

The Taiwan Calculus in China's Strategy Towards the North Korea – Iran Axis

by Dr. Christina Y. Lin

Introduction: Current Korean Peninsula Crisis

On 23 November 2010, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) attacked the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea), by firing an estimated 200 artillery shells onto Yeonpyeong island just seven miles off DPRK, killing two ROK marines and wounding at least 19 others.¹ This is the second attack within 8 months, on the heels of DPRK torpedoing and sinking the ROK corvette *Cheonan* on 26 March and killing 46 sailors. DPRK and ROK are technically still at war, having signed an armistice in 1953 but no treaty in the Korean War. It appears that DPRK is ratcheting up the beat of its war drums, since sinking a military vessel is an act of war by international law, followed by deliberate shelling of military installations on Yeonpyeong island.

ROK Congresswoman Song Yong-sun on the National Assembly's Defense Committee said, "They attacked gas station, helicopter pad and command and control sites and water tanks. Everything that is directly related to military operations, they have completely smashed." She observed, "... North Korea was picking and choosing its aiming point, they are very focused."² DPRK used thermo baric bombs that burn more violently and increase casualties and property destruction, said a Joint Chiefs of Staff official.³ Moreover, it appears DPRK emulates China in claiming and enforcing their maritime borders. Congresswoman Song added that in addition to internal succession politics, DPRK might be enforcing their own maritime borderline that differs from ROK's Northern Limit Line (NLL) (See Figure 1).⁴

¹ Seo Yoonjung and Keith B. Richburg, "2 civilians killed in North Korean artillery attack", *The Washington Post*, 24 November 2010.

² Daniel Trotter, "VIDEO: China appears to criticize U.S.-South Korean military exercise", *WTSP*, 27 November 2010.

³ Hung-Jin Kim and Kwang Tae Kim, "SKorea's defense chief resigns over NKorea attack", *Associated Press*, 25 November 2010.

⁴ In the 1953 Armistice, there was agreement on the DMZ but not maritime borders. UN unilaterally drew the NLL at 3 nautical miles off DPRK coast, placing 5 islands south of NLL under ROK/UN control. DPRK never recognized the border and suggested the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) at 12 nautical miles, which would give them access to Haiju deepwater port and important crab fishing grounds. There have been naval clashes in the disputed region in 1999, 2002, 2009 and 2010. The *Cheonan* was in disputed waters. Rodger Baker, "Dispatch: Importance of the Korea's Northern Limit Line", *Stratfor*, 24 November 2010.

Map 1: Disputed Maritime Border between Two Koreas



Source: Robert Mackey, "Line in the Sea Divides the Two Koreas," *New York Times*, 23 November 2010

Likewise, China is highly critical of ROK-U.S. military exercises and has been aggressively claiming its own maritime border/EEZ in the Yellow Sea and South China Sea. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hong said "We oppose any party to take any military acts in our exclusive economic zone without permission"⁵, and Major general Luo Yuan from the influential PLA's Military Science Academy (AMS) said the military exercise is like "pouring oil onto flames."⁶

Admiral Mullen recently told CNN Fareed Zakaria, "It's hard to know why China doesn't push harder."⁷ Lawmakers are equally pushing for China to pressure DPRK, and indeed westerners are perplexed at China's behavior if it is a responsible stakeholder. However, the Chinese themselves declare they do not want to do what is only of interests to the U.S.—perceived as China's peer competitor. They want to do what is in China's core interests. "There is zero chance of China, either in open or in private, putting major substantive pressure on North Korea", said Shi Yinhong, professor of international relations at Beijing's Renmin University."⁸ Professor Shen Dingli, China's foremost expert on Sino-U.S. relations from Fudan University, linked Taiwan with DPRK. Earlier this year, Washington pushed through a \$6 billion-plus arms-sale package to Taiwan. "... I think if the U.S. sells weapons to Taiwan, then it can't expect China to act for Washington's interests on the North Korean issue. Everything is connected."⁹ Indeed Shen in a 2006 *China Security* article outlined the linkage between DPRK and a Taiwan scenario.

