

SEPTEMBER 2022

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A NUISANCE OR A CORNERSTONE OF
STABILITY ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA
- AN OUTSIDE VIEW FROM A CLOSE
OBSERVER

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Introduction

Most visitors to South Korea are surprised to see the United Nations (UN) flag waving from poles at military installations together with the South Korean and/or the U.S. flag. The closer they get to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating the two Koreas since 1953 the more this constellation is visible. All aforementioned installations are hosting infrastructure, staff elements or units with a direct affiliation to the United Nations Command (UNC). Apart from the highly visible and for most people closed DMZ, UNC is a strong reminder of the fact that the two Koreas are also 69 years after the signing of the 1953 Armistice Agreement in Korea technically still at war and a comprehensive peace regime has yet to be achieved.

There have been discussion and debate on UNC's utility, particularly among South Korean politics, basically from the aftermath of the signing of the Armistice Agreement (AA) onwards. Most recently it is getting more prominent and has been accelerated in the framework of the Moon administration's initiative for an "end-of-war declaration" (EOW) on the Korean Peninsula. Prominent voices in South Korea are considering UNC even to be "under attack". This holds certainly true with regard to North Korea launching numerous attempts and requests to the UN to revoke UN Security Council Resolution UNSCR 84 thus disbanding UNC, the latest being at the UN General Assembly in autumn 2021. But there are critical voices in South Korea as well that are openly questioning utility and necessity of UNC as of today.

This article does not intend to discuss the pros and cons of the more or less disappeared EOW campaign by the last ROK administration nor the implications on UNC in case a declaration should be signed by all relevant actors¹. However, viewed from the outside, the recent discussion and perceptions on the "peace processes" on the Korean Peninsula are looking somehow strange, assuming an EOW would be signed by all relevant parties on government level: Politically, the Korean war would be terminated but an armistice agreement concluded and signed by the military level would still be in place. A 69-year-old military document would thus have superseded a political decision of today!

¹ The current Yoon administration has apparently skipped the EOW Declaration project as a whole.

Amid all these reservations and objections against UNC among Korean, unequivocal in the North, more subtle but often hidden in the South, UNC does continue to play a crucial role for security and stability on the Korean Peninsula. This article is attempting to add some arguments to the above statement based on extended experience as a close outside observer of UNC and its daily armistice management on a strategic as well as operational-tactical level.

The author has served from February 2012 to August 2017 as Swiss Member to the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC), a body mandated by the AA to monitor the correct implementation of the provisions of the agreement. This role provided a unique opportunity to closely monitor UNC activities, particularly of its Armistice Commission (UNCMAC), but also to observe the large-scale exercise series “KEY RESOLVE/FOAL EAGLE (KR/FE) in spring and “ULCHI FREEDOM GUARDIAN (UFG) end of summer. Between 2012 and 2017 the author has observed a total of 11 of these exercises.

UNC's Changing Role Over Time and Its Perception By the Main Actors

Shortly after the not so unexpected attack of the Korean People's Army (KPA) on this rainy Sunday morning of 25 Jun 1950, it became pretty obvious that the ill equipped South Korean Forces would not be able to withstand the KPA thrust towards the South. Hence, President Truman not only sent reinforcing units from Japan to Korea, but he was also smartly instrumentalizing the young United Nations for the defense of South Korea. With UN Security Council Resolution 82 (UNSCR 82) already on the day of the attack, followed by UNSCR 83 some days later and then most importantly UNSCR 84 on 07 July 1950, Truman succeeded in building a coalition against the North Korean attack, broadly along U.S. terms. With the short and similar exception of the UN coalition against Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait in 1990, the setting in Korea is pretty unique up to this day, in the sense that the UN is acting de facto as a party to a war, de jure on behalf of the United States of America².

Soon after the "Unified Command" mentioned in UNSCR 84 and subsequent resolutions has been named United Nations Command by the U.S. as lead nation. On 13 July 1950 General Douglas MacArthur received the UN Flag as Supreme Commander UNC at his request. The first post-World War II collective security coalition under the UN umbrella got operational and kept fairly coherent throughout the hot phase of the Korean War.

