

# *An Assessment of the Security Environment and Challenges in the Post-Cheonan Era: A South Korean Perspective\**

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## **Abstract**

The Cheonan incident has brought the biggest security challenges to South Korea since the end of the Korean War. These challenges include the multiplying North Korean security challenges, the rise of China and changes in the strategic landscape in Northeast Asia, the hard, cold reality of international politics, and a weak domestic posture toward preventing and handling North Korean provocations. To overcome these challenges, South Korea needs to widen the scope of its security paradigm to reflect the bigger picture of the North Korea question. It is also necessary for South Korea to pay more attention to the security environment of Northeast Asia, which is fundamentally conditioned by the shifting U.S.-Chinese power structure. In addition, South Korea should view issues from various angles and devise comprehensive measures and approaches toward present and future security challenges. There are several measures for consideration. First, South Korea must establish a comprehensive security platform, including military and non-military means, to prevent North Korea from attempting any kind of military provocation. Second, South Korea should mobilize and secure the understanding and support of the concerned countries on fundamental issues, such as the nature of North Korean regime, the desirable end state on the Korean Peninsula, and the roadmap and action plan for reaching that end state. Third, South Korea should develop its own security network to minimize the impact of the shifting balance of power between the U.S. and China. Finally, South Korea should consolidate a domestic base for security and North Korea policy by enhancing domestic strategic communication.

**Key Words:** Cheonan incident, North Korea, security challenges, U.S.-China relations, China

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\* The opinions on this paper are those of authors and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of the government bodies or institutes with which authors are associated.

## **Introduction**

The Cheonan incident, which occurred on March 26, 2010, raised significant challenges to the diplomacy and security posture of the Republic of Korea (hereafter the ROK or South Korea), considering the background and details of the incident as well as the subsequent investigation, post-incident developments and conclusion. The incident made the South Korean government revisit certain realities of its security situation that had been forgotten or unheeded and revealed the possibility of a split in public opinion on security problems. In addition, it showed ill-preparedness to prevent and react to such incidents and revealed the harshness of the international community which ROK diplomacy faces at present. Furthermore, the Cheonan incident reminded us of the importance of being conscious and prepared to analyze how security circumstances around the Korean Peninsula have changed thus far and what course to take in the future.

Taking the incident as an opportunity, South Korea should make efforts to thoroughly analyze and discern a comprehensive list of “North Korea questions” including core security challenges raised by North Korea now and in the future. Moreover, it is urgent that South Korea establish a comprehensive and multi-dimensional strategy for national security taking into account the possibility of changes in the overall security and strategic landscape of the Northeast Asia region, including U.S.-China and China-North Korea relations. In particular, it is important to devise an objective and plausible approach strategy while avoiding “arbitrary understanding” or “wishful thinking” on our part. On top of that, it is vital to closely analyze and assess the security policies and strategies of related countries, paying attention to connectivity between issues on the Korean Peninsula and changes in the security structure of Northeast Asia.

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to analyze the problems

uncovered after Cheonan incident and ultimately identify the future security strategy and policy to be carried out. This paper is divided into three sections as follows: 1) an examination of the responses of the related countries including the U.S., China, North Korea and others, with a view to the future outlook, as a basis for understanding the situation after the Cheonan incident and the emerging perceptions about the changed security environment; 2) an analysis of major challenges including diverse North Korean threats, changes to the regional strategic landscape, and international and domestic factors; and 3) a proposal for a policy agenda to be considered by the ROK government.

### **Responses of Related Countries and the Future Outlook**

It is necessary for the ROK government to comprehend its neighboring countries' perceptions on this issue as a basis for handling it and deciding on the future direction in which to lead international cooperation. Also, their positions reflect perceptions and interests in regard to the Korean Peninsula. Through the Cheonan incident and subsequent follow-up measures, related countries such as the U.S., China, Russia and Japan expressed their standpoints in dealing with this incident. There is convergence and divergence among the concerned parties. Some support the South Korean government, while some express ambiguous stances. Simultaneously, North Korea has shown its strong position by insisting it was not involved in the incident. By recognizing each country's position, we can understand how their different positions are formed in terms of managing the incident itself and North Korea in general, and the perceived security environment in Northeast Asia.

### *The United States*

In the early stage following the Cheonan incident, the U.S. government was cautious in expressing its position on whether or not the incident was caused by a North Korean torpedo attack. However, as the investigation proceeded, the U.S. began to recognize that the Cheonan incident was a critical challenge to both security on the Korean Peninsula and regional peace and stability in Northeast Asia. Under the principle of “ROK-leading, U.S.-supporting,” the U.S., as an ally of South Korea, actively supported South Korea on various occasions including summit meetings, foreign ministerial meetings, and the 2+2 Meeting (Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting). The U.S. emphasized “compelling evidence” from the investigation conducted by the Civil-Military Joint Investigation Team and firmly maintained its position that North Korea should take responsibility for the Cheonan incident.

While its initial attitude was timid, after announcement of the investigation results the U.S. showed an active and aggressive position. Of particular note, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited to Seoul on the way back to the U.S. after the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue and confirmed the strong U.S. support of the investigation results at the press briefing for the ROK-U.S. Foreign Ministerial Meeting.<sup>1</sup> Also, the U.S. conducted various follow-up measures beginning with a ROK-U.S. joint anti-submarine drill in the Yellow/West Sea. Simultaneously, it reviewed its unilateral measures and actions against North Korea.

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<sup>1</sup>- The U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in regard to the Cheonan incident, “The international independent investigation was objective, the evidence overwhelming, the conclusion inescapable. This was an unacceptable provocation by North Korea, and the international community has a responsibility and a duty to respond. The measures that President Lee announced in his speech are prudent. They are absolutely appropriate, and they have the full support of the United States.” These remarks were made at the press briefing after the ROK-U.S. Foreign Ministerial Meeting held on May 26, 2010.

From the beginning, the Obama administration has emphasized a policy of “settling the Cheonan incident first, then resuming the six-party talks,” taking the same position as the ROK. Also, the U.S. seemed to gradually expand the various North Korean issues including the Cheonan incident into the broader “North Korea question.” The U.S. policy toward North Korea has been overshadowed by its nuclear program, as it was designed and implemented based on that issue. In dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue, the U.S. emphasized “strategic patience” and maintained its position that North Korea should take visible action to prove its willingness to denuclearize. Also, the U.S. adhered to the position that it would not accept “dialogue for dialogue.” It was clear that the focal point of North Korean policy in the U.S. was the nuclear question.