DPRK in China's Strategic Calculus: The Taiwan Scenario and Potential U.S. Naval Intervention in the Region

Taiwan is Core of Hub-and-Spokes Foreign Policy Model

Taiwan is an existential issue for China. Its core national interests are economic development for regime survival and national reunification.¹⁰ While it is globally fashionable to view

⁵ "China opposes any military action in its EEZ without permission", *Xinhua*, 26 November 2010.

⁶ Wu Jiao, Qin Jize and Cheng Guangjin, "China urges not to 'pour oil on flames'", *China Daily*, 2 December 2010.

⁷ Hwang Doo-hyong, "Adm Mullen urges China to pressure N Korea to refrain from provocations", *Yonhap News Agency*, 27 November 2010.

⁸ "China keeps pressure off North Korea", *Japan Today*, 26 November 2010.

⁹ Hannah Beech, "What Will China's Next Move on North Korea Be?", *Time*, 24 November 2010.

¹⁰ "Anti-Secession Law, Article 1," Adopted at the Third Session of the 10th Chinese National People's Congress on 14 March 2005. <http://www.chinataiwan.org/web/webportal/W5266634/A71202.html>.

today's China through an economic lens, it is geopolitics, not economics that drives Beijing support for DPRK and stranglehold on Taiwan. In a 2006 *China Security* article, Professor Shen Dingli of Fudan University stated that although U.S. and China cooperate in economic relations, there is rivalry in security relations due to U.S. support of Taiwan's defense through the Taiwan Relations Act. As such, he argued that DPRK is China's strategic buffer zone by allowing redeployment of military assets from northeast China to southeast China for a Taiwan scenario.¹¹ He conceded the Six Party Talks allowed DPRK to go nuclear, and argued that a nuclear DPRK is a strategic asset in that it raises the cost of U.S. military intervention on the Korean Peninsula or Taiwan Straits, thereby serving as an effective deterrent for military conflicts.¹² Singapore's former Prime Minister and current Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, who also told U.S. deputy secretary of state James Steinberg last May that China would prefer a nuclear-armed DPRK than a DPRK that has collapsed, corroborates this view.¹³ Indeed, with the recent revelation of DPRK's HEU program in addition to its plutonium stockpile, DPRK is realizing its stated goal of becoming an "Israel of East Asia".¹⁴

Shen further argues that if nuclear DPRK becomes an Asian Libya one day and denuclearize in exchange for peace treaty with the U.S., this would be a disastrous outcome for China. He assessed that losing DPRK as a buffer zone could lead to Japan, ROK, DPRK and Taiwan aligning with the U.S., which would put more pressure on China regarding Taiwan independence.¹⁵ While placing caveats on the 1961 Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty, in that not all attacks launched by DPRK on ROK or U.S. would qualify evoking Article II of the mutual military assistance clause, Shen is very clear on China's redline: should DPRK come under a pre-emptive military strike over its nuclear weapons program, China would be obligated to assist its partner.¹⁶

U.S. military intervention in Taiwan is another red line for China to use force and even nuclear weapons. Major General Zhu Chenghu, Dean of Defense Affairs Institute in China's National Defense University who criticized Defense Secretary Gates on Taiwan arms sales during the 2010 *Shangri La Dialogue*, had declared in 2005 that China would use nuclear weapons on the U.S. if attacked by Washington in a Taiwan scenario. "If the Americans draw their missiles and position-guided ammunition on to the target zone on China's territory, I think we will have to respond with nuclear weapons."¹⁷ Ambassador Chas Freeman, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense, said in 1996 that a PLA official (now believed to be Xiong Guangkai, PLA's deputy chief of general staff/head of military intelligence until recently) had told him China could respond with a nuclear strike in the event of a conflict with Taiwan.¹⁸

Given this, China is likely to continue supporting DPRK, known in diplomatic circles as "China's hidden dagger."

¹¹ Shen Dingli, "North Korea's Strategic Significance to China", *China Security*, Autumn 2006, p. 20.

