

Theatre of War and Prospects for Peace on the Korean Peninsula on the Anniversary of the Yeonpyeong Incident 延坪島事件一周年にあたり、朝鮮半島における戦域と平和への見込み

Tim Beal

Theatre of War and Prospects for Peace on the Korean Peninsula on the Anniversary of the Yeonpyeong Incident

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Russian dolls

23rd November 2011 was the first anniversary of the artillery exchange between the two Koreas around the island of Yeonpyeong off the west coast of Korea. The artillery battle in 2010 was the first such since the Korean War armistice and brought the peninsula to a state of heightened tension.¹ With the Lee Myung-bak administration mulling an invasion of the North in the event of a collapse of the DPRK, a local conflict could easily explode into war. The last year has seen a lopsided arms race with South Korea dramatically increasing its military capabilities on a scale the North cannot match. The South Korean military are under American 'wartime' control, and since for technical reasons as well they cannot engage in war without US support, the Americans would be automatically involved in any war. A US-ROK invasion of the DPRK would almost certainly force China to intervene, as it did in 1950. A second Sino-US war would have calamitous, consequences.



South Korean sailors on exercises in the West Sea ([Source](#))

But things are not quite as they seem. Whilst the dangers are real, the portrayal of what has been happening is based on layers of deception. Just as the 2010 incident was not the result of an unprovoked, surprise attack as South Korea claims, so too the massive commemorative exercises of 2011 were really a matter of theatre, designed to raise tension but not, at this stage, precipitate conflict and certainly not, as was claimed, to deter an attack from North Korea. However, like Russian dolls, rhetoric and gestures on the Korean peninsula take place within the context of US-China contestation. The theatre of war in Korea ("We will deter North Korean aggression") nestles inside a theatre of peace ("The United States is not bent on containing China").² The rhetoric of this theatre of peace is as deceptive as that of the theatre of war and whilst there is not space here to go into details about US strategy, it is clear that Lee Myung-

bak's *Nordpolitik* is only acceptable to Washington because it is compatible with, and reinforces, the containment of China, of which tension over North Korea is an integral part.³ However, crucial as this US-China context is, Korean politics have their own specific dynamic, and that is the focus of this article.

Anniversary of a battle

Deception and knowledge, as the ancient Chinese strategist Sun Zi pointed out, is at the heart of war. Know yourself, know your enemy, deceive and destroy. These arts were much in evidence in recent theatrical displays around the island of Yeonpyeong, off the west coast of Korea.

23rd November 2011 marked the 1st anniversary of the Yeonpyeong Incident, an artillery duel between the two Koreas which was the first since the Korean War, and which, many believe, brought the peninsula perilously close to war. However, what happened on 23 November, in 2011 and in 2010, was not quite what it seemed.



Smoke from artillery fire Yeonpyeong Island, 23 November 2010 ([source](#))

There are two main conduits of information about events on the Korean peninsula. One is North Korea's official, state news agency, Korea Central News Agency (KCNA),

headquartered in Pyongyang. KCNA would make Goebbels sigh; it is pretty hopeless as a propaganda medium. Its (English language) releases are usually uninformative and wooden. Sometimes when it reproduces communiqués from the Foreign Ministry the arguments are lucid and coherent, but statements from the military tend to be flowery and blustering.

The other conduit is Yonhap News Agency, South Korea's official voice, headquartered in Seoul. It too is government controlled though newspapers that use its services are too polite to point that out. Yonhap is much better resourced than KCNA and its English is good. Its articles are professional and informative. It tells a much better story. However, that does not mean it tells a more accurate story. Indeed its description of the Yeonpyeong Incident, and its anniversary, are deeply deceptive. As is its coverage of the Cheonan Incident of 2010. The South Korean naval ship Cheonan sank, killing 46 of its crew. The issues remain controversial, but it probably having detonated a South Korean mine. This was falsely blamed on North Korea and the government went as far, it would appear, of fabricating evidence.⁴ The Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents were major propaganda issues for the Lee Myung-bak government in Seoul, and Yonhap is the vehicle by which the government line is articulated and disseminated. Scratch an article in the South Korean press, or most of the international media, and you will usually find Yonhap provided the original.



