

Terrorism in South Korea

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Abbreviations

DMZ = demilitarized zone
 US = United States of America

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Abstract

South Korea has experienced >30 suspected terrorism-related events since 1958, including attacks against South Korean citizens in foreign countries. The most common types of terrorism used have included bombings, shootings, hijackings, and kidnappings. Prior to 1990, North Korea was responsible for almost all terrorism-related events inside of South Korea, including multiple assassination attempts on its presidents, regular kidnappings of South Korean fisherman, and several high-profile bombings. Since 1990, most of the terrorist attacks against South Korean citizens have occurred abroad and have been related to the emerging worldwide pattern of terrorism by international terrorist organizations or deranged individuals.

The 1988 Seoul Olympic Games provided a major stimulus for South Korea to develop a national emergency response system for terrorism-related events based on the participation of multiple ministries. The 11 September 2001 World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks and the 2001 United States of America (US) anthrax letter attacks prompted South Korea to organize a new national system of emergency response for terrorism-related events. The system is based on five divisions for the response to specific types of terrorist events, involving conventional terrorism, bioterrorism, chemical terrorism, radiological terrorism, and cyber-terrorism. No terrorism-related events occurred during the 2002 World Cup and Asian Games held in South Korea. The emergency management of terrorism-related events in South Korea is adapting to the changing risk of terrorism in the new century.

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Introduction

The Republic of Korea is a democratic country with 46 million people situated at the southern end of the Korean peninsula (Figure 1). Bounded by a demilitarized zone (DMZ) to the north, the East Sea to the east, and the Yellow Sea to the west, this nation is known to most of the world as South Korea. For the 36 years prior to 1945, Korea was a colony of Japan. After World War II, Korea gained its independence from Japan, but was divided into two territories: South Korea below the 38th parallel, where the US Army was stationed; and North Korea

above the 38th parallel, where the Soviet Army was stationed. In 1950, the Korean War began between the northern communists and southern nationalists, ending in a cease-fire agreement in 1953 that continues today. This article reviews the burden of terrorism in South Korea since the 1950s and its national system of emergency management for terrorism-related events. Although South Korea has made great strides in its ability to respond to terrorism, much work remains in the face of a rapidly changing world.



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Figure 1—Map of South Korea and surrounding countries (printed with permission)

Year	Event	Location	Site	Target	Dead	Injured	Terrorists	Terrorist Group attributed to
1958	Hijacking	Aircraft from Seoul to Pusan	Aircraft	32 passengers, crew	0	0	7	North Korea
1968	Shooting	Seoul	Blue House	President	68	66	31	North Korea
1969	Hijacking	Aircraft from Kangreung to Seoul	Aircraft	51 passengers, crew	0	0	1	North Korea
1974	Shooting	Seoul	Presidential speech	President	2	-	1	North Korea
1978	Kidnapping	-	-	2 movie actors	0	0	-	North Korea
1981	Shooting	Canada	-	President	0	0	-	North Korea
1983	Bombing	Myanmar	-	President	21	46	3	North Korea
1983	Missile attack	Aircraft from New York to Seoul	-	Passengers and crew	269	0	-	USSR
1986	Bombing	Seoul	Kimpo Airport	Public	30	-	-	North Korea
1987	Bombing	Aircraft from Abu Dhabi to Bangkok to Seoul	-	Passengers and crew	115	0	2	North Korea

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Table 1—Terrorism-related events affecting South Korea prior to 1990 (- = Data not available)

Burden of Terrorism in South Korea

More than 30 terrorism-related events have taken place against South Korea or its citizens since 1958 (Tables 1 and 2). The most common types of terrorism have been bombings, shootings, hijackings, and kidnappings. The total number of terrorist attacks is greater than that shown in Table 1, because information about some events is unavailable in open sources due to national security considerations. In addition, numerous kidnappings of South Korean fishermen are not listed.

