

Crisis in Korea:

America, China, and the Risk of War

TIMELINE

A selection of some of the key or more relevant recent events. Much is missing. For instance I have yet to come across a good source of information on military exercises.¹

1994

21 October: Signing of the Agreed Framework between the US and the DPRK. The DPRK agrees to mothball its reactors, mainly Yongbyon, and destroy them when US commitments fulfilled. US promise to construct two Light Water Reactors (LWR), provide interim heavy fuel oil, and move towards lifting of sanctions and normalisation of relations. Deliveries of oil cease late 2002, other commitments not fulfilled

1999

15 June: First battle of Yeonpyeong near Northern Limit Line. ROK estimates 17-30 Northern casualties, 9 Southern sailors slightly injured

2000

13-15 June: North-South summit meeting, Pyongyang. Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il meet several times, signing a Joint Declaration on Jun. 15.

21 August: ROK scales back 12-day exercise with U.S. troops.

2001

27 March: U.S.-ROK joint three-day military exercise named “Rapid Thunder” begins.

6 November: South Korea and the U.S. announce the postponement of their joint “Foal Eagle” military exercise until spring 2002.

2002

29 January: President Bush, in his State of the Union address, says North Korea is part of an “axis of evil” threatening the U.S.

- 29 June:** Second battle of Yeonpyeong. According to the ROK ‘Thirteen North Koreans were killed and twenty five wounded while four South Korean sailors died and nineteen were injured’
- 16 October:** State Department reveals that Assistant Secretary Kelly accused North Korea of building a clandestine uranium enrichment facility and claims that North Korea acknowledged this secret nuclear weapons program. North Korea denies both claims. This is the prelude to the abrogation of the Agreed Framework
- 14 November:** Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization announces suspension of heavy fuel oil deliveries pending “concrete and credible actions” by DPRK to dismantle uranium enrichment program. This is effectively the first step in the Bush administration’s withdrawal from the Agreed Framework
- 12 December:** North Korea announces plans to immediately reactivate Yongbyon reactor; calls on International Atomic Energy Agency to remove monitoring devices.
- 16 December:** North Korea declares that only a non-aggression pact with Washington can prevent “a catastrophic crisis of a war.”
- 19 December:** Roh Moo-hyun, the ruling Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) candidate, is elected president with 48.9 percent of the vote, defeating Lee Hoi-chang of the Grand National Party (GNP), who won 46.6 percent, and several other candidates.

2003

- 25 February:** Roh Moo-hyun is inaugurated as president of the Republic of Korea. Secretary of State Colin Powell leads U.S. delegation, says U.S. will resume food aid to North Korea.
- 11 March:** The U.S. announces it will send up to six radar-avoiding F-117A “stealth” warplanes to South Korea for “Foal Eagle” exercise.
- 22-27 March:** U.S. and South Korea hold joint military training exercises *SOI* and *Foal Eagle*
- 28 October:** North Korean ambassador to the UN protests that the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) naval exercise is a violation of the UN Charter.

2005

- Aug. 22, 2005:** U.S. and ROK forces begin command and control military exercise called *Ulchi Focus Lens*.
- 19 September:** The six parties issue a joint statement, based on a Chinese draft, in which North Korea pledges to dismantle its nuclear program and return to the NPT and the US agree to recognise DPRK sovereignty accept peaceful coexistence, and move towards normalisation of relations. All parties to take coordinated steps to implement the aforementioned consensus in a phased manner in line with the principle of "commitment for commitment, action for action." (see full text in this appendix)
- 26 June-28 July:** Eight nations including Japan and South Korea participate in the 20th *Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2006* exercises.

2006

- 5 July:** North Korea test launches six short- and medium-range missiles and one long-range missile.
- 21 August:** U.S. and South Korea start annual *Ulchi Focus Lens* military exercise; U.S.

9 October: North Korea announces that it has successfully completed an underground nuclear test.

2007

25-31 March: U.S. and ROK military hold 12th *Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration* and *Foal Eagle* exercises in South Korea.

