	92K	
Air	Combat Aircraft	730	
1 111	Helicopters	300	
	Transport Aircraft	290	
	Personnel	60K	
	Submarines	70	
Naval	Patrol Combatants	420	
INAVAI	Amphibious Landing Craft	260	
	Mine Warfare Vessels	30	
	Support/Auxiliary Vessels	30	

Table 2. North Korean Military Capability and Capacity

Source: US DoD

nological superiority is not the only benchmark by which to judge North Korean capabilities. For instance, sinking of the South Korean warship *Cheonan* in 2010 effectively demonstrates what a poorly equipped North Korean navy can achieve against a technologically superior South Korea.<sup>20</sup> Finally, continuing the current level of troop presence in Korea makes for a good foreign policy from the standpoint of the United States. As shown in the latest set of polls conducted by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, an overwhelming majority of the South Korean public supports both short (78%) and long-term (68%) presence of USFK on the Korean Peninsula (See Figure 4).

The plurality (48%) also supports continued USFK presence post-reunification. This pattern persists even after accounting for any negative public sentiments against the USFK (See Figure 5). Among those that perceive the US military as a source



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Figure 5. South Korean Public Opinion on the US Forces Korea

of historical and/or social problem (50%), the general view is that the US military presence in South Korea is a necessity (over 80%). An explanation for this dichotomy is the recognition that the USFK security guarantee is the source of stability on the Korean Peninsula (over 60%). In other words, the South Korean public seems to appreciate the instrumental value of US military presence even after accounting for all the baggage (historical and/or social) that might come with this package.

### What Next?

Despite all this, it would be a mistake for South Korea to rest solely on what makes good policy sense for the United States. As numerous critics have argued, the current budget challenge facing the United States was guided less by good policy sense and more by political convenience and personal ambition in Washington.<sup>21</sup> What

Source: Asan Daily Poll, September 14 - 16, 2013

guarantees exist to reassure the South Korean government that good policy sense will somehow prevail this time? Even as late as this past August, the Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew alerted the leaders on the Hill about an imminent breach of debt ceiling by mid-October. Time is running out and consensus looks to be in short supply.

On this side of the Pacific, difficult circumstances demand difficult choices for Seoul. While South Korea should seek to maintain good relations with all partners, including the United States, it should also plan ahead for contingencies that may arise from deepened budget cuts and even possible reordering of strategic priorities in Washington.

One possible option available to the Park Geun-Hye administration is to consider adjustments to the existing Defense Reform 307 Plan (DR307). Although some assessments suggest that even as large as a 30 percent reduction of USFK would not be significant enough to tip the balance in favor of North Korea,<sup>22</sup> we know from experience that the existing level of USFK presence does not necessarily deter North Korea from engaging in aggressive behavior or encourage the regime to end its nuclear program. While some independent experts have hailed DR307 as an improvement over its precursor (i.e. Defense Reform Plan 2020), the plan itself was conceived as a response to a series of North Korean provocations in 2010.<sup>23</sup> In short, it does not account for a possible reduction in US defense spending or change in its strategic priorities. Time is ripe for the administration to revisit DR307 and consider possible changes to scheduled modernization or possible force size in light of new developments in Washington.

Even before considering adjustments to the DR307, however, the administration can consider raising the bar on South Korea's own defense spending. The Defense Reform Plan 2020 (DRP2020) called for a spending level set to three percent of GDP. South Korea's defense budget has never exceeded this level since 1996. Granted, South Korea's economy has continued to grow and its defense budget has generally increased over time; however, the rate of this growth has not kept up with the requirements of either the DRP2020 or DR307.<sup>24</sup> Under the developing circumstance in the United States, a more sensible spending level may call for a target in the range of three to four percent of GDP.

In the way of increasing the defense budget, the Park administration may also consider propping up South Korea's contribution to the SMA. Putting aside all calls for fairness, one key area of renegotiation may be the 2009 SMA provision for capping South Korea's contribution at four percent per year. Having an upper limit which straitjackets the allies from making strategic defensive adjustments is somewhat perplexing to say the least especially when dealing with an unpredictable neighbor like North Korea or a potentially explosive situation in the East China Sea or the East Sea. Aside from the fact that increased contribution signals South Korea's commitment to the alliance, it also keeps the defensive posturing in the Peninsula from being driven by the budget rather than strategic necessity.<sup>25</sup>

Another possible option available to the Park administration is to continually build upon South Korea's past successes in forming and maintaining strong bonds with other states in the region. There is some rationale (both theoretic and empirical) suggesting, for instance, that increased trade between two or more states will lower the likelihood of war between these parties since likelihood of conflict will raise the cost of breaking this relationship.<sup>26</sup> The proposed move to complete a free trade agreement with China and/or Japan is a positive step in this regard. South Korea's renewed interest in the once marginalized Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) with Japan's entry into the negotiations could also have some positive security implications as well. South Korea must take care, however, that these trade regimes truly raise the mutual benefits of all participating countries; otherwise, the principled condition by which increased trade can incentivize the parties to seek peace would not hold.

