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Chapter 1

Country Overview

Country Overview

SOUTH KOREA

In August 1948 the Republic of Korea (R.O.K.) was established, with Syngman Rhee as the first president. North Korean troops invaded the south in June 1950, starting the three-year Korean War. An armistice ended the war in 1953, but a permanent peace treaty has never been signed. In the following decades, South Korea experienced political turmoil under autocratic leadership. President Syngman Rhee was forced to resign in April 1960 following a student-led uprising. The leadership of President Chang Myon ended after only one year when Major General Park Chung-hee led a military coup. Park's rule, which resulted in tremendous economic growth and development but increasingly restricted political freedoms, ended with his assassination in 1979. Subsequently, a powerful group of military officers, led by Lieutenant General Chun Doo-hwan, declared martial law and took power. Throughout the Park and Chun eras, South Korea developed a vocal civil society that led to strong protests against authoritarian rule. Intensified pro-democracy activities ultimately forced political concessions by the government in 1987, including the restoration of direct presidential elections. In 1987, Roh Tae-woo, a former general, was elected president, but additional democratic advances during his tenure resulted in the 1992 election of a long-time pro-democracy activist Kim Young-sam, who became Korea's first civilian elected president in 32 years. The 1997 presidential election and peaceful transition of power marked another step forward in Korea's democratization when Kim Dae-jung, a life-long democracy and human rights activist, was elected from a major opposition party. The transition to an open, democratic system was further consolidated in the following years, although as of 2015, South Korea must grapple with the challenge of corruption.

Key Data

Key Data	
Region:	Asia
Population:	49115196
Climate:	Temperate, with rainfall heavier in summer than in winter.
Languages:	Korean, English widely taught in high school
Currency:	1 South Korean won (W) = 100 chun (theoretical)
Holiday:	Independence Day is 15 August (1948), Memorial Day is 6 June
Area Total:	98480
Area Land:	98190
Coast Line:	2413

Korea, South

Country Map



Asia

Regional Map



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Chapter 2

Political Overview

History

According to the legend, Tangun, the god-king, founded the Korean nation in 2333 before the common era or B.C.E.. The Korean Peninsula was divided into the kingdoms of Silla, Koguryo and Paekche by the first century in the common era or C.E. All the three kingdoms achieved centralization of power and developed highly sophisticated cultures. In 688 C.E., with the support of China, the Silla kingdom unified the peninsula by conquering Paekche in 660 and Koguryo in 668 C.E. In 676 C.E., Silla drove out the Chinese and gained complete control of the Korean peninsula.

In 918 C.E., Wang Kon, succeeding the Silla kingdom, founded the Koryo dynasty and eventually expanded its territory to the Yalu River. The Koryo ruling class consisted largely of the provincial castle lords and former Silla aristocrats. They held Buddhism as their religion and Confucianism as their political principles. In 1231, the Mongolian invaders occupied Koryo. After vainly resisting for nearly 30 years, the Koryo regime signed a peace treaty with the invaders in 1258.

A new land-distribution system was established in later years with the support of General Yi Song-gye, and the land was granted according to the rank of office by this new system. The land reforms as well as the new system brought the Koryo dynasty's end. In 1392, the Choson (Yi) dynasty was established and it lasted until 1910 when the Japanese annexed Korea.

In 1592 and 1597, the Japanese twice invaded Korea. The Japanese invaders withdrew from Korea after the Japanese military leader Toyotomi died in 1598. In 1627, the Manchu occupied northern Korea. In 1636, the Manchu overran Seoul and the Korean king surrendered to the Manchu invaders.

Korea had been an independent nation during the Choson dynasty though it paid fealty to China until the Sino-Japanese War in 1894-95 and Russo-Japanese War in 1904-05. Japan annexed Korea as part of its empire in 1910 after it won both wars. Korea had been under the Japanese control until the end of World War II in 1945.

Korea was liberated from the Japanese rule when Japan surrendered to the Allied forces in August 1945, but in the mean time liberation did not bring Korea independence. The Yalta Conference held in February 1945 did not produce any formal agreement on the future status of Korea among

the Allied powers, only agreeing to establish a four-power trusteeship over Korea. On Aug. 11, 1945, the United States drafted the General Order Number One for Japanese surrender terms in Korea, providing for Japanese forces north of the 38th parallel to surrender to the Soviets and those of south of that line to the Americans. With the Soviet Union agreeing to the order, Korea was divided into two zones at that time. In December 1945, a joint Soviet-American commission was established for the future settlement of Korea at a conference held in Moscow, but the commission was deadlocked over the issue of establishing a national government in Korea.

As early as Sept. 6, 1945, during a meeting South Korean delegates from various groups proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of Korea, but the U.S. military government refused to recognize the republic. Later on, the exiled Korean provisional government was also denied government power but only a political party on their returning. The U.S. policy in Korea was to set up a trusteeship to replace both the American and the Soviet occupation forces in the country. In contrast to the U.S., the Soviet Union set up a communist-controlled government in the North by placing some expatriate Korean communists in key positions of power.

As the United States and the Soviet Union disagreed with each other's proposal for a unified Korean national government, the United States presented the Korean question to the United Nations in September 1947. In November, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the proposal by the United States to hold a general election in Korea under the observation of the U.N. Temporary Commission on Korea. Although the commission was barred from entering the North by the Soviet Union, the South held elections on May 10, 1948. On Aug. 15, the Republic of Korea was inaugurated, and in December the U.N. General Assembly declared that the republic was the only lawful government in Korea. In the North, on Sept. 9, 1948, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was established with Kim Il Sung appointed as premier. On Oct. 12, the Soviet Union recognized the DPRK as the only lawful government in Korea. The division of Korea was originally meant to be temporary to facilitate the Japanese surrender, but the Cold War led to the establishment of two separate nations. A unified Korea was out of the question in the meantime.

Upon establishment, the Republic of Korea adopted a presidential system and Syngman Rhee was elected the first president of the republic. Rhee was re-elected as president in August 1952. In 1954, Rhee succeeded in forcing the National Assembly, then dominated by the ruling party, to pass an amendment that exempted him from what was then a two-term limit on the presidency. In May 1956, Rhee was re-elected president for his third term. During the presidential election in March 1960, there were massive student demonstrations against Rhee to be elected for the fourth time. On April 19, the intensified student uprising and many casualties caused by it forced Rhee to resign and he fled to exile in Hawaii. Syngman Rhee died in 1965 at the age of 90 in Hawaii.

On June 25, 1950, North Korean troops invaded the South, which started the Korean War that lasted for three years. On July 27, 1953, an armistice agreement was signed at Panmunjom by

North Korea, China and the United Nations, but neither the United States nor South Korea was a signatory of the armistice agreement. Nevertheless, the war came to an end by the agreement, with the United States and South Korea also adhering to the agreement through the U.N. Council. The armistice agreement also set up the current border between South and North Korea, as well as a demilitarized zone along the border. Since then, there has no permanent peace agreement signed between South and North Korea, for which a condition of belligerency has been actually existing on the divided peninsula, with each side heavily stationing troops at the demilitarized zone.

Until 1971, the governments of South and North Korea had had no direct contact although both sides had expressed desires to reunify the Korean peninsula. From 1972, South and North Korea started talks and have reached various agreements since then. On July 4, 1972, South and North Korea signed the Joint Communiqué, agreeing on the three unification principles-independence, peace and Grand National unity. A treaty of non-aggression and reconciliation was signed between the two sides in 1992. In 1994, North and South Korea agreed to hold a summit in July, but the meeting was canceled later because of North Korean leader Kim Il Sung's sudden death.

Developments in the late 1990s and early 2000s in the North-South relations sent encouraging messages of reconciliation and peace on the Korean Peninsula. In June 2000, a summit between then-South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il was held in Pyongyang. The summit was seen as a turning point in the inter-Korea relations and many analysts believed it could lead to a lessening of tensions, ultimately resulting in cooperation between the two Koreas. The decision by North Korea to develop its nuclear capacity has somewhat stymied the climate of optimism in more recent years.

Note on History: In certain entries, open source content from the State Department Background Notes and Country Guides have been used. A full listing of sources is available in the Bibliography.

Political Conditions

Syngman Rhee served as president of the Republic of Korea until April 1960 when unrest led by university students forced him to step down. Though the constitution was amended and national elections were held in June, Maj. Gen. Park Chung-hee led an army coup d'etat against the successor government and assumed power in May 1961.

After two years of military government under Park, civilian rule was restored in 1963. Park, who had retired from the army, was elected president and was reelected in 1967, 1971 and 1978 in

highly controversial elections.

The Park era, marked by rapid industrial modernization and extraordinary economic growth, ended with his assassination in October 1979. Prime Minister Choi Kyu Ha briefly assumed office, promising a new constitution and presidential elections. In December 1979, however, Maj. Gen. Chun Doo-hwan and some of his close military colleagues staged a coup d'etat, removed the army chief of staff and soon controlled the government.

University student-led demonstrations against Chun's government spread in the spring of 1980 until the government declared martial law, banned all demonstrations and arrested many political leaders and dissidents. Special forces units in the city of Kwangju dealt harshly with demonstrators and residents, ultimately setting off a chain of events, which left at least 200 civilians dead. Perhaps because of the violence involved, the incident has been regarded as a significant event in contemporary South Korean political history by many South Korean citizens.

Chun, by then retired from the army, officially became president in September 1980. Although martial law ended in January 1981, his government retained broad legal powers to control dissent. Nevertheless, an active and articulate minority of students, intellectuals, clergy and others remained critical of the Chun government and demonstrated against it.

In April 1986 the president appeared to yield to demands for reform, particularly for a constitutional amendment allowing direct election of his successor. In June 1987, however, Chun suspended all discussion of constitutional revision, and the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP) approved Chun's handpicked successor, Roh Tae-woo. In response, students, followed by the general public, took to the streets in protest.

Then, in a surprise move, on June 29, 1987, the ruling party presidential candidate, Roh Tae-woo, announced the implementation of democratic reforms. That very year, in October, the constitution was revised to include direct presidential elections and a strengthened National Assembly consisting of 299 members.

The main opposition forces soon split into two parties-Kim Dae-jung's Peace and Democracy Party (PDP) and Kim Young-sam's Reunification Democratic Party (RDP). With the opposition vote split, Roh Tae-woo subsequently won the December 1987 presidential election -- the first direct presidential election since 1971 -- with 37 percent of the votes cast.

The new constitution went into effect in February 1988 when President Roh Tae-woo assumed office. Elections for the National Assembly were held on April 26, 1988. President Roh Tae-woo's ruling Democratic Justice Party then captured only 34 percent of the vote in the National Assembly elections. It was the first time that the ruling party had lost control of the legislative body since 1952.

South Korean politics were changed as a result of three things during the late 1980s: (1) the outcome of the 1988 legislative elections; (2) the Assembly's greater powers, granted under the 1987 constitution; and (3) the influence of public opinion.

One notable outcome was that there was significant political liberalization, including greater freedom of press, greater freedoms of expression and assembly, and the restoration of the civil rights of former detainees. Within this more progressive climate, the new opposition-dominated National Assembly quickly challenged the president's prerogatives.

The trend toward greater democratization continued for the next several years. In free and fair elections in December 1992, Kim Young-sam, the former opposition leader who joined the ruling party of Roh Tae-woo, received 43 percent of the vote and became Korea's first civilian president in nearly 30 years.

Almost four years later in August 1996, ex-Presidents Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo were convicted on corruption and treason charges but were pardoned by President Kim Young-sam in December 1997.

Presidential elections were held at the close of 1997. Kim Dae-jung of the National Congress for New Politics (NCNP) won the December 1997 presidential election, defeating Lee Hoi-chang of the renamed ruling party, Grand National Party (GNP). Kim's 1997 victory was the first true victory of an opposition party in a Korean presidential election.

When President Kim Dae-jung took office in early 1998, the country was at the height of its worst economic crisis. Under the leadership of the reform-oriented president, South Korea went through significant structural economic reforms, and its economic recovery was the fastest of the countries seriously affected by Asia's economic crisis. Kim Dae-jung was determined to continue reforms while in office. In 2000, at a New Year's news conference, he said, "We are required to continue pushing for structural reforms in order to transform our country into the world's first-class state in the new century."

Meanwhile, in 1999 and in early 2000, the South Korean government was facing public criticisms of corruption. As a way of soothing public anger as well as carrying on his reforms, President Kim Dae-jung created a new ruling party named the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) and undertook reshuffling the cabinet in January 2000. As a result, Park Tae-chun was appointed as South Korea's prime minister, since former Prime Minister Kim Jong-pil had resigned. Kim Jong-pil was the former leader of the United Liberal Democrats (ULD).

Before the 1997 presidential election, Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-pil made an agreement to form a ruling coalition government system, and they also agreed to change the nation's constitution by

1999 to create a parliamentary cabinet system. Kim Dae-jung narrowly won the 1997 presidential election with the support of the ULD.

In February 2000, the ULD declared an end to partnership with the ruling MDP, saying the president failed to implement his promise. Analysts suspected that the real reason behind the rift between the two parties was that Kim Jong-pil was named in a blacklist of tainted politicians who civic groups said should be ostracized in the parliamentary elections. The ULD suspected that Kim Dae-jung and his party orchestrated the campaign by civic groups.

On April 13, 2000, South Korea held its parliamentary elections. The main opposition Grand National Party (GNP) won 133 seats in the 273-member National Assembly, strengthening its position as the biggest single force in the parliament. The ruling Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) failed to win the largest number of the parliamentary seats, winning 115 seats. This election clearly outlined a virtual two-party system with the ruling MDP lagging 18 seats behind the GNP, and no party winning the majority.

The election also showed growing public discontent and cynicism toward politics as voter turnout reached a mere 57.2 percent, below 60 percent for the first time in the country's general election history. As for the ruling party, its failure to obtain the largest party position in parliament meant that it would be ensconced in a rather awkward situation while President Kim Dae-jung tied to carry out his political and economic reforms.

Shortly after the parliamentary elections, another corruption scandal erupted and finally led to the resignation of Prime Minister Park Tae-jung who had been in office for only four months. Park was an industrialist-turned-politician, founder of the Pohang Iron and Steel Co., the world's second-largest steel maker. It was reported that he purchased about US\$5.3 million worth of property between 1988 and 1993 and tried to hide the assets by putting them under another person's name. In mid-May, a Seoul court ruled that what Park did was deliberately designed to avoid tax payments, ordering him to pay 1.3 billion won (US\$1.2 million) to the tax authorities. The tax evasion scandal brought another wave of criticism of the government corruption from the opposition as well as civic groups. The main opposition Grand National Party (GNP) demanded Park's immediate resignation. Consequently, under pressure to step down, Park offered his resignation.

A few days after Park Tae-jung's resignation, President Kim Dae-jung nominated Lee Han-dong as his new prime minister. In late June, Lee Han-dong was confirmed as prime minister after the parliament voted to approve the nomination. Lee Han-dong was the leader of the United Liberal Democrats (ULD), a former coalition party of President Kim Dae-jung's government. The president's nomination of Lee as prime minister was taken as a restoration of the coalition between the ruling MDP and the minor ULD, which had won 17 seats in the parliament in April's general elections. Since the ruling MDP had fewer seats than the opposition GNP in the parliament, its

coalition with the ULD was expected to enhance its leverage over the main opposition.

In early August 2000, President Kim Dae-jung announced a major cabinet reshuffle, replacing nine of the 19 serving ministers. The reshuffle was aimed at forming a stronger economic team to assist the government in pushing ahead with wide-ranging economic reforms. Since taking office, the Kim government undertook economic reforms in various sectors. It has also identified corporate restructuring as one of its goals. The South Korean government, as well as foreign observers, believed that the giant Korean "chaebols" or conglomerates need drastic restructuring because of their lack of corporate governance, imprudent business expansion through excessive leverage, and covert corporate decision-making.

Daewoo Motor, once the second-largest automaker of South Korea, was one of the "chaebols" that went bankrupt in November of 2000. Hyundai, the country's largest industrial conglomerate, which employed about 100,000 people at the time, had been carrying a debt of US\$4.6 billion. The government decided that there would be no fresh loans to help bankruptcy-threatened Hyundai Engineering and Construction Company -- unless the company carried out wholesale restructuring. The ruling indicated the government's determination to pressure the "chaebols" into restructuring, notwithstanding the hardships, which would invariably be incurred.

The Finance and Economy Minister Chin Nyun cited the economic difficulties, such as the instability of financial market and unemployment, in the wake of the process of corporate restructuring. However, he said that the economy would be able to enter a recovery phase -- if the corporate restructuring proceeded as smoothly as planned, and if the financial market was stabilized.

South Korea's relationship with North Korea has been one of the key current political issues for over a decade. In 1992, an accord was signed stipulating non-aggression, reconciliation and cooperative exchanges between North and South Korea. Meanwhile, impoverished North Korea has been the recipient of humanitarian aid from South Korea, despite the prevailing hostilities between the two entities.

The major aspects of the accord involve the reunification of estranged families who have been divided by the political fate of the peninsula, and more abstract arenas of reconciliation, cooperation, a climate of entente and the long-term possibility of reunification. It was hoped that this kind of substantive engagement could be realized by separating business from politics, and by emphasizing the shared ideals designated in the 1992 accord.

In early 2000, the world saw the two Koreas take a significant step toward the goal of rapprochement. The two Koreas announced in April that a summit would be held between the top leaders of both Koreas in Pyongyang. South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's "sunshine policy" of engagement with North Korea had contributed significantly to the decision to hold a summit.

Economic reforms and reconciliation with North Korea had been the two core policies of the Kim government. As well, President Kim Dae-jung had expressed his desire to meet with the North's leader, saying a summit could help end hostilities between the two countries, which have remained technically at war, and in a state of non-violence due to a prevailing armistice. In February 1999, North Korea responded to the South's proposal by an open letter to the South Korean authorities that 1999 was set as a year for enhancing national reconciliation and unity.

The two Koreas held two vice ministerial meetings in Beijing in April 1998 and in June 1999 respectively over the hopes and plans for reunification of the two factions of the Korean peninsula, and to put into effect the stipulations of the 1992 accord. On March 17, 2000, delegates of Seoul and Pyongyang first met in China as plans were made to pave the way for the final announcement of a summit in June 2000.

After the announcement of the summit, President Kim Dae-jung convened a cabinet meeting in which he said he would seek reconciliation and cooperation with North Korea. He also emphasized expecting only "practical outcomes" from the summit. Kim Dae-jung said that he would focus on economic cooperation, consolidation of peace, and reunion of separated families and establishment of a permanent office for inter-Korean cooperation. Kim made it clear that he would pursue the summit on the basis of national consensus and cooperation between the ruling and opposition parties. Kim also took pains to separate humanitarian aid from economic cooperation with North Korea. His efforts in this regard were seen as an indirect response to emerging allegations that his government had pledged large-scale economic aid to the North in order to secure the North's participation at the summit.

From June 13-15, 2000, North Korean leader Kim Jong il and South Korean President Kim Dae-jung held the first ever summit in Pyongyang since the end of the Korean War in 1950s. The summit had been scheduled to start on June 12, but was postponed one day by Pyongyang for "technical reasons." To the world's surprise, Kim Jong il personally greeted Kim Dae-jung at the airport when the South Korean president arrived in Pyongyang for the summit.

After this historic moment, North Korean leader Kim Jong il and South Korean President Kim Dae-jung signed a historic accord called "North-South Joint Declaration" at the end of the second day of the three-day summit. With the aim of reducing tension in the divided peninsula and working towards an eventual reunification, the Joint Declaration covered five issues: (1) the North and the South agreed to resolve the country's reunification independently; (2) both sides agreed to work for the reunification in the direction based on the proposal of federation by the North and that of confederation by the South with common elements; (3) both sides agreed to settle the problems of the separated families and long-term prisoners, and exchange of visiting groups of separated families was to start Aug. 15, 2000; (4) the North and the South would promote economic cooperation and cooperation in social, cultural, sports, public health and environmental fields; and (5) both sides agreed to remain in contact to assure that this agreement would be

implemented.

The summit was seen as a turning point in the inter-Korean relations. It has been the first formal step in the bilateral efforts for reunification. The agreement reached by the leaders of both Koreas during the summit was far more detailed than those reached by lower-ranking officials in 1972 and 1991. Although the agreement did not mention certain major issues, such as South Korea's concern over the North's nuclear and missile programs and the North's demand for the withdrawal of 37,000 United States (U.S.) troops stationed in the South, the summit -- at the time -- opened the door for future discussions for those issues. The two leaders also agreed that North Korean leader Kim Jong il would pay a return visit to the South in the near future.

On Aug. 15, 2000, a significant move toward reconciliation took place on the Korean Peninsula. Seoul and Pyongyang exchanged 100 people from each side by air for a four-day reunion with family members separated for more than 50 years. The airplane carrying 100 North Koreans flew to Seoul from Pyongyang and returned to Pyongyang with 100 South Koreans one hour later. This was also the first North Korean airplane allowed runway privileges in the South since the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950s. On Aug. 18, the South Korea airplane brought the 100 North Koreans back to Pyongyang and returned with the 100 South Koreans. The exchange of the 200 people was part of the June 15 Joint Declaration reached in Pyongyang. More than 75,000 South Koreans applied for the reunions with their relatives in North Korea, but the number was narrowed down to 100 by computerized lottery, giving priority to those with a direct family relationship, such as parents, spouses and children.

In November, the two Koreas went on the second such exchanges for family reunion. At the time, an estimated 7.6 million South Koreans had relatives in North Korea. About 1.2 million North Koreans escaped to the South during the Korean conflict, with thousands of South Koreans went to the North.

In late January 2001, South and North Korea held the three-day inter-Korean Red Cross talks and reached a six-point agreement on reunions and communication between separated family members. According to the agreement, 300 family members from each side would be allowed to exchange letters on March 15, the first exchange of its kind since the Korean War in 1950s.

Another high profile progress in reconciliation of the two Koreas was the plan to re-link the two sides by road and rail. Defense ministers of North and South Korea met in September 2000 for the first time since the Korean War and agreed to seek military cooperation for the cross-border railway. In November of that year, the military officers from both sides met again to hold their first talks on restoring road and railway links across the world's most heavily fortified border. The Korean War had cut off transport links in early 1950s, and the project to reconnect transport includes the main railway from Seoul to Pyongyang and a four-lane highway parallel to it through the demilitarized zone. For a few years, the reconstruction of the inter-Korean railway and

highway was under way by both sides in the demilitarized zone. The two sides also agreed to jointly manage the reconstruction and operation of the railroad and highway in the demilitarized zone.

Until early 2001, the two Koreas had held four rounds of ministerial level talks aimed at accelerating steps in reconciliation and cooperation. During these talks, the two sides agreed to set up an inter-Korean committee for economic cooperation, and such a committee was established in late December 2000. Senior economic officials from North and South Korea talked about ways to boost economic cooperation, including North Korea's urgent request for electricity supplies from the South to ease its chronic energy shortages. In early January 2001, South Korea delivered a draft agreement on economic cooperation to North Korea, which included the provision of electricity, measures to prevent Imjin River flooding, construction of rail and road links, and the building of an industrial complex in North Korea.

While President Kim Dae-jung, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000, gained worldwide praise for his policy of rapprochement towards North Korea, his policy met increasing criticism from home. With gloomy economic prospects, many South Koreans criticized the extent of the government's economic aid to the North, which reached around US\$560 million in the year 2000. The major opposition party GNP was once the most outspoken critics of President Kim Dae-jung's "sunshine policy" aimed at constructively engaging the North. However, since the historic summit, the GNP had moderated its position by stressing the need to maintain reciprocity in dealing with the North.

From March 2001, the inter-Korean dialogue had been frozen for six months, with North Korea unhappy with the tougher line from the Bush administration's policy towards the North. In the meantime, South Korea had undergone some political conflicts related to the government's policy towards North Korea.

In August 2001, more than 300 South Korean civic leaders paid a controversial visit to North Korea. Later on, seven of the delegates were arrested and charged with violating South Korea's anti-communist national security law which bans activities praising the communist North.

In early September 2001, the National Assembly, South Korea's parliament, passed a motion of no-confidence in Unification Minister Lim Dong-won. The main opposition Grand National Party called on Lim to take responsibility for the aforementioned visit to the North, saying that Lim's approach to reunification had failed. One day after the parliament no-confidence vote, South Korea's cabinet offered to resign en masse, letting the president to reshuffle the cabinet. Worse for President Kim Dae-jung's coalition government was that its junior coalition partner the ULD broke ranks with Kim's MDP to vote with the opposition in calling for Lim's dismissal.

With the National Assembly vote and the split of the coalition, the government and the ruling party

would face more obstacles in continuing its sunshine policy towards the North. Nevertheless, just a day before the parliament vote, President Kim's sunshine policy got a boost from North Korea by its surprise offer to resume government-level talks with South Korea. Thereafter, from Sept. 15-18, the fifth North-South ministerial talks were held in Seoul, with the two sides laying out a schedule of bilateral meetings and discussions on implementation of earlier agreements on exchanges. The dramatic development of the issue implied a deepening rift between those who still support the sunshine policy and those who felt that the policy had been too one-sided and too costly to the South. Such opposition notwithstanding, President Kim Dae-jung was not likely to abandon his sunshine policy.

In November 2001, North-South Korean dialogue was stalled and future family reunions were cancelled after the North Korean government announced it was unhappy with United States' (U.S.) interference in South Korea's policy towards the North and with South Korea's heightened state of alert after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the U.S. The already souring Korean relations received another blow in January 2002 after U.S. President George Bush declared North Korea to be a part of an "axis of evil" that included Iraq and Iran. This declaration was made just weeks before President Bush was to visit South Korea to strengthen diplomatic and military ties.

While offended North Korean government accused the U.S. of plotting war, angry South Koreans actively demonstrated against Bush before and during the U.S. President's visit in February 2002. The relations were further strained in March 2002 when the U.S. and South Korean militaries took part in a week-long defensive military drill.

By late March 2002, tensions had relaxed and both dialogue and family reunions continued. South Korean special envoy to North Korea, Lim Dong-won even coaxed the North Korean government into engaging in dialogue with the U.S. and Japan. Despite the Bush administration's policy toward North Korea, at home in South Korea, there had been consistent support for President Kim Dae-jung's sunshine policy.

On the domestic front, in October 2002, South Korea held by-elections, and the ruling MDP lost all three contested parliamentary seats to the main opposition Grand National Party (GNP), leaving the GNP one seat short of a parliamentary majority. As an attempt to heal divisions in party ranks before presidential elections next year, President Kim Dae-jung resigned from the post of the MDP party leader. Analysts said that Kim's departure from partisan politics would give him more time to concentrate on reviving the country's sagging economy and breathing new life into his sunshine policy towards the North. With the National Assembly controlled by the opposition, the president's resignation from the party leadership was viewed as helpful in creating more harmony in the parliament.

Meanwhile, since late 2001, South Korea had been rocked by a series of political scandals. Top intelligence officials, government ministers and presidential aids accused of corruption, bribery,

cover-ups and embezzlement. Even the President's sons were allegedly linked to criminal activity. President Kim made numerous apologies to the public and vowed to conduct thorough and transparent investigations into these allegations.

In an attempt to regain the public's trust, on Jan. 29, 2002, the president re-shuffled his cabinet and staff, replacing nine ministers including the Unification Minister, Hong Soon-young, with the more Pyongyang-friendly, Chong Se-hyon. With his tenure as president almost over and the embarrassing scandals surrounding him, many were doubtful of President Kim Dae-jung's ability to make any political headway during his remaining months in office.

Despite the general perception of President Kim as a lame duck, his firm determination to push through his economic reform driven privatization policy was the source of recent civil unrest. Workers in these sectors were concerned that privatization would lead to huge layoffs and raise power prices. Labor unions, for their part, demanded shorter workweeks without pay cuts; the average worker works six days a week, or over 60 hours a week. Labor union organizers and workers also protested the government's plans to privatize the state-run corporate, financial and public sector sectors with massive strikes.

In Feb. 25, 2002, thousands of rail, gas and power workers and their supporters, mainly students, staged a nationwide general strike. The government called the strikes illegal as members of public service sectors are forbidden from striking. Dozens of union leaders were arrested. While the government was able to negotiate with gas and rail workers, electric workers from Korea Electric Power Corp. and the government could not reach an agreement, and the strike continued for six weeks.

The labor crisis came at a precarious time both politically and economically. There were more threats of strikes, should privatization continue. Further strikes would create problems just before South Korea was to host the 2002 World Cup games, which it was counting on to boost the economy with tourist dollars. Furthermore, as elections drew near, politicians were hard-pressed to publicly support such economic measures. On the other hand many economists believed privatization was a sure way to pump much needed cash into the country's sagging economy and keep South Korea attractive to foreign investors.

Political scandals, labor unrest, warming relations with North Korea, shifting political alliances and expected political mergers, were at the forefront of the political campaign for the December 2002 elections. Former human rights lawyer Roh Moo-hyun was the presidential candidate of the ruling MDP. Roh Moo-hyun was regarded as both a progressive liberal and a reformer; he was also untainted by current scandals. Nevertheless, some of his policies, such as distancing South Korea from U.S. influence, as well as his proposal to redraw electoral districts to counteract political regionalism, drew fierce criticism from his political opponents. The GNP's Lee Hoi-chang won the nomination for his party.

Prior to the election later in 2002, on Monday, May 6, President Kim Dae-jung resigned from the ruling MDP. The MDP was founded by the president, however, it became increasingly apparent that it would be preferable that he spend his remaining months in office as a politically neutral figure. Opposition members urged the president to replace the current cabinet with neutral ministers as well.

In December 2002, Roh Moo-hyun won South Korea's closely contested presidential election; he defeated Lee Hoi-chang by approximately 2.3 percentage points. Roh's popularity was buoyed by the younger generation of voters who supported his policy of engaging with North Korea. In contrast, Lee was supported by a more hard-line older generation of voters, who typically espoused pro-American views. Growing anti-American sentiment in South Korea, spurred by the acquittal of two United States soldiers in the road deaths of two Korean teenage girls, may have also influenced the election's outcome.

By the close of 2002, relations with North Korea took center stage once again when the North reopened its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, saying that its decision was in response to perceived hostility from the United States.

In January 2003, North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and South Korea intensified its diplomatic efforts to consolidate international support for halting North Korea's nuclear program. Diplomatic plans included discussions with both of North Korea's main allies, Russia and China. South Korea hoped that Russia and China could persuade North Korea to reverse its decisions to expel United Nations inspectors and to reactivate its Yongbyon nuclear plant.

The South Korean effort was directed by the new leader of South Korea, President Roh Moo-Hyun, who had been consistently forthright in his support for rapprochement with North Korea. The new South Korean leader was also vocal in his criticism of United States' role in North Korea conundrum. Incoming President Roh Moo-Hyun criticized the Bush administration for exacerbating the situation at a time when diplomacy with North Korea was needed.

Contributing to rising tensions was a missile test by North Korea. Just before the new President of South Korea was inaugurated in February 2003, Pyongyang fired a missile into the sea between Japan and the Korean peninsula. The missile was reported to be a short range land-to-ship missile which fell 36 miles or 60 kilometers from the Korean peninsula. While South Korea's incoming President Roh made no mention of the missile test during his inauguration, he did call upon North Korea to step away from its nuclear program. Roh again expressed the desire to resolve tensions on the Korean peninsula peacefully and criticized the United States' rhetoric in regard to the North.

In May 2003, North Korea announced it would be withdrawing from a 1992 agreement with its

neighbor to the south which pledges to keep the Korean peninsula free of nuclear weaponry. Pyongyang said its reason for withdrawing from the agreement with South Korea was due to "the sinister and hostile" policy of the United States toward North Korea. This announcement preceded impending talks between the leadership of South Korea and the U.S., which was to focus on the nuclear ambitions of North Korea. For his part, President Roh of South Korea has said his country would never accept a nuclear neighbor to the north, however, he allowed that Seoul was committed to finding a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

In August 2003, North Korea agreed to multilateral talks, which would include the countries in the region of East Asia as well as the United States. The talks were to take place in Beijing, however, a precise date was not announced. The multilateral talks would include North Korea, the United States, China, South Korea, Japan and Russia.

Ahead of the multilateral talks aimed at resolving the nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula, North Korea ratcheted up its rhetoric by referring to South Korea as a "dangerous place" and canceling its plans to take part in the World University Games in Daegu. Meanwhile, South Korean warships fired warning shots at a North Korean vessel which broached South Korean territory. Complicating matters was the decision by South Korea and the United States to carry out its annual joint war games on the peninsula. Pyongyang objected to the activities saying that they were akin to a rehearsal for a preemptive attack against the North.

Also in August 2003, Chung Mong-hun, the chairman of Hyundai Asan, was found dead after apparently plunging to his death from the 12th floor of the company's headquarters in the South Korean capital of Seoul. His death was deemed to be a suicide. In June 2003 Chung had been indicted for false accounting in the case of the clandestine transfer of funds to the leadership of North Korea. A Hyundai Asan subsidiary had business interests in North Korea, including investments and trade; the company said that the money was used to shore up further business licenses in North Korea.

An earlier investigation concluded that \$100 million had been transferred on behalf of the South Korean government to the communist north in order to facilitate the historic (aforementioned) summit between the government of North Korea and South Korea a few years prior. South Korea's former President Kim Dae-jung had been the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for endeavoring to meet with the leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-il. Once the details of the expensive payment were revealed, however, several South Korean officials were indicted, and the diplomatic success that surrounded the summit was tainted by the still-evolving scandal.

In October 2003, President Roh Moo-hyun rejected calls by his cabinet to resign amid claims that he had lost confidence in his ability to govern. The embattled president said he would hold a national referendum on his leadership in mid-December. He promised that if he failed to garner sufficient support in the referendum, he would hold early presidential elections in April 2004. The

president's term of office was due to end in 2008. Only in office for eight months, President Roh's popularity had decreased in tandem with increased criticism from both the opposition and the media regarding a financial scandal (distinct from the Hyundai Asan matter noted just above). Although there was no evidence to suggest that President Roh was linked to the financial scandal, there was an investigation involving one of his aides over the receipt of payments by one of South Korea's largest conglomerates, the SK Group.

In March 2004, the South Korean parliament impeached the country's President Roh Moo-Hyun for violating electoral law and general incompetence. The decision to impeach the president came a month prior to the country's general election. The decision, however, resulted in the overflow of anger outside the parliament where polls showed that 70 percent of the South Korean people believed the main charge of endorsing a pro-government party was not sufficiently serious as to justify Roh's impeachment. Indeed, the English language newspaper, the Korea Times, noted in an editorial: "The causes for the impeachment are still weak and it is controversial whether these causes satisfy the requirements for impeachment in the Constitution." The result included daily protests attended by tens of thousands of people expressing their anger and frustration.

With no sign that protest activity would cease, the National Police Agency warned of a crackdown on attendees at demonstrations. Meanwhile, the government of neighboring North Korea called the impeachment of Roh a right-wing political rebellion and referred to the South's current climate of instability as the reason for failing to attend diplomatic talks.

In May 2004, the Constitutional Court overturned the parliamentary decision of impeachment and President Roh Moo-hyun was reinstated as the country's leader. (Note: Then-Prime Minister Goh Kun had been functioning as acting president in the interim until Roh Moo-hyun's reinstatement.)

Meanwhile, in April 2004, parliamentary elections were held. (Note: These election results also include by-election results of six seats voted upon after the April 15, 2005 election day.) Of the seats in the National Assembly, the Uri Party, which had been created by former members of the MDP won 146 seats; the GNP won 125 seats, the DLP won 10 seats, the MDP won 9 seats, the ULD won 3 seats, and independents won 6 seats. Then, on May 25, 2004, Yi (also known as "Lee") Hae-chan became the new prime minister.

Earlier in 2004, the parliament had approved the controversial deployment of troops to Iraq. Then, in May 2004, the international world of politics took center stage when Islamic militants captured a South Korean translator in Iraq. They threatened to execute him if South Korean troops were not withdrawn from Iraq. South Korea's Foreign Ministry called for the release of Kim Sun-il noting that the government was doing all that it could via diplomatic channels to have him freed. A group of diplomats were sent to Jordan to help in the negotiations while several Seoul-based ambassadors from Arab countries were asked to extend assistance. Although South Korean officials said they would not reverse troop deployment plans for Iraq, they also tried

to make clear that the South Korean presence in Iraq was for the purpose of helping to rebuild that country. Meanwhile, Kim Sun-il's family called on the South Korean government to reconsider its policy toward troop deployment in Iraq. Despite their efforts and those of the diplomatic community, Kim Sun-il was tragically beheaded by his captors.

In other developments, in June 2004, the United States announced it would cut its troop presence in South Korea by a third. The decision was met with anxiety and worry about the security implications, especially as the North nuclear development continued.

In early 2005, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun carried out a partial cabinet reshuffle. According to the Presidential Office, he made the following appointments: Seoul National University President Lee Ki-jun was named deputy minister for education and human resources development; Oh Young-kyo, the head of the South Korea Trade Investment Promotion Agency, was named government administration and home affairs minister; Jang Ha-jin, former head of the state-run South Korea Women's Development Institute, was named as gender equality minister; former Busan City Mayor, Oh Geo-don, was named to be maritime affairs and fisheries minister; ruling Uri Party Rep. Park Hong-soo was named as agriculture and forestry minister; and Kim Sun-wook, Ewha Woman's University professor, was named as government legislation minister.

In March 2005, Japan reinstated its claim on a small group of islands whose sovereignty has been under dispute. South Korea, which has also claimed the islands, said that the move by Japan would have a damaging effect on bilateral relations.

By August 2005, the issue of nuclear proliferation on the Korean peninsula was once again dominating the political landscape. Talks between North Korea and the United States had met with little success, with no narrowing of the gap between those two countries on North Korea's peaceful use of nuclear energy. The United States continued to insist that all of North Korea's nuclear facilities had to be dismantled while North Koreans insisted they had the right to conduct peaceful nuclear activities. Indeed, North Korean chief delegate Kim Kye-gwan rhetorically asked, "We are not a defeated nation in war, and we have committed no crime, so why should we not be able to conduct peaceful nuclear activities?"

The meeting took place within the context of the resumption of multilateral talks, of which South Korea had been a part. As noted previously, multilateral talks, which began in 2003 following North Korea's 2002 withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, had stalled some time later when North Korea walked away from the negotiating table to the chagrin of the other meeting partners, most especially South Korea. The multilateral talks resumed again in 2005, but with little progress being made.

On March 24, 2006, President Roh Moo-hyun nominated Han Myung-sook to be the new prime minister after former Lee Hae-chan resigned from office over a golf scandal. Less than a month

later on April 19, 2006, the South Korean National Assembly approved the nomination of Han as the country's first female prime minister. Following a two-day confirmation hearing, she acquired 182 votes out of a total of 264 votes cast in a parliamentary vote.

Han Myung-sook was born in Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, in 1944. She shares a son with her husband, Park Sung-jun -- a professor at Sung Kong Hoe University who served 12 years imprisonment for being a democracy movement leader during the country's period of military dictatorship.

Her academic background commenced with a Bachelor's Degree in French Language and Literature at Ehwa Women's University. She later acquired Master's Degrees in Christian Theology and Women's Studies respectively from South Korean Hanshin University and Ehwa.

Prior to her foray into politics, her career was marked by pro-democracy and pro-feminist activism. Her call to activism was largely sparked by her efforts with the South Korean Christian Academy during the military dictatorship of Park Chung-hee. Indeed, she had been imprisoned from 1979 to 1981 for her role in advocating democracy in South Korea. In subsequent years, her interests were focused on promoting women's status in South Korea. To that end, she served as the president of Womenlink Korea, a feministic civilian organization.

Han entered politics when she became a legislator within the ruling Uri Party. She was elected to the National Assembly as lawmaker twice, respectively in 2000 and 2004. She served as Minister of Environment between 2003 and 2004 in the Roh Moo-hyun's administration. Previously, in 2001, she had been appointed as the first Minister of Gender Equality by then-President Kim Dae-jung.

In July 2006, North Korea test-fired a number of short-range missiles and one Taepodong-2 long-range missile into the Sea of Japan (known as the East Sea by Koreans). The situation sparked international condemnation and threats of punitive measures by some countries, including sanctions. In South Korea, the government in Seoul convened an emergency cabinet meeting and placed its military on high alert.

For its part, North Korea said that further missile tests would be launched. North Korea also warned that it would react strongly to punitive pressures from the international community, and it threatened to carry out an "annihilating" nuclear strike if its atomic facilities were pre-emptively hit by the United States.

The missile tests, in conjunction with dire promises of further tests and a nuclear strike, intensified the widely-held view that North Korea was a threat to global security. Moreover, these moves by North Korea effectively served to further isolate the country and confirm its pariah status within the international community. The impact on relations with South Korea was yet to be determined. However, the country was quick to distance itself from a hard-line Japanese draft resolution that

provided for economic and military sanctions against North Korea. Indeed, South Korea went so far as to describe the Japanese draft as "reckless."

In mid-July 2006, the United Nations condemned North Korea for carrying out a series of missile tests earlier in the month. The United Nations Security Council also issued a resolution demanding that North Korea cease activities related to its ballistic missile program and prohibiting all United Nations member states from supplying that country with any weapons-related materials. The resolution passed unanimously after a reference to Chapter Seven of the United Nations Charter was removed. That reference would authorize sanctions and military action and would be legally binding. Its removal ensured that there would be complete support from among Security Council members. South Korea called on the North to issue a moratorium on missile tests and return to the multilateral negotiating table. For its part, however, North Korea angrily rejected the resolution and vowed to further develop its military arsenal as a means to "bolster its war deterrent."

In the first week of October 2006, North Korea said that it intended to test a nuclear weapon. A week after issuing this threat, North Korea announced that it had indeed conducted its first nuclear weapons test. North Korea's state-controlled news agency declared, "The nuclear test is a historic event that brought happiness to our military and people." The message in the state-controlled media also went on to assert that the nuclear test would, "contribute to maintaining peace and stability in the Korean peninsula and surrounding region." The state-controlled news agency also said that the successful nuclear test, which utilized local technology, had taken place at an underground facility and had not resulted in any radiation leaks. While there was no immediate verification of North Korea's claim, officials from South Korea said that an explosion measuring 3.5 on the Richter scale had been detected and appeared to have come from the north-eastern part of North Korea. The South Korean news agency, Yonhap, suggested that the explosion may have occurred in an area called Gilju in North Korea's Hamgyong province.

The apparent test took place in defiance of warnings by the international community not to go through with the test. In response, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun scheduled an emergency meeting of his National Security Council. The meeting was convened to address the serious shift in the security scenario on the Korean peninsula. Only days before, South Korean troops fired warning shots at North Korean soldiers when they crossed into the demilitarized zone. It was not clear whether the North Koreans' actions were calculated or accidental. Regardless, they were emblematic of the increasing climate of tension on the Korean peninsula, which reached an unprecedented high following the apparent nuclear test. Meanwhile, Japan's new head of government, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, was expected to discuss the matter with his South Korean counterpart in Seoul. Prime Minister Abe and Chinese Premier Hu Jintao had previously met in Beijing to discuss regional concerns and had jointly issued their opposition to the notion of a nuclear test by North Korea. Clearly, their joint statement went unheeded by Pyongyang.

Regardless of motivation, the effects of the nuclear test augured negatively. Apart from

destabilizing the region, analysts warned that it could potentially halt any progress on reconciliation between the two Koreas, and it could well spark an arms race. Meanwhile, at the United Nations work was being done to craft a resolution that would be passed in the Security Council authorizing punitive action against North Korea. A draft document by the United States underwent revisions to accommodate the reservations of China and Russia. Those two countries had stated that they would not support the military enforcement of financial and security sanctions against North Korea. With adjustments made, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 1718 on October 14, 2006. The resolution called for the inspections on cargo going to and from North Korea to search for weapons, a ban on the sale or transfer of materials related to North Korea's unconventional weapons program, and a freeze on the transfer of funds connected with North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Absent from Resolution 1718 was the Chapter Seven [of the United Nations charter] provision, which would enforce the sanctions via military force.

Also in October 2006, South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon was nominated and confirmed as the new United Nations Secretary General.

In January 2007, it was announced that six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program would resume. A previous round of talks ensued in December 2006 but ended inconclusively. In the background of such developments was the testing of a nuclear device by North Korea in the fall of 2006. That action did little to bolster Pyongyang's case for its right to a nuclear program, and overshadowed prevailing hopes that North Korea might abandon its nuclear ambitions and rejoin the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in exchange for economic aid and security guarantees.

But by February, 2007, it was announced that concurrence had been reached. North Korea agreed to shut down its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon within 60 days in exchange for 50,000 tonnes of fuel oil or economic aid of equal value, with 950,000 tonnes of fuel oil or equivalent received after further disarmament steps are taken. Yet to be seen was whether or not the agreement would be ratified by all six parties, and also whether or not North Korea would fully comply with the provisions of the deal.

In the third week of June 2007, North Korea reportedly agreed to shut down its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon and, then, disable its nuclear facilities. North Korea also noted that it was inviting International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors to return to North Korea to monitor the closure of its nuclear program and facilities. To that end, IAEA inspectors were expected to visit North Korea on June 26, 2007, for the first time since their dismissal from that country in 2002.

These announcements came months after the Chinese drafted an agreement in February 2007 (discussed above), in which the closure of the reactor at Yongbyon would be secured, in lieu of heavy fuel oil that would be secured by other countries participating in the multilateral nuclear disarmament talks. The total amount of fuel oil -- one million metric tons -- appeared to more

substantial that the original quantity discussed earlier in the year under the Chinese-brokered plan. In addition, diplomatic recognition and humanitarian aid benefits were included in the deal. Also included in the arrangement was the untangling of a financial dispute.

A new round of six-party disarmament talks, which has included North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the United States, was set to commence in July 2007.

Meanwhile, domestic politics returned to the forefront of the scene in March 2007 when Prime Minister Han Myung-sook stepped down from her post as South Korea's first prime minister.

In her resignation speech, Han expressed interest in contesting the presidential elections. The fact that she won public approval for her administration of the government was expected to boost her presidential prospects. Other presidential hopefuls included the former mayor of Seoul mayor and the head of Hyundai, Lee Myung-bak of the Grand National Party (GNP), as well as the former GNP leader, Park Geunhye.

Meanwhile, Han was expected to concentrate on her duties as a legislator. Also on the agenda would be her involvement in the affairs of the Uri Party, which suffered a loss of parliamentary control earlier in the year when a number of legislators defected from the party to form their own breakaway enclave. As well, President Roh Moo-hyun resigned from the party. It was hoped that the return of Han into the everyday workings of the party would help rebuild its strength and popularity -- especially before new presidential elections.

In April 2007, Han Duck-soo became the new prime minister.

In mid-July 2007, North Korea said that it shut down its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. The announcement was welcomed by South Korea and the wider world -- particularly by those countries participating in multilateral talks with North Korea aimed at disarmament.

In October 2007, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun and the North Korea's leader Kim Jong-il signed a joint declaration calling for a permanent peace agreement on the Korean Peninsula. The eight-point declaration set forth an agenda for international dialogue aimed at crafting a treaty, which would replace the existing armistice that brought an end to the Korean War that took place from 1950 to 1953. The two Korean leaders signed the declaration following a historic summit in Pyongyang and issued the following statement, "The South and North share the view that they should end the current armistice system and build up a permanent peace system."

In December 2007, presidential elections were held in South Korea. Turnout was low by South Korean standards at 60 percent. Nevertheless, Lee Myung-bak, the head of Hyundai and candidate of the Grand National Party (GNP) won a decisive victory with 48.6 percent of the vote share, according to the National Electoral Commission. Chung Dong-young, of the ruling Liberals,

garnered a distant second place finish with 26.2 percent. The victory for Lee Myung-bak was won despite prevailing accusations of corruption and effectively placed power back into the hands of the GNP for the first time in a decade.

In February 2008, Lee Myung-bak was inaugurated into office and succeeded outgoing President Roh Moo-hyun. The swearing in ceremony in the South Korean capital of Seoul was witnessed by foreign dignitaries including Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Ahead of being sworn into power, Lee Myung-bak was cleared of charges following a fraud inquiry. During his inauguration address, the new South Korean president said that his priorities would include economic revitalization and taking a strong stance regarding North Korea.

At the close of the month, the National Assembly confirmed the nomination of Han Seung-soo as prime minister. The new prime minister worked as an ambassador to the United Nations, president of the United Nations General Assembly, as well as foreign minister. A student of international relations, Han gained a doctorate in economics at the University of York in the United Kingdom. A spokesman for President Lee Myung-bak said a meeting between the new president and Han was in the offing. The approval of Han's nomination came on the heels of the resignation of three designated cabinet ministers amidst emerging scandals.

South Korea then looked toward impending parliamentary elections set for April 9, 2008. The parties contesting the election were: The Democratic Labor Party (DLP), the Democratic Party (DP), The Grand National Party (GNP), the People-First Party (PFP), the Uri Party, and other independent candidates.

Coming on the heels of the December 2007 election of Lee Myung-bak as the new president, his Grand National Party looked to saturate the government with their representatives on the April 9, 2008 election. A fairly conservative party, the focus of the party has remained on free trade, lower taxes, and a strong alliance with traditional democracies such as Japan and the United States.

On the other hand, the Democratic Labor Party was looking to continue to develop stature since the last parliamentary election. Considered a more liberal, socialist party, it was led by Moon Sung-Hyun. Coming off of a 10-seat win in the 2004 election, the DLP will look to build upon this number in April.

The Democratic Party, and their leader Park Sang-cheon, has been looking to rebuild their image since the impeachment of their president in 2004. Traditionally a liberal party as well, they have been known as the Centrist Reformists Democratic Party as well as the Millennium Democratic Party.

The Uri Party was the majority leader in the South Korean legislature going into the election. A

moderate-to-liberal leaning party, they tend to focus on social programs devoted to the poor population. In 2007, members of the Uri Party formed the United New Democratic Party with a small, liberal party.

According to Angus Reid, the GNP looked quite stable going into the April 9th election. The GNP received 48.9 percent of the support during the opinion poll, with the newly formed United New Democratic Party (formerly the Uri Party) receiving 10.7 percent of the vote.

A consistent issue with the South Korean elections has been relations with the volatile North Korea. Many of the parties, including the GNP, believe that the Sunshine policy is outdated and they are looking to move away from its doctrine. The liberal parties have focused more on the taxation and economic struggles of the poor, as well as improving the economy.

The election saw low turnout but was appeared to have been conducted in a free and fair manner. The ruling Grand National Party (GNP) won more than half of the seats in South Korea's parliamentary elections. Results suggested that the GNP secured 153 seats in the 299-seat National Assembly. It was less than the overwhelming majority desired by the GNP, but a better performance than that of the opposition United Democratic Party. For its part, the opposition party took 81 seats -- significantly less than the 136 seats it held in the outgoing parliament. Kang Jae-sup, leader of the victorious GNP, thanked party supporters and characterized the election as "a victory of all the South Koreans." The election result was expected to bolster newly-elected President Lee Myung-bak in the administration of the government. To that end, the president hoped that the election result would help him pass his proposed economic reform package.

In late June 2008, angry South Koreans took to the streets in the capital city of Seoul to protest the resumption of beef imports from the United States (U.S.). Since 2003, South Korea suspended beef imports from the U.S. after a case of "mad cow" disease was identified. Now, in 2008, the ban was being lifted, effectively allowing shipments of U.S. beef to enter South Korea. However, despite assurances that U.S. beef was safe, many South Koreans were not assuaged and decided to register their discontent in public demonstrations. Indeed, clashes between protestors and police became so heated as to necessitate the use of water cannons to disperse the crowds. There was some suggestion that the passions of the crowd were stoked by the assertions by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that American beef was safe to consume.

In July 2008, a South Korean woman was shot to death by a North Korean soldier. North Korean authorities said that the 53-year old woman strayed from the special tourism zone in the mountains into a restricted area of the Mount Kumgang resort. More than one million South Korean visitors have traveled to the resort, which is located in a strategic nazar area, in the last decade without any such incident occurring. South Korean authorities responded by suspending cross-border trips, pending an investigation. Because cross-border tourism trips have been the

fulcrum of economic and cultural cooperation in the last decade, the incident had the potential to adversely affect cross-border relations.

The start of 2009 was marked on the Korean peninsula by devolving relations between Pyongyang and Seoul. At issue has been the more hard-line approach taken by South Korea's President Lee Myung-Bak in the last year since coming to power. Significantly, the South Korean president reversed the "sunshine" policy bestowed aid to North Korea. President Lee said that economic assistance would now be dependent on North Korea's willingness to completely end its nuclear weapons program.

North Korea responded with outrage at the change. In January 2009, North Korea announced that it had enough plutonium stocks to produce four or five nuclear weapons. The third week of January 2009 saw North Korea warn South Korea that its "confrontational" policies could lead to retaliation by the nuclear power. Military authorities in Pyongyang told Seoul that it would bolster its "nuclear deterrent force" in the face of perceived threats. In response, South Korean authorities called for amplified troop strength. At the start of February 2009, it was reported that North Korea was preparing to test-fire the long-range Taepodong-2 missile. Then, by mid-month, North Korea was declaring its right to launch a "space program." Since North Korea has, in the past, characterized rocket launches in similar terms, it was believed that the term "space program" was associated with the anticipated missile launch.

On the other side of the equation, South Korea's President Lee Myung-Bak has eschewed beginning negotiations from too-conciliatory a stance, cautioning previous South Korean leaders had gone down that path with no substantial end result to show for those efforts. That said, the South Korean president did not foreclose re-entering peace talks with the North. To that end, he said, in a national radio address "I am very aware there are people who are concerned about the recent series of North Korean threats. But you do not need to worry too much. The government is ready to sit down with North Korea at any time and resolve every issue."

Multilateral talks aimed at halting North Korea's nuclear ambitions in exchange for aid saw some progress in recent years, however, the diplomatic efforts have slowed more recently. Indeed, the stance by the new South Korean leader, which was crafted by his nominee for Unification Minister, Hyun In-taek, appears to have brought diplomacy to a halt. In fact, North Korea has threatened to end all talks with the South if Hyun was confirmed for the job.

Amidst this growing imbroglio, some analysts have said that efforts by the Obama administration in the United States could potentially thaw increasingly cold relations between the two Koreas. Obama's Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was scheduled to travel to Asia in mid-February 2009.

Before arriving in Asia on her first overseas trip, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

warned North Korea against any "provocative action and unhelpful rhetoric." En route to Asia, Clinton said that North Korea had to adhere to its commitments to dismantle its nuclear programs. She said, "The North Koreans have already agreed to dismantling...We expect them to fulfill the obligations that they entered into."

But the United States' top diplomat was also critical of the Bush administration for abandoning the 1994 agreement with North Korea, which was forged during the presidency of Bill Clinton. The 1994 framework, which called for North Korea to give up its weapons program, collapsed when the Bush administration accused Pyongyang of maintaining a parallel (secondary) enriched uranium program. Clinton suggested that Pyongyang's decision to restart its nuclear program may have been partially due to the Bush administration's intemperate accusations of North Korea.

Clinton was confronted with a significant challenge on the trip to Asia, and particularly, the Korean peninsula. Amidst devolving relations between Pyongyang and Seoul, North Korea was hinting that it was preparing to test-fire the long-range Taepodong-2 missile. Accordingly, she was tasked with taking a strong positions on, first, the missile test, and second, on North Korea's nuclear ambitions, while also working to reinvigorate the diplomatic process in the region and improving relations between Pyongyang and Washington.

To these ends, Clinton warned that relations between her country and North Korea were unlikely to improve unless Pyongyang was willing to engage in dialogue with Seoul. Clinton, who was speaking in the South Korean capital, took a sharp tone as she called on North Korea to bring an end to its nuclear ambitions, consistent with the provisions of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718. She also characterized the notion of a missile test as "provocative." Nevertheless, Clinton made clear that diplomacy was the central focus of her objectives by announcing a special envoy to North Korea. Clinton aimed former Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, who served in South Korea from 1997 to 2000, to that role.

At the start of February 2009, it was reported that North Korea was preparing to test-fire the long-range Taepodong-2 missile. Then, by mid-month, North Korea was declaring its right to launch a satellite as part of its "space program." Since North Korea has, in the past, characterized rocket launches in similar terms, it was believed that the term "space program" or satellite launch was associated with the anticipated missile launch.

In March 2009, North Korea was threatening to go to war with any entity that tried to shoot down the (aforementioned) satellite it intended to launch. A statement by the North Korean military read, "We will retaliate any act of intercepting our satellite for peaceful purposes with prompt counter-strikes by the most powerful military means." It also included the following assertion: "Shooting our satellite for peaceful purposes will precisely mean a war." In a presumed effort to augment its warning, North Korea said its military was placed on full combat alert. This warning came at a time when scheduled joint military exercises between South Korea and the United States were about to commence. Meanwhile, the newly-appointed United States envoy to North Korea,

Stephen Bosworth, who was in Asia to revitalize six-party denuclearization talks, noted that a launch by North Korea would be "ill advised."

In early April 2009, North Korea said that its attempt to launch a satellite into orbit ended in failure with parts of the rocket landing in the Pacific Ocean. But such an end did little to quell the international outcry. Throughout, the United States and South Korea have said that North Korea's claim of launching a satellite in space was just a cover for an actual missile test of the Taepodong-2. Accordingly, they have urged the United Nations Security Council to issue a strong response at an impending emergency session, which was called by Japan. The United States, South Korea and Japan regard the launch to be an abrogation of United Nations Security Resolution 1718, which in 2006 banned North Korea from ballistic missile activity. On the other side of the equation, China and Russia have advocated a restrained and measured response.

Late in April 2009, North Korea announced that it was withdrawing from multilateral disarmament talks and restarting its operations at the Yongbyon nuclear plant. This decision to withdraw from the negotiating table and resume reprocessing spent fuel rods came after the United Nations (UN) Security Council decided to impose sanctions on three North Korean companies. That decision by the UN Security Council was reached in the aftermath of a controversial missile launch. North Korea maintained that it had simply launched a satellite in space and so characterized the international reaction as "a wanton violation of the UN charter."

On May 25, 2009, North Korea said that it had successfully conducted an underground nuclear test. Several independent entities confirmed that a powerful explosion had been registered, resulting in the conclusion that it was caused by the nuclear test. The actual location of the testing was unknown but South Korea noted that a seismic tremor had been detected in the north-eastern part of the country close to Kilju.