After the Cheonan incident, however, the North Korean policy of the U.S. appeared to take on a more comprehensive approach. The U.S. seemed to expand the scope of North Korean issues, considering not only the importance and seriousness of the Cheonan incident, but also the general “North Korea question” beyond the nuclear issue. One sign of this comprehensive approach was the recent sanctions measure against North Korea which was unilaterally introduced and implemented by the U.S. The U.S. justified these sanctions against the North due to not only WMDs (Weapons of Mass Destruction) but also illegal activities conducted by North Korea. This may explain the changed policy direction of the U.S. on a variety of North Korean issues. This compulsive policy by the U.S. sends the critical message that the U.S. wishes for North Korea to make a new strategic decision.<sup>2</sup> Also, it shows that the U.S. is running out of

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<sup>2</sup>- At first, the U.S. urged North Korea to resume the Six-Party Talks without conditions, and then stressed that North Korea should take a clear action to support the spirit of the September 19<sup>th</sup> Joint Statement. The specific measures the U.S. demands of North Korea are the disablement and shutdown of its Yongbyon nuclear facilities and a return to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Six-Party Talks.

strategic patience and is pessimistic about resolving the North Korean nuclear problem.

The U.S.' tough position on the Cheonan incident also reflects the need to "keep China in check." After the 2<sup>nd</sup> nuclear test by North Korea in May 2009, the U.S. and China reached a consensus in dealing with the North Korean nuclear problem and strengthened their cooperation.<sup>3</sup> However, with the continued deadlock of the six-party talks, China asked the U.S. to take a more flexible position. At the same time, it tried to improve its relationship with North Korea. The most significant point was Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's visit to North Korea. It is assumed that during this visit China and North Korea agreed on an economic cooperation plan including Chinese economic aid to the North. After that, conflicts between the U.S. and China emerged in other fields irrelevant to North Korea's nuclear problem.

From the U.S. point of view, the North Korean leader Kim Jong-il's visit to China from May 3-5, 2010 was also occasion enough for the U.S. to feel concern about the details of the agreement between China and North Korea. Moreover, the fact that China actively restored and strengthened its relations with the North by permitting Kim Jong-il's visit to China in the midst of international discussion about the Cheonan incident made the U.S. consider China's position as a disruptive element in North Korean policy.<sup>4</sup> In light of this attitude, China displayed its

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<sup>3</sup>- China and Russia were very active and cooperative in the process of adopting United Nations Security Council Resolution 1874, which is related to North Korea's nuclear issue, and the U.S. assessed it positively.

<sup>4</sup>- At the G20 Toronto Summit in June 2010, while talking to Chinese President Hu Jintao, U.S. President Barack Obama criticized that China was reacting to the Cheonan incident with willful blindness. Also, President Obama criticized China publicly, mentioning the summit with President Hu Jintao as follows. "This is not an issue where you've got two parties of moral equivalence who are having an argument. This is a situation in which you have a belligerent nation that engaged in provocative and deadly acts against the other, and I think it is very important that we are clear about that... But I think there's a difference between restraint and willful blindness to consistent problems, and my hope

desire to contain U.S. influence, at least in the Northeast Asia region including the Korean Peninsula.

In this vein, the U.S. seems to perceive China's attempts to expand its influence over the Northeast Asia region and the Korean Peninsula on the basis of its efforts to rebuild its traditional relations with North Korea throughout the Cheonan incident. Especially, it is recognized that the very enthusiastic U.S. stance toward the ROK-U.S. joint military exercises sends a strong message toward not only the North but also China in terms of U.S. willingness to fulfill its security commitment to South Korea. The reason for this is that, as the U.S. sees it, China's recent increase in military capability has focused on access denial capabilities, and the increase in military activities in the East China Sea and the South China Sea may become a new challenge for the U.S.

### ***China***

Fundamentally, China approaches North Korean problems, including Cheonan incident, with the sense that peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula are critical to China's sustainable economic development and they should contain the U.S. expansion of its influence.

From the Chinese point of view, it felt pressured out of necessity to take a sort of desperate measure in embracing North Korea. China considers that severe pressure against North Korea could lead to additional provocations or uncontrollable behaviors by the North and consequently raise tensions on the Korean Peninsula. China tries to be a *balancer* or *mediator* between North Korea and other countries, actually taking North Korea's side to manage diplomatic pressure from others. The reason why China takes this position is that it regards the security

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is that President Hu will recognize as well that this is an example of Pyongyang going over the line in ways that just have to be spoken about seriously.”

environment of the Korean Peninsula as more unstable than ever. Also, China judges that increased pressure against North Korea and deepened isolation from the international community could lead to more tensions on the peninsula.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the attitude shown by China in dealing with the Cheonan incident can be considered as a sign that China is reinforcing its policy to restore and strengthen its mutually cooperative relations with North Korea in order to contain the alliance relationship between the U.S. and South Korea. In fact, South Korea has been focusing on reconstructing and developing its alliance with the U.S. since the Lee Myung-bak administration was inaugurated. Further, China has expressed skepticism about the ROK-U.S. alliance as a leftover of the Cold War on a number of occasions. Considering the facts mentioned above, it can be assumed that China may have responded to the incident in order to contain the strengthening of the ROK-U.S. alliance, which would weaken China's impact on the Korean Peninsula. In sum, China might want to impose its influence and prevent South Korea's stance on the ROK-U.S. alliance from highlighting the prominent pattern of "U.S.-South Korea versus China-North Korea" in military and security fields.

Also, the posture of China implies that it has complaints about the government policies of the U.S. and South Korea toward the North. It is well known that China has been pressing for a change in the ROK's policy toward North Korea since President Lee Myung-bak's inauguration. China has stressed that South Korea should enforce a flexible policy toward North Korea. Chinese experts on North Korea insisted that North Korean problems should be dealt with by inducing gradual changes in

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<sup>5</sup>- Heung-gyu Kim, "Cheonanham Sataewa Han-Jung Gwankye [The Cheonan Incident and ROK-China Relations]," *Juyogukgemunjabunseok [Analysis of Major International Affair]*, No. 010-23 (Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, September 1, 2010), pp. 7-8.

North Korea through closer mutual understanding, rather than simply imposing pressure on it. As the U.S. position toughened and North Korea's attitude changed significantly, the U.S. and China started to hold different views of each other. Evidently, China has been aggressively pushing for consistent engagement by the U.S., which set forth a policy of "strategic patience" and argued that it is meaningless to talk with North Korea unless North Korea takes clear action to renounce its nuclear programs.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, U.S.-China cooperation toward North Korea grew weaker, and wider gaps were revealed between their opinions. Under these circumstances the Cheonan incident occurred. The gap between the two countries was reflected in the process of reaching a resolution on the incident, and it led to different approaches toward North Korea within the structure of the ROK and the U.S. versus China, even though the three share the common goal of establishing peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. This gap among the major related countries - the ROK, the U.S. and China - appears to be widening.

