

## North Korea's Provocations and their Impact on Northeast Asian Regional Security

### Executive Summary

The impact of the March 2010 sinking of the South Korean warship *Cheonan* and North Korea's November 2010 artillery barrage against civilian-occupied Yeonpyeong Island have highlighted differences in strategic perceptions among major parties concerned, underscoring the close connection between Korean peninsular and regional stability. The Yeonpyeong attack and international exposure of North Korea's progress in pursuing uranium enrichment require a serious reassessment of the implications of North Korea's expanding capacities, the long-term regional implications of DPRK provocations, and the prospects for a collective response that can adequately address North Korea as a primary source of regional instability. Widespread pessimism about the efficacy of Six Party Talks has undermined the prospects for building a permanent security mechanism in Northeast Asia. The regional response to North Korea's provocations raises fundamental questions regarding the role of the U.S.-ROK alliance as well as China's strategic priorities in responding to inter-Korean tensions and joint U.S.-ROK actions at a time of leadership transition in Pyongyang. Without practical means by which to pressure North Korea to pursue denuclearization, policymakers face a stark choice between acceptance of North Korea as a de facto nuclear weapons state and the idea that denuclearization is only possible with regime change. North Korea's stepped up external aggression and the regional responses reveal the following challenges that must now be resolved in a way that gives consideration to the need to both stabilize the inter-Korean relationship and address the dilemmas posed for North Korea's neighbors, particularly China and the United States, as they consider next steps in dealing with North Korea:

- South Korea has sought to respond to North Korean provocations by holding North Korea accountable for its actions, but has failed to either mobilize coercive measures that can be employed without risking an escalation of conflict counter to its own interests or mobilize sufficient international support to send a sufficiently strong signal to exact a price for North Korean provocations. This failure to mount a proportionate military response to past North Korean provocations has reignited deep-seated South Korean domestic political divisions over North Korea policy and heightens the risks of miscalculation and military escalation, despite public fears of the consequences of such escalation, by generating political pressure on Lee Myung-bak to punish North Korea decisively during the next crisis.
- South Korean preemption or self-defense in advance of a future North Korean provocation runs the risk of further misunderstanding with China, including the possibility that China might feel compelled to come to North Korea's defense in accord with China's extant mutual defense treaty obligations to North Korea in the event that North Korea is attacked. On the other hand, South Korea needs to cooperate with China if its goals of stability, peaceful coexistence, and eventual Korean unification are to be achieved, yet the dramatic success of Sino-South Korean economic relations has not discernibly influenced China's view that Chinese interests are better served by stable division than South Korean-led reunification.

- North Korean provocations have reinforced China's tendency to view peninsular issues through the lens of Chinese relations with the United States. China's protests against U.S.-ROK military exercises aimed at deterring the North have made Sino-U.S. cooperation on Korean peninsula matters more difficult. China continues to fear that a unified Korea allied with the United States would be detrimental to China's security. China's decision to support North Korea has come at high economic and political costs, yet China has not mobilized the leverage necessary to constrain North Korean provocations because such actions carry even higher long-term costs for China. Chinese cooperation with the United States and South Korea undermines China's already limited influence on the North.
- North Korean provocations have exploited South Korean political and military vulnerabilities and attempted to generate potential fissures in the U.S.-ROK alliance; however, the effect thus far has been to promote even closer U.S.-ROK political and military cooperation within the alliance. The provocations have also strengthened U.S.-Japan alliance cooperation and served as a catalyst for promoting unprecedented trilateral security cooperation among the United States, South Korea, and Japan.
- The regional response to North Korea's provocations has deepened tensions between the United States and China and highlighted serious differences over how to respond to the North. Despite growing pessimism over the future of the Six Party Talks as a regional mechanism for managing crises, China has endorsed a return to talks without acknowledging that North Korea is the source and instigator of regional tensions.
- With North Korea's revelations of progress in its enriched uranium program, a continued diplomatic stalemate over how to address North Korean nuclear issues allows North Korea to strengthen its claim that it is a nuclear weapons power. Yet a premature return to diplomacy runs the risk of reinforcing to Pyongyang the idea that it can pursue military provocations and nuclear activities with impunity.

All actors have a common stake in cooperation to address the common challenges to regional stability posed by North Korean provocations. But North Korean actions have thus far enhanced the likelihood that North Korean instability might engender regional strategic competition or even conflict.

## North Korea's Provocations and their Impact on Northeast Asian Regional Security

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The sinking of the Republic of Korea (ROK) warship *Cheonan* on March 26, 2010, that killed 46 South Korean soldiers heightened tensions on the Korean peninsula amid ongoing regional strains in the aftermath of North Korea's May 2009 nuclear test. On May 24, President Lee Myung-bak confirmed the results of a Seoul-led multilateral investigation indicating that the sinking was caused by a North Korean torpedo attack. Lee affirmed South Korea's "right of self-defense" based on "the principle of proactive deterrence,"<sup>1</sup> in response to which the White House pledged that "U.S. support for South Korea's defense is unequivocal," calling Lee's announced measures toward the North "entirely appropriate."<sup>2</sup> Yet after much diplomatic maneuvering among the two Koreas, the United States, and China, the UN Security Council (UNSC) issued a Presidential Statement on July 9 condemning the attack without naming North Korea as the culprit.<sup>3</sup> On July 10, Permanent Representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to the UN Sin Son Ho claimed "a diplomatic victory of the DPRK"<sup>4</sup> and the DPRK Foreign Ministry declared Pyongyang's willingness to return to Six-Party Talks.<sup>5</sup> The UNSC Presidential Statement presented a compromise solution that some hoped would lay the foundation for renewed multilateral dialogue on DPRK denuclearization. But it also failed to achieve the U.S.-ROK objective of holding North Korea accountable for its actions or sending signals of resolve to deter future provocations. At the July 21 foreign and defense ministers' (2+2) meeting in Seoul, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Gates announced joint U.S.-ROK anti-submarine warfare exercises and their intent to impose new U.S. sanctions against North Korea. On July 24, the DPRK National Defense Commission declared "retaliatory sacred war" while the Foreign Ministry pledged that North Korea would "bolster its nuclear deterrent in a more diversified manner...now that the U.S. opted for military provocations, sanctions and pressure."<sup>6</sup> But despite strong opposition from Beijing and Pyongyang, the United States and South Korea pushed ahead with four-day joint military exercises on July 25-28 in the East Sea in an unprecedented show of solidarity that appeared to put into action Obama's words of praise that the alliance "is stronger than ever."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Special Address to the Nation by The President Lee Myung-bak, Seoul, Korea, May 24, 2010, [http://english.president.go.kr/pre\\_activity/latest/latest\\_view.php?uno=3216&board\\_no=E02&search\\_key=&search\\_value=&search\\_cate\\_code=&cur\\_page\\_no=1](http://english.president.go.kr/pre_activity/latest/latest_view.php?uno=3216&board_no=E02&search_key=&search_value=&search_cate_code=&cur_page_no=1)

<sup>2</sup> Statement by the Press Secretary on the Republic of Korea, May 24, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/statement-press-secretary-republic-korea>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Security Council Presidential Statement, July 2, 2010, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/sc9975.doc.htm>