Geopolitical analysts were trying to determine why North Korea had chosen to move from negotiations to a clearly confrontational stance. Two years earlier, North Korea agreed to close its nuclear facility at Yongbyon and comply with international monitoring of its nuclear assets. In exchange, it was to be the recipient of a generous aid package. Later, however, North Korea withdrew from long-running multilateral negotiations and stopped inspectors from monitoring progress related to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

There was some speculation that after a woeful harvest, with up to a quarter of the North Korean population in desperate need of food aid, according to the World Food Programme, Pyongyang may have been trying to divert attention from this internal crisis. There was also some suggestion that the domestic worries may have prompted an internal power struggle, which ultimately may have spurred this action by hard-liner within the regime.

For its part, Pyongyang appeared to indicate its motive via a communique announced on state

radio, which asserted that the underground nuclear testing had been "successfully conducted... as part of measures to enhance the Republic's self-defensive nuclear deterrent in all directions." The statement went on to note that the test was intended to "contribute to safeguard the sovereignty of the country and the nation and socialism." Pyongyang also offered assurances that the underground nuclear testing had ensued in a safe manner with advanced technology.

International news agencies reported that in addition to the underground nuclear test, North Korea also test-fired two short-range missiles. There were reports that the test firing of these missiles was aimed at disrupting the ability of United States' surveillance of the nuclear testing.

The international community -- including reliable allies of North Korea, such as China and Russia - - reacted with outrage and condemnation to these collective actions, which occurred just a month after North Korea test fired a long-range missile capable of reaching Asia as well as parts of the United States. Crisis talks were convened in South Korea. A spokesman for South Korean President Lee Myung-bak said that North Korea's decision to conduct nuclear testing was a "grave challenge" to international non-proliferation efforts.

Russia, which was at the helm of the rotating presidency, called for an emergency session of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, noting that North Korea had violated UN Security Council Resolution 1718. Indeed, UN Security Council Resolution 1718 exists in tandem with Article 41 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter and compels compliance by all member states. A nuclear test would be an unassailable violation of UN Security Resolution 1718, which itself imposed sanctions in North Korea after it conducted a previous test in 2006.

Not surprisingly, the UN Security Council rapidly reacted with a strenuous statement of condemnation, registering North Korea's contravention of the resolution, demanding that North Korea return to multilateral talks aimed at denuclearization, and reminding all member states that they must comply with sanctions imposed on North Korea. The UN Security Council also made clear that further action, in the form of a new resolution with stronger measures, was in the offing.

On May 27, 2009, the North Korean military announced that it was abandoning the armistice that brought an end to Korean War. The North Korean military said that this action was being taken in response to South Korea's decision to participate in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). North Korea said that South Korea's decision to join PSI -- a United States-led effort to patrol the oceans in search of nuclear weapons -- was tantamount to a "declaration of war" and promised military action if its shipping vessels were intercepted. In another development, South Korean media reported that steam had been observed emanating from North Korea's nuclear plant at Yongbyon -- a sign indicating North Korea had decided to recommence the manufacture of weapons-grade plutonium.

Geopolitics and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula aside, South Korea was also faced with something of a domestic tragedy just days before the aforementioned missile test. On May

23, 2009, former South Korea President Roh Moo-hyun committed suicide by jumping from a cliff to his death while hiking close to his home in Bongha Village. Former President Roh, who served in the top spot in South Korea from 2003 to 2008, became embroiled in a bribery scandal in recent times. The issue sparked an investigation, which some South Koreans viewed as being politically-motivated. It was believed that former President Roh was driven by the stain on his reputation, as well as the pressure surrounding the scandal, to take his own life.

On May 29, 2009, Roh Moo-hyun's funeral procession from Bongha to Seoul on May 29, 2009. The funeral was attended by leading officials and the eulogy was given by Prime Minister Han Seung-soo, who said that the former president had "spent his life fighting for human rights, democracy and the end of authoritarianism." Tens of thousands also filled the streets of the capital city to pay their respects to former President Roh Moo-hyun. His body was to be cremated and his ashes were to be laid to rest in his home town of Bongha.

Roh's presidency was marked by an effort to reconcile with North Korea and he convened a joint summit with his North Korean cohort, Kim Jong-il in 2007. His stance on peninsula relations has been viewed as distinct from the hard-line position of current South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak.

Attention returned to geopolitics in June 2009 when the United Nations Security Council decided to impose harsh new sanctions against North Korea in response to the nuclear test carried out in May 2009. Included in the new sanctions regime was the expected provision for the increased inspection of North Korean cargo not only on shipping vessels, but also on land and by air, and it authorized the destruction of any materials suspected of being linked to weapons of mass destruction. The new sanctions regime also expanded the arms embargo against North Korea, effectively prohibiting the sale of heavy and small arms by North Korea.

Undeterred, North Korea was said to be preparing for another missile test into the Pacific. As well, the United States military was reportedly tracking a North Korean ship -- the Kang Nam 1 -- under suspicion of carrying banned cargo. At issue was the heightened sanctions regime approved by the United Nations Security Council, which provided for the increased inspection of North Korean cargo by all United Nations member states, the destruction of any materials suspected of being linked to weapons of mass destruction, and a complete prohibition of the sale of heavy and small arms by North Korea.

On July 2, 2009, North Korea test-fired four short-range missiles. According to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency, two surface-to-ship missiles had been fired from the port of Wonsan while the other two were launched from Sinsang-ni. All four were fired into the Sea of Japan, which South Korea regards as the "East Sea." The missile tests were not surprising as Pyongyang issued warnings to shipping vessels, urging them to avoid coastal waters. Two days later, North Korea was suspected of firing another seven ballistic missiles. These seven Scud-type missiles were

launched from an east coast base and, as before, fell into the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea.

The timing of the missile tests coincided with the United States' celebration of its Independence Day on July 4, 2009, and was regarded as a clear act of defiance against Washington. Nevertheless, the United States was joined by Russia and China in calling for calm. Russia and China urged North Korea to return to the negotiating table and said all parties should work to avoid further destabilization of the region. The United States also said that the tense situation should not be exacerbated. Using highly restrained language, a United States Department of State official said the volley of missile tests were "not helpful" and said that North Korea should not "aggravate tensions" but instead "focus on denuclearization talks." While British Foreign Secretary David Miliband echoed this sentiment by saying that tensions on the Korean peninsula should remain "at manageable levels," Japan and South Korea struck a somewhat harsher tone in saying that the missile launches constituted an "act of provocation."

Former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung died in the third week of August 2009. He had been suffering from pneumonia and died as a result of heart failure. Known for his vigorous support for the reunification of the two Koreas, President Kim was the champion of South Korea's "Sunshine Policy" of engagement with North Korea. The winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000 following a summit with North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il, President Kim was also the target of several attempted assassinations. He additionally endured torture in jail, was exiled twice, and placed under house arrest. Indeed, in 2007, South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) admitted that it was behind the 1973 abduction of Kim, and indicated that the move was backed by the country's leader at the time, Park Chung-hee. In an interview with Agence France Presse in 2006, President Kim looked back on his career saying, "I underwent many ordeals in my life but I never strayed from principles and never compromised with injustice, even at the risk of my life."

After the meeting between the Governor Richardson and the North Korean envoys, North Korea invited the United States envoy to North Korea, Stephen Bosworth, for direct negotiations on its nuclear program. South Korea media reported that there were rumblings about the White House giving serious consideration to the idea of actually sending Bosworth to North Korea. But on the record, the United States embassy in Seoul would offer no comment on the matter.

In other developments, South Korea and North Korea agreed to the arrange reunions for separated families from either side of the Korean peninsula. The reunions were scheduled to be held from September 26, 2009 to October 1, 2009 in the Mount Gungang area. The agreement was forged following talks between delegates from the respective Red Cross societies in North Korea and South Korea. A joint statement read as follows: "The South and the North will continue to cooperate on the issue of separated families and other humanitarian issues involving the Red Cross." The program of reuniting Korean families commenced in 2000 following a landmark inter-Korean summit. Since that time, the two sides have held several reunions and orchestrated a

number of video exchanges although the last such meetings took place in October 2007. Soon thereafter, South Korea's hard line government of President Lee Myung-bak came to power, bilateral relations devolved, and the program was suspended. This 2009 agreement could be illustrative of a possible breakthrough between the two sides.

On October 12, 2009, North Korea fired five short-range missiles into Sea of Japan (also known as the East Sea). The surface-to-surface KN-02 missiles with a range of 75 miles were launched south of Musudan-ri in the North Hamgyeong Province. As a precaution, North Korea had banned shipping vessels from the waters off the east and west coasts from October 10 to October 20, 2009, according to the Yonhap news agency. It was the first missile launches by North Korea in several months and came after North Korea said that it was willing to return to multilateral talks about its nuclear program.

On Nov. 10, 2009, South Korean and North Korean ships exchanged heavy fire at sea in South Korean waters when a North Korean patrol boat traversed the Northern Limit Line, which demarcates the boundary between the two Koreas. The exchange of fire was described as having lasted only for a short period of time and left a North Korean vessel in flames but with no casualties on the South Korean side. There was no information available on the casualties -- if any -- from Pyongyang. Whereas the South Korean authorities characterized the incident as "accidental," the North Koreans said it was an "armed provocation."

Despite this incident, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that talks between Washington and Pyongyang would go forward, as planned. Speaking at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Singapore, Secretary Clinton said, "This does not in any way affect the decision to send ambassador Bosworth. We think that this is an important step that stands on its own." To that end, Bosworth was expected to travel to Pyongyang for direct talks with the North Koreans following the Asia-Pacific summit. It would be the first direct contact between the United States and North Korea in more than a year. On the agenda during that meeting would be the matter of North Korea's return to the stalled six-party talks on denuclearization.

In March 2010, North Korea accused South Korea of carrying out psychological warfare by facilitating journalist tours in the demilitarized border zone between the two countries. North Korea warned South Korea that there would be repercussions for these actions, claiming that the tours allowed reporters to tour the zone and prepare "materials for anti-north smear campaigns." A statement issued by Pyongyang said those these actions were in violation of the armistice, which brought at ended to the hostilities in the 1950-1953 war. The statement also warned that the United States would be held responsible for any negative fallout saying: "If the U.S. and the South Korean authorities persist in their wrong acts to misuse the DMZ for the inter-Korean confrontation despite our warnings, these will entail unpredictable incidents including the loss of human lives in this area for which the U.S. side will be wholly to blame." Analysts have suggested

that this may be another circuitous attempt by North Korea to draw the United States into direct negotiations and press for a treaty officially ending the war. North Korea earlier suggested that no progress could be made on the denuclearization issue without such a treaty being forged.

Note that these developments came in the aftermath of the sinking of a South Korean military ship on March 27, 2010, in the conflict ridden waters of the border zone. Both South Korea and the United States said they did not believe that North Korea was involved in that incident. In April 2010, investigations into the sinking of that South Korean warship near the North Korean border cast new suspicions on Pyongyang's possible involvement, although Seoul was careful not to expressly place the blame in that direction. Initial reports indicated that the underwater explosion was caused by a torpedo. South Korean Defense Minister Tae-young said that a close range external explosion appeared to have destroyed the vessel. In an interview with the media, the South Korean cabinet minister said, "Basically, I think the bubble jet effect caused by a heavy torpedo is the most likely cause." Kim was careful to refrain from speculating about who might be behind the firing of a torpedo and said that the investigation still had to be completed.

South Korea confirmed in the third week of May 2010 that North Korea was behind the March 2010 incident in which one of its warships located in the conflict ridden waters of the border zone was destroyed. South Korean investigators earlier said that a torpedo hit the ship, killing 46 people. Despite knowing the cause of the sinking of the warship, South Korea had been circumspect in ascribing blame. Now, however, South Korea was asserting that its neighbor to the north was behind the mysterious incident. Clearly, South Korea's confidence in naming North Korea as the responsible party would change the geopolitical landscape.

North Korea immediately responded by denying any such role, promising dire consequences, and warning that war was inevitable if South Korea sought retribution. Pyongyang promised to cease any cooperation with Seoul and warned that it would abrogate the North-South non-aggression pact, if Seoul moved to retaliate. Moreover, Pyongyang issued a statement noting that "a war may break out right now" and that it "will regard the present situation as the phase of a war and decisively handle all matters arising in inter-Korean relations to cope with it."

For his part, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak described the sinking incident as a "surprise military attack from North Korea [that came] while South Korean people were resting late at night." President Lee also said his country would indeed take "resolute countermeasures" against the North over the sinking of the war ship. Given Seoul's position that its response would be "prudent," and the vulnerability of the South Korean people in terms of proximity, it was unlikely that the response would involve military retaliation.

During a formal address on the matter, President Lee said his country would take the matter up at the United Nations Security Council. He also announced the suspension of inter-Korean exchanges and said that North Korean ships would be banned from passing through South Korean waters.

Explaining the rationale behind these measures, President Lee said, "We have always tolerated North Korea's brutality, time and again. We did so because we have always had a genuine longing for peace on the Korean peninsula." He continued, "But now things are different. North Korea will pay a price corresponding to its provocative acts."

In response to South Korea's moves, North Korea severed all ties with its neighbor, including communications links and the passage of ships and aircraft from territorial waters and airspace respectively. According to Pyongyang's official news agency, North Korea also intended to expel all South Korean workers at a factory to the north of the border, which has jointly-administered. Indeed, a statement publicized via the official news agency read as follows: "The Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea... formally declares that from now on it will put into force the resolute measures to totally freeze the inter-Korean relations, totally abrogate the agreement on non-aggression between the North and the South and completely halt the inter-Korean cooperation,"

These developments did not bode well for the process of reconciliation between the two Koreas. Still, Seoul seemed intent on winning the public relations war across the border. To this end, there were plans to send propaganda leaflets and flash electronic billboard messages to North Korea, explaining the sinking of the warship. As well, there were plans for the resumption of propaganda broadcasts to North Korea for the same reason.

Earlier, United States Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, en route to Asia, made clear that North Korea would have to face consequences for its apparent intemperate actions. On the diplomatic front once in Asia, United States Secretary of State Clinton enjoyed little progress in drawing China into the equation to place pressure on North Korea. The United States, which firmly backed South Korea, was hoping for a joint response to the act of provocation from North Korea. However, China offered only a call for all sides to demonstrate restraint. That said, in a measure presumably intended to demonstrate solidarity and inflict some degree of intimidation, the United States announced it would conduct joint anti-submarine naval exercises with South Korean forces.

By the first week of June 2010, South Korea had referred North Korea to the United Nations over the matter of the torpedoed warship. While South Korea seemed intent on forcing North Korea to face consequences for its actions, it was not seeking a particular action by the international body. Instead, South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak said during a speech in Singapore that "North Korea must admit its wrongdoing." Speculation abounded that with China, which wields a veto on the United Nations Security Council, unlikely to support the notion of sanctions against North Korea, South Korea was likely to be seeking some other form of international rebuke against the North. For its part, North Korea dispatched a letter to the United Nations Security Council rejecting claims it sank the South Korean warship. North Korea also warned the international body to refrain from debating the issue, saying that it should instead facilitate Pyongyang's own internal inquiry into the incident.

On July 29, 2010, South Korean Prime Minister Chung Un-chan resigned following 10 tumultuous months in office. He was expected to stay in place until South Korean President Lee Myung-bak appointed a successor. Chung's resignation appeared to be due to the government's failure to secure parliamentary approval for a plan to make Sejong City a science-business hub. For his part, Chung said, "It's regrettable that I wasn't able to get the project past the parliament. I feel guilty that the failure may lead to a waste of national resources."

In the first week of August 2010, President Lee announced a cabinet shuffle and named Kim Tae-ho, a former governor of South Gyeongsang province, as the new prime minister. Kim's nomination to replace Chung Un-chan as prime minister was subject to parliamentary approval. By the close of August 2010, Kim Tae-ho withdrew from contention as the nominee to be the new prime minister. The decision appeared to be linked with questionable financial dealings of the nominee. The development was a political blow to President Lee Myung-bak and left something of a governing vacuum in South Korea. For his part, Kim expressed regret over the situation saying, "I deeply regret having caused trouble to the public with my own problems."

Finally, on September 16, 2010, the president's office announced that the head of a state audit agency would be the new prime minister. During a news conference, Kim Hwang-sik, chairman of the Board of Audit and Inspection, said: "I feel enormous responsibility. If I get the official nomination, I will do my best to aid the president and help build a prosperous nation and a fair society by tapping into 38 years of my experience in public service." With parliamentary approval on October 1, 2010, Kim Hwang-sik officially replaced Chung Un-chan, who resigned in August over failing to get parliamentary support for a government relocation project.

In late October 2010, North Korean and South Korean troops exchanged fire across the border. According to accounts from authorities in Seoul, North Korean troops fired two rounds in the direction of a front line unit at Hwacheon, prompting South Korean troops to return fire. No further exchange of fire followed the incident and there were no injuries to South Korean troops. There was no consensus as to whether or not North Korea's actions constituted a direct provocation. Only days later on November 3, 2010, South Korea's navy fired warning shots at a North Korean fishing vessel in maritime border waters.

In the last week of November 2010, an exchange of fire occurred between North Korean and South Korean forces, leaving two South Korean marines dead, 16 other South Korean marines injured, and three civilians wounded. At issue was the shelling of the inhabited Yeonpyeong Island by North Korea, located in close proximity the disputed Yellow Sea maritime border, just off the North Korean coast. South Korea, whose military was conducting military exercises in the waters off Yeonpyeong Island, reportedly returned fire, spurring one of the most serious clashes between the North and the South since the Korean War. Some fifty shells reportedly landed on the island, largely hitting a South Korean military base in the area. South Korea returned a fire with about 80

shells; the casualties on the north side of the border were not known.

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak convened a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the capital city of Seoul. Following the meeting, he announced that the South Korean military would punish North Korea for its attack, adding that it was vital that Pyongyang not engage in further provocation.

For its part, Pyongyang placed the blame on South Korea for igniting the clashes. It should be noted that Seoul disputes the North Korean version of the events that transpired. Nevertheless, according to the state-run KCNA news agency, "The South Korean enemy, despite our repeated warnings, committed reckless military provocations of firing artillery shells into our maritime territory near Yeonpyeong Island." The North, therefore, was prepared to strike back if South Korea "dares to invade our sea territory."

United States President Barack Obama characterized the incident an "outrageous, provocative act" by North Korea. Russia struck a similar tone with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warning of a "colossal danger" and characterizing those responsible for the clashes as carrying a huge responsibility. The European Union also added its voice to the litany of condemnations. Japanese Prime Minister, Naoto Kan, took a defensive stance in the national interests of his country, saying that his government had to prepare for the occurrence of "any unexpected event."

But China, North Korea's closest ally, offered a murky suggestion that the two Koreas should "do more to contribute to peace." A spokesperson for the Chinese government also called for restarting six-party negotiations on North Korea's nuclear program -- a prospect that seemed practically unlikely, given these latest developments. Indeed, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency, President Lee Myung-bak was reported to have informed a visiting Chinese foreign policy adviser, Dai Bingguo, that his country (South Korea) was not interested in the resumption of the multilateral nuclear talks; the South Korean leader apparently emphasized the importance of immediately dealing with North Korea's aggressive actions of late.

In another development, South Korean Defense Minister Kim Tae-young came under fire for ignoring intelligence reports that alerted his country of possible attacks from the North, as well as the country's slow and weak responses to the threat posed by Pyongyang. Perhaps not surprisingly, he was forced to resign from his post.

To date, there have been occasional flare ups in the border regions since the Korean War ended without a peace treaty in 1953. However, the attack on Yeonpyeong Island occurred at a time of increased tensions between the two Koreas. Months earlier in March 2010, as discussed above, South Korea accused North Korea of torpedoing one of its warships in the area of the western maritime border, also known as the Northern Limit Line. For its part, North Korea has denied that charge and has also insisted that South Korea engage in diplomatic talks with Pyongyang aimed at easing tensions, or, deal with "catastrophic" consequences. Then, in late October 2010, as

discussed above, North Korean and South Korean troops exchanged fire across the border. According to accounts from authorities in Seoul, North Korean troops fired two rounds in the direction of a front line unit at Hwacheon, prompting South Korean troops to return fire. No further exchange of fire followed the incident and there were no injuries to South Korean troops. There was no consensus as to whether or not North Korea's actions constituted a direct provocation. Only days later on November 3, 2010, South Korea's navy fired warning shots at a North Korean fishing vessel in maritime border waters.

At the time, South Korea sought to downplay the incidences or the prospects of trouble emanating from the North. Indeed, during a news conference focused on an impending summit in Seoul, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak had said, "I don't think the North will try to do anything when leaders of the international community are meeting to discuss the world economy." He continued, "I trust the North won't do anything but still we are fully prepared."

On the other side of the border, while North Korea has a history of making provocative moves, many analysts said that it was unlikely that Pyongyang would seek to alienate the international community, especially at a time when it has been revealing its new leadership succession team to the world. Earlier, President Kim Jong-il's son was given a military promotion, and sanctioned as the likely successor to the ailing leader. Of course, as illustrated by the events in late November 2010 on Yeonpyeong Island, it was apparent that the path of provocation was the one being traversed by North Korea.

Attention was on the matter of why North Korea would seek to heighten the state of volatility on the Korean Peninsula. Perhaps, for North Korea, this is a simple matter of defending its interests. However, it could well be that the aforementioned analysts interpreted the matter of leadership transition incorrectly. It could well be that North Korea is not concerned with the matter of alienating the international community. Instead, at this time of leadership transition from ailing President Kim Jong-il to his son, the priority from Pyongyang is to establish North Korea's power, and to show the military elite in North Korea that the named successor is not afraid to embrace a muscular stance in relation to the South, and indeed, the world.

The situation on the Korean peninsula has been made more complicated by the November 2010 revelation that North Korea constructed a new nuclear facility. A nuclear scientist from Stanford University in the United States, Dr. Siegfried Hecker, said that during a visit to North Korea, he was shown a new nuclear facility. There -- at the new nuclear facility at the Yongbyon nuclear complex to the north of the capital of Pyongyang -- he viewed "more than 1,000 centrifuges" for enriching uranium -- elements needed for the production of nuclear weapons.

Since the nuclear facility did not exist when international nuclear weapons inspectors were expelled from North Korea in 2009, it was clear that it had been constructed quickly. But Dr. Hecker noted that the facility boasted a high level of sophistication, and as reported in the New York Times, it included an "ultra-modern control room." According to Dr. Hecker, the facility

appeared oriented for the use of civilian nuclear power. Noting that there was no sign of plutonium production, which is needed for weapons proliferation, Dr. Hecker nonetheless cautioned in an interview with the Associated Press that the new facility could be "readily converted to produce highly enriched uranium bomb fuel."

Dr. Hecker additionally shored up previous reports that North Korea has been constructing a light-water nuclear reactor. His observations on the ground in North Korea appeared to coincide with satellite imagery depicting the construction of the reactor at Yongbyon. Typically, light-water reactors are associated with civilian energy usage, however, uranium enrichment is part of the process, it was not inconceivable that further enrichment could potentially ensue at weapons-grade levels.

To date, North Korea is believed to have sufficient weaponized plutonium for about six atomic bombs, although there has been little evidence to suggest that the country has actively pursued a weapons program. That being said, Western powers have been advocating a resumption of the stalled six-party talks dealing with North Korea's nuclear program.

In November 2010, a senior United States Department of State envoy, Stephen Bosworth, was in Asia on a trip aimed at reviving the multilateral negotiations. However, this latest act of provocation by North Korea on Yeonpyeong Island left the United States with no choice but to disengage from the multilateral diplomatic process, essentially ruling out the resumption of six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear disarmament for the foreseeable future.

On Nov. 23, 2010, in an interview with ABC News, United States President Barack Obama characterized North Korea's shelling of Yeonpyeong Island as "a serious and ongoing threat that needs to be dealt with. President Obama also reaffirmed his country's alliance with South Korea, describing that country as an important ally. He said, "We strongly affirm our commitment to defend South Korea as part of that alliance." The United States president also noted, "We want to make sure all the parties in the region recognize that this is a serious and ongoing threat that needs to be dealt with." This statement appeared to target China, as he continued saying that Pyongyang needs to know "that there are a set of international rules they need to abide by."

By the close of November 2010, tensions on the Korean peninsula remained high, as South Korea and the United States carried out joint military exercises in the Yellow Sea, to the south of the disputed maritime border. North Korea said it viewed the previously -arranged military exercises as a provocation and warned of retaliation if there was any violation of its territorial waters. A statement from Pyongyang broadcast by the state-controlled KCNA news agency read as follows: "We will deliver a brutal military blow on any provocation which violates our territorial waters."

At the start of December 2010, South Korea took a highly assertive position. The South Korean defense minister-designate, Kim Kwan-jin, warned that North Korea would face a harsh response, including air strikes, if it dared to act aggressively in the future. Kim Kwan-jin's remarks were

made in parliament as he answered questions during his confirmation hearing. In response to the question of how he would react to another violent action by North Korea, Kim Kwan-jin said, "If North Korea provokes again, we will definitely use aircraft to attack North Korea." Clearly, this posture by South Korea was a marked departure from its long-held restraint in the face of North Korea's provocations. Making clear that it intended to maintain this assertive posture, South Korea also said that it was going to carry out military drills from the aforementioned Yeonpyeong Island, even though North Korea has condemned those plans and warned that it would retaliate with force. With Pyongyang and Seoul at odds with one another in such a marked fashion, there were heightened anxieties about the renewal of war on the Korean peninsula.

Yet even with those fears at hand, the landscape became even more complicated when in mid-December 2010, South Korea said that it suspected North Korea of secretly enriching uranium at locations beyond its main nuclear site at Yongbyon. South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan would not confirm a media report that North Korea was home to three more plants where uranium enrichment could take place, however, he admitted to having suspicions along these lines. During a news conference, he said, "It is a report based on what is still intelligence and let me just say that we have been following this issue for some time." Should this claim be proved correct, North Korea could conceivably possess material -- potentially for building more nuclear bombs. Moreover, such actions would fly in the face of renewed nuclear disarmament talks, which were already on a downward slide as a result of North Korea's latest aggressive actions (as discussed above).

By the third week of December 2010, intense dissonance characterized relations on the Korean peninsula for the myriad reasons discussed above. Former New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, who also served as ambassador to the United Nations, was acting as an unofficial United States envoy in the region, with an eye on reducing the level of tensions. That job, however, was not helped when United Nations meetings on the matter ended with no resolution. Nevertheless, there were signs of progress when North Korea began to reverse course, effectively moving away from its threats to take retaliatory action against South Korea for the aforementioned military drills. The shift from Pyongyang came after South Korea evacuated residents from the area on and around Yeonpyeong Island and launched fighter jets from its terrain. Analysts surmised that the strong stance from South Korea may have forced North Korea to rethink the likely consequences of making good on expressed threats. As explained by Governor Richardson, "South Korea was able to flex its muscles, and North Korea reacted in a statesmanlike manner." But despite these encouraging indications, on Dec. 23, 2010, the rhetoric between the two Koreas was on the rise once again. South Korea's president was promising harsh retaliation if his country was again attacked, while North Korean was warning of a "sacred" nuclear war, if provoked.

Meanwhile, Governor Richardson -- a seasoned diplomat -- who has had years of experience negotiating with the North Koreans, announced that North Korea was willing to offer concessions in regard to their nuclear program. In an interview with the Associated Press, Governor Richardson

said, "We had positive results." He continued, "I hope this will signal a new chapter and a round of dialogue to lessen tension on the Korean peninsula." Given the increasing concerns about North Korea's capacity to build nuclear bombs, this development was welcomed. But, as United States Department of State spokesman, P.J. Crowley, cautioned, "North Korea talks a great game. They always do. The real issue is what will they do. If they are agreeable to returning IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] inspectors to their country, they need to tell the IAEA that."

In a New Year's message at the close of 2010, North Korea appeared to strike a conciliatory note as it called for dialogue with South Korea. North Korea was reported to have called for "a lasting peace system on the Korean Peninsula," which it said should be made "nuclear-free through dialogue and negotiations." Heightened tensions have marked relations between the two Koreas since the sinking of a South Korean warship by the North earlier in 2010, and reached a nadir at the close of the year, following the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island (under South Korean jurisdiction) by the North. For its part, Seoul opted to take a more aggressive stance in relation to Pyongyang since these events by carrying out military exercises in the border zones and increasing its rhetoric. Now, the call for improved relations by Pyongyang may have been interpreted as a shift in stance, aimed at lowering tensions on the Korean peninsula. However, Pyongyang's message, which was publicized via North Korean state media, went onto to warn of increased military strength. The New Year's message said that North Korea's military would "conduct intense combat training in an atmosphere of actual battle as required by the tense situation."

On Feb. 9, 2011, bilateral talks between the two Koreas were reported to have broken down. Delegates from North Korea and South Korea had been meeting in the border village of Panmunjom with the intent of working through a number of sensitive cross-border issues. There were hopes that the security talks would ease tensions between the two Koreas, which reached a nadir after the shelling of a South Korean island by North Korean forces in November 2010. Significantly, these discussions were intended to set the foundation for further, higher-level, negotiations. However, the disintegration of these talks meant that there was no consensus on an agenda for future meetings.

In July 2011, some good news was brewing in the realm of foreign relations. The United States and North Korea completed a set of exploratory discussions, which North Korea's envoy, Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye Gwan, characterized as positive. Speaking of his meetings with United States Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, the Obama administration's leading representative on North Korean affairs, Kim Kye Gwan said, "Yesterday and today we discussed comprehensively, with Mr. Bosworth, matters of mutual interest. The talks were very constructive and businesslike and we continue to maintain contacts." For his part, Ambassador Bosworth said, "These discussions are designed to explore the willingness of North Korea to take concrete and irreversible steps toward denuclearization." These bilateral talks were intended to be a precursor to the resumption of multilateral denuclearization negotiations. To that end, Ambassador Bosworth said that his country would enter consultations with South Korea and other countries involved multilateral

negotiations that have been ongoing for years, to consider how to proceed further with North Korea.

Later in August 2011, though, prospects for a return to multilateral talks were dimmed when an imbroglio ensued between North Korea and South Korea. The situation was spurred when shells from North Korea were fired close to the maritime border with South Korea. In response, the South Korean navy fired warning shots towards North Korea. According to South Korean sources, artillery shells from North Korea landed in the Yellow Sea close to Yeonpyeong Island, which is under Seoul's jurisdiction. Further rounds were fired on the same day. Defense officials from South Korea surmised that the initial firing of shells may have been due to training exercises by North Korea. Nevertheless, South Korea wasted no time in responding with warning shots. It should be noted that Yeonpyeong Island was in the global purview in late 2010 when North Korea fired shells in that direction, leaving four people dead and triggering the outrage of South Korea and its allies.

As the month drew to a close, tension increased when five South Koreans were arrested for spying on behalf of North Korea. South Korean prosecutors said that the five individuals conveyed sensitive military and political information to the North over a period of two decades. Among the sensitive material were satellite images of major military installations, as well as field manuals of United States forces in South Korea. All five individuals were accused by South Korean authorities of violating the country's national security law, engaging in espionage, and communication with an enemy.

It should be noted that in December 2011, North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il, died leaving his son, Kim Jong-un, as the new leader of that country. It was yet to be seen how this development would influence relations between the two Koreas.

Meanwhile, on the domestic scene, as 2011 drew to an end, South Korea's liberal main opposition Democratic Party announced a merger with a progressive civics entity founded by former aides to late President Roh Moo-hyun known as Citizen Integration Party. The merger created a significant liberal opposition coalition ahead of elections to be held in 2012. The new center-left party, named the "Unified Democratic Party," was to hold a convention on Jan. 15, 2012, to elect the party leadership and finalize its party platform. The merger was formed with an eye on ensuring that the liberal vote was not split in future 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections against the conservative ruling Grand National Party. That being said, there would nonetheless still be some vote splitting among the center-left and left in South Korea since a number of minor leftist and liberal parties launched their own coalition called the Unified Progressive Party.

At the start of February 2012, South Korea's ruling Grand National Party (GNP) announced it was changing its name to "Saenuri," which translates into "New World" in Korean. The move appeared to be a symbolic gesture aimed at re-branding the conservative GNP's image ahead of general

elections set for April 2012. Indeed, the GNP has been plagued by declining approval ratings and unfavorable perceptions. The name change was expected to be confirmed during a meeting of the national party.

By Feb. 11, 2012, name change aside, the GNP was subject to scandal when a senior aide to South Korean President Lee Myung-bak was forced to resign amidst reports prosecutors were poised to question Kim Hyo-jae in an alleged vote-buying scandal. At issue was a prevailing investigation by prosecutors into accusations that former National Assembly Speaker, Park Heetae, bribed fellow GNP legislators before being elected party leader in 2008. Kim's alleged involvement centered on the fact that his former aide gave envelopes of cash to legislators before a vote to choose a new party chief. Thus, there were suggestions that Kim may have played a role in the bribery scandal.

For his part, President Lee accepted the resignation his senior political affairs secretary but indicated there would be no additional comment on the matter.

In the aftermath of a "denuclearization for food" agreement between North Korea and the United States, there were high hopes that the deal would facilitate progress in multilateral negotiations on North Korea's nuclear program. Those high hopes were somewhat dashed by news that North Korea intended to launch a satellite into orbit.

Pyongyang announced on March 16, 2011, that it would launch an "earth observation" satellite, or the Kwangmyongsong-3, using a long-range rocket. The event was intended to mark the 100th birthday of its late leader Kim Il-Sung. Of course, such a move would be contrary to the prevailing United Nations resolutions, which prohibits North Korea's use of long-range intercontinental ballistic missile technology, as well as the aforementioned "denuclearization for food" agreement, the latter of which requires North Korea to adhere to a moratorium on nuclear tests and long-range missile launches.

Not surprisingly, all the other countries involved in multilateral negotiations -- South Korea, Japan, China, Russia, and the United States -- expressed dismay over this plan by North Korea. United States Department of State spokesperson, Nuland, pointed to this concurrence and urged North Korea to rethink the satellite launch saying, "Obviously, we were heartened that every single one of the six-party talks participants made clear that they think that this would be an extremely bad idea and a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions, so we are hoping and expecting that the DPRK will take that to heart." The United States also noted it would be "very hard" to go forward with its planned food assistance if North Korea moved ahead with the plan to launch a satellite into orbit.

The geopolitical complexity of the Korean peninsula became more complicated on March 21, 2012, when the White House in the United States announced that President Barack Obama intended to visit to the world's most heavily militarized border -- the Korean Demilitarized Zone

(DMZ). The White House explained that the trip to the DMZ was intended to convey the president's support for the 30,000 United States troops stationed in South Korea, and to augment bilateral relations between Washington and Seoul. In a press briefing, Daniel Russel, Asia director for the White House National Security Council, said: "The DMZ is the front line of democracy in the Korean Peninsula, and it's the symbol of the U.S. and [South Korean] resolve, as well as solidarity. So a visit by the president there to see and to thank the U.S. and the South Korean service members makes perfect sense."

After his visit to the DMZ, President Obama was set to attend a global summit aimed at reducing the risk of nuclear terrorism in the South Korean capital of Seoul. Ahead of the Nuclear Security Summit, President Obama reiterated his call for "a world without nuclear weapons" and advanced his foreign policy agenda that advocates non-proliferation and the reduction of nuclear weapons through increase diplomacy.

In a speech to students at South Korea's Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, President Obama said the United States -- the only nation to have ever used nuclear weapons -- was fully committed to reducing its stockpile of nuclear arms. The United States leader said his country had a "moral obligation" to pursue strategic arms cuts. President Obama also drew thunderous applause from the audience of students when he said that, as a father, he did not wish to see his daughters growing up in a world with nuclear threats.

"I say this as president of the only nation ever to use nuclear weapons," Obama said. "I say it as a commander in chief who knows that our nuclear codes are never far from my side. Most of all, I say it as a father, who wants my two young daughters to grow up in a world where everything they know and love can't be instantly wiped out."

President Obama acknowledged his country's unique position in the world, but he noted that "serious sustained global effort" was needed to achieve his expressed hope for a nuclear weapons-free world.

The issue of nuclear proliferation has been at the forefront of the international purview given the ongoing concerns about North Korea's nuclear arsenal. Addressing the matter of North Korea's nuclear ambitions, President Obama made it clear that the United States held "no hostile intent" to that country, but warned that there would be "no rewards for provocation."

The United States president said: "The United States has no hostile intent toward your country...We are committed to peace. And we are prepared to take steps to improve relations, which is why we have offered nutritional aid to North Korean mothers and children." President Obama continued, "But by now it should be clear, your provocations and pursuit of nuclear weapons have not achieved the security you seek -- they have undermined it. Instead of the dignity you desire, you're more isolated. Instead of earning the respect of the world, you've been met with strong sanctions and condemnation. You can continue down the road you are on, but we know

where that leads. It leads to more of the same -- more broken dreams, more isolation, ever more distance between the people of North Korea and the dignity and the opportunity that they deserve."

President Obama also reiterated the warning already issued by his government that the long-range missile launch to place a satellite in orbit would only result in isolation for Pyongyang. He said, "With respect to North Korea, we are going to be both sending messages to North Korea that they should not go forward with this missile launch, which would violate existing U.N. Security Council resolutions. And our hope is, is that we can resolve these issues diplomatically."

President Obama also joined South Korean President Lee Myung-bak in noting that North Korea would be subject to further sanctions if it did not cancel its launch plans. Making clear the options available for North Korea, President Obama addressed the leadership of that country saying, "You can continue with the road you are on but we know where that leads...Today, we say: Pyongyang, have the courage to pursue peace."

For his part, Kim Jong Un -- North Korea's new leader -- appeared to be following his father's footsteps in the realm of rhetoric as he deemed the nuclear summit to be "a childish farce." Earlier, Pyongyang asserted that denunciations of North Korea would amount to a "declaration of war."

Pyongyang was also signaling that it had no intention of pulling back from its missile launch to sent a satellite into orbit. Instead, South Korean sources were reporting that North Korea moved a long-range rocket to a launch pad close to the Chinese border. As well, satellite imagery appeared to depict preparations for the launch, which Pyongyang had said would take place between April 12-16, 2012. The guidance was that the rocket would follow a trajectory that would take it close to south-western Japan.

Accordingly, Japan's defense ministry made it clear that it had ordered the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to intercept North Korea's rocket launch, if necessary, using its missile shield. Japanese authorities also alerted rescue personnel that they would be mobilized to deal with potential disasters, should the veer off course. Already, the South Korean government had said that it would shoot down any North Korean rocket that strayed into its territory. As well, the United States was sea-based X-band radar into the Pacific to monitor the launch. Upset about the prospect of rocket debris affecting countries of the Pacific, President Benigno Aquino III of the Philippines called on Pyongyang to abandon the launch plans.

It should be noted that the Obama administration in the United States canceled its food aid program to North Korea due to that country's decision to move forward with the satellite launch. An official from the Pentagon was cited as saying: "Why we're not providing that food assistance at this point is because our confidence in their ability to meet their agreements has been diminished. We do not use it as a lever to change their policies."

A week ahead of the timeline expected for the North Korean missile launch, President Kim Jong Un warned that any country that dared to interfere with its plans would face "immediate, resolute and merciless punishment." In a statement published by the Korean Central News Agency, the North Korean leader asserted: "(Any country that) intercepts the satellite or collects its debris will meet immediate, resolute and merciless punishment." Pyongyang also warned South Korea against intercepting the rocket booster, should it stray into South Korean territorial waters. Pyongyang promised that an interception by Seoul would bring about "the end of everything in South Korea."

On April 10, 2012, the United States was reiterating its warnings to North Korea that the launch of a new missile would be "a clear and serious violation" of international agreements. White House press secretary Jay Carney said in an interview with journalists: "The proposed missile launch, if conducted, would represent a clear and serious violation of North Korea's obligations under two United Nations Security Council resolutions that explicitly prohibit North Korea from testing ballistic missiles." Carney said the United States intended to work allied countries on implementing consequences for North Korea, should it proceed with its provocative missile launch; Carney noted that United States food aid to North Korea could be cut off.

By April 13, 2012, news emerged from North Korea that although that country attempted to launch its satellite into space, the long-range rocket failed to reach orbit. Despite the spectacular failure of the mission, the attempted action was nonetheless widely condemned by the international community. Notably, members of the Group of Eight industrial nation states issued a joint condemnation, noting that the launch was in clear violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions prohibiting intercontinental missile deployments.

In a related development, South Korean officials were noting that new satellite imagery suggests that North Korea was preparing to carry out a nuclear test. The imagery depicted piles of earth and sand at the entrance of a tunnel at a nuclear site, where previous nuclear bomb testing was carried out in 2006 and 2009. An anonymous source was quoted by Agence France Presse as saying: "Recent satellite images led us to conclude the North has been secretly digging a new underground tunnel in the nuclear test site... besides two others where the previous tests were conducted." Given the aforementioned launch failure, there were some suggestions that North Korea might try to "save face" by moving forward with an even more provocative act -- quite possibly, a nuclear test. Of course, such an act would be regarded as a clear move down the path of confrontation by North Korea's regional neighbors as well as Western powers.

By the third week of April 2012, presumably as a cautionary move, South Korea announced that it had deployed missiles with a range of 625 miles. The weapons would be able to strike nuclear targets inside North Korea.

As April 2012 entered its final week, North Korea was ratcheting up the militaristic rhetoric as it threatened to initiate military action against South Korean targets and characterized South Korean

President Lee Myung-bak a "traitor" and "scum." In a statement, Pyongyang issued the following threat: "The special actions of our revolutionary armed forces will start soon to meet the reckless challenge of the group of traitors. Once the ... special actions kick off, they will reduce all the rat-like groups and the bases for provocations to ashes in 3 or 4 minutes ... by unprecedented peculiar means and methods of our own style."

Meanwhile, reports suggested that North Korea was close to completing preparations for a nuclear test. This move -- if successful -- would constitute North Korea's third nuclear test after two in 2006 and 2009. The global community was watching events unfold in North Korea closely as Pyongyang may now have the capacity to conduct a test using highly enriched uranium for the very first time. This development would presage North Korea's possible ability to significantly build up its stocks of weapons-grade nuclear material. As well, it would facilitate the manufacture of a nuclear warhead to mount on a long-range missile. Should North Korea go forward with its third nuclear test, it would be a clear example of the limits of China's influence on the paranoid regime ruling North Korea today.

Parliamentary elections were set to take place in South Korea in April 2012. At stake were the 299 seats in the unicameral "Kukhoe" (National Assembly). Of the 299 seats in the National Assembly, 243 are elected by direct popular vote, while the remaining 56 are determined via a proportional system. Members of the National Assembly serve four-year terms. In the previous elections of 2008, the Grand National Party or GNP won the most seats; the main opposition is the Democratic Party (formerly the United Democratic Party), which was looking to take victory over the GNP in 2012.

It should be noted that months earlier in February 2012, South Korea's ruling Grand National Party announced it was changing its name to "Saenuri," which translates into "New World" in Korean. The move appeared to be a symbolic gesture aimed at re-branding the conservative GNP's image ahead of general elections. Indeed, the GNP has been plagued by declining approval ratings and unfavorable perceptions. The name change was confirmed during a meeting of the national party.

With the name change established, all eyes were on the elections. To that end, on April 11, 2012, voters went to the polls in South Korea to vote in this parliamentary contest. Voter turnout was estimated to be around 50 percent. Exit poll data showed that a close race was unfolding between the ruling Saenuri Party and the main opposition Democratic Party; media outlets were forecasting that both parties would respectively garner between 131 and 147 seats.

Once the votes were counted, it was apparent that President Lee Myung-bak's ruling Saenuri Party had eked out a victory in these tightly contested parliamentary elections. The Saenuri Party appeared to have outperformed the exit poll predictions and secured 152 seats, thus retaining its parliamentary majority. The main opposition Democratic Party slightly underperformed exit poll expectations by winning 127 seats. The minor opposition Unified Progressive Party, which fielded

joint candidates with the Democrats, gained 13 seats.

A presidential election in South Korea was expected to be held in December 2012. In South Korea, the president is elected by popular vote for a single five-year term. Accordingly, incumbent President Lee Myung-bak, who was elected in 2008, would not be on the ballot in 2012. South Korea's two top presidential hopefuls for what promised to be a close contest were the ruling Saenuri Party's Park Geun-hye and the main opposition Democratic United Party's Moon Jae-in. Polling data gave Park -- a slight lead over Moon.

It should be noted that Park was the daughter of Park Chung-hee, who ruled South Korea for 18 years; the older Park came to power via a military coup in 1961 and stayed as South Korea's leader until his assassination in 1979. Meanwhile, Moon was a human rights lawyer who gained some notoriety as a student protest organizer who rallied against the older Park.

After the polls closed on Dec. 19, 2012, and with the votes counted, it was Park who claimed victory in the country's presidential election. Initial results gave Park 52 percent over Moon with 48 percent. In her victory speech to supporters, Park said: "This is the victory of the people. This is a victory for the people's wish to overcome crises and revive the economy." Park would have the distinction of being the first woman elected as president in South Korea. During the election campaign, she cast herself as a symbolic mother of the nation, saying: "I have no family to take care of. I have no child to inherit my properties. You, the people, are my only family, and to make you happy is the reason I do politics. And if elected, I would govern like a mother dedicated to her family."

It should be noted that on Jan. 1, 2013, North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, delivered a rare new year's message on state television. His address -- the first new year's speech in almost two decades -- focused on the imperatives of economic development and reunification of the two Koreas. The call for a unified Korea came only weeks after Park Geun-hye was elected as the first female president of South Korea. In power since 2011 himself, Kim Jong-un may have been attempting to establish better relations with South Korea, which was now coming under new leadership itself. Notably, Kim Jong-un warned that confrontation had only resulting in war. It was to be seen if there was substance to accompany the new rhetorical tone coming from the North.

At the start of 2013, the United Nations tightened sanctions against North Korea. This move was made in response to North Korea's December 2012 rocket launch. For its part, North Korea reacted with anger and promised strong retaliation. All expectations were that another nuclear test might be in the offing, although North Korea was raising the anxiety of the international community by raising the rhetoric and threatening an even harsher actions.

North Korea warned of retribution against the United States, which it described as a "sworn

enemy." The following statement was issued via the official Korean Central News Agency: "We do not hide that a variety of satellites and long-range rockets will be launched and a nuclear test of higher level will be carried out in the upcoming new phase of the anti-U.S. struggle, targeting against the U.S., the sworn enemy of the Korean people." Pyongyang soon expanded its threats to noted that it would take action against South Korea, if it participated in the United Nations sanctions regime. China's official Xinhua News Agency was also reporting that Pyongyang intended to walk away from multilateral six-part talks since "the U.N. Security Council has been reduced into an organization bereft of impartiality and balance."

On Feb. 12, 2013, seismic activity in North Korea suggested that North Korea may have selected an even earlier date to go forward with its third nuclear test. The seismic shock activity was emanating from the same area where North Korea conducted its 2006 and 2009 nuclear tests. Kim Min-seok of the South Korean Defense Ministry indicated that country's belief, saying, "We believe that North Korea has conducted a nuclear test." Meanwhile, the United States Geological Survey indirectly confirmed that the test had taken place as it noted the shock appeared to be one kilometer underground and was consistent with a nuclear blast. According to Lassina Zerbo, the director of the international data center of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty Organization, the magnitude of the test was twice as large as the 2009 nuclear test. It should be noted that initial reports suggested the use of plutonium in this nuclear test, which tends to be suited for use as a missile warhead.

North Korea itself soon confirmed that it had carried out its third underground nuclear test, which it said involved a "miniaturized" nuclear device. As reported in a statement by the state-run KCNA news agency: "It was confirmed that the nuclear test that was carried out at a high level in a safe and perfect manner using a miniaturized and lighter nuclear device with greater explosive force than previously did not pose any negative impact on the surrounding ecological environment."

North Korea claimed its third nuclear test was an act of self-defense against "U.S. hostility" and warned that further moves might be in the offing. Via the state-controlled KCNA news agency, Pyongyang claimed that the nuclear test "was only the first response" taken "with maximum restraint." Pyongyang warned that further actions were in the offing, saying: "If the United States continues to come out with hostility and complicates the situation, we will be forced to take stronger, second and third responses in consecutive steps."

The chorus of condemnation from the international community was broad and vociferous. United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon wasted no time in condemning North Korea's nuclear test, which he emphasized was a "clear and grave violation" of United Nations resolutions. NATO cast the nuclear test as an "irresponsible act" that posed a serious threat to world peace. China, North Korea's closest ally, demanded an audience with the North Korean ambassador in Beijing, while Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said China was "strongly dissatisfied and resolutely opposed" to the nuclear test. In a statement, United States President Barack Obama argued for a swift

response, asserting: "The danger posed by North Korea's threatening activities warrants further swift and credible action by the international community. The United States will also continue to take steps necessary to defend ourselves and our allies."

The United Nations Security Council convened an emergency meeting later on Feb. 12, 2013, to discuss future measures. During that meeting, the permanent and rotating member nations of the United Nations Security Council unanimously condemned North Korea's latest nuclear test and warned that "appropriate measures" would be in the offing.

Clearly, North Korea would be faced with the prospects of international action. Even its closest ally, China, via its state-controlled media, urged North Korea not to go forward with such a provocative action and warned that North Korea would pay a "heavy price" if it proceeded with the test. Of course, in the realm of international jurisprudence, heavy costs have come in the form of harsh sanctions by the United Nations Security Council, which have done little to curtail North Korea from going forward with its missile program and nuclear development agenda. Indeed, the very existence of sanctions have not stopped North Korea from repeatedly violating the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

With news circulating in the first week of March 2013 that a draft of a United Nations Security Council resolution against North Korea had been crafted, Pyongyang wasted little time in registering its anger. On March 5, 2013, North Korea warned that it would end its 1953 armistice (ceasefire) that brought a conclusion to the conflict with South Korea, without officially ending the Korean War. North Korea also demanded that the United States and South Korea end its ongoing military drills in the region, referring to them as a "dangerous nuclear war targeted at us." Furthermore, the Korean People's Army warned that it would carry out stronger actions in response to the "hostile" policies of the United States and South Korea. It was apparent that North Korea was prepared to take an aggressive stance in the face of international pressure.

On March 7, 2013, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2094 censuring North Korea for its February nuclear test and imposing an even stricter sanctions regime on that country. Included in those new sanctions were provisions to target the financing sources of North Korea's nuclear and missile technology, but there were additional penalties imposed on North Korea in the realm of banking, travel, transportation, and trade.

As stated by United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, "The strength, breadth and severity of these sanctions will raise the cost to North Korea of its illicit nuclear program. Taken together, these sanctions will bite and bite hard." South Korea's Ambassador to the United Nations, Kim Sook, said the time had come for North Korea to "wake up from its delusion" of becoming a nuclear state. He continued, "It can either take the right path toward a bright future and prosperity, or it can take a bad road toward further and deeper isolation and eventual self-destruction." Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the unanimous

adoption of the resolution delivered a strong message to North Korea that its pursuit of nuclear weapons would not be tolerated by the international community.

In addition to scrapping its non-aggression agreements with South Korea, North Korea responded to the news of international action by saying that it would be cutting off the North-South hot-line. Installed in 1971, the hot-line was created to provide direct communication at times of increased tensions and also to organize the transfer of persons and goods through the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone. Clearly, the disabling of the hot-line was not only symbolic of the breakdown in bilateral relations between the two Koreas, there were also practical and security implications.

It should be noted that North Korea has also shockingly threatened to launch pre-emptive nuclear attacks on the United States and South Korea in response to the joint military drills, which it said were proof of the United States' intent to go to war. A belligerent North Korea said via its Foreign Ministry that the United Nations' action would "compel" that country to take "countermeasures" in short order. Furthermore, it declared in a statement: "Now that the U.S. is set to light a fuse for a nuclear war, the revolutionary armed forces of the DPRK will exercise the right to a pre-emptive nuclear attack to destroy the strongholds of the aggressors and to defend the supreme interests of the country." North Korea even threatened to transform Washington and Seoul into "a sea in flames" with "lighter and smaller nukes."

For its part, South Korea was undeterred and moving forward with the very joint military drills (with the United States) that earned outrage and threats from Pyongyang. Still, South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se said on March 11, 2013, that his country would try to re-engage with North Korea with an eye on shifting the climate from tension and threats to cooperation. In an address, Yun said his goal was to "turn this era of confrontation and mistrust into an era of trust and cooperation with North Korea." Yun further asserted: "The security situation on the Korean Peninsula for now is very grave as the unpredictability surrounding North Korea is rising following its third nuclear test."

As March 2013 was drawing to a close, North Korea increased its belligerent rhetoric and said that missile and artillery units were combat-ready and aimed at United States and South Korean targets. In a statement broadcast on the state-controlled Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the Korean People's Army's Supreme Command said: "From this moment, the Supreme Command puts all of its field artillery including strategic rocket units and long-range artillery units into the No. 1 combat ready posture." The statement further delineated targets in South Korea and the United States -- from its military installations in the Pacific to Hawaii and the mainland. Indeed, a North Korean spokesperson was on the record saying, "The U.S. should not forget that the Anderson Air Force Base on Guam, where B-52s take off, and naval bases in Japan proper and Okinawa, where nuclear-powered submarines are launched, are within the striking range of [North Korea's] precision strike means." North Korea said that its motivation was driven by the priority "to safeguard our sovereignty and the highest dignity [of leader Kim Jong Un] through military

actions."

The United States responded with its own statement as follows: "North Korea's bellicose rhetoric and threats follow a pattern designed to raise tensions and intimidate others. While the United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command and U.S. Forces Korea continue to maintain the armistice, North Korea continues its provocative behavior and rhetoric. The Republic of Korea-U.S. alliance is strong and we remain committed to the defense of [South Korea]."

Then, on March 30, 2013, North Korea declared it was in a "state of war" with South Korea and that its the long-standing truce with the South had ended. A statement from Pyongyang read as follows: "From this time on, the North-South relations will be entering the state of war and all issues raised between the North and South will be handled accordingly. The long-standing situation of the Korean peninsula being neither at peace nor at war is finally over." In response, the South Korean defense ministry denounced the war threat and issued its own statement, which read as follows: "Our military is maintaining full preparedness to leave no blind point in safeguarding the lives and safety of the people." As well, South Korean President Park Geun-hye noted that her country was taking the threats from North Korea "very seriously." She said, "If there is any provocation against South Korea and its people, there should be a strong response in initial combat without any political considerations."

For its part, the United States military command in South Korea dispatched a statement that read as follows: "North Korea will achieve nothing by threats or provocations, which will only further isolate North Korea and undermine international efforts to ensure peace and stability in Northeast Asia."

Matching its words with concrete illustrations, the United States was also displaying its military versatility by deploying B-2 and B-52 planes with nuclear capabilities over South Korea, while also flying F-22 Raptor fighter jets from Japan to South Korea's Osan Air base. As well, as noted below, the United States said it would deploy additional ballistic-missile interceptors along the country's Pacific Coast, with an eye on protecting the United States from a potential attack from North Korea. As well, the United States moved its sea-based X-Band radar platform, normally based in Hawaii, closer to the North Korean coast, with the intent of monitoring potential attempts from North Korea to launch a long-range missile. By April 2013, the United States additionally decided to deploy an anti-missile system to Guam.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsular escalated on April 2, 2013 when the state-controlled Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) of the North Korea announced that it would be re-opening its main nuclear complex at Yongbyon and restarting its nuclear reactor there.

The Yongbyon complex was home to both a uranium enrichment facility and a nuclear reactor; it was closed as a part of a 2007 agreement between North Korea and a multilateral cadre, including

China and the United States. The agreement mandated the closure of the reactor at Yongbyon in lieu of one million metric tons of heavy fuel oil as well as humanitarian aid benefits. The agreement was only really in effect for a couple of years since North Korea resumed the reprocessing of fuel rods stored at the site in 2009, complaining that it did not receive the desired level of energy assistance.

This 2013 decision to open the Yongbyon complex and restart operations of the nuclear reactor was illustrative of the intensification of dissonance on the Korean peninsula ongoing since late 2012. But it was also a disturbing development as it showed that the new leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-un, was not interested in continuing to honor a deal approved by his late father, Kim Jong-il. Clearly, the international community was now regarding the paranoid and alienated nation state of nuclearized North Korea through the valence of anxiety.

Reflecting this sentiment, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he was "deeply dismayed" by North Korea's decision to re-open the main nuclear complex at Yongbyon and restart the nuclear reactor. He further condemned the provocative actions declaring: "The current crisis has already gone too far. Nuclear threats are not a game. Aggressive rhetoric and military posturing only result in counter-actions, and fuel fear and instability."

Secretary General Ban urged all parties to engage in urgent talks as "the only way to resolve the current crisis." However, with North Korea cutting off its military hot-line with South Korea, canceling its armistice with that country, using the rhetoric of war, and re-opening its Yongbyon facility, it seemed that authorities in Pyongyang were not in the mood for productive diplomatic engagement.

Indeed, a day later on April 3, 2013, North Korea has ceased border crossing access for South Koreans into the jointly-administered Kaesong industrial zone. Since Kaesong has been viewed as a tacit symbol of the state of geopolitical relations and the last significant arena of cooperation between the two Koreas, the cessation of cross-border access at the industrial zone was regarded as a disturbing development.

By April 4, 2013, the state-controlled Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said the military had "ratified" an attack on United States interests. The KCNA statement further noted that North Korean troops had been authorized to counteract American aggression with "powerful practical military counteractions," including nuclear weapons, and involving "cutting-edge smaller, lighter, and diversified nuclear strike means." The KCNA statement included the following warning: "The moment of explosion is approaching fast. No one can say a war will break out in Korea or not and whether it will break out today or tomorrow." The expressed nuclear threat was the most blatant and belligerent exposition from the North Korean regime on global stability in recent memory. Raising the threat to another level, Pyongyang also told foreign embassies that it could not guarantee their safety in the event of conflict.

In a speech to the National Defense University in Washington, United States Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel noted that the recent actions of the North Koreans "present a real and clear danger." Meanwhile, Russian foreign ministry spokesperson, Alexander Lukashevich, observed that North Korea's actions may very well foreclose the notion of multilateral negotiations. He cast Pyongyang's attempts to violate decisions of the United Nations Security Council "as 'categorically unacceptable,'" and issued the following warning: "This radically complicates, if it doesn't in practice shut off, the prospects for resuming six-party talks."

On April 5, 2013, Western officials were confirming reports that North Korea had moved a medium-range missile, known as a Musudan or Nodong B, to its east coast. It was unknown if the move was to be interpreted as a threatening gesture, with a warhead mounted on the missile, or part of the preparations for test firing. There was growing suspicion that North Korea might, in fact, be preparing to carry out yet another missile test. It should be noted that while this Musudan/Nodong B missile has a range of 3,000 kilometers (1,875 miles), which would put all of South Korea, Japan, and possibly Guam in its range, there was no test history to ensure precision. As noted by Greg Thielmann, a senior fellow at the Arms Control Association, "A missile that has never even had a flight test is not an operational system and is not a credible threat." Of course, a missile launch might be in the offing for the purpose of acquiring that test history.