### ***North Korea***

North Korea continues to deny its involvement in the Cheonan incident and to respond to the problem very actively and aggressively through its diplomatic activities. First, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il visited China and met with President Hu Jintao in May 2010 in an attempt to seek the cooperation and understanding of China, insisting that North Korea was not involved in the Cheonan incident.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>- The Obama administration has emphasized the implementation of the September 19<sup>th</sup> Joint Statement and urged North Korea to return to the NPT regime while freezing and shutting down its nuclear facilities. The U.S. regards these two actions as a demonstration of North Korea's intention to abandon its nuclear program.

<sup>7</sup>- A number of Chinese experts report that in the middle of their meeting, Chinese President Hu Jintao asked North Korean leader Kim Jong-il if North Korea was responsible for the Cheonan incident, and Kim strongly denied it.

Regarding the announcement of the outcome of the investigation by the Civil-Military Joint Investigation Team on May 20, North Korea promptly took strong action, claiming that the Cheonan incident was fabricated by the South Korean government on several occasions including a press conference, a statement by the North Korean National Defense Commission,<sup>8</sup> the warning statement of the North Korean Military Front-Central Command,<sup>9</sup> and a statement by a spokesperson of *Chopyungdong* (the North Korean National Peace and Unification Committee).<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, North Korea accused the U.S. of inciting a nuclear war and insisted on reinforcement of its nuclear deterrent. In fact, North Korea has not taken any physical action to put their announcements into practice, but has focused on a verbal threats and diplomatic activities. For example, North Korea actively introduced diplomatic measures at international and regional diplomatic meetings. It explained and publicized its stance by keenly participating in the U.N., regional events, and civil-governmental joint conferences of regional security experts and governmental officials such as the Council on Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) and the Asia-Pacific Roundtable.

Such activities imply that North Korea also realizes the situation is unfavorable to itself. In other words, North Korea has already noticed that its belligerent attitude and actions serve to strengthen the ROK-U.S.-Japan relationship and international solidarity, intensify its own isolation,

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<sup>8</sup>- In the statement by the North Korean National Defense Commission released just after the Civil-Military Joint Investigation Team reported its results, North Korea announced that it would take countermeasures such as dispatching an inspection team regarding the incident, reacting strongly to the sanctions, and reinforcing its physical responses.

<sup>9</sup>- In the warning statement North Korea stated that "If a psychological warfare is conducted, North Korea will implement direct fire to eliminate speakers."

<sup>10</sup>- In the statement, North Korea listed its major concerns as easing the current war-like situation, abolishing the non-aggression agreement between North and South Korea, eliminating inter-Korean economic cooperation, and requesting that the South accept the North's inspection team.

worsen China's situation, and ultimately lead to changes in China's policy toward the Korean Peninsula in the long-term. Considering the possible consequences, North Korea will be reluctant to implement actual measures that may cause radical changes or aggravate the situation. It is evident that North Korea recently displayed soft-line gestures toward South Korea by suggesting family reunions and inter-Korean military working-level talks, and calling for humanitarian relief aid.<sup>11</sup> All of these activities by North Korea showed a desire to conclude the Cheonan incident quickly and focus on U.S.-North Korea bilateral talks and the nuclear problem. As mentioned in the previous China section, China is also taking a similar stance with North Korea.

### ***Russia and Japan***

Russia has been careful about the incident but began to actively support South Korea's stance after the South Korean government announced counter-measures against North Korea. However, as the post-incident proceedings continued, Russia altered to a stance similar to China's (position with reservation) and raised its suspicions indirectly about the investigation results. Meanwhile, President Dmitry Medvedev of Russia expressed a strong intention to support South Korea, talking on the phone with ROK President Lee Myung-bak,<sup>12</sup> and he demonstrated cooperation by dispatching a Russian investigation team to South Korea. However, the Russian investigation team started to have doubts about the results of the investigation conducted by the Civil-Military Joint Inves-

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<sup>11</sup>- It was reported in the media that North Korea requested aids of food, cement, heavy equipment and vehicles, while South Korea excluded heavy equipment and vehicles.

<sup>12</sup>- On May 25, 2010, in a phone conversation with President Lee Myung-bak, President Dmitry Medvedev expressed his intention to actively cooperate with and support the South Korean government, stating that "Russia will try to send a clear message to North Korea. Also, Russia understands South Korea's policy toward the North, including the matters related to the U.N. Security Council."

tigation Team, which made the South Korean position difficult. Although Russia did not publicly express its suspicions, they were partially exposed through the media, further exacerbating the situation.<sup>13</sup>

Russia may be concerned over the growing tensions on the Korean Peninsula and attempting to check the strengthening of ROK-U.S. relations. Also, Russia may want to use the incident as an opportunity to reinforce its influence on the Korean Peninsula. Or, Russia's posture toward the incident can be interpreted as a reflection of the country's dissatisfaction with South Korean relations thus far. From this point of view, it can be expected that Russia will work to check the U.S. as China does, emphasizing North Korea's nuclear problem and the six-party talks rather than the Cheonan incident.

The basic position of Japan is similar to what the U.S. has been continuously advocating since the beginning of the incident. Also, Japan has insisted on strengthening ROK-U.S.-Japan cooperation and enforcing sanctions against North Korea. Japan has a great interest in security cooperation with South Korea, particularly after this incident; the reason is that Japan considers the China factor to be a challenge that extends beyond North Korea issues. Recently, Japan has been very sensitive about China's aggressive posture in dealing with the Senkaku Islands dispute. At the same time, Japan agrees on the need for a strong reaction against the aggressive foreign policy of China since the Cheonan incident. Moreover, it is likely that Japan will show an interest in seeking out measures to tackle North Korea's problems based on broad analysis and assessments

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<sup>13</sup> The situation was exacerbated by the revelation of Russia's conclusion that the South Korean vessel Cheonan was sunk not by a North Korean torpedo attack but because of a net and mine, as revealed in a *New York Times* article written by the former advisor to the Korea Society, Donald Gregg. According to the article, Russia responded to Mr. Gregg's question as to why the Russian government was reluctant to publicize its stance by saying, "If Russia announces this, it will severely affect the Lee Myung-bak administration and shame the Obama administration." Russia finally clarified its standpoint not to publicize its "report on Cheonan incident."

looking at the incident as an opportunity, and will remain enthusiastic about strengthening security cooperation with South Korea.

### ***Future Outlook***

The developments surrounding the Cheonan incident touch upon various issues, including not only North Korea's military provocation, but also the whole North Korea question in parallel with other issues such as inter-Korean relations, strengthening North Korea-China relations, the rise of China and its foreign policy, ROK-China relations and U.S.-China relations, all interacting together in a dimensionally complex way.

