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**STRENGTHENING COMPREHENSIVE AND
COOPERATIVE SECURITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC**

“Prospect for Peace in the Korean Peninsula ”

by

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Prospects for Peace in the Korean Peninsula

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North Korea's Hostile Campaign against South Korea

After Mr. Lee Myung-Bak sworn in as the 18th President of the Republic of Korea in 2008, North Korea has launched ever-increasing hostile campaign against the South Korean government and the leading conservative Grand National Party. Unlike previous liberal Presidents, Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun, who were supportive of the Kim Jong Il regime, President Lee has taken principled and rigid approaches in dealing with North Korea, and in return, the North has taken more belligerent positions against the South. Propped up by two pillars—bashing South Korea with verbal and physical threats on the one hand, and attracting the United States with peace offensive on the other, North Korea's hostile postures have created security concerns in the Korean peninsula and increased uncertainty about its future. At the moment, Kim Jong-Il seems to bet his regime's fortune by ratcheting up tension in the relations with South Korea.

On January 17, 2009, the spokesman of the Joint Chief of Staff of the Korea People's Army (KPA) announced that the KPA would enter all-out confrontational stage against South Korea and counter any attempt to nullify North Korea's self-designated demarcation line on the West Sea. Such an antagonistic statement was a signal that the inter-Korean relations entered a military confrontation stage, moving beyond just a political dispute as follows. In particular, according to a new strategic assessment by the United States Forces in Korea, North Korea has spent dwindling coffers to build a surprise attack capability "with little or no warning," specifically designed for affecting economic and political stability in Korea.¹ On April 5, 2009, North Korea conducted its

¹ Thom Shanker and David Sanger, "U.S. to aid South Korea with naval defense plan," *New York Times*,

third long-range ballistic missile test. On May 25, 2009, it conducted its second nuclear test. On March 26, 2010, the South Korean navy corvette Cheonan was sunk in the West Sea just south of the Northern Limit Line (NLL).

The Corvette Cheonan Incident

At 9:22 p.m. Friday evening on March 26, the South Korean navy corvette Cheonan sank in the West Sea just south of the Northern Limit Line (NLL) near Baekryongdo Island. A sudden underwater explosion ripped the battle ship in two parts, killing 46 out of 108 sailors on board. Amid rumors and speculations of North Korean involvement on this tragic incident, South Korean government decided to launch a scientific, objective and thorough investigation without hasty prejudgment.

International Joint Investigation

In order to increase the objectivity and fairness of the investigation, experts from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Sweden, and later Canada were invited to join and assist the investigation. Within South Korea, a group of nationwide experts on various fields were called from both military and civilian sectors. The Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group (JIG) was formed with 25 experts from 10 South Korean expert institutions (22 military personnel and 3 civilian specialists recommended by the National Parliament) and 24 foreign experts. The JIG is composed of 4 task forces—Scientific Investigation Team, Explosive Analysis Team, Ship Structure Management Team, and Intelligence Analysis Team.

After the about 2 months-long intensive investigation, on May 20, the JIG reported the concluding result of the investigation. The essence of the report can be summarized as follows:²

- The JIG assesses that a strong underwater explosion generated by the detonation of a homing torpedo below and to the left of the gas turbine room caused Republic of Korea Ship (ROKS) “Cheonan” to split apart and sink.
- ROKS “Cheonan” was split apart and sunk due to a shockwave and bubble effect produced by an underwater torpedo explosion. The explosion occurred

May 30, 2010.

² The Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group, *Investigation Result on the Sinking of ROKS “Cheonan,”* (Seoul: The Ministry of National Defense, May 20, 2010).

approximately 3m left of the center of the gas turbine room, at a depth of about 6-9m. The weapon system used is confirmed to be a high explosive torpedo with a net explosive weight of about 250kg, manufactured by North Korea.

- The Multinational Combined Intelligence Task Force, comprised of 5 states including Canada confirmed that a few small submarines and a mother ship supporting them left a North Korean naval base in the West Sea 2-3 days prior to the attack and returned to port 2-3 days after the attack. It also confirmed that all submarines from neighboring countries were either in or near their respective home bases at the time of the incident.
- The torpedo parts recovered at the site of the explosion by a dredging ship on May 15th, which include the 5x5 bladed contra-rotating propellers, propulsion motor and a steering section, perfectly match the schematics of the CHT-02D torpedo included in introductory brochures provided to foreign countries by North Korea for export purposes. The markings in Korean character, which reads “1번(or No. 1 in English)”, found inside the end of the propulsion section, is consistent with the marking of a previously obtained North Korean torpedo. Russian and Chinese torpedoes are marked in their respective languages.
- The CHT-02D torpedo manufactured by North Korea utilizes acoustic/wake homing and passive acoustic tracking methods. It is a heavyweight torpedo with a diameter of 21 inches, a weight of 1.7 tons and a net explosive weight of up to 250kg.

