

## Between Peace and War: South Korea's Crisis Management Strategies Towards North Korea

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### INTRODUCTION

This study analyses the management of past crises on the Korean peninsula from the perspective of South Korea. Crisis management focuses mainly on the balance and reconciliation of two diverse elements during each crisis: “bilateral competition” and “shared danger.”<sup>1)</sup> As Alexander L. George has argued, “the tension between these two objectives—protection of one’s interests and avoidance of measures that could trigger undesired escalation—creates a dilemma that is the basic challenge policy makers engaged

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1) Phil Williams, *Crisis Management: Confrontation and Diplomacy in the Nuclear Age* (London: Martin Robertson, 1976), p. 29. See Phil Williams, “Crisis Management,” in John Baylis, Ken Booth, John Garnett, and Phil Williams, *Contemporary Strategy I: Theories and Concepts* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 240; Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 120.

in crisis management must try to resolve.”<sup>2)</sup>

This core dilemma is particularly significant on the Korean peninsula, one of the most volatile areas in the world. Within this complex security environment, several crises have been triggered by North Korea, dramatically increasing the probability of war on the Korean peninsula. In past Korean crises, the basic policy dilemma requiring South Korean crisis management arose from tensions between the desire to pursue vital national interests and the necessity of avoiding war.

Ever since the establishment of the ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty in 1954, South Korea and the U.S. have maintained strong bilateral security arrangements, which include a joint crisis management system. That system has been integrated with the ROK-U.S. joint crisis management structures and procedures for consultation and policy co-ordination, command and control arrangements of armed forces, intelligence sharing, a joint alert system, and a communication channel to North Korea. Indeed, the South Korean crisis management system has generally relied on the U.S. to take the initiative in crisis management. In this context, in order to examine South Korea’s crisis management of North Korea, it is more realistic and logical to examine it within the context of the ROK-U.S. alliance and the joint crisis management system. Therefore, the working assumption of this study is that there are two dimensions to South Korea’s crisis management towards North Korea within the context of the ROK-U.S. alliance. On the one hand, in order to achieve fundamental crisis management objectives—protecting interests, and at the same time avoiding war—South Korea has to take into account both military and diplomatic considerations toward North Korea, and then integrate them. On the other hand, these fundamental crisis management tasks have to be achieved

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2) Alexander L. George, “A Provisional Theory of Crisis Management,” in Alexander L. George (ed.), *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), p. 23.

within the framework of a ROK-U.S. alliance. South Korea has to “manage” the U.S. to coordinate common crisis objectives, but it also has to consider the precondition of implementing an effective joint action which means involving the U.S. in a programme of crisis management towards North Korea. In this sense, an understanding of crisis management within a framework of patron-client state relationship is important in order to understand South Korea’s crisis management towards North Korea.

The main objective of this study is to explore the dominant characteristics of South Korea’s crisis management strategies towards North Korea setting it within the context of the ROK-U.S. alliance, with particular emphasis on the four crises that occurred between 1968 and 1999. The discussion of strategies includes South Korea’s efforts to take into account and balance both military and diplomatic considerations so as to reconcile its fundamental objectives of crisis management.

## DEFINITIONS OF CRISIS AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

### *Definitions of Crisis*

While much has been written on crises and crisis management, there are no universally agreed definitions. However, it is possible to identify three different approaches to the definition of crisis: (1) the systemic approach; (2) the decision-making approach; and (3) a combination of the two approaches.

