

“The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements”

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Summary

Dr. Jennifer Lind, Assistant Professor of Government at Dartmouth College, presented the 12th *Asan Dosirak Series with Experts* on “The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements”. Drawing on her most recent work published in *International Security* (2011 Fall edition), co-authored with Dr. Bruce Bennett, Professor Lind discussed the immediate-term military missions and objectives that states may perform in the event of regime collapse in North Korea.

Professor Lind began by briefly outlining the complexities associated with a potential collapse of the North Korean regime. She emphasized that while the regime had survived until now through repressive authoritarian control over its people, the upcoming leadership transition represented a potential challenge to the status quo. While there would always remain uncertainty as to when—or even whether—collapse would occur, the military stability operations that would be needed in even the most optimistic collapse scenarios merited advanced joint planning between neighboring countries.

Professor Lind’s collapse scenario was premised on a situation in which the majority of the North Korean political leadership has fled, the Korean People’s Army and state security services have been demobilized, and there is no large-scale organized military resistance. While scholars could envisage a range of situations in which a North Korean collapse could be far worse than her case scenario—such as a collapse amidst military hostilities, after a descent into a warlord state, or a situation in which weapons of mass destruction (WMD) had been used—this

would simply require an adjustment to the existing parameters and measurements of the analytic framework.

Professor Lind discussed the four security problems most likely to exist in a post-collapse scenario, the dangers of unsecured WMD, a humanitarian disaster, extensive refugee flows, and a potential insurgency or the outbreak of civil war. She then focused on the necessary missions to effectively deal with these problems, such as locating and securing North Korean WMD, stability operations, border control, conventional disarmament, and combat/deterrence operations. These missions would all require extensive deployments of troops, particularly in relation to peacekeeping and stability operations. Utilizing a relatively benign collapse scenario, she posited that it would nevertheless require between 260,000 and 400,000 military forces to complete these missions.

Professor Lind focused on the necessary scope of the stability operations, noting that the rapid provision of public services, in particular, food and health services was critical to successfully mitigating a major humanitarian disaster. The need to deploy troops to secure lines of communications (LOC) such as ports, highways and rail networks, as well as distribute supplies and ensure public security, makes adopting appropriate force metrics crucial. She offered a force requirement of 13 soldiers per 1,000 civilians, amounting to 312,000 troops as a mid-level estimate, but emphasized that, depending on the exact situation, this measurement could be adjusted from as low as four to as high twenty per one thousand civilians.

In order to insert such a large number of forces into North Korea simultaneously, Professor Lind provided a sequenced operational strategy in which military forces would progressively move from south to north across the country in five distinct tiers, leaving behind units for policing and distribution roles. She acknowledged that such a strategy would be time-sensitive and that there would be a need to secure the northern parts of the country, too. To do so, forces could be deployed further north through the country's two major ports, Nampo in the west and Ch'ongjin in the northeast.

Professor Lind next covered the issue of counter-WMD missions and the urgent threat posed by the potential dispersal of North Korean WMD materials and personnel. In particular, the relationship between the North's scientific personnel and the international black market for WMD expertise was disconcerting.

Professor Lind noted that a four-stage strategy would be required to address this issue: 1) the stopping of any WMD materials leaving the country via air, land, and sea; 2) the surveillance of any activity or looting in or around WMD facilities; 3) the use of small special-forces raids against facilities where such activity is detected; 4) and a sequenced, systematic sweep of all North Korean WMD facilities in tandem with the stability operation.

In addition to these two missions, of stability operations and securing WMDs, Professor Lind briefly touched upon the other three missions of border control along the North Korean-Chinese border, the disarmament of North Korean soldiers and the security services, and the use of a rapid reaction force to deal with isolated cases of resistance. In considering all of these missions, Professor Lind noted that the total forces required would fall within the range of 267,000 and 409,500 troops, with the variation largely dependent upon the force requirements for the stability operations.

Before concluding, Professor Lind cited a number of medium to long term challenges that scholars needed to pay greater attention to that did not fall within the purview of her current study which include: 1) the composition of deployed forces; 2) questions over the legitimacy of the intervening forces among the North Korean population; 3) the possibility of an institutional mandate such as through the United Nations to enhance multilateral involvement; 4) broader challenges related to unification; 5) and tensions between various regional actors, particularly the United States and China, over the desired outcomes and processes in a collapse scenario. While all of these considerations remain important, Professor Lind highlighted how it was important for scholars, policymakers, and national leaders to begin discussions about, and joint planning for, a post-collapse situation in North Korea.