Terrorism before 1990

From 1958 to 1990, most terrorism-related events affecting South Korea were sponsored by North Korea (Table 1). These events took place in South Korea and abroad, and were the result of the ongoing political conflict between the two countries; an antagonism fueled by the Cold War. There are several possible reasons that North Korea adopted terrorism as a tactic against South Korea. First, terrorism provided North Korea with a means to attack South Korea at little military, political, or economic risk. In particular, North Korea recognized the near impossibility of penetrating the heavily defended DMZ separating the two countries with a conventional military force. Second, terrorism provided North Korea with a perfect "cover". As long as the perpetrators were not caught, terrorism enabled North Korea to remain anonymous as the sponsor of attacks (and to accuse South Korea of fabricating claims against it). Third, North Korea believed that terrorist attacks inside South Korea would destroy its growing international image. In attempting to paint South Korea as one of the world's most dangerous countries, North Korea hoped to deprive South Korea of opportunities to host high-profile international events, such as the 1988 Olympic Games, thereby harming its economy. Finally, North Korea believed that it could harness any resulting political and social instability in South Korea in its campaign to unify the Korean peninsula under North Korean rule.

Chronology of Terrorism by North Korea

In 1958, North Korea carried out its first terrorist attack against South Korea, the hijacking of a South Korean commercial flight from Seoul to Pusan; this act marked a major policy shift in North Korea from conventional war to terrorism.¹ The subsequent chronology of terrorist attacks by North Korea followed a pattern that changed from decade to decade, reflecting the reaction of North Korea to the steady political and economic advances in South Korea over the next 30 years. During the 1960s, terrorist attacks by North Korea became a regular occurrence in South Korea, as evidenced by frequent kidnappings of fishermen. By 1968, South Korea was undergoing steady economic development under President Chunghee Park. In an attempt to destabilize the country and murder its leadership, North Korea carried out a full-scale terrorist assault on the Blue House in Seoul, the residence of the South Korean President.

During the 1970s, rapid economic development led to political and social gains in South Korea, dubbed the "Miracle of the Han River". North Korea responded to

these advances with two more assassination attempts on President Park, both of which were unsuccessful. These assassination attempts corresponded to the international trend of terrorist attacks against political officers at the time, as evidenced by more frequent attacks against diplomats and the terrorist occupations of embassies.²

During the 1980s, the South Korean economy continued to grow, prompting North Korea to plan two further assassination attempts against President Doohwan Chun during international visits in 1981 and 1983. As a result of its prospering economy and diplomatic gains, South Korea was invited by the international community to host the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympic Games. North Korea responded to the growing international stature of South Korea with even larger and more lethal terrorist attacks, including the 1986 Kimpo International Airport bombing and the 1987 bombing of Korean Airlines Flight 858. This escalation in the magnitude of terrorist attacks against South Korea paralleled the worldwide increase in terrorist attacks during this decade.³

Major Terrorist Strategies by North Korea

In general, North Korea used four major strategies in its attacks against South Korea: (1) presidential assassination attempts; (2) civilian kidnappings; (3) attacks on commercial aircraft; and (4) attacks on major public facilities.

Assassination Attempts

North Korea attempted to kill the President of South Korea on several occasions. In 1968, North Korea sent 51 terrorists belonging to a special corps against the Blue House in Seoul, the residence of the South Korean President. Although the attack failed to injure the President, 68 others were shot to death and 66 were injured. On 06 July 1970 (National Memorial Day), three North Korean terrorists using a remote controlled bomb, attempted to kill President Park during a presidential speech; the bomb did not explode. On 15 August 1974 (Korean Independence Day), a single North Korean terrorist attempted to shoot President Park during a speech. Although he missed the president, he shot and killed the First Lady and a member of the chorus. In 1981, a North Korean plot to assassinate President Chun during a visit to Canada was uncovered. On 09 October 1983, three North Korean terrorists again attempted to assassinate President Chun during a presidential visit to Myanmar. They detonated a bomb by remote control, killing 17, including four South Korean ministers, but missed the president, who arrived later than scheduled. One terrorist was shot to death by police, and two were captured. After this bombing, the North Korean Embassy in Myanmar was closed and diplomatic relations between Myanmar and North Korea were severed.