President Syngman Rhee and parts of the ROK military leadership were increasingly feeling uneasy if not openly opposed of the increasingly likelihood of an armistice after the death of Stalin in early March and the subsequent resumption of armistice negotiations in April 1953. The stipulated "iron-clad" coherence of UNC was getting first indications of dissonance. Open differences between the White House in Washington and its military UNC leadership with the ROK leadership culminated in early summer 1953 with the unilateral ROK prisoner-of-war release on 18 June 1953 and the open threat of leaving UNC command structure in case of signing the armistice agreement.

² UNSCR 84 is stipulating the encouragement to other nations to join a U.S. led coalition in defense of the ROK, hereby authorizing this Unified Command to carry the UN-Flag during the operations. Cf. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/84> In 1990, UNSCR 678 the UN did not mention a lead nation nor did it authorize the use of the UN Flag during the operations. Cf. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/678>



Figure 1 General Mark W. Clark, CDR UNC, signing the Armistice Agreement on 27 July 1953 at Munsan-Ri. Photo by U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command

Rhee's opposition to an armistice agreement basically founded on his firm position that such an agreement would be de facto the end of his vision of "Puk Chin T'ongil" (Go North for Unification) to continue the war until complete unification. Only after getting five major pledges accepted by the new U.S. President Eisenhower in early June 1953, the South Korean president backed down, kept ROK Forces in the UNC, and did "not oppose" to the terms of the armistice and subsequent repatriations³. Having a strong support of the general public behind him and finally only "not opposing" the reached agreements in Panmunjom, Rhee apparently never considered to become a signing party to the Armistice Agreement, a fact that is keeping its consequences up until today⁴.

3 Syngman Rhee gave up his resistance in early June 1953 to the armistice only after having succeeded to get the new U.S. President Eisenhower basically agreed to 5 pledges, among them a Mutual Defense Treaty (signed on 01 October 1953) and economic aid for reconstruction and development of South Korea. Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Big_Switch or the Statement of President Syngman Rhee on 06 June 1953 at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119372>

4 Stephen Jin-Woo Kim describes this very tense period out of primary sources as "allies in conflict" in his insightful publication "Master of Manipulation" on Syngman Rhee and his struggle against UNC and the leadership in Washington. Cf. Kim, Stephen Jin-Woo: "Master of Manipulation. Syngman Rhee and the Seoul-Washington Alliance 1953-1960", Yonsei University Press 2001, pp. 77ff.

This important and basically fundamental disagreement on an armistice between the ROK leadership, supported by the majority of the South Korean people and UNC is today still remembered and in some Korean circles at least tacitly shared. From a historical perspective, the period between April and July 1953 laid a ground work for the most important treaty of the ROK in her existence (Mutual Defense Treaty), but also the seeds for at least reservations towards UNC.

From a U.S. perspective, UNC has been the perfect instrument as a “coalition of the willing” in supporting the young South Korean state against the North Korean aggression. The smart move by President Truman to get a United Nation umbrella, even visible though the authorization to use the UN Flag during the operations, provided a strong international legitimacy and also attractiveness for countries as far as Colombia, Ethiopia or South Africa to join and fight on the battlefield in a country that has been hardly known before. There is another fact that is often overlooked with regard to the implications of UNC in North East Asia up until today: The necessity to establish a strategic rear area in order to receive, stage and prepare incoming contingents for successfully integrate them into the Korean theater of operation. For obvious reasons Japan has been best suited to serve for this purpose. At the outbreak of the Korean War, Japan was still under U.S. occupation with General of the Army Douglas MacArthur as Governor General. The imminent need for a strategic rear area, further on called UNC Rear, thus accelerated the process for Japanese independence and integration into a lasting “security orbit” with the U.S. by concluding a UN backed peace treaty⁵ as well as a bilateral security pact granting the U.S. military base facilities basically under the auspices of UNC Rear⁶.

For the DPRK and their Korean People’s Army (KPA) UNC has been and still is considered the main obstacle for a solution on the Korean Peninsula, at least in the sense of a favorable outcome to the North. UNC is consistently considered as the ultimate proof of the U.S. being the real if not only opponent since the outbreak of the Korean

5 The San Francisco Treaty of September 1951 has been signed by 49 out of 52 UN Member States, with the USSR, Poland and Czechoslovakia in opposition.