First, the systemic definition of crisis identifies a “crisis” as changes in the existing patterns of interaction between countries and in the international system. Charles A. McClelland observes that “[crisis] interaction is likely to be in terms of [effects on the] stability or equilibrium of the system”<sup>3)</sup> and he sees an international crisis

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3) Quoted from McClelland’s dialogue in Charles F. Hermann, “Some Issues in the

occurring “when...a succession of extraordinary inputs begetting new outputs begetting new inputs, etc., passes some point in volume and intensity...”<sup>4)</sup> Oran R. Young concurs:

An international crisis, then, is a set of rapidly unfolding events which raises the impact of destabilizing forces in the general system or any of its subsystems substantially above “normal” (i.e., average) levels and increases the likelihood of violence occurring in the system.<sup>5)</sup>

Michael Brecher and Hemda Ben Yehuda further develop the systemic definition as follows:

A systemic crisis may be defined as a situational change characterized by two necessary and sufficient conditions: (1) an increase in the intensity of *disruptive interactions* among system actors, and (2) incipient change within the structure of an international system, more precisely, in one or more structural attributes—power distribution, actors/regimes, rules and alliance configuration.<sup>6)</sup> (*italics in original*)

To summarise, this approach focuses upon the interaction of “actors” within the general international system or regional sub-systems, but gives little attention to the perception of decision-makers.

Secondly, the decision-making approach focuses on the perception of threat and behaviour, usually from the perspective of a

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Study of International Crisis,” in Charles F. Hermann (ed.), *International Crises: Insights from Behavioral Research* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), p. 7 (Brackets in original).

4) Charles A. McClelland, “The Acute International Crisis,” *World Politics*, Vol. 14 (October 1961), p. 199.

5) Oran R. Young, *The Intermediaries: Third Parties in International Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 10.

6) Michael Brecher and Hemda Ben Yehuda, “System and Crisis in International Politics,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (January 1985), p. 23.

single country. In his 1962 study, James A. Robinson suggests a three-fold concept of crisis which consists of the identification of the origins of the event, decision time, and important values.<sup>7)</sup> Based on Robinson's definition, Charles F. Hermann has developed one of the most widely accepted decision-making definitions of crisis. He writes:

Crisis is a situation that (1) threatens the high-priority goals of the decision-making unit; (2) restricts the amount of time available for response before the situation is transformed; and (3) surprises the members of the decision-making unit when it occurs.<sup>8)</sup>

Michael Brecher elaborates on the definition as follows:

It derives from three interrelated perceptions that are generated by a hostile act, disruptive event or environmental change, perceptions of:

- (1) *threat to one or more basic values*;
- (2) *finite time for response*; and
- (3) *heightened probability of involvement in military hostilities* before the challenge is overcome.<sup>9)</sup> (italics in original)

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7) James A. Robinson has identified, "Crisis as a decision situation or as an occasion for decision... included: (1) identification of the origin of the event—whether external or internal for the decision-makers; (2) the decision time available for response—whether short, intermediate, or long; and (3) the relative importance of the values at stake to the participants—whether high or low." James A. Robinson, "Crisis," in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 3 (New York: The Macmillan Company and the Free Press, 1968), p. 511.

8) Charles F. Hermann, *Crises in Foreign Policy: A Simulation Analysis* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), p. 29.

9) Michael Brecher, *Crises in World Politics: Theory and Reality* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993), p. 3. Richard Ned Lebow also defines crisis based on three operational criteria: "1. Policy-makers perceive that the action or threatened action of another international actor seriously impairs concrete national interests, the country's bargaining reputation, or their own ability to remain in power. 2. Policy-makers perceive that any actions on their part designed to counter this

In short, decision-making definitions focus on decision-makers' subjective perceptions of a crisis which influence their ability to identify a crisis situation and to make the appropriate policy choices.

The third "combined" approach criticises the conceptual problems of the first two approaches and argues the necessity of synthesising them. As Raymond Tanter strongly argues, "one could discover which of the aggregate of changes that constitute a definition of crisis at the system level are perceived by decision-makers as a crisis at the individual level.... Answers to such queries would begin the process of synthesizing the two levels of analysis."<sup>10</sup> Oran R. Young also stresses the level of perception of participants, and offers the following combined definition of crisis:

[a] crisis in international politics is a process of interaction occurring at higher levels of perceived intensity than the ordinary flow of events and characterized by: a sharp break from the ordinary flow of politics; shortness of duration; a rise in the perceived prospects that violence will break out; and significant implications for the stability of some system or subsystem (or pattern of relationships) in international politics.<sup>11</sup>

Based on Young's definition, Phil Williams observes that "*an international crisis is a confrontation of two or more states, usually occupying a short time period, in which the probability of an outbreak of war between the participants is perceived to increase significantly....* The

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threat (capitulation aside) will raise a significant prospect of war. 3. Policy-makers perceive themselves to be acting under time constraints." Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 10-12.