Civilian Kidnappings

North Korean terrorists also have abducted South Korean citizens on numerous occasions. Almost every year, from 1958 to the early 1990s, North Koreans kidnapped South Korean fishermen (and confiscated their boats) in international waters. North Korean terrorists also attempted

Year	Type of event	Location	Target	Number dead	Number injured	Number of terrorists	Terrorist organization attributed to
1992	Shooting	Uganda	Resident officer	1	0	-	-
1992	Kidnapping	Iran	Construction workers	0	1	8	-
1993	Shooting	Chile	Korean resident	1	0	-	-
1993	Bombing	Egypt	Tourists	0	0	-	Islamic fundamentalists
1994	Shooting	Algeria	Company vice-president	1	0	-	-
1994	-	China	President	0	0	3	-
1995	Stabbing	Taiwan	Diplomat	0	1	1	-
1995	Kidnapping	Russia	29 workers	0	0	-	-
1995	Shooting	Pakistan	Diplomat	0	0	4	-
1996	Shooting	Libya	Worker	1	0	3	-
1996	Bombing	Sri Lanka	Company officers	0	0	-	-
1996	Stabbing	China	Company officer	1	0	-	-
1996	Shooting	Russia	Diplomat	1	0	-	-
1997	Bombing	Sri Lanka	Company officer	0	2	-	-
1998	Bombing	Greece	Company officer	0	0	-	-
1999	Shooting	South Africa	Company officer	1	0	-	-
1999	Shooting	Indiana, USA	Korean resident	1	0	-	Racist extremist
1999	Shooting	Tokyo, Japan	Company president	1	0	-	-
2001	Kidnapping	Indonesia	16 workers	0	0	-	-
2001	Kidnapping	Colombia	10 passengers	0	0	-	-
2001	Hostage-taking	Istanbul, Turkey	Tourists	0	0	-	Chechen extremists
2003	Shooting	Pusan, South Korea	Businessman	1	0	-	Russian mafia
2003	Shooting	Tikrit, Iraq	Electric company employees	2	2	1	-

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Table 2—Terrorism-related events affecting South Korea, 1990–present (- = Data not available)

kidnappings of high-profile South Korean celebrities including the movie director Shin, actress Choi, pianist Baek, and actress Yoon. In addition, North Korea kidnapped Japanese citizens off the coast of Japan. One kidnapped Japanese woman subsequently taught the Japanese language to the female terrorist involved in the Korean Airlines Flight 858 bombing.

Attacks on Commercial Aircraft

North Korean terrorists also carried out several attacks on commercial aircraft. In the first attack in 1958, seven North Korean terrorists hijacked a commercial flight between Seoul and Pusan, kidnapping its 32 passengers and crew, and taking them to North Korea. In December 1969, a single North Korean terrorist hijacked another commercial flight en route from Kangreung to Seoul, and kidnapped its 51 passengers and crew and took them to North Korea, of which only 39 were returned to Seoul 66 days later. On 29 November 1987, North Korean terrorists exploded a bomb onboard Korean Airlines Flight 858

while en route from Abu Dhabi to Seoul via Bangkok, killing 115, most of whom were South Korean construction workers returning home after long assignments in the Middle East. Arrested at the airport in Lebanon, the two responsible terrorists attempted suicide. Only a female terrorist survived and she was taken to South Korea, where she ultimately confessed to the carefully planned attack that was directly controlled by North Korea.

Attacks on Major Public Facilities

North Korean terrorists attacked major public facilities in South Korea on several occasions. On 05 and 09 September 1967, North Korean terrorists attempted to bomb a train and railroad in South Korea. In 1983, North Korea bombed the Daegu USA Cultural Institute. On 29 July 1983, a North Korean vessel attempted to penetrate the Weolsung area, where a nuclear power plant is located. In 1986, only a week before the start of the Seoul Asian Games, North Korean terrorists detonated a bomb at Kimpo International Airport in Seoul, killing 30 people.

This bombing allegedly was intended to cause political unrest in South Korea and disturb an upcoming presidential election in December 1987.