6 In a separate exchange of notes, Japan permitted the use of 7 military installations by UNC in support of the defense of the Republic of Korea.

War as the DPRK narrative sees UNC not more than a cover for U.S. Forces. Hence, the DPRK is ever since celebrating 27 July as “Victory Day commemorating KPA’s victory over the U.S. forces”. Contributions or participation of the various UNC Sending States⁷ have always hardly been considered by the KPA. ROK Forces have been considered basically not much more than “puppets”, if at all. At least up until the conclusion of the Comprehensive Military Agreement (CMA) in September 2018, the KPA only accepted delegations led by an U.S. officer for armistice related meetings or negotiations⁸. The most prominent rebuff of ROK participation in armistice matters resulted from the nomination of a South Korean General Officer as Senior Member of the southern armistice commission, the UNC Military Armistice Commission (UNC-MAC).

With the creation of the Combined Forces Command (CFC) in July 1978, UNC was relieved of its role as warfighting command in case of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula. Thus, the roles of the overarching agreements were clarified finally. UNC as a construct of the Korean War with its unique responsibility as signatory to the Armistice Agreement has eventually been able to focus on its role as “guarantor” of the acquis of the AA, defined in the status of “Armistice Conditions” ever since. CFC as the command structure of the bilateral ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty of October 1953 would take care of contingencies escalating out of “Armistice Conditions” up to open conflict and war.

The last important step of the evolvement of UNC over time has been the implementation of a significantly more important participation of the ROK in “armistice business”. Apart from the above-mentioned transition of the leadership of UNCMAC to a ROK General Officer, the involvement of ROK Army formations into the operational AA implementation in and around the DMZ from 1992 on has had even more important implications on UNC and its reputation among the ROK military and indeed the

⁷ Nations participating according UNSCR 84 under UNC during the war and being part of the coalition ever since. Currently 16 nations are considered UNC Sending States (Canada, UK, France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Turkey, Greece, Australia, New Zealand, The Philippines, Thailand, South Africa and Colombia).

⁸ As recently as 2017, a KPA delegation walked out of a meeting in Panmunjom after recognizing that the UNC delegation was led by a Canadian senior officer.

political and public perception. Up until roughly 1992, the operational armistice implementation has been more or less an exclusive task of units of U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK). Hence, the DMZ as an area of UNC responsibility according to the AA but politically part of the territory of the Republic of Korea, was in general militarily not accessible to ROK Forces under “Armistice Conditions”.

From 1992 on ROK Army units gradually took over the tactical and operational responsibilities and duties of armistice implementation in the DMZ, whereas the U.S. units were withdrawn with the exception of parts on the UNC Security Battalion, responsible for the Joint Security Area (JSA). This unit is successfully continuing to operate as a joint U.S.-ROK unit. In hindsight, this transition process has been going rather smoothly, but was apparently lacking an in-depth preparation and introduction of the respective ROK Army divisions into this new challenge. Evidence to this conclusion has been revealed, amongst others, during UNCMAC investigations with regard to introduction of non-AA-complying weapon systems and military installations by the ROK Army in 2013-2014 with the NNSC observing this investigation. One of the key elements for Commander UNC to decide on whether a system or an installation had to be removed or not, consisted in the authoritative list on which systems would be considered acceptable in AA term issued by UNC or 8th Army respectively. To some surprise, at least for NNSC, the list in force dated from 1976!

The role of “Rules of Engagement ROEs” and its implications on ROK perceptions on UNC

Between July 1953 and 1992, the ROK Armed Forces were basically supposed to implement the primary task of armed forces, i.e., the defense of their own country against an enemy aggression, thus applying ROEs in a very classical approach of conventional warfare with the ultimate objective of destroying the enemy. From 1992 on up to present, all ROK Army and Marine Corps divisions implementing armistice obligations had and still have to apply ROEs in accordance with the AA for

their subunits deployed for AA guard duty in the DMZ. The same infantry division is defending the country and has to perform a sort of “peacekeeping operation” simultaneously, a pretty unique setting even on a global level. Hence, on division level the units have to apply two distinctively different ROE simultaneously. From an outside perspective, this might look rather simple on paper, but pretty complex for practical implementation on the field. From a division commander perspective this means that your regiment temporarily deployed in the DMZ has to apply a UNC-imposed ROE in accordance with AA-regulations, whereas the rest of your units is applying ROK-only ROE for the defense of the ROK. This complex dichotomy with an understandably clear preference for the latter has often been felt during AA Orientation and Education Sessions delivered regularly by UNCMAC and NNSC staff and particularly in case of investigations of incidents in the DMZ.