10) Raymond Tanter, "Crisis Management: A Critical Review of Academic Literature," *The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Fall 1975), p. 75.

11) Oran R. Young, *The Politics of Force: Bargaining During International Crises* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 15.

very fact that an international crisis involves a high threat to important values and objectives of the participants is of the utmost significance.”<sup>12)</sup> Similarly, Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing also attempt to combine the two approaches of crisis definition:

An international crisis is a sequence of interactions between the governments of two or more sovereign states in severe conflict, short of actual war, but involving the perception of a dangerously high probability of war.<sup>13)</sup>

James M. McCormick suggests a definition which combines both approaches as follows:

[a]n international crisis should be defined as a situation between two (or more) nations that is characterized by perceptual conditions of high threat, surprise, and short decision time, and by behavioral conditions of marked change in their interaction patterns.<sup>14)</sup>

To summarise, there is no consensus definition of “crisis.” Each definition varies depending upon the focus of each scholar’s study. In this study, Phil Williams’s definition of crisis is adopted. A grave threat to vital values and objectives and the probability of war are always the most significant factors in crises on the Korean peninsula. The crises considered here are foreign policy crises for South Korea, and mostly occur within the context of broader international crises. Although Williams’s definition concerns international crisis rather than foreign policy crisis, crisis on the Korean peninsula can be

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12) Williams, *Crisis Management*, p. 25 (italics in original).

13) Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision-Making, and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 6.

14) James M. McCormick, “International Crises: A Note on Definition,” *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. XXXI, No. 3 (1978), p. 356.

examined from a perspective of South Korean foreign policy crisis. As Williams has argued, “any international crisis can be broken down into several discrete foreign policy crises, with each side’s action being treated as a problem for the opponent.”<sup>15)</sup>

### *Definitions of Crisis Management*

Definitions of crisis management are employed in diverse and even contradictory ways. For analytical purposes, however, it seems useful to divide interpretations of crisis management into two major schools of thought. One school regards the objective of crisis management as the avoidance of war and the “peaceful resolution of confrontations.”<sup>16)</sup> As Leslie Lipson has stated, “Management of crisis consisted of reaching a solution acceptable to both sides without resorting to force.”<sup>17)</sup> The other school considers crisis management as “an exercise in winning.”<sup>18)</sup> William R. Kintner and David C. Schwarz have defined crisis management as “winning a crisis while at the same time keeping it within tolerable limits of danger and risk to both sides.”<sup>19)</sup>

Several scholars have claimed, however, that although each approach to crisis management contains important features of crisis management, each explains only one dimension of crisis. As Williams has argued, “crises have recognized the dual nature of the phenomenon—crises are times both of danger and opportunity and can be understood as involving both bilateral competition and shared danger.”<sup>20)</sup> Interestingly, the meaning of the Chinese word for

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15) Williams, *Crisis Management*, p. 23.

16) Lebow, *op. cit.*, p. 292; Williams, *Crisis Management*, p. 27.

17) Quoted in “Crisis Management or Crisis Prevention,” *NATO Letter* (August-September 1966), p. 14. See Williams, *Crisis Management*, p. 28.