¹² *Ibid*, pp.20f.

¹³ "Singapore's Lee calls N. Koreans 'psychopathic'—WikiLeaks", *Agence France-Press*, 30 November 2010.

¹⁴ DPRK had reportedly communicated to the U.S. on one occasion that it aspired to be the "Israel of East Asia". Crisis Group interviews, Washington DC, May 2009; Beijing, August-October 2009. International Crisis Group, *Shades of Red: China's Debate over North Korea*, Asia Report No. 179, 2 November 2009, p.10.

¹⁵ Shen Dingli, 'North Korea's Strategic Significance to China'.p.22.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 27.

¹⁷ *Financial Times* and the *Asian Wall Street Journal* reported Zhu's comments during a briefing organized by a private Hong Kong organization, the Better Hong Kong Foundation; China Threatens to Nuke the U.S.", *Agence France Press*, 15 July 2005; Alexandra Harney Demetri Sevastopulos, Edward Alden, "Top Chinese general warns US over attack", *Financial Times*, 14 July 2005.

¹⁸ *Financial Times*, 15 July 2005.

DPRK is China's 'hidden dagger'

The phrase “hidden dagger” is taken from ancient Chinese military text called “36 strategems” on covert use of another country to annihilate your enemy.¹⁹ Indeed “Korea has always been a dagger into Russia, and an invasion and penetration route between Japan and China... This is why China has always had this important interest in the peninsula,” said Kim Byung-ki, a security expert at Korea University²⁰

History seems to confirm this. Mongol rulers of China unleashed two 13th century assaults on Japan from Korea, while Japan launched the 16th century invasion of Ming China via Korea. Moreover, the first Sino-Japanese War from 1894-1895 was largely fought in Korea. In the 20th century, Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 was over control of the Peninsula, followed by Japan using Korea as a springboard to seize Manchuria in 1931 and onto China proper in 1937. Finally, the Korean War brought U.S. troops close to the Chinese border in 1950.²¹

Despite recent press reports based on a single ROK source in Wikileaks alleging that China has changed its stance on DPRK and is amenable to a unified Korea under Seoul, seasoned Asia experts disagree. Kim Won-ho, dean of Graduate School of International Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, said, “China does not want to lose North Korea as a buffer zone vis-à-vis a pro-U.S. country—South Korea... Any kind of conflict around China would be a threat to their political stability... and in the long term, they will never want to have a border with any pro-U.S. country”. Congresswoman Song Sun-Young from the National Assembly’s Defense Committee also echoed “The last thing China wants to see is U.S. style democracy in North Korea.”²² Bob Broadfoot, head of Hong Kong’s Political and Economic Risk Consultancy, added “I can see scenarios where the regime is toppled, but I think that any succession in North Korea would involve people China has a relationship with. I don’t see insider groups emerging in North Korea who are enemies of China and friends of the United States.”²³

All this is transpiring against the backdrop of celebration and flurries of high level visits between Beijing and Pyongyang to underscore the importance of Sino-DPRK bilateral relations in the Korean War. DPRK saber rattling occurred in midst of a large Chinese delegation visiting Pyongyang to celebrate 60 years of Workers Party of Korea (WPK) and entry of Chinese People’s Volunteers (CPV) into the Korean War in 1950, including on 23 November when DPRK attacked ROK. China and DPRK signed various trade and economic agreements on 23 November in Pyongyang, while the day after the attack on 24 November, DPRK held a celebration to commemorate Mao’s son Mao Anying’s role in the Korean War (See Table 1).

¹⁹ Alan Caruba, “North Korea, China’s Hidden Dagger”, *Canada Free Press*, 24 November 2010; Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (National Defense University Press, 2000); *Biography of Wang Jingze, Book of Qi*, <http://www.hoolulu.com/zh/25shi/07nanqishu/t-026.htm>.