In the future, it is expected that the gap between South and North Korea's position and the increasing possibility of another North Korean provocation may lead to military conflicts in the Northeast Asia region including the Korean Peninsula. Although the situation is not likely to cause an actual military conflict, diplomatic discord will be constantly triggered.

Moreover, the interest and focus of related countries will change and expand from the Cheonan incident to broader North Korea questions, the rise of China and changes in the dynamics of surrounding countries. The core target of interest in the long-term will be the ways in which the U.S.-China conflict and the power dynamics in Northeast Asia might influence the future security structure both on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia. The differences in these countries' policy priorities can disrupt the search for a common solution to North Korea issues like the Cheonan incident, and can widen and highlight the gaps between their different viewpoints. This situation may grow even more uncertain.

Against this backdrop, the ROK government is facing a situation in which it must seek a resolution to the Cheonan incident and the associated security challenges based on a distinct analysis. Also, the ROK government urgently needs to devise measures to address its long-term

security challenges, including North Korea issues, and to implement multi-dimensional security strategies.

## **Emerging Major Security Challenges**

The Cheonan incident provided an opportunity for both South Korea and its neighboring countries to reassess a variety of serious and diverse security challenges including the North Korean threat and the transformation of the security environment in Northeast Asia. Also, it forced South Korea to reconsider its response capability for coping with not only security issues but also the international and domestic politics involved in handling those issues. In this vein, on the basis of our understanding of the major related countries' positions as described in the previous section, this section introduces the major security challenges which have emerged or reemerged due to the Cheonan incident as follows: 1) diverse security threats by North Korea, 2) changes in the regional strategic landscape in Northeast Asia, 3) different postures among related countries on North Korean problem, 4) lack of a sufficiently capable crisis management system, and 5) the limitations of follow-up measures. In particular, the last two challenges require the South Korean government to seriously reconsider its situation and regain a level of alertness. It is inevitable that South Korea must strengthen its crisis management capability to a certain degree. And the question of international and domestic limitations in implementing follow-up measures in its security agenda is another important task for the South Korean government to carry out.

### ***Challenges of Diverse Security Threats by North Korea***

Security threats and challenges from North Korea can be divided into three categories: 1) the threat of full-scale war, 2) a limited-scale war or asymmetric threats, and 3) the threat incurred from regime instability. In terms of probability and frequency, asymmetric threats including limited military provocations can be considered the most urgent pending issue. In second place are threats from North Korean regime instability such as political, economic, and social contingency. Though least probable, the threat of all-out war must be concerned as well. The following explanation will address these threats in a different order, based on the scale of impact if the threat is actually carried out.

In that case, the threat of full-scale war must be considered first. In reality, as reflected in the Perry Report of September 1999, the likelihood of a full-scale war is low. The dominant observation is that a full-scale provocation by North Korea will result in its self-destruction, and North Korea is well aware of it. This testifies to the low probability of an all-out conflict. It cannot be ignored that the North might choose full-scale conflict as a last option when forced into the worst situation. However, as the North Korean leadership considers “regime security” as its top priority, the probability of a full-scale war leading to the destruction of North Korea as well as the leadership seems relatively low.

There are also external elements which reduce the probability of a full-scale confrontation by the North. The first element is China. Considering its current national interests and objectives, China is unlikely to support a full-scale war conducted by North Korea even though it is China’s ally. The top policy priorities of China are the creation of a favorable external environment for the sustainable growth of its economy and stability in domestic affairs involving political, economic, and social issues. In this regard, China strongly supports peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula in principle and stresses this basic position to North

Korea. China's lack of enthusiasm is an important factor in the assumption that a full-scale provocation by the North is unlikely.<sup>14</sup>

Another external factor is the decreasing gap in military capability between the two Koreas through South Korea's buildup of military strength.<sup>15</sup> In fact, it is hard to find consensus about the balance of military capability between the two Koreas, and it is expected that the South could not avoid sustaining tremendous damages in the early stages if North Korea launches a surprise attack. But ultimately, the deterrence and defense capabilities of the ROK-U.S. combined defense on the basis of the strong ROK-U.S. alliance are expected to effectively foil the North's military aims.

The second category of security threats by North Korea is asymmetrical threats, which can be classified by their causal types: 1) through the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and 2) through irregular warfare with conventional weapons. In particular, the increase in North Korean capability by the addition of WMDs brings an important challenge in terms of the threat of a full-scale war, making it possibly more serious. The North already conducted two nuclear tests, in 2005 and 2009, and still expresses a willingness to strengthen its self-deterrence capability through its nuclear program, and even use it if necessary. In

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<sup>14</sup>- The Perry Report, written in 1998-1999 and based on ROK-U.S.-Japan consultations, assessed a low probability of North Korea deciding to initiate a full-scale war. This assessment was based on the North Korean leadership's recognition that their regime would be destroyed through a full-scale war if the military capabilities of North and South Korea were balanced in any way.

<sup>15</sup>- This is based upon the assessment of conventional military strength, so different results are possible with the inclusion of asymmetrical capabilities. If the threat of WMDs is included, the aspect of warfare is basically different, so a comparison of conventional military strength cannot be very meaningful. Dominant assessments at present are as follows: 1) the South's air force capability is slightly superior to the North's; 2) Naval capabilities are on equal terms between the two Koreas; and 3) the South's army is especially inferior in numbers to the North's. However, if the military strength of the U.S. Forces in Korea is added to the total strength, the result of a comparison of conventional military power is very different.

addition, it is believed that the North's long-range missiles Taepodong-1 and 2 are continuously being developed. It is estimated that North Korea is working to diversify its missile capabilities as well.

If North Korea has nuclear weapons, it indicates a different dimension in the content and quality of the North Korean threat and necessitates a change in the strategies and tactics toward North Korea which have been maintained and developed, particularly by South Korea. North Korean nuclear weapons will be utilized to increase military tensions for its political and diplomatic aims even in peace time. In addition, the threat of nuclear war could be used as leverage to block active intervention and responses by external forces and the international community. In order to deal with such shifts in the nature of threats by North Korea, South Korea and the U.S. are making efforts to reinforce extended deterrence, including the nuclear umbrella.<sup>16</sup> However, the current extended deterrence policy of the Obama administration focuses not on the nuclear weapons but on conventional military capabilities.<sup>17</sup> The question is if the U.S. is ready to actively intervene when North Korea's WMD capability is no longer limited to the problem of proliferation but is extended to include the possibility of immediate military strikes. In other words, it is critical for the South Korean government to consider ways of establishing confidence in extended deterrence.

