

HOT SPOTS IN GLOBAL POLITICS



CHRISTOPH BLUTH

KOREA

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Foreword

When North Korea tested a nuclear weapon on 9 October 2006, the world was reminded once again of the dangerous situation on the Korean peninsula. This action, which was roundly condemned by the international community, destroyed many illusions about the alleged achievements of diplomacy and the inter-Korean dialogue.

The dangers of the military conflict on the Korean peninsula are obvious for the world to see. North Korea has an army of 1.1 million troops, 70 per cent of which is deployed within 100 km of the demilitarized zone that has separated the two Korean states since the end of the Korean war. It has deployed thousands of artillery pieces, tanks, hundreds of ballistic missiles and a significant number of chemical weapons. On the other side of the DMZ, referred to by former US President Bill Clinton as ‘the scariest place on earth’, forces of the United States and the Republic of Korea are deployed to counter any North Korean attack. According to the American specialist Michael O’Hanlon, the area between the South Korean capital Seoul and the North Korean capital Pyongyang has a higher concentration of military firepower than central Europe during the Cold War. The armed forces of North Korea are not configured for defence, but for offence, meaning that if a conflict should start armoured columns will immediately move south and Seoul will come under heavy artillery bombardment. In this context, North Korea’s growing ballistic missile and nuclear capabilities appear to raise the military threat to a new level.

But how are we to understand the nature of this threat? In the popular literature, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il is often portrayed as an irrational dictator ruling over an isolated 'hermit kingdom' and out of touch with the outside world. Of course this image is a caricature. In the Republic of Korea, there is a palpable division within society about how to understand and deal with North Korea. The traditional position of the political and military elite in South Korea has been defined by a staunch rejection of communism and the portrayal of North Korea as the enemy that must be deterred by the security cooperation with the United States. North Korean belligerence was explained as based on the desire by the Pyongyang regime to unite the Korean peninsula on Northern terms and extend communist rule over all of the Korean people. The alliance with the United States was essential to safeguard the security of free Korean people. Although in the decades following the Korean War this view found broad acceptance within South Korean society, there was growing opposition to the authoritarian government and a desire for social change and the movement towards democracy. Some of the younger generation who did not witness the devastating Korean War (1950–3) and who were involved or witnessed the struggle for democracy in the South have a more benign view of North Korea. They are yearning for unification of the divided nation and believe that interference from outside powers is prolonging the division. Such views were reinforced by President Kim Dae-jung's so-called 'sunshine policy' of engaging the North Korean regime with political dialogue, economic assistance and joint economic projects. His successor, President Roh Moo-hyun, inherited the same policy line under the banner of 'peace and prosperity' policy towards North Korea. But the nuclear test in October 2006 represents the culmination of trends in relations with North Korea that have raised grave doubts about the results of these policies. Thus President Roh has been criticized for continuously meeting North Korea's demands for aid without any concessions from North Korea's leaders. Moreover, the Roh government has allowed relations with the United States to drift apart. For example, it proposed that the Republic of Korea should assume the role of 'balancer' between major powers in

Asia, suggesting an almost neutral position in regional security. For a small country like South Korea which is at the frontline of a major geopolitical confrontation, that is simply not a feasible position to adopt. Even more controversial is the transfer of 'wartime command' from the United States to the Republic of Korea. Previously in the event of war, South Korean armed forces would have been under the Combined Forces Command (CFC) led by the commander of US forces under the aegis of the United Nations. In the future South Korea will be responsible for securing the armistice, raising doubts about the extent of support from the United States.

At the time of writing, the situation on the Korean peninsula has entered a new and particularly uncertain phase. The North Korean state has reached a point where it is politically, socially and economically bankrupt. The regime cannot guarantee minimal food provision for its people, its industry is largely idle and it relies on food and energy supplies from other countries. It uses its military and especially its weapons of mass destruction programmes to extort economic support and political concessions. In short, the apparent stability on the Korean peninsula is fragile. The sudden collapse of the North Korean state or the outbreak of military hostilities could have catastrophic consequences for the Korean people north and south and would affect the security of the entire region.

The situation on the Korean peninsula is complex and often misunderstood. North Korea is a very secretive and isolated country, and there is much that is unknown about its internal politics and decision-making processes. At the same time, an understanding of the factors that drive North Korean foreign policy behaviour is crucial. It is therefore very important that scholars, students, policymakers and the general public develop a deep understanding of the crisis on the Korean peninsula which is steeped in the knowledge of the history of the two Koreas since their division and an appreciation of their development into the post-Cold War era. It is for this reason that I welcome this book, which provides an excellent background on the security dilemma in Korea and makes a vital contribution to the international dialogue on the future of the Korean peninsula.