<sup>4</sup> "DPRK UN Representative holds press conference," *Korean Central News Agency*, July 10, 2010

<sup>5</sup> "Foreign Ministry on UN Presidential Statement of on "Cheonan"," *Korean Central News Agency*, July 10, 2010

<sup>6</sup> "NDC states to counter US-S. Korea war exercises with nuclear deterrence," *Korean Central News Agency*, July 24, 2010; "FM spokesman on DPRK prepared for dialogue and war," *Korean Central News Agency*, July 24, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Videotaped Remarks of President Obama for the Korea Society 2010 Annual Dinner, June 2, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/videotaped-remarks-president-obama-korea-society-2010-annual-dinner>

Regional tensions escalated further with North Korea's artillery attack on Yeonpyeong Island in the Yellow Sea on November 23, the first North Korean attack on a civilian area since the 1950-1953 Korean War. Killing two marines and two civilians, the attack has precipitated strong domestic criticism in South Korea of both the North's actions and the weak South Korean retaliatory response. It also fueled active Chinese diplomatic engagement with regional partners and another round of U.S.-ROK naval exercises in the Yellow Sea aimed to deter North Korean provocation. The latest North Korean attack, claimed by the North to be in response to South Korean military exercises on the island, occurred days after revelations of North Korean nuclear developments that appeared designed to affirm Pyongyang's renewed nuclear ambitions in defiance of the international community and demonstrate national strength under a newly-consolidated leadership. Current tensions on the Korean peninsula suggest a continued pattern of DPRK military provocations that pose major implications for the regional security environment and responses of key parties concerned.

This report assesses regional security in Northeast Asia in the aftermath of the *Cheonan* sinking and the Yeonpyeong artillery barrage, focusing on dynamics among the United States, China, and the two Koreas. First, it examines the respective responses of the four parties to the *Cheonan* incident, identifying key aspects of each party's strategic perspectives. Second, it assesses the implications for Northeast Asian security, highlighting major challenges to regional cooperation. Third, it considers next steps for advancing regional cooperation in the post-*Cheonan* and post-Yeonpyeong security environment.

### **Reassessing Northeast Asian Security: Regional Responses to the *Cheonan* Sinking**

Initially an inter-Korean issue, the *Cheonan* sinking evolved into the focal point of regional confrontation that presented a no-win situation for all concerned parties.<sup>8</sup> Some observers pointed to a renewed Cold War mentality in the region, with the United States and its allies on the one hand pitted against China, Russia, and North Korea on the other. The response from the United States and South Korea was primarily focused on the North, but it had regional ramifications that exposed underlying differences in strategic interests conducive to mutual mistrust and heightened tensions.

#### ***South Korea***

Although the Lee Myung-bak administration undertook initial efforts to avoid premature speculation and contain public sentiment, the *Cheonan* sinking had the immediate effect in South Korea of mobilizing conservative calls for punishing Pyongyang and strengthening alliance cooperation with the United States. The July 9 UNSC Presidential Statement was a "diplomatic victory" for Pyongyang, but for South Koreans it represented a "diplomatic setback" that required "beefed up bilateral cooperation between the South and the U.S. to prevent a recurrence of such a tragedy."<sup>9</sup> South Korea's response to the incident has strong domestic components, with the media playing a major role in raising expectations on both Seoul and Washington.

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<sup>8</sup> Scott Snyder, "No Winners from the Sinking of the *Cheonan*," *In Asia*, Council on Foreign Relations, August 2, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> "Closer Alliance," *Korea Times*, July 21, 2010.

The incident has highlighted the divide between supporters of the conservative Lee Myung-bak administration and liberal critics. Lee's handling of the issue ahead of the June 2 local elections was perceived by many South Koreans as ruling party attempts to use North Korea issues as a domestic political influence on public opinion. Opposition political parties, newspapers, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and academic experts challenged the Lee government's approach since the May 20 release of the Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group (JIG)'s report, the complete version of which was not publicly released until September 14.<sup>10</sup> While South Korea formally referred the case to the UN on June 4,<sup>11</sup> South Korean NGO People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy circulated a 27-page statement to the UNSC on the same day, identifying six flaws in the investigation process and asserting that a "bipartisan investigation must be conducted by the National Parliament members, not an investigation team under control of the military who had monopolized and censored the information regarding the *Cheonan* incident."<sup>12</sup> In their independent investigation into the sinking, international politics professor Jae Jung Suh and physics professor Seung Hun Lee pointed to "serious inconsistencies" in the May 20 interim report, arguing that: "the "critical evidence" presented by the JIG does not support its conclusion that the *Cheonan*'s sinking was caused by the alleged DPRK's torpedo. On the contrary, its contradictory data raises the suspicion that it fabricated the data."<sup>13</sup> An independent Russian investigating team also took issue with the conclusions of the JIG, but refused to release its own report based on an examination of the JIG's findings. Although South Korean government sources has summarily dismissed these challenges to the credibility of the report, and international participants in the investigation have backed the report's findings, the attacks on the report have fed South Korean domestic political divisions over the motives of the Lee Myung-bak administration and the competency of the investigation.

South Korean public opinion on the legitimacy of the investigation findings has been polarized as a result of perceived inconsistent statements from the Lee administration in the early stages of the investigation, suspicions raised by opposition voices, and the delayed release of the full JIG report, which has also been questioned regarding the credibility of the expert team's "international" representation and direction by the ROK military, the part of the bureaucracy under the most criticism from the incident.<sup>14</sup> While a poll conducted by the Ministry of Public Administration and Security in June 2010 showed that 75 percent of respondents believed that North Korea attacked the *Cheonan*, a separate poll carried out by Seoul

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<sup>10</sup> "Investigation Result on the Sinking of ROKS "*Cheonan*," Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group (JIG) interim report, May 20, 2010, <http://www.mnd.go.kr/webmodule/htsboard/template/read/engbdread.jsp?typeID=16&boardid=88&seqno=871&c=TITLE&t=&pagenum=3&tableName=ENGBASIC&pc=undefined&dc=&wc=&lu=&vu=&iu=&du=&st=>. The full report is available at: <http://www.Cheonan46.go.kr/100>

<sup>11</sup> Letter dated 4 June 2010 from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/DPRK%20S%202010%20281%20SKorea%20Letter%20and%20Cheonan%20Report.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, "Cheonan Warship Report 3: Six Problems on the Investigation Process of the *Cheonan* Sinking," June 4, 2010, <http://blog.peoplepower21.org/English/20905>

<sup>13</sup> Seunghun Lee and J. J. Suh, "Rush to Judgment: Inconsistencies in South Korea's *Cheonan* Report," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 28-1-10, July 12, 2010, <http://www.japanfocus.org/-JJ-Suh/3382>

<sup>14</sup> The JIG consists of 25 experts from 10 ROK agencies, 22 military experts, 3 experts recommended by the ROK National Assembly, and 24 foreign experts from the United States (15), Australia (3), United Kingdom (2), and Sweden (4).

