



AUSA BACKGROUND BRIEF



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NORTH KOREA: A PROFILE

THE COUNTRY

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is located in northeast Asia between the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Republic of Korea (South Korea, or ROK) and the Russian Federation; it is about the size of the state of Mississippi. (See map on following page.) Its numerous ranges of moderately high and partially forested mountains and hills are separated by deep, narrow valleys and small cultivated plains. This mountainous interior is isolated, nearly inaccessible and sparsely populated. The population of 22.7 million is predominately Korean but also includes some Chinese and Japanese. The population is well educated, with 99 percent of both men and women able to read and write by 15 years of age.¹

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

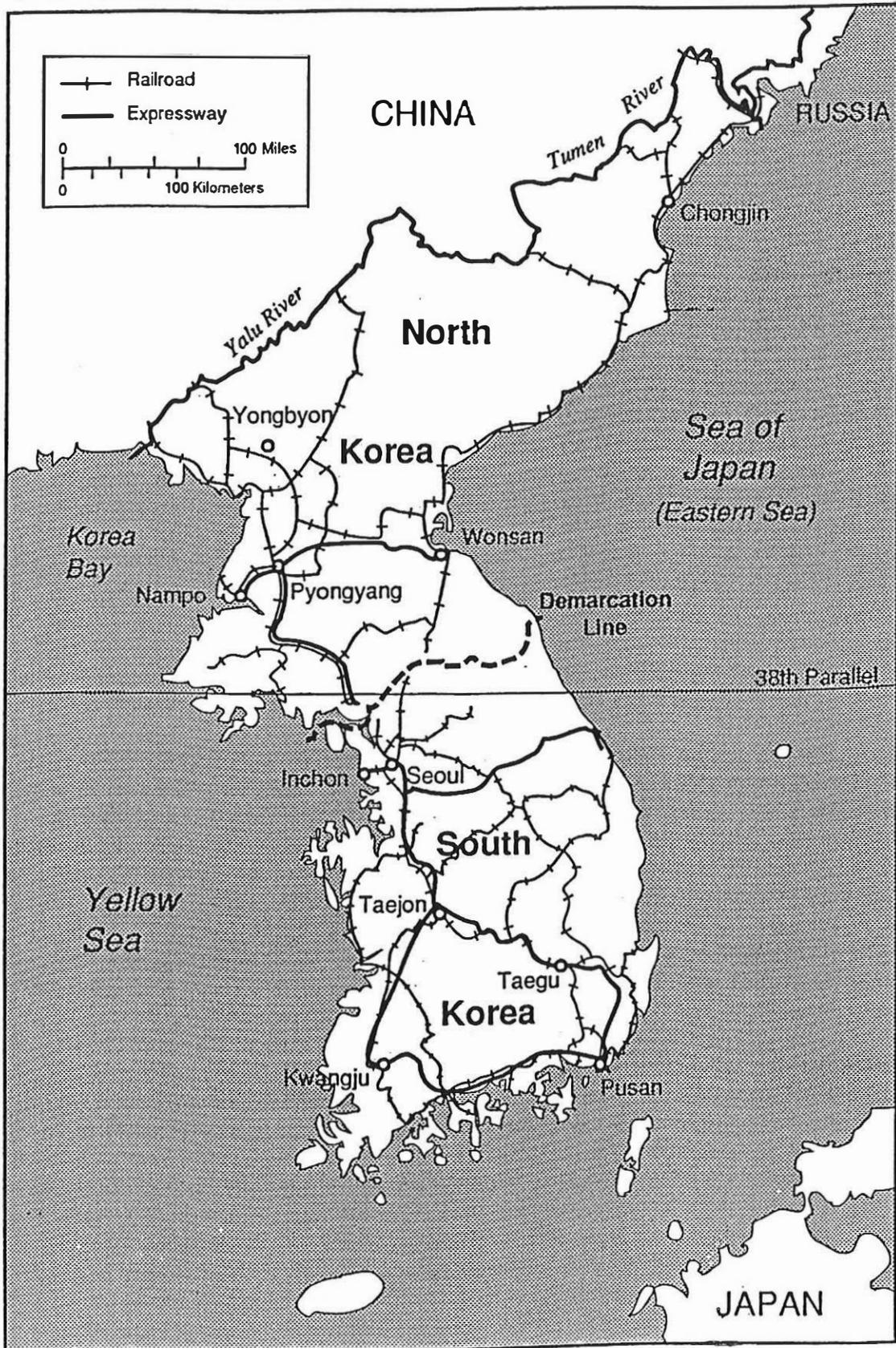
Throughout most of its history, the Korean Peninsula has been invaded, influenced and fought over by its neighbors.²

In A.D. 668, the peninsula was unified under the Silla kingdom. In A.D. 918, the Koryo dynasty (hence the name "Korea") succeeded the Silla kingdom until 1392, when it, in turn, was supplanted by the Yi dynasty. Mongolia occupied Korea from the early 13th to the 14th centuries; Chinese rebel armies devastated it in 1359 and 1597. Japanese invasions in 1592 and 1597 forced the Yi king to adopt a closed-door policy, thus the "Hermit Kingdom."

