



Written by on May 25, 2010

Crisis in Korea Continues

The crisis that began with the March 26 sinking of the South Korean warship *Cheonan* by a North Korean submarine continued on May 25, as KCNA, North Korea's official news agency, announced that "All communication links between the north and the south will be cut off."

The North's decision follows an announcement by Seoul on May 23 that it was ending trade relations with the North in response to the sinking of the *Cheonan*. Pyongyang denies it torpedoed the South Korean ship, killing 46 sailors.



Jonathan Marcus, a diplomatic correspondent for BBC observed on May 25: "Within a matter of days, relations between the two Koreas have returned to the freezer.... The diplomatic goal now will be to ensure that a renewed cold war on the Korean peninsula does not generate into a hot conflict."

The Russian state-owned RIA Novosti news agency reported on May 25 that Russian President Dmitry Medvedev spoke with President Lee Myung-bak by telephone about the heightened tensions between Seoul and Pyongyang. The report said Medvedev urged Lee to show restraint and not allow the situation on the Korean peninsula to escalate, and noted:

Both leaders have expressed regret that a number of important inter-Korean projects in the trade and economic spheres, which were drawn up with Russian help several years ago, have not been implemented, and that the general situation has deteriorated to the level of confrontation.

A May 24 *Washington Post* report noted that South Korea had announced the previous day that it would seek action against the North at the UN Security Council. The report quoted a senior U.S. official, traveling with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in China, who said the United States will back "all the steps the South Koreans are going to announce [on May 25]."

AP reported that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he expects the Security Council to take action against North Korea, calling the evidence that the North was responsible for the sinking of the *Cheonan* "overwhelming and deeply troubling."

According to a White House statement, the United States and South Korea are planning two major naval exercises off the Korean Peninsula in a display of strength intended "to deter future aggression" by North Korea.

A state of war technically exists between the two Koreas (and their allies) since the Korean conflict of 1950-1953 ended in a ceasefire, but not a peace treaty. As Professor Charles Armstrong, director of the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University, commented in a May 24 CNN opinion piece entitled "[The Korean War never ended](#)":

The Korean War began 60 years ago on June 25, 1950, and it still hasn't ended. Fighting on the Korean Peninsula may have stopped with a cease-fire in July 1953, but North and South Korea have remained in a tense state of armed truce ever since, with open warfare just a hair-trigger



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away.

In his article, Armstrong argued that “there is a real danger of this war of words escalating into a shooting war. With well over a million Korean troops facing each other across the Demilitarized Zone separating North and South, along with 29,000 U.S. troops in the South, and North Korea now armed with nuclear weapons, the consequences of a renewed Korean War would be catastrophic for the Korean peninsula and the entire Northeast Asia region.”

Armstrong expressed his concern that the strong joint postures the United States is currently taking, standing side-by-side with South Korea and Japan, may be misinterpreted by North Korea as acts of aggression and trigger a resumption of fighting in Korea.

Instead of expending so much political capital on the *Cheonan* incident, he suggests, the “international community” should take advantage of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il’s expressed willingness to return to multilateral negotiations aimed at eliminating Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons program, suspended since 2008, as a way of reducing tensions on the Korean peninsula.

While Armstrong’s warning about not stirring up a hornets’ nest on the Korean peninsula has some merit, his reference to the “international community” reveals a continuation of the mindset that dragged the United States into war in Korea 60 years ago, and threatens to do so again.

A strong foreign policy is important in deterring tyrannical regimes such as North Korea. Unfortunately, the United States showed only weakness when it allowed the Pyongyang regime to capture the *U.S.S. Pueblo* and its crew in 1968. Our nation reacted weakly once more in 1983 when a Soviet fighter jet shot down a South Korean commercial airliner off the coast of Siberia, with a sitting member of the U.S. Congress, Larry McDonald, aboard. Aside from some strongly worded language by then-President Reagan, the United States did nothing.

In incidents such as these, when U.S. interests have been threatened, it is highly appropriate to react with strength.

But when the target of aggression is foreign, in areas where the Constitution grants our government no mandate to act, it is the height of folly to become party to an “international community” (read that: UN) that has proved to be better at instigating wars than in preventing them.

It is the responsibility of Asian nations to maintain peace in Asia. The challenge of securing our own borders in North America is more than enough to occupy the United States.

For further reading on the crisis in the Korean peninsula, see:

[Tensions Rise Between Two Koreas](#)

[N. Korea Threatens War Over S. Korean Charges](#)

Photo: Officers from the UN Command inspect a broken section of a presumed North Korean torpedo at South Korea’s Defense Ministry building: AP Images



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