In addition to trade, South Korea also has the option of deepening its political engagement or security cooperation with other countries. The current hub-and-spoke model of security architecture in the Asia-Pacific is largely a historical legacy of the postwar settlement that resulted in the failure of the Pacific Pact.<sup>27</sup> Possible weakening of the hub (i.e. the United States) in the future may mean that this structure is not a sustainable option. Instead of attempting to reinvent the wheel, it may bode well for the current administration to consider increasing its participa-

tion to build up existing cooperative arrangements, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), or ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Of the three, ADMM+ seems most promising.<sup>28</sup> While there are many obstacles to the solidification of regional security framework in the Pacific, there is no reason to completely discount this possibility in the long run. Needless to say, destabilization on the Korean Peninsula does not only threaten the involved parties and immediate neighbors but also others in the region, whose interests are intricately tied to one another. South Korea can exploit this moment as an opportunity to lead if it wishes to build on its ambitions as a middle power on the global stage.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

There are encouraging signs that the US economic recovery is catching steam, but at the same time, the political jockeying on the Hill suggests that the impasse over the federal budget is not likely to be resolved any time soon. If current conditions persist without any changes down the road, South Korea may be forced into a corner without any choice. The good news is that the Park administration has the opportunity to make the right choice by planning for a potentially difficult future. Winston Churchill once observed that "kites rise highest against the wind - not with it." Will South Korea rise above this challenge to achieve new heights?

The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

- 1. The author wishes to thank Bruce Bennett, Choi Kang, Bridget Coggins, Bruce Klingner, and Katy (Kongdan) Oh for many useful comments, feedback and suggestions. Standard caveats apply.
- Leon Panetta, "Sequestration's Self-Inflicted Wounds," *The Washington Post*, September 2, 2013; Weisgerber, Marcus, "Sequestration Could Chop \$33B from DoD Investments," *DefenseNews*, July 10, 2013.
- 3. "Statement on Strategic Choices and Management Review," as delivered by Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, July 31, 2013.
- 4. Robert Barro and Veronique de Rugy, *Defense Spending and the Economy* (Arlington, VA: George Mason University Mercatus Center, 2013); Peter W. Singer, "Separating Sequestration Facts from Fiction: Defense Sequestration and What It Would Do for American Military Power, Asia, and the Flashpoint of Korea," *Time Magazine*, September 23, 2012.
- 5. Note that this estimate is based on a Statement on Strategic Choices and Management Review by the Secretary of Defense.
- "Statement on Strategic Choices and Management Review," Chuck Hagel; Claudette Roulo, "'Painful' Review Looked at Every Corner of DoD, Winnefeld Says." *American Forces Press Service*, July 31, 2013.
- 7. Michael O'Hanlon, *Healing the Wounded Giant: Maintaining Military Preeminence while Cutting the Defense Budget* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013).
- Mackenzie Eaglen, "The Pentagon's illusion of choice: Hagel's 2 options are really 1," American Enterprise Institute, August 1, 2013, http://www.aei.org/article/foreign-and-defense-policy/defense/the-pentagons-illusionof-choice-hagels-2-options-are-really-1/.
- 9. Department of Defense, Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense, January 2012.
- 10. "Statement on Strategic Choices and Management Review," Chuck Hagel.
- Strategic Choices Exercise Outbrief, CSBA, May 29, 2013, http://www.csbaonline.org/publications/2013/05/ strategic-choices-exercise-outbrief/; Analysis of the DoD SCMR Options, CSBA, August 1, 2013, http://www.csbaonline.org/2013/08/01/analysis-of-the-dod-scmr-options/.
- 12. Defense Department Background Briefing on the Strategic Choices and Management Review in the Pentagon Briefing Room, US Department of Defense, July 31, 2013.
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- 14. Center for Strategic & International Studies, US Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment (August 2012). It is important to note that the DoD's current official position is that South Korea will not be impacted by the sequester. As noted by the Deputy Secretary of Defense Ash Carter during a public statement in June 2013—"[the DoD] exempted a number of other critical functions from sequester – for example, nuclear deterrence, our ability to respond immediately to crises. . . on the Korean Peninsula, for example, if that were to become necessary...." See: "Korea immune from U.S. military budget cuts: Pentagon official," Korean Herald, June 13, 2013, http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20130613000144.
- 15. US Senate Committee on Armed Services, Inquiry into US Costs and Allied Contributions to Support the US

*Military Presence Overseas*, April 15, 2013. This figure does not include more than US\$2 billion in US military personnel costs as well as South Korea's contributions for offsetting US costs.