Japan returned to dominance in the late 19th century, defeated Chinese and Russian competitors and began efforts to replace Korean culture and language with its own. In 1910, Japan annexed Korea, eliminating the Yi dynasty. Japan treated Korea as an occupied territory, eventually absorbing it and using the peninsula's resources to support the Japanese war machine.³

In 1945, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill met at Yalta to sign an agreement resolving Far Eastern questions. Stalin's security interests were simple: subordinate weak states to powerful ones, divide the world into spheres of influence and widen the buffer zones along the periphery of the Soviet state. He wanted to "ensure the expansion of Soviet supremacy in Asia." The resulting accord validated many Soviet claims.⁴

The Korean Peninsula



In July 1945, at Potsdam, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to divide the Korean Peninsula at the 38th parallel — separating it for the first time in more than 13 centuries. The Soviet-American commission on Korea was beset by profound distrust. Each American action was interpreted as a provocation, and the Russians quickly concluded that their interests were irreconcilable with those of the United States. The Soviets also prevented the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea from entering the North to conduct UN-mandated free elections. The Republic of Korea was formed in May 1948; the DPRK was established in September.⁵

U.S. occupation forces withdrew by mid-1949, and the Republic of Korea was formally excluded from the Asian/U.S. security perimeter. Kim Il Sung lobbied for Soviet support for an attack in the South. Believing the United States would not involve itself in a “small war on the Korean Peninsula,” the Korean People’s Army (KPA) crossed the demarcation line with between 150,000 and 200,000 troops on 25 June 1950.⁶

UN forces raced to deploy U.S. troops before Pusan fell. “The UN won this race when the U.S. 2d division disembarked” in August 1950.⁷ UN forces rallied after the landing at Inchon, drove to the PRC-Korean frontier, and again withdrew as Communist China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) intervened. A static front developed and truce talks began at Panmunjom in July 1951, with the communists using stalling and delaying tactics to prevent any substantive negotiations. After the final communist offensive at Kumsong failed in July 1953, the communists returned to the peace talks. At 10:00 a.m. on 27 July 1953, the armistice agreement documents were signed; the cease-fire took effect 12 hours later.⁸

The resulting 1953 armistice agreement established the Military Advisory Commission (MAC) which has supervised the terms of the peace agreement for 41 years since; the commission is made up of representatives of the UN Command, DPRK and PRC armies. In April 1994, when the DPRK threatened to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it also withdrew from the MAC, seeking a separate U.S.-DPRK peace treaty.⁹

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

North Korea has been a communist, one-leader state since the Soviet Union established the DPRK on 9 September 1948 under former guerrilla leader Kim Il Sung (who died on 7 July 1994 and was succeeded by his son, Kim Jong Il). As such, it has a centralized government rigidly controlled by the Korean Workers’ (communist) Party (KWP). A few minor parties exist to present an appearance of representative government to the outside world.

Little is known about the actual lines of power and authority in the North Korean government, despite the formal structure set forth in the 1972 constitution.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is clear Kim Il Sung had held dictatorial powers since 1948. He and a dwindling number of long-time loyalists (all ranking KWP members) dominated political and economic systems through elaborate party structures and civilian and military bureaucracies. The extent to which Kim Jong Il has been similarly empowered is still emerging.

The 1972 constitution was ratified by the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA), officially the highest organ of state power. In reality, the SPA merely "ratifies" decisions made by the ruling KWP.

The 1972 constitution created the position of president (held, of course, by Kim) and the Central People's Committee (CPC), the government's top policy-making body. Kim nominated the other 24 CPC members to make policy decisions and supervise the State Administration Council, the cabinet. Again, it is unclear if his successor has similar powers.

The DPRK has a reputation as one of the world's most repressive states. After the Korean War, Kim consolidated his power by purging and executing his rivals. Since the 1960s, there have been tens of thousands of political prisoners; thousands have been tortured and executed. In 1983 Kim Il Sung purged the DPRK leadership to remove opposition to the hereditary transfer of power to Kim Jong Il.¹¹

THE "GREAT LEADER"

In addition to his titles of general secretary of the KWP and president of the DPRK, Kim Il Sung was also called the "Great Leader."