By April 10, 2013, South Korean sources said that North Korea appeared to be preparing to launch the Musudan mid-range ballistic missile that had been moved to the east coast, and warned that North Korea might even be preparing to fire the Musudan simultaneously with shorter range Nodong and Scud missiles. The missile launch could conceivably coincide with the celebration of the birthday of Kim Il-sung, the country's founder.

Meanwhile, the rhetoric from North Korea continued to be bellicose with North Korean state media asserting that the scenario on the Korean Peninsula situation was "inching close to a thermonuclear war," and authorities in Pyongyang warning foreign nationals in South Korea to evacuate from that country. The Obama administration in the United States, via White House spokesperson, Jay Carney, characterized North Korea's statements as "unhelpful." Carney continued, "This kind of rhetoric will only further isolate North Korea from the international community and we continue to urge the North Korean leadership to heed President Obama's call to choose the path of peace and to come into compliance with its international obligations."

It should be noted that the foreign ministers of the so-called G-8 countries -- the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan, and Russia -- have condemned North Korea's recent actions, and warned of consequences if North Korea conducts either a missile launch or a nuclear test. On April 12, 2013, United States Secretary of State John Kerry traveled to South Korea and accentuated this multilateral warning, saying "If Kim Jong-Un decides to launch a missile, whether it is across the Sea of Japan or some other direction, he will be choosing

willfully to ignore the entire international community."

A day later, Secretary of State Kerry met with Chinese leaders to find ways to end the geopolitical crisis brewing on the Korean peninsula. Following that meeting, Secretary Kerry said that the United States and China were both calling for North Korea to refrain from further provocative actions. It was clear that the international community was united in its stance against North Korea's recent acts of dangerous provocation.

Secretary of State John Kerry ended his Asian trip with a call for negotiations to end the dissonance and emphasizing the imperative of finding a diplomatic solution. He said, "The United States remains open to authentic and credible negotiations on denuclearization, but the burden is on Pyongyang. North Korea must take meaningful steps to show that it will honor commitments it has already made, and it has to observe laws and the norms of international behavior."

Meanwhile, with an eye on decreasing the tensions between the two Koreas, South Korean President Park Geun-hye called for peaceful dialogue. But North Korea was quick to reject the overture, characterizing the offer of talks as a "cunning ploy." If that response was any indication, North Korea remained defiant in the face of international pressure.

April 15, 2013 -- the anniversary of North Korea's founder's birth -- passed fairly quietly, without a continuation of the bellicose war threats and even free of a huge military parade showcasing North Korean military might. The hopes that North Korea might be digesting the call for talks, and that the heated geopolitical climate had cooled for the moment, dissipated as Pyongyang issued new threats of war. A statement via state-controlled media was issued as follows: "Our retaliatory action will start without any notice from now."

It should be noted that South Korea responded to the recent actions of North Korea by deploying two warships with the Aegis missile defense systems on the east and west coasts. As well, Japan deployed missile defense systems around Tokyo to defend against any missile threat by North Korea.

On April 18, 2013, North Korea's National Defense Commission issued a statement via the official Korean Central News Agency, demanding that the United States and South Korea withdraw "all nuclear war making capabilities from the region," with an eye on future dialogue. North Korea also called for Washington and Seoul to apologize for its aggression.

In response, a spokesperson for the White House, Josh Earnest, said that the Obama administration was committed to denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and was open to "authentic and credible negotiations." Earnest noted that the actions and rhetoric from North Korea "actually indicate the opposite." He added, "We also need to see some clear evidence that the North Koreans themselves are willing to live up to their international obligations, are willing to

demonstrate their commitment to ending the nuclear program, something they've promised in the past."

By April 21, 2013, North Korea was reported to have moved two short-range missile launchers to the east coast. According to a South Korean military source in a report by the South Korean Yonhap news agency, satellite imagery showed the transfer of two mobile missile launchers suitable for short-range Scud missiles to the South Hamgyeong province. Earlier in the month, as noted above, two mid-range Musudan missiles were placed on launchers on the east coast. Collectively, these actions indicated that a missile launch might be in the offing -- possibly to mark the anniversary of the founding of the North Korean military on April 25. However, that date passed without any events of note.

In the last week of April 2013, South Korea called on North Korea to engage in dialogue over the Kaesong industrial complex, which had become a flashpoint in the ongoing crisis between the two Koreas. Regarded as a symbol of cooperation between North Korea and South Korea, the decision by the North to block access to the jointly-run industrial complex was interpreted as a clear sign of deteriorating relations, devolving diplomacy, and the slide towards confrontation. That slide became more precipitous when North Korea outright rejected the invitation to engage in talks. South Korea, therefore, responded by withdrawing its nationals from the Kaesong industrial zone in the interests of safety.

On May 6, 2013, CBS News reported that the two Musudan medium-range missiles, which had been moved to the east coast of North Korea weeks prior, were now removed from the launch site. Those missiles, as discussed above, had sufficient range to reach Japan as well as the United States territory of Guam in the Pacific.

The movement of the missiles was being interpreted in some circles as a cooling of the heated tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Of course, with the start of the spring farming season, it was also possible that many members of the army were -- as they do each year -- necessarily turning their attention to the planting effort.

Regardless of the rationale, the removal of the Musudan missiles from the launch site conceivably indicated that the threat posed by North Korea was reduced at this time, if only on a temporary basis. Indeed, since the Musudan is a mobile missile, it could well be transported back to the launch site in short order. As noted by a senior United States official from the National Security Council in an interview with BBC News, it was "premature to celebrate it as good news," given North Korea's record of unpredictable behavior to date. Striking a similar tone, George Little, a Pentagon spokesperson, characterized North Korea's most recent stance as "a provocation pause."

May 2013 saw North Korea carry out a series of short-range missile tests from its east coast. As global leaders attempted to bring down the level of tensions on the Korean Peninsula, and even

after North Korea pulled back its two medium range missiles from its launch pad, the firing of four -- albeit short range -- missiles was being regarded as a provocation. It was not known if North Korea was trying to re-ignite geo-political tensions or if the tests were routine exercises intended to simply show military might. Regardless, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged North Korea to refrain from carrying out any further missile tests and "resume dialogue."

On June 6, 2013, North Korea proposed convening talks with South Korea over the jointly-administered Kaesong industrial zone, which had been shut down months earlier amidst heightened tensions. The proposal also included a provision to restart tours at the Mount Kumgang resort, which was suspended when a South Korea tourist was shot by a North Korean guard in 2008.

In regards to the more recent closure of the industrial complex, more than 50,000 North Korean workers at Kaesong were withdrawn and South Koreans and supplies were banned entry as part of North Korea's illustration that it was in a "state of war" with South Korea. As intimated above in the "Background" note, the Kaesong complex has often been viewed as a symbol of cross-border cooperation between the two Koreas and its closure augured negatively as regards the overall geo-political security on the Korean Peninsular. But with North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea offering the overture of dialogue on Kaesong and Mount Kumgang, it was believed that an effort was being made to de-escalate tensions and move to a more constructive footing.

North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea issued the following statement outlining its proposal of dialogue: "We propose holding talks between authorities of the North and South for the normalization of operations at Kaesong and the resumption of tours to Mount Kumgang on the occasion of the anniversary of the June 15 joint declaration." South Korea's Ministry of Unification, which administers inter-Korean affairs, said the government in Seoul was "considering the proposal in a positive light." Earlier, South Korea made it clear that given the precipitous and dangerous decline in bilateral relations during the first part of 2013, it would not only consider government level engagement with North Korea.

One day later on June 7, 2013, South Korea accepted North Korea's offer of bilateral talks but insisted that rather than have them take place in the North Korean border town of Kaesong, that the dialogue site be in the truce village of Panmunjom in the demilitarized zone between the countries. South Korea also noted that it was interested in taking up a range of issues, including the Kaesong Industrial Complex, the tourist center at Mount Kumgang, and the notion of family reunions. The North reacted to South Korea's stance in a rare show of cordiality asserting the following via a statement: "We appreciate the fact that the South side promptly and positively responded to the proposal made by us for holding talks between the authorities of both sides."

It should be noted that the North Korean government in Pyongyang also said that if Seoul accepted its proposal, it would also re-establish the emergency hotline channels, which were severed earlier

in the year, as noted above.

But optimism about diplomatic progress between the two Koreas plummeted on June 11, 2013, when despite the fact that preliminary talks on technical and administrative details were reported to have gone smoothly. By June 13, 2013, more details emerged related to the cancellation of the negotiations. The cause was attributed to the composition of the respective delegations at the negotiating table in the first ministerial level talks since 2007.

Originally, South Korean Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae was slated to lead South Korea's delegation. When South Korea requested that North Korea send Kim Yang-gon, an adviser to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, to the talks, North Korea declined. Seoul then decided to dispatch Vice-Unification Minister Kim Nam-shik to lead its delegation instead. North Korea took offense to the apparent "downgraded" level of South Korean officials present at the talks and decided to withdraw completely. North Korea placed the blame on South Korea for "arrogant obstruction" and "deliberate disturbance" resulting in the aborted negotiations. North Korea further characterized South Korea's decision to change the composition of its delegation in this manner as "the height of discourtesy and disrespect unprecedented in the history of the North-South dialogue".

For its part, South Korea said it was disappointed with North Korea's response. South Korea also made it clear that it would not be offering to participate in negotiations with North Korea at any point in the near future. As noted by South Korean Prime Minister Chung Hong-won: "In the past, we have made infinite concessions to the North, but the time has come to hold talks where both sides are represented by officials of the same level."

At the start of July 2013, relations between the two Koreas seemed to be moving in a more productive direction when North Korea agreed to hold talks on the Kaesong industrial complex, only hours after South Korea suggested the meeting. It was hoped that this overture would end more positively than the situation in June 2013 when the proposed Kaesong discussions were halted over procedural disagreements, as discussed just above. However, as of mid-July 2013, there was no immediate agreement reached on resuming operations at their joint Kaesong industrial complex.

With relations between the two Koreas at a stalemate of sorts in mid-June 2013 (subsequently improved in early July 2013, as discussed above), it came as something of a surprise when North Korea proposed direct talks with the United States. North Korea's National Defense Commission, headed by North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, said it hoped for "serious discussions... to secure peace and stability." The United States responded to this overture by saying it looked towards "credible negotiations," made clear that North Korea had to be compliant with United Nations resolutions and travel down the path of denuclearization. At the start of July 2013, North Korea renewed its push for engagement with the United States when Choi Myung-nam, an international

affairs director at the North Korean Foreign Ministry, said Washington should take Pyongyang's diplomatic offers seriously. It should be noted that while representatives of the United States and North Korea have held meetings sporadically, the two sides have not engaged in high-level talks since 2009.

Meanwhile, in the third week of June 2013, North Korea was apparently building on its sudden appetite for diplomatic engagement as it expressed an interest in restarting international nuclear negotiations. According to China's foreign ministry, North Korean officials were now indicating that they wanted to "peacefully resolve the nuclear issue." It should be noted that multilateral talks between North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States over North Korea's controversial nuclear program collapsed in 2008. North Korea's renewed interest in diplomatic engagement at the multilateral level came as a result of high-level strategic talks with Chinese officials in Beijing. It was to be seen if an actual return to the multilateral negotiating table was in the offing.

In mid-August 2013, the two Koreas were able to successfully reach an agreement to re-open the jointly-administered Kaesong industrial complex. The accord between the two countries included a provision ensuring that Pyongyang would never again shut the industrial complex -- often viewed as a symbol of cross-border cooperation -- "under any circumstances." Another key provision of the accord was the move to "internationalize" the Kaesong industrial complex by hosting foreign visitors at the factory park. This element would effectively make it harder for North Korea to take any unilateral action involving the facility. Left unspecified at the time was a precise date for the reopening of the facility and the resumption of regular operations.

By September 2013 the two Koreas agreed on a "trial" start date of Sept. 16, 2013. It should be noted that agreement was also forged in regard to exempting South Korean firms from taxes for the rest of 2013 to offset losses incurred during the period of months when the complex was closed. Agreement was also made to facilitate easier access to the complex for South Koreans carrying out commercial responsibilities, and for the purpose of attracting foreign investors to the Kaesong Industrial Complex.

In late November 2013, China tested the patience of the international community by declaring a new defense zone in the East China Sea. To that end, China announced it was deploying warplanes in the new air defense identification zone (ADIZ) for surveillance purposes. However, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Qin Gang noted that if disputes occurred in the region, his country hoped to resolve them through "peaceful means via friendly negotiation."

China's self-declaration of dominion over the territory and its warning that all airplanes passing through the area were to file flight plans and identify themselves or be prepared to deal with "defensive emergency measures" likely raised the ire of neighbors. Indeed, the new air defense identification zone (ADIZ) included contested territory claimed not only by China, but also Taiwan,

Japan, and South Korea. Of particular note were uninhabited but disputed islands in the area known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu by the Chinese. Their significance has, in the past, focused on fishing rights and shipping lanes; however, there was also the possibility of fossil fuel reserves in the area.

The United States Department of State characterized China's newly declared defense zone as "an attempt to unilaterally change the status quo in the East China Sea" and accordingly warned that it would "raise regional tensions and increase the risk of miscalculation, confrontation and accidents." In defiance of China's decision to declare the new ADIZ, the United States and Japan respectively ordered fighter jets to be flown through this area of the East China Sea. China was thus prompted to scramble warplanes to monitor those American and Japanese fighter jets crossing through the ADIZ.

For both Japan and the United States, the message was clear: they did not officially recognize China's newly declared defense zone in East China Sea. That being said, the United States was quick to note that its decision to fly fighter jets through the ADIZ was not intended to be a provocative act. An official for the United States military told CNN News that its aircrafts and a number of other Japanese military aircraft flew through the ADIZ without incident and as part of scheduled routine operations. The military official was quoted as saying, "This is status quo. We are not changing what we are doing. We are not trying to make a point with China. We fly U.S. aircraft daily in international airspace in the region. This is normal."

South Korea also reportedly dispatched a military aircraft on a routine patrol flight into the ADIZ and did not alert China of its flight plan. An official from the South Korean Defense Ministry said the flight was routine and carried out twice a week; the South Korean official said the patrols would continue irrespective of China's newly declared defense zone in East China Sea.

Still, several commercial airlines, such as Qantas Airlines and Singapore Airlines, were not prepared to take any chances of their own and made it clear that they intended to act in accordance with China's new regulations. As well, the United States advised American commercial carriers to comply with China's new requirements for filing flight plans when they traverse the newly declared ADIZ over the East China Sea for obvious security reasons. It was to be seen if the matter would spark a dispute, especially since at least two Japanese airlines announced they would not be complying with the new Chinese-dictated regulations.

Complicating matters was an announcement from South Korea on Dec. 8, 2013 that it was expanding its own air defense zone, which that area partially overlapping with China's zone. At issue was the Ieodo rock claimed by both countries and controlled by South Korea. As noted here, South Korea was already challenging China's ADIZ by flying its military aircraft through that zone. The moves were expected to raise already-heightened tensions in eastern Asia.

Meanwhile, in the first week of December 2013, while United States Vice President Joseph Biden was on a trip to Asia, the matter of China's self-declare air defense zone was a matter of discussion. In a joint appearance with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Tokyo, Vice President Biden said, "We, the United States, are deeply concerned by the attempt to unilaterally change the status quo in the East China Sea. This action has raised regional tensions and increased the risk of accidents and miscalculation." Biden said the United States was monitoring the situation with Japan and South Korea and noted that "we will remain steadfast in our alliance commitments." He continued, "The United States has an interest in the lowering of tensions in this vital region. This underscores the need for crisis management mechanisms and effective channels of communication between China and Japan to reduce the risk of escalation."

Vice President Biden then engaged in "very direct" talks regarding the ADIZ with Chinese officials. While China asserted its view that its self-declare air defense zone was consistent with "international law and practice," Vice President Biden pointed out that the move had caused "apprehension" in Asia and he noted that China had "increasing responsibility to contribute positively to peace and security." But Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said: "During the talks the Chinese side repeated its principled position, stressing that the Chinese move accorded with international law and practice." Thus, it was clear -- at least in the public purview -- that neither the United States nor China were prepared to step back from the expressly-stated stances.

On Feb. 27, 2014, North Korea fired four short-range missiles over the sea off its eastern coast -- essentially to the north of the border with South Korea. The South Korea Yonhap News Agency speculated that the missiles were Scud short-range missiles with a capacity of traversing 125 miles and thus capable of reaching targets in South Korea but not as far as Japan.

On March 2, 2014, North Korea fired another two short-range missiles into the sea off the eastern coast of the Korean peninsula. The South Korea Yonhap news Agency reported that the missiles likely flew about 300 miles and were believed to be Scud-C models -- this time capable of reaching targets in both South Korea and Japan.

In the third week of March 2014, North Korea fired a series of 30 short-range rockets into the sea off the eastern end of the Korean peninsula. The rockets were thought to be Soviet-era FROG rockets that have been in North Korea's possession since the 1960s, and seemingly flew for more than 35 miles before landing in the sea. This launch of the 30 FROG missiles came after other such missile tests in the weeks prior, as discussed above.

In the last week of March 2014, North Korea test fired two medium range Nodong missiles, which landed in the ocean between North Korea and Japan. The action essentially triggered a condemnation from the United Nations Security Council, which noted that the missile launches were a violation of prevailing United Nations resolutions, such as Security Council Resolutions 1718 and 1874 that prohibit North Korea from carrying out ballistic or nuclear activity. The

United Nations Security Council also warned of an "appropriate response" to come. Undeterred, North Korea lashed back at the United Nations Security Council, characterizing its condemnation as "absolutely intolerable" and justifying its own action as being a "self-defensive" move.

There were suggestions that North Korea was reacting to the annual joint military exercises by United States and South Korean forces, which Pyongyang typically characterizes as acts of war and aggression. Fueling the fire for North Korea was the flight of a United States nuclear-capable B-52 bomber over South Korea. South Korean authorities have put forth the theory that North Korea's missile launched constituted an "armed protest" against the joint South Korean-United States military drills that were taking place.

Perhaps exasperated by North Korea's provocative acts and saber rattling, which were manifest most recently by the missile launches, China had already entered the equation. Even before the launch of the medium range missiles in the last week of March 2014, China had earlier declared a "red line," saying that it would not allow war or chaos on the Korean peninsula, and asserting that peace was possible only via denuclearization. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was on the record saying, "The Korean peninsula is right on China's doorstep. We have a red line, that is, we will not allow war or instability on the Korean peninsula." Wang demanded that all parties "exercise restraint" and noted that "genuine and lasting peace" on the Korean peninsula was only possible with denuclearization. He said, "Confrontation can only bring tension, and war can only cause disaster." The Chinese foreign minister also endorsed the resumption of multilateral nuclear talks, saying, "Some dialogue is better than none, and better early than later."

This stance by China -- North Korea's most important diplomatic and economic supporter -- suggested that Beijing was no longer willing to accept Pyongyang's theatrics on its doorstep. Pressure on North Korea had already begun to intensify a month earlier in February 2014 when the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, urged global powers to refer North Korea to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court following a report that documented horrific crimes against humanity in that country. While China was unlikely to join the human rights chorus against North Korea, it certainly seemed prepared to use its influence to compel North Korea to return to the nuclear negotiating table. Adding to the suggestion that dialogue might be at hand, Japan and North Korea were scheduled to engage in their first high level talks in years.

However, the nuclear negotiating table appeared to be a distant notion as March 2014 came to a close, and as North Korea threatened to go forward with a nuclear test. As reported by the North Korean Central News Agency, North Korea said it would not foreclose the possibility of testing a "new form" nuclear weapon in defiance of international condemnation and in contravention of prevailing international law. While Pyongyang did not specify the type of nuclear weaponry it intended to test, the conventional wisdom has long been held that North Korea was attempting to develop small and sophisticated nuclear devices that could be delivered by intercontinental ballistic

missiles.

South Korea warned that if its neighbor to the north went forward with a nuclear test, there would be consequences in the offing. As noted by South Korea Foreign Ministry spokesman Cho Tae-young, "North Korea should bear in mind that if it ignores the stern demand from the neighboring countries and the international community and carries out a nuclear test, it will have to pay a price for it."

On March 31, 2014, tensions on the Korean peninsula exponentially increased as North Korea and South Korea exchanged fire across its western maritime border.

According to South Korean authorities, this exchange of fire was presaged by North Korea's announcement that it would hold "live fire" military drills along its border zone with South Korea. South Korea warned that there would be immediate retaliation if any ordinance touched its jurisdiction. North Korea then fired more than 500 artillery rounds, some 100 of which landed in South Korean territorial waters. As promised, the South Koreans responded by firing more than 300 rounds into North Korean waters and scrambling F-15s on its side of the maritime border.

Known as the Northern Limit Line, the maritime border has been a well known flashpoint region between the two Koreas, and its very existence is a matter of dispute from the point of view of the North Koreans. The boundary was established after the end of the Korean War in the 1950s by the United Nations, but the line of demarcation has been accepted by North Korea. It should be noted that North Korean artillery fire killed four South Koreans on the Yeonpyeong border island in the same disputed area in 2010. In another egregious incident in 2010, North Korea torpedoed a South Korean warship in the disputed border region, sinking the vessel and killing 46 people. Now, in 2014, it was again the locus of dissonance between the two Koreas as a result of the North's decision to hold military drills in this hotspot region.

It was to be seen if these were actions by North Korea were aimed at improving Pyongyang's negotiating position for the future as it attempted to stave off further sanctions that were likely to come, or, if they were intended to be blatant and irrational acts of provocation. South Korean Defence Ministry spokesperson, Kim Min-seok, intimated that Pyongyang's actions were being motivated by both factors as he said, "We believe the North's maritime firing is a planned provocation and an attempt to test our military's determination to defend the Northern Limit Line and to get an upper hand in South-North relations."

In late April 2014, South Korean Prime Minister Chung Hong-won offered his resignation as criticism erupted regarding the government's handling of the sinking of a passenger ferry off the coast on April 16, 2014.

Approximately 200 people were killed, and scores more were missing, as a result of the Sewol

ferry disaster. In a twist of fate, the 15-member crew survived the tragedy -- with the captain being one of the first persons able to find secure ground. Not surprisingly, families of the victims were outraged, and all members of the crew were soon facing criminal negligence charges. But with news emerging about lax regulatory enforcement by the government, in concert with growing criticism over the government's failure to respond quickly and efficiently to the tragedy, the focus of the blame was expanding past the crew to the governmental authorities. Accordingly, Prime Minister Chung Hong-won issued an apology and said he would step down from office.

In a statement that was broadcast nationally, the prime minister said, "On behalf of the government, I apologize for many problems from the prevention of the accident to the early handling of the disaster. The right thing for me to do is to take responsibility and resign as a person who is in charge of the cabinet." He continued, "There have been so many varieties of irregularities that have continued in every corner of our society and practices that have gone wrong. I hope these deep-rooted evils get corrected this time and this kind of accident never happens again."

President Park Geun-hye accepted Mr Chung's resignation. The president had already expressed outrage of the hundreds of deaths in vociferous language. Lee Wan-koo eventually became the new prime minister and head of government after a period in which the post remained vacant.

Meanwhile, in mid-August 2014, North Korea fired three short range rockets from the port city of Wonsan; the rockets landed in the sea off the east coast of the Korean peninsula. The incident coincided with Pope Francis' arrival in South Korea for a five day visit and ahead of scheduled joint military exercises between South Korea and the United States. North Korea objects to those drills, charging that they are intended to prepare for war. As such, North Korea has typically taken some sort of provocative action to protest the joint military activity. In this case, North Korea reacted with the firing of the rockets as well as the issuance of a statement that read as follows: "Given that the U.S. and the puppet forces of South Korea continue staging nuclear war exercises against us in particular, we will take countermeasures for self-defense which will include missile launches, nuclear tests, and all other programs." It was to be seen if North Korea would indeed follow up the rocket launches with nuclear tests, as indicated.

Across the border, Pope Francis arrived in South Korea where he was due to stay for a five day visit. It was to be Pope Francis' first visit to Asia since he became pontiff. In South Korea, where Roman Catholics make up about 10 percent of the population, Pope Francis was greeted by enthusiastic crowds. During his landmark visit, Pope Francis celebrated mass, lauded the Korean Catholics -- many of whom died for their religion in previous centuries, and beatified 124 South Korean Catholic martyrs with hundreds of thousands of South Koreans in attendance. Pope Francis' popularity among South Koreans was partially due his decision to travel around Seoul in a small and unpretentious hatch-back car -- a sharp contrast from the type of status-symbol laden vehicle that one would expect for almost any other world leader.

In February 2015, with joint military exercises looming between the United States and South Korea, North Korea launched anti-ship missiles from hoverships. North Korea's news agency published images showing the hoverships launching a so-called "cutting-edge anti-ship rocket" that would be used to secure the contested marine border with South Korea.

Some observers expressed alarm over what they thought to be signs of intensifying technical abilities by North Korea and thus raising the threat level to neighboring countries. They also suggested that the anti-missile technology may have come from either Russia or China, thus raising questions about those countries' culpability in facilitating North Korea's menacing behavior. Still others dismissed the event as simply an act of aggression ahead of the aforementioned joint military exercises looming between the United States and South Korea. But a third contingent of observers have suggested that the so-called advances in North Korean military capabilities were actually overblown. Peter Singer, a strategist at the New America Foundation, said "North Korea has a long track record of exaggerating and outright faking its military accomplishments... This is not going to disrupt the balance of power in the region." Indeed, the use of hovercraft vessels can hardly be regarded as a cutting edge or breakthrough technology. It has been in use for some time across the world.

That being said, North Korea's use of new missiles from hoverships would still pose a threat to the region. Should they be deployed in the area of contested marine waters, the South Korean military would be compelled to respond. As such, the chances of a situation escalating militarily remained high, making it clear that North Korea remained a regional menace.

In March 2015, United States Ambassador Mark Lippert was brutally attacked by a pro-North Korean activist in the South Korean capital of Seoul.

Ambassador Lippert, who was serving as the United States envoy to South Korea, was attending a breakfast aimed at a discussion of the reunification of the two Koreas. During the breakfast, the assailant pushed Lippert onto a table and slashed his face with a knife, seriously injuring him. The ambassador was then rushed to the hospital and endured 80 stitches and several hours of surgery to close his facial wound. South Korean doctors later said that Lippert narrowly survived the injury.

The assailant was soon identified as as pro-North Korean activist, Kim Ki-jong, who was known to authorities due to a previous attempt to attack Japanese Ambassador Toshinori Shigeie, for which he received only a suspended sentence. As well, there was a long record of Kim Ki-jong's participation in anti-American protests. In South Korea, activists with pro-Pyongyang sensibilities are few in number; however, they hold passionate beliefs about the contribution of foreign powers to the divisions between the Koreas.

South Korean President Park Guen-hye condemned what she cast as an "attack on the South

Korea-U.S. alliance." However, the incident did not reflect well on her, the South Korean government, or South Korean security authorities. Indeed, there were vital questions arising about (1) the level of security at the high-level breakfast, and (2) the fact that the assailant -- with his known history -- was not only free, but permitted to attend a diplomatic breakfast attended by high ranking officials.

Meanwhile, North Korea entered the fray, lauding the act of violence and characterizing it as "just punishment for U.S. warmongers." On behalf of the United States, Secretary of State John Kerry asserted that his country would not be "intimidated or deterred by threats or by anybody who harms any American diplomats." For his part, Ambassador Lippert exhibited great resilience, writing after surgery via the social media outlet, Twitter, "Doing well and in great spirits... Will be back ASAP to advance US-ROK [Republic of Korea] alliance!"

In June 2015, the parliament of South Korea approved Hwang Kyo-ahn to be the country's new prime minister following a corruption scandal that resulted in the resignation of Lee Wan-koo as the head of government. South Korean President Park Geun-hye indicated that the new prime minister -- a career prosecutor and former Justice Minister -- was the right selection and had the right credentials to tackle the problem of corruption in South Korea.

Going back to April 2015, South Korean Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo -- the head of government since 2014 -- resigned from office when his name appeared in the suicide note of a businessman. At the heart of the brewing scandal were claims that the outgoing prime minister received illegal funds from Sung Wang-jong, who was himself facing charges of fraud and bribery, but who ultimately committed suicide. As noted here, the prime minister's name was referenced in relation to the payment of funds in Sung's suicide note.

In his exit address, outgoing Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo declined to offer details surrounding his resignation and the allegations against him, limiting his statement to the following words: "There is a lot I want to say but I will leave behind a void with the belief that the truth will one day surely be told."

For her part, South Korean President Park Geun-hye accepted Lee Wan-koo's resignation. The president, who was already suffering from dismal job approval ratings, quite likely made the political calculation that the controversy would inevitably weaken her politically. President Park Geun-hye may have been attempting to stem the proverbial tide of disapproval a year ahead of general elections in 2016 when her Saenuri Party would have to try to hold control over the parliament. Her immediate task would be to name a new nominee for prime minister.

To that end, three successive nominations were introduced and abandoned in the space of a month, with continued questions emerging about personal improprieties. Then, in May 2015, President Park's office named Justice Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn to be the new prime minister.

President Park indicated that the latest nominee was the right selection and possessed the right credentials to tackle the blight of corruption in South Korea. The public affairs secretary for the president released a statement in which Hwang Kyo-ahn was described as "the right person to uproot corruption across society and accomplish political reform so we can create a new country." Finally, in June 2015, the parliament of South Korea approved Hwang Kyo-ahn to be the country's new prime minister.

On Aug. 20, 2015, North Korea shelled across the border, prompting South Korea to retaliate with several rounds of artillery fire. Reports indicated that North Korea carried out the initial burst of shelling in retaliation for anti-Pyongyang rhetoric that has been broadcast on loudspeakers from South Korea. The broadcasts have generally be regarded as a type of psychological warfare against Pyongyang and intended to counteract the North's nationalist propaganda.

South Korea responded to North Korea's shelling, as noted here, by firing rounds of artillery. North Korea did not immediately return fire, opting instead to warn South Korea to cease its broadcasts, which it viewed as a declaration of war, along the border area within 48 hours. North Korea warned that if South Korea did not heed its warning, it would take military action. However, South Korean authorities said that the broadcasts would not be stopped, thus prompting the exchange of multiple rounds of fire -- none of which ended at this time with any casualties.

The exchange of fire came after two South Korean soldiers died in a landmine blamed on North Korea earlier in August 2015, and before annual joint military exercises between the United States and South Korea that North Korea regularly condemns as an act of aggression. As a result of these incidents and the impending joint military exercises, tensions were now markedly intensified between the two Koreas. Given this unstable landscape, South Korea moved to evacuate residents from Yeoncheon in the western sea border. South Korea's National Security Council was also set to convene an emergency session.

Then, on Aug. 21, 2015, in a disturbing escalation of tensions, the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, placed his country on "war footing." North Korean state media reported that after an emergency meeting of the central military commission, King Jong-un had ordered that North Korean troops be "fully ready for any military operations at any time." While North Korea has often indulged in fiery militaristic rhetoric, this instance was regarded as more alarming since an exchange of fire had just taken place.

On Aug. 23, 2015, South Korean President Park Geun-hye released a statement in which she said that the anti-Pyongyang broadcasts would continue unless North Korea apologized for the landmine incident that killed two South Korean soldiers. She said, "We need a clear apology and measures to prevent a recurrence of these provocations and tense situations. Otherwise, this government will take appropriate steps and continue loudspeaker broadcasts." The program of cross-border broadcasts actually ended in 2004 but resumed in recent times as a result of North

Korean aggression. It was to be seen how North Korea would respond to the South Korean leader's demand, and if high level bilateral talks between the two sides -- presumably with an eye on decreasing tensions -- would yield productive results.

A day later on Aug. 24, 2015, following marathon negotiations between the two Koreas in the in the so-called "truce village" of Panmunjom inside the demilitarized zone (DMZ), the two Koreas released a statement indicating they had reached an agreement to de-escalate tensions. According to the statement, North Korea expressed "regret" over the deaths of two South Korean soldiers in the aforementioned landmine incident, stopping just short of taking responsibility for the loss of life. North Korea also agreed to end its war footing, which had actually commenced in earnest. For its part, South Korea agreed to end its cross-border loudspeaker broadcasts. Also of note was the fact that North Korea and South Korea agreed to future discussions on a range of issues, with an eye on diffusing tensions and improving bilateral ties.

The agreement could only be regarded as a positive development on the Korean peninsula, especially given the volatile personality of nuclear-armed North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un. But Pyongyang officially applauded the agreement, with the state news agency noting that it had moved the inter-Korean relations from a catastrophic path on to "the track of reconciliation and trust." North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un, also lauded the accord between the two Koreas, calling it "a landmark occasion."

On the other side of the border, South Korean President Park Geun-hye enjoyed a political boost from her handling of the North Korean crisis, according to survey data that showed a spike in her job approval rating.

Of significance was the fact that the 1950-1953 war between the two Koreas ended with an armistice and not a peace treaty. As such, any escalation of tensions or movement to military action is generally regarded with gravity and alarm by countries of the region of eastern Asia.

Relations on the Korean peninsula deteriorated in the period in early 2016 when North Korea carried out a hydrogen bomb test and launched a satellite into space, the latter of which was generally regarded as a ruse for a ballistic missile test. The two actions were regarded as virulent acts of provocation, committed in flagrant contravention of international law, and thus constituted a threat to regional -- if not global -- security, .

Tensions on the Korean peninsula deteriorated further in February 2016 when South Korea decided to suspend operations at the Kaesong industrial zone, which has been jointly administered by the two Koreas and viewed as a venue for cooperation. South Korea made the move in response to North Korea's provocative and belligerent actions, as noted just above. But North Korea itself reacted by evicting all South Koreans from the Kaesong industrial zone and accusing South Korea of effectively "declaring war." The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's

(DPRK) Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea released a statement that read as follows: "Unpardonable is the puppet group's act of totally suspending the operation in (Kaesong), finding fault with the DPRK's H-bomb test and launch of a satellite."

In late February 2016, in response to North Korea's provocative nuclear activities in contravention of international law, the United States and China arrived at an agreement intended to expand United Nations Security Council sanctions against that country. In the aftermath of North Korea's hydrogen bomb test in January 2016, Washington D. C. and Beijing have been ensconced in rigorous negotiations aimed at drafting a draft resolution.

The two sides were not in complete agreement about what types of initiatives should be undertaken, with Beijing favoring dialogue and advocating non-proliferation, and with Washington D.C. pushing for more stringent punitive measures, including curbs on Pyongyang's ability to access the global financial system. Other provisions being explored included mandatory inspections on cargo passing from or to North Korea, a ban on all supplies of aviation and rocket fuel to North Korea, and a ban on the transfer to North Korea of any item that could be used for military purposes.

Despite the distance on some of these items, Washington D. C. and Beijing were finally able to find concurrence and craft the draft resolution, which they hoped would be introduced and voted on in the full 15-member United Nations Security Council at the start of March 2016.

-- March 2016

Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, www.countrywatch.com; research resources listed in Bibliography.

Political Risk Index

Political Risk Index

The **Political Risk Index** is a proprietary index measuring the level of risk posed to governments, corporations, and investors, based on a myriad of political and economic factors. The [Political Risk Index](#) is calculated using an established methodology by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is

based on varied criteria* including the following consideration: political stability, political representation, democratic accountability, freedom of expression, security and crime, risk of conflict, human development, jurisprudence and regulatory transparency, economic risk, foreign investment considerations, possibility of sovereign default, and corruption. Scores are assigned from 0-10 using the aforementioned criteria. A score of 0 marks the highest political risk, while a score of 10 marks the lowest political risk. Stated differently, countries with the lowest scores pose the greatest political risk. A score of 0 marks the most dire level of political risk and an ultimate nadir, while a score of 10 marks the lowest possible level of political risk, according to this proprietary index. Rarely will there be scores of 0 or 10 due to the reality that countries contain complex landscapes; as such, the index offers a range of possibilities ranging from lesser to greater risk.

Country	Assessment
Afghanistan	2
Albania	4
Algeria	6
Andorra	9
Angola	4
Antigua	8
Argentina	4
Armenia	4-5
Australia	9.5

Austria	9.5
Azerbaijan	4
Bahamas	8.5
Bahrain	6
Bangladesh	3.5
Barbados	8.5-9
Belarus	3
Belgium	9
Belize	8
Benin	5
Bhutan	5
Bolivia	5
Bosnia-Herzegovina	4
Botswana	7
Brazil	7
Brunei	7
Bulgaria	6
Burkina Faso	4

Burma (Myanmar)	4.5
Burundi	3
Cambodia	4
Cameroon	5
Canada	9.5
Cape Verde	6
Central African Republic	3
Chad	4
Chile	9
China	7
China: Hong Kong	8
China: Taiwan	8
Colombia	7
Comoros	5
Congo DRC	3
Congo RC	4
Costa Rica	8
Cote d'Ivoire	4.5

Croatia	7
Cuba	4-4.5
Cyprus	5
Czech Republic	8
Denmark	9.5
Djibouti	4.5
Dominica	7
Dominican Republic	6
East Timor	5
Ecuador	6
Egypt	5
El Salvador	7
Equatorial Guinea	4
Eritrea	3
Estonia	8
Ethiopia	4
Fiji	5
Finland	9

Fr.YugoslavRep.Macedonia	5
France	9
Gabon	5
Gambia	4
Georgia	5
Germany	9.5
Ghana	6
Greece	4.5-5
Grenada	8
Guatemala	6
Guinea	3.5
Guinea-Bissau	3.5
Guyana	4.5
Haiti	3.5
Holy See (Vatican)	9
Honduras	4.5-5
Hungary	7
Iceland	8.5-9

India	7.5-8
Indonesia	6
Iran	3.5-4
Iraq	2.5-3
Ireland	8-8.5
Israel	8
Italy	7.5
Jamaica	6.5-7
Japan	9
Jordan	6.5
Kazakhstan	6
Kenya	5
Kiribati	7
Korea, North	1
Korea, South	8
Kosovo	4
Kuwait	7
Kyrgyzstan	4.5

Laos	4.5
Latvia	7
Lebanon	5.5
Lesotho	6
Liberia	3.5
Libya	2
Liechtenstein	9
Lithuania	7.5
Luxembourg	9
Madagascar	4
Malawi	4
Malaysia	8
Maldives	4.5
Mali	4
Malta	8
Marshall Islands	6
Mauritania	4.5-5
Mauritius	7

Mexico	6.5
Micronesia	7
Moldova	5
Monaco	9
Mongolia	5
Montenegro	6
Morocco	6.5
Mozambique	4.5-5
Namibia	6.5-7
Nauru	6
Nepal	4
Netherlands	9.5
New Zealand	9.5
Nicaragua	5
Niger	4
Nigeria	4.5
Norway	9.5
Oman	7

Pakistan	3.5
Palau	7
Panama	7.5
Papua New Guinea	5
Paraguay	6.5-7
Peru	7
Philippines	6
Poland	8
Portugal	7.5
Qatar	7.5
Romania	5.5
Russia	5.5
Rwanda	5
Saint Kitts and Nevis	8
Saint Lucia	8
Saint Vincent and Grenadines	8
Samoa	7
San Marino	9

Sao Tome and Principe	5.5
Saudi Arabia	6
Senegal	6
Serbia	5
Seychelles	7
Sierra Leone	4.5
Singapore	9
Slovak Republic (Slovakia)	8
Slovenia	8
Solomon Islands	6
Somalia	2
South Africa	7
Spain	7.5
Sri Lanka	5
Sudan	3.5
Suriname	5
Swaziland	5
Sweden	9.5

Switzerland	9.5
Syria	2
Tajikistan	4.5
Tanzania	6
Thailand	6.5
Togo	4.5
Tonga	7
Trinidad and Tobago	8
Tunisia	6
Turkey	7
Turkmenistan	4.5
Tuvalu	7
Uganda	6
Ukraine	3.5-4
United Arab Emirates	7
United Kingdom	9
United States	9.5
Uruguay	8

Uzbekistan	4
Vanuatu	7
Venezuela	4
Vietnam	5
Yemen	3
Zambia	4.5
Zimbabwe	3

*Methodology

The [Political Risk Index](#) is calculated by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on the combined scoring of varied criteria as follows --

1. political stability (record of peaceful transitions of power, ability of government to stay in office and carry out policies as a result of productive executive-legislative relationship, perhaps with popular support vis a vis risk of government collapse)
2. political representation (right of suffrage, free and fair elections, multi-party participation, and influence of foreign powers)
3. democratic accountability (record of respect for political rights, human rights, and civil liberties, backed by constitutional protections)
4. freedom of expression (media freedom and freedom of expression, right to dissent or express political opposition, backed by constitutional protections)
5. security and crime (the degree to which a country has security mechanisms that ensures safety of citizens and ensures law and order, without resorting to extra-judicial measures)
6. risk of conflict (the presence of conflict; record of coups or civil disturbances; threat of war; threats posed by internal or external tensions; threat or record of terrorism or insurgencies)

7. human development (quality of life; access to education; socio-economic conditions; systemic concern for the status of women and children)
8. jurisprudence and regulatory transparency (the impartiality of the legal system, the degree of transparency within the regulatory system of a country and the durability of that structure)
9. economic conditions (economic stability, investment climate, degree of nationalization of industries, property rights, labor force development)
10. corruption (the degree of corruption in a country and/or efforts by the government to address graft and other irregularities)

Editor's Note:

As of 2015, the current climate of upheaval internationally -- both politically and economically -- has affected the ratings for several countries across the world.

North Korea, [Afghanistan](#), [Somalia](#), and [Zimbabwe](#) -- retain their low rankings.

Several Middle Eastern and North African countries, such as [Tunisia](#), [Egypt](#), [Libya](#), [Syria](#), [Iraq](#) and [Yemen](#) were downgraded in recent years due to political instability occurring in the "season of unrest" sweeping the region since 2011 and continuing today. The worst downgrades affected [Syria](#) where civil war is at play, along with the rampage of terror being carried out by Islamist terrorists who have also seized control over part of Syrian territory. [Iraq](#) has been further downgraded due to the rampage of Islamist terrorists and their takeover of wide swaths of Iraqi territory. [Libya](#) has also been downgraded further due to its slippage into failed state status; at issue in [Libya](#) have been an ongoing power struggle between rival militias. [Yemen](#) continues to hold steady with a poor ranking due to continued unrest at the hands of Houthi rebels, secessionists, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, and Islamic State. Its landscape has been further complicated by the fact that it is now the site of a proxy war between [Iran](#) and [Saudi Arabia](#). Conversely, [Tunisia](#) and [Egypt](#) have seen slight upgrades as these countries stabilize.

In Africa, [Zimbabwe](#) continues to be one of the bleak spots of the world with the Mugabe regime effectively destroying the country's once vibrant economy, and miring [Zimbabwe](#) with an exceedingly high rate of inflation, debilitating unemployment, devolving public services, and critical food shortages; rampant crime and political oppression round out the landscape. [Somalia](#) also sports a poor ranking due to the continuing influence of the terror group, al-Shabab, which was not operating across the border in [Kenya](#). On the upside, [Nigeria](#), which was ineffectively dealing with the threat posed by the terror group, Boko Haram, was making some strides on the national

security front with its new president at the helm. [Mali](#) was slightly upgraded due to its efforts to return to constitutional order following the 2012 coup and to neutralize the threat of separatists and Islamists. But the [Central African Republic](#) was downgraded due to the takeover of the government by Muslim Seleka rebels and a continued state of lawlessness in that country. [South Sudan](#) -- the world's newest nation state -- has not been officially included in this assessment; however, it can be unofficially assessed to be in the vicinity of "3" due to its manifold political and economic challenges. [Burkina Faso](#), [Burundi](#) and [Guinea](#) have been downgraded due to political unrest, with [Guinea](#) also having to deal with the burgeoning Ebola crisis.

In Europe, [Ukraine](#) was downgraded due to the unrest facing that country following its Maidan revolution that triggered a pro-Russian uprising in the eastern part of the country. [Russia](#) was also implicated in the Ukrainian crisis due to its intervention on behalf of pro-Russian separatists, as well as its annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Strains on the infrastructure of southern and eastern European countries, such as [Serbia](#), [Croatia](#), and [Hungary](#), due to an influx of refugees was expected to pose social and economic challenges, and slight downgrades were made accordingly. So too, a corruption crisis for the Romanian prime minister has affected the ranking of that country. Meanwhile, the rankings for [Spain](#), [Portugal](#), [Ireland](#), and [Italy](#) were maintained due to debt woes and the concomitant effect on the euro zone. [Greece](#), another euro zone nation, was earlier downgraded due to its sovereign debt crisis; however, no further downgrade was added since the country was able to successfully forge a bailout rescue deal with creditor institutions. Cyprus' exposure to Greek banks yielded a downgrade in its case.

In Asia, [Nepal](#) was downgraded in response to continuous political instability and a constitutional crisis that prevails well after landmark elections were held. Both [India](#) and [China](#) retain their rankings; [India](#) holds a slightly higher ranking than [China](#) due to its record of democratic representation and accountability. Increasing violence and political instability in [Pakistan](#) resulted in a downgrade for this country's already low rating. Meanwhile, [Singapore](#) retained its strong rankings due to its continued effective stewardship of the economy and political stability.

In the Americas, ongoing political and economic woes, as well as crime and corruption have affected the rankings for [Mexico](#), [Guatemala](#), and [Brazil](#). [Argentina](#) was downgraded due to its default on debt following the failure of talks with bond holders. [Venezuela](#) was downgraded due to its mix of market unfriendly policies and political oppression. For the moment, the [United States](#) maintains a strong ranking along with [Canada](#), and most of the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean; however, a renewed debt ceiling crisis could cause the [United States](#) to be downgraded in a future edition. Finally, a small but significant upgrade was attributed to [Cuba](#) due to its recent pro-business reforms and its normalization of ties with the United States.

Source:

Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, CountryWatch Inc. www.countrywatch.com

Updated:

2015

Political Stability

Political Stability

The **Political Stability Index** is a proprietary index measuring a country's level of stability, standard of good governance, record of constitutional order, respect for human rights, and overall strength of democracy. The [Political Stability](#) Index is calculated using an established methodology* by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on a given country's record of peaceful transitions of power, ability of a government to stay in office and carry out its policies vis a vis risk credible risks of government collapse. Threats include coups, domestic violence and instability, terrorism, etc. This index measures the dynamic between the quality of a country's government and the threats that can compromise and undermine stability. Scores are assigned from 0-10 using the aforementioned criteria. A score of 0 marks the lowest level of political stability and an ultimate nadir, while a score of 10 marks the highest level of political stability possible, according to this proprietary index. Rarely will there be scores of 0 or 10 due to the reality that countries contain complex landscapes; as such, the index offers a range of possibilities ranging from lesser to greater stability.

Country	Assessment
Afghanistan	2
Albania	4.5-5
Algeria	5

Andorra	9.5
Angola	4.5-5
Antigua	8.5-9
Argentina	7
Armenia	5.5
Australia	9.5
Austria	9.5
Azerbaijan	5
Bahamas	9
Bahrain	6
Bangladesh	4.5
Barbados	9
Belarus	4
Belgium	9
Belize	8
Benin	5
Bhutan	5
Bolivia	6

Bosnia-Herzegovina	5
Botswana	8.5
Brazil	7
Brunei	8
Bulgaria	7.5
Burkina Faso	4
Burma (Myanmar)	4.5
Burundi	4
Cambodia	4.5-5
Cameroon	6
Canada	9.5
Cape Verde	6
Central African Republic	3
Chad	4.5
Chile	9
China	7
China: Hong Kong	8
China: Taiwan	8

Colombia	7.5
Comoros	5
Congo DRC	3
Congo RC	5
Costa Rica	9.5
Cote d'Ivoire	3.5
Croatia	7.5
Cuba	4.5
Cyprus	8
Czech Republic	8.5
Denmark	9.5
Djibouti	5
Dominica	8.5
Dominican Republic	7
East Timor	5
Ecuador	7
Egypt	4.5-5
El Salvador	7.5-8

Equatorial Guinea	4.5
Eritrea	4
Estonia	9
Ethiopia	4.5
Fiji	5
Finland	9
Fr.YugoslavRep.Macedonia	6.5
France	9
Gabon	5
Gambia	4.5
Georgia	5
Germany	9.5
Ghana	7
Greece	6
Grenada	8.5
Guatemala	7
Guinea	3.5-4
Guinea-Bissau	4

Guyana	6
Haiti	3.5-4
Holy See (Vatican)	9.5
Honduras	6
Hungary	7.5
Iceland	9
India	8
Indonesia	7
Iran	3.5
Iraq	2.5
Ireland	9.5
Israel	8
Italy	8.5-9
Jamaica	8
Japan	9
Jordan	6
Kazakhstan	6
Kenya	5

Kiribati	8
Korea, North	2
Korea, South	8.5
Kosovo	5.5
Kuwait	7
Kyrgyzstan	5
Laos	5
Latvia	8.5
Lebanon	5.5
Lesotho	5
Liberia	3.5-4
Libya	2
Liechtenstein	9
Lithuania	9
Luxembourg	9.5
Madagascar	4
Malawi	5
Malaysia	8

Maldives	4.5-5
Mali	4.5-5
Malta	9
Marshall Islands	8
Mauritania	6
Mauritius	8
Mexico	6.5-7
Micronesia	8
Moldova	5.5
Monaco	9.5
Mongolia	6.5-7
Montenegro	8
Morocco	7
Mozambique	5
Namibia	8.5
Nauru	8
Nepal	4.5
Netherlands	9.5

New Zealand	9.5
Nicaragua	6
Niger	4.5
Nigeria	4.5
Norway	9.5
Oman	7
Pakistan	3
Palau	8
Panama	8.5
Papua New Guinea	6
Paraguay	8
Peru	7.5
Philippines	6
Poland	9
Portugal	9
Qatar	7
Romania	7
Russia	6

Rwanda	5
Saint Kitts and Nevis	9
Saint Lucia	9
Saint Vincent and Grenadines	9
Samoa	8
San Marino	9.5
Sao Tome and Principe	7
Saudi Arabia	6
Senegal	7.5
Serbia	6.5
Seychelles	8
Sierra Leone	4.5
Singapore	9.5
Slovak Republic (Slovakia)	8.5
Slovenia	9
Solomon Islands	6.5-7
Somalia	2
South Africa	7.5

Spain	9
Sri Lanka	5
Sudan	3
Suriname	5
Swaziland	5
Sweden	9.5
Switzerland	9.5
Syria	2
Tajikistan	4.5
Tanzania	6
Thailand	6
Togo	5
Tonga	7
Trinidad and Tobago	8
Tunisia	5
Turkey	7.5
Turkmenistan	5
Tuvalu	8.5

Uganda	6
Ukraine	3.5-4
United Arab Emirates	7
United Kingdom	9
United States	9
Uruguay	8.5
Uzbekistan	4
Vanuatu	8.5
Venezuela	4.5-5
Vietnam	4.5
Yemen	2.5
Zambia	5
Zimbabwe	3

*Methodology

The Political Stability Index is calculated by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on the combined scoring of varied criteria as follows --

1. record of peaceful transitions of power (free and fair elections; adherence to political accords)
2. record of democratic representation, presence of instruments of democracy; systemic accountability

3. respect for human rights; respect for civil rights
4. strength of the system of jurisprudence, adherence to constitutional order, and good governance
5. ability of a government to stay in office and carry out its policies vis a vis risk credible risks of government collapse (i.e. government stability versus a country being deemed "ungovernable")
6. threat of coups, insurgencies, and insurrection
7. level of unchecked crime and corruption
8. risk of terrorism and other threats to national security
9. relationship with regional powers and international community; record of bilateral or multilateral cooperation
10. degree of economic strife (i.e. economic and financial challenges)

Editor's Note:

As of 2015, the current climate of upheaval internationally -- both politically and economically -- has affected the ratings for several countries across the world. The usual suspects -- North Korea, [Afghanistan](#), and [Somalia](#) -- retain their low rankings. The reclusive and ultra-dictatorial North Korean regime, which has terrified the world with its nuclear threats, has exhibited internal instability. Of note was a cut-throat purge of hundreds of high ranking officials deemed to be a threat to Kim Jung-un. Despite their attempts to recover from years of lawlessness, war, and warlordism, both [Afghanistan](#) and [Somalia](#) continue to be beset by terrorism and turmoil. In [Afghanistan](#), while international forces have seen success in the effort against the terror group, al-Qaida, the other Islamist extremist group, the Taliban, continues to carry out a vicious insurgency using terrorism. In [Somalia](#), while the government attempts to do the nation's business, the terror group, al-Shabab continues to make its presence known not only in [Somalia](#), but across the border into [Kenya](#) with devastating results/ Also in this category is [Iraq](#), which continues to be rocked by horrific violence and terrorism at the hands of Islamic State, which has taken over wide swaths of Iraqi territory.

Syria, [Libya](#), and [Yemen](#) have been added to this unfortunate echelon of the world's most politically unstable countries. [Syria](#) has been mired by the twin hazards of 1. a civil war as rebels oppose the Assad regime; and 2. the rampage of terror being carried out by Islamic State, which also seized control over vast portions of Syrian territory. Meanwhile, the post-Qaddhafi landscape of [Libya](#) has devolved into chaos as rival militias battle for control -- the elected government of the

country notwithstanding. Rounding out this grim triad is [Yemen](#), which was dealing with a Houthi rebellion, secessionists in the south, as well as the threat of terrorism from al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula as well as Islamic State, while also being the site of a proxy war between Shi'a [Iran](#) and Sunni [Saudi Arabia](#).

Meanwhile, several Middle Eastern and North African countries, such as [Tunisia](#), [Egypt](#), and [Bahrain](#) were downgraded in recent years due to political instability occurring in the "season of unrest" sweeping the region since 2011 and continuing today. All three of these countries have stabilized in recent years and have been upgraded accordingly. In [Bahrain](#), the landscape had calmed. In [Egypt](#), the secular military-backed government has generated criticism for its crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood; however, the country had ratified the presidency via democratic elections and were on track to hold parliamentary elections as the country moved along the path of democratization. Perhaps the most impressive story was coming out of [Tunisia](#) -- the country whose Jasmine Revolution sparked the entire Arab Spring -- and where after a few years of strife, a new progressive constitution was passed into law and a secular government had been elected to power. [Tunisia](#), [Egypt](#), and [Bahrain](#) have seen slight upgrades as these countries stabilize.

In Africa, the [Central African Republic](#) was downgraded the previous year due to the takeover of the government by Muslim Seleka rebels. Although the country has been trying to emerge from this crisis, the fact of the matter was that it was difficult to halt the precipitous decline into lawlessness in that country. [Zimbabwe](#) has maintained its consistently poor ranking due to the dictatorial regime of Mugabe, who continues to hold a tight grip on power, intimidates the opposition, squashes dissent, and oppresses the white farmer population of the country. Moving in a slightly improved direction is [Nigeria](#), which has sported abysmal ratings due to the government's fecklessness in dealing with the threat posed by the Islamist terror group, Boko Haram. Under its newly-elected government, there appears to be more of a concerted effort to make national security a priority action item. [Mali](#) was also slightly upgraded due to its efforts to return to constitutional order following the 2012 coup and to neutralize the threat of separatists and Islamists. Political instability has visited [Burkina Faso](#) and [Burundi](#) as the leaders of those countries attempted to side-step constitutional limits to hold onto power. In [Burundi](#), an attempted coup ensued but quelled, and the president won a (questionable) new term in office; unrest has since punctuated the landscape. In [Burkina Faso](#), the political climate has turned stormy as a result of a successful coup that ended the rule of the president, and then a putsch against the transitional government. These two African countries have been downgraded as a result.

It should be noted that the African country of South [Sudan](#) -- the world's newest nation state -- has not been officially included in this assessment; however, it can be unofficially assessed to be in the vicinity of "3" due to its manifold political and economic challenges. [Guinea](#) has endured poor rankings throughout, but was slightly downgraded further over fears of social unrest and the Ebola health crisis.

In Europe, [Ukraine](#) was downgraded due to the unrest facing that country following its Maidan revolution that triggered a pro-Russian uprising in the eastern part of the country. [Russia](#) was also implicated in the Ukrainian crisis due to its intervention on behalf of pro-Russian separatists, as well as its annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. [Serbia](#) and [Albania](#) were slightly downgraded due to eruptions of unrest, while [Romania](#) was slightly downgraded on the basis of corruption charges against the prime minister. [Spain](#), [Portugal](#), [Ireland](#), and [Italy](#) were downgraded due to debt woes and the concomitant effect on the euro zone. [Greece](#), another euro zone nation, was downgraded the previous year due to its sovereign debt crisis; however, the country successfully forged a rescue deal with international creditors and stayed within the Euro zone. Greek voters rewarded the hitherto unknown upstart party at the polls for these efforts. As a result, [Greece](#) was actually upgraded slightly as it proved to the world that it could endure the political and economic storms. Meanwhile, [Germany](#), [France](#), [Switzerland](#), the [United Kingdom](#), the [Netherlands](#), and the Scandinavian countries continue to post impressive ranking consistent with these countries' strong records of democracy, freedom, and peaceful transfers of power.

In Asia, [Nepal](#) was downgraded in response to continuous political instability well after landmark elections that prevails today. [Cambodia](#) was very slightly downgraded due to post-election instability that has resulted in occasional flares of violence. Despite the "trifecta of tragedy" in [Japan](#) in 2011 -- the earthquake, the ensuing tsunami, and the resulting nuclear crisis -- and the appreciable destabilization of the economic and political terrain therein, this country has only slightly been downgraded. Japan's challenges have been assessed to be transient, the government remains accountable, and there is little risk of default. Both [India](#) and China retain their rankings; [India](#) holds a slightly higher ranking than [China](#) due to its record of democratic representation and accountability. Increasing violence and political instability in [Pakistan](#) resulted in a downgrade for this country's already low rating.