Against this background, the mixed attitude on UNC regulations and obligations vis-à-vis military requirements of the national chain of command has been clearly felt, though hardly addressed by those concerned. Particularly in the aftermath of the sinking of the Cheonan and the shelling of YP-Do Island in 2010, retaliatory measures were expected up to the presidential level. Hence, investigation reports stating even very minor armistice violations were never contested but not always appreciated and sometimes only implemented after reminders.

To bring these challenges back into a larger and more strategic context, a blunt reality is being considered that the ROK and significant parts of its Army are implementing an agreement concluded by a U.S.-led coalition basically against the will of the then host nation leadership. UNC obligations are acknowledged as a host nation, de jure not being a member of UNC, and duly implemented, but hardly more. This respectful but often distinct distance to UNC has also implications on the status of non-U.S. personnel of UNC as well as NNSC personnel: Diplomatic status and privileges granted by the AA do only apply in a UNC environment but are not granted or accepted in a ROK-only environment.

The Yellow Sea (West Sea) and the NLL as particular challenges outside the area of application of the AA

The changing role and challenges of UNC in implementing the AA has not only developed over the almost 70 years of its existence in the defined area of application, which is the DMZ and the Han River Estuary. Military activities and thus tensions in the adjacent waters, particularly the West Sea, have significantly extended the area of UNC concern without being integral part of the AA AOR. With regard to the West Sea, it is coming to no surprise that the cracks if not differences into the perception on UNC's role and utility on the Korean Peninsula displayed in the previous sections of the paper are unfortunately not closing but indeed, have been more widening, particularly in the 21st Century. Due to the absence of KPA naval capabilities in the West Sea, this part did not play any role during the war and has been mentioned in the AA with the stipulation of the Northwest Is-lands to remain under UNC military control . However, no AA implementation process or rules have been defined in the AA with regard to this part of the Korean Peninsula. On 30 August 1953, soon after the signing of the AA, the then CDR UNC, General Mark W. Clark is said to have defined the Northern Limit Line (NLL) as the line that should not be crossed further north by any kind of vessels, hence as a measure of preventing incidents with the KPA.

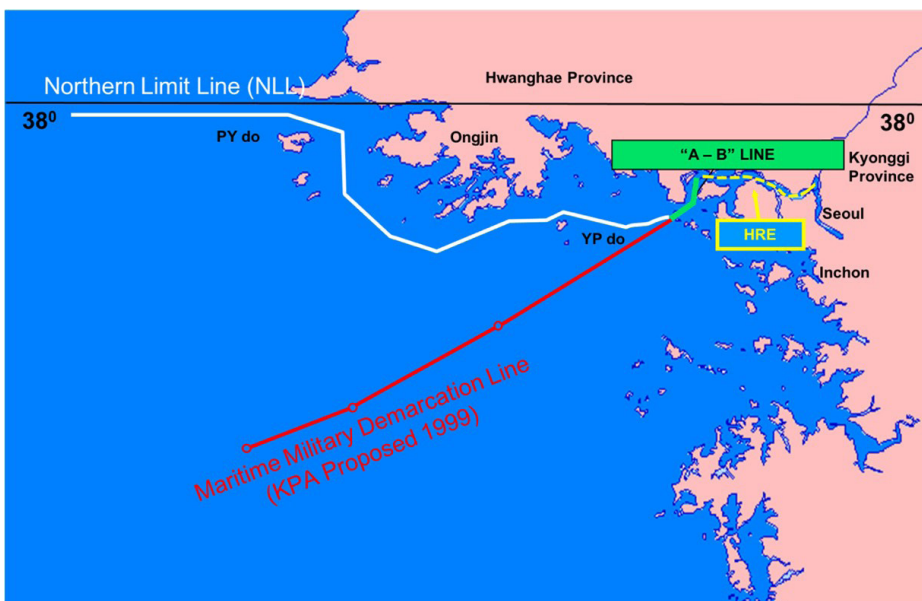


Figure 2 Northern Limit Line as defined by CDR UNC on 30 August 1953 and Maritime Military Demarcation Line proposed by the KPA in 1999. Illustration by NNSC