²⁰ Andrew Salmon, “China’s support of North Korea grounded in centuries of conflict,” *CNN*, 26 November 2010.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

Table 1: Sino-DPRK High Level Exchanges in October-November 2010

Date	Meetings
12 October 2010, Pyongyang	Kim Jong Il received Zhou Yongkang, member of Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China in Pyongyang to re-iterate China-DPRK friendship and celebrate 65 years of Worker's Party of Korea (WPK) (Chinese Government website, 12 Oct)
14 October 2010, Beijing	Chinese Defense Minister Liang Guanglie met Pyon In Son, vice minister of DPRK's People's Armed Forces in Beijing (People's Daily, 15 Oct)
23 October 2010, Pyongyang	General Guo Boxiong, vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission (CMC) met with Kim Yong-nam, president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of DPRK, to celebrate 60 th anniversary of Chinese People's Volunteers (CPV) into the Korean War front in Pyongyang (East Day, 24 Oct)
2 November 2010, Beijing	KCNA reported DPRK delegation left to visit China.
3 November 2010, Changcun, Jilin Province	Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Dejiang received DPRK Premier Choe yong Rim in Changcun, China (Xinhua, 4 Nov)
23 November 2010, Pyongyang (Day DPRK attacked ROK)	China, DPRK sign cooperation agreement on economy, trade, science and technology at People's Palace of Culture in Pyongyang. Chinese delegation arrived on 22 Nov. DPRK Deputy Foreign Trade Minister Ku Pon Thae and Chinese Deputy Commerce Minister Wang Hemim led the meeting. DPRK Vice Premier Kang Sok Ju met with the Chinese delegation at the Mansudae Assembly Hall on the same day. (People's Daily, 23 Nov)
24 November 2010, Pyongyang	Kim Yong Nam, president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of DPRK met with Chen Zhu, China's health minister and public health delegation in Mansudae Assembly Hall. (Xinhua, 24 Nov)
24 November 2010, Pyongyang	High profile ceremony in Pyongyang to commemorate/donation of Chinese TV drama series on Mao's son Mao Anying (1922-1950), who died in the Korean War. Kang Nung Su, DPRK vice premier attended ceremony and will deliver DVD copies to Kim Jong Il. Chinese delegation arrived on 22 Nov, to emphasize Sino-DPRK partnership, especially as comrades in the Korean War. (People's Daily, 24 Nov)

Source: Table compiled by author using Chinese and DPRK press sources from October to November 2010.

Similar to DPRK, Iran is China's "hidden dagger" in the Middle East.

Iran in China's Strategic Calculus: The Taiwan Scenario and Potential U.S. Naval Embargo on Energy Supplies

Due to fear of U.S. naval embargo on China's energy supplies in the event of a Taiwan Scenario, China's Persian Gulf strategy is to keep open the Gulf by aligning with Iran. In a 2000 *Strategy and Management Journal* article, author Tang Shiping argued that China should align with Iran to counter-balance U.S. hegemony in the Gulf via its Arab proxies such as Saudi Arabia and smaller Gulf states.²⁴ Since U.S. and its allies control the west bank of the Gulf, China aligns with Iran to control the east bank and prevent complete closure via a naval blockade. In the short term, it is embarking on frenzied constructions of overland pipelines, rails, and highways to bypass US Navy-patrolled SLOCs, while in the longer term it is steadily building its naval capabilities.²⁵

Iran-Taiwan Arms Linkage

Moreover, China engages in military cooperation with Iran to counter the U.S. Wu Bingbing, Professor of Arabic Studies from Peking University, said Taiwan is a very sensitive and emotional issue for China, and the Taiwan Relations Act also plays into its Gulf strategy. Because U.S. sells weapons to Taiwan, China counterattacks U.S. position by having nuclear cooperation with Iran. He stated, "China did not initiate this"—and China did not use Sino-Gulf relations to contain U.S.²⁶

Indeed, in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq War, China regularly supplied arms and Silk Worm anti-ship missiles to Iran. In September 1992, when President Bush announced the sale of 150 F-16 fighters to Taiwan, China protested that violated the 1982 Shanghai Communiqué on U.S.-PRC arms sales. Shortly after the announcement of the F-16 sales, reports began emerging that China was transferring thirty complete M-11 missiles to Pakistan that violated the MTCR.²⁷ China also transferred missile components and production technologies to Iran.²⁸

