

## **MONTHLY RECAP: MARCH**

### **DPRK MISSILE PREPARATIONS**

The month of March opened with all eyes on possible North Korean missile launch preparations. Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo publicly called on Pyongyang to halt missile assembly, and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak called on North Korea to return to inter-Korean dialog.

Commander of U.S. forces in Asia Admiral Timothy Keating warned, “If a missile leaves the launch pad we’ll be prepared to respond upon direction of the president,” but also stated he believed, “...like 60/40, 70/30 that it will, they will attempt to launch a satellite.” North Korea has insisted that the launch will be in order to place a satellite in orbit, and that it would not be a ballistic missile test. On March 29, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates ensured that the U.S. had no plans to take military action to preempt the launch, and said that the U.S. would only consider downing an “aberrant missile...that looked like it was headed for Hawaii or something...”

Japan’s Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone pointed out, “even if a satellite was launched...it would be a clear violation of the Security Council resolution [banning ballistic missile-related development].”

North Korea notified the International Maritime Organization, the International Civil Aviation Organization and other international agencies of its plan to launch a communications satellite between April 4-8, and gave coordinates of the expected splash-down of the first stage of its rocket. The coordinates released by the North would indicate a trajectory crossing over Japan. Japan has asserted it has the right to down any object falling toward its territory.

#### SIX-PARTY TALKS

On March 2, South Korea named Wi Sung-lac as its new chief negotiator for Six-Party Talks. He will replace Kim Sook. Wi is the special assistant to Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan, and previously served as minister for political affairs at the South Korean Embassy in the United States.

On March 3, it was reported that U.S. Special Envoy on North Korea Stephen Bosworth had “substantive and detailed” talks with Chinese foreign ministry officials on restarting talks and advancing North Korean denuclearization. Bosworth went on to Japan and South Korea to meet counterparts and work on a strategy for reinitiating 6-Party Talks.

On March 15, a U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) report stated North Korea has removed approximately 6,100, or 75 percent, of its spent fuel rods from its reactor at Yongbyon.

#### INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS

During a speech marking the March 1 Independence Movement, ROK President Lee Myung-bak stated “South and North Korea have agreed to seek peaceful coexistence and co-prosperity, while recognizing and respecting each other. I am going to respect these inter-Korean agreements.” He also stated that “the door to unconditional dialog remains open.”

Joint U.S.-ROK military exercises held during March led to heightened tensions between the two Koreas, with North Korean media denouncing the exercises as offensive in nature, and threatening to peace on the peninsula. On March 5, Korean Air and Asiana Airlines announced that they would alter certain routes to avoid passing near DPRK airspace after North Korea threatened, “Security cannot be guaranteed for South Korean civil airplanes flying through the territorial air of our side and its vicinity,” during the

exercises, as the North's military was put on "full combat readiness." Air Canada, Singapore Airlines and other international carriers followed suite, rerouting flights to Seoul in order to steer clear of the waters east of North Korea.

On March 19, North Korea notified the South that it would reopen communications across the DMZ on March 21, one day after joint U.S.-ROK military exercises ended.

#### ANTI-DPRK LEAFLETS

It was reported on March 17 that a defector group in the ROK again flew anti-Kim Jong Il leaflets into North Korea, despite objections from the South Korean government. This time, 100,000 leaflets with messages describing Kim as "the most vicious dictator and murderer," also carried North Korean banknotes.

#### KAESONG INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

On March 5, it was reported that North Korean authorities had penalized a South Korean firm in the complex for pollution, and banned DPRK laborers from the site. This is the first case of DPRK penalties levied against a

specific company in the KIC.

On the same day, it was reported that the North had threatened to suspend operations or impose fines of up to 2000 USD if firms fail to pay their DPRK employees. Increased severance pay and more overtime were also demanded.

On March 9, approximately 80 South Korean workers in the KIC were unable to return to the ROK as North Korea cut all lines of communication with South Korea, making it impossible to coordinate border crossings. Approximately 620 ROK citizens were in the complex at the time. The border was reopened the following day, allowing intermittent crossings for a short time until the issue could be resolved. On March 13, North Korea again blocked ROK workers from returning to the South, this time as 27 5 South Korean residents attempted to leave the KIC. South Korean operators complained that delays in delivery of raw materials could lead to production delays. The border was fully reopened on March 17.

#### KAESONG ESPIONAGE

The DPRK announced on March 30 that a South Korean worker in the KIC

was arrested by North Korean authorities for “Denouncing [the North’s] political system,” and further accused the South Korean of having “degenerated and spoiled our female employee to instigate defection.”

### U.S.-DPRK RELATIONS

On March 2, North Korea and the U.S.-led UN Command opened military talks. A statement from the UN Command called it “positive” and stated that the North had called for the meeting “to discuss tension reduction.” It was the first meeting between the two sides in seven years. More talks followed on May 5-6, but ended “without progress.”

On March 18, it was reported that North Korea had told five aid groups to leave the country by the end of the month, and the DPRK is refusing to accept any food aid from the United States.

On March 19, two U.S. journalists from CurrentTV Chinese guide were detained by North Korean border guards as they ventured out onto the frozen Tumen River along the China-DPRK border, while their Chinese guide and American cameraman escaped detention. The two reporters were

transported to Pyongyang for questioning. On March 30, North Korea announced the pair would be indicted and stand trial for illegal entry and hostile acts.

### DPRK ELECTIONS

Parliamentary elections were held in North Korea on March 7. Kim Jong Il was reportedly unanimously re-elected, with a 100 percent voter-turnout in his district, Constituency No. 33. 299 of the 687 members were replaced through this election, with some experts noting the replacement of moderates who advocated inter-Korean dialog with more hardline cadres.

### DPRK SHIPPING

A study by Hazel Smith of North Korea's merchant shipping fleet found it unlikely that the North was proliferating missiles or other WMDs. Smith stated, "We can't really find very much hard evidence of North Korean ships involved in smuggling WMD or components of WMD." This is because North Korean ships face significant scrutiny in foreign ports-of-call. This is not only because of UN sanctions banning the shipping of WMD-related goods, but because North Korea's dilapidated fleet of only 242 vessels, which lost state subsidies in the early 1990s, is "frequently stopped and even

detained for serious safety violations.”

#### DPRK AUTOMOBILES

On March 10, it was reported that North Korean authorities had revived efforts to ban foreign cars in the country. The National Defense Commission banned the cars in early February, but officials had been lax in enforcing the order. The current efforts are said to be aimed at those officials who had been turning a blind eye to the sale of imported autos as the NDC sees failure to comply as a “provocative act”. The order calls for all right-hand drive cars, primarily imported from Japan, be scrapped. Japanese cars account for as high as 80 percent of all imported cars in the North.

#### DPRK MISSILE SALES

On March 6, it was reported that the conclusion of a study by the Claremont Institute was that North Korea brings in approximately 1.5 billion USD per year through the export of around 1,000 Scud missiles and related missile technology to Iran, Syria and other Middle Eastern states.

#### DPRK HUMAN RIGHTS



On March 27, the UN Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution, cosponsored by the EU and the ROK, condemning human rights abuses in North Korea, and demanding that the North allow a UN Special Rapporteur to visit the country.

On March 28, it was reported that the South Korean government is allowing Voice of America radio to broadcast into North Korea using transmission equipment in the ROK and allowing for a much stronger signal to reach the DPRK. Since the 1970s, VOA has been broadcasting from the Philippines, Thailand and Saipan.