This UNC perception of separation and thus risk reduction has hardly been and is to a some extent still not be fully shared by the ROK political as well military leadership, particularly of conservative origin. In these quarters, the NLL is considered the ROK maritime border to be defended, if need be, by all costs. This obvious difference in perception has been a major issue of concern in terms of major incidents through unintended or even intended miscalculations. Particularly in the aftermath of the sinking of the Cheonan and the shelling of YP-Do Island in 2010 until the conclusion of the Comprehensive Military Agreement in September 2018, the West Sea has been a major flashpoint of confrontational risks between the two Koreas as well as of delicate UNC crisis management. Perfectly legitimate live fire exercises of ROK units on the North Western Islands as well as busy fishing activities of Chinese vessels during the blue crab seasons North and South of the NLL under often difficult weather and visibility conditions were particularly prone for frictions, which, luckily enough, never escalated into kinetic exchanges.

UNC and the annual large-scale exercises

During the author's tenure in Korea from 2012-2017, the KEY RESOLVE/FOAL EAGLE exercise series in spring and the ULCHI FREEDOM GUARDIAN exercises in late summer have been highlights of military training activities on the Korean Peninsula. The exercises were always accompanied by well-orchestrated North Korean accusations and even threats of retaliation. CDR UNC requested NNSC to observe the exercises and to report on whether the exercise series "had been deterrent and defensive in nature". Although pretty strict classification restrictions had to be applied, NNSC got a significant overview on roles and challenges of the different alliance partners as well as of the joint and combined processes among the various services. This unique insight did confirm the crucial importance of these complex exercises particularly also the command-post part on the military strategic and operational level of the U.S.-ROK Alliance, as CFC was the main training audience.

The purpose of the exercises was and still is manifold. From a strategic perspective,

it has been an important and integral part of strengthening the credibility of deterrence towards the north, though this aspect has apparently been downsized considerably in the aftermath of the summit in Singapore 2018 and the Comprehensive Military Agreement of September 2018. The strategic communication also emphasized the exercises' contribution to strengthening the ROK-U.S. Alliance. At least as important are the education, training and rehearsal efforts on the operational level. This is particularly obvious given the challenge that at every command post exercise, roughly one third of the training audience was new in their respective postings and responsibilities! As interoperability is a key element for success in an alliance, significant efforts with this respect have been undertaken in the command post part as well as in the field exercise part. From my observer point of view, remarkable improvements particularly in the command post part have been notified, though there seemed to be still considerable room for improvement compared with other alliances such as NATO, particularly with regard to language barriers or (military) cultural backgrounds.



Figure 3 NNSC KR/FE Observation of a Naval Exercise in the East Sea, March 2013. Photo by NNSC

Importance of the Crisis Management (CMX) Part of the Exercises

Most exercise series have been preceded by a crisis management exercise (CMX) part in form of a table-top exercise. Limited scenarios based on realistic incidents under “armistice conditions” had to be assessed and likely decisions to be elaborated. This has been the part of the series where UNC had to play a crucial role in its capacity as guarantor of the Armistice Agreement. Particularly in the wake and most probably as an element of the UNC revitalization process, subsequent Commanders UNC pivotal role under “armistice conditions” has been checked and exercised. As a rule, the initial task of the training audience has been to comprehensively assessing options to de-escalate and return to “armistice conditions”, an approach not always familiar to everybody and hence at least indirectly questioned by some. The quasi-imperative of de-escalation over “exploiting the opportunity for retaliation and punishment” has certainly been appreciated by those responsible for maintaining and observing the correct implementation of the AA.