20 August: U.S.-South Korea joint military exercise, *Ulchi Focus Lens*, begins.

8 October: South Korea resumes annual military training exercise *Hwarang*, which was delayed during the October South Korea/North Korea summit.

19 December: Lee Myung-bak of the conservative opposition Grand National Party (GNP) wins South Korea's presidential election, on a platform that includes a harder line towards North Korea. Lee polls 49 percent of all votes. Ex-unification minister, Chung Dong-young, standing for the pro-Sunshine United New Democratic Party (UNDP), takes only 26 percent. The hard-right Lee Hoi-chang receives 15 percent.

23 December: In the first reported Northern comment on the South's new president-elect, Senior Cabinet Councillor Kwon Ho Ung, the North's chief delegate to inter-Korean talks, says he hopes this will not change "the general trend of inter-Korean cooperation."

2008

20 February: A U.S. nuclear-powered submarine arrives in Busan to prepare for the *Key Resolve/Foal Eagle Exercise 2008* scheduled for early March.

25 February: Lee Myung-bak is formally inaugurated as the ROK's 17th-term president for a five-year term. DPRK media ignore this, but stress the need for great unity of the whole nation on the principle of independence.

1 March: 27,000 US troops, the *USS Nimitz* aircraft carrier, and a number of ROK soldiers begin the military exercises known as *Key Resolve* and *Foal Eagle*.

27 June: North Korea demolishes a cooling tower at its Yongbyon reactor.

4 November: Barack Obama wins US presidential election, promising change.

8-11 December: Six-Party Talks are held in Beijing, focusing on drafting an agreement on verification protocol. China circulates a draft protocol for verifying Yongbyon's nuclear information. However, talks conclude with no written agreement

Dec. 12, 2008: The DPRK threatens to slow disablement of its Yongbyon nuclear facility after the U.S. announces it will suspend fuel deliveries

2009

9-20 March: The annual U.S.-South Korea joint military exercise *Key Resolve/Foal Eagle* is held. According to the USFK, this year's drill involves 26,000 troops and a nuclear-powered carrier to test the ability to quickly deploy forces in case of a North Korean invasion (sic).

5 April: The DPRK claims a successful satellite launch, but the U.S. says the launch was not successful

13 April: UNSC issues a President's Statement unanimously condemning North Korea's launch of 5 April.

23 May: Former ROK President Roh Moo-hyun jumps to his death from a cliff near his rural home. He had been questioned by prosecutors on allegations of corruption; according to supporters this was harassment by Lee Myung-bak.

25 May: Kim Jong-il expresses his condolences to the late Roh Moo-hyun's family.

25 May: North Korea conducts an underground nuclear test near Kilju in the northeast.

- 26 July:** DPRK media criticize annual joint U.S.-ROK *Ulchi Freedom Guardian* military exercises as “a military plan aimed at invading the North.”
- 4 August:** Ex-U.S. President Bill Clinton visits Pyongyang. After talks and dinner with Kim Jong Il, he departs with two U.S. journalists, who had been arrested and sentenced for illicitly entering North Korea from China. Gesture produces no change in US policy.
- 17-27 August:** The U.S. and South Korea conduct *Ulchi Freedom Guardian*, an annual joint military exercise involving about 56,000 ROK troops and 10,000 U.S. troops.
- 24 August:** South Korea attempts to launch a satellite but is not successful. No condemnation from UNSC.
- 4-10 September:** Former President Jimmy Carter visits China to develop relations and ‘to ascertain opinions of South Korean and Chinese officials regarding North Korea ‘