National University's Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) in July indicated an even distribution of people who trust, distrust, or are unsure about the investigation results.<sup>15</sup>

A related second factor shaping South Korea's response to the *Cheonan* sinking was the South Korean government's misjudgment over how China would respond to the incident. South Korean reassessments of Seoul's policy orientation toward the United States and China respectively have been driven by deteriorating perceptions of China since Beijing's decision to host Kim Jong Il on May 3-7 for a summit with President Hu Jintao, days after the Hu-Lee summit on April 30 in Shanghai. Although Seoul officials had expected the Shanghai summit to lead to intensified consultations with China on laying out an international response to the *Cheonan* sinking, it failed to reflect any joint understanding on the issue. At the onset of Kim Jong Il's five-day trip to China, ROK Unification Minister Hyun In-taek urged China to play a "responsible role"<sup>16</sup> while media editorials pointed out that "Chinese leaders embraced North Korean leader Kim only a couple of days after shaking hands with President Lee. The warm welcome to the Kim entourage is particularly offensive...since it comes on the heels of South Koreans' mourning the sailors killed on the *Cheonan*."<sup>17</sup> China's prioritization of regional stability and relations with the North at the expense of China-ROK relations revealed South Korean miscalculations regarding Chinese strategic priorities and likely response at the UNSC as well as U.S. capacity to elicit Chinese support. Some conservative ROK analysts favoring a strong military alliance with the United States have argued that dual alignment with the United States and China is "impossible by definition."<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, South Koreans are also wary of the long-term risks that would accompany U.S.-China tensions. Ahead of the U.S.-ROK military exercises, a South Korean editorial noted that "Seoul and Washington have come to a new chapter in their strategic alliance and partnership," to which "no doubt the North's torpedo attack on the South's warship *Cheonan* in the West Sea in March has contributed." But it also warned that: "the two countries should be careful not to bring about unnecessary conflicts with neighboring countries, especially China...It would be better for the South to avoid being caught in the rivalry between Beijing and Washington."<sup>19</sup> Kim Taewoo of the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses has argued that responding to the North Korean threat through a strengthened alliance with the United States is more important than improving relations with China, but recognizing that South Korea "needs to do its best to maintain and develop non-hostile and economically mutually dependent relations with China," Kim also concludes that the "alliance with the U.S. and friendly relations with China must be South Korea's long-term survival strategy."<sup>20</sup> In remarks released by the Blue House, Lee "positively" assessed

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<sup>15</sup> 32.5 percent of respondents were convinced about the findings, 35.7 percent remained unconvinced, and the remainder did not know. Notably, within these groupings only 6.4 percent of respondents said they "completely trust" the findings while 10.7 percent said they "completely distrust" the findings. The IPUS poll findings appear to reflect a growing lack of public confidence in the Lee administration; public views of Lee's performance in government had up to four times a greater impact on perceptions of the investigation results than other factors such as political affiliation and age. See "Most S. Koreans Skeptical About *Cheonan* Findings, Survey Shows," *Chosun Ilbo*, September 8, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Sam Kim, "S. Korea calls for 'responsible role' by China in dealing with N. Korea," *Yonhap*, May 4, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> "Let's Cool Off Over China," *JoongAng Daily*, May 8, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with South Korean analyst, Quantico, VA, September 1, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> "Closer Alliance," *Korea Times*, July 21, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Kim Taewoo, "Post-*Cheonan* Regional Stability: A South Korean Perspective," Paper presented at an Asan Institute symposium on Post-*Cheonan* Regional Security, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy and Asan Institute for Policy Studies, Seoul, August 13, 2010, <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/0813KIMTaewoo.pdf>

Kim Jong Il's second trip to China this year on August 26-30 in terms of its potential impact on North Korea's reform and opening, reflecting an effort to counter the growing perception of Seoul's firm opposition to Chinese engagement of Pyongyang.<sup>21</sup>

### *United States*

The United States has primarily viewed the *Cheonan* incident as an important opportunity to demonstrate solidarity with its alliance partners in Northeast Asia. It also presented a test to the Obama administration of its ability to coordinate respective policies toward the two Koreas and China, and broader U.S. strategy in Asia. Washington immediately "condemned" the *Cheonan* attack after Seoul's release of the JIG interim report confirming North Korean responsibility, and ahead of the investigation results President Obama affirmed that the United States "fully supports" Lee's approach.<sup>22</sup> With the release of the UNSC Presidential Statement on July 9, Secretary Clinton stated that "we applaud the Republic of Korea's careful handling of this situation."<sup>23</sup> At his summit with President Lee on the sidelines of the Toronto G20 Summit in June, marking the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Korean War and the first meeting between the two presidents since the *Cheonan* sinking, President Obama called the U.S.-ROK alliance a "lynchpin" of Asian security and pledged to "deter any acts of North Korean aggression."<sup>24</sup> U.S. renewed support to the alliance has included efforts to reinforce U.S. security assurances to South Korea in the aftermath of the *Cheonan* incident. The joint communiqué of the U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) on October 8, 2010, "reaffirmed the continued U.S. commitment to provide and strengthen extended deterrence for the ROK, using the full range of military capabilities."<sup>25</sup>

Second, although the U.S.-ROK military exercises were designed to deliver a "clear message" of deterrence to North Korea, China's reaction underlined the challenge of managing relations with China when it comes to basic strategic interests on the peninsula. Washington's growing frustration with Chinese insistence on "calm and restraint" in dealing with the *Cheonan* incident was clearly reflected in President Obama's remarks at the G20 Summit in Toronto, where he noted "there's a difference between restraint and willful blindness to consistent problems."<sup>26</sup> At the same time, the United States appears to recognize both the critical importance of Chinese cooperation on North Korea and related Chinese sensitivities that limit such cooperation. At a speech at the MacArthur Foundation on July 9 following the initial postponement of U.S.-ROK military exercises, U.S. Forces Korea Commander General Walter Sharp stated that: "The Republic of Korea-U.S. alliance needs more from the entire international community and all countries in the region, in particular China. We believe all countries in the region and

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<sup>21</sup> Lee Chi-dong, "Lee views N.K. leader's China trip positively," *Yonhap*, August 31, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Statement by the Press Secretary on the Republic of Korea Navy ship the *Cheonan*, May 19, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/statement-press-secretary-republic-korea-navy-ship-Cheonan>

<sup>23</sup> Hillary Clinton, UN Security Council Statement on the *Cheonan* Attack, Washington DC, July 9, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/07/144407.htm>

<sup>24</sup> Remarks by President Obama and President Lee Myung-bak of the Republic of Korea After Bilateral Meeting, Toronto, June 26, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-and-president-lee-myung-bak-republic-korea-after-bilateral->

<sup>25</sup> Joint Communique, The 42<sup>nd</sup> U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting, Washington DC, October 8, 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/news/d20101008usrok.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> "Remarks by President Obama at G-20 Press Conference in Toronto, Canada, June 27, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-g-20-press-conference-toronto-canada>

China need to work in cooperation in addressing North Korean aggressive behavior. In particular we will welcome Chinese action even behind the scenes.”<sup>27</sup>

### *China*

For China, the *Cheonan* sinking evolved from an inter-Korean issue to a source of major strain in relations with South Korea and the United States. Chinese leaders have remained reluctant to address North Korea issues following the sinking of the *Cheonan*, consistently insisting on the importance of addressing the case “in an objective and fair manner.”<sup>28</sup> President Hu Jintao did not publicly mention the incident until his summit with President Lee in Shanghai on April 30, and in following talks in Toronto in June, reaffirmed that “China opposes and condemns any act that would undermine stability in the region” without referencing North Korea. China appeared to use its direct exchanges with North Korea, including “unofficial” summits between Hu and Kim Jong Il in May and August of 2010, to emphasize continued efforts to resume Six Party Talks, but such efforts served to raise suspicions in Seoul and Washington about Chinese strategic intentions rather than raise expectations about North Korea’s return to dialogue. Beijing’s cautious response to the *Cheonan* incident and continued diplomatic and economic support of North Korea reveal key aspects of Chinese strategic thinking that appear to contradict that of the United States and South Korea. North Korea’s potential involvement in the *Cheonan* also posed a serious challenge to Chinese interests to the extent that the provocation provided a pretext for further strengthening of the U.S.-ROK alliance.