According to the official history, Kim Il Sung was born Kim Sung-Ju on 15 April 1912 in Makyungdae, a village near Pyongyang. While in high school in Manchuria, he was active in the anti-Japanese underground movement and fought Japanese colonizers along the Korean-Manchurian border. While there he took the name Kim Il Sung from a famous guerrilla hero. At 15 he founded the "Down with Imperialism Union" and is credited with setting up the fledgling Korean People's Army in 1931.¹²

In 1934 he joined the Chinese Communist Party, fled from Japanese police and escaped to Moscow. He joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and fought against the Nazis as a major in the Red Army. In 1939-40, Kim was assigned to the Khabarovsk Infantry Officer School; in the summer of 1942 the 88th brigade's Korean battalion (with Kim as commander) was specifically tasked to train cadres for the future KPA.¹³

Kim Il Sung nurtured an intense and far-reaching personality cult closely resembling a state religion. From childhood, North Koreans were taught that Kim Il Sung had superhuman wisdom, determination and benevolence. He was proud of the development of his ideology of *juche* (self-reliance), skillfully letting both China and Russia have influence but not dominance. But in reality, throughout the early post-World War II years Kim was wholly dependent on Moscow and North Korea was a Soviet satellite; when the Soviet 25th Army left Korea it gave all its weapons to the KPA.¹⁴

THE "DEAR LEADER"

Kim Il Sung fostered a similar personality cult around his son and imminent heir, the "Dear Leader," Kim Jong Il, to achieve a monarchical succession.¹⁵ Kim Jong Il is an enigma to the outside

world. Like his father, Kim Jong Il has a great fear of flying and has traveled abroad only once or twice in 30 years, making proper evaluation of this new leader imprecise at best.

The official history states he was born on Mount Paekdu on 16 February 1942, though he actually was born in the Soviet Union. His mother died when he was seven. Kim Il Sung then married Kim Song Ae and had two more sons.¹⁶

Most observers see Kim Jong Il as a dangerous eccentric prone to violent acts. But he is also credited with day-to-day management of domestic affairs and a principal role in the nuclear program (even approving the NPT withdrawal). It is believed he actually ran the country for several months prior to the demise of the "Great Leader," and in the early 1980s he was personally responsible for terrorist and special operations conducted through the Research Department for External Intelligence (RDEI).¹⁷

In the mid-1980s he was appointed to head economic reforms and in 1992 he was named titular head of the KPA, though he is not well-liked by military leaders. In April 1993, he was appointed chairman of the National Defense Committee.¹⁸

Kim Il Sung reportedly died of a heart attack at 2:00 a.m. on 7 July 1994. Kim Jong Il was named head of the funeral organizing committee, a communist custom often signifying succession. The first-ever North-South summit scheduled for 25 July was postponed, and the funeral, set for 17 July, did not include foreign dignitaries.¹⁹

On 13 July, state-controlled radio reported that power had formally passed to Kim Jong Il.²⁰

THE ECONOMY

After the partition of the peninsula in 1945, the North had the advantage in industry and natural resources. To recover from the destruction of the Korean War, the command economy focused on rapid economic and industrial development. North Korea has relied upon large amounts of aid from fellow communist nations (contradicting the *juche* ideology).²¹

Even for a communist country, state control of economic affairs is unusually tight. More than 90 percent of the economy is socialized; agricultural land is collectivized; and 95 percent of manufactured goods are from state-owned industries.²²

In 1979, the DPRK became the first communist nation to default on loans it received in the early 1970s from free market countries. Even after renegotiating much of its international debt, by late 1986, North Korea's hard currency debt reached over \$4 billion (with almost \$2 billion of that owed to communist allies) and it again defaulted on all its loans. In August 1987, 120 Western banks declared it in default for \$750-810 million in loans. In December 1992, the People's Republic of China declared North Korea must pay for all imports in hard cash and not by barter.²³

Economic growth during 1984-88 averaged two to three percent but subsequently declined by three to five percent annually during 1989-92, due to systemic problems and disruptions in DPRK-Chinese and -USSR relations and financial support. In 1992, output dropped by around 10 to 15 percent because of further reductions in outside support.²⁴

Severe fuel shortages forced consumer goods factories to close and divert energy and raw goods to produce munitions, tanks and artillery. In 1990, the economy shrank three percent; in 1991 it shrank a further five percent; and in 1992 it shrank another three percent. Five years of poor harvests and distribution problems have caused strict food rationing.²⁵