18) Williams, *Crisis Management*, p. 27. See Lebow, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

19) Williams R. Kintner and David C. Schwarz, *A Study on Crisis Management* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1965), Appendix B, p. 21, quoted in Williams, *Crisis Management*, p. 29.

crisis, *weiji*, also expresses this dual nature in that it means both danger or threat and opportunity.<sup>21)</sup> From the combined approach, several definitions of crisis management have been developed. Snyder and Diesing note that “the central problem of crisis statesmanship is how to achieve an optimum blend of coercion and accommodation in one’s strategy, a blend that will both avoid war and maximize one’s gains or minimize one’s losses.”<sup>22)</sup> They have also argued:

The term crisis management is usually taken to mean the exercise of detailed control by the top leadership of the government involved so as to minimize the chances that the crisis will burst out of control into war.... They also want to advance or protect their state’s interests, to win or at least to maximize gains or minimize losses, and if possible to settle the issue in conflict so that it does not produce further crises.<sup>23)</sup>

Alexander L. George similarly has claimed:

It is well to recognize at the outset the basic paradox and dilemma of crisis management. The paradox is that there need be no crisis if one side is willing to forego its objectives and accept damage to the interests at stake. The dilemma, in turn, arises from a desire to do what may be necessary to protect one’s most important interests but, at the same time, to avoid actions that may result in undesired costs and risks.

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20) Phil Williams, “Crisis Management: From Cuba to Sarajevo,” in Ken Booth (ed.), *New Thinking about Strategy and International Security* (London: Harper Collins Academic, 1991), p. 146. See Schelling, *op. cit.*, p. 120; Lebow, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

21) See Eric Herring, *Danger and Opportunity: Explaining International Crisis Outcomes* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 1 and 74; Thomas W. Milburn, “The Management of Crisis,” in Hermann (ed.), *International Crises*, p. 270; Lebow, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

22) Snyder and Diesing, *op. cit.*, p. 10. See also Snyder, “Crisis Bargaining,” in Hermann (ed.), *International Crises*, p. 255.

23) Snyder and Diesing, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

Indeed, 'crisis management' can be usefully defined as embracing the task of resolving this policy dilemma.<sup>24)</sup>

The most widely accepted definition of crisis management is that of Phil Williams:

*[...]crisis management is concerned on the one hand with the procedure for controlling and regulating a crisis so that it does not get out of hand (either through miscalculations and mistakes by the participants or because events take on a logic and momentum of their own) and lead to war, and on the other with ensuring that the crisis is resolved on a satisfactory basis in which the vital interests of the state are secured and protected. The second aspect will almost invariably necessitate vigorous actions carrying substantial risks. One task of crisis management, therefore, is to temper these risks, to keep them as low and as controllable as possible, while the other is to ensure that the coercive diplomacy and risk-taking tactics are as effective as possible in gaining concessions from the adversary and maintaining one's own position relatively intact.*<sup>25)</sup> (italics added)

To summarise, as Williams has noted, "the essence of skilful crisis management lies in the reconciliation of the competing pressures

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24) Alexander L. George, "Crisis Management: The Interaction of Political and Military Considerations," *Survival*, Vol. XXVI, No. 5 (September/October 1984), p. 224. Ali E. Hillal Dessouki similarly argues, "Crisis management research should not assume that crisis avoidance or deescalation is necessarily a desirable goal of all participants in a crisis situation.... Though crises usually contain some elements of the unexpected, they can be and are in fact planned, engineering, and steered by some states to achieve their national interests.... Also, crisis management does not necessarily mean the avoidance of the use of force.... The concept of "management" refers to a way of handling or success in accomplishing one's objectives." Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, "The Middle East Crisis: Theoretical Propositions and Examples," in Daniel Frei (ed.), *Managing International Crises* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982), pp. 87-88.

25) Williams, "Crisis Management" in Baylis, *et al.*, p. 240.

which are inherent in the dual nature of crises.... Crisis management requires that policy-makers not only recognize the inherent dilemmas, but that they are willing and able to make the difficult trade-offs that are required.”<sup>26)</sup> Williams’ definition of crisis management is the one which will be used in this study.