First, China’s strong reaction to the U.S.-ROK military exercises was primarily driven by concerns about further provoking North Korea and escalating regional tensions. While the United States and South Korea saw the *Cheonan* sinking as an unprovoked attack by North Korea, China viewed the subsequent U.S.-ROK response as underestimating the serious risks of escalation at a time of fragility in North Korea’s efforts to consolidate leadership succession. In response to President Obama’s G20 remarks on *Cheonan* criticizing China’s “willful blindness to consistent problems,” the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman reaffirmed China’s “fair and irreproachable” position, stating that “China borders on the Korean Peninsula, and we have our own feeling on the issue...we have more direct and intense concerns.”<sup>29</sup> At the same time, China’s response to the *Cheonan* incident appeared to reflect widening internal divisions between civilian party and military leaders regarding North Korea policy which had surfaced after North Korea’s May 2009 nuclear test, with Chinese party leaders reportedly expressing increasing concerns about North Korean behavior and military leaders tending to defend Pyongyang’s position.<sup>30</sup> Some Chinese analysts have described Chinese policy toward North Korea as directed toward denuclearization, economic reform, and “strategic communication” to enhance North Korean predictability, but point to short-term “bureaucratic constraints” to achieving such objectives given internal divisions over dealing with North Korea.<sup>31</sup> China’s internal debate on North Korea may correspond with a broader trend of shifting Chinese perceptions of North Korea since 2009, when public

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<sup>27</sup> Song Sang-ho, “U.S. expects more N.K. provocations,” *The Korea Herald*, July 10, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> “China to make objective, fair judgment on S. Korean warship sinking: Wen,” *Xinhua*, May 28, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> “China rebuffs criticism over stance on Korean Peninsular situation,” *Xinhua*, June 29, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Landler, “U.S. stands with an ally, eager for China to join the line,” *New York Times*, May 26, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Private conversation with Chinese analyst, Washington DC, October 13, 2010.

opinion polls suggested that an increasing number of Chinese saw a nuclear North Korea as unfavorable to Chinese security and national interests.<sup>32</sup>

Second, the Chinese reaction to the U.S.-ROK military drills reflected growing concern about the intent of the U.S.-ROK alliance and demonstrated China's tendency to view the Korean peninsula through the lens of U.S.-China strategic relations. These concerns emerged with speculation about U.S.-ROK naval drills in the Yellow Sea, which prompted repeated calls by the Chinese Foreign Ministry that China would "firmly oppose" any military activities "undermining China's security interests."<sup>33</sup> The *Global Times* indicated that such exercises "would risk challenging China's strategic bottom line and its coastal defense,"<sup>34</sup> and affirmed that "there is no way Washington can reassure Beijing about its intent if it continues with its plan."<sup>35</sup> Chinese opposition was most apparent in military leaders' statements ahead of the exercises, featured in a series of reports by party newspaper *People's Daily* from early July. General Luo Yuan, Deputy Secretary General of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Academy of Military Sciences, provided a detailed five-point criticism stating that: "The drill area selected by the United States and South Korea is only 500 kilometers away from Beijing. China will be aware of the security pressure from military exercises conducted by any country in an area that is so close to China's heartland."<sup>36</sup> Notably, the exercises raised Chinese sensitivities toward the negative ramifications of Seoul's actions on U.S.-China relations. A month after the exercises, a *Global Times* editorial argued that "whatever the explanations the U.S. and South Korea offered, the military drills surrounding China's offshore sea obviously have the intention of targeting China," warning that "Seoul may not have fully realized the consequences of upsetting China-U.S. ties...a stronger South Korea-U.S. alliance might jeopardize the trust of Seoul with its neighbors."<sup>37</sup>

### ***North Korea***

In North Korea's first public mention of the *Cheonan* incident on April 17, a military commentator argued that the Lee administration's accusations were aimed to avoid "heavy defeat" at the June local elections, justify its conservative DPRK policy, strengthen international sanctions, and undermine North Korean efforts toward building a "strong and prosperous state."<sup>38</sup> North Korean statements appeared initially targeted at the Lee government, and it was not until the release of the May JIG report when the Foreign Ministry directly implicated the United States for using the *Cheonan* incident to realize broader strategic interests in the region.<sup>39</sup> After Secretary Clinton's visit to Seoul in May, the DPRK Foreign

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<sup>32</sup> Scott Snyder and See-Won Byun, "China-Korea Relations: China's Nuclear North Korea Fever," in Carl Baker and Brad Glosserman, eds., *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (October 2009), [http://csis.org/files/publication/0903qchina\\_korea.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/0903qchina_korea.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> "China seriously concerned about US-ROK naval drill: spokesman," *Xinhua*, July 6, 2010; Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang's Regular Press Conference, July 8, 2010; Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang's Regular Press Conference, July 15, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Song Shengxia, "US, South Korean war games concern China," *Global Times*, June 28, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> "Navy exercise tests China's resilience," *Global Times*, July 16, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> "Why China opposes US-South Korean military exercises in the Yellow Sea," *People's Daily*, July 16, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> "Military drills leave S. Korea insecure," *Global Times*, August 20, 2010.

<sup>38</sup> "Military Commentator Denies Involvement in Ship Sinking," *Korean Central News Agency*, April 17, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> "KCNA: Who Wire-pulled Shocking Case behind Scene," *Korean Central News Agency*, May 28, 2010. Also see Haksoon Paik, "An Analysis of the North Korean Perspective on Post-*Cheonan* Regional Security," Paper presented at an Asan Institute Symposium on Post-*Cheonan* Regional Security, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy and Asan

Ministry accused the United States of creating “an atmosphere of international pressure” on North Korea, pointing to Obama administration efforts to “appear strong” ahead of the November mid-term elections, justify its policy of “strategic patience,” and pressure China while strengthening ties with Japan and South Korea.<sup>40</sup> The National Defense Commission (NDC) criticized the United States and South Korea for using the *Cheonan* case as a pretext for the delay of U.S.-ROK wartime operational control transfer, and in June Pyongyang denounced South Korean participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative, calling the decision “little short of declaring they would not rule out military conflicts.”<sup>41</sup> Although the Foreign Ministry pledged to undertake “consistent efforts” toward denuclearization following the release of the July UNSC Presidential Statement, it also appeared to leave the door open for both engagement and confrontation, stating that “the DPRK is prepared for both dialogue and war.”<sup>42</sup> Pyongyang used the Presidential Statement as an opportunity for dialogue but also made clear that “how the situation will develop” would “entirely” depend on the U.S. and ROK response,<sup>43</sup> allowing it to deflect responsibility for its retaliatory behavior to subsequent U.S.-ROK actions.