South Korean F-15K. This outperforms any North Korean fighter (source)

But this is a business of more than lies and deception, though they figure strongly. It is also about the names of islands being rendered into English in a number of different variants, about a sea called both the Yellow Sea and the West Sea, about the NLL, the MDL, and yes, 'the West Sea Special Zone for Peace and Cooperation'. In other words what is needed is a bit of background to what is quite a complicated situation.

The contested boundary in the West Sea

Yeonpyeong (Yonphyong is the North's English version) is one of the four main islands held by South Korea off the North Korean coast. These islands were occupied by the United States during the Korean War and after the armistice was signed in 1953 they were handed over to the South Koreans. The US, worrying that South Korean president Syngman Rhee would reignite the fighting (he opposed the armistice and wanted the Americans to continue the war and reunite Korea under his control), unilaterally established the Northern Limit Line (NLL). This demarcation line, instead of extending the ceasefire land on land in a straight line out to sea, curved up the North Korea coast and embraced the offshore islands (Fig 1).⁵ The North Koreans subsequently proposed their own line, the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) which did, in effect,

extend the demilitarised zone (DMZ) in a straight line out to sea, separating the two sides.⁶ The two lines placed the islands on different sides of the line.



Fig 1. Sea of contention: the NLL,MDL, and the DMZ. Source: Beal, Tim. *Crisis in Korea: America, China, and the Risk of War*. London: Pluto, 2011.

The Northern Limit Line is a problem. It is not accepted by North Korea and it cuts off their fishing boats from rich crab grounds. It has no legal basis, as has been admitted in private by the Americans, including Henry Kissinger.⁷ After the Yeonpyeong incident of 2010 many commentators, including the staunchly pro-American International Crisis Group, argued that it should be abandoned and replaced by a line acceptable to both North and South.⁸ The North's Military Demarcation Line is an obvious choice, but a problem remains. The North does not contest the South's control of the offshore islands and it has suggested the solution to be lanes of access (Fig 2).

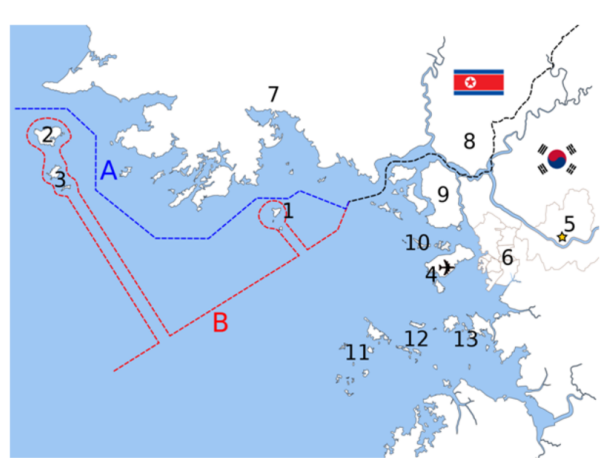


Fig 2. The NLL (A), MDL (B), and lanes of access (source)

One important point to note is that the North considers the waters *surrounding* these islands, down as far as the MDL, to be theirs. This was a key issue in the 2010 confrontation.

When the South's Roh Moo-hyun and the North's Kim Jong Il met for a summit in October 2007 they agreed, amongst other things, to set up 'The West Sea Special Zone for Peace and Cooperation'.⁹ This was scrapped by Lee Myung-bak when he came into office the following year. If there were joint management of fishing and transportation in this area (it is the gateway to the Northern port of Haeju) and the area was demilitarised, the likelihood of a serious clash would be radically reduced. This was obviously not part of Lee's game plan. It seems that he wanted clashes as part of his strategy to produce a crisis that would lead to a collapse of North Korea and its takeover by the South. If the area had been demilitarised, the artillery incident of November 2010 would not have taken place. However, far from demilitarising the area, Lee continued and even expanded the military presence on the offshore islands, and this expansion was greatly increased after November 2010.¹⁰

Falsehoods and spin

The South Korean version of the Yeonpyeong Incident contains at least two important inaccuracies. One is a deliberate falsehood, and the other more a matter of spin.

