



“CENTRAL CHALLENGES OF AMERICAN NATIONAL SECURITY, STRATEGY AND THE PRESS”
(2013)

To: Mr. Abramson, the *New York Tribune* Executive Editor

From: J. Comins

**Re: Dealing with the complexities in the Age of Leaks: Freedom of Speech vs. National Security
(November 5, 2013)**

Issue: Evaluating the potential harms to the national security of the United States and its foreign policy on the Korean peninsula as a result of the leaks provided to the *New York Tribune*.

New York Tribune Interests: 1) To inform the public opinion on how the U.S. government conducts its foreign and defense policy without harming the national security interests; 2) To press the U.S. administration to make it more accountable before the public opinion; 3) To consolidate the newspaper among the most reliable, respected and prestigious communication agencies.

Analysis: *The New York Tribune* just had access to a series of diplomatic communications and military archives that reveal important events in the Korean peninsula. Although the leaker remains anonymous, it could be a mid-level official at the Pentagon—who would have been arrested last week by the FBI. In case of confirmation of both identity of the source and credibility of the leaked documents, our newspaper would have an extraordinary material on the latest developments of the North Korean nuclear program, the defensive capabilities of South Korea—which have the support of the U.S. military, and the approach with which the U.S. administration seeks to address an eventual collapse of North Korea and the future of the peninsula. Despite of the fact that the set of documents have an unquestionable public relevance, it is necessary to weigh whether the publication could cause serious damages to the American national security. In particular, because of unlikely Wikileaks case, some of the leaks are classified as “*Top Secret*”, which could lead to change the previous legal strategies followed by the Department of Justice to prosecute journalists and news organizations.

Objectives: 1) Assessing the reliability of the source and the credibility of the information. 2) Facilitating a copy of the files back to the Pentagon and preserving a duplicate; 3) Negotiating the terms and contents of the publication.

Recommendations:

- 1) North Korean Nuclear Program: “A Growing Threat”.** Despite of the lack of concrete data, the interception of transporting a nuclear device is the most explosive information contained in the documents. Anyway, there is still no evidence that North Korea has exported nuclear weapons to other countries. Thus, the publication of this story could jeopardize other intelligence operations associated with the North Korean nuclear program, and endanger the lives of their operatives and gathering methods. In addition, it could lead to create a state of alarm among Americans with undesirable effects on domestic stability, as much as to increase social pressure on the government to take more robust actions against North Korea—which may be counterproductive. Therefore, it is advisable to hold off until the U.S. government is ready to announce it.
- 2) South Korean Defense Capabilities: “A Position of Strength”.** The leaks reveal that, with the help of U.S. technology, South Korea will be ready to successfully repel a conventional attack from North Korea in March 2014. The filtration of this high impact news could adversely affect the strategic alliance between South Korea and the United States as well as provoke North Korea’s retaliation attack, which would directly involve one of the U.S. vital interests: “ensure U.S. allies’ survival”. In this regard, the recommendation is to hold the story until March 2014 in exchange for the publishing another, less-sensible but relevant information on the military cooperation programs abroad.
- 3) The Future of the Korean Peninsula: “A Cynical Bargain”.** If the information provided in the cables is right, its publication would give China a strategic advantage. In this case, we recommend publishing the aspects related to the grant of buffer zones—to raise an internal debate on the relation between American values and human rights defense abroad—as well as killing the issue of “exclusive mining and exploitation zone” to abstain from interfering in future negotiations about the Korean peninsula.