In the Americas, [Haiti](#) retained its downgraded status due to ongoing political and economic woes. [Mexico](#) was downgraded due to its alarming rate of crime. [Guatemala](#) was downgraded due to charges of corruption, the arrest of the president, and uncertainty over the outcome of elections. [Brazil](#) was downgraded due to the corruption charges erupting on the political landscape, the stalling of the economy, and the increasingly loud calls for the impeachment of President Rousseff. [Argentina](#) was downgraded due to its default on debt following the failure of talks with bond holders. [Venezuela](#) was downgraded due to the fact that the country's post-Chavez government is every bit as autocratic and nationalistic, but even more inclined to oppress its political opponents. [Colombia](#) was upgraded slightly due to efforts aimed at securing a peace deal with the FARC insurgents. A small but significant upgrade was attributed to [Cuba](#) due to its recent pro-business reforms and its normalization of ties with the United States. Meanwhile, the [United States](#), [Canada](#), [Costa Rica](#), [Panama](#), and most of the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean retain their strong rankings due to their records of stability and peaceful transfers of power.

In the Pacific, [Fiji](#) was upgraded due to its return to constitutional order and democracy with the holding of the first elections in eight years.

In Oceania, [Maldives](#) has been slightly downgraded due to the government's continued and rather relentless persecution of the country's former pro-democracy leader - former President Nasheed.

Source:

Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, CountryWatch Inc. www.countrywatch.com

Updated:

2015

Freedom Rankings

Freedom Rankings

Freedom in the World

Editor's Note: This ranking by Freedom House quantifies political freedom and civil liberties into a single combined index on each sovereign country's level of freedom and liberty. The initials "PR" and "CL" stand for Political Rights and Civil Liberties, respectively. The number 1 represents the most free countries and the number 7 represents the least free. Several countries fall in the continuum in between. The freedom ratings reflect an overall judgment based on survey results.

Country	PR	CL	Freedom Status	Trend Arrow
Afghanistan	6 ?	6	Not Free	

Albania*	3	3	Partly Free	
Algeria	6	5	Not Free	
Andorra*	1	1	Free	
Angola	6	5	Not Free	
Antigua and Barbuda*	3 ?	2	Free	
Argentina*	2	2	Free	
Armenia	6	4	Partly Free	
Australia*	1	1	Free	
Austria*	1	1	Free	
Azerbaijan	6	5	Not Free	
Bahamas*	1	1	Free	
Bahrain	6 ?	5	Not Free ?	
Bangladesh*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Barbados*	1	1	Free	
Belarus	7	6	Not Free	
Belgium*	1	1	Free	
Belize*	1	2	Free	
Benin*	2	2	Free	

Bhutan	4	5	Partly Free	
Bolivia*	3	3	Partly Free	
Bosnia-Herzegovina*	4	3	Partly Free	
Botswana*	3 ?	2	Free	
Brazil*	2	2	Free	
Brunei	6	5	Not Free	
Bulgaria*	2	2	Free	
Burkina Faso	5	3	Partly Free	
Burma	7	7	Not Free	
Burundi*	4	5	Partly Free	↑
Cambodia	6	5	Not Free	↓
Cameroon	6	6	Not Free	
Canada*	1	1	Free	
Cape Verde*	1	1	Free	
Central African Republic	5	5	Partly Free	
Chad	7	6	Not Free	
Chile*	1	1	Free	
China	7	6	Not Free	

Colombia*	3	4	Partly Free	
Comoros*	3	4	Partly Free	
Congo (Brazzaville)	6	5	Not Free	↓
Congo (Kinshasa)	6	6	Not Free	↓
Costa Rica*	1	1	Free	
Cote d'Ivoire	6	5	Not Free	
Croatia*	1 ?	2	Free	
Cuba	7	6	Not Free	
Cyprus*	1	1	Free	
Czech Republic*	1	1	Free	
Denmark*	1	1	Free	
Djibouti	5	5	Partly Free	
Dominica*	1	1	Free	
Dominican Republic*	2	2	Free	↓
East Timor*	3	4	Partly Free	
Ecuador*	3	3	Partly Free	
Egypt	6	5	Not Free	
El Salvador*	2	3	Free	

Equatorial Guinea	7	7	Not Free	
Eritrea	7	7 ?	Not Free	
Estonia*	1	1	Free	
Ethiopia	5	5	Partly Free	↓
Fiji	6	4	Partly Free	
Finland*	1	1	Free	
France*	1	1	Free	
Gabon	6	5 ?	Not Free ?	
The Gambia	5	5 ?	Partly Free	
Georgia	4	4	Partly Free	
Germany*	1	1	Free	
Ghana*	1	2	Free	
Greece*	1	2	Free	
Grenada*	1	2	Free	
Guatemala*	4 ?	4	Partly Free	
Guinea	7	6 ?	Not Free	
Guinea-Bissau*	4	4	Partly Free	
Guyana*	2	3	Free	

Haiti*	4	5	Partly Free	
Honduras	4 ?	4 ?	Partly Free	
Hungary*	1	1	Free	
Iceland*	1	1	Free	
India*	2	3	Free	
Indonesia*	2	3	Free	
Iran	6	6	Not Free	↓
Iraq	5 ?	6	Not Free	
Ireland*	1	1	Free	
Israel*	1	2	Free	
Italy*	1	2	Free	
Jamaica*	2	3	Free	
Japan*	1	2	Free	
Jordan	6 ?	5	Not Free ?	
Kazakhstan	6	5	Not Free	↓
Kenya	4	4 ?	Partly Free	
Kiribati*	1	1	Free	
Kosovo	5 ?	4 ?	Partly Free ?	

Kuwait	4	4	Partly Free	
Kyrgyzstan	6 ?	5 ?	Not Free ?	
Laos	7	6	Not Free	
Latvia*	2	1	Free	
Lebanon	5	3 ?	Partly Free	
Lesotho*	3 ?	3	Partly Free ?	
Liberia*	3	4	Partly Free	
Libya	7	7	Not Free	
Liechtenstein*	1	1	Free	
Lithuania*	1	1	Free	
Luxembourg*	1	1	Free	
Macedonia*	3	3	Partly Free	↑
Madagascar	6 ?	4 ?	Partly Free	
Malawi*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Malaysia	4	4	Partly Free	
Maldives*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Mali*	2	3	Free	
Malta*	1	1	Free	↓

Marshall Islands*	1	1	Free	
Mauritania	6	5	Not Free	
Mauritius*	1	2	Free	
Mexico*	2	3	Free	
Micronesia*	1	1	Free	
Moldova*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Monaco*	2	1	Free	
Mongolia*	2	2	Free	↑
Montenegro*	3	2 ?	Free ?	
Morocco	5	4	Partly Free	↓
Mozambique	4 ?	3	Partly Free	
Namibia*	2	2	Free	
Nauru*	1	1	Free	
Nepal	4	4	Partly Free	
Netherlands*	1	1	Free	
New Zealand*	1	1	Free	
Nicaragua*	4	4 ?	Partly Free	
Niger	5 ?	4	Partly Free	

Nigeria	5	4	Partly Free	↓
North Korea	7	7	Not Free	↓
Norway*	1	1	Free	
Oman	6	5	Not Free	
Pakistan	4	5	Partly Free	
Palau*	1	1	Free	
Panama*	1	2	Free	
Papua New Guinea*	4	3	Partly Free	
Paraguay*	3	3	Partly Free	
Peru*	2	3	Free	
Philippines	4	3	Partly Free	↓
Poland*	1	1	Free	
Portugal*	1	1	Free	
Qatar	6	5	Not Free	
Romania*	2	2	Free	
Russia	6	5	Not Free	↓
Rwanda	6	5	Not Free	
Saint Kitts and Nevis*	1	1	Free	

Saint Lucia*	1	1	Free	
Saint Vincent and Grenadines*	2	1	Free	
Samoa*	2	2	Free	
San Marino*	1	1	Free	
Sao Tome and Principe*	2	2	Free	
Saudi Arabia	7	6	Not Free	
Senegal*	3	3	Partly Free	
Serbia*	2 ?	2	Free	
Seychelles*	3	3	Partly Free	
Sierra Leone*	3	3	Partly Free	
Singapore	5	4	Partly Free	
Slovakia*	1	1	Free	↓
Slovenia*	1	1	Free	
Solomon Islands	4	3	Partly Free	
Somalia	7	7	Not Free	
South Africa*	2	2	Free	
South Korea*	1	2	Free	
Spain*	1	1	Free	

Sri Lanka*	4	4	Partly Free	
Sudan	7	7	Not Free	
Suriname*	2	2	Free	
Swaziland	7	5	Not Free	
Sweden*	1	1	Free	
Switzerland*	1	1	Free	↓
Syria	7	6	Not Free	
Taiwan*	1 ?	2 ?	Free	
Tajikistan	6	5	Not Free	
Tanzania	4	3	Partly Free	
Thailand	5	4	Partly Free	
Togo	5	4 ?	Partly Free	
Tonga	5	3	Partly Free	
Trinidad and Tobago*	2	2	Free	
Tunisia	7	5	Not Free	
Turkey*	3	3	Partly Free	↓
Turkmenistan	7	7	Not Free	
Tuvalu*	1	1	Free	

Uganda	5	4	Partly Free	
Ukraine*	3	2	Free	
United Arab Emirates	6	5	Not Free	
United Kingdom*	1	1	Free	
United States*	1	1	Free	
Uruguay*	1	1	Free	
Uzbekistan	7	7	Not Free	
Vanuatu*	2	2	Free	
Venezuela	5 ?	4	Partly Free	
Vietnam	7	5	Not Free	↓
Yemen	6 ?	5	Not Free ?	
Zambia*	3	4 ?	Partly Free	
Zimbabwe	6 ?	6	Not Free	

Methodology:

PR and CL stand for political rights and civil liberties, respectively; 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free rating. The ratings reflect an overall judgment based on survey results.

? ? up or down indicates a change in political rights, civil liberties, or status since the last survey.

↑ ↓ up or down indicates a trend of positive or negative changes that took place but that were not sufficient to result in a change in political rights or civil liberties ratings of 1-7.

* indicates a country's status as an electoral democracy.

Source:

This data is derived from the latest edition of Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2010 edition.

Available at URL: <http://www.freedomhouse.org>

Updated:

Reviewed in 2015

Human Rights

Overview of Human Rights in South Korea

The Republic of Korea (Korea) is a constitutional democracy. International observers judged recent elections to be free and fair. The government generally works to respect the civil and human rights of its citizens; however there are still a few areas where problems remain. The highly controversial National Security Law allows the government to hold prisoners of conscience and to infringe upon citizen's civil liberties in the name of monitoring 'anti-state' activities. While President Roh called for the law to be abolished, this has not occurred.

In 2004, the Employment Permit System Act came into effect. This law gives the Ministry of Labour a legitimate means of controlling and monitoring migrant workers. At present, there are some 180,000 undocumented migrant workers in South Korea. Under this law, illegal migrants who have been in the country longer than four years are subject to immediate detention pending deportation.

Societal discrimination against minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities is a continuing problem. Trafficking in persons, especially children for domestic servitude or the sex trade, grows in scope each year. South Korea is considered a major transit point for alien smugglers in this region.

The country is taking steps to address the reported deficiencies. In 2001, the government, under the National Human Rights Commission Act, created the National Human Rights Commission to investigate allegations of human rights abuses. Though this body has no enforcement powers, it can make recommendations for change, which are often heard by the legislature.

Human Development Index (HDI) Rank:

See Social Overview of Country Review for full listing of rankings for all countries.

Human Poverty Index Rank:

Not Ranked

Gini Index:

35.8

Life Expectancy at Birth (years):

77.0 years

Unemployment Rate:

3.7%

Population living on \$1 a day (%):

<2%

Population living on \$2 a day (%):

<2%

Population living beneath the Poverty Line (%):

15%

Internally Displaced People:

N/A

Note-69,000 refugees are currently in South Korea. Many of these are from North Korea.

Total Crime Rate (%):

N/A

Health Expenditure (% of GDP):

Public: 2.6%

% of GDP Spent on Education:

4.2%

Human Rights Conventions Party to:

- International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Conventions on the Rights of the Child
- Convention relating to the Status of Refugees
- Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

*Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite index that measures the level of well-being in 177 nations in the world. It uses factors such as poverty, literacy, life-expectancy, education, gross domestic product, and purchasing power parity to assess the average achievements in each nation. It has been used in the United Nation's Human Development Report since 1993.

*Human Poverty Index Ranking is based on certain indicators used to calculate the Human Poverty Index. Probability at birth of not surviving to age 40, adult literacy rate, population without sustainable access to an improved water source, and population below income poverty line are the indicators assessed in this measure.

*The Gini Index measures inequality based on the distribution of family income or consumption. A value of 0 represents perfect equality (income being distributed equally), and a value of 100 perfect inequality (income all going to one individual).

*The calculation of the total crime rate is the % of the total population which has been effected by property crime, robbery, sexual assault, assault, or bribery (corruption) related occurrences.

Government Functions

Constitution

South Korea promulgated a constitution in 1948. Since then, it has been changed or re-written several times. The current constitution was approved in October 1987. Before that time, South Korea was ruled under a highly centralized government. Under the new constitution, which went into effect in 1988, South Korea is now a republic of multiparty system with powers shared between the president and the legislature.

Executive Authority

The president is elected for a term of five years by direct popular vote, and is chief of state, head of the executive branch and commander of the armed forces of the country. The prime minister is appointed by president with the consent of National Assembly and is the head of government. The prime minister presides over a cabinet or State Council which is appointed by the president on the prime minister's recommendation.

Legislative Authority

The legislative power in South Korea is vested in the unicameral National Assembly or "Kukhoe." Of the 299 seats in the National Assembly, 243 are elected by direct popular vote while the remaining 56 are determined via a proportional system; members serve four-year terms.

Judicial Authority

South Korea's judicial system consists of three levels of courts: the Supreme Court, High Courts and District Courts which include Family Court and Administrative Court. The Supreme Court is the highest judicial tribunal in the country. The chief justice of the Supreme Court is appointed by the president with approval of the National Assembly. Other justices are appointed by the president recommended by the chief justice. The legal system combines elements of continental European civil law systems, Anglo-American law, and Chinese classical thought.

Administration

South Korea has nine provinces and seven administratively separate cities.

Political Parties

Political parties include the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP), Grand National Party (GNP), United Liberal Democrats (ULD), Democratic People's Party (DPP), and New Korea Party of Hope. Note that the MDP became DP in May 2005 and the United Liberal Democrats (ULD) merged with GNP in February 2006.

Government Structure

Names:

conventional long form:

Republic of Korea

conventional short form:

South Korea

local long form:

Taehan-min'guk

local short form:

Han'guk

abbreviation:

ROK

Type:

Democratic republic

Executive Branch:

Chief of State:

President PARK Geun-hye (elected in December 2012; inaugurated in February 2013). The president is elected by popular vote for a single five-year term; see below for information on the 2012 presidential election

2012 elections note:

A presidential election was to be held in the latter half of 2012 following parliamentary elections, which were held in April 2012 (see below for details about parliamentary polls).

Primer on 2012 Presidential Election in South Korea

(Dec. 19, 2012)

A presidential election in South Korea was expected to be held in December 2012. In South Korea, the president is elected by popular vote for a single five-year term. Accordingly, incumbent President Lee Myung-bak, who was elected in 2008, would not be on the ballot in 2012. South Korea's two top presidential hopefuls for what promised to be a close contest were the ruling Saenuri Party's Park Geun-hye and the main opposition Democratic United Party's Moon Jae-in. Polling data gave Park -- a slight lead over Moon.

It should be noted that Park was the daughter of Park Chung-hee, who ruled South Korea for 18 years; the older Park came to power via a military coup in 1961 and stayed as South Korea's leader until his assassination in 1979. Meanwhile, Moon was a human rights lawyer who gained some notoriety as a student protest organizer who rallied against the older Park.

After the polls closed on Dec. 19, 2012, and with the votes counted, it was Park who claimed victory in the country's presidential election. Initial results gave Park 52 percent over Moon with 48 percent. In her victory speech to supporters, Park said: "This is the victory of the people. This is a victory for the people's wish to overcome crises and revive the economy." Park would have the distinction of being the first woman elected as president in South Korea. During the election campaign, she cast herself as a symbolic mother of the nation, saying: "I have no family to take care of. I have no child to inherit my properties. You, the people, are my only family, and to make you happy is the reason I do politics. And if elected, I would govern like a mother dedicated to her family."

Note on head of government:

In June 2015, the parliament of South Korea approved Hwang Kyo-ahn to be the country's new prime minister following a corruption scandal that resulted in the resignation of Lee Wan-koo as the head of government. South Korean President Park Geun-hye indicated that the new prime minister -- a career prosecutor and former Justice Minister -- was the right selection and had the right credentials to tackle the problem of corruption in South Korea.

Going back to April 2015, South Korean Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo -- the head of government since 2014 -- resigned from office when his name appeared in the suicide note of a businessman. At the heart of the brewing scandal were claims that the outgoing prime minister received illegal funds from Sung Wang-jong, who was himself facing charges of fraud and bribery, but who

ultimately committed suicide. As noted here, the prime minister's name was referenced in relation to the payment of funds in Sung's suicide note.

In his exit address, outgoing Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo declined to offer details surrounding his resignation and the allegations against him, limiting his statement to the following words: "There is a lot I want to say but I will leave behind a void with the belief that the truth will one day surely be told."

For her part, South Korean President Park Geun-hye accepted Lee Wan-koo's resignation. The president, who was already suffering from dismal job approval ratings, quite likely made the political calculation that the controversy would inevitably weaken her politically. President Park Geun-hye may have been attempting to stem the proverbial tide of disapproval a year ahead of general elections in 2016 when her Saenuri Party would have to try to hold control over the parliament. Her immediate task would be to name a new nominee for prime minister.

To that end, three successive nominations were introduced and abandoned in the space of a month, with continued questions emerging about personal improprieties. Then, in May 2015, President Park's office named Justice Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn to be the new prime minister. President Park indicated that the latest nominee was the right selection and possessed the right credentials to tackle the blight of corruption in South Korea. The public affairs secretary for the president released a statement in which Hwang Kyo-ahn was described as "the right person to uproot corruption across society and accomplish political reform so we can create a new country." Finally, in June 2015, the parliament of South Korea approved Hwang Kyo-ahn to be the country's new prime minister.

Cabinet:

State Council was appointed by the president on the prime minister's recommendation

Legislative Branch:

Unicameral "Kukhoe" (National Assembly):

Of the 300 seats in the National Assembly, 246 are elected by direct popular vote while the remaining 54 are determined via a proportional system; members serve four-year terms.

Primer on South Korea's parliamentary elections

April 11, 2012 --

Parliamentary elections were set to take place in South Korea in April 2012. At stake were the 299 seats in the unicameral "Kukhoe" (National Assembly). Of the 299 seats in the National Assembly, 243 are elected by direct popular vote, while the remaining 56 are determined via a proportional system. Members of the National Assembly serve four-year terms. In the previous elections of

2008, the Grand National Party or GNP won the most seats; the main opposition is the Democratic Party (formerly the United Democratic Party), which was looking to take victory over the GNP in 2012.

It should be noted that months earlier in February 2012, South Korea's ruling Grand National Party announced it was changing its name to "Saenuri," which translates into "New World" in Korean. The move appeared to be a symbolic gesture aimed at re-branding the conservative GNP's image ahead of general elections. Indeed, the GNP has been plagued by declining approval ratings and unfavorable perceptions. The name change was confirmed during a meeting of the national party.

With the name change established, all eyes were on the elections. To that end, on April 11, 2012, voters went to the polls in South Korea to vote in this parliamentary contest. Voter turnout was estimated to be around 50 percent. Exit poll data showed that a close race was unfolding between the ruling Saenuri Party and the main opposition Democratic Party; media outlets were forecasting that both parties would respectively garner between 131 and 147 seats.

Once the votes were counted, it was apparent that President Lee Myung-bak's ruling Saenuri Party had eked out a victory in these tightly contested parliamentary elections. The Saenuri Party appeared to have outperformed the exit poll predictions and secured 152 seats, thus retaining its parliamentary majority. The main opposition Democratic Party slightly underperformed exit poll expectations by winning 127 seats. The minor opposition Unified Progressive Party, which fielded joint candidates with the Democrats, gained 13 seats.

Note that a presidential election was set to follow later in the year. See above for details of that contest.

Judicial Branch:

Supreme Court (justices appointed by president with consent of National Assembly); Constitutional Court (justices appointed by president based partly on nominations by National Assembly and Chief Justice of the court)

Constitution:

Feb.25, 1988

Legal System:

The legal system ombines elements of continental European civil law systems, Anglo-American law, and Chinese classical thought

Administrative Divisions:

9 provinces (do, singular and plural) and 7 metropolitan cities (gwangyoksi, singular and plural)

Provinces:

Cheju-do, Cholla-bukto (North Cholla), Cholla-namdo (South Cholla), Ch'ungch'ong-bukto (North Ch'ungch'ong), Ch'ungch'ong-namdo (South Ch'ungch'ong), Kangwon-do, Kyonggi-do, Kyongsang-bukto (North Kyongsang), Kyongsang-namdo (South Kyongsang)

Metropolitan cities:

Inch'on-gwangyoksi (Inch'on), Kwangju-gwangyoksi (Kwangju), Pusan-gwangyoksi (Pusan), Soul-t'ukpyolsi (Seoul), Taegu-gwangyoksi (Taegu), Taejon-gwangyoksi (Taejon), Ulsan-gwangyoksi (Ulsan)

Political Parties:

Justice Party [SIM Sang-jeong]

Minjoo Party of Korea or MPK (formerly New Politics Alliance for Democracy or NPAD) [KIM Jong-in] (NPAD was a merger of the Democratic Party or DP (formerly DUP) [KIM Han-gil] and the New Political Vision Party or NPVP [AHN Cheol-soo] in March 2014)

New Frontier Party (NFP) or Saenuri (formerly Grand National Party) [Interim Chairman WON Yoo-chul]*

People's Party or PP [AHN Cheol-soo and CHUN Jung-bae]

* In February 2012, South Korea's ruling Grand National Party (GNP) announced that it was changing its name to "Saenuri," which translates into "New Frontier" in Korean. The move appeared to be a symbolic gesture aimed at rebranding the conservative GNP's image ahead of general elections set for April 2012. Indeed, the GNP has been plagued by declining approval ratings and unfavorable perceptions. The name change was expected to be confirmed during a meeting of the national party.

Suffrage:

19 years of age; universal

Principal Government Officials

Cabinet and Leadership of South Korea

Executive Branch:

Chief of State:

President PARK Geun-hye (elected in December 2012; inaugurated in February 2013). The president is elected by popular vote for a single five-year term; see below for information on the 2012 presidential election

2012 elections note:

A presidential election was to be held in the latter half of 2012 following parliamentary elections, which were held in April 2012 (see below for details about parliamentary polls).

Primer on 2012 Presidential Election in South Korea

(Dec. 19, 2012)

A presidential election in South Korea was expected to be held in December 2012. In South Korea, the president is elected by popular vote for a single five-year term. Accordingly, incumbent President Lee Myung-bak, who was elected in 2008, would not be on the ballot in 2012. South Korea's two top presidential hopefuls for what promised to be a close contest were the ruling Saenuri Party's Park Geun-hye and the main opposition Democratic United Party's Moon Jae-in. Polling data gave Park -- a slight lead over Moon.

It should be noted that Park was the daughter of Park Chung-hee, who ruled South Korea for 18 years; the older Park came to power via a military coup in 1961 and stayed as South Korea's leader until his assassination in 1979. Meanwhile, Moon was a human rights lawyer who gained some notoriety as a student protest organizer who rallied against the older Park.

After the polls closed on Dec. 19, 2012, and with the votes counted, it was Park who claimed victory in the country's presidential election. Initial results gave Park 52 percent over Moon with 48 percent. In her victory speech to supporters, Park said: "This is the victory of the people. This is a victory for the people's wish to overcome crises and revive the economy." Park would have the distinction of being the first woman elected as president in South Korea. During the election campaign, she cast herself as a symbolic mother of the nation, saying: "I have no family to take care of. I have no child to inherit my properties. You, the people, are my only family, and to make

you happy is the reason I do politics. And if elected, I would govern like a mother dedicated to her family."

Note on head of government:

In June 2015, the parliament of South Korea approved Hwang Kyo-ahn to be the country's new prime minister following a corruption scandal that resulted in the resignation of Lee Wan-koo as the head of government. South Korean President Park Geun-hye indicated that the new prime minister -- a career prosecutor and former Justice Minister -- was the right selection and had the right credentials to tackle the problem of corruption in South Korea.

Going back to April 2015, South Korean Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo -- the head of government since 2014 -- resigned from office when his name appeared in the suicide note of a businessman. At the heart of the brewing scandal were claims that the outgoing prime minister received illegal funds from Sung Wang-jong, who was himself facing charges of fraud and bribery, but who ultimately committed suicide. As noted here, the prime minister's name was referenced in relation to the payment of funds in Sung's suicide note.

In his exit address, outgoing Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo declined to offer details surrounding his resignation and the allegations against him, limiting his statement to the following words: "There is a lot I want to say but I will leave behind a void with the belief that the truth will one day surely be told."

For her part, South Korean President Park Geun-hye accepted Lee Wan-koo's resignation. The president, who was already suffering from dismal job approval ratings, quite likely made the political calculation that the controversy would inevitably weaken her politically. President Park Geun-hye may have been attempting to stem the proverbial tide of disapproval a year ahead of general elections in 2016 when her Saenuri Party would have to try to hold control over the parliament. Her immediate task would be to name a new nominee for prime minister.

To that end, three successive nominations were introduced and abandoned in the space of a month, with continued questions emerging about personal improprieties. Then, in May 2015, President Park's office named Justice Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn to be the new prime minister. President Park indicated that the latest nominee was the right selection and possessed the right credentials to tackle the blight of corruption in South Korea. The public affairs secretary for the president released a statement in which Hwang Kyo-ahn was described as "the right person to uproot corruption across society and accomplish political reform so we can create a new country." Finally, in June 2015, the parliament of South Korea approved Hwang Kyo-ahn to be the country's new prime minister.

Cabinet:

State Council was appointed by the president on the prime minister's recommendation

Pres.
PARK Geun-hye
Prime Min.
HWANG Kyo-ahn
Dep. Prime Min. for Economy
YOO Il-ho
Dep. Prime Min. for Social Affairs
LEE Joon-sik
Min., Office for Govt. Policy Coordination
LEE Suk-joon
Min. for Agriculture, Food, & Rural Affairs
LEE Dong-phil
Min. of Culture, Sports, & Tourism
KIM Jong-deok
Min. of Education
LEE Joon-sik
Min. of Employment & Labor
LEE Ki-kweon
Min. of Environment
YOON Seong-kyu
Min. of Foreign Affairs
YUN Byung-se
Min. of Gender Equality & Family
KANG Eun-hee
Min. of Govt. Admin. & Home Affairs
HONG Yun-sik
Min. of Health & Welfare
CHUNG Chin-youb
Min. of Justice
KIM Hyun-woong
Min. of Land, Infrastructure, & Transport
KANG Ho-in
Min. of National Defense
HAN Min-koo
Min. of Oceans & Fisheries
KIM Young-suk
Min. of Public Safety & Security
PARK In-yong
Min. of Science, Information & Communication Technologies (ICT), & Future Planning
CHOI Yang-hee

Min. of Strategy & Finance
YOO Il-ho
Min. of Trade, Industry, & Energy
JOO Hyung-hwan
Min. of Unification
HONG Yong-pyo
Chmn., Anticorruption & Civil Rights Commission
SUNG Yung-hoon
Chmn., Board of Audit & Inspection
HWANG Chan-hyun
Chmn., Fair Trade Commission
JEONG Jae-chan
Chmn., Financial Services Commission
YIM Jong-yong
Chmn., Korea Communications Commission
CHOI Sung-joon
Chmn., National Human Rights Commission
LEE Sung-ho
Chmn., Nuclear Safety & Security Commission
LEE Un-chul
Chief of Staff, Office of the Pres.
LEE Byung-kee
Dir., National Security Office, Office of the Pres.
KIM Kwan-jin
Dir., National Intelligence Service
LEE Byung-ho
Governor, Bank of Korea
LEE Ju-yeol
Ambassador to the US
AHN Ho-young
Permanent Representative to the UN, New York
OH Joon

-- as of 2016

Leader Biography

Leader Biography

Note on the The President :

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Foreign Relations

General Relations

During most of the Cold War period, South Korea pursued a foreign policy of being in concert with the Western countries. Placing efforts in improving relations with the Western countries, South Korea also tried to build cooperative relations with the developing countries. After the Cold War ended, South Korea began to promote a "Northern Diplomacy" aimed at enhancing ties with former socialist countries. The "Northern Diplomacy" proved to be successful, and relations with the Soviet Union and China were normalized in a short time.

In August 1991, South Korea joined the United Nations (U.N.) along with North Korea. Since then South Korea has been active in most U.N.-specialized agencies and many international forums. In 1996, South Korea became a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). At the end of 1997, it completed a term as a nonpermanent member of the U.N. Security Council. In 2006, South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon was nominated and confirmed as the new United Nations Secretary General.

South Korea's relationship with North Korea has been a central political and diplomatic issue. Since the 1970s South Korea has pursued a policy of promoting independent and peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula. Under President Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy, dramatic changes took place in the relations between the two Koreas, most encouragingly shown in the first-ever South-North summit in June 2000. In recent years, under the new president, it is difficult to know if improved bilateral relations will soon ensue, given the nuclear threat of a nuclear North Korea and the influence of hardline United States policies in opposition to the North.

Regional Relations

Relations with North Korea

For decades after the Korean War, both Korean governments had repeatedly reiterated their desire to reunify the Korean Peninsula. Until 1971, however, the two governments had no direct contacts or communications. In 1972, a series of secret meetings resulted in the announcement of an agreement by South and North Korea aimed at working toward peaceful reunification and an end to the hostile atmosphere prevailing on the peninsula. In 1994, after former U.S. President Carter's visit to North Korea in June, North and South Korea agreed to hold a summit in July. The two sides went ahead with plans for the summit, but it was canceled because of Kim Il Sung's sudden death on July 8, 1994. In April 2000, the governments of the two Koreas reached an agreement to hold the first-ever summit in Pyongyang.

From June 13-15, 2000, North Korean leader Kim Jong il and South Korean President Kim Dae-jung held the summit in Pyongyang, the first since the end of the Korean War in the 1950s. The two leaders reached a historic agreement during the summit to reduce tensions between the two sides of the peninsula and work toward the reunification. The two leaders also agreed that North Korean leader Kim Jong il would pay a return visit to South Korea in the near future. Since the June summit, considerable achievements have been made in improving relationship between North and South Korea. From August 2000 to February 2001, three rounds of family reunion events took place in the Korean Peninsula. The two Koreas also started working on the transport re-link between the two sides by reconnecting the railway between the capital cities of the two. Government officials from North and South Korea kept in contact since the summit, holding meetings regularly to discuss matters of reunification and cooperation.

The scenario changed in 2002, according to some (but not all) analysts with the decision by the United States to classify the North as part of an "axis of evil." The North responded by withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and restarting its nuclear development. Whether or not North Korea's actual reason for withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was the perceived hostility from the hardline Bush administration in the United States, it is fair to state that rapprochement between the North and South was halted, with most contemporary efforts focused on multilateral talks aimed at bringing some resolution to the current nuclear standoff discussed in the "Political Conditions" of this review.

In July 2006, North Korea test-fired a number of short-range missiles and one Taepodong-2 long-range missile into the Sea of Japan (known as the East Sea by Koreans). The situation sparked international condemnation and threats of punitive measures by some countries, including sanctions. In South Korea, the government in Seoul convened an emergency cabinet meeting and

placed its military on high alert. For its part, North Korea said that further missile tests would be launched. North Korea also warned that it would react strongly to punitive pressures from the international community, and it threatened to carry out an "annihilating" nuclear strike if its atomic facilities were pre-emptively hit by the United States.

The missile tests, in conjunction with dire promises of further tests and a nuclear strike, intensified the widely-held view that North Korea is a threat to global security. Moreover, these moves by North Korea effectively served to further isolate the country and confirm its pariah status within the international community. The impact on relations with South Korea was yet to be determined. However, the country was quick to distance itself from a hard-line Japanese draft resolution that provided for economic and military sanctions against North Korea. Indeed, South Korea went so far as to describe the Japanese draft as "reckless."

In mid-July 2006, the United Nations condemned North Korea for carrying out a series of missile tests earlier in the month. The United Nations Security Council also issued a resolution demanding that North Korea cease activities related to its ballistic missile program and prohibiting all United Nations member states from supplying that country with any weapons-related materials. The resolution passed unanimously after a reference to Chapter Seven of the United Nations Charter was removed. That reference would authorize sanctions and military action and would be legally binding. Its removal ensured that there would be complete support from among Security Council members.

South Korea called on the North to issue a moratorium on missile tests and return to the multilateral negotiating table. For its part, however, North Korea angrily rejected the resolution and vowed to further develop its military arsenal as a means to "bolster its war deterrent."

In the first week of October 2006, North Korea said that it intended to test a nuclear weapon. A week after issuing this threat, North Korea announced that it had indeed conducted its first nuclear weapons test. North Korea's state-controlled news agency declared, "The nuclear test is a historic event that brought happiness to our military and people." The message in the state-controlled media also went on to assert that the nuclear test would, "contribute to maintaining peace and stability in the Korean peninsula and surrounding region." The South Korean news agency, Yonhap, suggested that the explosion may have occurred in an area called Gilju in North Korea's Hamgyong province.

The apparent test took place in defiance of warnings by the international community not to go through with the test. In response, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun scheduled an emergency meeting of his National Security Council. The meeting was convened to address the serious shift in the security scenario on the Korean peninsula. Only days before, South Korean troops fired warning shots at North Korean soldiers when they crossed into the demilitarized zone. It was not clear whether the North Koreans' actions were calculated or accidental. Regardless,

they were emblematic of the increasing climate of tension on the Korean peninsula, which reached an unprecedented high following the apparent nuclear test. Meanwhile, Japan's new head of government, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, was expected to discuss the matter with his South Korean counterpart in Seoul. Prime Minister Abe and Chinese Premier Hu Jintao had previously met in Beijing to discuss regional concerns and had jointly issued their opposition to the notion of a nuclear test by North Korea. Clearly, their joint statement went unheeded by Pyongyang.

Regardless of motivation, the effects of the nuclear test augured negatively. Apart from destabilizing the region, analysts warned that it could potentially halt any progress on reconciliation between the two Koreas, and it could well spark an arms race. Meanwhile, at the United Nations work was being done to craft a resolution that would be passed in the Security Council authorizing punitive action against North Korea. A draft document by the United States underwent revisions to accommodate the reservations of China and Russia. Those two countries had stated that they would not support the military enforcement of financial and security sanctions against North Korea. With adjustments made, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 1718 on October 14, 2006. The resolution called for the inspections on cargo going to and from North Korea to search for weapons, a ban on the sale or transfer of materials related to North Korea's unconventional weapons program, and a freeze on the transfer of funds connected with North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Absent from Resolution 1718 was the Chapter Seven [of the United Nations charter] provision, which would enforce the sanctions via military force.

In late January 2007, it was announced that six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program would resume. A previous round of talks ensued in December 2006 but ended inconclusively. In the background of such developments was the testing of a nuclear device by North Korea in the fall of 2006. That action did little to bolster Pyongyang's case for its right to a nuclear program, and overshadowed prevailing hopes that North Korea might abandon its nuclear ambitions and rejoin the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in exchange for economic aid and security guarantees.

By February, 2007, it was announced that concurrence had been reached. North Korea agreed to shut down its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon within 60 days in exchange for 50,000 tonnes of fuel oil or economic aid of equal value, with 950,000 tonnes of fuel oil or equivalent received after further disarmament steps are taken. Yet to be seen was whether or not the agreement would be ratified by all six parties, and also whether or not North Korea would fully comply with the provisions of the deal.

In the third week of June 2007, North Korea reportedly agreed to shut down its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon and, then, disable its nuclear facilities. North Korea also noted that it was inviting International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors to return to North Korea to monitor the closure of its nuclear program and facilities. To that end, IAEA inspectors were expected to visit North Korea on June 26, 2007, for the first time since their dismissal from that country in 2002.

These announcements came months after the Chinese drafted an agreement in February 2007 (discussed above), in which the closure of the reactor at Yongbyon would be secured, in lieu of heavy fuel oil that would be secured by other countries participating in the multilateral nuclear disarmament talks. The total amount of fuel oil -- one million metric tons -- appeared to more substantial than the original quantity discussed earlier in the year under the Chinese-brokered plan. In addition, diplomatic recognition and humanitarian aid benefits were included in the deal. Also included in the arrangement was the untangling of a financial dispute.

A new round of six-party disarmament talks, which has included North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the United States, was set to commence in July 2007.

In mid-July 2007, North Korea said that it shut down its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. A team of inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was monitoring the situation at Yongbyon in order to verify Pyongyang's claim. Nevertheless, the announcement was welcomed by the countries of the West, the wider world, and particularly by the countries participating in multilateral talks with North Korea aimed at disarmament.

In October 2007, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun and the North Korea's leader Kim Jong-il signed a joint declaration calling for a permanent peace agreement on the Korean Peninsula. The eight-point declaration set forth an agenda for international dialogue aimed at crafting a treaty, which would replace the existing armistice that brought an end to the Korean War that took place from 1950 to 1953. The two Korean leaders signed the declaration following a historic summit in Pyongyang and issued the following statement, "The South and North share the view that they should end the current armistice system and build up a permanent peace system."

The declaration also came on the heels of a significant announcement by North Korea that it would end its nuclear ambitions. To that end, Pyongyang formally agreed to a timetable for the disabling of its nuclear facilities. Pyongyang also agreed to disclose details about its nuclear program by the close of 2007. North Korea was scheduled to surrender its stockpile of nuclear weaponry in 2008.

In July 2008, a South Korean woman was shot to death by a North Korean soldier. North Korean authorities said that the 53-year old woman strayed from the special tourism zone in the mountains into a restricted area of the Mount Kumgang resort. More than one million South Korean visitors have traveled to the resort, which is located in a strategic naval area, in the last decade without any such incident occurring. South Korean authorities responded by suspending cross-border trips, pending an investigation. Because cross-border tourism trips have been the fulcrum of economic and cultural cooperation in the last decade, the incident had the potential to adversely affect cross-border relations. It was viewed as a setback at a time when South Korean President Lee Myung-bak has advocated fresh dialogue with North Korea.

October 2008 saw the United States move to remove North Korea from its list of state-sponsors of terrorism. The development came after multilateral talks between North Korea, the United States, China, South Korea, Russia and Japan and appeared to end some dissonance that had been brewing in recent months, despite multilateral concurrence on North Korean disarmament.

The start of 2009 was marked on the Korean peninsula by devolving relations between Pyongyang and Seoul. At issue has been the more hard-line approach taken by South Korea's President Lee Myung-Bak in the last year since coming to power. Significantly, the South Korean president reversed the "sunshine" policy bestowed aid to North Korea. President Lee said that economic assistance would now be dependent on North Korea's willingness to completely end its nuclear weapons program.

North Korea responded with outrage at the change. In January 2009, North Korea announced that it had enough plutonium stocks to produce four or five nuclear weapons. The third week of January 2009 saw North Korea warn South Korea that its "confrontational" policies could lead to retaliation by the nuclear power. Military authorities in Pyongyang told Seoul that it would bolster its "nuclear deterrent force" in the face of perceived threats. In response, South Korean authorities called for amplified troop strength. At the start of February 2009, it was reported that North Korea was preparing to test-fire the long-range Taepodong-2 missile. Then, by mid-month, North Korea was declaring its right to launch a "space program." Since North Korea has, in the past, characterized rocket launches in similar terms, it was believed that the term "space program" was associated with the anticipated missile launch.

On the other side of the equation, South Korea's President Lee Myung-Bak has eschewed beginning negotiations from too-conciliatory a stance, cautioning previous South Korean leaders had gone down that path with no substantial end result to show for those efforts. That said, the South Korean president did not foreclose re-entering peace talks with the North. To that end, he said, in a national radio address "I am very aware there are people who are concerned about the recent series of North Korean threats. But you do not need to worry too much. The government is ready to sit down with North Korea at any time and resolve every issue."

Multilateral talks aimed at halting North Korea's nuclear ambitions in exchange for aid saw some progress in recent years, however, the diplomatic efforts have slowed more recently. Indeed, the stance by the new South Korean leader, which was crafted by his nominee for Unification Minister, Hyun In-taek, appears to have brought diplomacy to a halt. In fact, North Korea has threatened to end all talks with the South if Hyun was confirmed for the job.

Amidst this growing imbroglio, some analysts have said that efforts by the Obama administration in the United States could potentially thaw increasingly cold relations between the two Koreas. Obama's Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was scheduled to travel to Asia in mid-February 2009. See below for details about relations with the United States and impact on peninsula

relations.

At the start of February 2009, it was reported that North Korea was preparing to test-fire the long-range Taepodong-2 missile. Then, by mid-month, North Korea was declaring its right to launch a satellite as part of its “space program.” Since North Korea has, in the past, characterized rocket launches in similar terms, it was believed that the term “space program” or satellite launch was associated with the anticipated missile launch.

In March 2009, North Korea was threatening to go to war with any entity that tried to shoot down the (aforementioned) satellite it intended to launch. A statement by the North Korean military read, “We will retaliate any act of intercepting our satellite for peaceful purposes with prompt counter-strikes by the most powerful military means.” It also included the following assertion: “Shooting our satellite for peaceful purposes will precisely mean a war.” In a presumed effort to augment its warning, North Korea said its military was placed on full combat alert. This warning came at a time when scheduled joint military exercises between South Korea and the United States were about to commence. Meanwhile, the newly-appointed United States envoy to North Korea, Stephen Bosworth, who was in Asia to revitalize six-party denuclearization talks, noted that a launch by North Korea would be “ill advised.”

In early April 2009, North Korea said that its attempt to launch a satellite into orbit ended in failure with parts of the rocket landing in the Pacific Ocean. But such an end did little to quell the international outcry. Throughout, the United States and South Korea have said that North Korea's claim of launching a satellite in space was just a cover for an actual missile test of the Taepodong-2. Accordingly, they have urged the United Nations Security Council to issue a strong response at an impending emergency session, which was called by Japan. The United States, South Korea and Japan regard the launch to be an abrogation of United Nations Security Resolution 1718, which in 2006 banned North Korea from ballistic missile activity. On the other side of the equation, China and Russia have advocated a restrained and measured response.

Late in April 2009, North Korea announced that it was withdrawing from multilateral disarmament talks and restarting its operations at the Yongbyon nuclear plant. This decision to withdraw from the negotiating table and resume reprocessing spent fuel rods came after the United Nations (UN) Security Council decided to impose sanctions on three North Korean companies. That decision by the UN Security Council was reached in the aftermath of a controversial missile launch. North Korea maintained that it had simply launched a satellite in space and so characterized the international reaction as “a wanton violation of the UN charter.”

On May 25, 2009, North Korea said that it had successfully conducted an underground nuclear test. Several independent entities confirmed that a powerful explosion had been registered, resulting in the conclusion that it was caused by the nuclear test. The actual location of the testing was unknown but South Korea noted that a seismic tremor had been detected in the north-eastern

part of the country close to Kilju.

Geopolitical analysts were trying to determine why North Korea had chosen to move from negotiations to a clearly confrontational stance. Two years earlier, North Korea agreed to close its nuclear facility at Yongbyong and comply with international monitoring of its nuclear assets. In exchange, it was to be the recipient of a generous aid package. Later, however, North Korea withdrew from long-running multilateral negotiations and stopped inspectors from monitoring progress related to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

There was some speculation that after a woeful harvest, with up to a quarter of the North Korean population in desperate need of food aid, according to the World Food Programme, Pyongyang may have been trying to divert attention from this internal crisis. There was also some suggestion that the domestic worries may have prompted an internal power struggle, which ultimately may have spurred this action by hard-liner within the regime.

For its part, Pyongyang appeared to indicate its motive via a communique announced on state radio, which asserted that the underground nuclear testing had been "successfully conducted... as part of measures to enhance the Republic's self-defensive nuclear deterrent in all directions." The statement went on to note that the test was intended to "contribute to safeguard the sovereignty of the country and the nation and socialism." Pyongyang also offered assurances that the underground nuclear testing had ensued in a safe manner with advanced technology.

International news agencies reported that in addition to the underground nuclear test, North Korea also test-fired two short-range missiles. There were reports that the test firing of these missiles was aimed at disrupting the ability of United States' surveillance of the nuclear testing.

The international community -- including reliable allies of North Korea, such as China and Russia - - reacted with outrage and condemnation to these collective actions, which occurred just a month after North Korea test fired a long-range missile capable of reaching Asia as well as parts of the United States. Crisis talks were convened in South Korea. A spokesman for South Korean President Lee Myung-bak said that North Korea's decision to conduct nuclear testing was a "grave challenge" to international non-proliferation efforts.

Russia, which was at the helm of the rotating presidency, called for an emergency session of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, noting that North Korea had violated UN Security Council Resolution 1718. Indeed, UN Security Council Resolution 1718 exists in tandem with Article 41 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter and compels compliance by all member states. A nuclear test would be an unassailable violation of UN Security Resolution 1718, which itself imposed sanctions in North Korea after it conducted a previous test in 2006.

Not surprisingly, the UN Security Council rapidly reacted with a strenuous statement of condemnation, registering North Korea's contravention of the resolution, demanding that North

Korea return to multilateral talks aimed at denuclearization, and reminding all member states that they must comply with sanctions imposed on North Korea. The UN Security Council also made clear that further action, in the form of a new resolution with stronger measures, was in the offing.

On May 27, 2009, the North Korean military announced that it was abandoning the armistice that brought an end to Korean War. The North Korean military said that this action was being taken in response to South Korea's decision to participate in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). North Korea said that South Korea's decision to join PSI -- a United States-led effort to patrol the oceans in search of nuclear weapons -- was tantamount to a "declaration of war" and promised military action if its shipping vessels were intercepted. In another development, South Korean media reported that steam had been observed emanating from North Korea's nuclear plant at Yongbyon -- a sign indicating North Korea had decided to recommence the manufacture of weapons-grade plutonium.

Attention returned to geopolitics in June 2009 when the United Nations Security Council decided to impose harsh new sanctions against North Korea in response to the nuclear test carried out in May 2009. Included in the new sanctions regime was the expected provision for the increased inspection of North Korean cargo not only on shipping vessels, but also on land and by air, and it authorized the destruction of any materials suspected of being linked to weapons of mass destruction. The new sanctions regime also expanded the arms embargo against North Korea, effectively prohibiting the sale of heavy and small arms by North Korea.

Undeterred, North Korea was said to be preparing for another missile test into the Pacific. As well, the United States military was reportedly tracking a North Korean ship -- the Kang Nam 1 -- under suspicion of carrying banned cargo. At issue was the heightened sanctions regime approved by the United Nations Security Council, which provided for the increased inspection of North Korean cargo by all United Nations member states, the destruction of any materials suspected of being linked to weapons of mass destruction, and a complete prohibition of the sale of heavy and small arms by North Korea.

On July 2, 2009, North Korea test-fired four short-range missiles. According to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency, two surface-to-ship missiles had been fired from the port of Wonsan while the other two were launched from Sinsang-ni. All four were fired into the Sea of Japan, which South Korea regards as the "East Sea." The missile tests were not surprising as Pyongyang issued warnings to shipping vessels, urging them to avoid coastal waters. Two days later, North Korea was suspected of firing another seven ballistic missiles. These seven Scud-type missiles were launched from an east coast base and, as before, fell into the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea.

The timing of the missile tests coincided with the United States' celebration of its Independence Day on July 4, 2009, and was regarded as a clear act of defiance against Washington.

Nevertheless, the United States was joined by Russia and China in calling for calm. Russia and China urged North Korea to return to the negotiating table and said all parties should work to avoid further destabilization of the region. The United States also said that the tense situation should not be exacerbated. Using highly restrained language, a United States Department of State official said the volley of missile tests were "not helpful" and said that North Korea should not "aggravate tensions" but instead "focus on denuclearization talks." While British Foreign Secretary David Miliband echoed this sentiment by saying that tensions on the Korean peninsula should remain "at manageable levels," Japan and South Korea struck a somewhat harsher tone in saying that the missile launches constituted an "act of provocation."

South Korea and North Korea agreed to arrange reunions for separated families from either side of the Korean peninsula. The reunions were scheduled to be held from September 26, 2009 to October 1, 2009 in the Mount Gungang area. The agreement was forged following talks between delegates from the respective Red Cross societies in North Korea and South Korea. A joint statement read as follows: "The South and the North will continue to cooperate on the issue of separated families and other humanitarian issues involving the Red Cross." The program of reuniting Korean families commenced in 2000 following a landmark inter-Korean summit. Since that time, the two sides have held several reunions and orchestrated a number of video exchanges although the last such meetings took place in October 2007. Soon thereafter, South Korea's hard line government of President Lee Myung-bak came to power, bilateral relations devolved, and the program was suspended. This 2009 agreement could be illustrative of a possible breakthrough between the two sides.

On October 12, 2009, North Korea fired five short-range missiles into Sea of Japan (also known as the East Sea). The surface-to-surface KN-02 missiles with a range of 75 miles were launched south of Musudan-ri in the North Hamgyeong Province. As a precaution, North Korea had banned shipping vessels from the waters off the east and west coasts from October 10 to October 20, 2009, according to the Yonhap news agency. It was the first missile launches by North Korea in several months and came after North Korea said that it was willing to return to multilateral talks about its nuclear program.

On November 10, 2009, South Korean and North Korean ships exchanged heavy fire at sea in South Korean waters when a North Korean patrol boat traversed the Northern Limit Line, which demarcates the boundary between the two Koreas. The exchange of fire was described as having lasted only for a short period of time and left a North Korean vessel in flames but with no casualties on the South Korean side. There was no information available on the casualties -- if any -- from Pyongyang. Whereas the South Korean authorities characterized the incident as "accidental," the North Koreans said it was an "armed provocation."

Despite this incident, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that talks between Washington and Pyongyang would go forward, as planned. Speaking at the Asia-Pacific

Economic Cooperation summit in Singapore, Secretary Clinton said, "This does not in any way affect the decision to send ambassador Bosworth. We think that this is an important step that stands on its own." To that end, Bosworth was expected to travel to Pyongyang for direct talks with the North Koreans following the Asia-Pacific summit. It would be the first direct contact between the United States and North Korea in more than a year. On the agenda during that meeting would be the matter of North Korea's return to the stalled six-party talks on denuclearization.

By early 2010, North Korea indicated that part of the new phase of negotiations on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula should include a new peace treaty to replace the armistice that ended the Korean War. North Korea said that a peace agreement should form the fulcrum of negotiations on this matter and should be addressed prior to the return to six-party talks aimed at ending Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program, or, as a central part of those multilateral negotiations.

On January 29, 2010, North Korea reportedly fired artillery shells in the area of the Yellow Sea, close to the country's maritime border with South Korea. It was third day that North Korea had carried out such action, according to the South Korean military. Speculation abounded that the provocative action by North Korea may have been aimed at forcing the United States and South Korea to respond to its proposal for a peace treaty to officially end the Korean War, which has effectively ceased via a prevailing armistice rather than an actual peace agreement. North Korea, as discussed above, has argued that it cannot advance further denuclearization talks without the foundation of a peace treaty.

In late March 2010, North Korea accused South Korea of carrying out psychological warfare by facilitating journalist tours in the demilitarized border zone between the two countries.. North Korea warned South Korea that there would be repercussions for these actions, claiming that the tours allowed reporters to tour the zone and prepare "materials for anti-north smear campaigns." A statement issued by Pyongyang said those these actions were in violation of the armistice, which brought at ended to the hostilities in the 1950-1953 war. The statement also warned that the United States would be held responsible for any negative fallout saying: "If the U.S. and the South Korean authorities persist in their wrong acts to misuse the DMZ for the inter-Korean confrontation despite our warnings, these will entail unpredictable incidents including the loss of human lives in this area for which the U.S. side will be wholly to blame." Analysts have suggested that this may be another circuitous attempt by North Korea to draw the United States into direct negotiations and press for a treaty officially ending the war. North Korea earlier suggested that no progress could be made on the denuclearization issue without such a treaty being forged.

Note that these developments came in the aftermath of the sinking of a South Korean military ship on March 27, 2010, in the conflict ridden waters of the border zone. Both South Korea and the United States said they did not believe that North Korea was involved in that incident. In April

2010, investigations into the sinking of that South Korean warship near the North Korean border cast new suspicions on Pyongyang's possible involvement, although Seoul was careful not to expressly place the blame in that direction. Initial reports indicated that the underwater explosion was caused by a torpedo. South Korean Defense Minister Tae-young said that a close range external explosion appeared to have destroyed the vessel. In an interview with the media, the South Korean cabinet minister said, "Basically, I think the bubble jet effect caused by a heavy torpedo is the most likely cause." Kim was careful to refrain from speculating about who might be behind the firing of a torpedo and said that the investigation still had to be completed.

South Korea confirmed in the third week of May 2010 that North Korea was behind the March 2010 incident in which one of its warships located in the conflict ridden waters of the border zone was destroyed. South Korean investigators earlier said that a torpedo hit the ship, killing 46 people. Despite knowing the cause of the sinking of the warship, South Korea had been circumspect in ascribing blame. Now, however, South Korea was asserting that its neighbor to the north was behind the mysterious incident. Clearly, South Korea's confidence in naming North Korea as the responsible party would change the geopolitical landscape.

North Korea immediately responded by denying any such role, promising dire consequences, and warning that war was inevitable if South Korea sought retribution. Pyongyang promised to cease any cooperation with Seoul and warned that it would abrogate the North-South non-aggression pact, if Seoul moved to retaliate. Moreover, Pyongyang issued a statement noting that "a war may break out right now" and that it "will regard the present situation as the phase of a war and decisively handle all matters arising in inter-Korean relations to cope with it."

For his part, South Korean Prime Minister Lee Myung-bak described the sinking incident as a "surprise military attack from North Korea [that came] while South Korean people were resting late at night." Prime Minister Lee also said his country would indeed take "resolute countermeasures" against the North over the sinking of the war ship. Given Seoul's position that its response would be "prudent," and the vulnerability of the South Korean people in terms of proximity, it was unlikely that the response would involve military retaliation.

During a formal address on the matter, President Lee said his country would take the matter up at the United Nations Security Council. He also announced the suspension of inter-Korean exchanges and said that North Korean ships would be banned from passing through South Korean waters. Explaining the rationale behind these measures, President Lee said, "We have always tolerated North Korea's brutality, time and again. We did so because we have always had a genuine longing for peace on the Korean peninsula." He continued, "But now things are different. North Korea will pay a price corresponding to its provocative acts."

In response to South Korea's moves, North Korea severed all ties with its neighbor, including communications links and the passage of ships and aircraft from territorial waters and airspace

respectively. According to Pyongyang's official news agency, North Korea also intended to expel all South Korean workers at a factory to the north of the border, which has jointly-administered. Indeed, a statement publicized via the official news agency read as follows: "The Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea... formally declares that from now on it will put into force the resolute measures to totally freeze the inter-Korean relations, totally abrogate the agreement on non-aggression between the North and the South and completely halt the inter-Korean cooperation,"

These developments did not bode well for the process of reconciliation between the two Koreas. Still, Seoul seemed intent on winning the public relations war across the border. To this end, there were plans to send propaganda leaflets and flash electronic billboard messages to North Korea, explaining the sinking of the warship. As well, there were plans for the resumption of propaganda broadcasts to North Korea for the same reason.

Earlier, United States Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, en route to Asia, made clear that North Korea would have to face consequences for its apparent intemperate actions. On the diplomatic front once in Asia, United States Secretary of State Clinton enjoyed little progress in drawing China into the equation to place pressure on North Korea. The United States, which firmly backed South Korea, was hoping for a joint response to the act of provocation from North Korea. However, China offered only a call for all sides to demonstrate restraint. That said, in a measure presumably intended to demonstrate solidarity and inflict some degree of intimidation, the United States announced it would conduct joint anti-submarine naval exercises with South Korean forces.

By the first week of June 2010, South Korea had referred North Korea to the United Nations over the matter of the torpedoed warship. While South Korea seemed intent on forcing North Korea to face consequences for its actions, it was not seeking a particular action by the international body. Instead, South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak said during a speech in Singapore that "North Korea must admit its wrongdoing." Speculation abounded that with China, which wields a veto on the United Nations Security Council, unlikely to support the notion of sanctions against North Korea, South Korea was likely to be seeking some other form of international rebuke against the North. For its part, North Korea dispatched a letter to the United Nations Security Council rejecting claims it sank the South Korean warship. North Korea also warned the international body to refrain from debating the issue, saying that it should instead facilitate Pyongyang's own internal inquiry into the incident.

In late October 2010, North Korean and South Korean troops exchanged fire across the border. According to accounts from authorities in Seoul, North Korean troops fired two rounds in the direction of a front line unit at Hwacheon, prompting South Korean troops to return fire. No further exchange of fire followed the incident and there were no injuries to South Korean troops. There was no consensus as to whether or not North Korea's actions constituted a direct

provocation. Only days later on November 3, 2010, South Korea's navy fired warning shots at a North Korean fishing vessel in maritime border waters.

In the last week of November 2010, an exchange of fire occurred between North Korean and South Korean forces, leaving two South Korean marines dead, 16 other South Korean marines injured, and three civilians wounded. At issue was the shelling of the inhabited Yeonpyeong Island by North Korea, located in close proximity the disputed Yellow Sea maritime border, just off the North Korean coast. South Korea, whose military was conducting military exercises in the waters off Yeonpyeong Island, reportedly returned fire, spurring one of the most serious clashes between the North and the South since the Korean War. Some fifty shells reportedly landed on the island, largely hitting a South Korean military base in the area. South Korea returned a fire with about 80 shells; the casualties on the north side of the border were not known.

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak convened a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the capital city of Seoul. Following the meeting, he announced that the South Korean military would punish North Korea for its attack, adding that it was vital that Pyongyang not engage in further provocation.

For its part, Pyongyang placed the blame on South Korea for igniting the clashes. It should be noted that Seoul disputes the North Korean version of the events that transpired. Nevertheless, according to the state-run KCNA news agency, "The South Korean enemy, despite our repeated warnings, committed reckless military provocations of firing artillery shells into our maritime territory near Yeonpyeong Island." The North, therefore, was prepared to strike back if South Korea "dares to invade our sea territory."

United States President Barack Obama characterized the incident an "outrageous, provocative act" by North Korea. Russia struck a similar tone with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warning of a "colossal danger" and characterizing those responsible for the clashes as carrying a huge responsibility. The European Union also added its voice to the litany of condemnations. Japanese Prime Minister, Naoto Kan, took a defensive stance in the national interests of his country, saying that his government had to prepare for the occurrence of "any unexpected event."