Firstly the falsehood. It is claimed that the North Korean shelling on 23 November was a 'surprise'. This has been reiterated so often that even liberal newspapers such as the *Hankyoreh* repeat it. Thus we read, in 2011, that:

North Korea's surprise artillery attack on Nov. 23, 2010, brought major changes to the thinking and routine of military personnel stationed on Yeonpyeong Island. K9 artillery company members alternate over three shifts a day at artillery installations. The barracks is just 150 to 200 meters away, but they eat and sleep by the artillery in order to be able to fire back within five minutes in the event of a North Korean provocation. The situation is difficult, but no one complains. The prevailing view is that they were taken unaware once before, and they need to respond comprehensively if another opportunity arises.¹¹

Reading this one would get the impression that the South Korean soldiers were calmly going about their daily routines on 23 November when out of the blue the North Koreans opened fire. Not so. The North was reacting to a 'live fire' exercise conducted by ROK marines on Yeonpyeong. It had issued a number of warnings prior to the exercise, including a phone call on the morning of 23 November.¹² We do not know how explicit the North's warnings were, although it did threaten a 'resolute physical counter-strike'.¹³ The exercise at Yeonpyeong happened at the same time as, but was not officially part of, a massive South Korean military exercise called *Hoguk* (defending the country). This involved:

... some 70,000 troops, 50 warships, 500 warplanes, and 600 tanks in the areas of Seoul, surrounding provinces and the West Sea. The war game included large-scale aerial and naval

drills, including landing operations in the West Sea.¹⁴



South Korean soldiers on manoeuvres ([source](#))

The US was also scheduled to be involved in the exercise.¹⁵ Of particular concern to North Korea was the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) which is charged with seizing nuclear assets in the event of an invasion of the North.¹⁶ However, whilst Hoguk certainly raised tensions (as it was presumably intended to) it was not directly linked to the North Korean action. This was related specifically to the live fire exercises and their implications for sovereignty in the waters around Yeonpyeong.

If live shells are fired from the islet, they are bound to drop inside the territorial waters of the DPRK side no matter in which direction they are fired because of such geographical features.

The ulterior aim sought by the enemy is to create the impression that the DPRK side recognized the waters off the islet as their "territorial waters", in case that there was no physical counter-action on the part of the former.

Herein lies the crafty and vicious nature of the enemy's provocation.

The army of the DPRK took such a self-defensive measure as making a prompt powerful strike at the artillery positions from which the enemy fired the shells as it does not make an empty talk.[Emphasis added]¹⁷

This appears to have been the first time that South Korea had conducted live fire exercises in this area, so for North Korea it was a test case.¹⁸ It was clearly a provocation, by the South but to what degree they anticipated the consequences is unknown. Did they think that the North would not react, thereby strengthening their territorial claims? Did they just blunder into it, not heeding warnings and not passing those up the chain of command?¹⁹ Or did they welcome the prospect of a clash in order to stoke up tension and perhaps precipitate a crisis? We don't know, but we can be sure that South Korea was not the victim of an unprovoked, surprise attack as it has portrayed itself. North Korea could well be accused of over-reacting, or perhaps walking into a trap, though it should be remembered that many more Northerners than Southerners have been killed by enemy fire in these waters over the years.²⁰



A re-enactment in 2011 of the 1950 Inchon landings by which the US outflanked North Korean forces and took Seoul. Similar landings are a feature of contemporary US-South Korean military exercises. ([source](#))