With all these investigative findings, the JIG makes a final concluding remark:³

Based on all such relevant facts and classified analysis, we have reached the clear conclusion that ROKS “Cheonan” was sunk as the result of an external underwater explosion caused by a torpedo made in North Korea. The evidence points overwhelmingly to the conclusion that the torpedo was fired by a North Korean submarine. There is no other plausible explanation.

North Korea’s Reactions

Only 30 minutes after the JIG began its reporting of the investigative result, the spokesman of the National Defense Commission (NDC), the highest decision-making apparatus in North Korea, issued a statement criticizing the joint investigation. Defining

³ Ibid.

the Cheonan incident as “a conspiratorial farce and charade by the group of traitors in a deliberate and brigandish manner to achieve certain political and military aims,” the statement declared the following three points:⁴

1. The NDC will dispatch an inspection group to South Korea to verify material evidence proving that the sinking of the warship is linked with North Korea.
2. North Korea will promptly react to any “punishment” and “retaliation” and to any “sanctions” infringing upon our state interests with various forms of tough measures including an all-out war. The all-out war to be undertaken by us will be a sacred war involving the whole nation.
3. North Korea will brand any small incident that occurs in the territorial waters, air and land where its sovereignty is exercised including the West Sea as a provocation of confrontation maniacs and react to it with unlimited retaliatory blow, merciless strong physical blow.

Following the position set by the NDC, North Korea has launched extensive campaign of denying its involvement and blaming South Korea and the United States, both domestically and internationally.

South Korea's Responses and Policies

Four days after the investigation result was released in public, on May 24, President Lee Myung-Bak made a nationwide address. He defined the nature of the incident as “The Cheonan was sunk by a surprise North Korean torpedo attack. Again, the perpetrator was North Korea.” He said that “their attack came at a time when the people of the Republic of Korea were enjoying their well-earned rest after a hard day’s work. Once again, North Korea violently shattered our peace.” Referring to the JIG’s conclusive findings, President Lee insisted that “With the release of the final report, no responsible country in the international community will be able to deny the fact that the Cheonan was sunk by North Korea.”⁵

Promising to take stern postures to hold North Korea accountable, President Lee announced seven major policy measures including “proactive deterrence” as a new

⁴ “Spokesman for the DPRK National Defense Commission Issues Statement,” *Korean Central News Agency*, May 24, 2010, <http://www.globalsecurity.org>.

⁵ *South Korean President Lee's National Address*, May 24, 2010, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/22199>.

national security concept *vis-à-vis* North Korea.⁶

1. Regarding inter-Korean relations, South Korea will not permit North Korean ships to make passage through any of the shipping lanes in the waters under South Korea's control, which has been allowed by the Inter-Korean Agreement on Maritime Transportation. The South will suspend the inter-Korean trade and exchanges except providing assistance for infants and children. Matters pertaining to the Kaesong Industrial Complex will be duly considered, taking its unique characteristics into consideration.
2. Regarding South Korea's military posture, it will not tolerate any provocative act by the North and maintain the principle of proactive deterrence. If South Korea's territorial waters, airspace or territory are violated, it will immediately exercise its right of self-defense.
3. As an international response, South Korea will refer this matter to the U.N. Security Council, so that the international community can join it in holding North Korea accountable. The North violated the Charter of the United Nations and contravened the existing agreements reached for the sake of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, including the Korean War Armistice Agreement and the Basic Agreement between South and North Korea.
4. Toward the North Korean authorities, President Lee demands immediate apology to South Korea and the international community and calls to immediately punish those who are responsible for and those who are involved in the incident.
5. Despite the tragic incident, President Lee reconfirms that the overriding goal of South Korea is not military confrontation but the attainment of real peace, stability and prosperity for all Koreans. He reiterates South Korean vision of realizing the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula.
6. President Lee expresses his regret that North Korea is a country still holding onto an empty ambition of forcefully reuniting the Korean peninsula under the banner of communism and a country that still believes in making threats and committing terrorist activities. He urges the North to change by saying that it is now time for the North Korean regime to change and to start thinking about what is truly good for the regime itself and its people.
7. For South Korean public, President Lee sends an awakening message. He acknowledges that South Koreans had been forgetting the reality that the nation faces the most belligerent regime in the world and that the ROK military made

⁶ Ibid.

mistakes as well. He promises to solidify the national security readiness, reestablish the discipline and reinforce combat capabilities of the ROK. He asks South Korean public to strengthen its awareness of the importance of national security and not to waver in the face of threats, provocations and divisive schemes by the North.

