

November 7, 2017

The Honorable Tammy Duckworth
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ruben M. Gallego
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ted W. Lieu
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Duckworth, Representative Gallego, and Representative Lieu,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the current discussion regarding the possible use of force by the United States against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. As a former Air Force officer my duty was to provide my best military advice to our civilian leadership. The purpose of this letter is to do the same on a topic with which I am very familiar: the operational considerations of war on the Korean peninsula.

From January 2012 to December 2014 I was the deputy commander of US Forces Korea, and as such deeply involved with the development of plans to counter possible North Korean attacks on the Republic of Korea (ROK). This threat was the most dangerous I'd faced since the end of the Cold War, and planning for it the most challenging problem I'd encountered in my 35-year career.

The 28,500 US Armed Forces personnel in South Korea are vastly outnumbered by North Korean forces, as well as ROK forces that will conduct the overwhelming majority of the fighting. Unlike every conflict since the last Korean War, we will not be able to build up our forces prior to the start of hostilities. US reinforcements will take days to months to arrive in theater, as will supplies and equipment. When they do arrive, they may well find their bases subject to attack by conventional or chemical weapons, which will further delay their entry into the war.

US leadership, airpower, counterfire, and ISR are critical to the initial stages of the conflict, particularly in the defense of Seoul, the political, economic, and cultural center of South Korea that is home to 25 million people, half the nation's population. Unfortunately, North Korean artillery, rockets, and missiles that threaten the capital will take days to eliminate, even under ideal conditions. During that time an enormous casualty and evacuee crisis will develop and include over a hundred thousand non-combatant Americans, many of who will turn to US forces to get them off the peninsula.

The defense of South Korea and evacuation of US citizens will be significantly complicated by the expected North Korean use of chemical munitions and potential employment of nuclear weapons. Asymmetric North Korean capabilities will also pose severe challenges, including cyber attacks against US-ROK command and control nodes. North Korean Special Forces, among the largest in the world, will create a second front in the rear. The North Korean submarine force, although technically inferior, is also among the world's largest and capable of sinking allied vessels, sowing mines, and inserting Special Forces units.

US ISR capabilities that are critical to finding targets will be limited by hardened and concealed North Korean underground facilities, the lack of omnipresent overhead imagery satellites, mobile North Korean weapon systems that can rapidly relocate (including the KN-08 and KN-14 ICBMs), and terrain. Much of North Korea is mountainous, which limits distant visual reconnaissance by airborne platforms. Furthermore, a non-permissive air environment will drastically curtail the use of unmanned aerial vehicles that are ubiquitous in other theaters. ISR limitations, coupled with North Korean abilities to move, hide, or deeply shelter their assets, will significantly degrade our ability to find, fix, and finish many high priority targets at the onset of conflict. As such, it is very unlikely that a limited attack by the US would completely eliminate North Korea's nuclear capabilities.

It is far more likely that a US attack on North Korea, no matter how limited, would result in the dissolution of the 1953 armistice and a resumption of war between North Korea and the US-ROK alliance. An attack by the US on North Korea's strategic nuclear capabilities, which they deem essential to the regime's survival, would most likely be viewed as an existential threat and generate a corresponding response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jan-Marc Jouas', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Jan-Marc Jouas, Lt Gen, USAF (retired)