In January 1994, Kim Il Sung announced to the Central Committee of the KWP the endorsement of Chinese-style radical economic restructuring emphasizing exports (minerals, agriculture and fishery products, and armaments), agriculture and light industry. Coal, the only domestically produced energy source, also would be developed.²⁶

MILITARY CAPABILITIES

Though the official role of the Korean People's Army (KPA) is defense of the southern border, in actuality it has an offensive orientation with the specific goal, openly articulated, of reunifying the two Koreas by force of arms. Kim Il Sung "never believed in peaceful unification; he never had such an idea."²⁷

Total DPRK armed forces number around 1.1 million active and 540,000 reserve personnel, in addition to six million who have some type of reserve/militia commitment. Of this, the army has one million active troops.²⁸ (See charts, pages 11 and 12.)

A singularly curious aspect of the DPRK's military posture is the preponderance of tunnels (for both defense and infiltration) under the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea. The first was discovered in 1974; 18 are believed to have been built. A major tunnelling campaign occurred in 1966-70, with a North Korean team in 1968 reaching within 500 yards of the Blue House (the ROK presidential palace). (The raiders were killed by security forces.) Because of immensely high costs, the ROK has only countermined a few of the North's tunnels.²⁹

The president (now Kim Jong Il) is the supreme commander and the senior DPRK military authority. The Ministry of the People's Armed Forces reports directly to him. The general staff of the DPRK armed forces, in turn, reports to the ministry. The KPA is a unified force (based on the former Soviet pattern) and a single chief of staff commands the Army Corps, Artillery Command and the Naval and Air Commands.³⁰

In the early 1970s, the DPRK decreased sabotage and infiltrations through the DMZ and began a major long-term conventional military buildup. The DPRK military is nearing the completion of this improvement plan. They changed their doctrine and strategy from a "people's war" to a "war of maneuver." They transformed their forces from light infantry to highly mobile, heavily armored, artillery-intensive modern forces. They have organized five heavy corps and two national artillery corps and have increased their special operations forces to nearly 88,000.³¹

The strategy of any North Korean attack on South Korea would be to occupy territory and negotiate for war termination or to deny U.S. reinforcements by threatening nuclear warfare.³²

The KPA's 4,200 tanks are mostly obsolete Chinese and Soviet designs as well as Chinese and indigenous copies of Soviet designs. They also have some 84 Frog and Scud missiles of various types.³³ (See chart, page 13.)

Among their long-range weapons are the Nodong-I and -II surface-to-surface missiles. Essentially a modified Scud, the Nodong-I is believed to have a range of 1,300 kilometers. The KPA also has 6,800 artillery pieces, more than 2,000 multiple rocket launchers, and 9,000 mortars.³⁴

The DPRK navy is essentially a coastal defense force with nearly 400 various types of patrol and coastal combat ships. Its 25 submarines, 175 torpedo boats and 145 anti-ship missile craft are especially well suited for operations in and near coastal waters.³⁵

DPRK combat aircraft, numbering 730 planes and 50 armed helicopters, are considered insignificant because there is only enough fuel to fly four to five hours per month. (NATO considers 18 to 20 hours per month necessary to maintain proficiency.) DPRK thus lacks sufficient air power to gain air superiority.³⁶

In addition to the size and operational capabilities of the KPA, 65 percent of its forces and equipment have been relocated near the DMZ, and even support forces have been emplaced in hardened bunkers in attempts to reduce warning time. But countering this are reports asserting that there are only three months' supplies of stockpiles, with a logistic apparatus ill-suited for mobile land warfare.³⁷

The DPRK has both chemical agents and a biological warfare program as well as suitable delivery systems.³⁸

The DPRK has been active in the international military scene. In 1983, arms exports exceeded \$470 million. It is believed DPRK supplied nearly 40 percent of Iran's military equipment in the Iran-Iraq War, especially T-62 main battle tanks, artillery and surface-to-air missiles. In addition, its advisors were located in Madagascar, Zimbabwe and Nicaragua. Of major significance was the transfer of an undisclosed quantity of Scud-C missiles to Iran in March 1992.³⁹

THE NUCLEAR ISSUE

Alarm over North Korea's nuclear capability first began in the mid-1980s. In 1984, there were signs the North Koreans were building a nuclear fuel processing plant at Yongbyon, 30 miles north of Pyongyang. The West feared it could be teamed with other nuclear production facilities, giving North Korea the ability to reprocess "spent" fuel to separate plutonium. In July 1990, even the Soviets suspended the sale of four reactors to the DPRK, fearing it might withdraw from the NPT.⁴⁰