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Chronology ---

1945

- February 8 Yalta Conference between the Allies of World War II
- July 26 Potsdam Conference. An agreement is made to divide the Korean peninsula into zones of Soviet and US operation along the 41st parallel
- August 15 Japan surrenders and Korea is liberated
- August 26 Soviet armed forces enter northern Korea
- September 8 US troops arrive in southern Korea

1948

- May 31 After elections in the south of Korea, a National Assembly is formally established with Rhee Syngman as chairman
- July 17 The National Assembly adopts a constitution for the Republic of Korea. Rhee Syngman is elected President and the ROK is recognized by the United States
- August 15 The Republic of Korea takes over the government of South Korea from the US military government
- September 9 The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is established under Kim Il-sung
- December 12 The UN recognizes the Republic of Korea as the sole legal government of Korea

1950

- June 25 North Korean forces invade South Korea
July 8 General MacArthur is appointed UN commander-in-chief
September 15 UN forces land at Inchon
October 14 Chinese troops enter North Korea

1951

- January 4 Chinese and North Korean forces capture the capital of the ROK (Seoul)
March 15 The UN forces retake Seoul

1953

- July 27 The armistice agreement signed by the US (on behalf of the UN), North Korea and China. Rhee refuses to sign

1960

- April After student protests Rhee Syngman is forced to resign and leave the country

1961

- May 16 Major General Park Chung-hee seizes power in a military coup

1965

- June South Korea signs normalization treaty with Japan

1968

- January 23 The US 'spy ship' *Pueblo* is seized by the North Korean navy in international waters off the eastern coast of the DPRK. The crew is released one year later

1973

- June 8 Opposition leader Kim Dae-jung is kidnapped by agents of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency in Tokyo. He is kept under house arrest in Seoul

1979

October 26 Park Chung-hee is assassinated by the head of the KCIA. Major General Chun Doo-hwan takes control of the government

1980

May 18 Gwangju massacre. After mass protests, the armed forces kill 240 people. For the period of Chun Doo-hwan's administration, the incident is officially regarded as a rebellion inspired by Communists, but after civil rule the protests receive recognition as an effort to restore democracy from military rule

1983

October 9 North Korean commandos launch a bomb attack on a South Korean government delegation during an official visit to Rangoon, Myanmar, headed by the President Chun Doo-hwan. The president is unhurt, but 21 people are killed including four South Korean cabinet ministers

1986

January A nuclear reactor (the 5 MW(e) reactor) begins operation at Yongbyon, North Korea

1988

February Roh Tae-woo is inaugurated as president of the Republic of Korea

October The Olympic Games are held in Seoul

1990

June 1 Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev visits South Korea

September 11 Diplomatic relations are established between the Soviet Union and the Republic of Korea

1991

- September 17 The DPRK and the ROK are admitted into membership of the United Nations
- September 27 President G. Bush announces the withdrawal of all US nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula
- December North and South Korea announce a Joint Declaration on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and a non-aggression agreement

1992

- January South Korea announces the suspension of the 'Team Spirit' joint exercises with the US and the DPRK signs the IAEA safeguards agreement
- December Kim Young-sam is elected president, the country's first democratically elected civilian president in 30 years

1993

- February 25 The IAEA Board of Governors passes a resolution requiring North Korea to accept special inspections
- March 12 The DPRK announces that it intends to withdraw from the NPT
- April 1 The IAEA Board of Governors finds North Korea in non-compliance with its safeguards obligations
- May 11 UN Security Council Resolution 825 is passed. It calls on North Korea to comply with safeguards

1994

- March 19 North Korea walks out of negotiations with the US after one delegate threatens to 'turn Seoul into a sea of fire'. Plans for 'Team Spirit' 1994 are reactivated
- April 28 The DPRK declares that the 1953 Armistice Agreement is invalid

- May 4 North Korea begins to discharge fuel from the 5 MW(e) reactor, affecting the IAEA's capacity to measure spent fuel
- June 13 North Korea withdraws from the NPT
- June 15 Former US President Jimmy Carter travels to Korea and meets with Kim Il-sung. The North Korean leader agrees to permit IAEA inspections, to cooperate with the recovery of American soldiers 'missing in action' from the Korean War, and to hold an inter-Korean summit with President Kim Young-sam in return for improved political relations and economic support
- July 8 North Korean leader, Kim Il-sung dies of a heart attack. His son, Kim Jong-il, succeeds him as General-Secretary of the Korean Workers Party, but does not take the title of president
- October 21 North Korea agrees with the US to dismantle nuclear development programme in return for 2 light water reactors and economic aid (Geneva Agreed Framework)
- December 6 North Korean diplomats visit Washington, DC, in relation to the establishment of consular offices
- 1995**
- January 19 The first shipment of heavy fuel oil as part of the Agreed Framework arrives in Sonborg, North Korea
- January 20 US announces easing of sanctions on North Korea relating to telecommunications, financial transactions, North Korean magnesite exports and energy projects
- February Joint US-ROK exercises 'Team Spirit' cancelled
- March 9 KEDO is established as an international organization