But China, North Korea's closest ally, offered a murky suggestion that the two Koreas should "do more to contribute to peace." A spokesperson for the Chinese government also called for restarting six-party negotiations on North Korea's nuclear program -- a prospect that seemed practically unlikely, given these latest developments. Indeed, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency, President Lee Myung-bak was reported to have informed a visiting Chinese foreign policy adviser, Dai Bingguo, that his country (South Korea) was not interested in the resumption of the multilateral nuclear talks; the South Korean leader apparently emphasized the importance of immediately dealing with North Korea's aggressive actions of late.

In another development, South Korean Defense Minister Kim Tae-young came under fire for

ignoring intelligence reports that alerted his country of possible attacks from the North, as well as the country's slow and weak responses to the threat posed by Pyongyang. Perhaps not surprisingly, he was forced to resign from his post.

To date, there have been occasional flare ups in the border regions since the Korean War ended without a peace treaty in 1953. However, the attack on Yeonpyeong Island occurred at a time of increased tensions between the two Koreas. Months earlier in March 2010, as discussed above, South Korea accused North Korea of torpedoing one of its warships in the area of the western maritime border, also known as the Northern Limit Line. For its part, North Korea has denied that charge and has also insisted that South Korea engage in diplomatic talks with Pyongyang aimed at easing tensions, or, deal with "catastrophic" consequences. Then, in late October 2010, as discussed above, North Korean and South Korean troops exchanged fire across the border. According to accounts from authorities in Seoul, North Korean troops fired two rounds in the direction of a front line unit at Hwacheon, prompting South Korean troops to return fire. No further exchange of fire followed the incident and there were no injuries to South Korean troops. There was no consensus as to whether or not North Korea's actions constituted a direct provocation. Only days later on November 3, 2010, South Korea's navy fired warning shots at a North Korean fishing vessel in maritime border waters.

At the time, South Korea sought to downplay the incidences or the prospects of trouble emanating from the North. Indeed, during a news conference focused on an impending summit in Seoul, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak had said, "I don't think the North will try to do anything when leaders of the international community are meeting to discuss the world economy." He continued, "I trust the North won't do anything but still we are fully prepared."

On the other side of the border, while North Korea has a history of making provocative moves, many analysts said that it was unlikely that Pyongyang would seek to alienate the international community, especially at a time when it has been revealing its new leadership succession team to the world. Earlier, President Kim Jong-il's son was given a military promotion, and sanctioned as the likely successor to the ailing leader. Of course, as illustrated by the events in late November 2010 on Yeonpyeong Island, it was apparent that the path of provocation was the one being traversed by North Korea.

Attention was on the matter of why North Korea would seek to heighten the state of volatility on the Korean Peninsula. Perhaps, for North Korea, this is a simple matter of defending its interests. However, it could well be that the aforementioned analysts interpreted the matter of leadership transition incorrectly. It could well be that North Korea is not concerned with the matter of alienating the international community. Instead, at this time of leadership transition from ailing President Kim Jong-il to his son, the priority from Pyongyang is to establish North Korea's power, and to show the military elite in North Korea that the named successor is not afraid to embrace a muscular stance in relation to the South, and indeed, the world.

The situation on the Korean peninsula has been made more complicated by the November 2010 revelation that North Korea constructed a new nuclear facility. A nuclear scientist from Stanford University in the United States, Dr. Siegfried Hecker, said that during a visit to North Korea, he was shown a new nuclear facility. There -- at the new nuclear facility at the Yongbyon nuclear complex to the north of the capital of Pyongyang -- he viewed "more than 1,000 centrifuges" for enriching uranium -- elements needed for the production of nuclear weapons.

Since the nuclear facility did not exist when international nuclear weapons inspectors were expelled from North Korea in 2009, it was clear that it had been constructed quickly. But Dr. Hecker noted that the facility boasted a high level of sophistication, and as reported in the New York Times, it included an "ultra-modern control room." According to Dr. Hecker, the facility appeared oriented for the use of civilian nuclear power. Noting that there was no sign of plutonium production, which is needed for weapons proliferation, Dr. Hecker nonetheless cautioned in an interview with the Associated Press that the new facility could be "readily converted to produce highly enriched uranium bomb fuel."

Dr. Hecker additionally shored up previous reports that North Korea has been constructing a light-water nuclear reactor. His observations on the ground in North Korea appeared to coincide with satellite imagery depicting the construction of the reactor at Yongbyon. Typically, light-water reactors are associated with civilian energy usage, however, uranium enrichment is part of the process, it was not inconceivable that further enrichment could potentially ensue at weapons-grade levels.

To date, North Korea is believed to have sufficient weaponized plutonium for about six atomic bombs, although there has been little evidence to suggest that the country has actively pursued a weapons program. That being said, Western powers have been advocating a resumption of the stalled six-party talks dealing with North Korea's nuclear program.

In November 2010, a senior United States Department of State envoy, Stephen Bosworth, was in Asia on a trip aimed at reviving the multilateral negotiations. However, this latest act of provocation by North Korea on Yeonpyeong Island left the United States with no choice but to disengage from the multilateral diplomatic process, essentially ruling out the resumption of six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear disarmament for the foreseeable future.

On Nov. 23, 2010, in an interview with ABC News, United States President Barack Obama characterized North Korea's shelling of Yeonpyeong Island as "a serious and ongoing threat that needs to be dealt with. President Obama also reaffirmed his country's alliance with South Korea, describing that country as an important ally. He said, "We strongly affirm our commitment to defend South Korea as part of that alliance." The United States president also noted, "We want to make sure all the parties in the region recognize that this is a serious and ongoing threat that needs to be dealt with." This statement appeared to target China, as he continued saying that Pyongyang needs to know "that there are a set of international rules they need to abide by."

By the close of November 2010, tensions on the Korean peninsula remained high, as South Korea and the United States carried out joint military exercises in the Yellow Sea, to the south of the disputed maritime border. North Korea said it viewed the previously -arranged military exercises as a provocation and warned of retaliation if there was any violation of its territorial waters. A statement from Pyongyang broadcast by the state-controlled KCNA news agency read as follows: "We will deliver a brutal military blow on any provocation which violates our territorial waters."

At the start of December 2010, South Korea took a highly assertive position. The South Korean defense minister-designate, Kim Kwan-jin, warned that North Korea would face a harsh response, including air strikes, if it dared to act aggressively in the future. Kim Kwan-jin's remarks were made in parliament as he answered questions during his confirmation hearing. In response to the question of how he would react to another violent action by North Korea, Kim Kwan-jin said, "If North Korea provokes again, we will definitely use aircraft to attack North Korea." Clearly, this posture by South Korea was a marked departure from its long-held restraint in the face of North Korea's provocations. Making clear that it intended to maintain this assertive posture, South Korea also said that it was going to carry out military drills from the aforementioned Yeonpyeong Island, even though North Korea has condemned those plans and warned that it would retaliate with force. With Pyongyang and Seoul at odds with one another in such a marked fashion, there were heightened anxieties about the renewal of war on the Korean peninsula.

Yet even with those fears at hand, the landscape became even more complicated when in mid-December 2010, South Korea said that it suspected North Korea of secretly enriching uranium at locations beyond its main nuclear site at Yongbyon. South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan would not confirm a media report that North Korea was home to three more plants where uranium enrichment could take place, however, he admitted to having suspicions along these lines. During a news conference, he said, "It is a report based on what is still intelligence and let me just say that we have been following this issue for some time." Should this claim be proved correct, North Korea could conceivably possess material -- potentially for building more nuclear bombs. Moreover, such actions would fly in the face of renewed nuclear disarmament talks, which were already on a downward slide as a result of North Korea's latest aggressive actions (as discussed above).

By the third week of December 2010, intense dissonance characterized relations on the Korean peninsula for the myriad reasons discussed above. Former New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, who also served as ambassador to the United Nations, was acting as an unofficial United States envoy in the region, with an eye on reducing the level of tensions. That job, however, was not helped when United Nations meetings on the matter ended with no resolution. Nevertheless, there were signs of progress when North Korea began to reverse course, effectively moving away from its threats to take retaliatory action against South Korea for the aforementioned military drills. The shift from Pyongyang came after South Korea evacuated residents from the area on and around

Yeonpyeong Island and launched fighter jets from its terrain. Analysts surmised that the strong stance from South Korea may have forced North Korea to rethink the likely consequences of making good on expressed threats. As explained by Governor Richardson, "South Korea was able to flex its muscles, and North Korea reacted in a statesmanlike manner." But despite these encouraging indications, on Dec. 23, 2010, the rhetoric between the two Koreas was on the rise once again. South Korea's president was promising harsh retaliation if his country was again attacked, while North Korean was warning of a "sacred" nuclear war, if provoked.

Meanwhile, Governor Richardson -- a seasoned diplomat -- who has had years of experience negotiating with the North Koreans, announced that North Korea was willing to offer concessions in regard to their nuclear program. In an interview with the Associated Press, Governor Richardson said, "We had positive results." He continued, "I hope this will signal a new chapter and a round of dialogue to lessen tension on the Korean peninsula." Given the increasing concerns about North Korea's capacity to build nuclear bombs, this development was welcomed. But, as United States Department of State spokesman, P.J. Crowley, cautioned, "North Korea talks a great game. They always do. The real issue is what will they do. If they are agreeable to returning IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] inspectors to their country, they need to tell the IAEA that."

In a New Year's message at the close of 2010, North Korea appeared to strike a conciliatory note as it called for dialogue with South Korea. North Korea was reported to have called for "a lasting peace system on the Korean Peninsula," which it said should be made "nuclear-free through dialogue and negotiations." Heightened tensions have marked relations between the two Koreas since the sinking of a South Korean warship by the North earlier in 2010, and reached a nadir at the close of the year, following the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island (under South Korean jurisdiction) by the North. For its part, Seoul opted to take a more aggressive stance in relation to Pyongyang since these events by carrying out military exercises in the border zones and increasing its rhetoric. Now, the call for improved relations by Pyongyang may have been interpreted as a shift in stance, aimed at lowering tensions on the Korean peninsula. However, Pyongyang's message, which was publicized via North Korean state media, went onto to warn of increased military strength. The New Year's message said that North Korea's military would "conduct intense combat training in an atmosphere of actual battle as required by the tense situation."

On Feb. 9, 2011, bilateral talks between the two Koreas were reported to have broken down. Delegates from North Korea and South Korea had been meeting in the border village of Panmunjom with the intent of working through a number of sensitive cross-border issues. There were hopes that the security talks would ease tensions between the two Koreas, which reached a nadir after the shelling of a South Korean island by North Korean forces in November 2010. Significantly, these discussions were intended to set the foundation for further, higher-level, negotiations. However, the disintegration of these talks meant that there was no consensus on an agenda for future meetings.

In July 2011, good news was brewing in the realm of foreign relations. The United States and North Korea completed a set of exploratory discussions, which were mutually characterized as positive. These bilateral talks were intended to be a precursor to the resumption of multilateral denuclearization negotiations. To that end, Ambassador Bosworth said that his country would enter consultations with South Korea and other countries involved multilateral negotiations that have been ongoing for years, to consider how to proceed further with North Korea.

Later in August 2011, though, prospects for a return to multilateral talks were dimmed when an imbroglio ensued between North Korea and South Korea. The situation was spurred when shells from North Korea were fired close to the maritime border with South Korea. In response, the South Korean navy fired warning shots towards North Korea. According to South Korean sources, artillery shells from North Korea landed in the Yellow Sea close to Yeonpyeong Island, which is under Seoul's jurisdiction. Further rounds were fired on the same day. Defense officials from South Korea surmised that the initial firing of shells may have been due to training exercises by North Korea. Nevertheless, South Korea wasted no time in responding with warning shots. It should be noted that Yeonpyeong Island was in the global purview in late 2010 when North Korea fired shells in that direction, leaving four people dead and triggering the outrage of South Korea and its allies.

As the month drew to a close, tension increased when five South Koreans were arrested for spying on behalf of North Korea. South Korean prosecutors said that the five individuals conveyed sensitive military and political information to the North over a period of two decades. Among the sensitive material were satellite images of major military installations, as well as field manuals of United States forces in South Korea. All five individuals were accused by South Korean authorities of violating the country's national security law, engaging in espionage, and communication with an enemy.

It should be noted that in December 2011, North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il, died leaving his son, Kim Jong-un, as the new leader of that country. It was yet to be seen how this development would influence relations between the two Koreas.

See "Special Report" below as regards North Korea's provocative actions related to its nuclear program. See "Special Notes" below regarding recent bilateral relations between the two Koreas.

Relations with Japan

South Korea and Japan normalized relations in 1965. In the past several years, besides developing close and mutually beneficial economic relations, the bilateral relations of South Korea and Japan at the government level have improved steadily and significantly. But in March 2005, Japan reinstated its claim on a small group of islands whose sovereignty has been under dispute. South

Korea, which has also claimed the islands, said that the move by Japan would have a damaging effect on bilateral relations. South Korea and Japan share similar trepidation about a nuclearized North Korea.

Relations with China

South Korea and China established full diplomatic relations in August 1992, and since then the two countries have shed much of their Cold War enmity through economic ties. Two-way trade has expanded dramatically, to nearly \$24 billion in 1999 from \$6.4 billion in 1992. They are now each other's third-largest trading partners. Recently moves toward military relations began to emerge between South Korea and China. In August 1999 South Korean Defense Minister Cho Sung-tae visited China, and in January 2000 Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian paid a visit to South Korea.

The South Korean government expects close military ties with China to help ensure peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, believing that China is in better position than any other power to persuade North Korea to abandon its dangerous nuclear and missile brinkmanship and blackmail strategy.

As for relations with Taiwan, Seoul-Taipei relations were soured when South Korea switched its diplomatic recognition to China in 1992. South Korea reiterated its stance of continuing the "one China" policy, saying that South Korea-Taiwan relations are confined to the economic and private sectors.

Regional blocs

Meanwhile, South Korea has exerted itself in developing cooperative relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific region. It is a founding member of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. It also has participated in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) plus three summits along with Chinese and Japanese leaders to discuss economic and security issues with the ASEAN countries.

Other Significant Relations

Relations with the United States

A strong security relationship with the United States (U.S.) is an essential part of South Korea's foreign policy. In the 1954 U.S.-R.O.K. Mutual Defense Treaty, the United States agreed to help

the Republic of Korea defend itself against external aggression. In support of this commitment, the United States currently maintains approximately 37,000 service personnel, including the Army's Second Infantry Division and several Air Force tactical squadrons. To coordinate operations between these units and the 650,000-strong Korean armed forces, a Combined Forces Command (CFC) was established in 1978. The head of the CFC also serves as commander in chief of the United Nations Command (UNC) and the U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK).

Several aspects of the security relationship have changed as the U.S. moves from a leading to a supporting role. Since 1991, South Korea and the United States have shared the cost of keeping American troops in the peninsula. South Korea also has agreed to pay a larger portion of USFK's stationing costs, and to promote changes in the CFC command structure. On Dec. 1, 1994, peacetime operational control authority over all South Korean military units still under United States operational control was transferred to the South Korean Armed Forces.

Despite recent dramatic developments in the relationship between the two Koreas, South Korea still sees a close security cooperation with the United States and Japan a crucial priority in its policies on North Korea. South Korea's close relationship with the United States, especially as regards the war in Iraq, has exacted a difficult toll at times.

Note: In late June 2008, angry South Koreans took to the streets in the capital city of Seoul to protest the resumption of beef imports from the United States (U.S.). Since 2003, South Korea suspended beef imports from the U.S. after a case of "mad cow" disease was identified. Now, in 2008, the ban was being lifted, effectively allowing shipments of U.S. beef to enter South Korea. However, despite assurances that U.S. beef was safe, many South Koreans were not assuaged and decided to register their discontent in public demonstrations.

See "Political Conditions" for further details.

Editor's Update:

In mid-July 2007, 23 South Koreans were taken hostage by the Taliban in Afghanistan while traveling from Kandahar -- a Taliban stronghold -- to the Afghan capital of Kabul on a Christian mission. It was the most significant group abduction by the Taliban since the fall of its regime in 2001.

The Taliban said that the captives were in good health but would be killed if the Afghan government did not release several Islamic militants from prison. The Taliban also demanded the exit of the 200 South Korean forces operating in Afghanistan. South Korean forces were already scheduled to withdraw from Afghanistan later in the year. South Korean envoys traveled to Kabul to work with the Afghan government on securing the release of the hostages. These efforts

were grounded in serious diplomacy and were aimed at ensuring that the South Koreans were released safely. For its part, the Taliban extended its deadline for negotiations for the purpose of having their demands met. One South Korean hostage -- the group's leader, Bae Hyung-Kyu -- was reported to have killed on July 25, 2007.

By the close of July 2007, Afghan President Hamid Karzai said that his government was expending its best efforts to free the surviving 22 South Korean hostages -- most of whom were females -- held by the Taliban. Karzai condemned their abductions as a "shameful" reflection of Islamic religion and Afghan culture. There were also reports that the Afghan government was not foreclosing the use of military action to free the South Korean missionary workers. However, the Afghan government noted that it would not participate in a prisoner exchange.

On the other side of the equation, a spokesperson for the Taliban said that a new deadline would be set for the killing of the hostages. To that end, in an interview with Agence France Presse, Yousuf Ahmadi said that if the Afghan government did not meet its demands for the release of several Islamic militants from prison, some of the South Koreans would be killed. Indeed, on July 30, 2007, one male South Korean hostage was shot to death because the Taliban said that the government was not responding appropriately to its demands.

Pope Benedict XVI entered the political fray to excoriate the Taliban kidnappers whom he said were acting against "the most basic rules of civilization."

Editor's Note:

Foreign Policy involving new Obama Administration in the United States (as of early 2009 -2011)

Before arriving in Asia on her first overseas trip, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned North Korea against any "provocative action and unhelpful rhetoric." En route to Asia, Clinton said that North Korea had to adhere to its commitments to dismantle its nuclear programs. She said, "The North Koreans have already agreed to dismantling...We expect them to fulfill the obligations that they entered into."

But the United States' top diplomat was also critical of the Bush administration for abandoning the 1994 agreement with North Korea, which was forged during the presidency of Bill Clinton. The 1994 framework, which called for North Korea to give up its weapons program, collapsed when the Bush administration accused Pyongyang of maintaining a parallel (secondary) enriched uranium program. Clinton suggested that Pyongyang's decision to restart its nuclear program may have been partially due to the Bush administration's intemperate accusations of North Korea.

Clinton was confronted with a significant challenge on the trip to Asia, and particularly, the Korean peninsula. Amidst devolving relations between Pyongyang and Seoul, North Korea was hinting that it was preparing to test-fire the long-range Taepodong-2 missile. Accordingly, she was tasked with taking a strong positions on, first, the missile test, and second, on North Korea's nuclear ambitions, while also working to reinvigorate the diplomatic process in the region and improving relations between Pyongyang and Washington.

To these ends, Clinton warned that relations between her country and North Korea were unlikely to improve unless Pyongyang was willing to engage in dialogue with Seoul. Clinton, who was speaking in the South Korean capital, took a sharp tone as she called on North Korea to bring an end to its nuclear ambitions, consistent with the provisions of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718. She also characterized the notion of a missile test as "provocative."

Nevertheless, Clinton made clear that diplomacy was the central focus of her objectives by announcing a special envoy to North Korea. Clinton named former Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, who served in South Korea from 1997 to 2000, to that role.

As noted above, by the start of February 2009, it was reported that North Korea was preparing to test-fire the long-range Taepodong-2 missile. Then in March 2009, North Korea was threatening to go to war with any entity that tried to shoot down the satellite it intended to launch. A statement by the North Korean military read, "We will retaliate any act of intercepting our satellite for peaceful purposes with prompt counter-strikes by the most powerful military means." It also included the following assertion: "Shooting our satellite for peaceful purposes will precisely mean a war." In a presumed effort to augment its warning, North Korea said its military was placed on full combat alert. This warning came at a time when scheduled joint military exercises between South Korea and the United States were about to commence. Meanwhile, the newly-appointed United States envoy to North Korea, Stephen Bosworth, who was in Asia to revitalize six-party denuclearization talks, noted that a launch by North Korea would be "ill advised."

By the spring of 2009, North Korea's attempt to launch a satellite into orbit resulted in an international outcry. Throughout, the United States and South Korea have said that North Korea's claim of launching a satellite in space was just a cover for an actual missile test of the Taepodong-2. Accordingly, they have urged the United Nations Security Council to issue a strong response. The United States, South Korea and Japan regard the launch to be an abrogation of United Nations Security Resolution 1718, which in 2006 banned North Korea from ballistic missile activity.

North Korea's announcement that it was withdrawing from multilateral disarmament talks and restarting its operations at the Yongbyon nuclear plant -- made in the spring of 2009 -- was not expected to improve the foreign relations climate.

Then, on May 25, 2009, North Korea said that it had successfully conducted an underground

nuclear test. Several independent entities confirmed that a powerful explosion had been registered, resulting in the conclusion that it was caused by the nuclear test. As noted above, condemnation from the international community -- including the United States, as expected, as well as Russia and China -- followed this action. As well, the United Nations issued its own scathing rebuke and warned that a new resolution was in the works.

Meanwhile, United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, also said that the formulation of a new resolution with more stringent measures would commence right away. Rice said, "The US thinks that this is a grave violation of international law and a threat to regional and international peace and security. And therefore the United States will seek a strong resolution with strong measures."

As noted above, on May 27, 2009, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the armistice that ended the Korean War and restarted its nuclear operations at Yongbyon.

Also as noted above, by early 2010, North Korea indicated that part of the new phase of negotiations on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula should include a new peace treaty to replace the armistice that ended the Korean War. North Korea said that a peace agreement should form the fulcrum of negotiations on this matter and should be addressed prior to the return to six-party talks aimed at ending Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program, or, as a central part of those multilateral negotiations.

As noted above in May 2010, the United States expressed support for the measures taken by South Korea in response to the sinking of a warship by North Korea.

As noted above, by the close of 2010, the United States was stepping away from possible multilateral negotiations with North Korea following a spate of aggression by the North towards the South. See above for details.

In July 2011, some good news was brewing in the realm of foreign relations. The United States and North Korea completed a set of exploratory discussions, which North Korea's envoy, Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye Gwan, characterized as positive. Speaking of his meetings with United States Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, the Obama administration's leading representative on North Korean affairs, Kim Kye Gwan said, "Yesterday and today we discussed comprehensively, with Mr. Bosworth, matters of mutual interest. The talks were very constructive and businesslike and we continue to maintain contacts." For his part, Ambassador Bosworth said, "These discussions are designed to explore the willingness of North Korea to take concrete and irreversible steps toward denuclearization." These bilateral talks were intended to be a precursor to the resumption of multilateral denuclearization negotiations. To that end, Ambassador Bosworth said that his country would enter consultations with South Korea and other countries involved multilateral negotiations that have been ongoing for years, to consider how to proceed further with North

Korea.

Later in August 2011, though, prospects for a return to multilateral talks were dimmed when an imbroglio ensued between North Korea and South Korea, as discussed above. The situation was spurred when shells from North Korea were fired close to the maritime border with South Korea. In response, the South Korean navy fired warning shots towards North Korea. According to South Korean sources, artillery shells from North Korea landed in the Yellow Sea close to Yeonpyeong Island, which is under Seoul's jurisdiction. Further rounds were fired on the same day. Defense officials from South Korea surmised that the initial firing of shells may have been due to training exercises by North Korea. Nevertheless, South Korea wasted no time in responding with warning shots. It should be noted that Yeonpyeong Island was in the global purview in late 2010 when North Korea fired shells in that direction, leaving four people dead and triggering the outrage of South Korea and its allies.

As the month drew to a close, tension increased when five South Koreans were arrested for spying on behalf of North Korea. South Korean prosecutors said that the five individuals conveyed sensitive military and political information to the North over a period of two decades. Among the sensitive material were satellite images of major military installations, as well as field manuals of United States forces in South Korea. All five individuals were accused by South Korean authorities of violating the country's national security law, engaging in espionage, and communication with an enemy.

It should be noted that in December 2011, North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il, died leaving his son, Kim Jong-un, as the new leader of that country. It was yet to be seen how this development would influence relations between the two Koreas.

Special Report

In April 2012, attention was on North Korea's plan to launch a satellite into orbit. Pyongyang announced a month prior that it would launch an "earth observation" satellite, or the Kwangmyongsong-3, using a long-range rocket. The event was intended to mark the 100th birthday of its late leader Kim Il-Sung. Of course, such a move would be contrary to the prevailing United Nations resolutions, which prohibits North Korea's use of long-range intercontinental ballistic missile technology, as well as the aforementioned "denuclearization for food" agreement, the latter of which requires North Korea to adhere to a moratorium on nuclear tests and long-range missile launches.

Not surprisingly, all the other countries involved in multilateral negotiations -- South Korea, Japan, China, Russia, and the United States -- expressed dismay over this plan by North Korea. Victoria Nuland of the United States Department of State pointed to the concurrence and urged North

Korea to rethink the satellite launch saying, "Obviously, we were heartened that every single one of the six-party talks participants made clear that they think that this would be an extremely bad idea and a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions, so we are hoping and expecting that the DPRK will take that to heart." The United States also noted it would be "very hard" to go forward with its planned food assistance if North Korea moved ahead with the plan to launch a satellite into orbit.

The geopolitical complexity of the Korean peninsula became more complicated when the White House in the United States announced that President Barack Obama intended to visit the world's most heavily militarized border -- the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The White House explained that the trip to the DMZ was intended to convey the president's support for the 30,000 United States troops stationed in South Korea, and to augment bilateral relations between Washington and Seoul. In a press briefing, Daniel Russel, Asia director for the White House National Security Council, said: "The DMZ is the front line of democracy in the Korean Peninsula, and it's the symbol of the U.S. and [South Korean] resolve, as well as solidarity. So a visit by the president there to see and to thank the U.S. and the South Korean service members makes perfect sense."

After his visit to the DMZ, President Obama was set to attend a global summit aimed at reducing the risk of nuclear terrorism in the South Korean capital of Seoul. In addition to the controversial and difficult issues of nuclear development in Iran and North Korea, the summit also addressed the threats posed by nuclear terrorists, as well as radiological materials that could be used to construct a "dirty bomb" (i.e. a bomb that would spread radiological contamination rather than causing a nuclear explosion). Also on the agenda was a plan for nuclear power stations to convert to low-enriched fuel. Due to the complexity of these issues, it was unlikely that new agreements and concurrence would be found anytime soon despite the participation of 50 countries at the Nuclear Security Summit. Notably absent from the list of participants at the summit were North Korea and Iran.

During his trip to Asia for the Nuclear Security Summit, President Obama reiterated his call for "a world without nuclear weapons" and advanced his foreign policy agenda that advocates non-proliferation and the reduction of nuclear weapons through increase diplomacy.

In a speech to students at South Korea's Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, President Obama said the United States -- the only nation to have ever used nuclear weapons -- was fully committed to reducing its stockpile of nuclear arms. The United States leader said his country had a "moral obligation" to pursue strategic arms cuts. President Obama also drew thunderous applause from the audience of students when he said that, as a father, he did not wish to see his daughters growing up in a world with nuclear threats.

"I say this as president of the only nation ever to use nuclear weapons," Obama said. "I say it as a commander in chief who knows that our nuclear codes are never far from my side. Most of all, I

say it as a father, who wants my two young daughters to grow up in a world where everything they know and love can't be instantly wiped out."

President Obama acknowledged his country's unique position in the world but noted that "serious sustained global effort" was needed to achieve his expressed hope for a nuclear weapons-free world. Addressing the matter of North Korea's nuclear ambitions, President Obama made clear that the United States held "no hostile intent" to that country, but warned there would be "no rewards for provocation."

President Obama went on say: "The United States has no hostile intent toward your country...We are committed to peace. And we are prepared to take steps to improve relations, which is why we have offered nutritional aid to North Korean mothers and children." President Obama continued, "But by now it should be clear, your provocations and pursuit of nuclear weapons have not achieved the security you seek -- they have undermined it. Instead of the dignity you desire, you're more isolated. Instead of earning the respect of the world, you've been met with strong sanctions and condemnation. You can continue down the road you are on, but we know where that leads. It leads to more of the same -- more broken dreams, more isolation, ever more distance between the people of North Korea and the dignity and the opportunity that they deserve."

Meanwhile, in his speech at the nuclear summit, President Obama reiterated the warning already issued by his government that the long-range missile launch to place a satellite in orbit would only result in isolation for Pyongyang. He said, "With respect to North Korea, we are going to be both sending messages to North Korea that they should not go forward with this missile launch, which would violate existing U.N. Security Council resolutions. And our hope is, is that we can resolve these issues diplomatically."

President Obama also joined South Korean President Lee Myung-bak in noting that North Korea would be subject to further sanctions if it did not cancel its launch plans. Making clear the options available for North Korea, President Obama addressed the leadership of that country saying, "You can continue with the road you are on but we know where that leads...Today, we say: Pyongyang, have the courage to pursue peace."

For his part, Kim Jong Un -- North Korea's new leader -- appeared to be following his father's footsteps in the realm of rhetoric as he deemed the nuclear summit to be "a childish farce." Earlier, Pyongyang asserted that denunciations of North Korea would amount to a "declaration of war."

Pyongyang was also signaling that it had no intention of pulling back from its missile launch to sent a satellite into orbit. Instead, South Korean sources were reporting that North Korea moved a long-range rocket to a launch pad close to the Chinese border. As well, satellite imagery appeared to depict preparations for the launch, which Pyongyang had said would take place between April 12-16, 2012. The guidance was that the rocket would follow a trajectory that would take it close

to south-western Japan.

Accordingly, Japan's defense ministry made it clear that it had ordered the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to intercept North Korea's rocket launch, if necessary, using its missile shield. Japanese authorities also alerted rescue personnel that they would be mobilized to deal with potential disasters, should the veer off course. Already, the South Korean government had said that it would shoot down any North Korean rocket that strayed into its territory. As well, the United States was sea-based X-band radar into the Pacific to monitor the launch. Upset about the prospect of rocket debris affecting countries of the Pacific, President Benigno Aquino III of the Philippines called on Pyongyang to abandon the launch plans.

It should be noted that the Obama administration in the United States canceled its food aid program to North Korea due to that country's decision to move forward with the satellite launch. An official from the Pentagon was cited as saying: "Why we're not providing that food assistance at this point is because our confidence in their ability to meet their agreements has been diminished. We do not use it as a lever to change their policies."

A week ahead of the timeline expected for the North Korean missile launch, President Kim Jong Un warned that any country that dared to interfere with its plans would face "immediate, resolute and merciless punishment." In a statement published by the Korean Central News Agency, the North Korean leader asserted: "(Any country that) intercepts the satellite or collects its debris will meet immediate, resolute and merciless punishment." Pyongyang also warned South Korea against intercepting the rocket booster, should it stray into South Korean territorial waters. Pyongyang promised that an interception by Seoul would bring about "the end of everything in South Korea."

On April 10, 2012, the United States was reiterating its warnings to North Korea that the launch of a new missile would be "a clear and serious violation" of international agreements. White House press secretary Jay Carney said in an interview with journalists: "The proposed missile launch, if conducted, would represent a clear and serious violation of North Korea's obligations under two United Nations Security Council resolutions that explicitly prohibit North Korea from testing ballistic missiles." Carney said the United States intended to work allied countries on implementing consequences for North Korea, should it proceed with its provocative missile launch; Carney noted that United States food aid to North Korea could be cut off.

By April 13, 2012, news emerged from North Korea that although that country attempted to launch its satellite into space, the long-range rocket failed to reach orbit. Despite the spectacular failure of the mission, the attempted action was nonetheless widely condemned by the international community. Notably, members of the Group of Eight industrial nation states issued a joint condemnation, noting that the launch was in clear violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions prohibiting intercontinental missile deployments.

In a related development, South Korean officials were noting that new satellite imagery suggests

that North Korea was preparing to carry out a nuclear test. The imagery depicted piles of earth and sand at the entrance of a tunnel at a nuclear site, where previous nuclear bomb testing was carried out in 2006 and 2009. An anonymous source was quoted by Agence France Presse as saying: "Recent satellite images led us to conclude the North has been secretly digging a new underground tunnel in the nuclear test site... besides two others where the previous tests were conducted." Given the aforementioned launch failure, there were some suggestions that North Korea might try to "save face" by moving forward with an even more provocative act -- quite possibly, a nuclear test. Of course, such an act would be regarded as a clear move down the path of confrontation by North Korea's regional neighbors as well as Western powers.

By the third week of April 2012, presumably as a cautionary move, South Korea announced that it had deployed missiles with a range of 625 miles. The weapons would be able to strike nuclear targets inside North Korea.

As April 2012 entered its final week, North Korea was ratcheting up the militaristic rhetoric as it threatened to initiate military action against South Korean targets and characterized South Korean President Lee Myung-bak a "traitor" and "scum." In a statement, Pyongyang issued the following threat: "The special actions of our revolutionary armed forces will start soon to meet the reckless challenge of the group of traitors. Once the ... special actions kick off, they will reduce all the rat-like groups and the bases for provocations to ashes in 3 or 4 minutes ... by unprecedented peculiar means and methods of our own style."

Meanwhile, reports suggested that North Korea was close to completing preparations for a nuclear test. This move -- if successful -- would constitute North Korea's third nuclear test after two in 2006 and 2009. The global community was watching events unfold in North Korea closely as Pyongyang may now have the capacity to conduct a test using highly enriched uranium for the very first time. This development would presage North Korea's possible ability to significantly build up its stocks of weapons-grade nuclear material. As well, it would facilitate the manufacture of a nuclear warhead to mount on a long-range missile. Should North Korea go forward with its third nuclear test, it would be a clear example of the limits of China's influence on the paranoid regime ruling North Korea today.

At the start of 2013, the United Nations tightened sanctions against North Korea. This move was made in response to North Korea's December 2012 rocket launch. For its part, North Korea reacted with anger and promised strong retaliation. All expectations were that another nuclear test might be in the offing, although North Korea was raising the anxiety of the international community by raising the rhetoric and threatening an even harsher actions. North Korea warned of retribution against the United States, which it described as a "sworn enemy." The following statement was issued via the official Korean Central News Agency: "We do not hide that a variety of satellites and long-range rockets will be launched and a nuclear test of higher level will be carried out in the upcoming new phase of the anti-U.S. struggle, targeting against the U.S., the sworn enemy of the Korean people." Pyongyang soon expanded its threats to noted that it would take action against

South Korea, if it participated in the United Nations sanctions regime. China's official Xinhua News Agency was also reporting that Pyongyang intended to walk away from multilateral six-part talks since "the U.N. Security Council has been reduced into an organization bereft of impartiality and balance."

On Feb. 12, 2013, seismic activity in North Korea suggested that North Korea may have selected an even earlier date to go forward with its third nuclear test. The seismic shock activity was emanating from the same area where North Korea conducted its 2006 and 2009 nuclear tests. Kim Min-seok of the South Korean Defense Ministry indicated that country's belief, saying, "We believe that North Korea has conducted a nuclear test." Meanwhile, the United States Geological Survey indirectly confirmed that the test had taken place as it noted the shock appeared to be one kilometer underground and was consistent with a nuclear blast. According to Lassina Zerbo, the director of the international data center of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty Organization, the magnitude of the test was twice as large as the 2009 nuclear test. It should be noted that initial reports suggested the use of plutonium in this nuclear test, which tends to be suited for use as a missile warhead.

North Korea itself soon confirmed that it had carried out its third underground nuclear test, which it said involved a "miniaturized" nuclear device. As reported in a statement by the state-run KCNA news agency: "It was confirmed that the nuclear test that was carried out at a high level in a safe and perfect manner using a miniaturized and lighter nuclear device with greater explosive force than previously did not pose any negative impact on the surrounding ecological environment."

North Korea claimed its third nuclear test was an act of self-defense against "U.S. hostility" and warned that further moves might be in the offing. Via the state-controlled KCNA news agency, Pyongyang claimed that the nuclear test "was only the first response" taken "with maximum restraint." Pyongyang warned that further actions were in the offing, saying: "If the United States continues to come out with hostility and complicates the situation, we will be forced to take stronger, second and third responses in consecutive steps."

The chorus of condemnation from the international community was broad and vociferous. United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon wasted no time in condemning North Korea's nuclear test, which he emphasized was a "clear and grave violation" of United Nations resolutions. NATO cast the nuclear test as an "irresponsible act" that posed a serious threat to world peace. China, North Korea's closest ally, demanded an audience with the North Korean ambassador in Beijing, while Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said China was "strongly dissatisfied and resolutely opposed" to the nuclear test. In a statement, United States President Barack Obama argued for a swift response, asserting: "The danger posed by North Korea's threatening activities warrants further swift and credible action by the international community. The United States will also continue to take steps necessary to defend ourselves and our allies."

The United Nations Security Council convened an emergency meeting later on Feb. 12, 2013, to discuss future measures. During that meeting, the permanent and rotating member nations of the United Nations Security Council unanimously condemned North Korea's latest nuclear test and warned that "appropriate measures" would be in the offing.

Clearly, North Korea would be faced with the prospects of international action. Even its closest ally, China, via its state-controlled media, urged North Korea not to go forward with such a provocative action and warned that North Korea would pay a "heavy price" if it proceeded with the test. Of course, in the realm of international jurisprudence, heavy costs have come in the form of harsh sanctions by the United Nations Security Council, which have done little to curtail North Korea from going forward with its missile program and nuclear development agenda. Indeed, the very existence of sanctions have not stopped North Korea from repeatedly violating the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

With news circulating in the first week of March 2013 that a draft of a United Nations Security Council resolution against North Korea had been crafted, Pyongyang wasted little time in registering its anger. On March 5, 2013, North Korea warned that it would end its 1953 armistice (ceasefire) that brought a conclusion to the conflict with South Korea, without officially ending the Korean War. North Korea also demanded that the United States and South Korea end its ongoing military drills in the region, referring to them as a "dangerous nuclear war targeted at us." Furthermore, the Korean People's Army warned that it would carry out stronger actions in response to the "hostile" policies of the United States and South Korea. It was apparent that North Korea was prepared to take an aggressive stance in the face of international pressure.

On March 7, 2013, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2094 censuring North Korea for its February nuclear test and imposing an even stricter sanctions regime on that country. Included in those new sanctions were provisions to target the financing sources of North Korea's nuclear and missile technology, but there were additional penalties imposed on North Korea in the realm of banking, travel, transportation, and trade.

As stated by United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, "The strength, breadth and severity of these sanctions will raise the cost to North Korea of its illicit nuclear program. Taken together, these sanctions will bite and bite hard." South Korea's Ambassador to the United Nations, Kim Sook, said the time had come for North Korea to "wake up from its delusion" of becoming a nuclear state. He continued, "It can either take the right path toward a bright future and prosperity, or it can take a bad road toward further and deeper isolation and eventual self-destruction." Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the unanimous adoption of the resolution delivered a strong message to North Korea that its pursuit of nuclear weapons would not be tolerated by the international community.

In addition to scrapping its non-aggression agreements with South Korea, North Korea responded

to the news of international action by saying that it would be cutting off the North-South hot-line. Installed in 1971, the hot-line was created to provide direct communication at times of increased tensions and also to organize the transfer of persons and goods through the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone. Clearly, the disabling of the hot-line was not only symbolic of the breakdown in bilateral relations between the two Koreas, there were also practical and security implications.

It should be noted that North Korea has also shockingly threatened to launch pre-emptive nuclear attacks on the United States and South Korea in response to the joint military drills, which it said were proof of the United States' intent to go to war. A belligerent North Korea said via its Foreign Ministry that the United Nations' action would "compel" that country to take "countermeasures" in short order. Furthermore, it declared in a statement: "Now that the U.S. is set to light a fuse for a nuclear war, the revolutionary armed forces of the DPRK will exercise the right to a pre-emptive nuclear attack to destroy the strongholds of the aggressors and to defend the supreme interests of the country." North Korea even threatened to transform Washington and Seoul into "a sea in flames" with "lighter and smaller nukes."

For its part, South Korea was undeterred and moving forward with the very joint military drills (with the United States) that earned outrage and threats from Pyongyang. Still, South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se said on March 11, 2013, that his country would try to re-engage with North Korea with an eye on shifting the climate from tension and threats to cooperation. In an address, Yun said his goal was to "turn this era of confrontation and mistrust into an era of trust and cooperation with North Korea." Yun further asserted: "The security situation on the Korean Peninsula for now is very grave as the unpredictability surrounding North Korea is rising following its third nuclear test."

As March 2013 was drawing to a close, North Korea increased its belligerent rhetoric and said that missile and artillery units were combat-ready and aimed at United States and South Korean targets. In a statement broadcast on the state-controlled Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the Korean People's Army's Supreme Command said: "From this moment, the Supreme Command puts all of its field artillery including strategic rocket units and long-range artillery units into the No. 1 combat ready posture." The statement further delineated targets in South Korea and the United States -- from its military installations in the Pacific to Hawaii and the mainland. Indeed, a North Korean spokesperson was on the record saying, "The U.S. should not forget that the Anderson Air Force Base on Guam, where B-52s take off, and naval bases in Japan proper and Okinawa, where nuclear-powered submarines are launched, are within the striking range of [North Korea's] precision strike means." North Korea said that its motivation was driven by the priority "to safeguard our sovereignty and the highest dignity [of leader Kim Jong Un] through military actions."

The United States responded with its own statement as follows: "North Korea's bellicose rhetoric and threats follow a pattern designed to raise tensions and intimidate others. While the United

Nations Command, Combined Forces Command and U.S. Forces Korea continue to maintain the armistice, North Korea continues its provocative behavior and rhetoric. The Republic of Korea-U.S. alliance is strong and we remain committed to the defense of [South Korea]."

Then, on March 30, 2013, North Korea declared it was in a "state of war" with South Korea and that its the long-standing truce with the South had ended. A statement from Pyongyang read as follows: "From this time on, the North-South relations will be entering the state of war and all issues raised between the North and South will be handled accordingly. The long-standing situation of the Korean peninsula being neither at peace nor at war is finally over." In response, the South Korean defense ministry denounced the war threat and issued its own statement, which read as follows: "Our military is maintaining full preparedness to leave no blind point in safeguarding the lives and safety of the people." As well, South Korean President Park Geun-hye noted that her country was taking the threats from North Korea "very seriously." She said, "If there is any provocation against South Korea and its people, there should be a strong response in initial combat without any political considerations."

For its part, the United States military command in South Korea dispatched a statement that read as follows: "North Korea will achieve nothing by threats or provocations, which will only further isolate North Korea and undermine international efforts to ensure peace and stability in Northeast Asia."

Matching its words with concrete illustrations, the United States was also displaying its military versatility by deploying B-2 and B-52 planes with nuclear capabilities over South Korea, while also flying F-22 Raptor fighter jets from Japan to South Korea's Osan Air base. As well, as noted below, the United States said it would deploy additional ballistic-missile interceptors along the country's Pacific Coast, with an eye on protecting the United States from a potential attack from North Korea. As well, the United States moved its sea-based X-Band radar platform, normally based in Hawaii, closer to the North Korean coast, with the intent of monitoring potential attempts from North Korea to launch a long-range missile. By April 2013, the United States additionally decided to deploy an anti-missile system to Guam.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsular escalated on April 2, 2013 when the state-controlled Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) of the North Korea announced that it would be re-opening its main nuclear complex at Yongbyon and restarting its nuclear reactor there.

The Yongbyon complex was home to both a uranium enrichment facility and a nuclear reactor; it was closed as a part of a 2007 agreement between North Korea and a multilateral cadre, including China and the United States. The agreement mandated the closure of the reactor at Yongbyon in lieu of one million metric tons of heavy fuel oil as well as humanitarian aid benefits. The agreement was only really in effect for a couple of years since North Korea resumed the reprocessing of fuel rods stored at the site in 2009, complaining that it did not receive the desired

level of energy assistance.

This 2013 decision to open the Yongbyon complex and restart operations of the nuclear reactor was illustrative of the intensification of dissonance on the Korean peninsula ongoing since late 2012. But it was also a disturbing development as it showed that the new leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-un, was not interested in continuing to honor a deal approved by his late father, Kim Jong-il. Clearly, the international community was now regarding the paranoid and alienated nation state of nuclearized North Korea through the valence of anxiety.

Reflecting this sentiment, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he was "deeply dismayed" by North Korea's decision to re-open the main nuclear complex at Yongbyon and restart the nuclear reactor. He further condemned the provocative actions declaring: "The current crisis has already gone too far. Nuclear threats are not a game. Aggressive rhetoric and military posturing only result in counter-actions, and fuel fear and instability."

Secretary General Ban urged all parties to engage in urgent talks as "the only way to resolve the current crisis." However, with North Korea cutting off its military hot-line with South Korea, canceling its armistice with that country, using the rhetoric of war, and re-opening its Yongbyon facility, it seemed that authorities in Pyongyang were not in the mood for productive diplomatic engagement.

Indeed, a day later on April 3, 2013, North Korea has ceased border crossing access for South Koreans into the jointly-administered Kaesong industrial zone. Since Kaesong has been viewed as a tacit symbol of the state of geopolitical relations and the last significant arena of cooperation between the two Koreas, the cessation of cross-border access at the industrial zone was regarded as a disturbing development.

By April 4, 2013, the state-controlled Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said the military had "ratified" an attack on United States interests. The KCNA statement further noted that North Korean troops had been authorized to counteract American aggression with "powerful practical military counteractions," including nuclear weapons, and involving "cutting-edge smaller, lighter, and diversified nuclear strike means." The KCNA statement included the following warning: "The moment of explosion is approaching fast. No one can say a war will break out in Korea or not and whether it will break out today or tomorrow." The expressed nuclear threat was the most blatant and belligerent exposition from the North Korean regime on global stability in recent memory. Raising the threat to another level, Pyongyang also told foreign embassies that it could not guarantee their safety in the event of conflict.

In a speech to the National Defense University in Washington, United States Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel noted that the recent actions of the North Koreans "present a real and clear danger." Meanwhile, Russian foreign ministry spokesperson, Alexander Lukashevich, observed that North

Korea's actions may very well foreclose the notion of multilateral negotiations . He cast Pyongyang's attempts to violate decisions of the United Nations Security Council" as "categorically unacceptable," and issued the following warning: "This radically complicates, if it doesn't in practice shut off, the prospects for resuming six-party talks."

On April 5, 2013, Western officials were confirming reports that North Korea had moved a medium-range missile, known as a Musudan or Nodong B, to its east coast. It was unknown if the move was to be interpreted as a threatening gesture , with a warhead mounted on the missile, or part of the preparations for test firing. There was growing suspicion that North Korea might, in fact, be preparing to carry out yet another missile test. It should be noted that while this Musidan/Nodong B missile has a range of 3,000 kilometers (1,875 miles), which would put all of South Korea, Japan, and possibly Guam in its range, there was no test history to ensure precision. As noted by Greg Thielmann, a senior fellow at the Arms Control Association, "A missile that has never even had a flight test is not an operational system and is not a credible threat." Of course, a missile launch might be in the offing for the purpose of acquiring that test history.

By April 10, 2013, South Korean sources said that North Korea appeared to be preparing to launch the Musudan mid-range ballistic missile that had been moved to the east coast, and warned that North Korea might even be preparing the fire the Musudan simultaneously with shorter range Nodong and Scud missiles. The missiles launch could conceivably coincide with the celebration of the birthday of Kim Il-sung, the country's founder.

Meanwhile, the rhetoric from North Korea continued to be bellicose with North Korean state media asserting that the scenario on the Korean Peninsula situation was "inching close to a thermonuclear war," and authorities in Pyongyang warning foreign nationals in South Korea to evacuate from that country. The Obama administration in the United States, via White House spokesperson, Jay Carney, characterized North Korea's statements as "unhelpful." Carney continued, "This kind of rhetoric will only further isolate North Korea from the international community and we continue to urge the North Korean leadership to heed President Obama's call to choose the path of peace and to come into compliance with its international obligations."

It should be noted that the foreign ministers of the so-called G-8 countries -- the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan, and Russia -- have condemned North Korea's recent actions, and warned of consequences in North Korea conducts either a missile launch or a nuclear test. On April 12, 2013, United States Secretary of State John Kerry traveled to South Korea and accentuated this multilateral warning, saying "If Kim Jong-Un decides to launch a missile, whether it is across the Sea of Japan or some other direction, he will be choosing willfully to ignore the entire international community."

A day later, Secretary of State Kerry met with Chinese leaders to find ways to end the geopolitical crisis brewing on the Korean peninsular. Following that meeting, Secretary Kerry said that the

United States and China were both calling for North Korea to refrain from further provocative actions. It was clear that the international community was united in its stance against North Korea's recent acts of dangerous provocation.

Secretary of State John Kerry ended his Asian trip with a call for negotiations to end the dissonance and emphasizing the imperative of finding a diplomatic solution. He said, "The United States remains open to authentic and credible negotiations on denuclearization, but the burden is on Pyongyang. North Korea must take meaningful steps to show that it will honor commitments it has already made, and it has to observe laws and the norms of international behavior."

Meanwhile, with an eye on decreasing the tensions between the two Koreas, South Korean President Park Geun-hye called for peaceful dialogue. But North Korea was quick to reject the overture, characterizing the offer of talks as a "cunning ploy." If that response was any indication, North Korea remained defiant in the face of international pressure.

April 15, 2013 -- the anniversary of North Korea's founder's birth -- passed fairly quietly, without a continuation of the bellicose war threats and even free of a huge military parade showcasing North Korean military might. The hopes that North Korea might be digesting the call for talks, and that the heated geopolitical climate had cooled for the moment, dissipated as Pyongyang issued new threats of war. A statement via state-controlled media was issued as follows: "Our retaliatory action will start without any notice from now."

It should be noted that South Korea responded to the recent actions of North Korea by deploying two warships with the Aegis missile defense systems on the east and west coasts. As well, Japan deployed missile defense systems around Tokyo to defend against any missile threat by North Korea.

On April 18, 2013, North Korea's National Defense Commission issued a statement via the official Korean Central News Agency, demanding that the United States and South Korea withdraw "all nuclear war making capabilities from the region," with an eye on future dialogue. North Korea also called for Washington and Seoul to apologize for its aggression.

In response, a spokesperson for the White House, Josh Earnest, said that the Obama administration was committed to denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and was open to "authentic and credible negotiations." Earnest noted that the actions and rhetoric from North Korea "actually indicate the opposite." He added, "We also need to see some clear evidence that the North Koreans themselves are willing to live up to their international obligations, are willing to demonstrate their commitment to ending the nuclear program, something they've promised in the past."

By April 21, 2013, North Korea was reported to have moved two short-range missile launchers to the east coast. According to a South Korean military source in a report by the South Korean Yonhap news agency, satellite imagery showed the transfer of two mobile missile launchers suitable for short-range Scud missiles to the South Hamgyeong province. Earlier in the month, as noted above, two mid-range Musudan missiles were placed on launchers on the east coast. Collectively, these actions indicated that a missile launch might be in the offing -- possibly to mark the anniversary of the founding of the North Korean military on April 25. However, that date passed without any events of note.

In the last week of April 2013, South Korea called on North Korea to engage in dialogue over the Kaesong industrial complex, which had become a flashpoint in the ongoing crisis between the two Koreas. Regarded as a symbol of cooperation between North Korea and South Korea, the decision by the North to block access to the jointly-run industrial complex was interpreted as a clear sign of deteriorating relations, devolving diplomacy, and the slide towards confrontation. That slide became more precipitous when North Korea outright rejected the invitation to engage in talks. South Korea, therefore, responded by withdrawing its nationals from the Kaesong industrial zone in the interests of safety.

On May 6, 2013, CBS News reported that the two Musudan medium-range missiles, which had been moved to the east coast of North Korea weeks prior, were now removed from the launch site. Those missiles, as discussed above, had sufficient range to reach Japan as well as the United States territory of Guam in the Pacific.

The movement of the missiles was being interpreted in some circles as a cooling of the heated tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Of course, with the start of the spring farming season, it was also possible that many members of the army were -- as they do each year -- necessarily turning their attention to the planting effort.

Regardless of the rationale, the removal of the Musudan missiles from the launch site conceivably indicated that the threat posed by North Korea was reduced at this time, if only on a temporary basis. Indeed, since the Musudan is a mobile missile, it could well be transported back to the launch site in short order. As noted by a senior United States official from the National Security Council in an interview with BBC News, it was "premature to celebrate it as good news," given North Korea's record of unpredictable behavior to date. Striking a similar tone, George Little, a Pentagon spokesperson, characterized North Korea's most recent stance as "a provocation pause."

May 2013 saw North Korea carry out a series of short-range missile tests from its east coast. As global leaders attempted to bring down the level of tensions on the Korean Peninsula, and even after North Korea pulled back its two medium range missiles from its launch pad, the firing of four -- albeit short range -- missiles was being regarded as a provocation. It was not known if North Korea was trying to re-ignite geo-political tensions or if the tests were routine exercises intended to

simply show military might. Regardless, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged North Korea to refrain from carrying out any further missile tests and "resume dialogue."

On June 6, 2013, North Korea proposed convening talks with South Korea over the jointly-administered Kaesong industrial zone, which had been shut down months earlier amidst heightened tensions. The proposal also included a provision to restart tours at the Mount Kumgang resort, which was suspended when a South Korea tourist was shot by a North Korean guard in 2008.

In regards to the more recent closure of the industrial complex, more than 50,000 North Korean workers at Kaesong were withdrawn and South Koreans and supplies were banned entry as part of North Korea's illustration that it was in a "state of war" with South Korea. As intimated above in the "Background" note, the Kaesong complex has often been viewed as a symbol of cross-border cooperation between the two Koreas and its closure augured negatively as regards the overall geopolitical security on the Korean Peninsular. But with North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea offering the overture of dialogue on Kaesong and Mount Kumgang, it was believed that an effort was being made to de-escalate tensions and move to a more constructive footing.

North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea issued the following statement outlining its proposal of dialogue: "We propose holding talks between authorities of the North and South for the normalization of operations at Kaesong and the resumption of tours to Mount Kumgang on the occasion of the anniversary of the June 15 joint declaration." South Korea's Ministry of Unification, which administers inter-Korean affairs, said the government in Seoul was "considering the proposal in a positive light." Earlier, South Korea made it clear that given the precipitous and dangerous decline in bilateral relations during the first part of 2013, it would not only consider government level engagement with North Korea.

One day later on June 7, 2013, South Korea accepted North Korea's offer of bilateral talks but insisted that rather than have them take place in the North Korean border town of Kaesong, that the dialogue site be in the truce village of Panmunjom in the demilitarized zone between the countries. South Korea also noted that it was interested in taking up a range of issues, including the Kaesong Industrial Complex, the tourist center at Mount Kumgang, and the notion of family reunions. The North reacted to South Korea's stance in a rare show of cordiality asserting the following via a statement: "We appreciate the fact that the South side promptly and positively responded to the proposal made by us for holding talks between the authorities of both sides."

It should be noted that the North Korean government in Pyongyang also said that if Seoul accepted its proposal, it would also re-establish the emergency hotline channels, which were severed earlier in the year, as noted above.

But optimism about diplomatic progress between the two Koreas plummeted on June 11, 2013,

when despite the fact that preliminary talks on technical and administrative details were reported to have gone smoothly. By June 13, 2013, more details emerged related to the cancellation of the negotiations. The cause was attributed to the composition of the respective delegations at the negotiating table in the first ministerial level talks since 2007.

Originally, South Korean Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae was slated to lead South Korea's delegation. When South Korea requested that North Korea send Kim Yang-gon, an adviser to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, to the talks, North Korea declined. Seoul then decided to dispatch Vice-Unification Minister Kim Nam-shik to lead its delegation instead. North Korea took offense to the apparent "downgraded" level of South Korean officials present at the talks and decided to withdraw completely. North Korea placed the blame on South Korea for "arrogant obstruction" and "deliberate disturbance" resulting in the aborted negotiations. North Korea further characterized South Korea's decision to change the composition of its delegation in this manner as "the height of discourtesy and disrespect unprecedented in the history of the North-South dialogue".

For its part, South Korea said it was disappointed with North Korea's response. South Korea also made it clear that it would not be offering to participate in negotiations with North Korea at any point in the near future. As noted by South Korean Prime Minister Chung Hong-won: "In the past, we have made infinite concessions to the North, but the time has come to hold talks where both sides are represented by officials of the same level."

At the start of July 2013, relations between the two Koreas seemed to be moving in a more productive direction when North Korea agreed to hold talks on the Kaesong industrial complex, only hours after South Korea suggested the meeting. It was hoped that this overture would end more positively than the situation in June 2013 when the proposed Kaesong discussions were halted over procedural disagreements, as discussed just above. However, as of mid-July 2013, there was no immediate agreement reached on resuming operations at their joint Kaesong industrial complex.

With relations between the two Koreas at a stalemate of sorts in mid-June 2013 (subsequently improved in early July 2013, as discussed above), it came as something of a surprise when North Korea proposed direct talks with the United States. North Korea's National Defense Commission, headed by North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, said it hoped for "serious discussions... to secure peace and stability." The United States responded to this overture by saying it looked towards "credible negotiations," made clear that North Korea had to be compliant with United Nations resolutions and travel down the path of denuclearization. At the start of July 2013, North Korea renewed its push for engagement with the United States when Choi Myung-nam, an international affairs director at the North Korean Foreign Ministry, said Washington should take Pyongyang's diplomatic offers seriously. It should be noted that while representatives of the United States and North Korea have held meetings sporadically, the two sides have not engaged in high-level talks

since 2009.

Meanwhile, in the third week of June 2013, North Korea was apparently building on its sudden appetite for diplomatic engagement as it expressed an interest in restarting international nuclear negotiations. According to China's foreign ministry, North Korean officials were now indicating that they wanted to "peacefully resolve the nuclear issue." It should be noted that multilateral talks between North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States over North Korea's controversial nuclear program collapsed in 2008. North Korea's renewed interest in diplomatic engagement at the multilateral level came as a result of high-level strategic talks with Chinese officials in Beijing. It was to be seen if an actual return to the multilateral negotiating table was in the offing.

In mid-August 2013, the two Koreas were able to successfully reach an agreement to re-open the jointly-administered Kaesong industrial complex. The accord between the two countries included a provision ensuring that Pyongyang would never again shut the industrial complex -- often viewed as a symbol of cross-border cooperation -- "under any circumstances." Another key provision of the accord was the move to "internationalize" the Kaesong industrial complex by hosting foreign visitors at the factory park. This element would effectively make it harder for North Korea to take any unilateral action involving the facility. Left unspecified at the time was a precise date for the reopening of the facility and the resumption of regular operations.