The other misrepresentation was over ‘civilian casualties’. President Lee Myung-bak, for instance, in an address to the nation expressed outrage over the North's ruthless attack on civilians, calling it an "inhumane" crime'.²¹ Much was made of ‘civilian casualties’ – ‘Along with the two young Marines, two civilians were killed in the first North Korean attack on South Korean territory since the 1950-53 Korean War’.²² The reality was that these two unfortunate civilians were contractors working on the military base, and among the 18 wounded on the island that day, only three were civilians.²³ Indeed the South Korean government refused to recognise the dead contractors as ‘men of national merit who sacrificed themselves’, a quasi-military designation requested by their families; dead civilians make better PR.²⁴ We do not know how many casualties the North suffered in the exchange of fire, or whether civilians were hit by the South Korean counter-attack.²⁵

That was November 2010. Things were not what they seemed, certainly not as they were portrayed by the South Korean government, its Yonhap news agency, and accepted by most of the international media. The Wikipedia entry on ‘Bombardment of Yeonpyeong’ has a long list of governments around the world most of whom seem to have accepted the South Korean line.²⁶

Anniversary commemorations

Forward now to 2011 and the anniversary which was marked on both side of the border in distinctly different ways. There were reports of Kim Jong Il visiting an army unit – the ‘Command of KPA Large Combined Unit 233 in the western sector of the front’ – presumably in the vicinity of Yeonpyeong.²⁷ The message was that we will retaliate if attacked, but there do not appear to have been any military exercises, or demonstrations in Pyongyang.



Kim Jong Il inspecting the North Korean People's Army's 789 Unit ([source](#))

The Korean People's Army (KPA) issued a bombastic statement:

They [South Korean military] should be mindful that If they dare to impair the dignity of the DPRK again and fire one bullet or shell toward its inviolable territorial waters, sky and land, the deluge of fire on Yonphyong [Yeonpyeong] Island will lead to that in Chongwadae and the sea of fire in Chongwadae to the deluge of fire sweeping away the stronghold of the group of traitors.²⁸

Chongwadae is the presidential office of South Korea, situated in Seoul.

One perhaps should not get too exercised about the ethics of all of this. After all, the Americans do this every day, assassinating political leaders around the world in what is euphemistically called ‘high value targeting’.²⁹ In practical terms it is a different matter. The Americans have drones which are accurate enough to engulf a few family members, colleagues, and unfortunate villagers in the deluge of fire, whereas if North Korea really

shelled Chongwadae that would mean attacking Seoul. And the US uses its drones in countries which cannot retaliate, whereas an attack on Seoul would mean war.

But the statement should not be taken literally. It was a rhetorical flourish akin to a Maori haka before an All Blacks rugby game. This was a piece of theatre responding to what was happening on the other side of the border which was also designed to frighten, excite, and impress whilst at the same time making it known that it was just theatre.

The Yeonpyeong incident in 2010 provided a big boost for the South Korean government. Many people, especially the young and better educated, had remained very sceptical about the government's version of the Cheonan incident.³⁰ The ruling party had also done badly in the June 2010 elections despite (or because of) the Cheonan fabrication.³¹ The Yeonpyeong incident did much to restore the government's standing as there was a lot of public anger at what was perceived to be an unprovoked attack.³² Indeed, there were reports that some changed their mind over Cheonan after Yeonpyeong.³³



A US Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM). South Korea is scheduled to buy 170 of these stealth cruise missiles in 2012 (source)

It was inevitable that the government would

seek to capitalise on the anniversary. And did they ever.

SKorea flaunts firepower year after NKorean attack

South Korean attack helicopters screamed through the skies above the Koreas' disputed Yellow Sea waters Wednesday in a display of power exactly a year after North Korea launched a deadly artillery attack on a front-line island.....

Wednesday's drills involving aircraft, rocket launchers and artillery guns took place off Baengnyeong Island, another front-line territory near the disputed maritime border, and were meant to send a strong message to North Korean rivals stationed within sight just miles (kilometers) away.