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<sup>16</sup>- The extended deterrence of the U.S. consists of conventional forces, the nuclear umbrella, and missile defense. The problem is that the U.S. stresses conventional forces rather than the nuclear umbrella, and has been equivocal toward the nuclear umbrella.

<sup>17</sup>- President Barack Obama called for "a world without nuclear weapons" in his speech in Prague in April 2009 and held the 1<sup>st</sup> Nuclear Security Summit with the leaders of 47 countries in Washington in April 2010. President Obama is continuing his efforts to find and prepare ways to reduce dependency on nuclear weapons. The NPR (Nuclear Posture Review) is a document which reflects such ideas. NPR 2010 called for 1) preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism; 2) reducing the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy; 3) maintaining strategic deterrence and stability at reduced nuclear force levels; 4) strengthening regional deterrence and reassurance of U.S. allies and partners; and 5) sustaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal.

Another asymmetrical threat is the increase in the possibility of limited warfare or the limited use of military forces. North Korea, not capable of competing with the South in the conventional realm either quantitatively or qualitatively, must have continued to look for various ways to achieve its political and military goals by targeting South Korea's weaknesses. The Cheonan incident worked well in terms of exploiting the weaknesses of the South. North Korea will continue to attempt to acquire a dominant position through such unconventional military provocations. Such unconventional types of military provocations by the North represent its continued efforts to dominate the security competition. Such provocations are carried out not for a military purpose but for a political purpose, and given its internal and external circumstances North Korea's political motives to create tensions on the Korean Peninsula are expected to continue to a certain degree, or even increase. This change of the North's strategy and tactics also implies that South Korean vulnerability has possibly increased along with the development of its society and economy. For example, a cyber attack by the North can exploit this vulnerability by creating confusion in social and economic areas in South Korea. This shows a political aim to attack through unconventional provocations rather than the military.

Finally, regime instability in North Korea is another possible security challenge. The North Korean regime adopted its "Military First" policy and set 2012 as the year of achieving "Kang-sung-dae-guk" (a Strong and Prosperous Country), and is concentrating its efforts on realizing this objective. However, the regime's internal contradictions have tended to escalate and grow more serious as time passes. Its economy has almost failed and social discontent has been steadily growing. Worse still, as Kim Jong-il's health condition has continued to deteriorate, concerns have arisen as to his ability to hold complete command of the regime. Thus, the possibility of disturbances in the process of succession

cannot be denied. As the regime transforms from a one-man dictatorship to a collective leadership system, it is questionable whether the new system will be able to maintain a certain level of stability.

The security challenges brought on by regime instability are different from those caused by all-out war or irregular warfare and therefore demand a much more complex and precise response.<sup>18</sup> Particularly, when considering the terminal phase of the regime, the subsequent stabilization and nation-building phases, and integration, the material measures required by South Korea would not be the same as the measures it would prepare for a war, and this implies additional expenses.

### ***Changes in the Security and Strategic Landscape in Northeast Asia***

Throughout the Cheonan incident, the possibility of shifts in the security structures and dynamics surrounding the Korean Peninsula has emerged more prominently, and this must be considered from the mid- and long-term perspectives. This change will not pose a direct threat to South Korea and other neighboring countries. Nonetheless, it may present an indirect threat or potential limitation to the decision-making process in foreign and security policy. Therefore, it is necessary to follow this trend closely, analyze the changes, and prepare policy alternatives.

The Cheonan incident and the post-crisis development of the situation revealed the current status of U.S.-China relations and gave implications for the future direction and prospects of that relationship. The U.S. and China started their relationship with high expectations when the Obama administration was inaugurated. However, a negative atmosphere of containment and conflict between the two countries

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<sup>18</sup>- Colonel David S. Maxwell, head of the Strategic Initiatives Group, U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), predicted that violent extremism may arise when the North Korean regime collapses. *Yonhap News*, "Violent extremism expected when regime collapses," September 3, 2010.

emerged from the end of 2009. China criticized the U.S. stance on several sensitive issues such as the resumption of U.S. exports of weapons to Taiwan, the Dalai Lama's visit to the U.S. and his personal meeting with President Obama, the trade imbalance, and currency manipulation. On the other hand, the U.S. started to be concerned about China's recent assertive position when China announced its designation of the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait as regions of core interest and decided to strengthen its military activity. In particular, the U.S. was concerned about the increase in China's projection capability in the military field. China's military capability in its navy and air force is still not comparable with that of the U.S. However, China possesses enough capability to conduct effective operations at least at the regional level, and it presents a critical challenge to the U.S. in terms of pursuing "freedom of navigation," accessing the region, and securing SLOCs (Sea Lines Of Communication).<sup>19</sup>

After the Cheonan incident, China assertively and critically responded to the ROK-U.S. joint military exercises. Previously, China's reaction on the joint exercises was a verbal critique, but unlike before, this time China revealed undiscovered images of maritime exercises (including a practice with a full charge) and held its own exercises in the Yellow/West Sea. In some analysts' views, this indicated that China has intentions to take advantage of the ROK-U.S. joint military exercises and the strengthened ROK-U.S. alliance to increase its own military estab-

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<sup>19</sup>- For more information about the assessment and analysis in terms of China's military buildup, see "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2010." In the past, the U.S. pointed out the lack of transparency in Chinese military and defense policy, and expressed its concerns. Recently, however, the U.S. starts indicating more specific contents of Chinese defense policy such as anti-access and area-denial capability, the capability of conducting cyber warfare, and the increase of power projection ability. In addition, the U.S. is pointing out that it is possible for China to use its strengthened military capability to achieve political and diplomatic aims.

ishment. If this is the case, China's continuous increases in military capabilities, including power projection and the ability to implement various types of operations, deserve more attention as a key element challenging the power balance in the Northeast and East Asian regions.

In sum, China's reaction to the Cheonan incident has become a useful clue in figuring out and analyzing the hitherto overlooked military buildup of China and its implications for the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, the nearsighted strategy of narrowly focusing on North Korea should be replaced with a policy that takes into account shifts in the regional power balance and their implications. This implies a greater need for measures to deal with not only the immediate issues at hand but also the security challenges ahead as well.

### ***Different Postures of Related Countries toward Possible Solutions***

As mentioned in the previous section, consensus among related countries is very weak and the scope of cooperation is limited for various reasons. As time goes by, it is possible that the scope of cooperation may grow even narrower.