By 1991 it was believed North Korea could produce a nuclear weapon in one or two years. In response, the United States postponed programming force reductions. Also in 1991, the president of South Korea announced that there were no nuclear weapons in the ROK and suggested both Koreas sign a peninsular denuclearization accord.⁴¹

In April 1992, the Supreme People's Assembly "ratified" the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection protocol. In June of that year the first inspection team entered Yongbyon. Inspections showed North Korean claims of possessing reprocessed fuel from routine maintenance as false. In November the IAEA tried to inspect two undeclared sites collocated at Yongbyon. North Korea refused. Since then it has refused to allow IAEA inspectors to carry out inspections of its nuclear "research" facilities as mandated by the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) it signed in 1985 (albeit under Soviet pressure) except for routine maintenance of monitoring equipment.⁴²

In January 1993, the United States and South Korea announced the restart of the Team Spirit exercises, previously postponed as an incentive in negotiations with the DPRK. In February the IAEA demanded special inspection access to the two undeclared sites. In March, North Korea announced its intention to withdraw from the NPT, the first nation ever to announce such an action. In December, though they agreed to resume IAEA inspections and reopen North-South talks, they denied IAEA access to monitoring cameras at various sites.⁴³

In January 1994, the United States announced the deployment of Patriot missile batteries to South Korea. In February, the DPRK government said it would allow IAEA inspections of seven nuclear sites in accordance with the NPT. (This did not include the two previously suspected waste dumps.) But after sending entrance visas, the inspection team returned in March, obstructed from carrying out tests.⁴⁴

In May, North Korea removed plutonium-rich fuel rods from the Yongbyon reactor without IAEA monitoring. Secretary of Defense William Perry states the 8,000 rods could contain enough plutonium for four or five bombs. It is also believed that fuel rods removed in 1989 provided enough plutonium for one or two nuclear weapons; some observers believe the DPRK is using the dispute over fuel rods to disguise a second source of uranium — enriching natural uranium mined in North Korea itself.⁴⁵

Complicating matters, North Korea developed and tested upgraded Scud missiles, the Nodong-I and -II. Several Nodong-Is, with a suspected range of 1,300 kilometers, were sold to Iran in 1993.⁴⁶

On a more positive note, North Korea did announce a freeze on its nuclear program in June 1994. It offered not to reload its 5-megawatt reactor with new fuel rods and not to reprocess spent fuel. This action resulted from talks between Kim Il Sung and former President Jimmy Carter earlier in the month.⁴⁷

In August, the DPRK and the United States signed an accord to "help forge a new era of normal relations between the two countries." Under the provisions of that accord, Washington is to arrange for construction of Western-style "light water" reactors and move toward establishing normal diplomatic relations. The DPRK is to halt plutonium production and eventually halt work on several

tailor-made reactors for producing plutonium. But North Korea still refuses inspections of the two undeclared but suspected sites. The United States asserted it would not deliver any reactors until inspections occur. The DPRK countered by threatening to restart plutonium production if it does not receive the reactors.⁴⁸ The process of international leveraging continues.

The prospect of North Korea's possessing nuclear weapons reaches far beyond Asia. It encompasses the debate about the role of nuclear weapons in a world free of Cold War-era superpowers capable of reining in proxy states. The NPT expires in the spring of 1995. The fundamental question of the North Korean nuclear issue is whether the UN and the West can create effective institutions, systems and principles for the post-Cold War era capable of deterring repeats of the North Korean situation while at the same time avoiding nuclear war.⁴⁹

CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

1910 - Korea annexed by Japan.

April 1945 - United States and Soviet Union establish joint trusteeship.

September 1948 - People's Democratic Republic of Korea established by the Soviet Union; Kim Il Sung chosen as the "Great Leader."

June 1950 - North Korea invades South Korea.

July 1953 - DPRK finally accepts UN brokered cease-fire.

1968 - USS *Pueblo* seized, crew tortured and imprisoned.

1969 - Unarmed U.S. EC-121 shot down in international airspace.

1976 - KPA troops savagely butcher two U.S. Army officers in the DMZ.

1983 - Kim Il Sung purges DPRK leadership to allow for hereditary transfer of power to Kim Jong Il.

1987 - DPRK agents blow up South Korean airplane, killing all 115 people on board to disrupt impending ROK presidential elections and highlight poor security for upcoming Olympic games.

November 1991 - North Korea permits inspections if United States allows inspections to confirm withdrawal of nuclear weapons from ROK; United States indefinitely suspends troop withdrawals due to DPRK's nuclear program.