The exercises represent far greater firepower than the South Korean military mounted last year...³⁴

Massive Military Drill Marks Yeonpyeong Attack Anniversary

South Korea is holding a massive military drill on Wednesday involving cutting-edge F-15K fighter jets and K-9 long-range artillery pieces to mark North Korea's shelling of Yeonpyeong Island a year ago.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff on Tuesday said the exercise will be held "under real conditions" to deal with North Korean provocations. The F-15K fighter jets will train firing SLAM-ER air-to-ground missiles with a range of 278 km capable of knocking out targets in North Korea. ...

Marines stationed on the island will follow their new directives of responding first with a volley of rounds from their K-9 howitzers and only then reporting the incident to their commanders.

Army Cobra attack helicopters and Navy vessels will wrap up the drill by attacking North Korean special forces troops approaching Baeknyeong Island aboard hydrofoils.³⁵

Wow! Hold onto your hats boys, we're off to World War III!

Well not quite. Looking at the small print we see that this is more like a film than the real thing.

At 1 p.m., a *mock* marine firing exercise is being held with crew-served weapons such as the K9 self-propelled artillery. A *hypothetical* North Korean response with a launch of dozens of rounds of 122 mm artillery at the Gaemeori area 12 kilometers off Yeonpyeong Island is planned for 2:33 p.m [Emphasis added].³⁶

And again

The JCS [South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff] said the exercise will begin with the Yeonpyeong Marine Unit *simulating* firing its K-9 self-propelled howitzers and other artillery in a regular exercise at 1 p.m. Then at 2:33 p.m., the time when North Korea began firing at Yeonpyeong a year ago, the JCS will *simulate* North Korean launching shots from its artillery base in Kaemori [Gaemeori], only 13 kilometers from Yeonpyeong....

The JCS said the Yeonpyeong Marine Unit will *simulate* bombing Kaemori base five minutes after the North's first strike, and the South's fighters will also launch missiles.

The JCS said the *simulated* drill will wrap up with the shooting down of a North Korean aircraft attempting to land on Baengnyeong Island, using an AH-1 Cobra attack helicopter and other naval and aerial weapons....

The Army said in a statement that the Capital Corps exercise will involve *simulated* firing drills with self-propelled guns and ground-

based air defense weapons, under the *scenario* of North Korean maritime infiltration and aerial provocation.³⁷



South Korean marines on patrol on Yeonpyeong Island, 22 November 2011 (source)

So no live firing of the sort that brought North Korean retaliation in 2010. So no possibility of South Korean forces 'fir[ing] one bullet or shell toward [North Korea's] inviolable territorial waters, sky and land'. So no 'sea of fire in Chongwadae'.³⁸ All smoke and mirrors. The South Korean government made a big splash about the anniversary but did it in such a way that the North had no 'legitimate' reason for taking action. The word 'legitimate' in this context raises all sorts of arcane issues which are not entirely legalistic in the Western sense but perhaps relate more to Confucian concepts of acceptable behaviour. The North did not respond to the South's resumed live fire exercise in December 2010 because the other side was :

.....firing shells left unused during the military provocation on November 23 after shifting by stealth the waters to be a scene of the projected shelling and its target (sic).³⁹

This might mean that the South was firing not into what the North considered its territorial

waters but into the 'lane of access' (see Fig 2). The fact that the South merely finished off the shells left over from the first exercise seems to have been a factor, but why is unclear. By the time of the anniversary it seems that both sides had reached some unspoken agreement about what was acceptable, and what would cross the line in the sand. Simulations were annoying, but bearable; live fire might have been another matter.

However, from the point of view of the South, simulations provided the necessary drama and photo opportunities.



South Korean (US made) Patriot surface to air missiles (source)

Sustaining and increasing tension

It is all really to do with sustaining and increasing tension, partly in order to precipitate some further military clash that

might in turn lead to a takeover of the North. It is also designed to instil in the South Korean population a feeling of being under threat from the North.