Moreover, China played the Iran nuclear card against the U.S. On 10 September 2010, 8 days after Bush's F-16 announcement, Iran and China publicly signed an agreement on nuclear cooperation and sale of several nuclear reactors. China views that what one terms 'proliferation' is termed 'arms sale' by another, and over the years it continued to evoke the Iran-Taiwan linkage, much like the DPRK-Taiwan linkage. Given China's stance, and as stated earlier by the Chinese scholar Shen that "... I think if the U.S. sells weapons to Taiwan, then it can't expect China to act for Washington's interests on the North Korean issue. Everything is connected," it seems unlikely China will be cooperative in the P5+1 meetings on Iran's nuclear program. Additionally, recent evidence has emerged that China allows DPRK to proliferate WMD to Iran via its territory, as well as Chinese companies supplying chemical weapons precursors to Iran.²⁹

²⁴ Christina Y. Lin, "China's Persian Gulf Strategy: Israel and a Nuclearizing Iran 2009", *China Brief*, Vol.9, Issue 21, 22 October 2009; Tang Shiping, "Lixiang anquan huanjing yu xin shiji zhongguo da zhuanlue" [ideal security environment and China's grand strategy in the new century]; zhanlue yu guanli (Strategy and Management), no. 6 (2000), 45-46.

²⁵ Andrew S. Erickson, "[Pipe Dream—China Seeks Land and Sea Energy Security](#)," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, China Watch, Vol. 21, No. 8 (August 2009), pp. 54-55.

²⁶ Wu Bingbing, "China and the Persian Gulf", conference at Woodrow Wilson Center, 12 July 2010.

²⁷ "The Secret Missile Deal," *Time*, 30 Jun 1997, 29; Bill Gertz, "U.S., China Clash over Missile Deal," *Washington Times*, 4 October 1994, A8; Barbara Starr, "U.S. Links Chinese Ties to Missile Exports," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 22, no. 15 (October 15, 1994): 5.

²⁸ "Chinese Ire at U.S. Could Prompt More Arms Sales to Iran," *Defense News*, September 14-20, 1992, 19; "Boucher Supports China's Commitment Not to Aid Others' Nuclear Programs", 22 November 2000, <http://usembassy.state.gov/posts/pk1/www00112203.html>.

²⁹ "US embassy cables: China urged to stop shipment of missile parts for Iran," *Guardian*, 28 November 2010; Simon Tisdall, "China pressed over Iran and North Korea's nuclear trade", *Guardian*, 28 November 2010; Thomas Reed (former US Air Force

Conclusion: Implications for U.S. and Allies in Asia Pacific and the Middle East

With China's current unhelpful stance regarding DPRK and Iran, what are the next courses of action for U.S. and her allies?

Given that DPRK and ROK are technically still at war, the key additional stakeholders are their treaty allies—China in the 1961 Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty, and U.S. in the 1954 U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty. In face of growing international perception of U.S. retrenchment, it is important, during times of testing, to demonstrate U.S. commitment and credibility of its security umbrella to allies.

Demonstrate Credibility of U.S. Security Umbrella to Allies

Gunboat Diplomacy in 1996 Taiwan Straits Crisis In 1996, U.S. conducted effective gunboat diplomacy during the Taiwan Strait Crisis, resulting in a successful de-escalation of tensions into a ceasefire.