December 1991 - North Korea agrees to sign IAEA safeguards accord and permit inspections at Yongbyong; both Koreas sign nonaggression treaty and an initial agreement banning nuclear weapons on the peninsula (does not include compliance measures).

January 1992- DPRK signs safeguards accords but claims inspections cannot occur until ratification by legislature; two North Korean cargo ships suspected of carrying ballistic missiles elude the U. S. Navy and dock in Iran.

April 1992 - SPA ratifies inspection accord.

May 1992 - DPRK submits 100-page report to IAEA listing only four nuclear reactors in country.

June 1992 - First IAEA inspection team enters Yongbyon.

August 1992 - Two land and one sea route are opened between the Koreas for the first time since the Korean War.

November 1992 - IAEA inspects Yongbyong and attempts surprise inspections at two undeclared locations; North Korea refuses.

December 1992 - North Korea allows IAEA teams access for minor routine service of existing monitoring equipment but still refuses access to two other sites at Yongbyong.

January 1993 - South Korea announces resumption of Team Spirit exercises.

February 1993 - IAEA demands special access to the two undeclared but suspected Yongbyon sites.

March 1993 - Team Spirit '93 exercises begin; North Korea announces its intention to withdraw from the provisions of the NPT.

April 1993 - Kim Jung Il appointed chairman of the National Defense Committee.

June 1993 - DPRK suspends its NPT withdrawal; Japan announces test in late May of the Nodong-I missile (capable of striking Japanese homeland).

November 1993 - DPRK cancels talks with South Korea.

January 1994 - Test of Nodong-II missile; United States announces deployment of Patriot missiles to ROK.

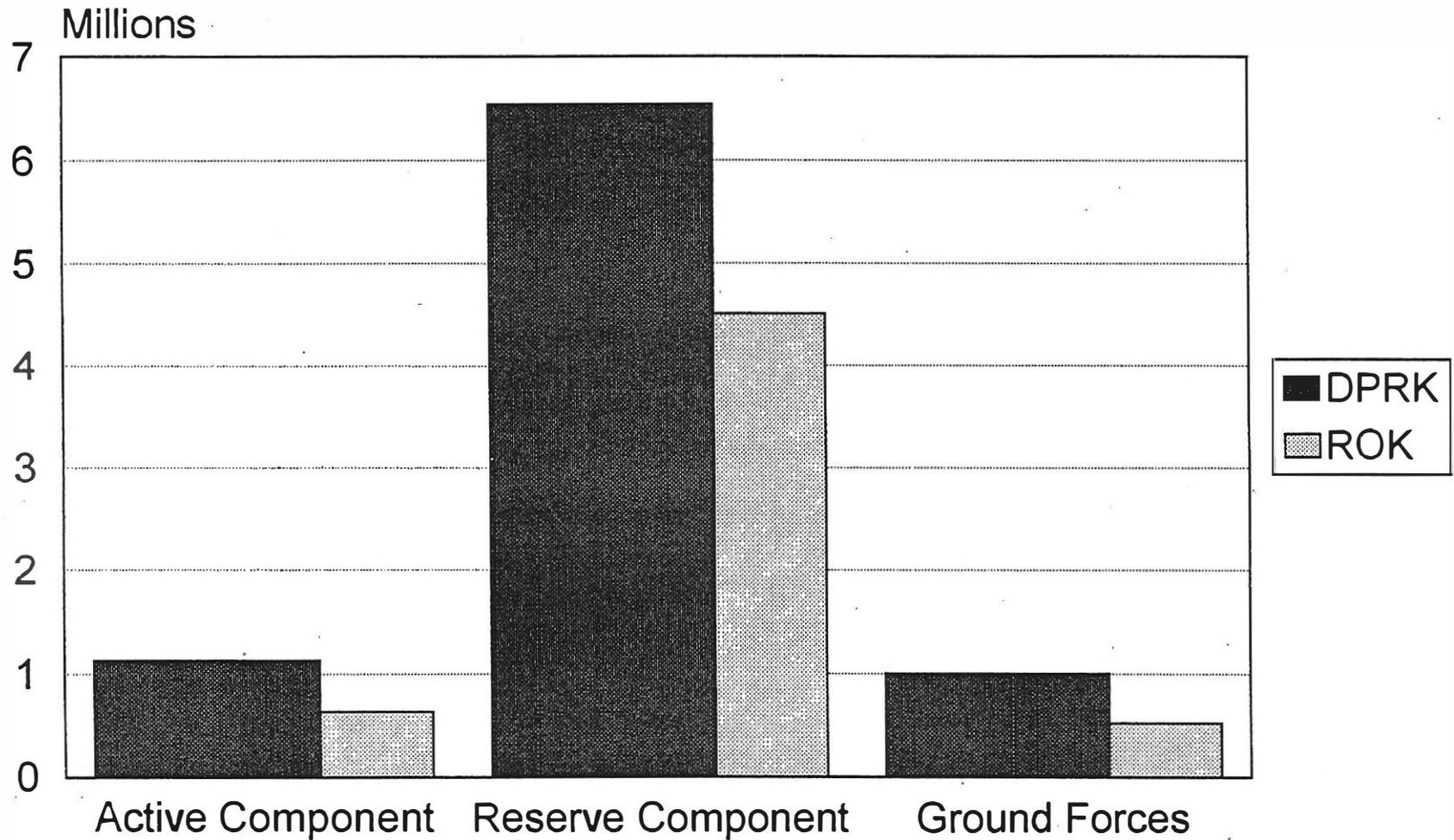
March 1994 - North Korea again refuses IAEA inspections of the two suspected sites.