2010

- 18 January:** An ROK intelligence source says the KPA joint exercise observed by Kim Jong-il involved some 10 jet fighters, warships, and 240 mm multiple-launch missile systems. It was held in a western coastal area near Pyongyang.
- 8 March 2010:** The launch of annual US-ROK military exercise *Key Resolve and Foal Eagle* brings protests from Pyongyang.
- 11 March:** US commanding general in Korea Gen. Sharp says that US troops who would be tasked with eliminating the DPRK’s weapons of mass destruction in the event of armed conflict are participating in the current *Key Resolve-Foal Eagle* US-ROK military exercise.
- 26 March:** ROK navy corvette Cheonan sinks off Baengnyeong Island near the NLL
- 3-7 May:** Kim Jong Il visits China, has talks with President Hu Jintao in Beijing. Seoul annoyed at warm Chinese reception
- 20 May:** JIG interim report released
- 4 June:** DPRK warns that exercises off Yeonpyeong and other islets near the NLL will bring ‘merciless retaliation’
- 9 July:** UNSC condemns ‘attack’ on Cheonan, but does not identify attacker. It notes that the DPRK ‘has stated that it had nothing to do with the incident.’
- 21 July:** China condemns planned US-ROK exercises, saying that it “firmly oppose(s) foreign warships and military aircraft entering the Yellow Sea and other coastal waters of China to engage in activities affecting China’s security and interests”.
- 25 July:** US -ROK naval exercises
- 27/8 July:** Seoul newspaper Hankyoreh publishes leaked document "Data from the Russian Naval Expert Group's Investigation into the Cause of the South Korean Naval Vessel Cheonan's Sinking". This contradicts South Korea’s JIG report and suggests torpedo evidence was fabricated.
- 3 August:** DPRK warns that ‘Command of Forces of the Korean People's Army in the western sector of the front made a decisive resolution to counter the reckless naval firing projected’ from Yeonpyeong Island
- 5 August:** Following joint US-ROK exercises in the East Sea, South Korea holds its own five-day naval manoeuvres in the West (Yellow) sea.
- 9 August:** DPRK fires some 130 rounds of artillery into its territorial waters in the West (Yellow) Sea near its border with the South.
- 12 August:** North Korea launches a Twitter account. South Korea blocks access to it, and warns that South Korean netizens seeking to reply or .retweet. risk punishment.
- 24-27 August:** Former president Jimmy Carter goes to Pyongyang and secures release of US citizen Aijalon Gomes who had entered illegally. Does not meet Kim Jong Il who is visiting China. Gesture produces no change in US policy.

- 26-30 August:** Kim Jong Il visits China's Northeast. Chinese President Hu Jintao comes meets him in Jilin
- 9 September:** Commander of the U.S. Forces Korea Gen. Walter Sharp admits that South Korea and the U.S. conducted exercises aimed at "stabilizing" North Korea in the event of 'regime collapse'.
- 14 September:** Final Report of the JIG released *Joint Investigation Report: On the Attack Against ROK Ship Cheonan*. Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2010.
- 2 November:** North Korea releases first instalment of National Defence Commission report on the sinking of the *Cheonan*. Two further instalments were promised but have not appeared
- 22-30 November:** conducts *Hoguk* Exercise that was reported to involve 70,000 South Korean military troops, 50 warships, 90 helicopters and 500 planes. The 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) of U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Seventh Air Force was also scheduled participate in the exercise.
- 23 November:** ROK conducts live fire exercise into contested waters, DPRK retaliates as warned, killing four people (2 marines and 2 civilians) in military base on Yeonpyeong Island
- 19 December:** Governor of New Mexico Bill Richardson makes unofficial visit to DPRK, is credited with North Korea's not retaliating in response to ROK live fire drills.
- 22 December:** Former US ambassador Donald Gregg complains that 'what I see from the Obama administration, which apparently is not even interested in debriefing Mr. Richardson, the visit may have been for naught'

Kleine-Ahlbrandt, Stephanie. *China and Inter-Korean Clashes in the Yellow Sea*, Asia Report N°200. Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2011.

ⁱ There is a partial list for 2010 in Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt, *China and Inter-Korean Clashes in the Yellow Sea*, Asia Report N°200 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2011). This is reproduced in Chapter 7