Terrorism Since 1990

Since 1990, most terrorism-related events affecting South Korea have been attacks against South Korean citizens abroad by international terrorist organizations or individuals with anti-social inclinations.⁴ From 1992 to 2000, at least 26 terrorism-related events involved Korean citizens in other countries (Table 2). For example, on 22 April 2001, Chechen terrorists armed with automatic rifles, broke into the Swiss Hotel in the center of Istanbul and held more than 60 guests hostage including two South Koreans, to protest the Russian invasion of Chechnya. In addition, at least one of these attacks, the 1999 shooting of a South Korean in Indiana, was racially motivated. In general, four major types of South Korean citizens have been targeted: (1) South Korean diplomats in countries with diplomatic relations with South Korea; (2) South Korean businessmen; (3) South Korean tourists; and (4) South Korean residents in other countries, often in Korean communities. The right of South Korean citizens to freely travel outside the country since the early 1990s and the globalization of South Korean business interests worldwide are two factors contributing to this trend. These factors led to an increased number of South Korean companies conducting business overseas, and an increased number of South Koreans visiting or residing in foreign countries.

Future Risk of Terrorism

Although North Korea has conducted relatively few terrorist attacks against South Korea since the end of the Cold War, the future risk of terrorism within South Korea persists. Key factors include: (1) the possibility that North Korea is building or already has nuclear weapons, which could be used against South Korea in the future; and (2) the existence of potential terrorist targets in South Korea, including 18 nuclear power plants and numerous oil refineries situated in densely populated areas.

Emergency Management before 11 September 2001

In the wake of the terrorist attack during the 1972 Munich Olympic Games and frequent terrorist attacks by North Korea in the 1980s, South Korea developed its first guidelines for anti-terrorism activities, which became the foundation for later efforts. Soon after South Korea was named as the host country for the 1988 Olympic Games, the government began to organize a national system of emergency management for terrorism-related events.

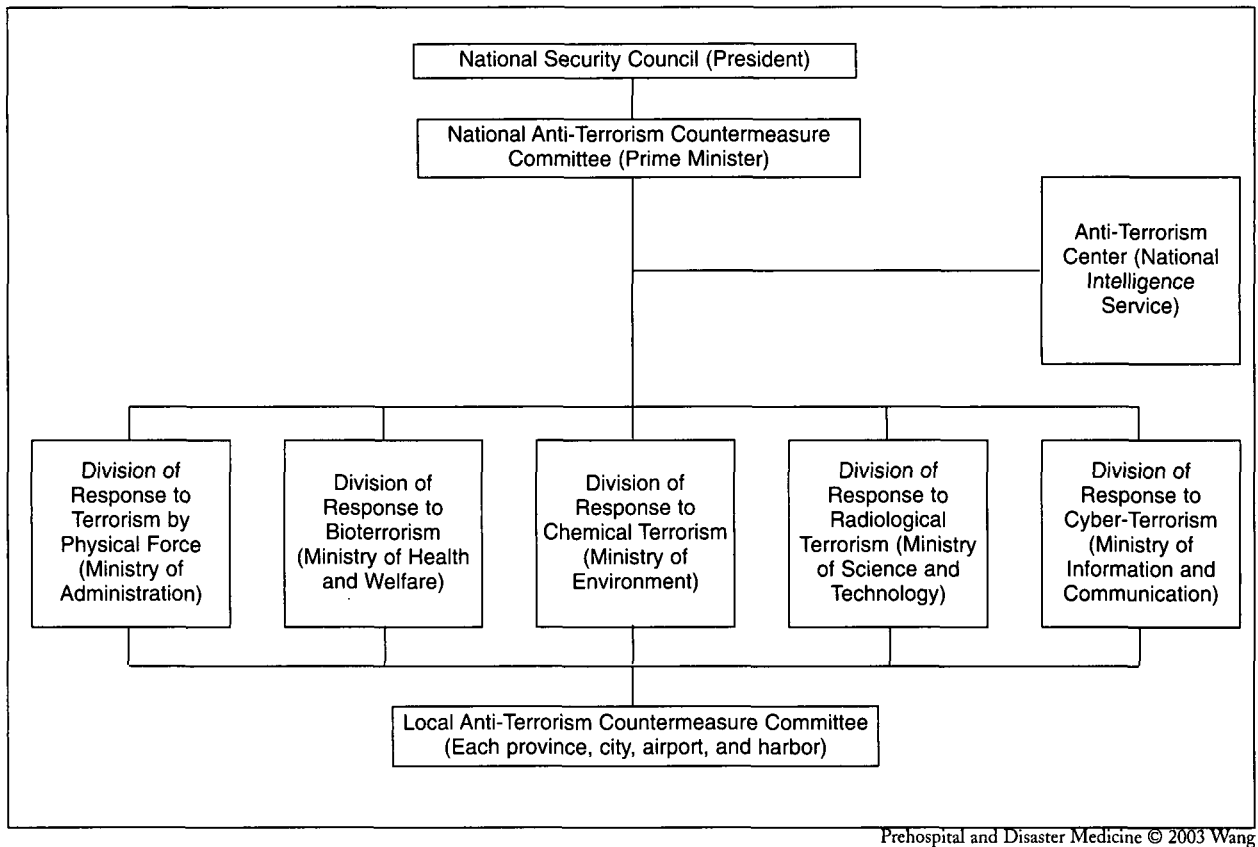
This system was built around three "response committees": (1) the National Anti-Terrorism Countermeasure Committee; (2) the Anti-Terrorism Steering Committee; and (3) the Airport and Harbor Countermeasure Steering Committee. The lead committee was the National Anti-terrorism Countermeasure Committee, which reported directly to the president and was headed by the Prime Minister. Committee members included the Minister of Diplomacy and Commerce, Minister of Administration, Minister of Justice, Minister of Defense, Minister of

Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Director of National Intelligence Service, Director of Custom Service, and other key personnel appointed by the Prime Minister. The National Anti-Terrorism Countermeasure Committee had the following responsibilities during a terrorism-related event: (1) to conduct a preliminary evaluation of the event according to the diplomatic and military policies of the president; (2) to supervise operations conducted under established policy; (3) to command and control the response to terrorism; and (4) to execute the president's orders.

At the next level was the Anti-Terrorism Steering Committee, which was headed by the Minister of Administration. The Anti-Terrorism Steering Committee had the following responsibilities: (1) to execute the orders of the Anti-Terrorism Countermeasure Committee; (2) to command and control the Anti-Terrorism functions of related departments; (3) to coordinate Anti-Terrorism operations when multiple departments are involved; and (4) to provide expert opinion and planning proposals to the Anti-Terrorism Countermeasure Committee. Regional Anti-Terrorism Steering Committees also were established in each region in South Korea in order to provide coordination among regional departments involved in response. A third committee, the Airport and Harbor Countermeasure Steering Committee, was organized to be independent of the other two committees, for the special instance of a terrorist attack at one of these critical sites.

Another characteristic of this national system included "response teams": (1) Negotiation Teams for the peaceful resolution of terrorism-related hostage crises; (2) Special Attack Teams organized by military and police services for the suppression of terrorism by physical force; and (3) Assistance Teams. In addition, ministry-level organizations also were endowed with detailed responsibilities during terrorism-related events under the direction of the Anti-Terrorism Steering Committee. These ministries and their functions were the:

1. *Ministry of Diplomacy and Commerce*—prepared response plans for terrorism-related events occurring in foreign countries.
2. *Ministry of Administration*—secured and protected potential terrorist targets, enforced international anti-terrorism treaties, improved the capability of regional police to manage explosive devices, and organized and maintained special police attack teams.
3. *Ministry of Justice*—developed measures to block the entry of international terrorists into the country, including the technology to detect forged entry visas and passports.
4. *Ministry of Defense*—organized and maintained special attack teams, researched and developed anti-terrorism tactics, prepared the equipment needed in anti-terrorism operations, and provided military operational assistance.
5. *Ministry of Construction and Traffic*—developed measures to prevent hijacking including participation in international anti-hijacking organizations and treaties and facilitation of international information exchange about hijacking.
6. *National Intelligence Service*—gathered and spread



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Figure 2—Field command and control system to terrorism-related events in South Korea

information related to terrorism, prepared the basic anti-terrorism management plan and operational guidelines, developed risk management capability, provided information, technology, equipment, and training related to anti-terrorism activities, and established an international anti-terrorism information assistance system.