By September 2013 the two Koreas agreed on a "trial" start date of Sept. 16, 2013. It should be noted that agreement was also forged in regard to exempting South Korean firms from taxes for the rest of 2013 to offset losses incurred during the period of months when the complex was closed. Agreement was also made to facilitate easier access to the complex for South Koreans carrying out commercial responsibilities, and for the purpose of attracting foreign investors to the Kaesong Industrial Complex.

Editor's Note

China declared air defense zone in East China Sea

In late November 2013, China tested the patience of the international community by declaring a new defense zone in the East China Sea. To that end, China announced it was deploying warplanes in the new air defense identification zone (ADIZ) for surveillance purposes. However, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Qin Gang noted that if disputes occurred in the region, his country hoped to resolve them through "peaceful means via friendly negotiation."

China's self-declaration of dominion over the territory and its warning that all airplanes passing

through the area were to file flight plans and identify themselves or be prepared to deal with "defensive emergency measures" likely raised the ire of neighbors. Indeed, the new air defense identification zone (ADIZ) included contested territory claimed not only by China, but also Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea. Of particular note were uninhabited but disputed islands in the area known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu by the Chinese. Their significance has, in the past, focused on fishing rights and shipping lanes; however, there was also the possibility of fossil fuel reserves in the area.

The United States Department of State characterized China's newly declared defense zone as "an attempt to unilaterally change the status quo in the East China Sea" and accordingly warned that it would "raise regional tensions and increase the risk of miscalculation, confrontation and accidents." In defiance of China's decision to declare the new ADIZ, the United States and Japan respectively ordered fighter jets to be flown through this area of the East China Sea. China was thus prompted to scramble warplanes to monitor those American and Japanese fighter jets crossing through the ADIZ.

For both Japan and the United States, the message was clear: they did not officially recognize China's newly declared defense zone in East China Sea. That being said, the United States was quick to note that its decision to fly fighter jets through the ADIZ was not intended to be a provocative act. An official for the United States military told CNN News that its aircrafts and a number of other Japanese military aircraft flew through the ADIZ without incident and as part of scheduled routine operations. The military official was quoted as saying, "This is status quo. We are not changing what we are doing. We are not trying to make a point with China. We fly U.S. aircraft daily in international airspace in the region. This is normal."

South Korea also reportedly dispatched a military aircraft on a routine patrol flight into the ADIZ and did not alert China of its flight plan. An official from the South Korean Defense Ministry said the flight was routine and carried out twice a week; the South Korean official said the patrols would continue irrespective of China's newly declared defense zone in East China Sea.

Still, several commercial airlines, such as Qantas Airlines and Singapore Airlines, were not prepared to take any chances of their own and made it clear that they intended to act in accordance with China's new regulations. As well, the United States advised American commercial carriers to comply with China's new requirements for filing flight plans when they traverse the newly declared ADIZ over the East China Sea for obvious security reasons. It was to be seen if the matter would spark a dispute, especially since at least two Japanese airlines announced they would not be complying with the new Chinese-dictated regulations.

Complicating matters was an announcement from South Korea on Dec. 8, 2013 that it was expanding its own air defense zone, which that area partially overlapping with China's zone. At issue was the Ieodo rock claimed by both countries and controlled by South Korea. As noted here,

South Korea was already challenging China's ADIZ by flying its military aircraft through that zone. The moves were expected to raise already-heightened tensions in eastern Asia.

Meanwhile, in the first week of December 2013, while United States Vice President Joseph Biden was on a trip to Asia, the matter of China's self-declare air defense zone was a matter of discussion. In a joint appearance with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Tokyo, Vice President Biden said, "We, the United States, are deeply concerned by the attempt to unilaterally change the status quo in the East China Sea. This action has raised regional tensions and increased the risk of accidents and miscalculation." Biden said the United States was monitoring the situation with Japan and South Korea and noted that "we will remain steadfast in our alliance commitments." He continued, "The United States has an interest in the lowering of tensions in this vital region. This underscores the need for crisis management mechanisms and effective channels of communication between China and Japan to reduce the risk of escalation."

Vice President Biden then engaged in "very direct" talks regarding the ADIZ with Chinese officials. While China asserted its view that its self-declare air defense zone was consistent with "international law and practice," Vice President Biden pointed out that the move had caused "apprehension" in Asia and he noted that China had "increasing responsibility to contribute positively to peace and security." But Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said: "During the talks the Chinese side repeated its principled position, stressing that the Chinese move accorded with international law and practice." Thus, it was clear -- at least in the public purview -- that neither the United States nor China were prepared to step back from the expressly-stated stances.

Update

Relations with North Korea

On Feb. 27, 2014, North Korea fired four short-range missiles over the sea off its eastern coast -- essentially to the north of the border with South Korea. The South Korea Yonhap News Agency speculated that the missiles were Scud short-range missiles with a capacity of traversing 125 miles and thus capable of reaching targets in South Korea but not as far as Japan.

On March 2, 2014, North Korea fired another two short-range missiles into the sea off the eastern coast of the Korean peninsula. The South Korea Yonhap news Agency reported that the missiles likely flew about 300 miles and were believed to be Scud-C models -- this time capable of reaching targets in both South Korea and Japan.

In the third week of March 2014, North Korea fired a series of 30 short-range rockets into the sea off the eastern end of the Korean peninsula. The rockets were thought to be Soviet-era FROG

rockets that have been in North Korea's possession since the 1960s, and seemingly flew for more than 35 miles before landing in the sea. This launch of the 30 FROG missiles came after other such missile tests in the weeks prior, as discussed above.

In the last week of March 2014, North Korea test fired two medium range Nodong missiles, which landed in the ocean between North Korea and Japan. The action essentially triggered a condemnation from the United Nations Security Council, which noted that the missile launches were a violation of prevailing United Nations resolutions, such as Security Council Resolutions 1718 and 1874 that prohibit North Korea from carrying out ballistic or nuclear activity. The United Nations Security Council also warned of an "appropriate response" to come. Undeterred, North Korea lashed back at the United Nations Security Council, characterizing its condemnation as "absolutely intolerable" and justifying its own action as being a "self-defensive" move.

There were suggestions that North Korea was reacting to the annual joint military exercises by United States and South Korean forces, which Pyongyang typically characterizes as acts of war and aggression. Fueling the fire for North Korea was the flight of a United States nuclear-capable B-52 bomber over South Korea. South Korean authorities have put forth the theory that North Korea's missile launched constituted an "armed protest" against the joint South Korean-United States military drills that were taking place.

Perhaps exasperated by North Korea's provocative acts and saber rattling, which were manifest most recently by the missile launches, China had already entered the equation. Even before the launch of the medium range missiles in the last week of March 2014, China had earlier declared a "red line," saying that it would not allow war or chaos on the Korean peninsula, and asserting that peace was possible only via denuclearization. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was on the record saying, "The Korean peninsula is right on China's doorstep. We have a red line, that is, we will not allow war or instability on the Korean peninsula." Wang demanded that all parties "exercise restraint" and noted that "genuine and lasting peace" on the Korean peninsula was only possible with denuclearization. He said, "Confrontation can only bring tension, and war can only cause disaster." The Chinese foreign minister also endorsed the resumption of multilateral nuclear talks, saying, "Some dialogue is better than none, and better early than later."

This stance by China -- North Korea's most important diplomatic and economic supporter -- suggested that Beijing was no longer willing to accept Pyongyang's theatrics on its doorstep. Pressure on North Korea had already begun to intensify a month earlier in February 2014 when the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, urged global powers to refer North Korea to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court following a report that documented horrific crimes against humanity in that country. While China was unlikely to join the human rights chorus against North Korea, it certainly seemed prepared to use its influence to compel North Korea to return to the nuclear negotiating table. Adding to the suggestion that dialogue might be at hand, Japan and North Korea were scheduled to engage in their first high level

talks in years.

However, the nuclear negotiating table appeared to be a distant notion as March 2014 came to a close, and as North Korea threatened to go forward with a nuclear test. As reported by the North Korean Central News Agency, North Korea said it would not foreclose the possibility of testing a "new form" nuclear weapon in defiance of international condemnation and in contravention of prevailing international law. While Pyongyang did not specify the type of nuclear weaponry it intended to test, the conventional wisdom has long been held that North Korea was attempting to develop small and sophisticated nuclear devices that could be delivered by intercontinental ballistic missiles.

South Korea warned that if its neighbor to the north went forward with a nuclear test, there would be consequences in the offing. As noted by South Korea Foreign Ministry spokesman Cho Tae-young, "North Korea should bear in mind that if it ignores the stern demand from the neighboring countries and the international community and carries out a nuclear test, it will have to pay a price for it."

On March 31, 2014, tensions on the Korean peninsula exponentially increased as North Korea and South Korea exchanged fire across its western maritime border.

According to South Korean authorities, this exchange of fire was presaged by North Korea's announcement that it would hold "live fire" military drills along its border zone with South Korea. South Korea warned that there would be immediate retaliation if any ordinance touched its jurisdiction. North Korea then fired more than 500 artillery rounds, some 100 of which landed in South Korean territorial waters. As promised, the South Koreans responded by firing more than 300 rounds into North Korean waters and scrambling F-15s on its side of the maritime border.

Known as the Northern Limit Line, the maritime border has been a well known flashpoint region between the two Koreas, and its very existence is a matter of dispute from the point of view of the North Koreans. The boundary was established after the end of the Korean War in the 1950s by the United Nations, but the line of demarcation has been accepted by North Korea. It should be noted that North Korean artillery fire killed four South Koreans on the Yeonpyeong border island in the same disputed area in 2010. In another egregious incident in 2010, North Korea torpedoed a South Korean warship in the disputed border region, sinking the vessel and killing 46 people. Now, in 2014, it was again the locus of dissonance between the two Koreas as a result of the North's decision to hold military drills in this hotspot region.

It was to be seen if these were actions by North Korea were aimed at improving Pyongyang's negotiating position for the future as it attempted to stave off further sanctions that were likely to come, or, if they were intended to be blatant and irrational acts of provocation. South Korean Defence Ministry spokesperson, Kim Min-seok, intimated that Pyongyang's actions were being

motivated by both factors as he said, "We believe the North's maritime firing is a planned provocation and an attempt to test our military's determination to defend the Northern Limit Line and to get an upper hand in South-North relations."

In mid-August 2014, North Korea fired three short range rockets from the port city of Wonsan; the rockets landed in the sea off the east coast of the Korean peninsula. The incident coincided with Pope Francis' arrival in South Korea for a five day visit and ahead of scheduled joint military exercises between South Korea and the United States. North Korea objects to those drills, charging that they are intended to prepare for war. As such, North Korea has typically taken some sort of provocative action to protest the joint military activity. In this case, North Korea reacted with the firing of the rockets as well as the issuance of a statement that read as follows: "Given that the U.S. and the puppet forces of South Korea continue staging nuclear war exercises against us in particular, we will take countermeasures for self-defense which will include missile launches, nuclear tests, and all other programs." It was to be seen if North Korea would indeed follow up the rocket launches with nuclear tests, as indicated.

Special Note

Relations with Holy See

In August 2014, Pope Francis arrived in South Korea where he was due to stay for a five day visit. It was to be Pope Francis' first visit to Asia since he became pontiff. In South Korea, where Roman Catholics make up about 10 percent of the population, Pope Francis was greeted by enthusiastic crowds. During his landmark visit, Pope Francis celebrated mass, lauded the Korean Catholics -- many of whom died for their religion in previous centuries, and beatified 124 South Korean Catholic martyrs with hundreds of thousands of South Koreans in attendance. Pope Francis' popularity among South Koreans was partially due his decision to travel around Seoul in a small and unpretentious hatch-back car -- a sharp contrast from the type of status-symbol laden vehicle that one would expect for almost any other world leader.

* denotes territory

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Korea, North

Political Conditions

Introduction

For over a decade, North Korea has lived through one upheaval after another. Political unrest, economic troubles and diplomatic isolation combined have put the country into an impoverished and desperate situation. Positive trends appeared to have been emerging in 1999. Events from 2001 onward, however, would take the country in a less positive path in the realm of geopolitics.

Still, throughout 1999, North Korea made all-out national efforts to pull itself back from the brink. As Pyongyang's media put it, "It is the unswerving will and resolution of our leader to concentrate national efforts on the economy so as to put our country on the path toward an economic power." As a result, according to reports from a South Korean government think tank, North Korea's grain output in 1999 was estimated at 4.2 million tons, an 8.5 percent increase from that of 1998. This was the highest since floods devastated the North's harvest in 1995. In 1999, North Korea's economy stopped shrinking and recorded 6.2 percent growth, the first positive growth in 10 years.

Key political issues in North Korea in the last decade have been focused on its relationship with South Korea. In 1992, an accord was signed stipulating non-aggression, reconciliation, and cooperative exchanges between North and South Korea. Meanwhile, impoverished North Korea has been the recipient of humanitarian aid from South Korea, despite the prevailing hostilities between the two entities.

In June 1999, talks began between North and South Korea, in Beijing, over the hopes and plans for reunification of the two factions of the Korean peninsular, and to put into effect the stipulations of the 1992 accord. The major aspects of the accord involved the reunification of estranged families who had been divided by the political fate of the peninsula, reconciliation, cooperation, a

climate of entente and the long-term possibility of reunification. It was hoped that this kind of substantive engagement could be realized by separating business from politics, and by emphasizing the shared ideals designated in the 1992 accord.

In early 2000, the world saw big steps taken by the two Koreas toward the goal of rapprochement. On April 8, 2000, delegates from both Koreas signed an agreement in Beijing, China announcing that a summit would be held between the top leaders of both Koreas in Pyongyang in mid-June 2000. The agreement on the summit had been the result of mutual efforts by the leaders of the two sides of the peninsula.

As early as in 1981, South Korean President Chun Doo-hwan suggested direct talks between South and North Korean leaders, but was rejected by North Korean President Kim Il Sung. In February 1993, South Korean President Kim Young-sam also suggested a summit with Kim Il Sung, and Kim Il Sung accepted the suggestion in June 1994. But the scheduled summit was canceled due to Kim Il Sung's sudden death on July 8, 1994.

After taking office in early 1998, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung expressed a desire to meet with North Korea's leader, saying a summit could help end hostilities between the Koreas. Indeed, in the late 1990s, inter-Korean trade had grown, and the number of visitors from the South to the North had increased.

In February 1999, in an open letter, the North Korean government proposed to the South Korean authorities that the year 1999 be set as a year for enhancing national reconciliation and unity. It also proposed wide-ranging dialogue between the two governments.

On March 17, 2000, delegates of Seoul and Pyongyang met in China in anticipation of the summit between Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong il. All these contributed to the final decision that the summit between the North and South Korean top leaders be held in June 2000.

From June 13-15, 2000, North Korean leader Kim Jong il and South Korean President Kim Dae-jung met in Pyongyang; it was the first summit of its type since the end of the Korean War in 1950s. The summit had been scheduled to start on June 12, but was postponed one day by Pyongyang for "technical reasons." To the world's surprise, Kim Jong il personally greeted Kim Dae-jung at the airport when the South president arrived in Pyongyang for the summit.

After this historic moment, North Korean leader Kim Jong il and South Korean President Kim Dae-jung signed a historic accord called "North-South Joint Declaration" at the end of the second day of the three-day summit. With the aim of reducing tension in the divided peninsula and working towards an eventual reunification, the Joint Declaration covered five issues: (1) the North and the South agreed to resolve the country's reunification independently; (2) both sides agreed to work for the reunification in the direction based on the proposal of federation by the North and that of confederation by the South with common elements; (3) both sides agreed to settle the problems of the separated families and long-term prisoners, and exchange of visiting groups of separated families was to start Aug. 15, 2000; (4) the North and the South would promote economic cooperation and cooperation in social, cultural, sports, public health and environmental fields; and (5) both sides agreed to remain in contact to assure that this agreement would be implemented.

The summit was seen as a turning point in the inter-Korean relations. It has been the first formal step in the bilateral efforts for reunification. The agreement reached by the leaders of both Koreas during the summit was far more detailed than those reached by lower-ranking officials in 1972 and 1991. Although the agreement did not mention certain major issues, such as South Korea's concern over the North's nuclear and missile programs and the North's demand for the withdrawal of 37,000 United States (U.S.) troops stationed in the South, the summit -- at the time -- opened the door for future discussions for those issues. The two leaders also agreed that North Korean leader Kim Jong il would pay a return visit to the South in the near future.

On Aug. 15, 2000, a significant move toward reconciliation took place on the Korean Peninsula. Seoul and Pyongyang exchanged 100 people from each side by air for a four-day reunion with

family members separated for more than 50 years. The airplane carrying 100 North Koreans flew to Seoul from Pyongyang and returned to Pyongyang with 100 South Koreans one hour later. This was also the first North Korean airplane allowed runway privileges in the South since the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950s. On Aug. 18, the South Korea airplane brought the 100 North Koreans back to Pyongyang and returned with the 100 South Koreans. The exchange of the 200 people was part of the June 15 Joint Declaration reached in Pyongyang. More than 75,000 South Koreans applied for the reunions with their relatives in North Korea, but the number was narrowed down to 100 by computerized lottery, giving priority to those with a direct family relationship, such as parents, spouses and children.

In November, the two Koreas went on the second such exchanges for family reunion. At the time, an estimated 7.6 million South Koreans had relatives in North Korea. About 1.2 million North Koreans escaped to the South during the Korean conflict, with thousands of South Koreans went to the North.

In late January 2001, South and North Korea held the three-day inter-Korean Red Cross talks and reached a six-point agreement on reunions and communication between separated family members. According to the agreement, 300 family members from each side would be allowed to exchange letters on March 15, the first exchange of its kind since the Korean War in 1950s.

Another high profile progress in reconciliation of the two Koreas was the plan to re-link the two sides by road and rail. Defense ministers of North and South Korea met in September 2000 for the first time since the Korean War and agreed to seek military cooperation for the cross-border railway. In November of that year, the military officers from both sides met again to hold their first talks on restoring road and railway links across the world's most heavily fortified border. The Korean War had cut off transport links in early 1950s, and the project to reconnect transport includes the main railway from Seoul to Pyongyang and a four-lane highway parallel to it through the demilitarized zone. For a few years, the reconstruction of the inter-Korean railway and highway was under way by both sides in the demilitarized zone. The two sides also agreed to jointly manage the reconstruction and operation of the railroad and highway in the demilitarized zone.

Until early 2001, the two Koreas had held four rounds of ministerial level talks aimed at accelerating steps in reconciliation and cooperation. During these talks, the two sides agreed to set up an inter-Korean committee for economic cooperation, and such a committee was established in late December 2000. Senior economic officials from North and South Korea talked about ways to boost economic cooperation, including North Korea's urgent request for electricity supplies from the South to ease its chronic energy shortages. In early January 2001, South Korea delivered a draft agreement on economic cooperation to North Korea, which included the provision of electricity, measures to prevent Imjin River flooding, construction of rail and road links, and the building of an industrial complex in North Korea.

Meanwhile, there were signs that North Korea was making progress in changing its image of seclusion, being more open to the outside world. What was most obvious was its desire or interest in economic reforms. In October 2000, just days after North and South Korea agreed to establish a joint economic cooperation committee, the North Korean government replaced the country's finance minister and Central Bank president. Two months later, the trade minister of North Korea was also replaced with someone having expertise in trade with Western countries. The replacement of the top financial and trade officials suggested that North Korea was serious about economic reforms by bringing its financial and trade systems more in line with international norms.

In November 2000, officials from the European Union paid a three-day visit to North Korea's capital Pyongyang. During the visit the North Korean officials told them that the country might relax its investment rules by allowing multinational companies full control over any investment in the country.

In his New Year's speech for 2001, Kim Jong il called for "new thinking," portraying himself as the Kim Il Sung of the 21st century. One of the most dramatic moves was North Korean leader Kim Jong il's visit to China.

In mid-January 2001, Kim Jong il paid a six-day visit to China, most of the time visiting Shanghai, the city at the center of China's economic reform effort. There were reports that he visited Shanghai's stock market as well as huge factories run by foreign corporations. It was reported that Kim was very interested in the economic achievements China had made since its reforms in early 1980s, and Kim's comment after the visit was that China's market reform policies were correct.

North Korea's Slide into Greater Isolation; 2001-2006

The momentum towards normalization of relations between North Korea and the outside world was slowed with the election of United States (U.S.) President George W. Bush. Early in his administration President Bush ordered a review of United States policy towards North Korea and the Bush Administration made it clear that improved relations with the United States depended on progress across a broad range of security issues -- including force deployments, nuclear weapons

and missiles.

The U.S. - North Korea relationship was then dealt a blow with the terrorist attack against the United States on Sept. 11, 2001. In a speech in early 2002 on terrorism and global security, the American leader referred to North Korea as a member of the "axis of evil," along with Iran and Iraq. This designation resulted in retrenchment by North Korea and saber rattling on both sides.

As well, there was an awkward tension between South Korea and the United States that grew out of the situation. As noted in this review, South Korea has expressed the desire for eventual reunification with North Korea, in accordance with the sunshine policy of former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung. At the same time, the South wants to maintain a good relationship with the United States. The American position on North Korea placed South Korea in a difficult situation.

In September 2002, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan held a summit meeting with Kim Jong il. The focus of the meeting was to foster improved relationships between Japan and North Korea. The meeting signaled an interesting drift in Japanese foreign policy towards a view independent of the United States on policy in North Korea.

In October 2002, following talks between North Korea's government representatives and United States Special Envoy, James Kelly, North Korea accused the United States of arrogance and high-handedness. The discussions were launched because Japan and South Korea expressed similar desires to ameliorate their relations with North Korea and end diplomatic isolation. In this regard, these discussions embodied the highest level diplomatic contact between North Korea and the United States since United States President, George Bush, referred to North Korea as one third of the "axis of evil" as aforementioned.

North Korean outrage about the Kelly's handling of the talks was reportedly due to the United States' insistence over missiles programs, human rights matters, and other military issues. North Korea's government stated that it was apparent that the United States was not really interested in a bilateral dialogue but rather, the United States wished to pursue a continued policy of hostility, arrogance and high-handed practices in its relations with North Korea. For its part, the United States Special Envoy, James Kelly, described the discussions as "frank."

A week later, North Korea admitted it had been developing a clandestine nuclear weapons program. This nuclear weapons endeavor was in contravention of a 1994 accord, which provided for the end of any such weapons programs, in exchange for the construction of two nuclear power reactors. The situation was complicated by the fact that some reports suggest that Pakistan -- a United States ally in the war on terrorism -- may have provided North Korea with equipment used to develop the weapons program.

North Korea stated that it was open to discussing the situation with the United States. These discussions would embody another round of high level diplomatic contact between North Korea and the United States. The earlier round of discussions (noted in the paragraph above) were fraught with discord. Meanwhile, the United States insisted that the existence of a North Korean nuclear weapons program should be distinguished from the possible development of a nuclear weapons program in Iraq -- an issue that was gaining global media attention.

By November 2002, the United States and a number of its its allies agreed to stop the supply of fuel oil to North Korea. The United States and its allies explained that North Korea's recent admission of an ongoing nuclear weapons program constituted a breach of a 1994 agreement.

In a strange twist, however, South Korea then stated that it believed that North Korean's admission of a nuclear weapons program might, in fact, have been an erroneously translated statement. South Korean authorities noted that the interpretation of North Korea's radio transmission of issues regarding a nuclear weapons program may have been flawed. Specifically, South Korean authorities suggest that a verb used in the transmission may not have been clearly understood by monitors. That is to say, rather than stating that North Korea "has come to have" military counter-measures, including nuclear weapons, the key phrase was, in fact, that North Korea is simply "entitled" to own nuclear weapons. This ironic revelation gained credence when the wording in a new radio transmission was clearly changed to reflect the entitlement of a nuclear weapons program, rather than the actual ongoing development of one. Nevertheless, officials from news networks who cross-checked the South Korean claim of misinterpretation stated that the original translation was correct.

Meanwhile, regional experts as well as International Relations specialists noted that North Korea's

official media transmissions generally tend to be imbued by sharp rhetoric, even when the North Korean government may be engaged with foreign entities. In this way, the hostile tone of the North Korean governmental megaphone might not necessarily have reflected the government's actual position on matters of international import. Yet other analysts suggested that North Korea's admission of a nuclear weapons program might have been a step in the direction of diplomacy. By responding to the United States' recent threats, the government in Pyongyang may have been signaling that it was open to discussion. Put simply, by declaring its nuclear weapons program, the government in Pyongyang may have been pushing the United States into some sort of negotiations.

By the end of 2002, reports surfaced suggesting that North Korea had re-opened an old nuclear plant, despite strict warnings from both South Korea and the United States. A representative the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as well as an official from the South Korean government, both reported that seals had been removed from the radiochemical laboratory in Yongbyon, which had been used for nuclear reprocessing. Experts observed that the Yongbyon plant has the facility to extract weapons-grade plutonium from spent fuel rods.

For its part, North Korea claimed it had no choice but to resume its nuclear program since fuel oil supplies shipments had been halted in response to the United States' claims that it was in violation of a 1994 agreement. The North Koreans noted that they had to meet the energy needs of the country. The United States responded that the North Koreans were indulging in a circular argument; they also asserted that the re-opening of the old nuclear plant and nuclear program had nothing to do with energy generation.

The government of North Korea in Pyongyang stated it was willing to respond favorably to the security concerns of the United States, if a non-aggression treaty could be developed. This willingness again suggested that the North Koreans appeared to want to move in the direction of diplomatic discussions. The Bush administration in the United States, however, refused to negotiate with the North Koreans under these circumstances, although they moved closer in the direction of talks with North Korea. It remained unclear as to how the Bush administration distinguishes bilateral negotiations from talks or discussions.

Amidst a climate of political wrangling, two nuclear inspectors from the IAEA arrived in China on the last day of 2002, having been expelled from North Korea. The country's nuclear program was left unmonitored, although IAEA representatives expressed hopes that their inspectors would be allowed to return in due course. In another shocking development, North Korean officials hinted that the country would pull out of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in the near future, as a consequence of threats from the United States. The "threats" were thought to refer to a constellation of items, including the use of the term "axis of evil" by United States President George W. Bush in early 2002, the reportedly acrimonious bilateral discussions between United States envoy Kelly and North Korean officials, as well as the halt on fuel energy supplies to North Korea.

On Jan. 10, 2003, North Korean officials announced the country would withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. In a speech to the United Nations, the North Korean ambassador explained that the decision was indeed a consequence of United States' clearly expressed hostility toward North Korea. Pak Gil-yon, the North Korean ambassador, also referenced the Bush administration's inclusion of North Korea as part of an "axis of evil" in early 2002 as evidence of the United States' threatening stance against his country. In addition, he blamed the IAEA for acting as the pawn of the United States, in order to implement a policy hostile to North Korea.

The most promising development in regard to the brewing standoff between North Korea and the United States was a January 2003 meeting between North Korean officials and Bill Richardson, the governor of New Mexico. Richardson was the former Energy Secretary and Ambassador to the United Nations under United States President Bill Clinton.

In those meetings with Richardson, Deputy United Nations Ambassador, Han Song Ryol, reiterated North Korea's claim that it was not interested in building nuclear bombs, and that it wished to participate in nuclear verification. Richardson observed that these were positive developments that should be weighed against the North Korean withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Richardson, and other regional experts, observed that it has been customary for the North Koreans to make bellicose statements regarding the West, while simultaneously moving toward engagement. For this reason, Richardson urged bilateral dialogue between the United States and North Korea, despite the displays of North Korean brinkmanship.

On Jan. 13, 2003, it was reported that if North Korea could resolve its nuclear weapons issue, the United States and other countries would offer energy assistance. United States envoy James Kelly

did not comment on whether or not this incentive to North Korea constituted a shift in the Bush administration's policy. By mid-week, however, it was apparent that the United States was indeed signaling some interest in a compromise solution to the stand-off. Previously, the Bush administration had stated it would not reward or appease North Korea for abandoning its agreement to dismantle its nuclear weapons program.

On Jan. 17, 2003, the government in Pyongyang dismissed the United States' offer of aid to North Korea -- in exchange for an end to its nuclear program -- as "trickery" and "deceptive drama." Instead, the officials in Pyongyang insisted that "face to face" bilateral negotiations were imperative, and a formal non-aggression agreement had to be established.

By Jan. 20, 2003, United States Secretary of State Colin Powell expressed hope that the IAEA would refer the North Korean withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to the United Nations Security Council. Should the matter indeed be taken up by the international body's Security Council, however, the possibility of sanctions could ensue. North Korea had already indicated that the imposition of sanctions would be regarded as a declaration of war.

Meanwhile, Russian envoy Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Losyukov met North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in an attempt to resolve the impasse between Washington and Pyongyang. Although Losyukov offered no details regarding his lengthy discussions with the North Korean leader, the talks were described as successful. The Russian plan to resolve the impasse provided security guarantees for North Korea, as well as an economic development and aid package, while also creating a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

Against this backdrop, United States Under-Secretary of State John Bolton headed to China to seek assistance from North Korea's ally, China, in resolving the situation.

In late January 2003, a South Korean national security adviser, Lim Dong-won, arrived in Pyongyang for diplomatic discussions aimed at resolving the conflict over North Korea's nuclear program.

South Korea's representative, Lim, who happened to be a former unification minister, cautioned that while his efforts would be aimed at averting a war, there was no easy or quick resolution at hand. Instead, Lim observed that his job would be to create a foundation for dialogue, and eventually, the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue.

North Korea's willingness to accept mediation from other countries, such as South Korea, was considered to be a productive development in an otherwise grim situation. Previously, the North Korean government had said that it would only accept direct negotiations with the United States government. For its part, the United States government refused direct negotiations with North Korea, but later, shifted its stance and agreed to "talks."

Meanwhile, the IAEA said it would convene an emergency session in early February 2003 to discuss the nuclear issue in North Korea. In those meetings, it would decide whether or not to refer the nuclear issue to the United Nations Security Council. Thus far, the North Koreans had been adamantly opposed to United Nations actions in regard to their nuclear program, and warned that the establishment of United Nations' sanctions against North Korea would be regarded as a declaration of war. Complicating matters was the United States' claim that recently recorded satellite imagery showed trucks at the North Korean nuclear complex at Yongbyon being loaded with unspecified materials. The finding suggested that North Korea was pursuing its nuclear ambitions in the midst of increasing tensions.

Contributing to rising tensions was a missile test by North Korea. Just before the new President of South Korea was inaugurated, Pyongyang fired a missile into the sea between Japan and the Korean peninsula. The missile was reported to be a short range land-to-ship missile which fell 36 miles or 60 kilometers from the Korean peninsula. While South Korea's incoming President Roh made no mention of the missile test during his inauguration, he did call upon North Korea to step away from its nuclear program. Roh expressed the desire to resolve tensions on the Korean peninsula peacefully and criticized the United States' rhetoric in regard to the North.

In March 2003, North Korea test-fired another missile into the sea off its coast. The United States announced that there were signs suggesting another missile launch was imminent. As such, ships were warned to stay away from the targeted area of the Sea of Japan (also known as the East Sea). The missile test followed another refusal by Washington to hold direct talks with Pyongyang, for the purpose of resolving the brewing conflict.

Then, reports emerged suggesting that North Korea intended to test fire another missile in the near future. This longer range Rodong ballistic missile could reach any part of Japan. As such, Japan threatened to impose economic sanctions on North Korea if such a ballistic missile was, indeed, tested. Sanctions would include a halt in cash transfers and several hundred millions in exports. Japan has since stepped up surveillance patrols near the Korean Peninsula.

Meanwhile, the United States air force resumed reconnaissance flights in international airspace close to North Korea. This resumption came on the heels of a United States aircraft being intercepted by North Korean fighter jets in late February 2003.

Both former United States Secretary of State Colin Powell and former National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice repeatedly stated that while they were not against multilateral discussions, direct bilateral negotiations were not likely. As well, Washington expressed no plans to establish new

agreements or treaties with Pyongyang, including North Korea's repeated request for a non-aggression treaty.

In March 2003, North Korea's nuclear program had been referred to the United Nations Security Council when the country expelled the United Nations nuclear inspectors. The head of the IAEA, Mohammed El Baradei, stated that nuclear inspectors should return to North Korea and the international community should send a consistent message regarding the prohibition of nuclear weapons. The government of North Korea said that discussions of its country's nuclear program in the United Nations Security Council would be regarded as both a provocative act and a prelude to war. Officials in Pyongyang also promised to strengthen the country's military forces and weaponry, noting that only strong military deterrence could protect its nation security and prevent United States aggression.

At that time, the North Korean government observed that the United States-led war against Iraq had demonstrated how disarmament via inspections had not prevented military action from taking place. In light of the United Nation's failure to prevent a war with Iraq, Pyongyang said it would ignore any resolution that emerged from the Security Council meetings. Officials in Pyongyang ominously observed that it was hardly likely that a non-aggression treaty with the United States could resolve the issue of the country's nuclear program peacefully.

In April 2003, delegations from the United States and North Korea arrived in Beijing, China, for the first face-to-face discussions in several months since the confrontation erupted in 2002.

The North Korean government surprisingly announced it wished to pursue multilateral diplomatic talks in regard to its nuclear program. The announcement was made during an interview with a

Foreign Ministry official on the state-controlled official news service. The government in Pyongyang had insisted for several months on direct bilateral talks with the United States. This reversal was viewed as a significant opening in the impasse surrounding the North Korean nuclear program.

The decision to pursue multilateral talks effectively softened the stance of the North Korean government. The government of South Korea expressed the view that the shift was a result of fear and intimidation produced by the military war against Iraq. Other observers, however, believed that the government of Kim Jong-il wanted to present a more reasonable position internationally. Still others suggested that the softened stance was intended to "buy time," in much the same way as the Soviet leadership would propose talks when its influence was threatened during the Soviet era. Finally, political scientists expressed the belief that intensified pressure by the Chinese produced the concession.

The discussions were scheduled to last for three days and were led by United States Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian affairs, James Kelly, and North Korea's American Affairs Bureau Chief, Li Gun. The role of China in the discussions remained unclear. The United States insisted that China was another third party within the context of multilateral talks, while North Korea described China as simply the host country. Former United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, described the talks as "useful."

For its part, Pyongyang offered to abandon its nuclear weapons program in exchange for a package of political and economic benefits by the United States. Political benefits would include the normalization of bilateral relations, while economic benefits would include financial aid.

The discussions were not likely change the position of the United States that North Korea must abandon its nuclear program and agree to verification of the process. For its part, although North Korea offered to dismantle its nuclear program in lieu of various rewards (intimated above), officials in Pyongyang stated they would not allow United Nations' verification of nuclear program abandonment. The United States said it would "study" North Korea's proposals.

Meanwhile, intelligence reports as well as the North Korean state news agency, disclosed findings that North Korea was successfully reprocessing 8,000 spent fuel rods. Such fuel rods would be used in the production of weapons-grade plutonium. Another report by the IAEA claimed that North Korea had the capability to produce nuclear weapons and, indeed, might already possess such weaponry.

In May 2003, North Korea announced it would be withdrawing from a 1992 agreement with its neighbor to the south which pledged to keep the Korean peninsula free of nuclear weaponry. Pyongyang said that its reason for withdrawing from the agreement with South Korea was due to "the sinister and hostile" policy of the United States toward North Korea. This announcement

preceded impending talks between the leadership of South Korea and the United States, which would focus on the nuclear ambitions of North Korea.

In August 2003, North Korea agreed to multilateral talks, which would include the countries in the region of East Asia as well as the United States. The talks were to take place in Beijing, China. The talks would include North Korea, the United States, China, South Korea, Japan and Russia. The North Korean official news agency said that "the forthcoming talks would clearly show the world community whether or not the United States had a true willingness to make a switchover in its policy toward the DPRK [North Korea]." Pyongyang said that a change in United States policy to North Korea would be essential in resolving the nuclear crisis. Tensions between the United States and North Korea intensified when North Korea's disclosed that it already had produced nuclear bombs and was prepared to produce more.

Ahead of the multilateral talks, North Korea ratcheted up its rhetoric by referring to South Korea as a "dangerous place" and canceling its plans to take part in the World University Games in Daegu, South Korea. Meanwhile, South Korean warships again fired warning shots at a North Korean vessel which broached South Korean territory. Complicating matters was the decision by South Korea and the United States to carry out its annual joint war games on the peninsula. Pyongyang objected to these activities saying that they were akin to a rehearsal for a preemptive attack against the North. The North Korean news agency carried a report warning that if the United States failed to shift its current policy on North Korea, then Pyongyang would reaffirm its commitment to a nuclear program.

The talks in Beijing in August resulted in a brash declaration by Pyongyang that they had been a waste of time. Soon thereafter, however, Pyongyang softened its stance. No resolution was produced as a result of the meeting.

In October 2003, the North Korean government announced it had reprocessed 8,000 spent nuclear fuel rods and said it was now able to use the plutonium extracted from the rods for weapons purposes. The announcement also included the claim that North Korea would reprocess more spent fuel from the nuclear reactor in Yongbyon. Although the resumption of nuclear activities had been for "peaceful purposes," the government statement noted that since the deterioration of relations with the United States, that purpose had changed. This admission by North Korea came only weeks after multilateral talks (mentioned above) in Beijing. North Korea then said it had no interest in further talks.

By 2004, the IAEA said it was investigating reports that North Korea made clandestine sales of uranium to Libya at a time when that country was attempting to develop nuclear weapons. A report in the *New York Times* stated that the IAEA uncovered evidence that Pyongyang had provided Tripoli with nearly two tons of uranium in 2001. The *New York Times* report also noted that the uranium sent to Libya could not have been used as nuclear fuel unless it was enriched in

centrifuges. The report went on to state that Libya had been constructing centrifuges and had a plan to purchase equipment from a black-market network run by Pakistan's former nuclear chief, Abdul Qadeer Khan, who admitted to selling nuclear secrets to Libya, Iran and North Korea. In this regard, the IAEA said it planned investigations on the basis of evidence that emerges from interviews with former members of Khan's network. Meanwhile, intelligence agencies were reportedly attempting to determine if North Korea carried out any other secret deals with other countries or groups.

In September 2004, North Korea insisted it would never dismantle its nuclear program while the United States maintained a "hostile" policy toward the country. Earlier, North Korea had suspended six-nation talks to protest South Korean violations of nuclear accords.

In early 2005, the Chinese government assured newly-appointed United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that it would push multi-party talks with North Korea, which would be aimed at ending the nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula. For its part, however, North Korea said it has no interest in re-entering such talks, which stalled in 2003.

By May 2005, Mohammed El Baradei, the head of the United Nations nuclear watchdog group -- the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) -- said that North Korea could potentially have as many as six nuclear weapons. The IAEA chief also said that the North Koreans had the industrial infrastructure to weaponize the plutonium in their possession. His statement came amidst reports that North Korea might be preparing to test a nuclear bomb.

Only a week earlier, the United States and Japan said they were investigating reports that North Korea had test-fired a short-range missile into the Sea of Japan. Public broadcasts from Japan noted that the missile may have flown 62 miles (about 100 kilometers) into the sea. Japanese authorities had been on alert since warnings emerged that North Korea might test a nuclear warhead and following the withdrawal of the North Koreans from multilateral nuclear talks.

Amidst this development, North Korea and the United States indulged in a war of words. United States President George W. Bush called North Korean leader Kim Jung-il "a tyrannical dictator" in his April press conference, while President Kim Jung-il referred to Bush as a "Philistine" and "half baked man." (CountryWatch's Editor does not endorse these characterizations. Editor simply reports that which is within the public record.)

Following a meeting with South Korean officials in June 2005, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il said that Pyongyang might return to international talks related to its nuclear proliferation program. He added that Pyongyang might be prepared to resume the six-party talks which had been suspended a year ago as early as July 2005. Kim Jong-il noted that North Korean participation would be contingent on respectful treatment by the United States as an "equal" dialogue partner. He also hinted at the need for further consultations between Pyongyang and Washington. Despite

these assertions, movement toward a return to multilateral talks were progressing.

In July 2005, ahead of the anticipated resumption of multilateral talks on nuclear weaponry, North Korea called for a peace treaty with the United States. In an official statement, Pyongyang said that in order to resolve the current nuclear crisis, a full treaty was needed to replace the armistice signed at the end of the Korean War in 1953. In effect, a formalization of peace would replace the cease-fire and lead to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Pyongyang has made similar calls previously, and more recently, it has demanded a non-aggression pact with the United States. Washington rejected the idea of a non-aggression pact stating that it would not deal with Pyongyang until its nuclear weapons program was shut down. For its part, Pyongyang accused Washington of hostility. Indeed, North Korea has said its nuclear weaponry is needed as a form of protection against American aggression.

By August 2005, the issue of nuclear proliferation on the Korean peninsula continued to dominate the political landscape. Talks between North Korea and the United States had met with little success, with no narrowing of the gap between those two countries on North Korea's peaceful use of nuclear energy. The United States continued to insist that all of North Korea's nuclear facilities had to be dismantled while North Koreans insisted that they had the right to conduct peaceful nuclear activities. Indeed, North Korean chief delegate Kim Kye-gwan rhetorically asked, "We are not a defeated nation in war, and we have committed no crime, so why should we not be able to conduct peaceful nuclear activities?"

Note: The meeting took place within the context of the resumption of multilateral talks, of which South Korea had been a part. As noted previously, multilateral talks, which began in 2003 following North Korea's 2002 withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, had stalled some time later when North Korea walked away from the negotiating table to the chagrin of the other meeting partners, most especially South Korea. The multilateral talks resumed again in 2005, but with little progress being made by mid-year.

In response to the insistence by the United States that North Korea relinquish its nuclear programs before receiving any concessions, Pyongyang in the first part of September 2005 said it would continue its nuclear development activities. Despite suggestions by United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that Washington was running out of patience with Pyongyang, negotiators in China attempted to form a compromise agreement. In this regard, Beijing proposed a revised draft agreement which affirmed Pyongyang's right to civilian nuclear technology. While there was no immediate feedback from either Washington or Pyongyang on the proposal at the time, Pyongyang had already rejected an offer by the South Korean authorities in Seoul to provide economic aid, security guarantees, diplomatic recognition and energy aid. Instead, Pyongyang steadfastly maintained its requirement for a light-water nuclear reactor for generating power in exchange for dismantling its nuclear weapons program.

On Sept. 19, 2005, North Korea announced that it was relinquishing its nuclear activities and would rejoin the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Pyongyang also agreed to accept inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the nuclear watchdog agency of the United Nations. The announcement of the breakthrough was made by negotiators in Beijing during six-party talks. In exchange for Pyongyang's agreement to stop its nuclear activities, it was reported that the United States had to offer assurances that it would not attack or invade North Korea. The United States also made clear that it had no nuclear weaponry on the Korean peninsula. Wu Dawei, China's vice foreign minister, said, "This is the most important result since the six-party talks started more than two years ago." Left outside the agreement were a number of unresolved issues including the aforementioned matter of Pyongyang's request for a light water nuclear reactor. While the announcement was welcomed, observers warned that implementation of the agreement could result in a host of challenges. Indeed, there was little actual progress reported following announcement of the deal. In fact, a day later, North Korea said it would only comply with the agreement if it was provided with a civilian reactor. Soon thereafter, the United States imposed financial sanctions on North Korean businesses.

The 2006 Nuclear Test and Consequences

In mid-June 2006, reports emerged that North Korea intended to test a weapon that could reach the United States. On June 19, 2006, the Bush administration in the United States said that North Korea had completed the loading of fuel into a long-range ballistic missile. Intelligence sources suggested that the type of missile might be the Taepodong-2 with a firing range of 9,300 miles, however, there was no confirmation on this particular point.

White House spokesman Tony Snow said, "North Korea has imposed a moratorium on launching missiles." Referring to a previous commitment made by North Korea to dismantle its nuclear weapons and stop further development, Snow also said, "We hope it will continue that moratorium and we hope it also will abide by commitments it made." The White House provided little further comment, however, Snow did acknowledge that the United States had held some direct talks with North Korean representatives in New York, presumably via North Korea's United Nations mission.

Several countries warned North Korea that launching a missile would yield undesirable results. Notably, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi advised North Korea against test-firing the missile saying, "Japan has been urging North Korea to stop the attempt to launch a missile. We are making efforts to urge North Korea to act rationally and with self-restraint." He went on to warn,

"If it does not listen to us and fires a missile, we have to consult with the United States and take stern measures." While the actual consequences were not specified, some officials noted that the Japanese leader was referring to a protest to the United Nations Security Council.

For its part, North Korea referred to its missile program for the first time on June 19, 2006. Absent from its reference, however, was any mention of intent to actually perform the missile test. Monitoring of North Korean state media led to reports that an editorial had been cited in which the North declared its right to own a missile that could "immediately halt the United States' reckless aerial espionage activity." The citation was believed to have been a reference to allegations regarding United States spy planes in Korean territory.

An actual missile test would mark North Korea's first major launch since 1998 when it sent a missile over Japanese territory. Since then, Pyongyang has stood by a self-imposed test moratorium even as it separately developed a nuclear weapons program. More recently, North Korea said that it required a nuclear weapons program as well as a delivery system for the purpose of countering a potential invasion by the United States.

In the early hours of July 5, 2006, North Korea test-fired a number of missiles. Most of the missiles were of the short-range variety. Among those fired, however, was also the Taepodong-2 long-range missile, which experts said has a possible range of 2,190 to 2,690 miles (3,500 to 4,300 kilometers). All of the short-range missiles fell safely into the Sea of Japan (also known as the East Sea by Koreans). The first of the missiles fell into the sea less than 400 miles (approximately 600 kilometers) from the Japanese mainland. The Taepodong-2 long-range missile, which has the capacity to reach Alaska in the United States, crashed approximately 40 seconds after it was launched. This outcome did little to alleviate anxieties among the international community about North Korea's latest move.

In response, the United Nations Security Council said that it would convene an emergency meeting later in the day to consider the missile tests. The closed session meeting was requested by Kenzo Oshima, Japan's ambassador to the United Nations.

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe condemned the move by North Korea saying, "This is a grave problem in terms of peace and stability not only of Japan but also of international society." As a result, Japan announced that it was prohibiting the entry of officials, chartered flights and ferries from North Korea. Also, Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Aso warned that Tokyo was now considering the imposition of economic sanctions on North Korea.

The last time North Korea test-fired a long-range missile was 1998 when it launched the Taepondong-1 over Japan. Then, in 2002, North Korea forged a concord with Japan by which both parties agreed to a moratorium on missile tests. It was an agreement that was reaffirmed in 2004, but which has now been effectively abrogated as a result of North Korea's latest actions.

In South Korea, the government in Seoul convened an emergency cabinet meeting and placed its military on high alert.

China expressed strong concern about North Korea's actions and called on the international community to stay calm.

The United States Department of State reacted to the situation by characterizing the launch of the Taepodong-2 as a "provocative" and attention-seeking act. White House press secretary, Tony Snow, said that President George W. Bush was consulting with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on the matter. Secretary Rice called on North Korea to return to the multilateral discussion table.

For its part, North Korea confirmed that it had test-fired a series of missiles and that further missile tests would be launched. North Korean officials also warned that they would react strongly to punitive pressures from the international community. Furthermore, North Korea defiantly defended its right to launch the missiles, saying that it was a matter of national sovereignty. That said, geopolitical analysts observed that North Korea's latest moves may have been made for strategic reasons rather than simply as an act of national sovereignty.

North Korea may well have decided to launch the missiles in order to draw attention to its demands regarding its nuclear program. Multilateral negotiations (mentioned above) have seen little progress since the talks stalled in 2005. As well, relations between Pyongyang and Washington D.C. have remained poor.

Tensions between the United States and North Korea may well have factored into the decision by Pyongyang to launch the missiles. Indeed, two days prior on July 3, 2006, North Korea warned that it would carry out an "annihilating" nuclear strike if its atomic facilities were pre-emptively hit by the United States. While the United States dismissed the threat by North Korea as hypothetical, North Korea's ominous warning nonetheless evoked the notion of brinkmanship. As intimated above, experts have often surmised that the North Koreans tend to stake out radical stances in order to push for engagement.

Rather than engagement, however, North Korea was more likely to face international action. In fact, Japan was said to be drafting a resolution in response to its decision to test-fire several missiles, including the long-range Taepodong-2 variety.

While most of the members of the international community were unified in their condemnation of the test-firing of the missiles by North Korea, not everyone was in agreement about how to respond. A draft resolution by Japan was backed by the United States and the United Kingdom but did not receive unanimous support.

The reticence among some countries to support the Japanese draft was likely due to some of its particular provisions. The Japanese draft resolution's less controversial elements included a demand that countries prevent the transfer of resources and technology that could help with the development of North Korea's missile program. But the draft also characterized North Korea as a "threat to international peace and security" and invoked Chapter Seven of the United Nations charter. Resolutions crafted under the aegis of Chapter Seven are legally binding and have the authority to impose not only economic sanctions, but also military action.

China and Russia both said that they opposed punitive measures, preferring the route of diplomacy instead. China said that a statement condemning the missiles tests would be appropriate while sanctions would not. China also said that the Japanese draft was an "over-reaction" and warned that it would "increase tension." China was playing host during a visit from North Korean officials in July 2006. During that visit, Chinese President Hu Jintao made clear that China was opposed to any actions that might "worsen the situation on the Korean peninsula." For his part, Russian President Vladimir Putin also warned that "common sense" should not be abandoned. He pointed to the fact that North Korea's current level of technology would make it impossible for a missile with a range of around 3,700 miles (6,000 kilometers) to be constructed. As well, South Korea reacted with anxiety to the Japanese proposal, even going so far as to accuse Japan of recklessness.

The positions taken by Russia and China, both of whom hold veto power at the United Nations Security Council, suggested that they would wield that influence to oppose any moves they deemed to be unconstructive or inflammatory. Instead it was believed that both countries would be more likely to back a non-binding statement by the Security Council, which demanded that North Korea cease the development and testing of ballistic missiles. It was a proposal not likely to be supported by the United Kingdom and United States because of its lack of legal accountability.

Nevertheless, diplomatic efforts continued in the hopes that a solution might be presented. To this end, the members of the Security Council agreed to postpone voting on strong sanctions until China had been given an opportunity to broker some sort of resolution to the crisis. July 2006 also saw United States envoy to North Korea, Christopher Hill, convening talks in Beijing, while a North Korean delegation was visiting Seoul.

In mid-July 2006, the United Nations condemned North Korea for carrying out a series of missile tests earlier in the month. The United Nations Security Council also issued a resolution demanding that North Korea cease activities related to its ballistic missile program and prohibiting all United Nations member states from supplying that country with any weapons-related materials. The resolution passed unanimously after a reference to Chapter Seven of the United Nations Charter was removed. That reference would authorize sanctions and military action and would be legally binding. Its removal ensured that there would be complete support from among Security Council

members.

Both the United States and the United Kingdom expressed approval for the strong message enshrined in the resolution. Japan's Foreign Minister, Taro Aso, applauded the Security Council for its quick response. South Korea called on the North to issue a moratorium on missile tests and return to the multilateral negotiating table. For its part, however, North Korea angrily rejected the resolution and vowed to further develop its military arsenal as a means to "bolster its war deterrent." North Korea also characterized the resolution as being the result of hostile United States policy and vowed not to be bound by it.

In the first week of October 2006, North Korea said that it intended to test a nuclear weapon. In response, the United Nations Security Council issued a statement noting that a nuclear test would "jeopardize peace, stability and security in the region and beyond" and "bring universal condemnation by the international community."

A week after issuing its threat and receiving the aforementioned warning from the United Nations, North Korea announced on October 9, 2006 that it had indeed conducted its first nuclear weapons test. North Korea's state-controlled news agency declared, "The nuclear test is a historic event that brought happiness to our military and people." The message in the state-controlled media also went on to assert that the nuclear test would, "contribute to maintaining peace and stability in the Korean peninsula and surrounding region" -- a diametrically opposed view to the perspective depicted by the United Nations. The state-controlled news agency also said that the successful nuclear test, which utilized local technology, had taken place at an underground facility and had not resulted in any radiation leaks.

While there was no immediate verification of North Korea's claim, officials from South Korea said that an explosion measuring 3.5 on the Richter scale had been detected and appeared to have come from the north-eastern part of North Korea. The South Korean news agency, Yonhap, suggested that the explosion may have occurred in an area called Gilju in North Korea's Hamgyong province. Whether or not the explosion was derived from an actual nuclear event, however, was yet to be determined.

The apparent test took place in defiance of warnings by the international community not to go through with the test. In response, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun scheduled an emergency meeting of his National Security Council. The meeting was convened to address the serious shift in the security scenario on the Korean peninsula. Only days before, South Korean troops fired warning shots at North Korean soldiers when they crossed into the demilitarized zone. It was not clear whether the North Koreans' actions were calculated or accidental. Regardless, they were emblematic of the increasing climate of tension on the Korean peninsula, which reached an unprecedented high following the apparent nuclear test.

Meanwhile, Japan's new head of government, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, was expected to discuss the matter with his South Korean counterpart in Seoul. Prime Minister Abe and Chinese Premier Hu Jintao had previously met in Beijing to discuss regional concerns and had jointly issued their opposition to the notion of a nuclear test by North Korea. Clearly, their joint statement went unheeded by Pyongyang.

Some analysts have surmised that Pyongyang's actions of this period -- the missile tests in July and this nuclear test three months later -- may be due to feelings that it has nothing to lose. That is to say, as noted above North Korea said in 2005 that it was willing to give up its nuclear activities, and a day later said it would only do so if it was provided with a civilian reactor. At that time, the United States imposed financial sanctions on North Korean businesses. Thus, it has been theorized that North Korea feels as if it has no choice but to "up the ante" in order to have its interests considered.

Regardless of motivation, the effects of the nuclear test augured negatively. Apart from destabilizing the region, analysts warned that it could potentially halt any progress on reconciliation between the two Koreas, and it could well spark an arms race.

A day later, attention shifted to the consequences of North Korea's claim that it carried out a nuclear test. In particular, the United Nations Security Council was debating what action should be taken. At issue was a proposal by the United States that would entail the imposition of strict sanctions against North Korea. That 13-point draft resolution called for the sanctions to be implemented under the aegis of Chapter Seven of the United Nations Charter, which would make

the conditions mandatory and enforceable via military means. Those sanctions would include a complete prohibition of military trade and careful inspection of all cargo departing and entering North Korea. Underscoring this hardline stance, John Bolton, the United States ambassador to the United Nations, said that his country would not rule out force although it hoped to resolve the matter through diplomacy.

It was yet to be seen if such a course of action would be acceptable to other United Nations Security Council members. Despite its alliance with North Korea, China called for punitive action in the face of the apparent nuclear test. That said, China made it clear that it would not support the use of force. Russia's position very much reflected that of China. In this way, the Chapter Seven elements within the United States draft resolution promised to be a obstacle to any agreement forged within the United Nations Security Council. With China and Russia unlikely to vote for the resolution in its original form, the United States revised the text, essentially expunging the threat of imminent military action. A vote was expected in the United Nations Security Council on October 14, 2006.

The draft document by the United States soon underwent revisions to accommodate the reservations of China and Russia. With adjustments made, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 1718 on October 14, 2006. The resolution called for the inspections on cargo going to and from North Korea to search for weapons, a ban on the sale or transfer of materials related to North Korea's unconventional weapons program, and a freeze on the transfer of funds connected with North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Absent from Resolution 1718 was the Chapter Seven [of the United Nations charter] provision, which would enforce the sanctions via military force.

Even though the resolution was approved by the United Nations Security Council and welcomed by the international community, total agreement on the matter of North Korea remained distant. China announced that it retained "reservations" about the notion of cargo inspections while Russia said that it did not expect the sanctions to be imposed indefinitely. At issue for both China and Russia has been their shared concern that cargo inspections could spark naval confrontations with North Korean shipping vessels, thus spurring further regional destabilization.

Meanwhile, South Korea welcomed the new sanctions and called on North Korea to return to the negotiating table for multilateral talks. Japan also welcomed the new sanctions, which came days after the new administration of Shinzo Abe had instituted unilateral sanctions against North Korea, essentially banning all North Korean imports and preventing North Korean vessels from entering Japanese waters. For his part, United States President George W. Bush applauded the United Nations for taking "swift and tough" measures against North Korea, in order to keep the Korean Peninsula secure.

As expected, the North Korean government in Pyongyang had a different view. It decried

Resolution 1718, characterized the membership of the United Nations Security Council as "gangsters," and warned that subsequent pressure by the United States would be regarded as "a declaration of war."

In the aftermath of North Korea's apparent nuclear test, diplomatic efforts were underway to resolve the situation and to return all parties to the negotiating table for talks. At issue was the question of whether or not North Korea might defy the will of the international community again and test another nuclear device.

There were media reports suggesting that the North Korean government was moving in a direction regarded as more amenable to the international community. Indeed, some reports intimated that the leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-il, expressed regret for the nuclear test. Other reports indicated that Kim Jong-il had given assurances to Chinese envoy, Tang Jiaxuan, that there would be no further nuclear tests. Kyodo, the Japanese news agency, even reported that the North Korean leader said that he wished to honor the 1992 declaration, which aimed at ending nuclear proliferation on the Korean peninsula.

The United States, however, did not quickly accept this version of events. On her return trip from her Asian tour, United States Secretary of State , Condoleezza Rice, said that she knew nothing about these developments and expressed the view that North Korea demonstrated little desire to resolve the matter. According to British media (BBC), Rice said, "Tang did not tell me that Kim Jong-il either apologized for the test or said that he would not ever test again." She went on the note, "The Chinese did not, in a fairly thorough briefing to me, say anything about an apology. The North Koreans, I think, would like to see an escalation of the tension."

Editor's Note: The nuclear test and earlier missile tests intensified the widely-held view that North Korea was a threat to global security. Moreover, these moves by North Korea effectively served to further isolate the country and confirm its pariah status within the international community.

A Return to Diplomacy? Late 2006-2007

December 2006 marked the resumption of multilateral talks regarding North Korea's controversial nuclear program. North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the United States indicated their return to the negotiating table after a year-long hiatus. The re-opening of dialogue came a few months after North Korea caused global anxiety when it tested a nuclear weapon. That incident resulted in international condemnation, and ultimately prompted the imposition of sanctions against North Korea by the United Nations.

While the news of the recommencement of six-party talks was welcomed, there was also a pervasive sense of caution. Experts conveyed limited optimism about the prospects of forging a resolution amenable to all parties. Indeed, the United States has consistently expressed vociferous opposition to the notion of North Korea being a nuclear power, while North Korea has been equally adamant about its need for nuclear weapons. These two absolutist positions have resulted in an impasse.

