

**EMBARGO UNTIL 09:00 SEPT. 25 (KOR)**

**9.25일 오전 9시 이후 보도 가능합니다**

September 25, 2013

**Asan North Korea Conference 2013 – Session I**

## **North Korea's Nuclear Capability**

Abstract

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It is said that, when the Cold War ended, both the United States and the Soviet Union were surprised to find out that neither one had planned for a nuclear first strike – both had only planned for retaliation. Each one's fear of a nuclear first strike was unfounded.

More than 20 years later, a nuclear armed North Korea is feared not only in the region, but also beyond the ocean.

Fear, however, is a bad advisor, and should therefore never be unfounded. With other words, if there is fear, there has to be a threat. And this threat can be analyzed.

There is little doubt by now that North Korea is capable of exploding a nuclear device. The question is: *Can* such a device be used as a weapon, and if yes, under what circumstances *will* it be used as a weapon?

Weapons always have to be delivered to the intended target. For distant targets like the U.S., or even Europe, it is generally agreed that this can only be done by the use of missiles or means of terrorism. Successfully smuggling an atomic bomb from North Korea to a target in the U.S., or Europe, especially in the course of a war, seems unlikely, and North Korea is still far away from relying on long range missiles for that task. Therefore, there is no clear and present nuclear danger emanating from North Korea to distant countries *today*.

This, however, changes with distance. Japan is in range of North Korean missiles, and China and the Republic of Korea share common borders with North Korea.

Delivery of a nuclear weapon to these countries by aircraft seems unlikely – there are few who doubt that North Korea, in case of war, would instantly lose air superiority, and any aircraft leaving a North Korean runway would instantly be shot down. Missiles are an option for a nuclear attack on neighboring countries, but a risky one, probably too risky for the few precious nuclear devices North Korea might have. But common borders allow for other ways of delivery, for example by truck or tank, perhaps also by means

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similar to terrorist attacks.

Therefore, looking only at the potential capability, the risk of a nuclear explosion on South Korean territory is real.

However, there are many other factors that have to be included in the threat scenario, and these factors significantly reduce that risk for the near future. For example, unlike Syria, the use of a WMD would instantly be ascribed to the North Korean government, and it is clear that there would be a united, quick, and strong response by the global community.

But, more important, the main purpose of nuclear weapons is deterrence. And considering that, it might well be that, one day, North Korea and South Korea end up just as surprised as the U.S. and the Soviets were at the end of the Cold War.