



Written by on May 24, 2010

Tensions Rise Between Two Koreas

As tensions increase as a result of the March 26 sinking of the South Korean warship Cheonan, presumably by a North Korean submarine, a White House press statement issued on May 24 said: "President Obama fully supports [South Korean] President Lee in his handling of the ROKS Cheonan incident and the objective investigation that followed."



The statement continued:

Specifically, we endorse President Lee's demand that North Korea immediately apologize and punish those responsible for the attack, and, most importantly, stop its belligerent and threatening behavior. *U.S. support for South Korea's defense is unequivocal, and the President has directed his military commanders to coordinate closely with their Republic of Korea counterparts to ensure readiness and to deter future aggression. We will build on an already strong foundation of excellent cooperation between our militaries and explore further enhancements to our joint posture on the Peninsula as part of our ongoing dialogue.* [Emphasis added.]

Shortly after the White House issued this statement in support of Seoul, Secretary of State Hillary told reporters in Beijing that all of North Korea's neighbors, including its principal ally China, understand the seriousness of the matter and want to "contain" it. "We are working hard to avoid an escalation of belligerence and provocation," Clinton said. "This is a highly precarious situation that the North Koreans have caused in the region."

AP reported that Clinton would not discuss the details of what the United States might do but stated that President Barack Obama had ordered U.S. military commanders to "to ensure readiness and to deter future aggression" from North Korea. The report noted that the United States has 28,500 troops in South Korea.

"I solemnly urge the authorities of North Korea ... to apologize immediately to the Republic of [South] Korea and the international community," Reuters news quoted South Korean President Lee Myung-bak's statement in a nationally televised address.



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Lee said he would take the issue to the UN Security Council, whose past sanctions have already taken a severe toll on North Korea's economy.

South Korea has banned all trade, investment, and visits with North Korea and stopped the North's use of a more economical commercial shipping route through South Korean waters.

The *Washington Post* quoted a senior U.S. official, traveling with Secretary of State Clinton in China on May 23, as saying that the United States will back "all the steps the South Koreans are going to announce tomorrow." Underscoring the seriousness with which the Obama administration views the escalating tensions between the North and the South, he added: "We have not faced something like this in decades."

The *Post* also quoted Michael Green, a national security official during George W. Bush's administration, who analyzed the Chinese position in the crisis, which is critical to any hope of implementing UN sanction against North Korea. As a permanent Security Council member, China holds veto power over any UN punitive actions. "The Chinese are very negative about the prospect of a democratic, united Korea on their border," Green said. "They want to keep North Korea alive."

"This incident is going to drive the United States, South Korea and Japan closer together," he said. "China won't be happy."

Today's conflict between the two Koreas is a delayed repercussion to the unresolved manner in which fighting on the Korean peninsula ended with a ceasefire that was signed on July 27 1953. And the Korean conflict, itself, can be attributed to the manner in which the Asian theater of World War II was settled. At the Potsdam Conference (held from July-August 1945), the United States, the Soviet Union, and Britain unilaterally decided to divide Korea — without consulting the Koreans, which was in contradiction of the Cairo Conference.

Under the agreement, the United States occupied the southern half of the peninsula, the Soviets, the northern. In 1948, the South established a free government headed by Syngman Rhee, and the Soviets established a communist dictatorship in the North under Kim Il-sung.

It was a situation ripe for turmoil, and on June 25, 1950 the North Korean Peoples Army invaded the South. (Communist China committed over 900,000 troops in support of the North, over the course of the war, which it called "the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea." The Soviet Union sent a smaller amount to aid the communist side.)

When the UN Security Council voted to authorize military action against the communist North, the Soviet Union — which publicly opposed the intervention — was expected to block this UN action with its veto power as a permanent member of Security Council. But the Soviet delegate failed to cast the veto; instead, he expressed indignation over some point, walked out of the Security Council, and remained away long enough for the Council to commit the UN to military action in Korea.

Once U.S. troops were sent to Korea as the backbone of the UN force, the Soviet delegate to the Security Council conveniently forgot his anger and returned to his position, where he was a party to the running of the war against himself and his communist allies. Furthermore, all orders and plans for our troops in Korea went through the Undersecretary for Political and Security Council Affairs, the Soviet Konstantin Zinchenko. Zinchenko was notorious for his verbal attacks on United States and on General Douglas MacArthur's handling of the war effort. Finally, in 1952, Zinchenko and his aide, Nikolai Skvortsov, fled the country as the FBI and U.S. Senate investigators zeroed in on a massive espionage network they directed at the UN.



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Combined with our government's no-win policy (including the removal of MacArthur as commander), the UN's management of the war in Korea guaranteed that communists would retain control of half the peninsula when the ceasefire was finally declared. The current crisis is just one of many that are a direct result of that duplicity and treason more than 55 years ago.

U.S. intervention around the world since our troops were first sent to Korea has rarely helped to depose tyrants or help secure the freedom of the hapless residents of the nations where we intervened. It has helped to perpetuate and prolong international conflicts, and at the cost of tens of thousands of killed and maimed U.S. military personnel.

It is no wonder that, while he was Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams once said: "America goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own."

Photo: South Korean President Lee Myung-bak delivers a speech at the War Memorial of Korea near a U.S. army base in Seoul on May 24, 2010: AP Images



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