In preliminary talks with his Chinese and South Korean cohorts in the Chinese capital of Beijing, United States Envoy Christopher Hill expressly stated that he believed Pyongyang had a clear choice to make. To this end, he said, "We can either go forward on a diplomatic track or you have to go to a much more difficult track. That is a track that involves sanctions and I think ultimately will really be very harmful to the economy."

This view from Washington, however, was not likely to resonate particularly well with Pyongyang. First, North Korean Envoy Kim Kye-gwan made it clear that his country required nuclear weaponry for deterrent purposes. Second, he expressed the view that the problem was not rooted in North Korea's nuclear program itself, but rather, it stemmed from the hostile stance of the United States toward North Korea. He said, "The biggest problem is that the United States needs to change its hostile policy against North Korea. When they change their policy from a hostile stance to one of peaceful co-existence, the problem can be resolved."

The clear disconnection between the two perspectives on the eve of the resumption of multilateral talks augured grave difficulties during the negotiating process. In fact, it suggested that concurrence was not likely to be found easily. Nevertheless, the return of all parties to the table for dialogue presented a new opportunity to find creative solutions. For example, despite the hardline positions referenced above, there have been some suggestions that the United States might be willing to consider easing the financial component of the existing sanctions. Such a move could pave the way for decreased intransigence by North Korea. As well, there were hopes that an earlier offer by the United States of a security guarantee could be used as the foundation for forthcoming negotiations. That arrangement offered North Korea a security guarantee in exchange for the cessation of its nuclear program. In actuality, the December 2006 talks ended inconclusively.

A month later in January 2007, it was announced that six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program would resume. In the background of such developments was the aforementioned testing of a nuclear device by North Korea in the fall of 2006. That action did little to bolster Pyongyang's case for its right to a nuclear program, and overshadowed prevailing hopes that North Korea might abandon its nuclear ambitions and rejoin the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in exchange for economic aid and security guarantees.

The situation was made more complex as a result of a financial dispute involving North Korea and the United States (U.S). At issue was the 2005 decision by the U.S. to take action against a private bank in the Chinese domain of Macao on the basis of North Korean money laundering. Fearing consequences of the same sort, several other banks refrained from doing business with North Korea as well. Now with the international community urging progress on the nuclear issue, North Korea was hoping to link resolution of the financial dispute with whatever agreement could be forged.

By February 2007, the multilateral discussions commenced in China between all six parties -- North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, the United States, and Russia. Progress was quickly made during the six-party talks in Beijing when North Korea agreed to move closer toward the position of disarmament. Of particular interest was an agreement reportedly requiring Pyongyang to shut down its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon over the course of the ensuing months, in lieu of aid, such as fuel oil provided by the United States and South Korea. The draft agreement, which had been drafted by Chinese, also called for the return of international inspectors to North Korea.

No concurrence was yet forged days after talks began. Nevertheless, spokespersons from the United States and North Korea refrained from harsh rhetoric, and instead commented on the work yet to be accomplished. Notably, United States delegate, Christopher Hill, struck a note of cautious optimism saying in an interview with Agence France Presse, "I think we have managed to get through what we thought were tough issues but nothing is agreed until everything is agreed so we must be very cautious." Along a similar vein, North Korean delegate, Kim Kye-gwan, said "There are still differences on a series of issues in the overall talks, so we will try to work them out."

The shift in tone on the parts of both the United States and North Korea demonstrated a sharp contrast to dynamics of the previous several years. The United States demonstrated greater willingness for dialogue during meetings in Berlin, which preceded the Beijing multilateral talks. Meanwhile, North Korea has been facing a massive food crisis in the winter months -- a scenario that may have also contributed to the more productive dynamics in 2007.

By February 13, 2007, it was announced that concurrence had been reached. As noted above, North Korea agreed to shut down its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon within 60 days in exchange for 50,000 tonnes of fuel oil or economic aid of equal value, with 950,000 tonnes of fuel oil or equivalent received after further disarmament steps are taken. As well, both Japan and the United States agreed to discuss the possibility of normalizing ties with North Korea -- something that Pyongyang has been seeking for some time. The United States also said that it would work with North Korea to resolve the banking dispute discussed above, and it would consider the prospects of removing North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

United States President George W. Bush said that the deal represented "the best opportunity to use diplomacy to address North Korea's nuclear programs." In his official statement, he also stated that the agreement was emblematic of "the common commitment of the participants to a Korean Peninsula that is free of nuclear weapons."

Yet to be seen was whether or not the agreement would be ratified by all six parties, and also whether or not North Korea would fully comply with the provisions of the deal. For example, the state news agency of North Korea issued a report referring to the "temporary" suspension of nuclear activities, rather than enduring disarmament. United States negotiator, Christopher Hill, warned that the resumption of nuclear activities in the future would be a clear violation of the agreement.

In the third week of June 2007, North Korea reportedly agreed to shut down its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon and, then, disable its nuclear facilities. North Korea also noted that it was inviting International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors to return to North Korea to monitor the closure of its nuclear program and facilities. To that end, IAEA inspectors were expected to visit North Korea on June 26, 2007, for the first time since their dismissal from that country in 2002.

These announcements came months after the Chinese drafted an agreement in February 2007 (as noted above), in which the closure of the reactor at Yongbyon would be secured, in lieu of heavy fuel oil that would be secured by other countries (noted below) participating in the multilateral nuclear disarmament talks. The total amount of fuel oil -- one million metric tons -- appeared to more substantial than the original quantity discussed earlier in the year under the Chinese-brokered plan. In addition, diplomatic recognition and humanitarian aid benefits were included in the deal. Also included in the arrangement was the untangling of aforementioned financial dispute. With the deal now moving forward, North Korea said that it would begin the process of shutting down

operations at Yongbyon within weeks, pending receipt of the frozen funds. Russia, which worked to facilitate the complex transfer, said that the money was in the process of being delivered.

North Korea characterized talks with United States nuclear envoy, Christopher Hill, on these matter as being both "comprehensive and productive." Hill responded to the developments positively but noted that the closure of the reactor at Yongbyon was only the start of an ongoing process, and would not solve all the problems at hand. Hill also said that a new round of six-party disarmament talks, which has included North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the United States, would commence in July 2007.

In mid-July 2007, North Korea said that it shut down its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. A team of inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was monitoring the situation at Yongbyon in order to verify Pyongyang's claim. Nevertheless, the announcement was welcomed by the countries of the West, the wider world, and particularly by the countries participating in multilateral talks with North Korea aimed at disarmament.

In October 2007, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun and the North Korea's leader Kim Jong-il signed a joint declaration calling for a permanent peace agreement on the Korean Peninsula. The eight-point declaration set forth an agenda for international dialogue aimed at crafting a treaty, which would replace the existing armistice that brought an end to the Korean War that took place from 1950 to 1953. The two Korean leaders signed the declaration following a historic summit in Pyongyang and issued the following statement, "The South and North share the view that they should end the current armistice system and build up a permanent peace system."

The declaration also came on the heels of a significant announcement by North Korea that it would end its nuclear ambitions. To that end, Pyongyang formally agreed to a timetable for the disabling of its nuclear facilities. Pyongyang also agreed to disclose details about its nuclear program by the close of 2007. North Korea has additionally been scheduled to surrender its stockpile of nuclear weaponry in 2008.

A Return to Defiance and Provocation 2008 - 2009

In March 2008, North Korea was reported to have test fired several short range missiles from its western coast into the Yellow Sea. The Yonhap news agency reported that the missiles were Russian-designed Styx ship-to-ship missiles with a range of 29 miles or 46 kilometers. For its part, the South Korean government dismissed the missile tests by characterizing them as "ordinary military training." But the United States responded to this development by noting that it was "not constructive." Moreover, a spokesperson for the United States government called on Pyongyang to "focus on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula."

In July 2008, a South Korean woman was shot to death by a North Korean soldier. North Korean authorities said that the 53-year old woman strayed from the special tourism zone in the mountains into a restricted area of the Mount Kumgang resort. More than one million South Korean visitors have traveled to the resort, which is located in a strategic nazar area, in the last decade without any such incident occurring. South Korean authorities responded by suspending cross-border trips, pending an investigation. Because cross-border tourism trips have been the fulcrum of economic and cultural cooperation in the last decade, the incident had the potential to adversely affect cross-border relations. It was viewed as a setback at a time when South Korean President Lee Myung-bak has advocated fresh dialogue with North Korea.

In September 2008 when North Korean leader Kim Jong-il failed to appear at a military parade marking the 60th anniversary of the founding of his country, and then failed to attend the annual Chuseok festival, speculation arose about the state of his health. North Korea denied South Korean claims that Kim Jong-il was suffering from a stroke, characterizing the suggestion as "worthless." A newspaper in Japan surmised that the North Korean leader was suffering from seizures in recent months and was unable to lead as a result. As with the South Korean claim, the North Korea rejected any suggestion that its leader is unwell and blamed the foreign media for carrying out a conspiracy. Nevertheless, the question of Kim Jong-il's health sparked questions about leadership succession in nuclear North Korea. There has been no public announcement about a possible successor to Kim Jong-il and, as such, there were now anxieties about a possible power vacuum.

Meanwhile, despite Kim Jong-il's absence on the national -- and international -- scene, geopolitical troubles resurfaced when Pyongyang indicated that it would start reconstituting its main nuclear facility at Yongbyon in protest of the United States' decision to keep it on a list of state sponsors of terrorism. The development would halt -- and even reverse -- much of the diplomatic work done in recent years. That work culminated in the 2007 agreement calling for Pyongyang to relinquish its nuclear ambitions in return for humanitarian aid and diplomatic concessions.

Pyongyang finally handed over the details relating to its nuclear program in July 2008 and destroyed its main cooling tower as a sign of its commitment to the "disarmament for aid" deal. Pyongyang then expected that North Korea would be dropped from the United States' terrorism "black list." However, lack of progress on that front has led to Pyongyang's belief that the United States has not fulfilled a key component of the "disarmament for aid" agreement, hence its decision to restart nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. For its part, the United States has said that North Korea would remain on its list of state sponsors of terrorism until North Korea's disarmament process is fully verified.

October 2008 saw the United States move to remove North Korea from its list of state-sponsors of terrorism. The development came after multilateral talks between North Korea, the United States, China, South Korea, Russia and Japan and appeared to end some dissonance that had been

brewing in recent months, despite multilateral concurrence on North Korean disarmament.

The United States' decision to move in the direction of removing North Korea from the "black list" suggested that progress had been made on the verification process. Indeed, a spokesperson for North Korea's foreign ministry confirmed that Pyongyang would now resume disabling its nuclear facilities and allow international monitors access in order for the verification process to take place. The spokesperson was reported to have said: "We welcome the United States' implementation of its duty to remove us from the list of states sponsoring terrorism. We have decided to resume the disabling of nuclear facilities in Yongbyon and to allow United States and International Atomic Energy Agency monitors to carry out their work again."

The situation was different some months later. The start of 2009 was marked on the Korean peninsula by devolving relations between Pyongyang and Seoul. At issue has been the more hard-line approach taken by South Korea's President Lee Myung-Bak in the last year since coming to power. Significantly, the South Korean president reversed the "sunshine" policy bestowed aid to North Korea. President Lee said that economic assistance would now be dependent on North Korea's willingness to completely end its nuclear weapons program.

North Korea responded with outrage at the change. In January 2009, North Korea announced that it had enough plutonium stocks to produce four or five nuclear weapons. The third week of January 2009 saw North Korea warn South Korea that its "confrontational" policies could lead to retaliation by the nuclear power. Military authorities in Pyongyang told Seoul that it would bolster its "nuclear deterrent force" in the face of perceived threats. In response, South Korean authorities called for amplified troop strength. At the start of February 2009, it was reported that North Korea was preparing to test-fire the long-range Taepodong-2 missile. Then, by mid-month, North Korea was declaring its right to launch a satellite as part of its space program. Since North Korea has, in the past, characterized rocket launches in similar terms, it was believed that the term "space program" was associated with the anticipated missile launch.

On the other side of the equation, South Korea's President Lee Myung-Bak has eschewed beginning negotiations from too-conciliatory a stance, cautioning previous South Korean leaders had gone down that path with no substantial end result to show for those efforts. That said, the South Korean president did not foreclose re-entering peace talks with the North. To that end, he said, in a national radio address "I am very aware there are people who are concerned about the recent series of North Korean threats. But you do not need to worry too much. The government is ready to sit down with North Korea at any time and resolve every issue."

Multilateral talks aimed at halting North Korea's nuclear ambitions in exchange for aid saw some progress in recent years, however, the diplomatic efforts have slowed more recently. Indeed, the stance by the new South Korean leader, which was crafted by his nominee for Unification Minister, Hyun In-taek, appears to have brought diplomacy to a halt. In fact, North Korea has

threatened to end all talks with the South if Hyun was confirmed for the job.

Amidst this growing imbroglio, some analysts have said that efforts by the Obama administration in the United States could potentially thaw increasingly cold relations between the two Koreas. Obama's Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was scheduled to travel to Asia in mid-February 2009.

Before arriving in Asia on her first overseas trip, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned North Korea against any "provocative action and unhelpful rhetoric." En route to Asia, Clinton said that North Korea had to adhere to its commitments to dismantle its nuclear programs. She said, "The North Koreans have already agreed to dismantling...We expect them to fulfill the obligations that they entered into."

But the United States' top diplomat was also critical of the Bush administration for abandoning the 1994 agreement with North Korea, which was forged during the presidency of Bill Clinton. The 1994 framework, which called for North Korea to give up its weapons program, collapsed when the Bush administration accused Pyongyang of maintaining a parallel (secondary) enriched uranium program. Clinton suggested that Pyongyang's decision to restart its nuclear program may have been partially due to the Bush administration's intemperate accusations of North Korea.

Clinton was confronted with a significant challenge on the trip to Asia, and particularly, the Korean peninsula. Amidst devolving relations between Pyongyang and Seoul, North Korea was hinting that it was preparing to test-fire the long-range Taepodong-2 missile, which has been reported to be capable of reaching Alaska from the north-eastern coast of North Korea. Accordingly, she was tasked with taking a strong positions on, first, the missile test, and second, on North Korea's nuclear ambitions, while also working to reinvigorate the diplomatic process in the region and improving relations between Pyongyang and Washington.

To these ends, Clinton warned that relations between her country and North Korea were unlikely to improve unless Pyongyang was willing to engage in dialogue with Seoul. Clinton, who was speaking in the South Korean capital, took a sharp tone as she called on North Korea to bring an end to its nuclear ambitions, consistent with the provisions of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718. She also characterized the notion of a missile test as "provocative." Nevertheless, Clinton made clear that diplomacy was the central focus of her objectives by announcing a special envoy to North Korea. Clinton aimed former Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, who served in South Korea from 1997 to 2000, to that role.

By March 2009, North Korea was threatening to go to war with any entity that tried to shoot down the (aforementioned) satellite it intended to launch. A statement by the North Korean military read, "We will retaliate any act of intercepting our satellite for peaceful purposes with prompt counter-strikes by the most powerful military means." It also included the following assertion: "Shooting our satellite for peaceful purposes will precisely mean a war."

In a presumed effort to augment its warning, North Korea said its military was placed on full combat alert. This warning came at a time when scheduled joint military exercises between South Korea and the United States were about to commence.

The 2009 Nuclear Test, Missile Tests, and Consequences

In mid-March 2009, according to the International Maritime Organization, North Korea set a date to execute its space launch between April 4-8, 2009.

Meanwhile, the newly-appointed United States envoy to North Korea, Stephen Bosworth, who was in Asia to revitalize six-party denuclearization talks, noted that a launch by North Korea would be "ill advised." As well, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned that if Pyongyang went ahead with the launch, there were "a range of options" that could be taken, including action by the United Nations Security Council. Of significance was a clear effort not to ratchet tensions any higher as exemplified by Clinton's acknowledgement that six-party denuclearization talks would not be affected.

In early April 2009, North Korea said that its attempt to launch a satellite into orbit ended in failure with parts of the rocket landing in the Pacific Ocean. But such an end did little to quell the international outcry. Throughout, the United States and South Korea have said that North Korea's claim of launching a satellite in space was just a cover for an actual missile test of the Taepodong-2. Accordingly, they have urged the United Nations Security Council to issue a strong response at an impending emergency session, which was called by Japan. The United States, South Korea and Japan regard the launch to be an abrogation of United Nations Security Resolution 1718, which in 2006 banned North Korea from ballistic missile activity. On the other side of the equation, China and Russia have advocated a restrained and measured response.

Appearing in public for his first major official appearance since 2008, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il attended a parliamentary session in April 2009 in which he was re-elected as the country's leader. His arrival in the Supreme People's Assembly was met with a standing ovation. Visibly thinner than he was in the latter part of 2008, there was speculation that his health -- possibly due to a stroke -- may have been at risk. But ahead of the parliamentary vote, authorities began a public relations campaign of sorts in which Kim Jong-il was shown on video touring farms and factories across the country. Indeed, there was even some suggestion that the controversial rocket launch that took place days earlier may have been part of the campaign orchestrated to show Kim Jong-il in control of the country. Motive aside, the matter became the subject of debate at the United Nations Security Council where member states were debating what action -- if any -- should be taken against North Korea.

Late in April 2009, North Korea announced that it was withdrawing from multilateral disarmament talks and restarting its operations at the Yongbyon nuclear plant. This decision to withdraw from the negotiating table and resume reprocessing spent fuel rods came after the United Nations (UN) Security Council decided to impose sanctions on three North Korean companies. That decision by the UN Security Council was reached in the aftermath of a controversial missile launch. North Korea maintained that it had simply launched a satellite in space and so characterized the international reaction as "a wanton violation of the UN charter." In the face of North Korean defiance, the United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has called on North Korea to return to its previous agreement to end its nuclear program on the Korean peninsula.

On May 25, 2009, North Korea said it had successfully conducted an underground nuclear test. North Korea said this test contained more explosive power than an earlier nuclear test conducted in 2006.

Several independent entities confirmed that a powerful explosion had been registered, resulting in the conclusion that it was caused by the nuclear test. Indeed, the United States Geological Survey said that a 4.7 magnitude seismic tremor was detected underground and indicated a nuclear explosion of some kind. As well, the Russian Defense Ministry was also reported to have said it detected the explosion. The actual location of the testing was unknown but South Korea noted that a seismic tremor had been detected in the north-eastern part of the country close to Kilju. This was the area where North Korea's first nuclear test had been conducted.

Geopolitical analysts were trying to determine why North Korea had chosen to move from negotiations to a clearly confrontational stance. Two years earlier, North Korea agreed to close its nuclear facility at Yongbyong and comply with international monitoring of its nuclear assets. In exchange, it was to be the recipient of a generous aid package. Later, however, North Korea withdrew from long-running multilateral negotiations and stopped inspectors from monitoring progress related to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

There was some speculation that after a woeful harvest -- with up to a quarter of the North Korean population in desperate need of food aid, according to the World Food Programme -- Pyongyang may have been trying to divert attention from this internal crisis. There was also some suggestion that the domestic worries may have prompted an internal power struggle, which ultimately may have spurred the move by hard-liners within the regime. Specifically, a power struggle stemming from the line of succession, with party loyalists backing Kim Jong-il's son, and the military opposing this move, may have led to the extroversion of military might. Yet another theory centered on the notion that Pyongyang has a history of provocation ahead of conciliation at the negotiating table.

For its part, Pyongyang appeared to indicate its motive via a communique announced on state radio, which asserted that the underground nuclear testing had been "successfully conducted... as

part of measures to enhance the Republic's self-defensive nuclear deterrent in all directions.” The statement went on to note that the test was intended to "contribute to safeguard the sovereignty of the country and the nation and socialism.” Pyongyang also offered assurances that the underground nuclear testing had ensued in a safe manner with advanced technology.

International news agencies reported that in addition to the underground nuclear test, North Korea also test-fired two short-range missiles. There were reports that the test firing of these missiles was aimed at disrupting the ability of United States’ surveillance of the nuclear testing.

The international community reacted with outrage and condemnation to these collective actions, which occurred just a month after North Korea test fired a long-range missile capable of reaching Asia as well as parts of the United States.

Crisis talks were convened by Japan and South Korea respectively. A spokesman for South Korean President Lee Myung-bak said that North Korea’s decision to conduct nuclear testing was a "grave challenge" to international non-proliferation efforts. Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Takeo Kawamura deemed the path embarked on by North as "unacceptable."

United States President Barack Obama called the action by North Korea a threat to international peace and stability. He warned, “The danger posed by North Korea's threatening activities warrants action by the international community.” The American president observed that North Korea is "not only deepening its own isolation, it's also inviting stronger international pressure.”

United Kingdom Prime Minister Gordon Brown said North Korea’s nuclear activities "undermine prospects for peace on the Korean peninsula."

One of North Korea’s closest allies, China, joined the wider international realm in decrying the nuclear testing. The Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement that read: "China expresses a resolute protest against new nuclear weapons tests carried out by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in defiance of the objections voiced by the world community.” The Chinese government also demanded that North Korea to honor its obligations related to denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. At the wider level China called for peaceful and calm dialogue to resolve the burgeoning crisis.

Another of North Korea’s closest allies, Russia, closed ranks with Western powers in denouncing North Korea’s actions. The chairman of the State Duma Defense Committee, Viktor Zavarzin, echoed the words of United States President Obama. Zavarzin said, "The actions of the North Korean leadership can be described as threatening international peace and security. The whole world community should be involved in resolving this problem, in particular within the framework of the UN Security Council.”

Russia, which was at the helm of the rotating presidency, called for an emergency session of the

United Nations (UN) Security Council, noting that North Korea had violated UN Security Council Resolution 1718.

In fact, the Russian Foreign Ministry categorically rebuked North Korea's actions in a statement that read: "We cannot describe the North Korean move other than as a breach of UN Security Council resolution 1718, which prohibits Pyongyang from carrying out nuclear tests." The statement continued, "The North Korean nuclear test has a serious impact on international efforts aiming to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and breaches the international regime provided by the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty."

Indeed, UN Security Council Resolution 1718 exists in tandem with Article 41 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter and compels compliance by all member states. A nuclear test would be an unassailable violation of UN Security Resolution 1718, which itself imposed sanctions in North Korea after it conducted a previous test in 2006.

Not surprisingly, the UN Security Council rapidly reacted with a strenuous statement of condemnation, registering North Korea's contravention of the resolution, demanding that North Korea return to multilateral talks aimed at denuclearization, and reminding all member states that they must comply with sanctions imposed on North Korea. The UN Security Council also made clear that further action, in the form of a new resolution with stronger measures, was in the offing.

After the emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, Vitaly Churkin -- Russian envoy to the UN and the current president of the body -- made clear that work on the new resolution would start immediately. He said, "The members of the Security Council have decided to start work immediately on a Security Council resolution on this matter, in accordance with the Security Council's responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations."

Susan Rice, United States Ambassador to the UN, also said that the formulation of a new resolution with more stringent measures would commence right away. Rice said, "The US thinks that this is a grave violation of international law and a threat to regional and international peace and security. And therefore the United States will seek a strong resolution with strong measures."

On May 27, 2009, the North Korean military announced it was abandoning the armistice that brought an end to Korean War. The North Korean military said the action was being taken in response to South Korea's decision to participate in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). North Korea said that South Korea's decision to join PSI -- a United States-led effort to patrol the oceans in search of nuclear weapons -- was tantamount to a "declaration of war" and promised military action if its shipping vessels were intercepted. In another development, South Korean media reported that steam had been observed emanating from North Korea's nuclear plant at Yongbyon -- a sign indicating North Korea had decided to recommence the manufacture of weapons-grade plutonium.

By the end of the month, North Korea had fired a total of six short-range missiles and United States military officials warned that further missile launches were likely in the works. Military officials in Washington D.C. said that satellite photographs indicated activity at a facility from which North Korea has in the past fired long-range missiles. Meanwhile, with the UN Security Council contemplating action in response to North Korea's nuclear test days earlier, Pyongyang warned that it could take "self defense" actions if sanctions were imposed.

In the first week of June 2009, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that North Korea could well be reinstated on her country's list of countries viewed as sponsors of terrorism. With some politicians in the United States calling for such a response, the country's top diplomat said, "Well, we're going to look at it. There's a process for it. Obviously we would want to see recent evidence of their support for international terrorism."

North Korea was removed from the terror list in October 2008 when it was compliant with a denuclearization agreement brokered via multilateral talks. But North Korea's recent decisions to pursue nuclear activities, manifest most blatantly in an underground nuclear test, as well as a volley of short-range missile tests, have rendered that agreement functionally void. Secretary of State Clinton observed, "Obviously they were taken off of the list for a purpose and that purpose is being thwarted by their actions."

Secretary of State Clinton also warned that North Korea was likely to face harsh consequences from the United Nations, as the international body contemplated a new resolution against North Korea. To that end, Clinton said, " We think we're going to come out of this with a very strong resolution with teeth that will have consequences for the North Korean regime." She continued, "If we do not take significant and effective action against the North Koreans now, we'll spark an arms race in North-East Asia."

In the second week of June 2009, Russian officials warned that North Korea was close to test-firing another ballistic missile. The Russian military reportedly claimed that it had accessed information pertaining to the type of rocket to be launched although it was unaware of a specific launch date. This claim was somewhat supported by reports that North Korea warned shipping vessels to stay away from its east coast waters for a period for three weeks.

Meanwhile, the United States special envoy to North Korea, Stephen Bosworth, said in an address to the Korea Society in New York that his government was considering stronger responses to the challenges posed by North Korea's recent missile activities. He said, "North Korea's recent actions to develop a nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile capacity require that we expand our consideration of new responses." He continued, "However, the North Korean claim to be responding to a 'threat' or a 'hostile policy' by the United States is simply groundless. Quite to the contrary, we have no intention to invade North Korea or change its regime through force, and this has been made clear to the DPRK repeatedly."

Among the possible responses being considered by the United States were financial sanctions, as well as tougher inspections of shipping vessels in waters surrounding North Korea. Related to these possible moves was the unanimous decision by the United Nations Security Council to impose harsh new sanctions against North Korea in response to the nuclear test carried out in May 2009. Included in the new sanctions regime was the expected provision for the increased inspection of North Korean cargo not only on shipping vessels, but also on land and by air, and it authorized the destruction of any materials suspected of being linked to weapons of mass destruction. The new sanctions regime also expanded the arms embargo against North Korea, effectively prohibiting the sale of heavy and small arms by North Korea.

Rosemary DiCarlo, the United States deputy ambassador at the United Nations said: "North Korea chose a path of provocation. This resolution will give us new tools to impair North Korea's ability to proliferate, and to threaten international stability." In a rare show of solidarity with the international powers against North Korea, China said that the measures showed that the world opposed Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions. Indeed, Chinese ambassador, Zhang Yesui, said: "We strongly urge the DPRK (North Korea) to honor its commitment to de-nuclearization, stop any moves that may further worsen the situation, and return to the six-party talks." He also rebuked North Korea for jeopardizing regional security by carrying out the nuclear test.

For its part, North Korea reacted to these developments by threatening to weaponize its stocks of plutonium. United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that this threat by Pyongyang was both "provocative" and "deeply regrettable." She warned that the move would serve only to isolate North Korea even further from the wider international community.

Meanwhile, a political confrontation between the United States and North Korea could become more likely after reports emerged that a North Korea court convicted two American journalists of "hostile acts" and illegal entry into the communist state. Despite international protests and the two journalists' insistence of innocence, Laura Ling and Euna Lee were sentenced them to 12 years in a labor prison. The families of the two journalists have urged that they not be part of the burgeoning political challenge over North Korea's nuclear activities.

In other developments in North Korea, Kim Jong-nam, the eldest son of North Korean President Kim Jong-il, confirmed in an interview with Japanese media that his youngest brother -- Kim Jong-un -- was named to succeed his father. Kim Jong-nam also said, "The appointment of a successor is totally my father's decision."

By the third week of June 2009, as reports emerged about a long range missile launch by North Korea -- quite possibly in the direction of Hawaii -- United States Defense Secretary Robert Gates noted that his country was "in a good position" to protect itself. Secretary Gates said, "We do have some concerns if they were to launch a missile to the west in the direction of Hawaii." But he made it clear that the United States had approved the deployment of both radar and missiles

"provide support," should the American state of Hawaii face attack. United States President Barack Obama later echoed these assurances in an interview with CBS News. President Obama said, "This administration - and our military - is fully prepared for any contingencies." The American president dismissed the notion that it was warning of a military response against North Korea. But he also said, "I don't want to speculate on hypotheticals. But I do want to give assurances to the American people that the T's are crossed and the I's are dotted."

In other developments, United States President Barack Obama renewed its sanctions -- separate from the United Nations sanctions -- against North Korea. President Obama explained that North Korea's nuclear development combined with threats posed a national security risk to the United States and destabilized the region of eastern Asia. The American president also said his administration would end the cycle of responding to North Korean nuclear threats by granting concessions and incentives to Pyongyang.

Around the same time, the United States, North Korea's neighbors and the wider international community were all bracing for a possible missile launch by Pyongyang in the direction of Hawaii -- a presumed act of retaliation for the new sanctions. Earlier, President Obama had said that the United States military was prepared to deal with any of contingencies posed by a possible North Korean missile launch.

On July 2, 2009, North Korea test-fired four short-range missiles. According to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency, two surface-to-ship missiles had been fired from the port of Wonsan while the other two were launched from Sinsang-ni. All four were fired into the Sea of Japan, which South Korea regards as the "East Sea." The missile tests were not surprising as Pyongyang issued warnings to shipping vessels, urging them to avoid coastal waters. Two days later, North Korea was suspected of firing another seven ballistic missiles. These seven Scud-type missiles were launched from an east coast base and, as before, fell into the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea.

The timing of the missile tests coincided with the United States' celebration of its Independence Day on July 4, 2009, and was regarded as a clear act of defiance against Washington. Nevertheless, the United States was joined by Russia and China in calling for calm. Russia and China urged North Korea to return to the negotiating table and said all parties should work to avoid further destabilization of the region. The United States also said that the tense situation should not be exacerbated. Using highly restrained language, a United States Department of State official said the volley of missile tests were "not helpful" and said that North Korea should not "aggravate tensions" but instead "focus on denuclearization talks." While British Foreign Secretary David Miliband echoed this sentiment by saying that tensions on the Korean peninsula should remain "at manageable levels," Japan and South Korea struck a somewhat harsher tone in saying that the missile launches constituted an "act of provocation."

In August 2009, former United States President Bill Clinton traveled to Pyongyang in the North Korea to try to press for the release of two American journalists, Laura Ling and Euna Lee, who had been arrested and sentenced to prison for crossing the border into North Korea. Former President Clinton -- the husband of the United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton -- arrived in Pyongyang in the early hours of August 4, 2009 and was warmly met by a North Korean delegation that included a nuclear negotiator. The landmark visit by the former United States leader came at a time of increasing tensions between Pyongyang and the West over its nuclear program. After a meeting between Clinton and Kim Jong-il, a special pardon for Ling and Lee was announced. Former President Bill Clinton is the highest ranking American to visit North Korea since his own Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with Kim Jong-il in 2000. Whether or not this particular success would extend to an overall thaw in relations between Pyongyang and Washington D.C. was yet to be seen. See "Foreign Relations" for details.

Later in August 2009, North Korea deployed envoys to the United States to meet with New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson. The seasoned diplomat, Richardson, served as United Nations ambassador and Energy Secretary under the Clinton administration in the 1990s, and was responsible for helping to broker an agreement with the North Koreans that brought a temporary end to its nuclear development.

Following his meeting with the North Koreans, Governor Richardson, a Democrat who endorsed Barack Obama for president, said that believed that Pyongyang had issued "good signals" that pointed toward the restarting of dialogue with Washington. Indeed, multilateral talks on North Korea's controversial nuclear program had stalled in recent times, and relations became increasingly strained after North Korea went forward with an underground nuclear, followed by a succession of missile tests. Now, however, in the aftermath of a successful but unofficial trip by former President Bill Clinton to North Korea to secure the release of two American journalists, Governor Richardson said that he believed the climate had improved. Indeed, Governor Richardson said that he indicated a "thaw" in relations and believed that North Korea was "ready for a new dialogue with the United States regarding the nuclear issue."

That said, an actual diplomatic breakthrough was still in the offing. According to Governor Richardson, North Korea remained intransigent on the issue of returning to six-party talks. Instead, Pyongyang believed that it had earned some goodwill and wanted to pursue direct bilateral talks with the United States. To this end, Governor Richardson said that Pyongyang had "obviously used the journalists as a bargaining chip" and was looking for a reciprocal a "gesture" from Washington.

The Obama administration has indicated that while it was willing to return to the negotiating table with North Korea within the multilateral framework, with an eye on irreversible denuclearization, it would not soon engage in direct talks. State Department spokesman, Ian Kelly, said: "Our goal is the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. And, of course, we want to see progress toward

that."

The White House also made clear that it had not orchestrated the meeting between the North Korean envoys and the New Mexico governor. As well, Governor Richardson expressly noted that he was not acting as an emissary on behalf of President Obama.

After the meeting between the Governor Richardson and the North Korean envoys, North Korea invited the United States envoy to North Korea, Stephen Bosworth, for direct negotiations on its nuclear program. South Korea media reported that there were rumblings about the White House giving serious consideration to the idea of actually sending Bosworth to North Korea. But on the record, the United States embassy in Seoul would offer no comment on the matter.

On September 18, 2009, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il said that he was ready for talks aimed at resolving his country's nuclear dispute with the international community. According to China's state-run new agency Xinhua, Kim Jong-il said, "North Korea will continue to maintain its goal of denuclearization and make efforts for the protection of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula." In an indication that he was prepared for either direct talks with the United States or to return to six-party talks, he said: "I hope to resolve this issue through bilateral or multilateral dialogue." These declarations signaled a marked shift in rhetoric from North Korea, which appeared to be moving back toward the negotiating table. Meanwhile, China's presidential envoy, Dai Bingguo, traveled to Pyongyang with an eye on just this objective of bringing North Korea back to denuclearization talks.

In other developments, South Korea and North Korea agreed to the arrange reunions for separated families from either side of the Korean peninsula. The reunions were scheduled to be held from September 26, 2009 to October 1, 2009 in the Mount Gumgang area. The agreement was forged following talks between delegates from the respective Red Cross societies in North Korea and South Korea. A joint statement read as follows: "The South and the North will continue to cooperate on the issue of separated families and other humanitarian issues involving the Red Cross." The program of reuniting Korean families commenced in 2000 following a landmark inter-Korean summit. Since that time, the two sides have held several reunions and orchestrated a number of video exchanges although the last such meetings took place in October 2007. Soon thereafter, South Korea's hard line government of President Lee Myung-bak came to power, bilateral relations devolved, and the program was suspended. This 2009 agreement could be illustrative of a possible breakthrough between the two sides.

On October 12, 2009, North Korea fires five short-range missiles into Sea of Japan (also known as the East Sea). The surface-to-surface KN-02 missiles with a range of 75 miles were launched south of Musudan-ri in the North Hamgyeong Province. As a precaution, North Korea had banned shipping vessels from the waters off the east and west coasts from October 10 to October 20, 2009, according to the Yonhap news agency. It was the first missile launches by North Korea

in several months and came after North Korea said that it was willing to return to multilateral talks about its nuclear program.

At a time when North Korea indicated a willingness to return to the negotiating table for multilateral talks on its nuclear program, China extended an overture of goodwill. In late October 2009, Chinese President Hu Jintao invited his North Korean counterpart, Kim Jong-il, for a visit. The invitation was offered when a North Korean official was in China for a meeting, intended to strengthen ties between the two countries and mark their six decade-long alliance. It was believed that North Korea was in the mood to reach out to the wider international community and was looking to re-open dormant nuclear talks.

On Nov. 10, 2009, South Korean and North Korean ships exchanged heavy fire at sea in South Korean waters when a North Korean patrol boat traversed the Northern Limit Line, which demarcates the boundary between the two Koreas. The exchange of fire was described as having lasted only for a short period of time and left a North Korean vessel in flames but with no casualties on the South Korean side. There was no information available on the casualties -- if any -- from Pyongyang. Whereas the South Korean authorities characterized the incident as "accidental," the North Koreans said it was an "armed provocation."

Despite this incident, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that talks between Washington and Pyongyang would go forward, as planned. Speaking at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Singapore, Secretary Clinton said, "This does not in any way affect the decision to send ambassador Bosworth. We think that this is an important step that stands on its own." To that end, Bosworth was expected to travel to Pyongyang for direct talks with the North Koreans following the Asia-Pacific summit. It would be the first direct contact between the United States and North Korea in more than a year. On the agenda during that meeting would be the matter of North Korea's return to the stalled six-party talks on denuclearization.

On Dec. 12, 2009, Thailand seized a cargo plane that was said to be carrying 40 tons of weapons from North Korea to an unknown destination. The chartered Soviet-designed Il-76 aircraft, which originated in the North Korean capital city of Pyongyang, was refueling at the Bangkok airport when it was intercepted by the Thai military. The ensuing raid of the aircraft resulted in the uncovering of missiles, rocket-propelled grenades and other weapons. As well, five crew members -- four from Kazakhstan and one from Belarus -- were detained and taken into Thai custody. The Thai authorities said they were acting as a result of a tip from foreign intelligence. Reuters reported that the source was actually United States intelligence, based on information supplied by an anonymous source. Reuters quoted that anonymous source as saying: "It [the plane] came from North Korea and was heading for somewhere in South Asia, probably Pakistan." While another news report stated the aircraft was headed on to Sri Lanka, geopolitical analysts suggested that the Indian Ocean island might not have been the ultimate destination.

Thai Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban confirmed that the weapons had been found aboard the aircraft and that a transparent investigation was in the offing. Indeed, such an investigation was likely to have international effects since the United Nations increased sanctions against North Korea earlier in the year in response to controversial nuclear testing. Those sanctions expressly addressed the transshipment of weaponry. But impoverished North Korea derives much of its revenue from arms sales to countries in the Middle East.

Developments in 2010 - 2011

By early 2010, North Korea indicated that part of the new phase of negotiations on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula should include a new peace treaty to replace the armistice that ended the Korean War. North Korea said that a peace agreement should form the fulcrum of negotiations on this matter and should be addressed prior to the return to six-party talks aimed at ending Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program, or, as a central part of those multilateral negotiations. In a statement published by North Korea's state-run news agency, the North Korean Foreign Ministry said: "If a peace treaty is signed, it will help resolve hostile relations between North Korea and the United States and speed up the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula." North Korea also called for an end to the United Nations sanctions, which were imposed after it conducted nuclear and ballistic missile tests in 2009. North Korean officials said that its return to the negotiating table was contingent upon the lifting of those sanctions.

On January 29, 2010, North Korea reportedly fired artillery shells in the area of the Yellow Sea, close to the country's maritime border with South Korea. It was third day that North Korea had carried out such action, according to the South Korean military. Speculation abounded that the provocative action by North Korea may have been aimed at forcing the United States and South Korea to respond to its proposal for a peace treaty to officially end the Korean War, which has effectively ceased via a prevailing armistice rather than an actual peace agreement. North Korea, as discussed above, has argued that it cannot advance further denuclearization talks without the foundation of a peace treaty.

In February 2010, reports from Reuters indicated that dire economic conditions in North Korea has led not only to mass starvation of already-impooverished North Korean citizens, but also growing unrest and social destabilization as a result of these realities. The situation has led to speculation that North Korea may be under pressure to end its boycott of multilateral denuclearization talks, with an eye on gaining international aid. Indeed, North Korea's recent actions -- both its provocative firing of artillery shells as well as its newly-found desire for a peace agreement -- are related to its underlying desire to return to the negotiating table, knowing that any likely agreement would also contain humanitarian aid.

In late March 2010, North Korea accused South Korea of carrying out psychological warfare by facilitating journalist tours in the demilitarized border zone between the two countries.. North Korea warned South Korea that there would be repercussions for these actions, claiming that the tours allowed reporters to tour the zone and prepare "materials for anti-north smear campaigns." A statement issued by Pyongyang said those these actions were in violation of the armistice, which brought at ended to the hostilities in the 1950-1953 war. The statement also warned that the United States would be held responsible for any negative fallout saying: "If the U.S. and the South Korean authorities persist in their wrong acts to misuse the DMZ for the inter-Korean confrontation despite our warnings, these will entail unpredictable incidents including the loss of human lives in this area for which the U.S. side will be wholly to blame." Analysts have suggested that this may be another circuitous attempt by North Korea to draw the United States into direct negotiations and press for a treaty officially ending the war. North Korea earlier suggested that no progress could be made on the denuclearization issue without such a treaty being forged.

Note that these developments came in the aftermath of the sinking of a South Korean military ship on March 27, 2010, in the conflict ridden waters of the border zone. Both South Korea and the United States said they did not believe that North Korea was involved in that incident. In April 2010, investigations into the sinking of that South Korean warship near the North Korean border cast new suspicions on Pyongyang's possible involvement, although Seoul was careful not to expressly place the blame in that direction. Initial reports indicated that the underwater explosion was caused by a torpedo. South Korean Defense Minister Tae-young said that a close range external explosion appeared to have destroyed the vessel. In an interview with the media, the South Korean cabinet minister said, "Basically, I think the bubble jet effect caused by a heavy torpedo is the most likely cause." Kim was careful to refrain from speculating about who might be behind the firing of a torpedo and said that the investigation still had to be completed.

South Korea confirmed in the third week of May 2010 that North Korea was behind the March 2010 incident in which one of its warships located in the conflict ridden waters of the border zone was destroyed. South Korean investigators earlier said that a torpedo hit the ship, killing 46 people. Despite knowing the cause of the sinking of the warship, South Korea had been circumspect in ascribing blame. Now, however, South Korea was asserting that its neighbor to the north was behind the mysterious incident. Clearly, South Korea's confidence in naming North Korea as the responsible party would change the geopolitical landscape.

North Korea immediately responded by denying any such role, promising dire consequences, and warning that war was inevitable if South Korea sought retribution. Pyongyang promised to cease any cooperation with Seoul and warned that it would abrogate the North-South non-aggression pact, if Seoul moved to retaliate. Moreover, Pyongyang issued a statement noting that "a war may break out right now" and that it "will regard the present situation as the phase of a war and decisively handle all matters arising in inter-Korean relations to cope with it."

For his part, South Korean Prime Minister Lee Myung-bak described the sinking incident as a "surprise military attack from North Korea [that came] while South Korean people were resting late at night." Prime Minister Lee also said his country would indeed take "resolute countermeasures" against the North over the sinking of the war ship. Given Seoul's position that its response would be "prudent," and the vulnerability of the South Korean people in terms of proximity, it was unlikely that the response would involve military retaliation.

During a formal address on the matter, President Lee said his country would take the matter up at the United Nations Security Council. He also announced the suspension of inter-Korean exchanges and said that North Korean ships would be banned from passing through South Korean waters. Explaining the rationale behind these measures, President Lee said, "We have always tolerated North Korea's brutality, time and again. We did so because we have always had a genuine longing for peace on the Korean peninsula." He continued, "But now things are different. North Korea will pay a price corresponding to its provocative acts."

In response to South Korea's moves, North Korea severed all ties with its neighbor, including communications links and the passage of ships and aircraft from territorial waters and airspace respectively. According to Pyongyang's official news agency, North Korea also intended to expel all South Korean workers at a factory to the north of the border, which has jointly-administered. Indeed, a statement publicized via the official news agency read as follows: "The Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea... formally declares that from now on it will put into force the resolute measures to totally freeze the inter-Korean relations, totally abrogate the agreement on non-aggression between the North and the South and completely halt the inter-Korean cooperation."

These developments did not bode well for the process of reconciliation between the two Koreas. Still, Seoul seemed intent on winning the public relations war across the border. To this end, there were plans to send propaganda leaflets and flash electronic billboard messages to North Korea, explaining the sinking of the warship. As well, there were plans for the resumption of propaganda broadcasts to North Korea for the same reason.

Earlier, United States Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, en route to Asia, made clear that North Korea would have to face consequences for its apparent intemperate actions. On the diplomatic front once in Asia, United States Secretary of State Clinton enjoyed little progress in drawing China into the equation to place pressure on North Korea. The United States, which firmly backed South Korea, was hoping for a joint response to the act of provocation from North Korea. However, China offered only a call for all sides to demonstrate restraint. That said, in a measure presumably intended to demonstrate solidarity and inflict some degree of intimidation, the United States announced it would conduct joint anti-submarine naval exercises with South Korean forces.

By the first week of June 2010, South Korea had referred North Korea to the United Nations over the matter of the torpedoed warship. While South Korea seemed intent on forcing North Korea to face consequences for its actions, it was not seeking a particular action by the international body. Instead, South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak said during a speech in Singapore that "North Korea must admit its wrongdoing." Speculation abounded that with China, which wields a veto on the United Nations Security Council, unlikely to support the notion of sanctions against North Korea, South Korea was likely to be seeking some other form of international rebuke against the North. For its part, North Korea dispatched a letter to the United Nations Security Council rejecting claims it sank the South Korean warship. North Korea also warned the international body to refrain from debating the issue, saying that it should instead facilitate Pyongyang's own internal inquiry into the incident.

In the third week of July 2010, the United States (U.S.) announced that it was imposing new sanctions against North Korea. The announcement by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton came in the aftermath of her visit to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that separates North Korea from South Korea. Secretary of State Clinton explained that the sanctions would target North Korea's sale and purchase of arms, and were aimed at preventing nuclear proliferation and discouraging provocative actions by North Korea.

South Korea accused North Korea of provocative action over the sinking of its Cheonan warship months earlier, which an international investigation ultimately blamed on North Korea despite Pyongyang's denial of culpability. As one the most sanctioned countries in the world, these new sanctions were likely intended to intensify the pressure on North Korea in response to the Cheonan incident. In fact, as indicated by Secretary of State Clinton, they were aimed at compelling Pyongyang to take responsibility for the sinking of the warship that left 47 dead. For its part, North Korea warned that fresh sanctions would be interpreted as an act of war.

Tensions on the peninsula were unlikely to decrease since the U.S. and South Korea conducted joint naval exercises, which North Korea characterized as "dangerous sabre-rattling." But defense officials of United States and South Korea said that the military drills were intended to deliver a clear message to North Korea that its "aggressive" behavior should cease. Indeed, the North Korean official news agency reported the following statement from the government in Pyongyang: "The army and people of the DPRK will legitimately counter with their powerful nuclear deterrence the largest-ever nuclear war exercises to be staged by the U.S. and the South Korean puppet forces."

On September 27, 2010, it was announced via the Korean Central News Agency that North Korean leader Kim Jong Il had promoted his son, Kim Jong Un, to the rank of general in the Korean People's Army. The news came at the start of national political meetings of the ruling Workers' Party meeting, which was itself touted as the country's most significant political conference in three decades. But it was the announcement about Kim Jong Un that commanded

national and, indeed, international attention. Moreover, it sparked speculation that Kim Jong-il's son was being tapped to succeed his father at the helm of the country. At issue in recent times has been Kim Jong-il's ill health and anxieties about who would fill the power chasm after his death. With the companion news that Kim Jong-il's sister, Kim Kyong Hui, had also been promoted, there was also growing speculation that she might be tapped to serve as a caretaker leader after Kim Jong-il's death, until Kim Jong Un was ready to take on the top post in North Korea. Kim Kyong Hui's influence has been highlighted by her increasing appearances with her brother's during trips and events.

It should be noted that on October 8, 2010, a top North Korean official from the ruling Workers Party, Yang Hyong Sop, said that North Koreans would be honored to follow Kim Jong Un -- the third-generation leader of the communist nation. Indeed, it was Kim Jung-il's father, Kim Il Sung, who founded that nation state of North Korea in 1948 upon the notion of "juche" or self-reliance. Yang said, "Our people are honored to serve the great President Kim Il Sung and the great leader Kim Jong Il." He continued, "Now we also have the honor of serving young Gen. Kim Jong Un." The remarks made official the speculation that Kim Jong Un was the named successor to Kim Jung-il.

In late October 2010, North Korean and South Korean troops exchanged fire across the border. According to accounts from authorities in Seoul, North Korean troops fired two rounds in the direction of a front line unit at Hwacheon, prompting South Korean troops to return fire. No further exchange of fire followed the incident and there were no injuries to South Korean troops. There was no consensus as to whether or not North Korea's actions constituted a direct provocation. Only days later on November 3, 2010, South Korea's navy fired warning shots at a North Korean fishing vessel in maritime border waters.

In the last week of November 2010, an exchange of fire occurred between North Korean and South Korean forces, leaving two South Korean marines dead, 16 other South Korean marines injured, and three civilians wounded. At issue was the shelling of the inhabited Yeonpyeong Island by North Korea, located in close proximity the disputed Yellow Sea maritime border, just off the North Korean coast. South Korea, whose military was conducting military exercises in the waters off Yeonpyeong Island, reportedly returned fire, spurring one of the most serious clashes between the North and the South since the Korean War. Some fifty shells reportedly landed on the island, largely hitting a South Korean military base in the area. South Korea returned a fire with about 80 shells; the casualties on the north side of the border were not known.

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak convened a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the capital city of Seoul. Following the meeting, he announced that the South Korean military would punish North Korea for its attack, adding that it was vital that Pyongyang not engage in further provocation.

For its part, Pyongyang placed the blame on South Korea for igniting the clashes. It should be noted that Seoul disputes the North Korean version of the events that transpired. Nevertheless, according to the state-run KCNA news agency, "The South Korean enemy, despite our repeated warnings, committed reckless military provocations of firing artillery shells into our maritime territory near Yeonpyeong Island." The North, therefore, was prepared to strike back if South Korea "dares to invade our sea territory."

United States President Barack Obama characterized the incident an "outrageous, provocative act" by North Korea. Russia struck a similar tone with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warning of a "colossal danger" and characterizing those responsible for the clashes as carrying a huge responsibility. The European Union also added its voice to the litany of condemnations. Japanese Prime Minister, Naoto Kan, took a defensive stance in the national interests of his country, saying that his government had to prepare for the occurrence of "any unexpected event."

But China, North Korea's closest ally, offered a murky suggestion that the two Koreas should "do more to contribute to peace." A spokesperson for the Chinese government also called for restarting six-party negotiations on North Korea's nuclear program -- a prospect that seemed practically unlikely, given these latest developments. Indeed, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency, President Lee Myung-bak was reported to have informed a visiting Chinese foreign policy adviser, Dai Bingguo, that his country (South Korea) was not interested in the resumption of the multilateral nuclear talks; the South Korean leader apparently emphasized the importance of immediately dealing with North Korea's aggressive actions of late.

In another development, South Korean Defense Minister Kim Tae-young came under fire for ignoring intelligence reports that alerted his country of possible attacks from the North, as well as the country's slow and weak responses to the threat posed by Pyongyang. Perhaps not surprisingly, he was forced to resign from his post.

To date, there have been occasional flare ups in the border regions since the Korean War ended without a peace treaty in 1953. However, the attack on Yeonpyeong Island occurred at a time of increased tensions between the two Koreas. Months earlier in March 2010, as discussed above, South Korea accused North Korea of torpedoing one of its warships in the area of the western maritime border, also known as the Northern Limit Line. For its part, North Korea has denied that charge and has also insisted that South Korea engage in diplomatic talks with Pyongyang aimed at easing tensions, or, deal with "catastrophic" consequences. Then, in late October 2010, as discussed above, North Korean and South Korean troops exchanged fire across the border. According to accounts from authorities in Seoul, North Korean troops fired two rounds in the direction of a front line unit at Hwacheon, prompting South Korean troops to return fire. No further exchange of fire followed the incident and there were no injuries to South Korean troops. There was no consensus as to whether or not North Korea's actions constituted a direct provocation. Only days later on November 3, 2010, South Korea's navy fired warning shots at a North Korean fishing vessel in maritime border waters.

At the time, South Korea sought to downplay the incidences or the prospects of trouble emanating from the North. Indeed, during a news conference focused on an impending summit in Seoul, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak had said, "I don't think the North will try to do anything when leaders of the international community are meeting to discuss the world economy." He continued, "I trust the North won't do anything but still we are fully prepared."

On the other side of the border, while North Korea has a history of making provocative moves, many analysts said that it was unlikely that Pyongyang would seek to alienate the international community, especially at a time when it has been revealing its new leadership succession team to the world. Earlier, President Kim Jong-il's son was given a military promotion, and sanctioned as the likely successor to the ailing leader. Of course, as illustrated by the events in late November 2010 on Yeonpyeong Island, it was apparent that the path of provocation was the one being traversed by North Korea.

Attention was on the matter of why North Korea would seek to heighten the state of volatility on the Korean Peninsula. Perhaps, for North Korea, this is a simple matter of defending its interests. However, it could well be that the aforementioned analysts interpreted the matter of leadership transition incorrectly. It could well be that North Korea is not concerned with the matter of alienating the international community. Instead, at this time of leadership transition from ailing President Kim Jong-il to his son, the priority from Pyongyang is to establish North Korea's power, and to show the military elite in North Korea that the named successor is not afraid to embrace a muscular stance in relation to the South, and indeed, the world.

The situation on the Korean peninsula has been made more complicated by the November 2010 revelation that North Korea constructed a new nuclear facility. A nuclear scientist from Stanford University in the United States, Dr. Siegfried Hecker, said that during a visit to North Korea, he was shown a new nuclear facility. There -- at the new nuclear facility at the Yongbyon nuclear complex to the north of the capital of Pyongyang -- he viewed "more than 1,000 centrifuges" for enriching uranium -- elements needed for the production of nuclear weapons.

Since the nuclear facility did not exist when international nuclear weapons inspectors were expelled from North Korea in 2009, it was clear that it had been constructed quickly. But Dr. Hecker noted that the facility boasted a high level of sophistication, and as reported in the New York Times, it included an "ultra-modern control room." According to Dr. Hecker, the facility appeared oriented for the use of civilian nuclear power. Noting that there was no sign of plutonium production, which is needed for weapons proliferation, Dr. Hecker nonetheless cautioned in an interview with the Associated Press that the new facility could be "readily converted to produce highly enriched uranium bomb fuel."

Dr. Hecker additionally shored up previous reports that North Korea has been constructing a light-water nuclear reactor. His observations on the ground in North Korea appeared to coincide with

satellite imagery depicting the construction of the reactor at Yongbyon. Typically, light-water reactors are associated with civilian energy usage, however, uranium enrichment is part of the process, it was not inconceivable that further enrichment could potentially ensue at weapons-grade levels.

To date, North Korea is believed to have sufficient weaponized plutonium for about six atomic bombs, although there has been little evidence to suggest that the country has actively pursued a weapons program. That being said, Western powers have been advocating a resumption of the stalled six-party talks dealing with North Korea's nuclear program.

In November 2010, a senior United States Department of State envoy, Stephen Bosworth, was in Asia on a trip aimed at reviving the multilateral negotiations. However, this latest act of provocation by North Korea on Yeonpyeong Island left the United States with no choice but to disengage from the multilateral diplomatic process, essentially ruling out the resumption of six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear disarmament for the foreseeable future.

On Nov. 23, 2010, in an interview with ABC News, United States President Barack Obama characterized North Korea's shelling of Yeonpyeong Island as "a serious and ongoing threat that needs to be dealt with. President Obama also reaffirmed his country's alliance with South Korea, describing that country as an important ally. He said, "We strongly affirm our commitment to defend South Korea as part of that alliance." The United States president also noted, "We want to make sure all the parties in the region recognize that this is a serious and ongoing threat that needs to be dealt with." This statement appeared to target China, as he continued saying that Pyongyang needs to know "that there are a set of international rules they need to abide by."

By the close of November 2010, tensions on the Korean peninsula remained high, as South Korea and the United States carried out joint military exercises in the Yellow Sea, to the south of the disputed maritime border. North Korea said it viewed the previously -arranged military exercises as a provocation and warned of retaliation if there was any violation of its territorial waters. A statement from Pyongyang broadcast by the state-controlled KCNA news agency read as follows: "We will deliver a brutal military blow on any provocation which violates our territorial waters."

At the start of December 2010, South Korea took a highly assertive position. The South Korean defense minister-designate, Kim Kwan-jin, warned that North Korea would face a harsh response, including air strikes, if it dared to act aggressively in the future. Kim Kwan-jin's remarks were made in parliament as he answered questions during his confirmation hearing. In response to the question of how he would react to another violent action by North Korea, Kim Kwan-jin said, "If North Korea provokes again, we will definitely use aircraft to attack North Korea." Clearly, this posture by South Korea was a marked departure from its long-held restraint in the face of North Korea's provocations. Making clear that it intended to maintain this assertive posture, South Korea also said that it was going to carry out military drills from the aforementioned Yeonpyeong Island, even though North Korea has condemned those plans and warned that it would retaliate with force.

With Pyongyang and Seoul at odds with one another in such a marked fashion, there were heightened anxieties about the renewal of war on the Korean peninsula.

Yet even with those fears at hand, the landscape became even more complicated when in mid-December 2010, South Korea said that it suspected North Korea of secretly enriching uranium at locations beyond its main nuclear site at Yongbyon. South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan would not confirm a media report that North Korea was home to three more plants where uranium enrichment could take place, however, he admitted to having suspicions along these lines. During a news conference, he said, "It is a report based on what is still intelligence and let me just say that we have been following this issue for some time." Should this claim be proved correct, North Korea could conceivably possess material -- potentially for building more nuclear bombs. Moreover, such actions would fly in the face of renewed nuclear disarmament talks, which were already on a downward slide as a result of North Korea's latest aggressive actions (as discussed above).

By the third week of December 2010, intense dissonance characterized relations on the Korean peninsula for the myriad reasons discussed above. Former New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, who also served as ambassador to the United Nations, was acting as an unofficial United States envoy in the region, with an eye on reducing the level of tensions. That job, however, was not helped when United Nations meetings on the matter ended with no resolution. Nevertheless, there were signs of progress when North Korea began to reverse course, effectively moving away from its threats to take retaliatory action against South Korea for the aforementioned military drills. The shift from Pyongyang came after South Korea evacuated residents from the area on and around Yeonpyeong Island and launched fighter jets from its terrain. Analysts surmised that the strong stance from South Korea may have forced North Korea to rethink the likely consequences of making good on expressed threats. As explained by Governor Richardson, "South Korea was able to flex its muscles, and North Korea reacted in a statesmanlike manner." But despite these encouraging indications, on Dec. 23, 2010, the rhetoric between the two Koreas was on the rise once again. South Korea's president was promising harsh retaliation if his country was again attacked, while North Korean was warning of a "sacred" nuclear war, if provoked.