#### FOUR CASES OF KOREAN CRISES, 1968-1999

##### *The Blue House Raid and the Pueblo Incident (January 21-23, 1968)*

On January 21, 1968, a 31-man unit of heavily armed North Korean commandos invaded Seoul with orders to raid the Blue House and to assassinate South Korean President Park Chung-hee. Two days later, on January 23, a U.S. Navy intelligence-gathering vessel, the USS *Pueblo*, and her crew of 83 men were seized by the North Korean Navy off the east coast of North Korea, near Wonsan.

During the initial phases of the 1968 Blue House raid and the *Pueblo* crisis, South Korea linked the two incidents, stressing that North Korea’s action threatened the common interests of both the South and the U.S., so that Washington would commit to deterring North Korea. In urging the U.S. to demonstrate firm resolve, President Park intended to demonstrate the South’s willingness to take retaliatory action. This would send strong signals not only to North Korea but also to the U.S., and thus, induce a firm threat from the alliance and a more favourable outcome for its own interests. Indeed, South Korea utilised its retaliatory option against North Korea as leverage to generate American military aid. In the end, South Korea was promised additional military aid in exchange for refraining from punitive action and for consenting to U.S. secret negotiations with North Korea for the release of the *Pueblo* crew.

President Johnson pursued a two-track strategy—diplomatic

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26) Williams, “Crisis Management” in Booth (ed.), p. 146.

activities and a limited show of force—since it favoured a diplomatic solution for the release of the *Pueblo* crew. After 28 secret meetings between the U.S. and North Korea at the truce village of Panmunjom over a 10-month period, the 82 crewmen of the *Pueblo* and the body of the one marine killed were released on December 23, 1968.<sup>27)</sup>

*Panmunjon Axe Murder Incident (August 23, 1976)*

On August 18, 1976, two U.S. Army officers were beaten to death by axe-wielding North Korean guards at the Joint Security Area (JSA) of Panmunjom in the Korean Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). The Panmunjom axe murder incident was the gravest of the physical clashes and the first deaths in the JSA since the end of the Korean Armistice Agreement in July 1953. This incident resulted in the gravest situation, which could have escalated into another war on the Korean peninsula.

President Ford ultimately decided that the appropriate response would be to chop down the tree. On the morning of August 21, a joint U.S.-ROK mission under the “Operation Paul Bunyan,” felled the tree. This action was backed up by an armed platoon, 27 helicopters, and a number of B-52 bombers and F-111 fighters flying along the DMZ. The North Koreans held their fire, and within an hour the operation was complete.<sup>28)</sup>

In the 1976 Panmunjom crisis, while trying to present that crisis in a more dangerous light and as a serious threat against the alliance’s common interests, South Korea urged the U.S. to take firm retaliatory action. At the same time, South Korea took independent action-taking weapons into the JSA, and destroying North Korean

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27) See Taeyoung Yoon, “The Blue House Raid and the Pueblo Incident of 1968: From a Perspective of South Korea’s Crisis Management under the South Korea-U.S. Alliance,” *KNDU Review: Journal of National Security Affairs*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (June 2000).

28) [[http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/paul\\_bunyan.htm](http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/paul_bunyan.htm)]

checkpoints and road barriers. This had the effect not only of warning North Korea that South Korea could act independently, but of showing the U.S. that it was still capable of independent action. In this way, the South increased its leverage against the United States. In other words, President Park attempted to manipulate U.S. strategies, a show of force and coercive diplomacy accompanied by massive military force, as an opportunity to undertake South Korea's own retaliatory action and demonstrate its strong resolve against North Korea.<sup>29)</sup> In the Panmunjom incident, South Korea correctly judged that North Korea would not risk war in a context in which America had committed massive forces at an early stage of the crisis.

*The Rangoon Bombing Incident (October 9, 1983)*

On October 9, 1983, three special North Korean reconnaissance officers detonated a bomb at the Aung San Martyr's Mausoleum in Rangoon, in the attempted assassination of South Korean President Chun Doo-hwan during a state visit to Burma. The explosion killed 17 South Korean officials, including four cabinet ministers and two senior presidential secretaries. Ironically, President Chun's motorcade had been delayed, and he escaped the blast by two minutes.