May 1994 - DPRK removes 8,000 fuel rods without IAEA monitoring to separate plutonium.

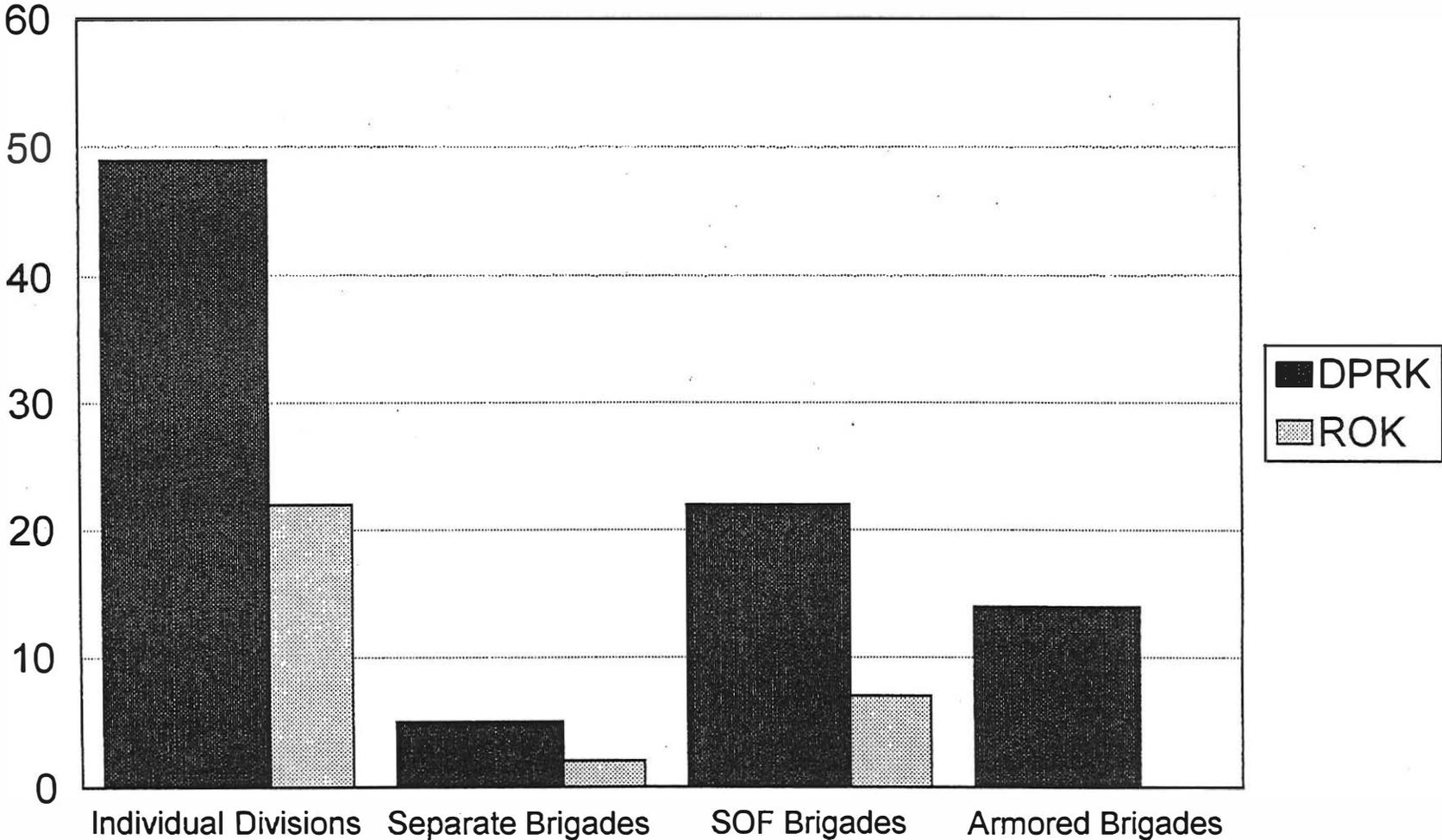
July 1994 - the "Great Leader" Kim Il Sung dies; his son the "Dear Leader" Kim Jong Il succeeds him.