7. *Customs Service*—developed measures to block the entry of terrorism-related material into the country including the technology to search for weapons and explosives.

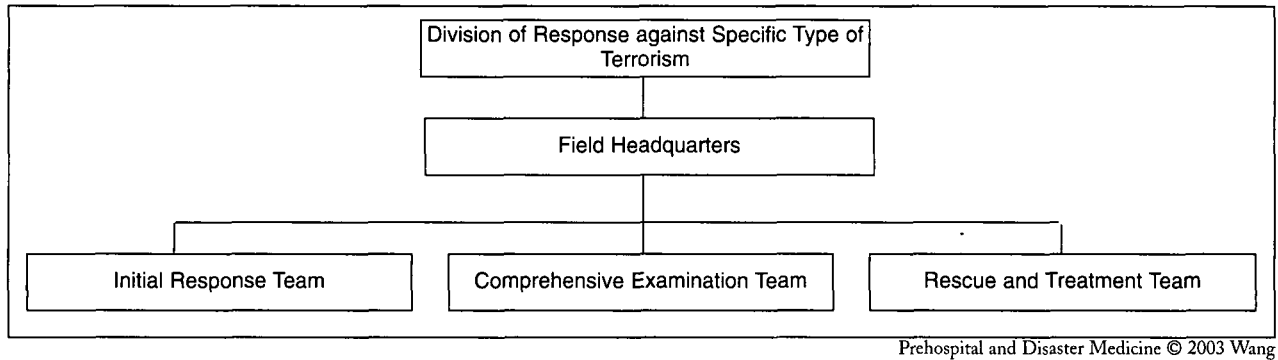
In addition to these specific anti-terrorism efforts, further improvements in emergency management in South Korea occurred in the 1990s as a result of lessons learned during several large technological emergencies, such as the Sampoong Department Store collapse and the Seongsoo Grand Bridge collapse.

Emergency Management after 11 September 2001

The 11 September 2001 World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks and the 2001 US anthrax letter attacks awoke the government to the need to prepare for large-scale, unconventional terrorist events including chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear releases. Accordingly, a task force was formed under the Office for Government Policy Coordination, and through a series of meetings, a new organizational system was developed. Ultimately, this organizational scheme was presented to the National Assembly, where it was approved. As a result, a new national system for the emergency management of terrorism-related events was formed (Figure 2).

At the top of this hierarchy is the National Security Council, headed by the president. Reporting to the National Security Council and the President is a new National Anti-Terrorism Countermeasure Committee, headed by the Prime Minister. The major responsibilities of the National Anti-Terrorism Countermeasure Committee are to evaluate the overall emergency response plan for terrorism-related events and to command and control operational activities once an event is underway. In recognition of the unique challenges of unconventional terrorism-related events, five new Divisions of Terrorism Response were also formed. These divisions and their respective ministries are: (1) Division of Response to Terrorism by Physical force (Ministry of Administration); (2) Division of Response to Bioterrorism (Ministry of Health and Welfare); (3) Division of Response to Chemical terrorism (Ministry of Environment); (4) Division of Response to Radiological terrorism (Ministry of Science and Technology); and (5) Division of Response to Cyber-Terrorism (Ministry of Information and Communication). The chief of each division is the Vice-Minister of the corresponding ministry. Each division is responsible for planning, preparedness, and response functions in their respective areas, including education, training, command and control, information acquisition and sharing, and public relations.