Balancing fundamental interests while avoiding an escalation of the crisis, President Chun signaled both firm resolve and prudent restraint. Although South Korea was concerned with retaliatory action in the early stages, in the end, it assured the U.S. that it would not take any steps to escalate the crisis. The South, thus, pursued international sanctions rather than more punitive action. At the expense of a military solution, South Korea tried to obtain the U.S. security guarantee and to gain strong U.S. diplomatic support for

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29) Taeyoung Yoon, "Managing the Korean Crisis: A Case Study of the Panmunjom Axe Murder Incident of 1976," *Korea Observer*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4 (Winter 2000), p. 653.

international sanctions against North Korea.

*The West Sea Naval Battle (June 15, 1999)*

On June 7, 1999, North Korean patrol boats proceeded to invade the Northern Limit Line (NLL) purportedly to protect crab-fishing boats in the vicinity of Yonpyong Island. For decades, the NLL has served as an effective means of preventing military tension between North and South Korean military forces and it still serves as a practical demarcation line. After a week of daily confrontations, the clash occurred on June 15 when South Korean warships tried to ram North Korean boats back over the NLL. North Korea then fired upon the South's vessels, and the South Korean navy vessels returned fire, sinking a North Korean torpedo boat and damaging others. Immediately after the clash, both sides withdrew to their respective sides of the NLL to reduce tensions in the disputed area.

While U.S. forces in Korea had not been placed on a higher state of alert, the command was monitoring the situation closely, ready to take appropriate steps if required. The U.S. dispatched two 7th Fleet Aegis guided-missile cruisers, the USS Vincennes and Mobile Bay, from Japan toward the Yellow Sea, and also sent from its west coast four EA-6Bs, aircraft with radar-jamming equipment.<sup>30)</sup>

**STRATEGIES FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT  
TOWARDS NORTH KOREA**

According to Alexander George, in order to resolve the basic policy dilemma of crisis management, "policy makers need to devise

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30) UNC/CFC Public Affairs Office, *News Release*, No. 990608, 990613; U.S. Department of Defense, DoD New Briefing (June 17, 1999), pp. 13-14 [[http://www.defenselink.mil/news/June1999/t06171999\\_t0617asd.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/June1999/t06171999_t0617asd.html)]; *Time*, June 28, 1999, p. 19.

a strategy appropriate to the specific configuration of a crisis that promises to protect the essential interests at stake without inadvertently triggering war.”<sup>31)</sup> Hence, South Korean leaders were eager to employ a strategy that would not only correct the intolerable situation, but also avoid escalation of the crisis. Nevertheless, due to the lack of credible military capability and operational control of its own armed forces, South Korea’s repertory of crisis management strategies and signalling instruments against North Korea were clearly limited.<sup>32)</sup> In particular, within the context of its reliance on American assistance and support for its security, South Korean policy makers realised that they would have very limited freedom of action to pursue the more coercive and punitive strategies. In other words, they could not be free of American perspectives and constraints.

Given the circumstances surrounding the crises addressed in this paper, the most common and dominant strategies for crisis management available to South Korea were: (1) the strategy of conveying commitment and resolve; (2) the test of capabilities strategy coupled with deterrence of escalation; (3) the strategy of tit-for-tat reprisals coupled with the deterrence of escalation; and (4) the strategy of defensive coercive diplomacy focusing on diplomatic or international sanctions.<sup>33)</sup>

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31) Alexander L. George, “Strategies for Crisis Management,” in George (ed.), *Avoiding War*, p. 377.

32) In the 1968 and 1976 crises, the U.S. Commander in Chief, UNC (CINCUNC) exercised operational control over the ROK armed forces. In the 1983 crisis, the CINCCFC had operational control. However, the peacetime operational control over some delegated ROK units exercised by the CINCCFC was transferred to the Chairman of the ROK JCS effective on 1 December 1994. Thus, “the CINCCFC in peacetime exercises the Combined Delegated Authority (CODA) delegated by the Chairman of the ROK JCS.” Ministry of National Defense, Korea, *Defense White Paper 1995-1996* (Seoul: MND, 1996), p. 114.