August 1994- DPRK and United States sign accord promising Western-style "light water" reactors for North Korea if it in turn ceases plutonium production and construction of processing reactors; DPRK still refuses IAEA inspections of the undeclared sites.

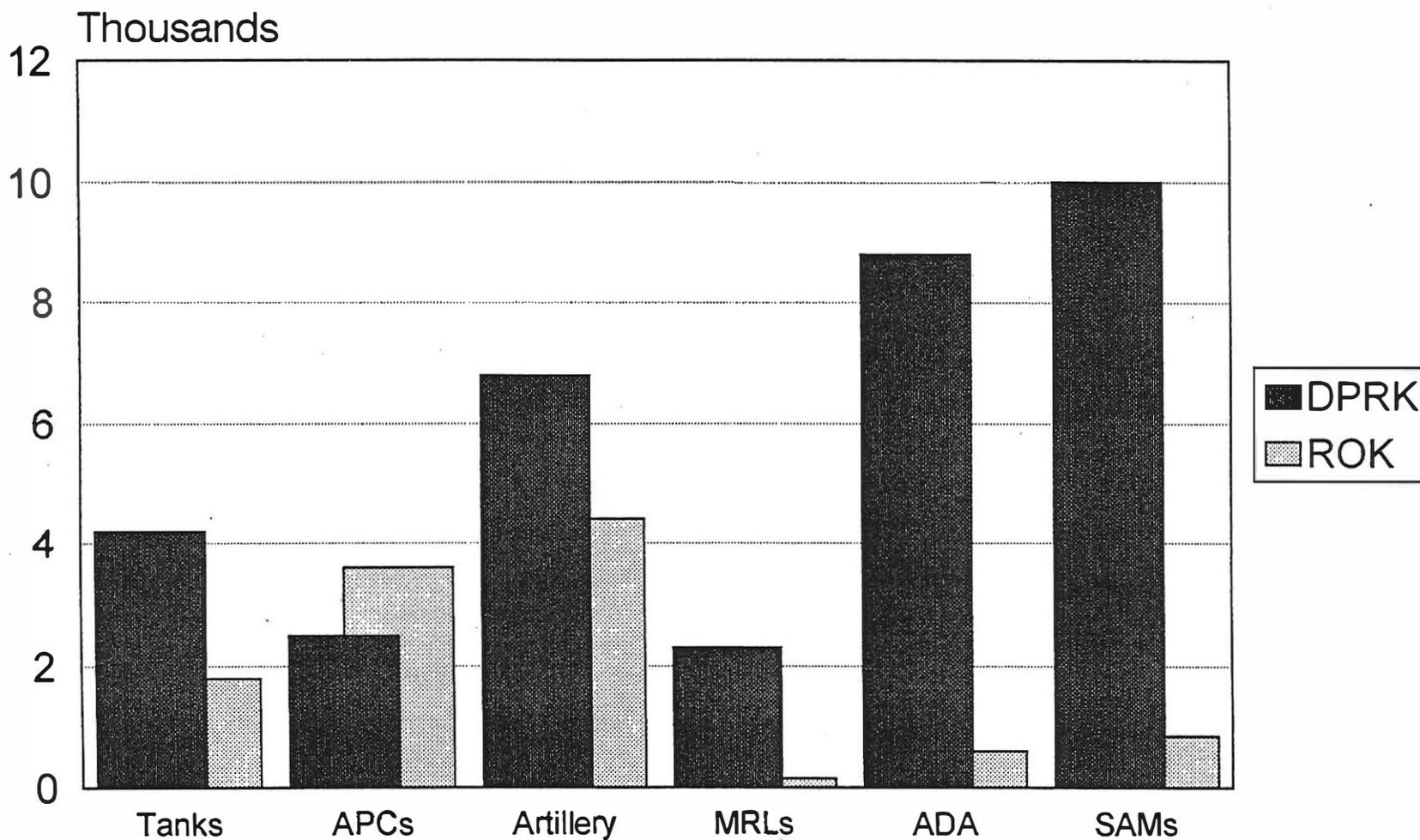
Total Military Personnel



Force Structure



Weapon Systems



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