Wrapping up the Six-Party Talks

It was the six-party talks that were hit most hard by North Korea's hostile provocations. The six-party talks have been stalemated since the end of the Bush administration in late 2008. The Bush administration officials had defended the six-party talks by arguing that they need to find out North Korea's nuclear intention—that is, whether Pyongyang is willing to give up nukes and return to the international non-proliferation regimes. In the aftermath of the second nuclear test, the North's intention has become obvious.

Despite all the compliments of the six-party talks, North Korea quadrupled nuclear capacities during the talks, conducted two nuclear tests, and secretly provided Syria with an upgraded version of the 5MWe reactor at Yongbyon—a plutonium producing machine. Compared to the mid-1990s, the amount of plutonium the DPRK acquired has increased from 7-12.5kg to 28.5-49kg at the end of 2007. The possible number of nuclear warheads also has increased from 1-5 to 5-20 or so, depending on various criteria and level of technologies. This is the end result of the six-party talks. Unfortunately, the Bush administration could not give up one-sided hope of negotiating away North Korean nukes. During his summit meeting with South Korean President Lee Myung-bak in April 2008, President Bush repeated his usual “wait and see” attitudes. When asked whether North Korea might not make full disclosure of nuclear programs, President Bush said that “you just have to wait and see whether they're sincere or not.”⁷

On October 11, 2008, the U.S. State Department removed North Korea from a list of state sponsors of terrorism, meeting Pyongyang's major demand in anticipation of its reciprocal good behavior in verifying denuclearization. The U.S. decision helped Kim Jong-il reinforce his political legitimacy and authorities that might have been weakened by his illness. The North Korean elites may have utilized this event to propagandize that the dear leader brought Americans to his knees without forgoing a piece of nuclear

⁷ *President Bush participates in Joint Press Availability with President Lee Myung-bak of the Republic of Korea*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/04/20080419-1.html>, April 19, 2008.

weapons. Internationally, the Bush administration's decision had a danger of encouraging further reckless behaviors of other would-be proliferators.

The State Department also announced that a package of verification measures was agreed between Pyongyang and Washington and would be finalized and adopted by the upcoming six-party talks. Then, a time of hope revisited. Some even supposed that the third stage of dismantlement would begin in a few months. Contrary to this hopeful expectation, the traditional wisdom led to that even finalizing the verification protocol would be a hard task and the six-party talks would encounter many "word mines" and "devils of details" in the course of verification. And that was exactly what happened. The DPRK rejected any verification measure tougher than "visits to facilities, review of documents, and interviews with technical personnel." This rejection was a shocking embarrassment to the outgoing Bush administration and was partly responsible for blocking further progress in the six-party talks. North Korea's negative attitudes against verification would remain so even when a new round of negotiations begins in the future.

The six-party talks also have major flaws in the agreed documents as well as its negotiating strategy. Original intention of the talks was to build a five-party coalition, exert pressure, and push North Korea to dismantle its nuclear programs. China was given a role of moderator and host of the talks. With hindsight, the six-party talks was no more than a setoff of the U.S.-DPRK bilateral talks. Major breakthroughs could be made only when Pyongyang and Washington made compromises. China scored high diplomatic profile as it convened a series of the talks with little substantial avail. In the end, Beijing only displayed that it had limited ability to handle the Kim Jong-Il regime. North Korea tried to drive a wedge among five parties, and created every opportunity to have direct talks with the United States, marginalizing the six-party framework. Five parties were supposed to lead North Korea, but in fact, were led by the North.

Besides its negotiating strategy, the six-party talks also have major flaws in the agreed documents. For example, as a founding document of the six-party process, the September 19th joint declaration has inherent flaws. First, it was wrong to define "denuclearization of the Korean peninsula" as its goal. Since South Korea already has been denuclearized since 1991, the goal should have been written down as "denuclearization of North Korea." Based on this misplaced goal, the North has argued for a mutual nuclear disarmament talk with the United States. Second, the Declaration

should not have mentioned the joint declaration on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula which was signed between the two Koreas in 1991. It was violated by the North from the beginning and persistently has been breached up to date. It is just a symbol of South Korea's humiliation toward North Korea, exacerbated by the wishy-washy sunshine policy of the two liberal governments. To refer to a document which was thoroughly nullified by one party is no more than infringing on South Korea's sovereignty and national esteem.

Third, the declaration should not have brought up two incompatible ideas of offering 200 million kilowatts of electricity and hinting provision of light water reactor (LWR) at the same time. South Korea intended to supply electricity only if North Korea was to forgo LWR option. Finally, the declaration had better not extend scope of negotiations by introducing very sensitive issues such as peace settlement or regional security dialogues. Extending negotiation agenda runs the risk of obscuring the primary objective of the six-party talks which is North Korean denuclearization. It also harbors a danger of malicious linkage where the North takes advantage of other issues as a pretext to stall or delay nuclear dismantlement.