In the case of the Taiwan Strait Crisis, China fired missiles in waters surrounding Taiwan from 21 July 1995 to 23 March 1996. In reaction to U.S. allowing then Taiwan's President Lee to attend a June reunion at his alma mater Cornell University, from 21-26 July 1995 China conducted its 1st set of missile tests in areas 60km north of Taiwan-held Penjia Islet and mobilized forces in Fujian. This is followed by a 2nd set of missile firings from 15-25 August and amphibious assault exercises in November that year. In the run up to the 1996 election, China conducted a 3rd set of missile tests from 8-15 March (just preceding the 23 March election) that landed **inside** Taiwan's territorial waters, only 25-35 miles off the ports of Keelung and Kaohsiung. Over 70% commercial shipping passed through both ports, and these shellings greatly disrupted Taiwan's commerce. Moreover, flights to Japan and trans-Pacific flights were diverted or prolonged, ships traveling between Kaohsiung and Hong Kong took two hours detours.³⁰

As a result, U.S. responded in March 1996 by staging the biggest display of American might in Asia since the Vietnam War. President Clinton ordered ships, including aircraft carriers *USS Independence* and *USS Nimitz* to the Taiwan Straits, sending a strong signal that U.S. is willing and ready to defend Taiwan and uphold the Taiwan Relations Act in face of PLA military aggression. On 8 March 1996, Clinton announced the deployment *Independence* carrier battle group (CVBG), already stationed in the western Pacific to international waters near Taiwan. China responded the following day by announcing live fire exercises to be conducted near Penghu from 12-20 March. Seeing that China did not stand down, on 11 March U.S. deployed *Nimitz CVBG*, which steamed at high speed from the Persian Gulf and arrived within days. On 15 March 1996, tensions erupted further when China announced a simulated amphibious assault planned for 18-25 March. Chinese Premier Li Peng issued a stern warning to Washington not to make a show of force by sending the U.S. Navy through the Taiwan Straits. In response, Defense Secretary William Perry said that while the Chinese "are a great military power, the premier—the strongest-military power in the Western Pacific is the United States." The U.S. Navy kept away from the Strait, and subsequently after the 23 March presidential election, tensions subsided and there was a ceasefire.³¹

Secretary) and Danny B. Stillman (former director of technical intelligence division at Los Alamos National Lab), *The Nuclear Express: A Political History of the Bomb and Its Proliferation* (Zenith Press, 2009). China also facilitates DPRK proliferation to Syria, Pakistan, Egypt, Libya and Yemen.

³⁰ "Taiwan Strait 21 July 1995 to 23 March 1996", *Global Security*, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/taiwan_strait.htm, accessed 27 November 2010; Robert Ross, "The 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation: Coercion, Credibility, and Use of Force", *International Security*, 25:2, pp.87-12, Fall 2000; James R Lilley, Chuck Downs eds, *Crisis in the Taiwan Strait* (National Defense University, September 1997).

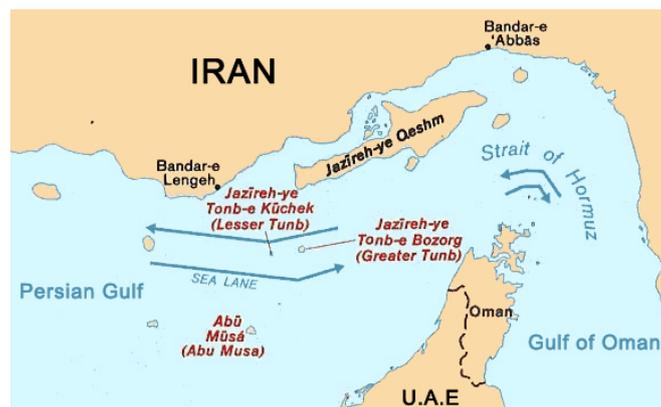
³¹ *Ibid.*

Fourteen years later in 2010, there is another East Asian crisis—this time on the Korean Peninsula. China is once again issuing stern warnings to the U.S. not to make a show of force by sending U.S. Navy to the Yellow Sea, and another Clinton—Secretary Clinton—is again convening key decision makers from the U.S. and allied countries on a response to the crisis.