33) These defensive crisis management strategies were identified by Alexander L. George, “Strategies for Crisis Management,” pp. 384-392. See also Alexander L.

First, in all four cases South Korea employed the “strategy of conveying commitment and resolve to avoid a miscalculation” by North Korea. In order to protect the threatened *status quo*, reduce the threat environment, and deter North Korea’s anticipated provocation, South Korea utilised formal declarations or explicit pronouncements, warnings, alerting measures, and deployment of military forces. The immediate purpose of this strategy was to convey its strong resolution to the North in order to deter North Korea from launching any military adventures.

Secondly, at the same time, South Korea employed the “test of capabilities strategy coupled with deterrence of escalation” by North Korea. South Korea alerted and deployed combat forces and generated implicit or explicit threats, not to threaten escalation, but to deter a frustrated North Korea from escalation.<sup>34</sup> These two strategies required that South Korea make credible commitments. By showing sufficient strength in order to convince North Korea that compliance was preferable, South Korea thus tried to secure the support of the United States.

Thirdly, in most cases, South Korea considered seriously the “strategy of tit-for-tat reprisals coupled with deterrence of escalation” against North Korea, especially in the initial phases of a crisis. South Korea’s consideration of tit-for-tat reprisals as part of its crisis management strategy was designed to signal resolve and make its threats more credible against North Korea. South Korea favoured reprisals because it “was motivated by a strong sense of vulnerability and of urgency, by an estimate that time was working very much against its interests, and by an expectation that the future would be

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George, “Coercive Diplomacy: Definition and Characteristics,” in Alexander L. George and William E. Simons (eds.), *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 2nd Edition (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), p. 8; Paul Gordon Lauren, “Coercive Diplomacy and Ultimata: Theory and Practice in History,” in George and Simons (eds.), *ibid.*, pp. 29-37; George, “Crisis Management: The Interaction of Political and Military Considerations,” *Survival*, pp. 229-233.

34) See George, “Strategies for Crisis Management,” p. 389.

more intolerable and dangerous than the present.<sup>35)</sup> South Korea intended to send warning signals to North Korea in an effort to discourage North Korea's hostile intentions and to convince the North that any provocative action against South Korea would meet certain and effective retaliation. However, unless sufficient measures to avoid escalation were carefully formulated far in advance, South Korean retaliatory action against North Korea might lead to a rapid escalation of the crisis and turn it into an all-out war on the Korean peninsula.<sup>36)</sup> In this context, within the military limitations imposed by the lack of operational control of its own armed forces and credible coercive capabilities, South Korea sought to obtain benefits from the U.S. such as military and political support or guarantees of security in order to increase the credibility and sufficient strength of this strategy towards North Korea. In this regard, it might be argued that South Korea's consideration of tit-for-tat reprisals was employed as a bargaining strategy, not only to signal a coercive threat to North Korea, but also to increase the South's bargaining power vis-à-vis the U.S. during crises. While signalling the threat of punishment through military moves and explicit verbal warnings, South Korea did exert pressure on the U.S. to support its retaliatory option or, at least, to strengthen the alliance's posture of deterrence and the U.S. security commitment. South Korea calculated that if the U.S. could be locked into supporting its reprisal strategy, the South could then threaten to retaliate, backed up by U.S. military protection, and thereby demonstrate its strong resolve. South Korean crisis managers waited to take retaliatory actions until they were reasonably confident that they had strong U.S. support for them.<sup>37)</sup> When this was no longer

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35) Janice Gross Stein, "The Managed and the Managers: Crisis Prevention in the Middle East," in Winham, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 196.

36) William J. Taylor, Jr., Young Koo Cha, Changsu Kim, Gye Yeol Lee, and Michael J. Mazarr, "Managing Crises: U.S.-ROK Security Ties, The Results of a Crisis Simulation," *Significant Issues Series*, Vol. XI, No. 6 (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1989), p. 27.

possible, South Korean leaders carefully calculated that it could gain a reward from the U.S.—i.e., military aid and a reinforcement of the posture of deterrence against North Korea, in return for its restraint.