The ROK, the U.S. and Japan have maintained the same position toward general North Korea issues, including the Cheonan incident. China and Russia, however, have expressed different points of views in policy priorities and approaches to solving problems. Specifically, South Korea, the U.S. and Japan maintain the stance that the situation must not play out according to the North's intentions, and it is important for related parties to give a tough and clear message to the North. In contrast, China and Russia are more interested in the negative impact cause by such firm stances from related countries. They seem focused on stabilizing the situation in the short-term rather than finding an ultimate solution to the problem. In particular, China has improved its relations with North Korea and shown efforts to restore the relationship and strengthen cooperation

with the North. It is also seeking to contain the U.S. Consequently, cooperation among the five members concerned with the North Korean nuclear problem is potentially getting worse as well. Moreover, this confrontational structure of ROK-U.S.-Japan versus China-Russia in terms of dealing with the Cheonan incident may be intensified, and this structure will influence the developing conspicuous gap in positions among the members involved in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. If so, the current structure among the related countries can become a critical challenge in both the short- and long-terms.

In addition, a more important issue among the concerned countries is that they do not share a common long-term vision of the Korean Peninsula. This is because they mainly gather to solve pending issues and because they have not had frank discussions based on confidence-building. The lack of exchanges of ideas and understandings led to this outcome. All the related countries – the U.S., China, Russia, Japan and the two Koreas – agreed to work toward peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula as an ultimate goal, but they have not agreed on “conditional elements” including methods, measures, and processes to guarantee stability and peace on the peninsula. The task of sharing methods to design a common vision of the Korean Peninsula is another inevitable challenge.

### ***The Lack of an Effective Crisis Management System with Sufficient Capabilities***

A serious problem that emerged from the controversy over the Cheonan incident, for the ROK government in particular, concerns the system of crisis management by which the government can prevent or react to a crisis. Since President Lee Myung-bak took office, several small and large crises have occurred. There was the detainment of a South Korean worker at the Gaesung Industrial Complex, the banishment of

South Korean workers from the complex, and the attack on a tourist at the Mountain Keumgang Resort. Although the ROK government announced a strong posture to improve and reinforce its crisis management system when each crisis happened, the system still clearly reveals deficiencies.

Specifically, the series of procedures, from collecting, reporting and delivering information in a timely manner to assessing the situation and executing response measures, did not progress favorably. These procedures revealed problems of omissions and delays, insufficient information, inappropriate timing and an insufficient level of response in the crisis management and reaction system. The gravity of the deficiency in crisis management should be considered a result of a lack of interest in the prevention and management of crises in actual practice.

Also, an insufficient and reversed explanation of the situation undermined public confidence in terms of the government announcement. The deficiencies in collecting and analyzing information at the early stage of the procedure were acceptable. However, it is necessary to understand that public confidence in the government's announcement may have weakened as unconfirmed information confused the situation, and the government's reversed account raised questions and increased suspicions.<sup>20</sup>

The ROK government reacted by announcing its intention to conduct a scientific and objective investigation on the incident considering all possibilities. However, insufficient analysis of the situation in the first stage and information omissions and reversals raised suspicions. In addition, the South Korean government hectically tried to respond to each of the suspicions and questions as they arose, rather than leading the

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<sup>20</sup>- Many public opinion polls have been conducted about South Korean public confidence in the government's performance related to the Cheonan incident. The results of public polls have varied depending on the time sequence and survey agencies/institutes. However, the frequent fluctuations of the results seem to reflect low confidence among the South Korean public in the government's announcements and explanations.

situation and handling public opinion. In the end, the government was confronted with an increased public mistrust of its announcements.<sup>21</sup>

It is true that the fundamental differences in views among the public toward the government's announcement reflected basic gaps in perceptions about inter-Korean relations. However, the fact that mistakes occurred in accurately judging the incident and delivering the explanation highlights the need for a more cautious approach. In addition, it is important to recognize that these problems do not simply concern the "means of delivery" but also the "contents being delivered" to help the public comprehend the situation.

### ***The Lack of Determination in Taking Firm Follow-up Measures***

On May 2, the ROK government announced its intention to impose a firm follow-up measure toward North Korea via a joint press conference conducted by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Unification.<sup>22</sup> However, they encountered limitations in their ability to control the pace of implementation of some measures, including psychological warfare toward North Korea, which strongly opposed such actions.<sup>23</sup> The ROK government's responses, including strong follow-up measures, were supported by the South Korean people originally, but public unease became increasingly problematic as the process went on.

This domestic situation showed clearly how military tensions

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<sup>21</sup>- In terms of public confidence, this situation can be compared with the beef crisis which occurred in the spring of 2008.

<sup>22</sup>- In the joint press conference, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade announced its intention to forward the Cheonan incident to the U.N. Security Council, and the Ministry of Defense announced a resumption of psychological warfare against North Korea. Also, the Ministry of Unification declared a halt to all exchanges and business cooperation except humanitarian aid to infants and operations in the Gaesung Industrial Complex.

<sup>23</sup>- North Korea announced its planned response to the South's follow-up measures, including direct fire against South Korean loudspeakers, the dispatching of an inspection team by the Military Committee of the North, etc.

negatively influenced society in general and how difficult it was to take optimal actions considering the limited scope and types of feasible alternatives. The core issue is that South Korean government needs to have options for stern countermeasures against the North, and to be able to minimize the negative impact on society and the economy. In sum, the Cheonan incident can be considered a demonstration of the “Korean-type security dilemma,” including the conflict between principle and reality in implementing firm countermeasures.

In diplomatic terms, when South Korea submitted the report of the Cheonan incident investigation to the U.N. Security Council, the results failed to meet their expectations. The U.N. Security Council issued a Presidential Statement condemning the attack rather than a resolution against North Korea.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the Presidential Statement of the U.N. Security Council mentioned the positions of both Koreas. The gist of the statement vaguely points to an attacker in the Cheonan incident. However, it does not directly implicate the North as the attacker, revealing the limitations of diplomatic measures. Through the Cheonan incident, South Korea recognized a chance to note that contrary to its expectations, the international community, and leading powers in particular, deal with pending issues on the basis of their own interests and mainly seek to stabilize the situation. Thus there are limits to the support and cooperation that can be secured from the international community even when all available diplomatic and non-diplomatic means are employed. In other words, the South Korean government must not underestimate the harshness of international community in reality.

In terms of inter-Korean relations, tensions between the two Koreas absolutely increased and influenced the domestic political burden,

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<sup>24</sup> - In the beginning, the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it ultimately aimed for a UNSC resolution and expected that the resolution would be similar to Resolution 1874, including sanctions against the North.

creating limitations in the ability to implement firm countermeasures against North Korea. Specifically, the issue of complaints from businesses involved in inter-Korean economic cooperation restricted the options for follow-up measures. In the beginning of the incident, there was strong support from the public for curtailing exchanges and cooperation with the North due to negative perceptions about North Korea. As time went by, some began to suggest the need for an “exit strategy” to manage the situation on the Korean Peninsula in a better way, and some conservatives also started to call for the resumption of humanitarian aid toward North Korea. The ROK government, however, was in difficult position as it could not restore inter-Korean relations without an apology from the North for the incident and a promise to prevent a recurrence. The South faced a dilemma between its strong stance of demanding an apology and reassurances, and the North’s peace offensive (including suggestions for family reunions and dialogue, etc.).