Thus we have the military build-up in the West Sea:

While the situation at the very front is one of fighting spirit based in hostility, the military leadership is moving to fortify the five West Sea islands. In June, a Marine-centered Northwest Islands Defense Command was set up, and an additional budget of 100 billion won (\$87.2 million) for 2011 was allocated just for reinforcement of military strength around the islands. An additional 1,000 military personnel were stationed there, and K9 units were more than doubled. Also brought in was an AH-1S Cobra attack helicopter with Vulcan and grenade-launching capabilities, a multiple rocket launcher and new Artillery Hunting Radar (ARTHUR), and daytime and nighttime observation equipment for monitoring the front. Plans are under way to bring in Spike missiles, tactical aerial vehicles, and unmanned reconnaissance aircraft.⁴⁰

A lop-sided arms race

What has been happening in the West Sea is but a microcosm of a quite astounding increase in South Korean military capabilities. Just in the last few weeks alone there have been a number of reports in the Seoul media highlighting this. Interestingly, much of this buildup, like the construction of the naval base on Jeju island for the US navy (denied of course), is clearly aimed at China.⁴¹ Thus:

South Korea is developing a supersonic cruise missile that can be used to attack aircraft carriers, Aegis ships and up-to-date destroyers.⁴²

Since North Korea does not have aircraft carriers, Aegis ships or destroyers of any vintage, let alone up-to-date ones, the

conclusion is obvious and is surely not lost in Beijing.



The Dokdo, South Korea's helicopter assault ship, designed for amphibious landings. North Korea has nothing comparable. (source)

Following a 6 December report that 'Korea to purchase 170 stealth cruise missiles next year', the following day a report indicated that 150 bunker buster bombs were being purchased.⁴³ The South Korean military naturally comes out publically with stories that the North has more troops and in various fields more hardware than the South, but even if the numbers were correct the disparity in quality of equipment between the two sides (let alone bringing the Americans into the calculation) is overwhelming.⁴⁴ An article in the right-wing Seoul paper *Chosun Ilbo* in August exulted:

The North has fallen sharply behind South Korea in terms of airpower. Experts conducted a simulated war game and found that South Korean and U.S. fighter jets could overpower North Korean aircraft and gain control of its airspace within three days. ...

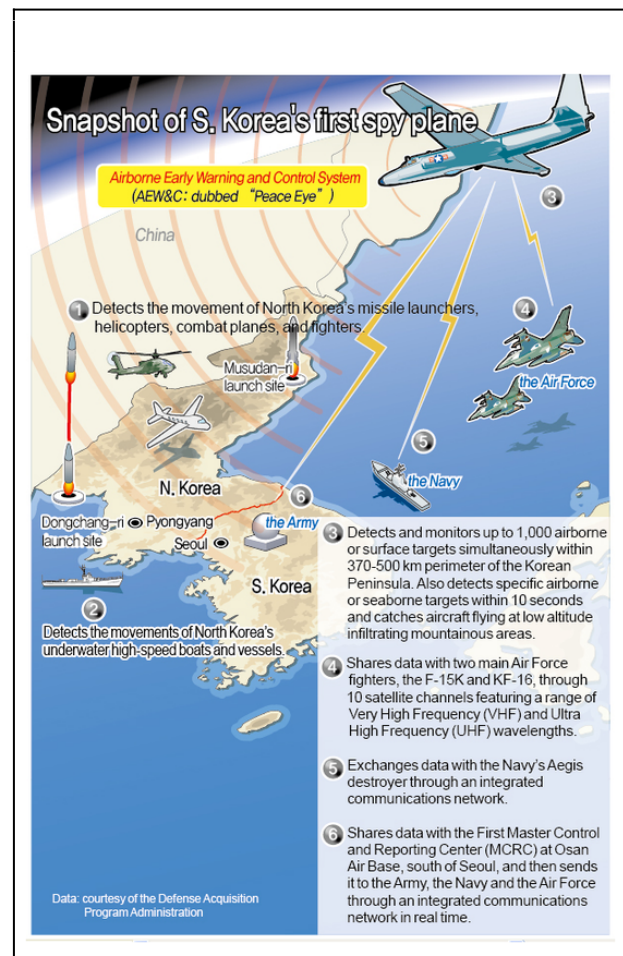
Some 70 percent of North Korea's fighter jets are MiG-15, 17, 19 and 21s that were built in the 1950s to 1960s. A lack of fuel has

prevented pilots from training properly, and a shortage of parts has left the aircraft in bad shape. ...

