

Features of North Korea's Military Exercises against South Korea since November 2009 and Our Response Course

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Two days have passed since the bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island on November 23rd, 2010. As we prepare for additional provocative acts, the time has come for us to devise a new response attitude based on an accurate means of predicting North Korea's future behavior. In relation to this, North Korea's past actions in declaring live fire exercise zones and firing its coastal artillery during the period between December 2009 and February 2010 reveal features of the regime's current posture which may be a key to unlocking their future actions and establishing an appropriate response policy.

1. Features of North Korea's Actions toward the South since November 2009

To understand the context of these events, we must go back a year. When the two Koreas conducted joint inspections of industrial complexes in China and Vietnam from December 12-22, 2009, the North Korean side expressed a keen desire to hold working-level talks to resolve pending issues concerning the Kaesong Industrial Complex, and on January 14th 2010 the South Korean Ministry of Unification received a communication from the North in the name of the Korean Asia Pacific Peace Committee proposing working-level contacts for the purpose of reopening the Mt. Kumgang Resort and

the Kaesong Industrial Complex. In regard to the Kaesong Industrial Complex, on January 22nd 2010 the North Korean delegation leader to the inter-Korean joint military talks proposed holding working-level military talks in order to resolve the pending issues of traffic, correspondence and customs as quickly as possible.

On the other hand, on November 11th 2009 the *Rodong Shinmun* printed an article accusing the South Korean government of taking a reluctant attitude toward improving inter-Korean relations, saying that if the South Korean authorities ignored opportunities for reconciliation and pursued a strategy of confrontation, they too would have to take a firm stance. In an attempt to pressure South Korean authorities, Radio Pyongyang on November 16th 2009 proclaimed that the continuation of (inter-Korean) dialogue and negotiation was dependent upon the South Korean side, and furthermore on November 18th they called on the ROK Ministry of Unification to immediately clear away their “anachronistic” policy of confrontation and take rapid steps for the improvement of inter-Korean relations. North Korea’s pressure tactics did not stop there. Immediately after the Daecheong Sea Battle, on November 13th 2009 the head of the North Korean delegation to the general-level talks communicated the North Korean military’s position, stating that merciless military measures would be taken to protect what they define as the military demarcation line in the West Sea. Then, in late January 2010, the North commenced firing exercises from its coastal artillery batteries.

In looking at North Korea’s announcements of live fire exercise zones and the firing of its coastal artillery guns from the time of the Daecheong Sea Battle of November 10th 2009 until February 2010, we can identify a pattern of “proposing talks? applying pressure through threats? armed provocation.” Further, the level of provocation is growing steadily more intense. To put it more concretely, on January 25th and February 3rd North Korea declared two sites in the West Sea near the NLL as live fire exercise zones, and on February 4th they made a similar declaration for five sites in the East and West Seas. On February 19th they additionally declared 6 sites in the East and West Seas off-limits due to live fire exercises. Thus we can see how the exercises expanded to cover a progressively wider area of sea territory. Against this backdrop, North Korea sank the South Korean naval vessel Cheonan on March 26th.

2. Differences between the January 2010 Coastal Artillery Firing and the November Attack on Yeonpyeong

There are several important differences between last January's coastal artillery firing exercises and the attack on Yeonpyeong in November. First, while the January exercises also raised tensions on the peninsula, at that time the North's coastal artillery fire did not cross into our territorial waters. Whereas this most recent attack on Yeonpyeong not only crossed into South Korean waters but also targeted South Korean land territory, greatly increasing the scope of the conflict.

The second significant point is that the Yeonpyeong attack made use of high-angle howitzer guns. Yeonpyeong is a mountainous region, so an attack by direct fire artillery guns would not be able to reach targets on the island. Because howitzers fly on a high trajectory they can avoid obstacles to hit their targets. The use of howitzers signifies that this attack was deliberately aimed at South Korean military and civilian targets on the island.

The third point is that this attack included civilian targets. From the standpoint of international law, the "principle of separation" forbids any attack on civilians or civilian property. Since the signing of the armistice on July 27th 1953 there have been three naval clashes in the West Sea as well as the Cheonan sinking, but this is the first instance of a provocation targeting South Korean civilians. Therefore North Korea's provocative act deserves severe criticism. Moreover, this act goes beyond the level of mere criticism as it violates multiple aspects of international law laid out in the UN Charter and the Armistice Agreement and represents a serious infringement of the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement. Therefore this attack calls for resolute action including stronger international cooperation in response.

3. The Intentions behind the Yeonpyeong Attack and Our Response

The North's intentions behind the attack on Yeonpyeong can be interpreted from a variety of angles, including securing the Kim Jong Eun succession, strengthening internal solidarity, amassing more achievements for Kim Jong Eun, changing the dynamic of inter-Korean and US-DPRK relations, attempting to demilitarize the NLL area in the West Sea, etc. Each of these arguments has some validity. An additional motive could be a desire to pressure South Korea in order to acquire economic aid. Recently North Korea has made several overtures for restarting South-North dialogue, including working-level military talks and efforts to reopen Mt. Kumgang

tourism. These overtures are all related to the issue of securing economic aid and cooperation from South Korea. Therefore it is also reasonable to posit that one of the motives behind the Yeonpyeong attack was the goal of restarting inter-Korean dialogue.

This theory is supported by the fact that just one day after the Yeonpyeong attack the website of North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland, "Uriminzokkiri," called for the reopening of the Mt. Kumgang tourism project. Further, North Korea denounced the South Korean decision to indefinitely postpone the Red Cross talks which had been scheduled for November 25th, saying this might lead to the collapse of inter-Korean relations; this also reveals how strongly the North desires inter-Korean dialogue. Therefore looking back at the North's actions from November 2009 to February 2010, we can anticipate that for the next interval North Korea will press the South Korean authorities to restart dialogue while simultaneously applying pressure through criticism, threats, and military exercises as part of a dual strategy, progressively raising the level of the provocations.

North Korea is currently taking a dual approach to its relations with South Korea: pursuing confrontation with us from the military/security standpoint while simultaneously playing the role of our partner in exchange, cooperation, and peaceful unification. Therefore it is necessary for us to respond firmly to North Korea's military provocations with a strong military/security policy, while at the same time continuing to seek peaceful unification through exchange and cooperation. If restarting inter-Korean dialogue is one of North Korea's aims in carrying out the Yeonpyeong attack, and if we fail to respond to their proposals for talks, then we can anticipate that the North will progressively up the pressure through more severe criticisms and threats. In that case, we must use our wits to figure out how to respond to the North's requests for dialogue whilst building a more robust security strategy, as well as how to achieve the peaceful unification which all of us so earnestly desire.