UNC and OPCON Transfer

Given the likely development of the situation on and around the Korean Peninsula, a substitution of the AA by a comprehensive peace regime is hardly in the offing for a considerable future. Hence, UNC will most likely still be in place and relevant when the planned OPCON transfer is going to be implemented in a short to mid-term perspective. From that moment on, the so far triple hatted U.S. Commander will be handing over the CFC-hat to a ROK General and will be serving as the Deputy CFC Commander. But he will be remaining in charge and responsible for the implementation of the AA as long as it is in force. Against the background and personal experience that the ROK senior military leadership has always been much more comfortable with CFC, representing “the strongest alliance on the planet”, compared to the not fully appreciated UNC, a further decrease of UNC relevance from a ROK

perspective has to be taken into consideration. Hence, a boost for UNC reputation among the Korean political and military leadership could contribute to balancing the perception on UNC compared to CFC.

UNC beyond AA Maintenance: “A Hidden Gem of Added Value”

The track record of UNC in fulfilling its primary mission of guaranteeing and maintaining the AA regime is certainly impressive. As described above, certain flaws do exist and there is room for improvement in particular areas. Military leaders in general tend to focus on successfully accomplishing their mission and therefore, keep shortcomings internal, or worse, do not address them properly at all. There is little difference in South Korea, not least to the fact, that alliance coherence for the sake of a credible deterrence against the North is absolutely key. Hence, the strong focus on the “iron-clad U.S. – ROK Alliance” for the defense of South Korea. Though with a different mandate and mission, UNC considered by many as a sort of junior or minor partner is experiencing similar perceptions of Pro’s and Con’s as hinted in the initial question.

If assessed from a comprehensive perspective, UNC is providing added values that a bilateral alliance cannot. Apart from the alliance partners, there are 16 Sending States as part of UNC that are providing legitimacy and credibility to the full AA implementation. However, this commitment is going far beyond the pure military aspects that were initially the main if not only purpose. It is to be considered a strong message and statement for a strong and prosperous democratic Republic of Korea through direct and indirect contributions to stability and security on the Korean Peninsula.

UNC has been the crucial coalition of the willing under a loose UN umbrella against the North Korea aggression during the Korean War. After signing the AA and the conclusion of the ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty of 01 October 1953, all other Sending States could have taken the decision to withdraw not only their contingents

but also from the coalition as a whole. Currently, 16 out of the 20 nations that provided combat or humanitarian support to UNC are still part of this unique coalition.

Furthermore, there are important aspects that do have implications beyond the Korean Peninsula. UNC has to be considered as a multinational security platform; a form of multilateral security structure so far unique in North East Asia Pacific. Though militarily focused on armistice maintenance, it is offering a political-diplomatic platform to consult, discuss and even coordinate on security issues beyond the Korean Peninsula. Experience and expertise out of these processes could be exploited for future true multilateral security arrangements in a bilateral-treaty-dominated region of the planet.

Last but certainly not least, UNC Rear, its infrastructure as well as its important logistical support role are to be considered as a sort of bridging element to Japan as another major player in the region. This military-technical bridge does not only serve U.S. or Japanese security interest but is offering opportunities for UNC and, despite all reservation, indeed for the Republic of Korea. These complex interdependencies firmly stipulated in the Status-of-Forces-Agreement (SOFA) between UN C and the Government of Japan of 1957 could be exploited in order to create and maintain a new post-UNC security platform beyond the Korean AA for the whole region.

Conclusions

The initial question has been asking on whether UNC is rather a nuisance or even a stumbling block or on the contrary, a cornerstone of stability on and around the Korean Peninsula. The answers of those that have been serving as part of or with UNC certainly tend in their perception towards the cornerstone scenario. From an impartial outside perception, there is no doubt that UNC is one of the important and relevant cornerstones of stability on and also around the Korean Peninsula. Its sheer existence and necessity after 74 years of existence is, however, a stark reminder of an unfinished business, a lasting peace regime in Korea. On the other side of the percep-

tion spectrum, North Korea is considering UNC at least as an important stumbling block to be disbanded rather sooner than later. In between, there is a substantial part of the South Korean political and military elites officially acknowledging UNC as a more or less painful necessity but basically tending more to a perception of a long overdue nuisance. The reasoning of these perceptions is looking rather diverse. From the author's experience, the spectrum is ranging from sharing the conviction of late President Syngman Rhee in opposing the armistice as a whole over political, military and territorial sovereignty considerations to anti-American sentiments. Interestingly enough, it did not really matter on whether the administration was conservative or progressive. The above-mentioned notion of "UNC under attack" is an underlying sentiment of those who believe in UNC irrespectively of the color of the administration. It is, however, more openly voiced under progressive administrations such as in the case of the ill-fated EOW-declaration initiative of the outgoing Moon-administration.