According to the current national emergency plan, when a specific type of terrorist event occurs, the corresponding Division of Terrorism Response becomes the lead



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Figure 3—Field command and control system to terrorism-related events in South Korea

organization in the field command and control system for that event (Figure 3). The next level of command and control is the Field Headquarters, which is established according to the location of the event. In events that occur on land, the Headquarters Chief is the Director of the Local Police Agency, while in events that occur at sea, the Chief is the Director of the Marine Police Agency. In events that occur in regions occupied by the military, the Chief is the ranking military officer. This system also includes three response teams. The Initial Response Team establishes a secure perimeter via a police line, performs emergency rescue and relief activities, and is comprised of personnel from military, police, fire, health, and customs services. The Comprehensive Examination Team is comprised of experts from military, police, and customs services. This team analyzes events for suspected terrorism, examines the results of the initial response, and collects forensic specimens. The Rescue and Treatment Team performs on-scene rescue, emergency treatment, and transport, and is comprised of personnel from fire stations and health offices.

Future Challenges

Although South Korea has made great strides in its ability to manage terrorism-related events, a number of challenges remain for its national system of emergency management. One major challenge will be to overcome the complacency of the South Korean public in order to keep terrorism in focus as a critical national issue. With no war since the cease-fire agreement in 1953, and no large terrorist attacks directly impacting South Korea since the bombing of Korean Airlines Flight 858 in 1987, most South Koreans are relatively relaxed about the prospect of terrorism in South Korea. This complacency is compounded by the widespread political and economic gains in recent decades and the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s.

Another major challenge is that no single law brings together all of the components of national emergency response under one organizational umbrella. Effective response to various types of terrorism-related events requires the integrated functions of many government agencies. At the present time, South Korean law does not identify an overall agency responsible for the horizontal management of the various vertical agencies involved in emergency management, although a movement is underway to create the statutory basis for such an organization in the near future.

Another challenge for South Korea will be to improve the competencies of its emergency medical personnel for terrorism-related events. Currently, there are no educational or training requirements for medical personnel in this area. As a result, medical personnel have little knowledge or experience regarding the medical response to terrorism-related events or other disasters. A related issue is that, since most hospitals in South Korea are private, there is little incentive for them to train personnel for activities that primarily benefit public health, such as emergency preparedness.⁵ A related challenge is the provision of adequate training to first responders in rescue, emergency treatment, and transport in terrorism-related events. One approach is for the medical establishment to incorporate Disaster Medicine and terrorism-related topics into the curricula offered in medical and other health professional schools. Efforts to establish an academic basis for disaster medicine in South Korea may help lead to harmonized terminology, improved methods for evaluating and reporting terrorism-related events, and standardized medical responses to various terrorism-related events.

Another challenge will be to incorporate other non-governmental stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations, civilian experts, and the public, into the national system of emergency response to terrorism-related events. Local medical response to terrorism-related events also will be improved by training the public in basic life-saving skills. The South Korean public also needs to be educated about the proper conduct during terrorism-related emergencies.

Another major challenge will be to provide the emergency response system in South Korea with the facilities, equipment, and supplies needed during unconventional terrorist attacks. Presently, emergency responders in South Korea are poorly equipped with the material resources required in chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear releases. For example, first responders lack adequate supplies of personal protective equipment, while the public health laboratory system lacks adequate laboratory equipment to cope with large-scale events.

A final challenge not only for South Korea, but also for other countries, will be to create and maintain global systems of emergency preparedness for terrorism-related events that cross geographic and political boundaries.

Conclusion

From 1958 until 1990, most terrorism-related events affecting South Korea were caused by North Korea. Since the end of the Cold War, most terrorism-related events affecting South Korea have been the result of international terrorist attacks against South Koreans abroad. The 11 September 2001 World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks and the 2001 US anthrax letter attacks prompted South Korea to organize a new national system of emergency response for terrorism-related events, with five divisions for the response to specific types of terrorist events, involving conventional terrorism, bioterrorism, chemical terrorism, radiological terrorism, and cyber-terrorism. Although no terrorist attacks marred the 2002 World Cup and Asian Games in South

Korea, the emergency management system for terrorism-related events requires further improvement. Remaining challenges for the emergency management of terrorism-related events in South Korea include the creation of a legally sanctioned horizontal organization that can coordinate the multiple vertical organizations involved in response, increasing competencies in personnel at all levels of emergency response, expanding the system to include non-governmental stakeholders, and providing the technology required by responders in unconventional terrorism-related events.

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