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Korea Condemns U.S. Naval Exercises With South

AFP news reported on July 22 that a spokesman for the North Korean delegation at the ASEAN security talks in Hanoi has condemned the U.S.-South Korea naval exercises planned for July 25 as a threat to global peace. The USS George Washington aircraft carrier arrived in the South Korean port of Busan on July 21 to take part in the exercises.



"Such movements pose a great threat not only to the peace and security of the Korean peninsula but also to global peace and security," the spokesman, Ri Tong Il, told reporters.

"If the U.S. is truly interested in the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula it must take the lead in creating an atmosphere (for dialogue) rather than ... staging military exercises or imposing sanctions."

Ri was in Hanoi for the 43rd ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) AMM/PMC/ARF meetings. ASEAN's members are Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

According to a White House statement, the joint U.S. and South Korea naval exercises off the Korean Peninsula are intended as a display of strength intended "to deter future aggression" by North Korea. The South Korean ship, *ROKS Cheonan*, was sunk on March 26 by a torpedo determined to be of North Korean origin.

Voice of America reported that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and South Korea's Foreign Minister are also attending the ASEAN meetings in Hanoi, and that discussion of North Korea and its pursuit of nuclear weapons is expected to be high on the event's agenda.

North Korea has come under pressure from the West in recent years for pursuing nuclear weapons and missile technology. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on March 31, 2009, in response to North Korea's launch of its Taepodong-2 long-range missile: "Their missile launch violates UN Security Council Resolution 1718 and there will be consequences, certainly (at) the UN Security Council if they proceed with the launch."

On April 5, 2009, President Obama called the launch "provocative" and a "clear violation" of the Security Council resolution.

Security Council Resolution 1718 was adopted in October 2006 after North Korea's atomic weapons test and demands that the country "not conduct any further nuclear test or launch of a ballistic missile."

With U.S.-North Korean relations already strained because of Pyongyang's missile and nuclear weapons



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policies, the sinking of the *Cheonan* only served to exacerbate matters. Secretary of State Clinton said at a news conference in Seoul, South Korea, on July 21 that the United States will impose new sanctions on North Korea, stating: "We continue to send a message to the North: There is another way. There is a way that can benefit the people of the North. But until they change direction, the United States stands firmly on behalf of the people and government of the Republic of [South] Korea, where we provide a stalwart defense along with our allies and partners."

During that same news conference, when a reporter asked Secretary of Defense Robert Gates if North Korean leader Kim Jong Il might endorse radical actions in order to strengthen his youngest son, Kim Jong Un's, path to his succession, Gates responded: "There has been some indication over the last number of months that as a succession process gets underway in the North that there might be provocations, particularly since the sinking of the *Cheonan*."

AFP cited State Department officials who said that Clinton would ask the Chinese government to do more to pressure North Korea, considered its ally, during bilateral talks with China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, who will also attend the ASEAN meeting in Hanoi.

State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said Clinton would ask Yang to consider additional steps to pressure the Pyongyang regime to stop what Clinton called its "destabilizing, illicit and provocative policies."

The Korean peninsula has been one of the world's most tense areas since fighting of the Korean conflict ceased in 1953 with a truce that did not officially end the state of war. The United States maintains a force of almost 20,000 Army personnel, 8,800 Air Force, and several hundred Navy and Marine forces in South Korea.

Photo: U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton attends the US-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam on July 22, 2010. : aP Images



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