The U.S.-ROK response to the *Cheonan* incident challenged North Korea’s traditional strategy of playing out U.S.-ROK differences, but North Korea has instead utilized to its strategic advantage differences among the two allies and China that emerged from the incident. In the absence of stable relations with the United States and South Korea, North Korea’s dependency on China has increased amid growing strains between China and U.S. allies following the *Cheonan* incident. This shift was demonstrated by North Korea’s rebuff of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter’s visit to Pyongyang in August, when Kim Jong Il chose to meet President Hu in Changchun instead, with the apparent mission of securing economic aid and Chinese support of Pyongyang’s unfolding leadership succession.<sup>44</sup>

Second, North Korea has continued to manipulate internal political divisions in South Korea. After the release of the May JIG report, the NDC called Seoul’s claims an “anti-DPRK” campaign led by “ultra-rightist conservatives of South Korea” and supported by U.S. and Japanese “hostile policy.”<sup>45</sup> In response to Seoul’s ruling Grand National Party’s adoption of a resolution on the *Cheonan* sinking in June, North Korea’s Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea stated that “not only South Koreans but the international community are getting increasingly skeptical about the “results of investigation” into the warship case.”<sup>46</sup>

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Institute for Policy Studies, August 13, 2010, Seoul,

<http://www.asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/0813HaksoonPaik.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> “FM Accuses US of Creating Atmosphere of International Pressure,” *Korean Central News Agency*, May 28, 2010.

<sup>41</sup> “Lee Myung Bak Groups’ Confrontation with DPRK Blasted,” *Korean Central News Agency*, June 26, 2010.

<sup>42</sup> “Foreign Ministry on UN Presidential Statement of on “*Cheonan*,”” *Korean Central News Agency*, July 10, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> “NDC Holds Press Conference on “*Cheonan*” Sinking,”” *Korean Central News Agency*, May 28, 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Scott Snyder and See-Won Byun, “China-Korea Relations: Consolidating Ties with New DPRK Leadership,” in Carl Baker and Brad Glosserman, eds., *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 12, No. 3, October 12, 2010, [http://csis.org/files/publication/1003qchina\\_korea.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/1003qchina_korea.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> “National Defence Commission Issues Statement,” *Korean Central News Agency*, May 20, 2010.

<sup>46</sup> “S. Korea’s Anti-DPRK “Resolution” Assailed,” *Korean Central News Agency*, June 26, 2010.

## **Post-Cheonan and Post-Yeonpyeong Regional Security: U.S.-China-Korea Dynamics**

The impact of the *Cheonan* incident underlined serious weaknesses in the coordination of respective regional responses. As the first North Korean military attack to claim civilian casualties since the Korean War, the November 23 attack on Yeonpyeong Island has raised public condemnation in South Korea to the highest levels, targeting not only the DPRK leadership but also the Lee administration and ROK military, whose chief, Defense Minister Kim Tae-young, resigned on November 25. The regional impact of continued DPRK military provocations poses major questions regarding the effectiveness of the U.S.-ROK security alliance as a deterrent to North Korea as well as China's strategic priorities in responding to inter-Korean tensions and joint U.S.-ROK responses at a time of leadership transition in Pyongyang.

**U.S.-ROK alliance.** While the U.S.-ROK response to the *Cheonan* incident demonstrated renewed strength of the alliance, it also exposed some challenges to implementing the June 2009 Joint Vision Statement.<sup>47</sup> The *Cheonan* sinking reinforced a shift in perceptions of the DPRK military threat; as Assistant Secretary of Defense Gregson indicated in his Congressional testimony in September 2010, “the conventional threat continues, but we now face an enemy capable of using a number of asymmetrical means to threaten its neighbors, while also violating past agreements, international norms and the United Nations Security Council resolution.” Although the 2009 Vision Statement for the first time documented the U.S. pledge of “extended deterrence, including the nuclear umbrella,”<sup>48</sup> following the April 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, which reflected a narrowing U.S. doctrine on nuclear use, some ROK analysts suggested a need for strengthened forms of U.S. extended deterrence including more institutionalized military-military exchanges such as information-sharing, joint planning, and exercises.<sup>49</sup>

However, the recent U.S.-ROK joint military exercises aimed to deter DPRK provocation have drawn strong Chinese and North Korean reactions that have heightened regional tensions. The October SCM produced “Strategic Alliance 2015,” which ensures that almost 30,000 U.S. troops will remain in South Korea until 2015, and through which “the Republic of Korea and the United States are more united than ever before to deter North Korean provocations and aggression.”<sup>50</sup> But it remains to be seen whether regional tensions will drive alliance cooperation rather than a strengthened alliance shaping regional stability. The continued series of DPRK military provocations raises questions about whether allies should be reactive or proactive in addressing recurring North Korean military actions. Second, it remains uncertain to what extent renewed efforts to enhance the U.S.-ROK security alliance will result in heightened tensions with China.

**U.S.-China relations.** U.S.-China tensions surrounding the *Cheonan* sinking revealed basic differences extending to broader geostrategic concerns. These differences surfaced ahead of the U.S.-ROK military exercises in July, when China reaffirmed its “core national interests” in the South China Sea in apparent

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<sup>47</sup> Scott Snyder, “2+2 and the U.S.-ROK Joint Vision Statement,” Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Newsletter, Vol. 2, No. 8 (August 2010), <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/CUSKPNewsletter28AugWEB.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Joint Vision for the Alliance of the United States of America and the Republic of Korea, Washington DC, June 16, 2009, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Joint-vision-for-the-alliance-of-the-United-States-of-America-and-the-Republic-of-Korea/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Joint-vision-for-the-alliance-of-the-United-States-of-America-and-the-Republic-of-Korea/)

<sup>49</sup> Interview with South Korean defense analyst, Seoul, August 26, 2010.

<sup>50</sup> Joint Communique, The 42<sup>nd</sup> U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting, Washington DC, October 8, 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/news/d20101008usrok.pdf>

response to Secretary Clinton's remarks at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Hanoi on U.S. "national interest" in freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and peaceful management of maritime and territorial affairs.<sup>51</sup> The U.S.-China clash over the South China Sea illustrated the potential for a larger conflict of U.S.-China strategic interests in the region. After the ARF meeting, a *People's Daily* editorial stated that "America hopes to contain a China with growing military capabilities," while the *Global Times* affirmed that "China will never waive its right to protect its core interest with military means." The China-Japan territorial debate over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in September also manifested itself as a U.S.-China issue when the PRC Foreign Ministry denounced U.S. statements that the islands are covered as part of U.S. defense agreements with Japan as "extremely erroneous."<sup>52</sup> This trend of U.S.-China tensions stemming from China's bilateral disputes with its neighbors, including U.S. Asian allies, presents a complex challenge to the long-term management of U.S.-China relations in the context of increasing regional perceptions of China's rise and assertiveness.