### **Major Policy Agenda Considerations**

The challenges posed by diverse threats from North Korea, the change in the Northeast Asian security landscape and its impact on the Korean Peninsula, the issues of crisis prevention and management, and the feasibility of resolute measures are currently major issues for security policy. After the Cheonan incident, the South Korean government launched the Commission for National Security Posture Review under the command of the Blue House and appointed a special security advisor. Through three months of activities, the Commission for National Security Posture Review suggested and reported ten agenda items and 50 sub-agenda items. The major agenda items are as follows: suspending a planned reduction of military forces, reinforcing countermeasures against the North’s asymmetrical threat, restoring the period of mandatory

military service to 24 months, modifying military strategy against North Korea, establishing an organization to manage nationwide crises or war-like conditions, strengthening reactions toward cyber war, eradicating “parochialism,” and appointing private specialists to high-level government posts.

What is more remarkable is that Seoul plans to change its military strategy against North Korea by strengthening measures against the North’s asymmetrical threat such as weapons of mass destruction, special operation forces, etc. and by pursuing “proactive deterrence,” consisting of active and offensive strategies. Such points only reflect the changes in the security environment of the Korean Peninsula, and it may be premature to conclude that the commission accurately reviewed the security conditions and suggested alternative solutions appropriately, as their suggestions only covered military and security issues in the traditional context. Therefore, in order to supplement the actions mentioned above, the following points need to be reviewed and developed further.

### ***Strengthening Deterrence against North Korea by Building a Comprehensive and Active Security Posture***

To deter the North’s provocations and induce change, it is all the more important to reinforce comprehensive security strategies and capabilities to tackle the political and military goals of North Korea. By controlling the North Korean risk through such a process, it is possible to minimize the challenges caused by Pyongyang. In other words, as long as the North fails to fully recognize that its strategies and policies will be unsuccessful, it will be difficult to expect the North to change. Therefore, the ROK’s first emphasis against North Korea should be on nurturing capabilities and creating circumstances to deter and respond to Pyongyang’s adventurous military provocations. Also, under these circumstances, it

is important to conduct extensive analyses and evaluations on the threats from North Korea, strengthen cooperation between South Korea and the U.S., develop military capabilities, strategies and tactics, and make sure that the North clearly understands the situation.

In terms of the military, it is crucial to secure full spectrum dominance, even going beyond predictable stages, to respond to the military actions of the North and build up capabilities and systems in order to limit North Korea's possible actions and options. Upon predicting possible actions by North Korea, several steps should be taken to prevent these actions. This means conducting "Crisis Action Standard Operation Procedures" (CASOPs), which are influenced by new types of provocations and threats. Namely, the aim is to reduce North Korea's options and approaches in terms of scope and to take a dominant position.

In this regard, firstly, it is important to analyze and evaluate the types and ranges of military approaches by North Korea and come up with countermeasures. To this end, it is necessary to think and judge matters from the North's perspective in order to determine how the North will challenge the South. Also, it is essential to pay keen attention to the impact on North Korea and the weaknesses of Pyongyang.

Secondly, non-military means need to be formulated to reinforce military measures and capabilities. If provocations by the North are detected or the possibility is raised, both military and non-military actions should be considered to pre-empt them. However, if the focus is on military action, conditions will likely grow worse and limit the opportunities to seek cooperation and support from relevant countries. Thus, political, diplomatic and economic measures should be developed and a cooperative network firmly forged to prevent possible incidents and to resolve problems peacefully. This will be more effective and reasonable if precautions are taken to establish a solid justification for South Korea's

military countermeasures. Previously, the Flexible Deterrence Options (FDOs), which have evolved constantly, were adopted to efficiently tackle crises. In order for FDOs to comprehensively deter the North in military actions as well as non-military actions such as politics, diplomacy, economics, etc., they must be further developed in cooperation with the relevant authorities.

Thirdly, through education, training and practice on the solutions and measures mentioned above, the capability to cope with actual incidents should be strengthened. Even if the programs and solutions are well-planned and organized, if the persons in charge are not very familiar with or accustomed to them, these plans may not bear fruit. Therefore, it must be noted that effective responses are possible only if the hardware, software and human-ware are evenly developed, and particularly more effort should be made to build up human-ware.

### ***Constructing Global Consensus and Cooperative Networks toward North Korea Issues and Policy***

A critical issue that surfaced after the Cheonan incident was the complete difference in stances toward North Korea by the U.S. and China. Also, while the two share the same goals, their priorities and key target points seem to diverge. Furthermore, they do not share the same vision for the most desirable end-state on the Korean Peninsula.

Concerning North Korea issues, the relevant countries have prioritized the nuclear issue (use and proliferation), regime instability, military provocations, etc. In the case of the U.S., nuclear proliferation, regime instability, use of nuclear weapons, and military provocations are considered key elements. For China, the greatest concern is the instability of the regime, followed by the nuclear issue and military provocations. South Korea places emphasis on the nuclear issue (feasibility and precautions instead of proliferation), military provocations and the in-

stability of the regime. Japan's stance closely resembles that of South Korea, but it puts more weight on regime instability than military provocations. True, such priorities can be affected by the internal conditions of the North, and it is highly likely that the same policy targets and priorities can be shared among the countries concerned. In this context, the related countries are likely show more differences in their key agendas toward North Korea.

It is critical to seek common understanding and support from the related countries in order for North Korean policies to succeed, and actual practical cooperation must be taken to reinforce mere declarations. Until now, mutual cooperation on North Korean policy has been formed and centered on pending issues, but contrasting opinions have emerged frequently throughout the process. There was even a lack of consensus on the fundamental understanding of the North Korean issue. To resolve the North Korea problem, it is crucial to consolidate cooperation not only between the U.S. and South Korea, but also between China and Russia. In particular, enormous efforts need to be made to find optimal solutions to guide the fundamental policy directions of these countries to the South's advantage on issues regarding the Korean Peninsula. This also signifies that consensus needs to be reached in order to find the right solutions. As a way to bring China and Russia back to the negotiation table, numerous strategic dialogues should be initiated to change their perceptions, policy priorities and targets, and South Korea needs to take passive as well as proactive approaches to transform the relevant countries' attitudes.