No North Korean aircraft is capable of taking on the F-15K.

The difference in airpower is expected to widen further with the South planning to bring in four more E-737 "Peace Eye" airborne early warning and control aircraft next year.⁴⁵

Perhaps the area where advanced technology has the most leverage is in airborne (or space) intelligence and surveillance equipment such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and the early warning and control aircraft mentioned above. Here South Korea has a clear edge thanks to its access to US technology (in the diagram the E-737 still carries American markings).



The E-737 system (Source)

In general, as a South Korean military strategist recently put it in an article for the [US] *Naval War College Review*: [North Korea] is poor and small, uses ageing and obsolete weapons, and lacks sustainment capabilities.⁴⁶

High-tech equipment is not everything, as this strategist acknowledged, but as, for instance, the rapid US conquest of Iraq at the start of the war demonstrated, it can be devastating.

The best measure of the quality of equipment for countries such as the Koreas is the amount of military imports. Here the South is far in the ascendant. Over the last five years alone South Korea was the world's third largest arms importer, and when one considers that the competition includes India, Saudi Arabia, and China, that is saying something.⁴⁷ Between 2000 and 2008, according to the World Bank's *World Development Indicators*, South Korea imported a hundred times as much military equipment as North Korea; \$9,682 million against \$98 million.⁴⁸



A South Korean Type 209 submarine. Three of these, worth \$1.1 billion, are being sold to Indonesia. South Korea far outstrips North Korea in arms sales and purchases. (source)

The specific buildup of equipment and marines on the West Sea islands is justified by reference to the 2010 clash and by creating scare stories

such as the idea that North Korea is poised to invade the islands:

Analysts said North Korea has brought in thousands of additional special forces soldiers for overseas invasion and hovercrafts, while South Korea is stepping up its exercises in anticipation of a surprise land attack by North Korea.⁴⁹

'Analysts' in this context presumably means spokespersons for the military. A glance at the map (Fig 1) will show how implausible a land attack is, except perhaps as a counterattack to neutralise attacking forces in the case of an invasion of the North. It should be noted that the troops on these islands are not some sort of decrepit Home Guard but marines, specially selected and trained amphibious assault troops.⁵⁰ From the South, the offshore islands in the West Sea could conceivably lie on the road to Pyongyang, and a landing from them would outflank Northern forces along the DMZ. But for the North, the islands lead nowhere except out to sea. Moreover, given the South's sea and air superiority, an invading force from the North would be isolated and easily mopped up.

One consequence of this geographical asymmetry is that the West Sea is a good place for the South Korean military to build up tension without much risk of it getting out of hand, unless they so desire.

Dangerous times lie ahead

Whether they do desire an explosion, so that the situation in the West Sea goes from tension to conflict, presumably depends on their reading of the state of affairs in Pyongyang, in Washington, in Beijing, and to a lesser extent in Moscow. If it is considered that serious fighting there will produce a crisis in Pyongyang leading to a collapse, or what could be portrayed as such, and if this is endorsed by the Americans (and no military action is possible without the Americans) then we might

see a provocation to which the North would be forced to react. That still leaves the Chinese reaction. The right wing press and the government in South Korea (and friends in the US) frequently claim that China (and Russia) would not oppose the takeover of the North.⁵¹ Sometimes they wheel out a tame Chinese academic to offer reassurance:

"I believe China will call for a diplomatic solution even if the North is attacked by South Korea or the U.S.," [Prof. Chu Shulong of Tsinghua University] said. "Most Chinese don't think a reunited Korea would stand against China, even if the U.S. keeps stationing troops or bases on the peninsula. China won't mind Korean reunification, even if it is led by South Korea."