***China-DPRK engagement.*** China's diplomatic and economic engagement with North Korea in the aftermath of the *Cheonan* incident, at the cost of both U.S.-China and China-ROK relations, has suggested potential points of conflict in the China-DPRK relationship that may test Chinese patience with North Korea's destabilizing actions. First, the limits of Chinese leverage over North Korea and limits of cooperation on the *Cheonan* issue have resulted in widespread skepticism about China's role as a responsible stakeholder in the international community and mediator of Six Party Talks. China's response to the incident not only heightened U.S. and ROK concerns about its strategic interests on the peninsula but also raised regional concerns about growing Chinese power and corresponding assertiveness on security issues.

Second, the outcome of Chinese direct engagement of Pyongyang based on continued prioritization of North Korean internal stability appears to challenge China's ongoing efforts to press Pyongyang toward shared regional objectives of denuclearization and reform and opening of the North. President Hu Jintao's two summit meetings with Kim Jong Il this year both focused on efforts to persuade North Korea to undertake Chinese-style reforms and demonstrate a greater commitment to denuclearization. But North Korea has instead demonstrated renewed nuclear strength, while the new DPRK leadership has continued to promote a national development strategy of self-reliance, as emphasized in the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the founding of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) in October 2010. North Korea's reversal of its denuclearization obligations and apparent unwillingness to pursue reform and opening may present two potential conflict points in the China-DPRK relationship that will reinforce skepticism among Northeast Asian neighbors about Chinese capacity to exert positive influence on North Korea toward common regional objectives. This challenge of engaging the North in line with regional goals will likely intensify the domestic debate in China on how to deal with North Korea.

***North Korean transition and the future of Korea.*** Recent DPRK provocations have led to heightened attention on North Korea's internal stability and domestic transition, which has been linked to the

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<sup>51</sup> Hillary Clinton, Remarks at Press Availability, Hanoi, Vietnam, July 23, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/07/145095.htm>; "China reiterates "indisputable" sovereignty over South China Sea islands," *Xinhua*, July 31, 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Ma Zhaoxu's Remarks, November 2, 2010, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/s2510/2535/t766758.htm>

*Cheonan* sinking.<sup>53</sup> While Pyongyang will likely remain preoccupied with securing a smooth leadership transition following its historic party conference in September 2010, the impact of the *Cheonan* incident has challenged North Korean efforts to balance domestic goals with foreign policy priorities. The *Cheonan* incident also had the effect of intensifying regional debates on Korean unification. At his address on Korean Independence Day on August 15, President Lee proposed a three-stage reunification process which Pyongyang later rejected.<sup>54</sup> In South Korea, the reunification debate now leans toward “pragmatic” motivations rather than being ideology-led.<sup>55</sup> But differences in long-term strategic interests as revealed by the *Cheonan* incident highlight the need for a common understanding on the end-state of the Korean peninsula among the two Koreas, the United States, and China.

Although U.S. support for an open and democratic, unified Korea is embodied in the 2009 Joint Vision Statement, this goal appears to be challenged by perceived Chinese preferences for the status quo and sensitivities regarding U.S. troop presence on a unified peninsula, and the expected costs of unification, the burden of which has increased with the global economic downturn in recent years. China has officially supported “peaceful unification,” and as a signatory of the 1953 Armistice Agreement, has made clear since the October 2007 inter-Korean Joint Declaration that it will not be excluded from Korean peninsula peace talks.<sup>56</sup> However, the *Cheonan* incident served to question the extent of regional convergence on both the outcome and process of Korean unification, including respective roles of regional actors. Prospects for enhanced dialogue on the future of Korea will importantly depend on the response from Pyongyang, where the handling of the *Cheonan* sinking was considered a destabilizing factor undermining unification.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Implications of the November 23 Yeonpyeong Attack***

Compared to the *Cheonan* sinking, the North Korean attack on a civilian area in Yeonpyeong has demanded a more immediate regional response. The impact of the *Cheonan* incident has clearly shaped the environment for regional coordination and South Korea's national response to the Yeonpyeong attack. Seoul's cautious approach to the *Cheonan* sinking was positively received by the international community, but the DPRK attack on Yeonpyeong Island has served to heighten domestic demands and expectations for a strong response. While the domestic reaction to the *Cheonan* incident was highly polarized, with most South Koreans seeing Lee's response as driven by political purposes, public opinion now reflects widespread criticism of the Lee administration's handling of North Korean provocations among both opponents and supporters.

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<sup>53</sup> Ruediger Frank, “An Act of Open Insubordination? Implications of the *Cheonan* Incident for Domestic Politics in North Korea,” *38 North*, SAIS U.S.-Korea Institute, May 9, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> “Marching Together Toward A Greater Republic of Korea,” Address by President Lee Myung-bak on the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of National Liberation, Seoul, Korea, August 15, 2010, [http://english.president.go.kr/pre\\_activity/speeches/speeches\\_view.php?uno=3694&board\\_no=E03&search\\_key=&search\\_value=&search\\_cate\\_code=&cur\\_page\\_no=2](http://english.president.go.kr/pre_activity/speeches/speeches_view.php?uno=3694&board_no=E03&search_key=&search_value=&search_cate_code=&cur_page_no=2); “CPRK denounces Lee Myung Bak's anti-reunification vituperation,” *Korean Central News Agency*, August 17, 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Victor Cha, “The End of History: Neojuche Revivalism and Korean Unification,” Paper presented at a conference on “Regional Security in East Asia: Sustaining Stability, Coping with Conflict, Building Cooperation?” Foreign Policy Research Institute and Reserve Officers Association, Washington DC, November 1, 2010.

<sup>56</sup> “Declaration on the Advancement of South-North Relations, Peace and Prosperity, October 4, 2007; Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Jianchao's Regular Press Conference, October 9, 2007.

<sup>57</sup> “NDC spokesman rebukes Lee Myung Bak's “Statement to People,” *Korean Central News Agency*, May 24, 2010.

According to poll results released by the East Asia Institute in December of 2010, the public support rate for the Lee administration's handling of the Yeonpyeong attack stood at 24.7 percent, significantly lower than the 57.6 percent on May 28 following Lee's announcement of countermeasures against the *Cheonan* attack.<sup>58</sup> The Yeonpyeong incident also appears to mark a turning point in South Korean public acceptance of limited military countermeasures against DPRK provocations. While 75 percent of respondents preferred handling the *Cheonan* sinking through the UN Security Council and 28.2 percent supported limited military retaliation, the preference for limited military action has jumped to 68.6 percent. Supporters of hard-line policy (42.7 percent) remain outnumbered by those favoring engagement (55.2 percent), but a comparison with figures from June 2010 (37.1 and 61.5 percent respectively) suggests a steadily shifting trend toward support for harsher measures. Another notable trend is the growing level of public support for strengthening the U.S.-ROK alliance, which has increased from 34.7 percent in January 2010 to 43.2 percent in July 2010 after the *Cheonan* sinking, and further to 48.6 percent after the Yeonpyeong attack. The number of South Koreans who are "concerned" about insecurity on the Korean peninsula has reached a historic high after the Yeonpyeong attack to 81.5 percent of respondents, compared to 66.8 percent after the *Cheonan* sinking and 48.4 percent after the May 2009 nuclear test.