Furthermore, it is important to share ideas on the desirable end-state of the Korean Peninsula, overcome the hurdles to creating a favorable environment, draw a framework of North Korean policy and clarify the roles of related countries.<sup>25</sup> It is true that this process will not

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<sup>25</sup> - A similar example of this issue is the Perry Process in 1999. There were trials to review the Perry Process in the U.S. and Japan, and recently there have been calls to revisit the

be completed overnight, but South Korea needs to lay the foundation for sharing perceptions and goals in order to narrow the gap among the relevant countries.

In his address marking the celebration of Korea's 65<sup>th</sup> Independence Day, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak proposed that the two Koreas build an inter-Korean economic community for comprehensive exchanges and mutual prosperity. It is desirable to raise understanding and seek cooperation from the related countries by demonstrating the prospects and benefits that a reunified Korea can bring. In the process of realizing reunification, even if it takes a tremendous amount of time, the foundation of a cooperative network can be strengthened while identifying problems and challenges through mutual cooperation. In other words, the pursuit of "active peace and reunification diplomacy" beyond "passive peace-oriented diplomacy" is a shortcut to raising the understanding of neighboring countries.

In this context, while working to resolve the Cheonan incident, the ROK government needs to concentrate on transforming the North and improving the quality of inter-Korean relations. It is all the more important for South Korea to consistently stick to its principles regarding inter-Korean relations and not change its stance based on events. The focus needs to be on peaceful coexistence and ultimate reunification through normalization of the North. The policy toward North Korea should be the stabilization of the Korean Peninsula and reunification through fundamental changes of the North, by transforming North Korea into a normal country. In this respect, what is needed is a harmonized strategy that incorporates diverse areas such as politics, diplomacy, economy, social issues, military issues, etc.

### *Preparing for Possible Changes in the Northeast Asian Security Structure*

The Cheonan incident highlighted the challenges posed by the rise of China and the gradual change in the strategic balance between the U.S. and China. The change in the strategic balance will become an independent variable that highly influences South Korea's foreign policy as well as the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asian region. Hence, now is an appropriate time to forecast changes in the strategic structure, identify challenges and come up with timely response measures.

At a global level, China does not yet possess a military capability to rival that of the U.S., and its probability of surpassing the U.S. in the future is very low, but it is reasonable to predict that China will become a containing power vis-a-vis the U.S. within the Northeast Asian region. Additionally, it is important to recognize the changes in China's attitude. Previously, China was highly passive in exercising its military power, but now it is showing a tendency to use its military capability for political and diplomatic purposes, as was proven through the Cheonan incident. China claims that it is achieving a "peaceful rise" and its fundamental aim is to stabilize its neighboring countries, but South Korea cannot ignore the fact that China is changing its approach and attitude toward its fundamental goals. China's gradually evolving stance has increased U.S. concerns toward China as well as the possibility of a more active approach by the U.S., as was taken during U.S. President Barack Obama's trip to Asia in November 2010, in building a cooperative network centered on the U.S. while taking China into account.<sup>26</sup> The U.S.'s encirclement strategy of checking China's expansion will arouse resistance from China, and Chinese antipathy may irritate the U.S., producing a vicious cycle

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<sup>26</sup>- The cooperative network led by the U.S. is expected to include India and Indonesia as well as its allies South Korea and Japan.

between the two countries.<sup>27</sup>

As the ROK government has dual goals of security cooperation with the U.S. and economic cooperation with China, such a confrontational structure will hardly benefit South Korea. However, South Korea has few options for dealing with this. A small-scale multilateral cooperative framework can help to overcome or minimize conflicts that arise in U.S.-China relations. Specifically, through various “mini-lateral dialogues,” the South should explore new areas and actively seek ways to ease the competitiveness of relations between the U.S. and China. Consequently, in addition to the South Korea-U.S.-Japan network, various other mini-lateral cooperative groupings such as South Korea-U.S.-Japan- Australia, South Korea-Japan-Australia, South Korea-China-the U.S., and South Korea-India-Australia-Japan-Indonesia can play pivotal roles in establishing security cooperative systems, redesigning the security structure and transforming the ROK’s cooperative network. This should be a key part of South Korea’s new Asian diplomacy agenda.

### ***Building Domestic Consensus***

It is necessary to draw South Koreans’ attention to their national interests at home and abroad, and to build understanding and consensus on inter-Korean relations. In fact, over the past several years national interest in inter-Korean relations has drastically declined, and the topic is no longer open to discussion. Therefore it has become very difficult to gain positive opinions from the general public on North Korean policies, and public opinion tends to change based on events.

Against this backdrop, it is important to build consensus and

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<sup>27</sup>- The U.S. and China have different definitions of the most desirable regional structure, and they do not even share fundamental values. This weakens cooperation between the two countries. In this regard, it seems probable that future U.S.-China relations would be structured based on competition and confrontation.

reinforce the foundation of public support for improved ties between the South and the North through extensive discussions on inter-Korean relations and North Korean questions. Furthermore, the South-South conflicts need to be handled through a series of thorough discussions, and measures should be taken to prevent the North from misusing these conflicts. In other words, South Korea needs to make more efforts to develop and deliver internal messages together with external messages. In particular, it is imperative to carefully figure out new ways to communicate accurate messages to the general public rather than reformulating old methodologies.

## **Conclusion**

Through the Cheonan incident, the South witnessed changes in its security circumstances which have not been well recognized. Due to the diversification of North Korean challenges and threats, and the shifts in balances and security structures in Northeast Asia, and the resulting uncertainty about security in the mid- to long-term, the South's security chaos has increased dramatically in absolute terms, and the problems have grown more complicated.

As a means to respond to changing security conditions and challenges, a comprehensive and multi-dimensional strategy is needed. By explaining the security status of the Korean Peninsula accurately to the Korean people, it will be possible to gain constant and consistent support from the general public at home. Instead of communicating messages unilaterally, efforts should be made to seek and expand consensus between the government and the public by holding genuine, sincere and interactive dialogues.

Secondly, the South Korean government needs to make efforts to complement and further reinforce national security. It is highly important

to establish cooperative systems and strategies by closely interlinking all security assets, rather than focusing on military affairs only. To this end, it will be useful to analyze and evaluate the changing threats from the North. That is to say, South Korea desperately needs to break away from its security mannerisms and wishful thinking and to firmly equip itself with realistic countermeasures and solutions, while doing away with the security illusion. In addition, instead of operating exclusively in the military dimension, it is worth considering using all the national assets in the name of “comprehensive security” in order to achieve the best effects. Furthermore, it is important to seriously consider what support and cooperation can be gained from alliances and allies.

Lastly, it is of utmost importance to understand the changes occurring around the Korean Peninsula and their impact on South Korea’s national security. After the Cheonan incident, the South once again had an opportunity to analyze the North Korean issue and even re-examined its thinking about the emergence of China. The Cheonan incident has laid a foundation for looking at challenges to national security from a different angle.

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