- August Torrential rain and flooding causes a major natural disaster in North Korea
- September International aid sent to North Korea
- December 15 The contract to supply LWR signed in New York

1996

- July The US and North Korean army begin to conduct joint operations to recover remains of American soldiers missing in action in the Korean War
- September A North Korean submarine transports commandoes to land on South Korea's east coast, provoking a major crisis on the peninsula

1997

- February Leading North Korean ideologue Hwan Chang-yop defects to South Korea
- August The groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of the light water reactors takes place in Sinpo, North Korea
- August The first preliminary round of the four-party talks to resolve the outstanding issues on the Korean peninsula takes place
- December Former opposition leader Kim Dae-jung is elected president. He goes on to pursue the 'sunshine policy' to engage North Korea

1998

- August 1998 North Korea launches a long-range missile to launch a satellite. The partially successful launch appears to threaten Japan, provoking a serious reaction from Tokyo

1999

- January The last round of the Four-Party Talks ends inconclusively
- September On the basis of the Perry Report, the United States eases sanctions on North Korea

2000

- February 9 The Russian Federation and the DPRK sign a new Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness and Cooperation
- June 12 The first summit between North and South Korean leaders takes place in Pyongyang
- October 9 North Korea's senior military leader, Cho Myong-rok (Vice-Chairman of the National Defence Committee), visits Washington and meets with President Clinton
- October 23 Summit meeting between US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il
- November 3 Talks on North Korea's missile programme end inconclusively

2001

- January 21 Inauguration of US President G. W. Bush
- March 7 South Korean President Kim Dae-jung meets President Bush
- June 6 President Bush announces the completion of the review of policy on North Korea

2002

- January 29 President Bush includes North Korea as part of the 'axis of evil' in his State of the Union speech
- October 3 While the US special envoy, James Kelly, visits North Korea, North Korea first denies and then apparently admits to having a programme to produce HEU (highly enriched uranium)
- October 26 The United States, the Republic of Korea and Japan call upon North Korea to dismantle its HEU programme and comply with all its international commitments
- November 14 KEDO suspends the shipment of Heavy Fuel Oil to North Korea

- December 19 The Millennium Democratic Party Candidate Roh Moo-hyun is elected president of the Republic of Korea
- December 22 North Korea announces that it will restart the nuclear reactor at Yongbyon and resume the reprocessing of plutonium
- December 27 North Korea announces the expulsion of IAEA inspectors and ends all IAEA monitoring of its nuclear facilities

2003

- January 10 North Korea announces its withdrawal from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty
- May 12 North Korea declares the Agreed Framework to be nullified
- April 23 Delegates from the United States, China and North Korea meet in Beijing to discuss the North Korean nuclear programme
- August 27 The first round of Six-Party Talks, which includes North Korea, South Korea, the US, China, Russia and Japan, to solve North Korea nuclear crisis is convened in Beijing, China

2004

- February 24 Second round of Six-Party Talks begins in Beijing
- February 25 Bilateral meeting between DPRK and US delegates to the Six-Party Talks
- February 28 Six-Party Talks end with agreement for a further round, but no progress in the substance
- March 12 The National Assembly impeaches President Roh Moo-hyun. The impeachment is overturned two months later by the Constitutional Court
- June 26 Third round of Six-Party Talks ends inconclusively after the US presents a comprehensive proposal including energy provision and

September a security guarantee in return for the dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear programme
North Korea postpones the next round of talks indefinitely

2005

May 11 North Korea announces it has completed the extraction of fuel rods from the nuclear reactor at Yongbyon

July 15 Fourth round of Six-Party Talks begins in Beijing

September 15 US bans all transactions with Banco Delta Asia Bank that is accused of handing illicit North Korean funds linked to money laundering, drug trafficking and counterfeiting of US currency, and freezes North Korean assets

September 19 In an agreed joint statement. North Korea agrees to give up its entire nuclear programme in exchange for energy assistance and security guarantees

September 20 North Korea states that it will only give up its nuclear programme if it gets a civilian nuclear reactor, in seeming contradiction to the joint statement

2006

January 3 North Korea states it will not return to talks unless the US releases frozen North Korean assets from Banco Delta Asia Bank

July 5 North Korea launches seven missiles including a long-range missile, *Taepodong-2*

July 15 The UN Security Council imposes sanctions on North Korea in response to the missile launches

October 9 North Korea conducts a test of a nuclear fission device

October 14 The UN Security Council imposes further sanctions on North Korea in response to the nuclear test

December 18 Six-Party Talks resume in Beijing

2007

February 13 North Korea pledges to dismantle nuclear weapons development programme in return for diplomatic recognition and economic aid

March 15 US enables the release of frozen North Korean bank accounts

April 14 North Korea misses the deadline to close down its reactor, but is given more time by the other parties