Strong South Korean public criticism of the response to the Yeonpyeong artillery shelling creates a difficult challenge for Lee Myung-bak if there are additional North Korean provocations going forward. On the one hand, South Koreans want a more robust military response to North Korean attacks, but on the other hand, President Lee will still want to avoid escalation to full-scale war, which would undoubtedly also draw criticism from a risk averse South Korean public. The challenge that has been created by past failures to hold North Korea accountable is that only a disproportionate response is likely to reinforce the message that South Korea has not been deterred by North Korean nuclear possession and that indeed the North Koreans are miscalculating if they believe that the threat of a nuclear strike will sufficiently hold South Korea hostage.

A South Korean military reform commission set up by the president following the *Cheonan* incident has delivered its initial report, advocating a change in military doctrine to a posture of "proactive deterrence" toward North Korea. Conservative analysts argue that this concept and the concept of self-defense should give the South justification to take actions to more clearly prevent the North from engaging in future provocations. However, both of these concepts involve limited forms of preemption, which might also give justification to blur international support for the legitimacy of South Korean military operations, and could provide China with a pretext for coming to North Korea's defense based on the Sino-DPRK mutual defense treaty signed in 1961 and still in force.

A statement from the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet indicated that the U.S.-ROK naval exercises that began on November 28 in the Yellow Sea were planned "well before" North Korea's "unprovoked" attack on Yeonpyeong Island, suggesting that the move was not retaliatory in nature and instead intended to demonstrate "the strength of the ROK-U.S. Alliance and our commitment to regional stability through

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<sup>58</sup> "The Impact of North Korea's Artillery Strike on Public Opinion in South Korea," EAI Issue Briefing on Public Opinion No. 91, EAI Center for Public Opinion Research, East Asia Institute, December 2, 2010.

deterrence.”<sup>59</sup> Although the United States and South Korea have perceived the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong attacks as “unprovoked” attacks by the North, China has viewed both incidents in the larger context of inter-Korean military provocations since the signing of the 1953 Armistice. The exercises have reignited criticism among Chinese military experts against “sensitive and provocative actions” by the United States and South Korea. Although China has undertaken serious diplomatic efforts both regionally and directly with Pyongyang to prevent escalation of tensions, calling for “emergency consultations” among Six Party Talks members on November 28,<sup>60</sup> the PRC Foreign Ministry again appeared to target the U.S. response when it renewed its opposition to “any military acts in our exclusive economic zone without permission” ahead of the naval exercises.<sup>61</sup>

Many international experts have viewed Pyongyang’s recurring military provocations as part of an internally consistent strategy for maintaining regime security amid ongoing internal economic challenges and international sanctions.<sup>62</sup> From the perspective of internal political dynamics since the September 2010 party conference, some analysts have suggested that the North’s latest moves can be seen as an attempt to legitimize the position of Kim Jong Il’s third son Kim Jong Un as heir-apparent and newly-elected Vice Chairman of the WPK Central Military Commission to continue Pyongyang’s “military first” policy. North Korea’s revelation of uranium enrichment facilities in mid-November appeared to signify not only a clear reversal of its denuclearization commitments but also an appeal for renewed food and economic aid and the lifting of sanctions amid growing frustration with U.S. “strategic patience” and the impact on the domestic economy.<sup>63</sup> But the Yeonpyeong incident came so soon after the enriched uranium revelations (and the *Cheonan* incident interrupted plans for an informal visit to the United States by North Korea’s chief nuclear negotiator Kim Kye Gwan), raising questions about why North Korea would short circuit opportunities for renewed international engagement. On the other hand, some experts have regarded recent DPRK provocations as the usual North Korean diplomatic tactic to set the stage for renewed negotiations with the United States.<sup>64</sup>

### **Conclusion: Prospects for Northeast Asian Security Cooperation**

The *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong incidents present clear obstacles to renewed regional dialogue, including the resumption of Six Party Talks on North Korean denuclearization. Widespread pessimism about the efficacy of such talks in the post-*Cheonan* and post-Yeonpyeong regional security environment has undermined the prospects for building a permanent security mechanism in Northeast Asia. Ahead of the G20 Summit in Seoul in November, President Lee appeared to signal a willingness to pursue an exit

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<sup>59</sup> “Naval Readiness Exercise Announced,” 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet Public Affairs, November 24, 2010, <http://www.c7f.navy.mil/news/2010/11-November/020.htm>

<sup>60</sup> “China proposes emergency consultations on Korean Peninsula tensions,” *Xinhua*, November 28, 2010.

<sup>61</sup> “China opposes any military acts in exclusive economic zone without permission,” *Xinhua*, November 26, 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Andrei Lankov, “The Yeonpyeong Island Incident: Why It Happened, Why Nothing Can Be Done, and What To Expect: Some Thoughts,” *North Korea Economy Watch*, November 29, 2010, <http://www.nkeonwatch.com/2010/11/29/lankov-on-the-shelling-of-yonpyong/>

<sup>63</sup> “North Korea: The Road Ahead,” CSIS-Schieffer Series Dialogues, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, November 22, 2010.

<sup>64</sup> Ruediger Frank, “Suicidal, Calculating, or Constrained? Yeonpyeong Island and North Korea’s Motives,” 38 *North*, November 29, 2010.

strategy when he suggested that a North Korean apology was not a prerequisite for resuming Six Party Talks.<sup>65</sup> However, North Korea's renewed claims of nuclear development and latest attack on Yeonpyeong Island demand a serious reassessment of the long-term regional implications of continued DPRK military provocations. The November 23 Yeonpyeong attack underlined the significance of North Korea's internal motivations while raising questions regarding North Korea policy, U.S.-ROK alliance cooperation, and China's role. Progress in current regional dialogue efforts will require enhanced coordination among the United States, China, and South Korea to develop a shared assessment of respective North Korea policies and North Korea's internal situation.

***Trilateral coordination: U.S. alliance coordination with China.*** Washington's dismissal of China's proposal of six party consultations and decision to instead host trilateral foreign ministerial consultations on North Korea policy with ROK and Japanese counterparts on December 6, reflects a decline in confidence in both Six Party Talks as a mechanism for dialogue and Chinese efforts to resume such talks. The decision by the three foreign ministers to meet together in a joint show of solidarity was aimed as much at China as North Korea since it affirmed that North Korean provocations are leading to developments China perceives as unfavorable to its national security interests. The move appeared to raise concerns in Beijing, where the PRC foreign ministry stated that "military alliances and displays of force cannot solve the issue."<sup>66</sup> Some Chinese analysts have indicated that "both the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong events substantially hurt China's strategic interests" in terms of strained China-ROK relations and strengthened U.S.-Japan-ROK alliance cooperation, arguing that, as a "victim" of Pyongyang's recent provocations, "it is high time for Beijing to review its overall strategy towards North Korea."<sup>67</sup> These Chinese analysts recognize that the key basis of Beijing's "neutral" position toward North Korea is the concern over regime stability, but also recognize that this position is increasingly challenged by North Korea's refusal to abandon nuclear weapons and the inclination of the United States and its allies to push for regime change following the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong incidents.