- 16. There are two plans in place to consolidate US forces on the Korean Peninsula into Camp Humphreys (40 miles south of Seoul) and Daegu. The Land Partnership Plan (LPP), which is projected to cost about US\$3.2 billion, involves repositioning US forces from areas north of Seoul to Camp Humphreys and Daegu. The Yongsan Relocation Plan (YRP) with a heftier price tag of US\$7 billion calls for moving US forces from the current base in Yongsan to Camp Humphreys.
- 17. For a more thorough discussion on why the United States should increase its presence in the Asia-Pacific, see: Bruce Klingner and Dean Cheng, "America's Security Commitment to Asia Needs More Forces." *Backgrounder*, no. 2715, August 7, 2012; Dean Cheng and Bruce Klingner, "Defense Budget Cuts Will Devastate America's Commitment to the Asia-Pacific," *Backgrounder*, no. 2629, December 6, 2011.
- 18. North Korea has become more daring and confident in its provocations against the South. Two most notable examples include the sinking of the *Pohang*-Class corvette named *Cheonan* near the Northern Limit Line on March 26, 2010 and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in November of that same year. In 2013, North Korea claims to have conducted a third nuclear test, which recorded the largest seismic activity to date. Finally, the successful launch of *Kwangmyongsong* in December 2012 marks an important turning point which suggests that North Korea is one step closer to developing a long-range payload capability. Finally, the latest report of possible activity at the Yongbyon facility suggests that North Korea has resumed production of plutonium.
- 19. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, Annual Report to Congress, February 15, 2013.
- 20. From South Korea's viewpoint, North Korea is a clear and present threat given its forward deployed arsenal of field artillery and multiple rocket launchers (MRLs). Even though only a fraction of these may have the range to reach Seoul, most independent experts confirm that North Korea possesses the capability to deliver as many as 20,000 shells an hour to downtown Seoul. See Chad O'Carroll, "North Korea's Conventional Weapons Threat," *Korea Economic Institute*, February 5, 2013, http://blog.keia.org/2013/02/north-koreas-convention-al-weapons-threat/.
- 21. Brendan Nyhan, "The Green Lantern Theory of Sequestration," *Columbia Journalism Review*, February 27, 2013; Brendan Greeley, "Lessons of Avoidance from Gramm's 'Pac-Man' Budget Sequestration," *Bloomberg News*, March 29, 2013; Laura Matthews, "Defense Spending Cuts 2013: Should Obama Worry Sequester Effects Could Shape His Legacy?" *International Business Times*, February 21, 2013.
- 22. Peter Singer, "Separating Sequestration Facts from Fiction."
- 23. Bruce W. Bennett, "The Korean Defense Reform 307 Plan" *Issue Brief*, no. 8, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2011; Bruce. Klingner, "South Korea: Taking the Right Steps Toward Defense Reform" *Backgrounder*, no. 2618, Heritage Foundation, October 19, 2011; Rhee Sang-Woo, "From Defense to Deterrence: The Core of Defense Reform Plan 307" *Korea Chair Platform*, CSIS, September 7, 2011.
- 24. SIPRI Military Expenditure Database.
- 25. Current schedule on the transfer of Operational Control (OPCON) should also be reconsidered with this

principle in mind. As some critics have noted already, the possible dismantling of the Combined Forces Command can send the wrong signal to North Korea that there may be a sizable cut in the number of US troops deployed to South Korea in case of an emergency (See *2006 SAIS US-Korea Yearbook*).

- 26. The logic, of course, dates back as far as Baron de Montesquieu, who noted in 1750 that "peace is the natural effect of trade." See also Solomon W. Polacheck, "Conflict and Trade," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24 (1980): 55-78; Solomon. W. Polache and Carlos Seiglie, "Trade, Peace and Democracy: An Analysis of Dyadic Dispute," *IZA Discussion Paper Series*, no. 2170 (2006); Erik Gartzke, "Chapter 2: Economic Freedom and Peace," in *Economic Freedom of the World: 2005 Annual Report*, ed. J. Gwartney, R. Lawson, and E. Gartzke (Toronto: The Fraser Institute, 2005).
- David W. Mabon, "Elusive Agreements: The Pacific Pact Proposals of 1949-1951," *Pacific Historical Review* 57, no. 2 (1988): 147-177; Charles M. Dobbs. "The pact that never was: The pacific pact of 1949." *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, no. 4 (1984): 29-42.
- 28. "The US Approach to Regional Security," Statement by US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel at the Shangri-La Dialogue, 2013; Bonnie S. Glaser, "American Reassurance of Rebalance Encourages Cooperation and Progress at ADMM+" cogitASIA, Septmber 5, 2013, http://cogitasia.com/american-reassurance-of-rebalance-encourages-cooperation-progress-at-admm/; Brian Harding, "Don't underestimate the ADMM+" PacNet #65R, CSIS, August 19, 2013, http://csis.org/publication/pacnet-65r-dont-underestimate-admm; Vibhanshu Shekhar, "ADMM+: Another Case of 'Pretentious Diplomacy'?" IPCS, October 29, 2010, http://www.ipcs.org/article/china/admm-another-case-of-pretentious-diplomacy-3268.html; Chu Shulong, "The East Asia Summit: Looking for an Identity," *Brookings Northeast Asia Commentary*, no. 6, February 2007.
- 29. Choi Young Jong, "South Korea's Regional Strategy and Middle Power Activism," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 23, no. 1 (2009): 47-67.



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