Israel and Gulf Allies Watching

In light of DPRK’s menace in East Asia, Israel and Gulf allies are watching U.S. reaction to an ally under attack, as they face their own Iran menace in West Asia. Emile El-Hokayem, political editor of *The National* (UAE) and senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), stated at a July 2010 Wilson Center conference that Gulf states have their own Taiwan issue. UAE has disputes over three islands with Iran (see Map 2), and Hokayem said Gulf States look at Taiwan as a litmus test for U.S. security guarantee.³² He observed that Gulf States saw that DPRK sank the *Cheonan* and U.S. did nothing. If Gulf States get in a situation where Iran sinks a vessel, what will U.S. do to protect its allies? Hokayem said that how U.S. treats its East Asian allies is relevant for Gulf States.

Map 2: UAE-Iran Dispute over Three Islands



Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection

It is also relevant for Israel. Israeli press has kept a close watch on events unfolding on the Korean Peninsula because Iran emulates DPRK’s playbook. “Why a brazen N. Korea is Israel’s concern”, “As Iran watches Korea”, and ‘S. Korea, N. Korea, Israel and Iran’ are samples of press titles the past months.³³ With such extended ramifications for the credibility of U.S. security umbrella resting on U.S. action towards DPRK, U.S. is once again conducting gunboat diplomacy.

Gunboat Diplomacy in 2010 Korean Peninsula Crisis After the muted international response to the *Cheonan* incident, U.S. and her Asia Pacific allies are stepping to the fore in a show of solidarity against DPRK aggression in the region. On 28 November, U.S. deployed its aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* for a four-day joint military exercise with ROK, with an Australian officer onboard to show support for ROK.³⁴ Representatives from Australia, United Kingdom, and France were on hand to observe the joint exercise in the Yellow Sea. Moreover,

³² Emile El-Hokayem, “China and the Persian Gulf”, Woodrow Wilson Center Conference, 12 July 2010.

³³ Caroline Glick, “S. Korea, N. Korea, Israel and Iran”, *Jerusalem Post*, 21 May 2010; “As Iran watches Korea”, *Jerusalem Post*, 27 November 2010; Jonathan Spyer, “Global Affairs: Why a brazen N. Korea is Israel’s concern”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 26 November 2010; “Hardline Israeli Paper Laments S Korea’s Response to Attack”, *Chosun Ilbo*, 30 November 2010.

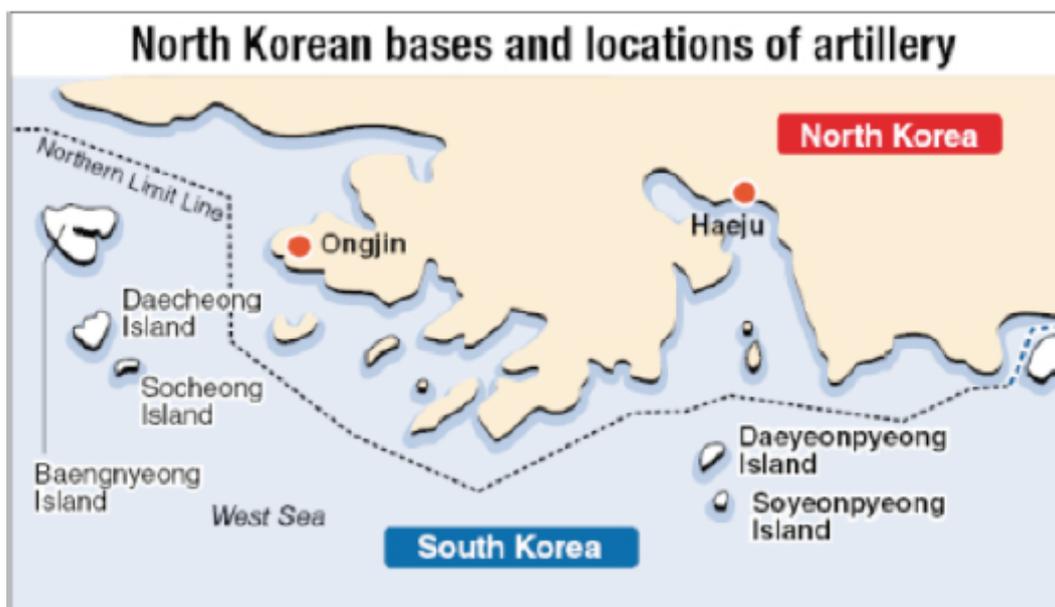
³⁴ “Australia shows support for South Korea”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 November 2010.

Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd showed firm support and publicly stated that “under our alliance obligations with the United States, article four of the ANZUS treaty is clear about our requirements to act to meet the common danger...” After the four-day exercise, *George Washington* continued on to join *Operation Keen Sword*, the largest U.S.-Japan joint military exercise from 3 to 10 December, involving 45,000 personnel, 60 military vessels and 400 aircrafts³⁵. *Keen Sword* caps the 50th anniversary of the U.S.-Japan alliance, and for the first time ROK military officers are aboard an U.S. Aegis ship to join the exercise as observers.³⁶

After years of failed engagement and diplomacy to stop DPRK’s nuclear program and belligerence, allies are finally coalescing into a united front. Japan, U.S., and ROK are deepening defense links, sending military officers to observe each other’s joint exercises with the U.S., and upgrading military intelligence sharing.³⁷ Japan is also updating its National Defense Program Guideline, as it confronts China’s military buildup and DPRK’s military aggressions. The guideline will also call for security cooperation with U.S., ROK and Australia.³⁸

The threat of escalation to a wider military conflict is real. ROK intelligence chief Won Seihoon confirmed that DPRK is planning on further attacks over the disputed 5 islands in the West Sea (See Map 3), with the new ROK defense minister General Kim Kwan-jin swearing ROK will respond with full military retaliation and bomb DPRK territory.³⁹ If this happens, it may draw in other treaty allies in a widening conflict.

Map 3: Islands in the West Sea



Source: “Islands in West Sea: Flashpoint of Koreas”, *Korea Herald*, 24 November 2010

U.S. has five treaty allies in the Asia Pacific region: Japan, ROK, Australia, Philippines and Thailand. It has defense cooperation with Taiwan, Singapore, India and Indonesia.⁴⁰

³⁵ “Japan-U.S. military drill begin”, *Daily Yomiuri Online*, 4 December 2010; “Largest-ever SDF-U.S. drill set in motion”, *The Japan Times*, 4 December 2010.

³⁶ “S Korea to join Japan-U.S. defense exercises as observer”, *Xinhua.*, 2 December 2010; Airman 1st Class Tara A Williamson, “Keen Sword exercise sharpens US-Japan alliance”, *Air Force News*, 2 December 2010; “Largest ever SDF-US drill set in motion”, *Japan Times*, 4 December 2010.

³⁷ Yoshihiro Makino, “Japan, U.S., South Korea deepen defense links”, *Asahi Shimbun*, 6 December 2010.

³⁸ “Japan defense plan wary of China’s military: report”, *Reuters*, 6 December 2010.

³⁹ “US, Japan Begin War Games: China Denounces Drills,” *The Associated Press*, 3 December 2010; Jeremy Laurence and Hyunjoon jin, “South Korea spy chief says more attacks likely”, *Reuters*, 1 December 2010; “Seoul Threatens to Bom North; US, Japan Launch Drills”, *Yonhap*, 3 December 2010.

⁴⁰ Bruce Vaughn, “U.S. Strategic and Defense Relationships in the Asia-Pacific Region”, *CRS Report RL33821*, 22 January 2007.

Map 4: U.S. Treaty Allies in Asia Pacific



Source: Bruce Vaughn, CRS Report RL33821, 22 January 2007, p.16.

While China may not invoke article II of its mutual military assistance clause with DPRK in cases of DPRK provocations against the ROK, it is unclear how it may react should U.S. and her allies up the ante militarily. With Admiral Mullen visiting Japan and ROK and displaying U.S. military leadership at the highest level, coupled with steady resolve of allies in what former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007 called an “Arc of Freedom” of like-minded states in the Asia Pacific region, hopefully the Korean Peninsula crisis—like the Taiwan Strait crisis—will also end in a ceasefire.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.



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