It would be unfair only to blame South Korean political and military circles for undervaluing the role and importance of UNC. In the author's experience, knowledge, purpose and value of UNC is at a surprisingly low level within the U.S. Forces Korea personnel as well. Whereas commitment and dedication of the senior level to UNC and the AA has been experienced as impressive, particularly with those directly involved in its mandate, staff elements and units not directly involved in armistice business were only aware of the UNC context on a very limited level if at all. "Ready to fight tonight" against a North Korean aggression has been and still is the main purpose of their rotational tour in Korea. As an example, only a very limited number of U.S. military or even diplomatic personnel serving in Korea have been aware of the utmost importance of UNC for security and stability beyond the Korean Peninsula through the set of agreements with Japan in the framework of UNC Rear. Against this background, there is undoubtedly room for improvement for raising the awareness of UNC.

The 16 UNC Sending States as the political and military back-up system of UNC can and should play a significant role in promoting and creating legitimacy and credi-

bility to UNC's role. This added value seems to be still somehow underestimated by many of the actors on the political and diplomatic level. The UNC re-vitalization efforts have certainly been increasing the awareness and also the military commitment. The most important step has been the attribution of very senior positions in UNC to non-U.S. general officers, most visibly in the position of the Deputy Commander UNC.

Options for improving UNC's reputation

As described and assessed above, in a (military)professional environment UNC is a rather solid member of the "military-strategic family" on the Korean Peninsula. All family members are adding to the effort of projecting this picture towards the outside and particularly across the DMZ. Some are doing more than others for reasons discussed above. Outside observers and partners with substantial interaction with this "family" do get the distinct impression that UNC seems to be the child with the least affection as it is spoiling the party more often than expected. To some degree this is impacting the outside view of large parts the Korean public and media where UNC seems to be negatively connoted in distinct opposite to the "iron-clad" ROK-U.S. Alliance.

In the author's experience, the UNC leadership has been aware of these shortcomings for quite some time. Efforts to improve UNC's reputation have been considered and implemented, such as the UNC re-vitalization efforts. However, the concerns of senior Korean officers that "UNC is under attack" and/or concrete steps to consolidate UNC's reputation are indicating that more should be done, not least on the Korean side of the "family". Some of the following options are elaborated and well explained in Major General Chang's book on the United Nations Command. It is particularly valuable that a true insider of UNC operations as well as of the ROK military structures and processes is offering recommendations for improving UNC's functioning as well as its reputation.

There would be a large spectrum of options adding to improve UNC's reputation. In the author's perception the single most important option would consist in a transparent, coherent and stringent effort to significantly enlarge and raise the awareness on role, mandate, responsibilities, constraints and indeed added values of UNC to a variety of target audiences. The most important target audience is considered to be the other military commands on the Peninsula, ROK and U.S. alike. Other sectors such as ROK and U.S. policymakers as well as the Korean media and general public should be addressed accordingly. This comprehensive strategic communication through information and education would require a truly common understanding by all partners. As this understanding is apparently still short of being truly common, the narrative on genesis, role and implication of UNC and the AA on the stability and security on and around the Korean Peninsula would have to be basically reviewed and consolidated, an effort that would most probably affect particularly past and current Korean perceptions on the issue.

In order to get there, senior staff elements and officers with a large experience at UNC should be taking a leading role. Former and current UNCMAC Senior Members should be attributed a pivotal role in this endeavor, as their credibility and competence in convincing a critical mass of the Korean military and political leadership would most probably be mission critical. UNC experienced U.S., Sending States and even NNSC senior personnel are considered to be key elements in supporting the effort towards the different target audiences.