In reality such acquiescence is unlikely.

So it comes down to a game of bluff and feint to see the reactions in Pyongyang, Washington, Beijing and Moscow. At the same it is necessary to keep things stirred in the South, to make people think they are under threat and need exercises such as those at Yeonpyeong to keep them safe.

This time it was all theatre, but next time, through miscalculation or because of a perception of changing opportunities, it may be the real thing. No longer theatre, just war. That perception of changing opportunities turns to some extent on what happens in that larger theatre of Sino-US and Sino-Russian-US interaction. Here, although the rhetoric of peace still prevails, the underlying theme is becoming increasingly belligerent as the United States, facing setbacks in the Middle East, 'moves back to Asia'.⁵²

Dangerous times lie ahead and the likeliest place for a second Sino-American war remains the Korean peninsula.⁵³

Tim Beal is the author of *North Korea: The Struggle Against American Power*, Senior Lecturer (emeritus) at Victoria University of Wellington, he is the editor of *The Pyongyang Report* and an Asia-Pacific Journal Associate.

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For articles on related themes see

See [Seunghun Lee and J.J. Suh](#), "Rush to Judgement: Inconsistencies in South Korea's Cheonan Report," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 12 July 2010.

[Tim Beal](#), "Korean Brinkmanship, American Provocation, and the Road to War: the manufacturing of a crisis," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 20 December, 2010.

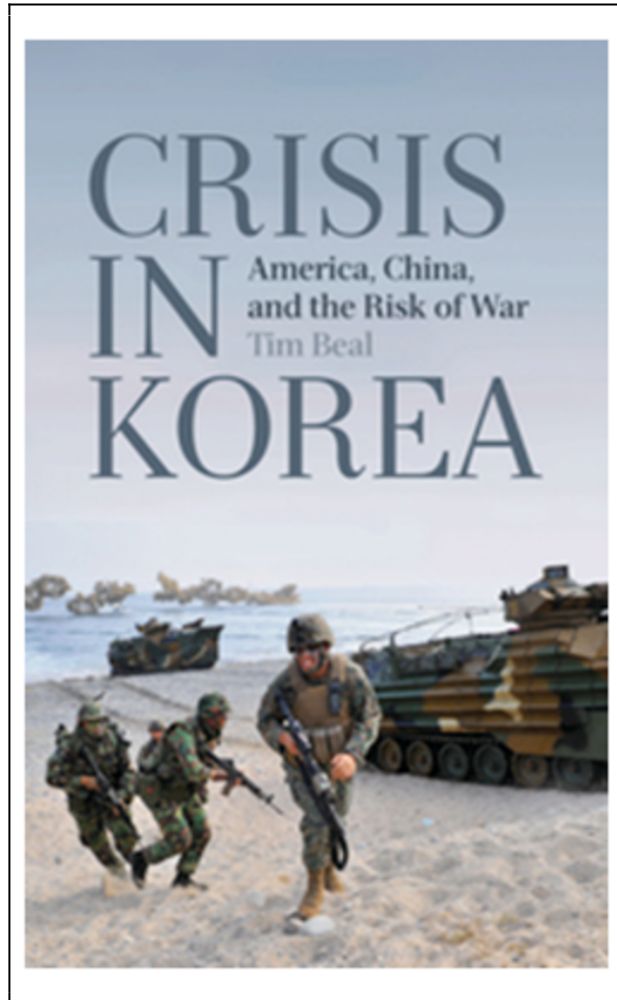
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This essay was occasioned by the anniversary on 23 November 2011 of the Yeonpyeong Incident. A longer essay on the current situation on the peninsula, within the context of contemporary geopolitics, is under preparation.

Tim Beal's most recent book, *Crisis in Korea: America, China and the Risk of War* was published by Pluto Press in 2011. Details are available [here](#).

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Notes

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