For example, in the 1968 and 1983 crises, South Korea's reprisal strategies against North Korea were constrained by the United States. However, as shown in the 1976 Panmunjom crisis, which was a direct challenge against U.S. military personnel, South Korea was able to conduct a limited tit-for-tat reprisal strategy under the protection of America's commitment and to make a show of force. In addition to the importance of close ROK-U.S. military coordination, it should be noted that when retaliatory action was conducted against North Korea, communication with other regional powers, especially China and the Soviet Union/Russia, was critical in order to restrain North Korea and minimise the danger of escalation through misinterpretation.<sup>37)</sup> In the West Sea naval battle, South Korea conducted a tit-for-tat reprisal strategy in reaction to the 27-mm cannon fire by North Korean torpedo boats.

Finally, South Korea employed the "strategy of defensive coercive diplomacy" focusing on diplomatic or international sanctions. In particular, in the 1983 Rangoon crisis, while reinforcing deterrent signals, the ROK government employed the strategy of defensive coercive diplomacy focusing on diplomatic punitive sanctions in an attempt to achieve the declared objectives of ending North Korea's use of terrorism against South Korea and isolating North Korea diplomatically.

Based on these findings South Korean leaders might identify three lessons for the employment of crisis management strategies against North Korea. First, converging alliance interests, ensuring close alliance consultations, and enlisting America's strong military

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37) For the logic of this argument, see Janice Gross Stein, "The Arab-Israeli War of 1967: Inadvertent War Through Miscalculated Escalation," in George (ed.), *Avoiding War*, p. 148.

38) See Taylor, Jr. *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

support, were the conditions necessary for the successful employment of crisis management strategies. Secondly, South Korea was constrained in the selection of coercive options of crisis management strategies towards North Korea due to a lack of credibility in its threats to inflict punishment on the North. Thirdly, however, when South Korea employed limited and carefully selected military measures, accompanied by firm U.S. military support, North Korea did, in fact, back off. Although North Korea became more bellicose and its coercive policy more pronounced as South Korean and U.S. military involvement intensified, what is clear from the available record is that North Korea feared America's massive military capabilities and the possibility of an escalation to war. In this connection, South Korean policy makers learned that America's strong commitment and support were vital in order to facilitate the successful implementation of retaliatory actions against North Korea.

## CONCLUSION

This examination of the phases of Korean crises during 1968-1999 provides sobering, theoretical implications for crisis management in the patron-client relationships which exist on the Korean peninsula. With respect to South Korea's crisis management within the context of the ROK-U.S. alliance, it can be argued that the capacity of South Korea to manage crises short of war on the Korean peninsula depended as much on influencing the behaviour of the U.S. as it did on controlling the behaviour of North Korea.

Although military threats were employed against North Korea as a part of a tacit or explicit coercive bargaining strategy, South Korea imposed self-restraints and concentrated on creating the most favourable conditions for crisis management through bargaining with North Korea. As for its bargaining with the U.S., although institutional inequalities in alliance structures and disparities in crisis management priorities brought about certain constraints and

tensions, South Korea was strongly motivated by a desire to obtain U.S. support and to maximise the credibility of the alliance's deterrent posture in order to manage or coerce North Korea. In other words, South Korea's crisis management on the Korean peninsula relied upon the workings of an intricate network of communication not only between South Korea and North Korea but also between South Korea and the United States.

On the whole, although the U.S. played an important role in crisis management in South Korea, it is clear that South Korea also displayed a reasonably consistent pattern of crisis management behaviour in the cases examined in this study. Despite weaknesses and problems in its own crisis management, it might be argued that South Korea's crisis behaviour reflected its decision to present strong incentives to avoid war, to seek opportunities for crisis management, and to exercise relevant crisis management skills.