The pledge of closer coordination and joint action among the governments of the United States, South Korea, and Japan sends a dual message. On the one hand, it shows solidarity in the views of the three allies in response to North Korea's challenge and China's role as an enabler of North Korean aggression. On the other hand, it is an invitation to China to join with other regional players in devising a coordinated approach to North Korea as a means of promoting regional stability.

South Korea faces a particularly difficult challenge as it manages its relations with China on North Korea issues. South Korea has been disappointed by China's failure to take on a more "fair and responsible role" in criticizing North Korea as the instigator of dangerous incidents that have cost South Korean lives, but China and South Korea also share interests in promoting a gradual, peaceful transition on the Korean peninsula.

***North Korea policy: sanctions, reform, and denuclearization.*** A Congressional Research Service report in October pointed to serious weaknesses in the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1874, including

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<sup>65</sup> Mark McDonald, "South Korea drops its call for apology from North," *New York Times*, November 8, 2010.

<sup>66</sup> "China refutes criticisms on efforts for emergency six-party consultations," *Xinhua*, December 2, 2010.

<sup>67</sup> You Ji, "Yeonpyeong: Tough Test for China's North Korea Policy," *RSIS Commentaries* No. 161/2010, December 1, 2010.

Chinese exports of luxury goods to North Korea.<sup>68</sup> The Obama administration's emphasis on sanctions combined with a strategy of "strategic patience" has led to North Korea's increased political and economic reliance on China in the absence of stable ties with South Korea and the United States. Seoul and Washington have at the same time supported Chinese efforts to lead North Korea's reform and opening, but whether Chinese engagements will positively shape North Korea's external environment will depend on the interaction with internal developments in Pyongyang over the course of domestic transition.<sup>69</sup> Without practical means by which to pressure North Korea to pursue denuclearization, policymakers face a stark choice between acceptance of North Korea as a de facto nuclear weapons state and the idea that denuclearization is only possible with regime change. This situation is likely to make diplomatic coordination and crisis management on the peninsula more difficult and urgent.

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<sup>68</sup> Mary Beth Nikitin et al., "Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1874," Memorandum to Hon. Richard G. Lugar, Congressional Research Service, October 8, 2010, <http://lugar.senate.gov/issues/foreign/reports/NKoreaCRSReport.pdf>

<sup>69</sup> Jack Pritchard, John Tilelli Jr., and Scott Snyder, "U.S. Policy toward the Korean Peninsula," Independent Task Force Report No. 64, Council on Foreign Relations, June 2010.

**Chronology of Events (March-November 2010)**

March 26: ROK warship *Cheonan* sinks in the Yellow Sea, killing 46 South Korean soldiers.

April 30: Presidents Lee Myung-bak and Hu Jintao meet on the sidelines of the Shanghai World Expo.

May 3-7: Kim Jong Il visits China and meets President Hu in Beijing.

May 19: The White House issues a statement on the *Cheonan* sinking.

May 20: South Korea's international Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group releases an interim report indicating that the *Cheonan* sinking was caused by a North Korean torpedo attack.

May 24: The White House issues a statement on the *Cheonan* sinking.

May 24-25: The 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue is held in Beijing.

May 24: President Lee delivers a public address in Seoul condemning North Korea for the *Cheonan* attack.

May 26: South Korea joins the Proliferation Security Initiative.

May 27: U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton holds ministerial talks with ROK Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan in Seoul and meets President Lee.

May 28: PRC Premier Wen Jiabao holds talks with President Lee in Seoul.

June 2: Premier Wen in an interview with *NHK* affirms China's "impartial" position on the *Cheonan* sinking.

June 4: South Korea formally refers the *Cheonan* case to the UN Security Council.

June 4: South Korean NGO People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy circulates a statement to the UN Security Council criticizing Seoul's *Cheonan* investigation process.

June 4-6: U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and ROK Defense Minister Kim Tae-young meet on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.

June 8: North Korea's *Rodong Sinmun* vows to strengthen China-DPRK friendship.

June 10: China reiterates its call for "calm and restraint" in dealing with the *Cheonan* sinking.

June 25-26: The G8 issues the Muskoka Declaration condemning North Korea's attack on the *Cheonan*.

June 26: Presidents Barack Obama, Lee Myung-bak, and Hu Jintao hold bilateral talks on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Toronto.

June 29: The PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman reaffirms China's "fair and irreproachable" position on the *Cheonan* sinking.

July 6: The Chinese Foreign Ministry opposes the holding of U.S.-ROK military exercises in the Yellow Sea.

July 8: The Chinese Foreign Ministry reiterates its warning on U.S.-ROK military exercises.

July 9: The UN Security Council issues a Presidential Statement condemning the *Cheonan* attack.

July 9: The White House and Secretary of State Clinton issue remarks on the UN Security Council Presidential Statement.

July 12: South Korean scholars release an independent report on "Inconsistencies in South Korea's *Cheonan* Report."

July 15: The Chinese Foreign Ministry reiterates its warning on U.S.-ROK military exercises.

July 16: General Luo Yuan, Deputy Secretary General of China's PLA Academy of Military Sciences, issues in *People's Daily* a five-point criticism of U.S.-ROK military exercises.

July 19-21: The U.S.-ROK Foreign and Defense Ministers meeting is held in Seoul.

July 21: The United States imposes new sanctions on North Korea.

July 23: The 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum is held in Hanoi.

July 24: Pyongyang declares "retaliatory sacred war" in response to planned U.S.-ROK military exercises.

July 25-28: U.S.-ROK joint military exercises are held in the East Sea/Sea of Japan.

August 5: The ROK military begins anti-submarine drills in the Yellow Sea.

August 25: Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter arrives in Pyongyang for the release of a detained U.S. citizen.

August 26-30: Kim Jong Il visits Northeast China and meets President Hu in Changchun.

September 7: Two Japanese naval vessels and a Chinese fishing boat collide in disputed waters near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.

September 14: Seoul releases the full report of the Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group.

September 28: The Workers' Party of Korea conference is held in Pyongyang, appointing Kim Jong Il's third son Kim Jong Un as Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

November 7: President Lee in an interview at the Blue House suggests that a North Korean apology for the *Cheonan* sinking is not a prerequisite for resumption of Six Party Talks.

November 11-12: Presidents Obama, Lee, and Hu hold bilateral talks on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Seoul.

November 12: U.S. scientist Siegfried Hecker tours North Korea's uranium enrichment facility during his visit to Pyongyang.

November 20-24: U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Policy Ambassador Stephen Bosworth leads an interagency delegation to South Korea, Japan, and China.

November 23: North Korea conducts an artillery attack on Yeonpyeong Island, killing two South Korean soldiers and two South Korean civilians.

November 23: South Korea, the United States, Britain, and Japan condemn the attack.

November 23: China and North Korea sign a trade and economic cooperation agreement in Pyongyang at the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the DPRK-China Intergovernmental Committee for Cooperation in Economy, Trade, Science and Technology.

November 25: ROK Minister of Defense Kim Tae-young resigns.

November 26: China cancels a trip to South Korea by Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi in apparent protest against the USS George Washington presence in the Yellow Sea.

November 28: The Chinese Foreign Ministry calls for "emergency consultations" among Six Party members.

November 28-December 1: The United States and South Korea hold joint naval exercises in the Yellow Sea.

November 29: PRC State Councilor Dai Bingguo visits Seoul.