On a more political-strategic level, there seems to be still considerable room for improvement for presenting the added value of UNC for stability and security not only on the Peninsula but also for a larger strategic neighborhood. The unique situation of having at least politically if not militarily involved 16 outside nations, among them with UK and France two more permanent members of the UN Security Council, is providing ample opportunities to highlight a global legitimacy and credibility of UNC and a correct implementation of its mandate. Having Japan, though not a UNC Sending State for obvious reasons, intertwined with UNC through deployment of UNC Rear and subsequent agreements, does considerably enlarge influence and yield

of UNC beyond the peninsula proper. Sending States and their representatives in the area are considered to be well placed to consistently bring across these messages not least to the Korean public. This might support and enhance “UNC re-vitalization” efforts that were getting somehow mixed reactions from the ROK side during the author’s tenure in Korea. A re-branding of the term “re-vitalization” partly ill-conceived by the Korean side might create favorable conditions to continue and even enhance these efforts.

Education and information are certainly adding considerable to awareness raising. Active participation and taking specific responsibilities in UNC and particularly in UNCMAC are considered to be even more beneficial. By increasing the active knowledge base of senior ROK officers through UNC assignment is not only enlarging their experience and understanding but can also be exploited in bringing the message over. The author has experienced positive results in that endeavor when UNCMAC has been provided with senior postings for ROK officers who were leading investigations into assumed or alleged armistice violations within the DMZ. Though a challenge for the individual officer given the assumed loyalty to the ROK military chain of command, the observing NNSC participants were, as a rule, impressed with the professionalism of how the investigations were accomplished in full compliance with UNC regulations. In a certain number of cases, the issue and the findings were not in the interest and the liking of the investigated ROK units or commands. These distinct efforts of exposing ROK military personnel with UNC and UNCMAC practical experience should be continued and even broadened where possible. There are hardly only few limits to that, if at all. Even the suggestion of ultimately providing the or one of the UNC Deputy Commander’s position(s) to a ROK general officer could be taken into consideration as a clear signal of a close and tight interaction of the ROK MND and military with UNC.

Way Ahead

After the “window of opportunity” 2018-2019 with the different summits, the situation on the Ko-rean Peninsula is unfortunately turning back to a “More of the Same” scenario. The DPRK has to be considered as a de facto nuclear power steadily consolidating its capabilities despite harsh sanction regimes with even less incentives to de-nuclearize after the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The conservative Yoon Administration in South Korea is following previous conservative administrations in focusing on security and deterrence with regard to North Korea. Hence, the “miscalculation scenario” amid alleged or real “provocations” has gained in importance again. This is exactly the environment, where UNC is a critical force of mitigating and handling situations that have a high potential for escalation. “Timely provisions of options for de-escalation and return to ‘Armistice Conditions’ and implementing them” is considered to be a key element for security and stability on the Korean Peninsula, particularly given the ever-increasing capabilities of the DPRK. As long as this “More of the Same scenario” is continuing, unfortunately it is likely to stay for quite some time, UNC remains an indispensable actor deserving the full support of the ROK political and military leadership, the Korean public as well as of all UNC sending/partner nations. This paper should have clearly displayed that there is still room for improvement in order to get closer to that objective.

As UNC is most probably still be needed for quite some time, its reputation matters and should quickly get rid of the perception that “UNC is under attack”. It is in the hands of key officials and institutions - Korean, U.S., and Sending States alike - to contribute to this endeavor!

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AA	Korean Armistice Agreement of 27 July 1953
CDR	Commander
CFC	Combined Forces Command
CMA	Comprehensive Military Agreement
CMX	Crisis Management Exercise
DMZ	De-Militarized Zone
DPRK	Democratic Republic of Korea
EOW	End-of-War Declaration
KPA	Korean People's Army
KR/FE KEY RESOLVE/FOAL EAGLE	exercise series
NLL	Northern Limit Line
NNSC	Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission
OPCON	(Wartime) Operational Control
ROE	Rules of Engagement
ROK	Republic of Korea
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
UFG	ULCHI FREEDOM GUARDIAN exercise series
UN	United Nations
UNC	United Nations Command
UNCMAC	United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission
UNC Rear	United Nations Command Rear in Japan
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council

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