Meanwhile, Governor Richardson -- a seasoned diplomat -- who has had years of experience negotiating with the North Koreans, announced that North Korea was willing to offer concessions in regard to their nuclear program. In an interview with the Associated Press, Governor Richardson said, "We had positive results." He continued, "I hope this will signal a new chapter and a round of dialogue to lessen tension on the Korean peninsula." Given the increasing concerns about North Korea's capacity to build nuclear bombs, this development was welcomed. But, as United States Department of State spokesman, P.J. Crowley, cautioned, "North Korea talks a great game. They always do. The real issue is what will they do. If they are agreeable to returning IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] inspectors to their country, they need to tell the IAEA that."

In a New Year's message at the close of 2010, North Korea appeared to strike a conciliatory note as it called for dialogue with South Korea. North Korea was reported to have called for "a lasting peace system on the Korean Peninsula," which it said should be made "nuclear-free through dialogue and negotiations." Heightened tensions have marked relations between the two Koreas since the sinking of a South Korean warship by the North earlier in 2010, and reached a nadir at the close of the year, following the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island (under South Korean jurisdiction) by the North. For its part, Seoul opted to take a more aggressive stance in relation to Pyongyang since these events by carrying out military exercises in the border zones and increasing its rhetoric. Now, the call for improved relations by Pyongyang may have been interpreted as a shift in stance, aimed at lowering tensions on the Korean peninsula. However, Pyongyang's message, which was publicized via North Korean state media, went onto to warn of increased military strength. The New Year's message said that North Korea's military would "conduct intense combat training in an atmosphere of actual battle as required by the tense situation."

On February 9, 2011, bilateral talks between the two Koreas were reported to have broken down. Delegates from North Korea and South Korea had been meeting in the border village of Panmunjom with the intent of working through a number of sensitive cross-border issues. There were hopes that the security talks would ease tensions between the two Koreas, which reached a nadir after the shelling of a South Korean island by North Korean forces in November 2010. Significantly, these discussions were intended to set the foundation for further, higher-level, negotiations. However, the disintegration of these talks meant that there was no consensus on an agenda for future meetings.

In July 2011, some good news was brewing in the realm of foreign relations. The United States and North Korea completed a set of exploratory discussions, which North Korea's envoy, Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye Gwan, characterized as positive. Speaking of his meetings with United States Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, the Obama administration's leading representative on North Korean affairs, Kim Kye Gwan said, "Yesterday and today we discussed comprehensively, with Mr. Bosworth, matters of mutual interest. The talks were very constructive and businesslike and we continue to maintain contacts." For his part, Ambassador Bosworth said, "These discussions are designed to explore the willingness of North Korea to take concrete and irreversible steps toward denuclearization." These bilateral talks were intended to be a precursor to the resumption of multilateral denuclearization negotiations. To that end, Ambassador Bosworth said that his country would enter consultations with South Korea and other countries involved multilateral negotiations that have been ongoing for years, to consider how to proceed further with North Korea.

Later in August 2011, though, prospects for a return to multilateral talks were dimmed when an imbroglio ensued between North Korea and South Korea. The situation was spurred when shells from North Korea were fired close to the maritime border with South Korea. In response, the South Korean navy fired warning shots towards North Korea. According to South Korean

sources, artillery shells from North Korea landed in the Yellow Sea close to Yeonpyeong Island, which is under Seoul's jurisdiction. Further rounds were fired on the same day. Defense officials from South Korea surmised that the initial firing of shells may have been due to training exercises by North Korea. Nevertheless, South Korea wasted no time in responding with warning shots. It should be noted that Yeonpyeong Island was in the global purview in late 2010 when North Korea fired shells in that direction, leaving four people dead and triggering the outrage of South Korea and its allies.

As the month drew to a close, tension increased when five South Koreans were arrested for spying on behalf of North Korea. South Korean prosecutors said that the five individuals conveyed sensitive military and political information to the North over a period of two decades. Among the sensitive material were satellite images of major military installations, as well as field manuals of United States forces in South Korea. All five individuals were accused by South Korean authorities of violating the country's national security law, engaging in espionage, and communication with an enemy.

The Death of Kim Jong-il

On Dec. 19, 2011, it was announced that North Korea's mercurial and autocratic leader, Kim Jong-il, had died. Blamed for keeping North Koreans on the brink of starvation, the nation on the edge of economic collapse, and the global community in a state of anxiety over the country's nuclear program, Kim Jong-il was believed to have suffered a stroke in 2008. Since then, his health was regarded to be in a state of decline. The North Korean leader's actual death took place two days earlier on Dec. 17, 2011, when Kim Jong-il was reportedly on a train trip -- his preferred means of transportation. His death was described as being due to "great mental and physical strain" as the North Korean leader was participating in a field guidance tour. Known as "Dear Leader" to the North Korean people, the rule of Kim Jong-il can well be viewed as one of the remaining "cults of personality" in the modern world.

Attention quickly turned to who would fill the power chasm. To that end, the known "great successor" to stand at the helm of the country was Kim Jong-un -- the son of Kim Jong-il, whom had been promoted to the rank of general in the Korean People's Army more than a year earlier. At that time in September 2010, the companion news involved Kim Jong-il's sister, Kim Kyong Hui, who had also been promoted and was regarded as a possible caretaker leader after in post-Kim Jong-il era. Of course, in December 2011, there was almost no mention of Kim Kyong Hui; instead, the international media was focused on the little-known Kim Jong-un. Educated in Switzerland and believed to be in his late 20s, Kim Jong Un was Kim Jong-il's third son; Kim Jong-un had been chosen as a successor partially because his disposition was regarded as more suitable for the post of leader than his older brothers.

At home in North Korea, citizens were urged to hold steadfast in their loyalty to Kim Jong-un. North Korean television broadcast images of news anchors, school children, and citizens weeping uncontrollably over the news that the "Dear Leader" had passed on. There were some suggestions by international analysts that the flamboyant expressions of grief over the death of Kim Jong-il might be contrived unlike the death of the earlier North Korean leader, Kim Sung-il, who had been a beloved figure among the North Korean citizenry. By contrast, most North Koreans would not be able to divorce their feelings of a long-standing leader from the reality of living in a country where starvation and dire circumstances characterize everyday life.

As the world community wondered about the effects of Kim Jong-il's death on the matter of international security, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that North Korea test-fired a missile off its eastern coast; South Korean officials apparently believed the missile launch was unrelated to the news of Kim Jong-il's death, although there was no official statement from South Korea's defense ministry.

That being said, South Korea wasted no time placing its armed forces on high alert and the country itself was placed on a crisis footing. Likewise, the government of Japan held an emergency security meeting and expressed hopes that the news of Kim Jong-il's death would not have an "adverse effect on peace and stability on the peninsula." The Chinese government expressed distress and "deep condolences" over the news, and reaffirmed Beijing's close ties with Pyongyang. From Russia, the foreign ministry said it did not expect changes in bilateral relationship with North Korea. Across the Pacific in the United States, President Barack Obama reportedly discussed the situation with South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and promised that its commitment to stability on the Korean Peninsula remained intact. A statement from the White House read as follows: "We remain committed to stability on the Korean peninsula, and to the freedom and security of our allies."

Ironically, news of Kim Jong-il's death came only days after a bilateral deal was forged between the United States and North Korea to exchange 240,000 tons of food from the United States for North Korea's pledge to move towards denuclearization. The agreement was brokered during talks in China between Robert King, United States special envoy on North Korean human rights, and Ri Kun, director general for North American affairs at North Korea's Foreign Ministry, and was intended to set the tone for forthcoming multilateral nuclear negotiations. Six-party talks -- involving North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, Russia, and the United States -- have stalled since late 2008.

According to South Korea's Yonhap news agency, Washington and Pyongyang "reached the agreement based on North Korea's pledge to implement initial measures of denuclearization that include a suspension of its uranium-enrichment program." North Korea, which has been plagued by chronic food shortages, would soon receive shipments of food aid, including biscuits and nutritional supplements for infants, rather than rice, which was requested by the North Koreans. United States officials have apparently been concerned that rice would be given to the country's

military rather than used to alleviate the dire circumstances of the North Korean general populace.

There was some speculation about the late Kim Jong-il's involvement in forging this agreement, given the timing of the death announcement. If Kim Jong-il's health was devolving to the extent that he had died from "great mental and physical strain," then was it possible for him to be involved in such significant negotiations?

Such speculation was only heightened when, on Dec. 20, 2011, South Korean authorities began to express skepticism about the public details pertaining to the death of Kim Jong-il during a field guidance tour. Indeed, the leader of South Korea's intelligence service said he had doubts about the time and location of the North Korean leader's death. National Intelligence Service head, Won Sei-hoon, reportedly told the members of a parliamentary committee that the very train Kim Jong-il used for travel -- and which was supposedly the venue of the North Korean leader's death -- was identified at Pyongyang's train station. As reported by the Korean Herald, Won Sei-hoon noted, "There were no signs the train ever moved." Certainly, if the train was not used for any travel, it was not possible that Kim Jong-il could have died aboard it while participating in the aforementioned field guidance tour, as officially declared by the North Korean authorities.

The quasi-mystery surrounding the actual details of Kim Jong-il's death aside, North Korea was concentrating its efforts on shoring up the image of Kim Jong-un as the undisputed new leader of the secretive communist nation. As reported by the New York Times, North Korean television broadcast images of the country's senior military leaders saluting Kim Jong-un as he received mourners at a mausoleum, where the body of Kim Jong-il laid in state. The particular imagery was ostensibly intended to show that Kim Jong-un had gained the allegiance of North Korea's powerful military. Meanwhile, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that Kim Jong-un had carried out one of his first measures of supreme power by ordering all North Korean troops to cancel their field exercises and return to their barracks.

His military influence notwithstanding, Kim Jong-un had yet to assume leadership as the general secretary of North Korea's Workers' Party -- the political power base of the country. Since 2010, Kim Jung-un held the position of vice chairman of the Central Military Commission of the ruling party.

Ultimately, Kim Jong-un would have to consolidate his power both symbolically and practically, or he could be relegated to a figurehead role at the helm of a ruling military cadre. But speculation on that score came to a close at the end of the year when Kim Jong-un was officially named supreme commander of the country's armed forces. That particular appointment was made in accordance with provisions set forth in Kim Jong-il's will.

It was yet to be seen how Kim Jong-un would relate to international powers, who were themselves anxious to see North Korea would move substantially in the direction of denuclearization at a time of sensitive geopolitical tensions across the globe. Following the funeral

for the late Kim Jong-il on Dec. 28, 2011, state media in North Korea delivered a message from the powerful National Defense Commission of that country making it clear that there would be no change in foreign policy orientation from Pyongyang in the post Kim Jong-il era. The statement read as follows: "We declare solemnly and confidently that the foolish politicians around the world, including the puppet group in South Korea, should not expect any change from us." Indeed, during the memorial funeral service for Kim Jong-il, the North Korean head of state, Kim Jong-un made it clear that the country -- now under new leadership -- intended to "march firmly along the path of Songun taught by great leader Kim Jong-il." The term "Songun" refers to North Korea's "military first" policy. Clearly, the military imperatives of North Korea would prevail even in the post Kim Jong-il era.

Developments in 2012

On Feb. 29, 2012, North Korea formalized its "denuclearization for food" agreement with the United States. The terms of the bilateral deal included the exchange of 240,000 tons of food from the United States for North Korea's pledge to move towards denuclearization. The agreement included provisions for a North Korean moratorium on nuclear tests, long-range missile launches and uranium enrichment at its Yongbyon nuclear center, and acceptance of United Nations inspectors who would monitor the implementation of the terms. North Korea's acquiescence on this matter raised the possibility of ending the diplomatic impasse, which had allowed its nuclear program to continue for years without international oversight.

Of course it should be noted that the agreement was not a new one; in fact it first came to light in the days prior to the news of the death of former North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il late in 2011. The agreement was brokered in December 2011 during talks in China between Robert King, United States special envoy on North Korean human rights, and Ri Kun, director general for North American affairs at North Korea's Foreign Ministry.

At the time, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that Washington and Pyongyang "reached the agreement based on North Korea's pledge to implement initial measures of denuclearization that include a suspension of its uranium-enrichment program" in exchange for much-needed food. North Korea, which has been plagued by chronic food shortages, would soon receive shipments of food aid, including biscuits and nutritional supplements for infants, rather than rice, which was requested by the North Koreans. United States officials have apparently been concerned that rice would be given to the country's military rather than used to alleviate the dire circumstances of the North Korean general populace.

The agreement was intended to set the tone for forthcoming multilateral nuclear negotiations. Six-party talks -- involving North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, Russia, and the United States -- have stalled since late 2008.

For its part, the United States welcomed the North Koreans' movement on the breakthrough deal, deeming it "important, if limited." The United States Department of State spokeswoman, Victoria Nuland, took a cautiously optimistic saying, "The United States still has profound concerns regarding North Korean behavior across a wide range of areas, but today's announcement reflects important, if limited, progress in addressing some of these."

Striking a similar tone, the director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Yukiya Amano, characterized the announcement "an important step forward." He continued, "Pending further details, we stand ready to return to Yongbyon to undertake monitoring activities upon request and with the agreement of the agency's board of governors."

In the aftermath of a "denuclearization for food" agreement with the United States, there were high hopes that the deal would facilitate progress in multilateral negotiations on North Korea's nuclear program. Those high hopes were somewhat dashed by news that North Korea intended to launch a satellite into orbit.

Pyongyang announced on March 16, 2011, that it would launch an "earth observation" satellite, or the Kwangmyongsong-3, using a long-range rocket. The event was intended to mark the 100th birthday of its late leader Kim Il-Sung. Of course, such a move would be contrary to the prevailing United Nations resolutions, which prohibits North Korea's use of long-range intercontinental ballistic missile technology, as well as the aforementioned "denuclearization for food" agreement, the latter of which requires North Korea to adhere to a moratorium on nuclear tests and long-range missile launches.

Not surprisingly, all the other countries involved in multilateral negotiations -- South Korea, Japan, China, Russia, and the United States -- expressed dismay over this plan by North Korea. United States Department of State spokesperson, Nuland, pointed to this concurrence and urged North Korea to rethink the satellite launch saying, "Obviously, we were heartened that every single one of the six-party talks participants made clear that they think that this would be an extremely bad idea and a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions, so we are hoping and expecting that the DPRK will take that to heart." The United States also noted it would be "very hard" to go forward with its planned food assistance if North Korea moved ahead with the plan to launch a satellite into orbit.

The geopolitical complexity of the Korean peninsula became more complicated on March 21, 2012, when the White House in the United States announced that President Barack Obama intended to visit to the world's most heavily militarized border -- the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The White House explained that the trip to the DMZ was intended to convey the president's support for the 30,000 United States troops stationed in South Korea, and to augment bilateral relations between Washington and Seoul. In a press briefing, Daniel Russel, Asia director for the White House National Security Council, said: "The DMZ is the front line of democracy in

the Korean Peninsula, and it's the symbol of the U.S. and [South Korean] resolve, as well as solidarity. So a visit by the president there to see and to thank the U.S. and the South Korean service members makes perfect sense."

After his visit to the DMZ, President Obama was set to attend a global summit aimed at reducing the risk of nuclear terrorism in the South Korean capital of Seoul. Ahead of the Nuclear Security Summit, President Obama reiterated his call for "a world without nuclear weapons" and advanced his foreign policy agenda that advocates non-proliferation and the reduction of nuclear weapons through increase diplomacy.

In a speech to students at South Korea's Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, President Obama said the United States -- the only nation to have ever used nuclear weapons -- was fully committed to reducing its stockpile of nuclear arms. The United States leader said his country had a "moral obligation" to pursue strategic arms cuts. President Obama also drew thunderous applause from the audience of students when he said that, as a father, he did not wish to see his daughters growing up in a world with nuclear threats.

"I say this as president of the only nation ever to use nuclear weapons," Obama said. "I say it as a commander in chief who knows that our nuclear codes are never far from my side. Most of all, I say it as a father, who wants my two young daughters to grow up in a world where everything they know and love can't be instantly wiped out."

President Obama acknowledged his country's unique position in the world, but he noted that "serious sustained global effort" was needed to achieve his expressed hope for a nuclear weapons-free world.

The issue of nuclear proliferation has been at the forefront of the international purview given the ongoing concerns about North Korea's nuclear arsenal. Addressing the matter of North Korea's nuclear ambitions, President Obama made it clear that the United States held "no hostile intent" to that country, but warned that there would be "no rewards for provocation."

The United States president said: "The United States has no hostile intent toward your country...We are committed to peace. And we are prepared to take steps to improve relations, which is why we have offered nutritional aid to North Korean mothers and children." President Obama continued, "But by now it should be clear, your provocations and pursuit of nuclear weapons have not achieved the security you seek -- they have undermined it. Instead of the dignity you desire, you're more isolated. Instead of earning the respect of the world, you've been met with strong sanctions and condemnation. You can continue down the road you are on, but we know where that leads. It leads to more of the same -- more broken dreams, more isolation, ever more distance between the people of North Korea and the dignity and the opportunity that they deserve."

President Obama reiterated the warning already issued by his government that the long-range missile launch to place a satellite in orbit would only result in isolation for Pyongyang. He said, "With respect to North Korea, we are going to be both sending messages to North Korea that they should not go forward with this missile launch, which would violate existing U.N. Security Council resolutions. And our hope is, is that we can resolve these issues diplomatically."

President Obama also joined South Korean President Lee Myung-bak in noting that North Korea would be subject to further sanctions if it did not cancel its launch plans. Making clear the options available for North Korea, President Obama addressed the leadership of that country saying, "You can continue with the road you are on but we know where that leads...Today, we say: Pyongyang, have the courage to pursue peace."

For his part, Kim Jong Un -- North Korea's new leader -- appeared to be following his father's footsteps in the realm of rhetoric as he deemed the nuclear summit to be "a childish farce." Earlier, Pyongyang asserted that denunciations of North Korea would amount to a "declaration of war."

Pyongyang was also signaling that it had no intention of pulling back from its missile launch to sent a satellite into orbit. Instead, South Korean sources were reporting that North Korea moved a long-range rocket to a launch pad close to the Chinese border. As well, satellite imagery appeared to depict preparations for the launch, which Pyongyang had said would take place between April 12-16, 2012. The guidance was that the rocket would follow a trajectory that would take it close to south-western Japan.

Accordingly, Japan's defense ministry made it clear that it had ordered the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to intercept North Korea's rocket launch, if necessary, using its missile shield. Japanese authorities also alerted rescue personnel that they would be mobilized to deal with potential disasters, should the veer off course. Already, the South Korean government had said that it would shoot down any North Korean rocket that strayed into its territory. As well, the United States was sea-based X-band radar into the Pacific to monitor the launch. Upset about the prospect of rocket debris affecting countries of the Pacific, President Benigno Aquino III of the Philippines called on Pyongyang to abandon the launch plans.

It should be noted that the Obama administration in the United States canceled its food aid program to North Korea due to that country's decision to move forward with the satellite launch. An official from the Pentagon was cited as saying: "Why we're not providing that food assistance at this point is because our confidence in their ability to meet their agreements has been diminished. We do not use it as a lever to change their policies."

A week ahead of the timeline expected for the North Korean missile launch, President Kim Jong Un warned that any country that dared to interfere with its plans would face "immediate, resolute and merciless punishment." In a statement published by the Korean Central News Agency, the

North Korean leader asserted: "(Any country that) intercepts the satellite or collects its debris will meet immediate, resolute and merciless punishment." Pyongyang also warned South Korea against intercepting the rocket booster, should it stray into South Korean territorial waters. Pyongyang promised that an interception by Seoul would bring about "the end of everything in South Korea."

On April 10, 2012, the United States was reiterating its warnings to North Korea that the launch of a new missile would be "a clear and serious violation" of international agreements. White House press secretary Jay Carney said in an interview with journalists: "The proposed missile launch, if conducted, would represent a clear and serious violation of North Korea's obligations under two United Nations Security Council resolutions that explicitly prohibit North Korea from testing ballistic missiles." Carney said the United States intended to work allied countries on implementing consequences for North Korea, should it proceed with its provocative missile launch; Carney noted that United States food aid to North Korea could be cut off.

By April 13, 2012, news emerged from North Korea that although that country attempted to launch its satellite into space, the long-range rocket failed to reach orbit. Despite the spectacular failure of the mission, the attempted action was nonetheless widely condemned by the international community. Notably, members of the Group of Eight industrial nation states issued a joint condemnation, noting that the launch was in clear violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions prohibiting intercontinental missile deployments.

In a related development, South Korean officials were noting that new satellite imagery suggests that North Korea was preparing to carry out a nuclear test. The imagery depicted piles of earth and sand at the entrance of a tunnel at a nuclear site, where previous nuclear bomb testing was carried out in 2006 and 2009. An anonymous source was quoted by Agence France Presse as saying: "Recent satellite images led us to conclude the North has been secretly digging a new underground tunnel in the nuclear test site... besides two others where the previous tests were conducted." Given the aforementioned launch failure, there were some suggestions that North Korea might try to "save face" by moving forward with an even more provocative act -- quite possibly, a nuclear test. Of course, such an act would be regarded as a clear move down the path of confrontation by North Korea's regional neighbors as well as Western powers.

By the third week of April 2012, presumably as a cautionary move, South Korea announced that it had deployed missiles with a range of 625 miles. The weapons would be able to strike nuclear targets inside North Korea.

As April 2012 entered its final week, North Korea was ratcheting up the militaristic rhetoric as it threatened to initiate military action against South Korean targets and characterized South Korean President Lee Myung-bak a "traitor" and "scum." In a statement, Pyongyang issued the following threat: "The special actions of our revolutionary armed forces will start soon to meet the reckless challenge of the group of traitors. Once the ... special actions kick off, they will reduce all the rat-like groups and the bases for provocations to ashes in 3 or 4 minutes ... by unprecedented peculiar

means and methods of our own style."

Meanwhile, reports suggested that North Korea was close to completing preparations for a nuclear test. This move -- if successful -- would constitute North Korea's third nuclear test after two in 2006 and 2009. The global community was watching events unfold in North Korea closely as Pyongyang may now have the capacity to conduct a test using highly enriched uranium for the very first time. This development would presage North Korea's possible ability to significantly build up its stocks of weapons-grade nuclear material. As well, it would facilitate the manufacture of a nuclear warhead to mount on a long-range missile. Should North Korea go forward with its third nuclear test, it would be a clear example of the limits of China's influence on the paranoid regime ruling North Korea today.

On July 25, 2012, news emerged from North Korea that the country's new leader, Kim Jong-un, was married to a woman seen in his company at a number of public events. North Korean state media finally confirmed that the country's leader Kim Jong-un was married and identified the leader's spouse as "Comrade Ri Sol-ju." There was no sense of when their marriage actually took place, although South Korean media suggested it was not a new development. The news of the marital status of the North Korean president, who succeeded his father Kim Jong-il at the start of the year, came weeks after a military shakeup. The military shuffle was interpreted as an attempt by Kim Jong-un to place his own stamp of authority on North Korea's most powerful institution. Now, with news of his marriage being made public and given his public appearances with his wife, some analysts were additionally suggesting that the new North Korean leader was also trying to establish his own, more accessible, image in the North Korean context.

That accessible image, however, did not necessarily augur a reformist inclination in the realm of government and politics. As July 2012 drew to a close, Pyongyang dismissed the notion of reform. A spokesperson for North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea, which directs relations with South Korea, put the idea of reform to rest, insisting that Kim Jong-un would maintain the "military first" policy of his father, the late Kim Jong-il. The spokesperson also spoke derisively of reports of possible changes in orientation from the North, which had emanated from the South, saying: "The puppet group (South Korea)... tried to give (the) impression that the present leadership of the DPRK (North Korea) broke with the past. This is the height of ignorance. To expect policy change and reform and opening from the DPRK is nothing but a foolish and silly dream, just like wanting the sun to rise in the west."

On Jan. 1, 2013, North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, delivered a rare new year's message on state television. His address -- the first new year's speech in almost two decades -- focused on the imperatives of economic development and reunification of the two Koreas. The call for a unified Korea came only weeks after Park Geun-hye was elected as the first female president of South Korea. In power since 2011 himself, Kim Jong-un may have been attempting to establish better relations with South Korea, which was now coming under new leadership itself. Notably,

Kim Jong-un warned that confrontation had only resulting in war. That being said, he continued to emphasize the military element as a national priority for North Korea. To that end, he said: "The military might of a country represents its national strength. Only when it builds up its military might in every way can it develop into a thriving country." Of course, North Korea has long been suffering from a famine and only a month prior (s discussed below) carried out a long-range rocket launch that was certain to elicit consequences from the United Nations Security Council.

Meanwhile, at the start of December 2012, North Korea announced plans to carry out a new satellite launch. A failed attempt to launch an "earth observation" satellite ensued in April 2012 when the long-range rocket crashed into the sea after traveling only a short distance. Now, in December 2012, North Korea was planning to launch a second version of Kwangmyongsong-3 (called the Unha-3) into space from the Sohae Space Center in North Phyongan Province. The official North Korean state news agency said the satellite launch was set to occur roughly between Dec. 10, 2012, and Dec. 22, 2012.

The United States issued a warning that the long-range missile launch to place a satellite in orbit would threaten global peace and security, and only result in isolation for Pyongyang. The United States also noted, as it did in April 2012, that such a move would be contrary to the prevailing United Nations resolutions, which prohibits North Korea's use of long-range intercontinental ballistic missile technology. In a written statement, United States Department of State spokesperson Victoria Nuland declared: "A North Korean 'satellite' launch would be a highly provocative act that threatens peace and security in the region...Any North Korean launch using ballistic missile technology is in direct violation of UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) 1718 and 1874." Nuland also noted that her country would be consulting with key partner countries, such as South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia, to discuss further steps in regards to these proposed moves by North Korea.

By Dec. 7, 2012, there were more signs that the rocket launch plan was going forward as fuel-injection work was reported to be taking place, according to South Korean media. Days earlier on Dec. 4, 2012, North Korea confirmed its plans to go forward with the rocket launch as it conveyed plans to the International Maritime Organization -- the United Nations' shipping agency. Typically, such notification to the International Maritime Organization in such instances. Further details about the launch were released including the news that the three-stage rocket was expected to fly on a southward path and would drop into the sea off the west coast of South Korea, ultimately landing in waters to the east of the Philippines. Since the flight path would take the rocket close to Japan's Okinawa island, the government of Japan was positioning missile defense interceptors in order to be prepared for the rocket charting off course. It should be noted that this long-range rocket has sufficient range to reach the western part of the United States.

On Dec. 9, 2012, North Korean authorities announced that the rocket launch -- due to take place between Dec. 10, 2012 and Dec. 22, 2012 -- was being delayed due to technical difficulties.

However, by Dec. 11, 2012, those technical difficulties were apparently resolved as international news media outlets reported that North Korea had fired its long-range Unha-3 rocket from its west coast. According to the South Korean Yonhap News Agency, some debris from the rocket fell into waters off the Philippines after passing over the Japanese city of Okinawa, consistent with the expected trajectory.

The firing of the rocket was supposedly intended to launch a satellite into space. North Korea announced that its goal had been achieved and a satellite was placed in orbit. The North Korean state news agency claimed success in its goal, declaring: "The launch of the second version of our Kwangmyongsong-3 [Unha-3] satellite from the Sohae Space Centre... on December 12 was successful. The satellite has entered the orbit as planned."

It should be noted that while United States officials confirmed there was an object launched into orbit, it also noted that the object appeared to be wobbling off course. South Korean defense sources had a somewhat different view and suggested that the satellite was not necessarily wobbling off course or out of control. The South Koreans said that the satellite may have been intended to be in a circular orbit but was instead an elliptical orbit.

There were also some questions about the level of success achieved in this exercise by the North Koreans. Some experts, such as Vassily Mikheev of Russia's Institute for World Economy and International Relations, have pointed to the fact that North Korean engineers used old technology to launch the satellite into orbit. Mikheev noted that Scud technology was intended for small missiles, and therefore not particularly reliable for firing a three-phased operation.

Of course, the conventional wisdom was that the entire exercise was a pretense, and intended to demonstrate North Korea's technological capacity to deliver a nuclear warhead on a intercontinental ballistic missile.

Regardless of actual motivation, the move by North Korea was made in defiance of international warnings that Pyongyang refrain from such provocative activity, and certainly in clear violation of prevailing United Nations Security Council resolutions. Accordingly, the United Nations Security Council wasted no time in condemning North Korea for its actions, and making note that the launch was "a clear violation of Security Council resolutions." China -- North Korea's closest ally -- expressed "regret" over North Korea's decision to fire the rocket while calling for restraint on the part of the international community in response. But the United States was already warning that Pyongyang would face consequences for its "highly provocative act that threatens regional security." There were suggestions that a new resolution by the United Nations Security Council was in the offing, but with China's position on such a measure unknown.

Meanwhile, all expectations were that North Korea was likely going to carry out a nuclear test. In 2009, following a rocket launch that year, North Korea carried out its second ever nuclear test.

North Korea's first nuclear test was carried out in 2006. Two rounds of sanctions were imposed on North Korea in response to those provocative actions. Now, with another rocket launch accomplished, it was anticipated that North Korea would again follow that path and carry out a third nuclear test. Of course, it should be noted that North Korea was pursuing expensive nuclear development and rocket delivery technology even as most of its population lived in a state of abject poverty. Thus, the notion of further economic sanctions was unlikely to deter the paranoid and reclusive regime, which has long privileged its military agenda ahead of domestic concerns.

2013 Special Report:

North Korea - A Threat to Global Security?

Summary:

On Feb. 12, 2013, North Korea carried out its third nuclear test, earning the wide and vociferous condemnation of the international community. North Korea cast the test as a restrained response and warned of further actions in the face of "U.S. hostility." The nuclear test was not unexpected, coming on the heels of a rocket launch in December 2012, which led to the United Nations' early 2013 decision to tighten sanctions against North Korea. North Korea under its new leader, Kim-Jong-un, has increased the anxiety of the international community by intensifying its rhetoric and threatening even more provocative actions.

In the face of such provocation, the United Nations Security Council convened an emergency meeting to consider measures against North Korea -- a country that has, to date, been undeterred by international action or prevailing international law. Indeed, the very existence of sanctions has not stopped North Korea from repeatedly violating the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. North Korea's lack of concern for international opinion was displayed in high relief in mid-February 2013 when the state-controlled newspaper declared the country's need for intercontinental ballistic missiles. Anxieties over global security reached new heights as news reports began to emerge about Iran playing a role in North Korea's nuclear development program.

In March 2013, the United Nations Security Council acted against North Korea by unanimously adopting Resolution 2094, which censured North Korea for its February 2013 nuclear test and imposing an even stricter sanctions regime on that country. At that time, tensions were increasing on the Korean peninsula, with North Korea using sharp rhetoric to issue threats against South Korea, even ending its armistice with the South that brought an end to the hostilities between the two Koreas, and ultimately declaring it was in "a state of war" with South Korea. North Korea also cut off its emergency hotline with South Korea; by April 2013, North Korea decided to re-open its nuclear complex at Yongbyon and ceased border crossing access for South Koreans into

the jointly-administered Kaesong industrial zone, which has often been viewed as a symbol of cross-border cooperation. North Korea, meanwhile, declared its enmity with the United States, warning that strikes on American interests might be in the offing, and pointing to United States military interests in Japan and Guam, presumably indicated they might be on Pyongyang's target list. The North Korean military additionally claimed to have "ratified" a possible attack on the United States.

But by May 2013, the political climate appeared to have cooled and North Korea withdrew two intermediate range missiles it had placed earlier on its east coast. Nevertheless, North Korea went on to carry out four short range missile tests in mid-May 2013. It was not known if North Korea was trying to re-ignite geo-political tensions or if the tests were routine exercises intended to simply show military might. A month later in June 2013, there was a bizarre mix of progress and retreat on the diplomatic front as the two Koreas planned and then cancelled bilateral negotiations; however, North Korea then proposed direct talks with the United States.

In August 2013 through September 2013, the two Koreas finally agreed to re-open operations at the jointly-administered Kaesong industrial zone. But in the second week of September 2013, signs pointed to the fact that operations were being restarted at North Korea's Yongbyon reactor. It seemed that regardless of calming of tensions, North Korea was going forward with the threat made in April 2013 about re-opening its Yongbyon facility.

Background:

On Jan. 22, 2013, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved a resolution authorizing tighter sanctions against North Korea over its December 2012 rocket launch, which at the time spurred international condemnation. North Korea angrily responded to the move by promising further rocket launches and nuclear testing, and also warning of retribution against the United States, which it described as a "sworn enemy." The following statement was issued via the official Korean Central News Agency: "We do not hide that a variety of satellites and long-range rockets will be launched and a nuclear test of higher level will be carried out in the upcoming new phase of the anti-U.S. struggle, targeting against the U.S., the sworn enemy of the Korean people." Pyongyang soon expanded its threats to note that it would take action against South Korea if it participated in the United Nations sanctions regime. China's official Xinhua News Agency also reported that Pyongyang intended to walk away from multilateral six-part talks since "the U.N. Security Council has been reduced into an organization bereft of impartiality and balance."

North Korea has not been a stranger to strong rhetoric, and since the December 2012 rocket launch, all expectations were that North Korea would follow its previous pattern of behavior and carry out a nuclear test. To that end, South Korea's Yonhap News referenced South Korean intelligence sources in reporting that North Korea had completed technical preparations for a

nuclear test. Thus, the nuclear test and belligerent threats against the United States and South Korea were, in many senses, not surprising reactions from North Korea. The decision to brand the United Nations Security Council an impartial entity and walk away from multilateral talks was perhaps the more unexpected path taken by Pyongyang, since China -- North Korea's closest ally - is a veto-wielding member of that body.

But by the end of January 2013, North Korea took its rhetoric to another level when it promised action at an even "higher level" than a nuclear test. The position of the North Korean leadership was reported in the Rodong Sinmun state newspaper as follows: "It is the people's demand that we should do something, not just a nuclear test, but something even greater. The U.N. Security Council has left us no room for choice."

This bellicose language continued in February 2013 when Pyongyang again threatened "stronger measures" than simply a third nuclear test in response to "hostile" sanctions by the international community. A statement by North Korea's state news agency read as follows: "The DPRK (Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, or North Korea) has drawn a final conclusion that it will have to take a measure stronger than a nuclear test to cope with the hostile forces nuclear war moves that have become ever more undisguised." There was no indication as to what form those "stronger measures" might entail although there was some suggestion that North Korea might use enriched weapons grade uranium, rather than plutonium, in an explosion of some sort.

The use of uranium could indicate North Korea's intent to expand its nuclear arsenal through uranium enrichment. It would also incur a high level of risk. As noted by Siegfried Hecker, former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico and a professor at Stanford University in California, in Foreign Policy magazine: "If a next test is well contained, then we may learn nothing about the device. However, one of the risks Pyongyang takes in trying to demonstrate a test at a higher level is that they may produce fissures that allow radioactive seepage or possibly cause a major blowout from the tunnel."

North Korea's bellicose language was matched with provocative visual imagery. At issue was the release of a three-minute video on YouTube depicting a North Korean man's dream sequence in which the city of New York is destroyed, with the 1985 song "We are the world" playing in the background. A caption, which was translated from Korean in The Guardian newspaper, reads as follows: "Somewhere in the United States, black clouds of smoke are billowing. It seems that the nest of wickedness is ablaze with the fire started by itself." It continues: "Despite attempts by imperialists to isolate and crush us ... never will anyone be able to stop the people marching towards a final victory." The video was reported to have been released by North Korea's state-run media and while of amateur quality in some regards, it nonetheless represented a sharp threat against the United States and/or the interests of its allies.

Two dates that North Korea might be considering for a nuclear test were Feb. 16, 2013, the

birthday of former leader, Kim Jong-il, or Feb. 25, 2013, the inauguration date of Park Geun-hye of South Korea.

North Korea's third nuclear test

On Feb. 12, 2013, seismic activity in North Korea suggested that officials may have selected an even earlier date to go forward with a third nuclear test. The seismic shock activity emanated from the same area where North Korea had conducted its 2006 and 2009 nuclear tests. Kim Min-seok of the South Korean Defense Ministry indicated that country's belief, saying, "We believe that North Korea has conducted a nuclear test." Meanwhile, the United States Geological Survey indirectly confirmed that the test had taken place as it noted the shock appeared to be one kilometer underground and was consistent with a nuclear blast. According to Lassina Zerbo, the director of the international data center of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty Organization, the magnitude of the test was twice as large as the 2009 nuclear test. It should be noted that initial reports suggested the use of plutonium in this nuclear test, which tends to be suited for use as a missile warhead.

North Korea itself soon confirmed that it had carried out its third underground nuclear test, which it said involved a "miniaturized" nuclear device. As reported in a statement by the state-run KCNA news agency: "It was confirmed that the nuclear test that was carried out at a high level in a safe and perfect manner using a miniaturized and lighter nuclear device with greater explosive force than previously did not pose any negative impact on the surrounding ecological environment."

North Korea claimed its third nuclear test was an act of self-defense against "U.S. hostility" and warned that further moves might be in the offing. Via the state-controlled KCNA news agency, Pyongyang claimed that the nuclear test "was only the first response" taken "with maximum restraint." Pyongyang warned that further actions were in the offing, saying: "If the United States continues to come out with hostility and complicates the situation, we will be forced to take stronger, second and third responses in consecutive steps."

International Response

The chorus of condemnation from the international community was broad and vociferous. United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon wasted no time in condemning North Korea's nuclear test, which he emphasized was a "clear and grave violation" of United Nations resolutions. NATO cast the nuclear test as an "irresponsible act" that posed a serious threat to world peace. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov demanded that North Korea abandon its nuclear program and return to the negotiating table. China, North Korea's closest ally, demanded an audience with the North Korean ambassador in Beijing, while Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said China was "strongly dissatisfied and resolutely opposed" to the nuclear test. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared the nuclear test to be a "grave threat" and vowed that it could not be tolerated. In a

statement, United States President Barack Obama argued for a swift response, asserting: "The danger posed by North Korea's threatening activities warrants further swift and credible action by the international community. The United States will also continue to take steps necessary to defend ourselves and our allies." But perhaps the most scathing response came from Denmark's Foreign Minister Villy Sovndal, who said: "This [nuclear test] deserves only one thing and that is a one-sided condemnation. North Korea is likely the most horrible country on this planet."

The United Nations Security Council convened an emergency meeting later on Feb. 12, 2013 to discuss future measures. During that meeting, the permanent and rotating member nations of the United Nations Security Council unanimously condemned North Korea's latest nuclear test and warned that "appropriate measures" would be in the offing.

Clearly, North Korea would be faced with the prospects of international action. Even its closest ally, China, via its state-controlled media, had urged North Korea not to go forward with such a provocative action and warned that North Korea would pay a "heavy price" if it proceeded with the test. Of course, in the realm of international jurisprudence, heavy costs have come in the form of harsh sanctions by the United Nations Security Council, which have done little to curtail North Korea from going forward with its missile program and nuclear development agenda. Indeed, the very existence of sanctions has not stopped North Korea from repeatedly violating the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

Belligerence and Brinkmanship

North Korea's lack of concern for international opinion was displayed in high relief when the state-controlled newspaper declared the country's need for intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Only two days after carrying out its third nuclear test, North Korea displayed its brazen stance by declaring that it should own ICBMs since the "imperialists" -- an apparent reference to the United States -- had a nuclear arsenal. According to a review in Rodong Sinmun, North Korea's main newspaper and an apparent mouthpiece for the North Korean government -- the country required ICBMs to augment its self-defense. The article in Rodong Sinmun also declared that North Korea would be a formidable enemy in the face of adversity or any challenge, and warned that there "can be no compromise in the last fight to herald the victory for independence for humanity." The diatribe also included the promise to "strike a blow to end imperialism."

The North Koreans' efforts to develop ICBM capacity were apparently not being undertaken in isolation. According to researchers at Johns Hopkins University, there were suggestions that the Iranians might be assisting the North Koreans with the development of a rocket program. Blog 38 at Johns Hopkins University noted that its analysis of satellite imagery taken in early 2013 showed that preparations were being made for an impending test of a liquid-fueled rocket. That satellite imagery further showed that North Korea could conceivably test rockets larger than the size of the rocket deployed in late 2012 from a new launch pad. As stated in the report published in Blog 38:

"Analysis of construction activities around the new launch pad has revealed evidence that Pyongyang's rocket program may be receiving assistance from Iran."

Since Iran was already ensconced its its own controversial nuclear development program -- to the great consternation of the international community -- the news of a possible connection between Pyongyang and Tehran was being met with alarm across the world. Indeed, there was a growing sense of anxiety about global security as a result. That being said, the general consensus was that North Korea had not, to date, developed the ability to deploy a nuclear warhead on an ICBM.

In the last week of February 2013, researchers at Johns Hopkins University -- via Blog 38 -- said that satellite imagery of the nuclear test facility show possible signs of human activity there, even after the third nuclear test. They suggested that North Korea might be preparing for a fourth nuclear test. As stated in Blog 38: "It remains unclear whether renewed activity at the site is normal for the days after a nuclear detonation or if it is an indication of Pyongyang's intention to conduct another test in the near future." Sources from the Chinese government suggested that Pyongyang was waiting for possible action from the United Nations Security Council before it makes a decision on a fourth nuclear test.

Consequences

With news circulating in the first week of March 2013 that a draft of a United Nations Security Council resolution against North Korea had been crafted, Pyongyang wasted little time in registering its anger. On March 5, 2013, North Korea warned that it would end its 1953 armistice (ceasefire) that brought a conclusion to the conflict with South Korea, without officially ending the Korean War. North Korea also demanded that the United States and South Korea end its ongoing military drills in the region, referring to them as a "dangerous nuclear war targeted at us." Furthermore, the Korean People's Army warned that it would carry out stronger actions in response to the "hostile" policies of the United States and South Korea. It was apparent that North Korea was prepared to take an aggressive stance in the face of international pressure.

On March 7, 2013, the United Nations Security Council unanimous adopted Resolution 2094 censuring North Korea for its February nuclear test and imposing an even stricter sanctions regime on that country. Included in those new sanctions were provisions to target the financing sources of North Korea's nuclear and missile technology, but there were additional penalties imposed on North Korea in the realm of banking, travel, transportation, and trade.

As stated by United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, "The strength, breadth and severity of these sanctions will raise the cost to North Korea of its illicit nuclear program. Taken together, these sanctions will bite and bite hard." South Korea's Ambassador to the United Nations, Kim Sook, said the time had come for North Korea to "wake up from its delusion" of becoming a nuclear state. He continued, "It can either take the right path toward a bright future and

prosperity, or it can take a bad road toward further and deeper isolation and eventual self-destruction." Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the unanimous adoption of the resolution delivered a strong message to North Korea that its pursuit of nuclear weapons would not be tolerated by the international community.

In addition to scrapping its non-aggression agreements with South Korea, North Korea responded to the news of international action by saying that it would be cutting off the North-South hot-line. Installed in 1971, the hot-line was created to provide direct communication at times of increased tensions and also to organize the transfer of persons and goods through the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone. Clearly, the disabling of the hot-line was not only symbolic of the breakdown in bilateral relations between the two Koreas, there were also practical and security implications.

It should be noted that North Korea has also shockingly threatened to launch pre-emptive nuclear attacks on the United States and South Korea in response to the joint military drills, which it said were proof of the United States' intent to go to war. A belligerent North Korea said via its Foreign Ministry that the United Nations' action would "compel" that country to take "countermeasures" in short order. Furthermore, it declared in a statement: "Now that the U.S. is set to light a fuse for a nuclear war, the revolutionary armed forces of the DPRK will exercise the right to a pre-emptive nuclear attack to destroy the strongholds of the aggressors and to defend the supreme interests of the country." North Korea even threatened to transform Washington and Seoul into "a sea in flames" with "lighter and smaller nukes."

For its part, South Korea was undeterred and moving forward with the very joint military drills (with the United States) that earned outrage and threats from Pyongyang. Still, South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se said on March 11, 2013, that his country would try to re-engage with North Korea with an eye on shifting the climate from tension and threats to cooperation. In an address, Yun said his goal was to "turn this era of confrontation and mistrust into an era of trust and cooperation with North Korea." Yun further asserted: "The security situation on the Korean Peninsula for now is very grave as the unpredictability surrounding North Korea is rising following its third nuclear test."

Escalating Tensions

As March 2013 was drawing to a close, North Korea increased its belligerent rhetoric and said that missile and artillery units were combat-ready and aimed at United States and South Korean targets. In a statement broadcast on the state-controlled Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the Korean People's Army's Supreme Command said: "From this moment, the Supreme Command puts all of its field artillery including strategic rocket units and long-range artillery units into the No. 1 combat ready posture." The statement further delineated targets in South Korea and the United States -- from its military installations in the Pacific to Hawaii and the mainland. Indeed, a North Korean spokesperson was on the record saying, "The U.S. should not forget that the Anderson Air

Force Base on Guam, where B-52s take off, and naval bases in Japan proper and Okinawa, where nuclear-powered submarines are launched, are within the striking range of [North Korea's] precision strike means." North Korea said that its motivation was driven by the priority "to safeguard our sovereignty and the highest dignity [of leader Kim Jong Un] through military actions."

The United States responded with its own statement as follows: "North Korea's bellicose rhetoric and threats follow a pattern designed to raise tensions and intimidate others. While the United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command and U.S. Forces Korea continue to maintain the armistice, North Korea continues its provocative behavior and rhetoric. The Republic of Korea-U.S. alliance is strong and we remain committed to the defense of [South Korea]."

Then, on March 30, 2013, North Korea declared it was in a "state of war" with South Korea and that its the long-standing truce with the South had ended. A statement from Pyongyang read as follows: "From this time on, the North-South relations will be entering the state of war and all issues raised between the North and South will be handled accordingly. The long-standing situation of the Korean peninsula being neither at peace nor at war is finally over." In response, the South Korean defense ministry denounced the war threat and issued its own statement, which read as follows: "Our military is maintaining full preparedness to leave no blind point in safeguarding the lives and safety of the people." As well, South Korean President Park Geun-hye noted that her country was taking the threats from North Korea "very seriously." She said, "If there is any provocation against South Korea and its people, there should be a strong response in initial combat without any political considerations."

For its part, the United States military command in South Korea dispatched a statement that read as follows: "North Korea will achieve nothing by threats or provocations, which will only further isolate North Korea and undermine international efforts to ensure peace and stability in Northeast Asia."

Matching its words with concrete illustrations, the United States was also displaying its military versatility by deploying B-2 and B-52 planes with nuclear capabilities over South Korea, while also flying F-22 Raptor fighter jets from Japan to South Korea's Osan Air base. As well, as noted below, the United States said it would deploy additional ballistic-missile interceptors along the country's Pacific Coast, with an eye on protecting the United States from a potential attack from North Korea. As well, the United States moved its sea-based X-Band radar platform, normally based in Hawaii, closer to the North Korean coast, with the intent of monitoring potential attempts from North Korea to launch a long-range missile. By April 2013, the United States additionally decided to deploy an anti-missile system to Guam.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsular escalated on April 2, 2013 when the state-controlled Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) of the North Korea announced that it would be re-opening its main

nuclear complex at Yongbyon and restarting its nuclear reactor there.

The Yongbyon complex was home to both a uranium enrichment facility and a nuclear reactor; it was closed as a part of a 2007 agreement between North Korea and a multilateral cadre, including China and the United States. The agreement mandated the closure of the reactor at Yongbyon in lieu of one million metric tons of heavy fuel oil as well as humanitarian aid benefits. The agreement was only really in effect for a couple of years since North Korea resumed the reprocessing of fuel rods stored at the site in 2009, complaining that it did not receive the desired level of energy assistance.

This 2013 decision to open the Yongbyon complex and restart operations of the nuclear reactor was illustrative of the intensification of dissonance on the Korean peninsular ongoing since late 2012. But it was also a disturbing development as it showed that the new leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-un, was prepared to take increasingly provocative actions. As a result, the international community was now regarding the paranoid and alienated nation state of nuclearized North Korea through the valence of anxiety.

Reflecting this sentiment, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he was "deeply dismayed" by North Korea's decision to re-open the main nuclear complex at Yongbyon and restart the nuclear reactor. He further condemned the provocative actions declaring: "The current crisis has already gone too far. Nuclear threats are not a game. Aggressive rhetoric and military posturing only result in counter-actions, and fuel fear and instability."

Secretary General Ban urged all parties to engage in urgent talks as "the only way to resolve the current crisis." However, with North Korea cutting off its military hot-line with South Korea, canceling its armistice with that country, using the rhetoric of war, and re-opening its Yongbyon facility, it seemed that authorities in Pyongyang were not in the mood for productive diplomatic engagement.

Indeed, a day later on April 3, 2013, North Korea has ceased border crossing access for South Koreans into the jointly-administered Kaesong industrial zone. Since Kaesong has been viewed as a tacit symbol of the state of geopolitical relations and the last significant arena of cooperation between the two Koreas, the cessation of cross-border access at the industrial zone was regarded as a disturbing development.

By April 4, 2013, the state-controlled Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said the military had "ratified" an attack on United States interests. The KCNA statement further noted that North Korean troops had been authorized to counteract American aggression with "powerful practical military counteractions," including nuclear weapons, and involving "cutting-edge smaller, lighter, and diversified nuclear strike means." The KCNA statement included the following warning: "The moment of explosion is approaching fast. No one can say a war will break out in Korea or not and

whether it will break out today or tomorrow." The expressed nuclear threat was the most blatant and belligerent exposition from the North Korean regime on global stability in recent memory. Raising the threat to another level, Pyongyang also told foreign embassies that it could not guarantee their safety in the event of conflict.

In a speech to the National Defense University in Washington, United States Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel noted that the recent actions of the North Koreans "present a real and clear danger." Meanwhile, Russian foreign ministry spokesperson, Alexander Lukashevich, observed that North Korea's actions may very well foreclose the notion of multilateral negotiations. He cast Pyongyang's attempts to violate decisions of the United Nations Security Council "as 'categorically unacceptable,' and issued the following warning: "This radically complicates, if it doesn't in practice shut off, the prospects for resuming six-party talks."

On April 5, 2013, Western officials were confirming reports that North Korea had moved a medium-range missile, known as a Musudan or Nodong B, to its east coast. It was unknown if the move was to be interpreted as a threatening gesture, with a warhead mounted on the missile, or part of the preparations for test firing. There was growing suspicion that North Korea might, in fact, be preparing to carry out yet another missile test. It should be noted that while this Musudan/Nodong B missile has a range of around 3,000 kilometers (1,875 miles), which would put all of South Korea, Japan, and possibly the United States' territory of Guam in its range; however, there was no test history to ensure precision. As noted by Greg Thielmann, a senior fellow at the Arms Control Association, "A missile that has never even had a flight test is not an operational system and is not a credible threat." Of course, a missile launch might be in the offing for the purpose of acquiring that test history.

By April 10, 2013, South Korean sources said that North Korea appeared to be preparing to launch the Musudan mid-range ballistic missile that had been moved to the east coast, and warned that North Korea might even be preparing to fire the Musudan simultaneously with shorter range Nodong and Scud missiles. The missile launch could conceivably coincide with the celebration of the birthday of Kim Il-sung, the country's founder.

Meanwhile, the rhetoric from North Korea continued to be bellicose with North Korean state media asserting that the scenario on the Korean Peninsula situation was "inching close to a thermonuclear war," and authorities in Pyongyang warning foreign nationals in South Korea to evacuate from that country. The Obama administration in the United States, via White House spokesperson, Jay Carney, characterized North Korea's statements as "unhelpful." Carney continued, "This kind of rhetoric will only further isolate North Korea from the international community and we continue to urge the North Korean leadership to heed President Obama's call to choose the path of peace and to come into compliance with its international obligations."

It should be noted that the foreign ministers of the so-called G-8 countries -- the United States, the

United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan, and Russia -- have condemned North Korea's recent actions, and warned of consequences in North Korea conducts either a missile launch or a nuclear test. On April 12, 2013, United States Secretary of State John Kerry traveled to South Korea and accentuated this multilateral warning, saying "If Kim Jong-Un decides to launch a missile, whether it is across the Sea of Japan or some other direction, he will be choosing willfully to ignore the entire international community."

A day later, Secretary of State Kerry met with Chinese leaders to find ways to end the geopolitical crisis brewing on the Korean peninsular. Following that meeting, Secretary Kerry said that the United States and China were both calling for North Korea to refrain from further provocative actions. It was clear that the international community was united in its stance against North Korea's recent acts of dangerous provocation.

Secretary of State John Kerry ended his Asian trip with a call for negotiations to end the dissonance and emphasizing the imperative of finding a diplomatic solution. He said, "The United States remains open to authentic and credible negotiations on denuclearization, but the burden is on Pyongyang. North Korea must take meaningful steps to show that it will honor commitments it has already made, and it has to observe laws and the norms of international behavior."

Meanwhile, with an eye on decreasing the tensions between the two Koreas, South Korean President Park Geun-hye called for peaceful dialogue. But North Korea was quick to reject the overture, characterizing the offer of talks as a "cunning ploy." If that response was any indication, North Korea remained defiant in the face of international pressure.

Latest Developments

April 15, 2013 -- the anniversary of North Korea's founder's birth -- passed fairly quietly, without a continuation of the bellicose war threats and even free of a huge military parade showcasing North Korean military might. The hopes that North Korea might be digesting the call for talks, and that the heated geopolitical climate had cooled for the moment, dissipated as Pyongyang issued new threats of war. A statement via state-controlled media was issued as follows: "Our retaliatory action will start without any notice from now."

It should be noted that South Korea responded to the recent actions of North Korea by deploying two warships with the Aegis missile defense systems on the east and west coasts. As well, Japan deployed missile defense systems around Tokyo to defend against any missile threat by North Korea.

In an interview with NBC News broadcast on April 16, 2013, United States President Barack Obama said that while the intelligence available does not suggest that North Korea has the ability to successfully arm a ballistic missile with nuclear warheads, he yet believed his country needed to be

prepared for all possibilities. He said, "Based on our current intelligence assessments we do not think that they have that capacity. But we have to make sure that we are dealing with every contingency out there. That's why I repositioned missile defense systems: to guard against any miscalculation on their part."

Asked whether he believed the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-Un, was mentally unstable, President Obama responded, "I'm not a psychiatrist. And I don't know the leader of North Korea." However, President Obama characterized North Korea's exposition of bellicose and vituperative war rhetoric as being similar to a childish tantrum, and unlikely to yield productive results. He said, "You don't get to bang your spoon on the table and somehow you get your way."

President Obama seemed cognizant of the fact that the impasse was unlikely to end easily, although he did not foreclose the possibility of a diplomatic resolution. He mused, "All of us would anticipate that North Korea will probably make more provocative moves over the next several weeks... This is the same kind of pattern that we saw his father engage in, and his grandfather before that. If they want to rejoin the community of nations, that path is available to them."

On April 18, 2013, North Korea's National Defense Commission issued a statement via the official Korean Central News Agency, demanding that the United States and South Korea withdraw "all nuclear war making capabilities from the region," with an eye on future dialogue. North Korea also called for Washington and Seoul to apologize for its aggression.

In response, a spokesperson for the White House, Josh Earnest, said that the Obama administration was committed to denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and was open to "authentic and credible negotiations." Earnest noted that the actions and rhetoric from North Korea "actually indicate the opposite." He added, "We also need to see some clear evidence that the North Koreans themselves are willing to live up to their international obligations, are willing to demonstrate their commitment to ending the nuclear program, something they've promised in the past."

By April 21, 2013, North Korea was reported to have moved two short-range missile launchers to the east coast. According to a South Korean military source in a report by the South Korean Yonhap news agency, satellite imagery showed the transfer of two mobile missile launchers suitable for short-range Scud missiles to the South Hamgyeong province. Earlier in the month, as noted above, two mid-range Musudan missiles were placed on launchers on the east coast. Collectively, these actions indicated that a missile launch might be in the offing -- possibly to mark the anniversary of the founding of the North Korean military on April 25. However, that date passed without any show of force.

In the last week of April 2013, South Korea called on North Korea to engage in dialogue over the Kaesong industrial complex, which became a flashpoint in the ongoing crisis between the two

Koreas. Regarded as a symbol of cooperation between North Korea and South Korea, the decision by the North to block access to the jointly-run industrial complex was interpreted as a clear sign of deteriorating relations, devolving diplomacy, and the slide towards confrontation. That slide became more precipitous when North Korea outright rejected the invitation to engage in talks. South Korea, therefore, responded by withdrawing its nationals from the Kaesong industrial zone in the interests of safety.

On May 6, 2013, CBS News reported that the two Musudan medium-range missiles, which had been moved to the east coast of North Korea weeks prior, were now removed from the launch site. Those missiles, as discussed above, had sufficient range to reach Japan as well as the United States territory of Guam in the Pacific.

The movement of the missiles was being interpreted in some circles as a cooling of the heated tensions on the Korean Peninsular. Of course, with the start of the spring farming season, it was also possible that many members of the army were -- as they do each year -- necessarily turning their attention to the planting effort.

Regardless of the rationale, the removal of the Musudan missiles from the launch site conceivably indicated that the threat posed by North Korea was reduced at this time, if only on a temporary basis. Indeed, since the Musudan is a mobile missile, it could well be transported back to the launch site in short order. As noted by a senior United States official from the National Security Council in an interview with BBC News, it was "premature to celebrate it as good news," given North Korea's record of unpredictable behavior to date. Striking a similar tone, George Little, a Pentagon spokesperson, characterized North Korea's most recent stance as "a provocation pause."

May 2013 saw North Korea carry out a series of short-range missile tests from its east coast. As global leaders attempted to bring down the level of tensions on the Korean Peninsular, and even after North Korea pulled back its two medium range missiles from its launch pad, the firing of four -- albeit short range -- missiles was being regarded as a provocation. It was not known if North Korea was trying to re-ignite geo-political tensions or if the tests were routine exercises intended to simply show military might. Regardless, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged North Korea to refrain from carrying out any further missile tests and "resume dialogue."

Presumably in an effort to show that the United States was fully prepared to defend itself from the potential nuclear missile threat posed by North Korea or any other belligerent nation state, the Missile Defense Agency along with the United States Navy on May 16, 2013 completed a successful test of a missile defense system as it destroyed a target launched in the Pacific Ocean. According to reports from the Department of Defense, a short-range ballistic missile target was launched from the Pacific Missile Range Facility on the Hawaiian island of Kauai; the USS Lake Erie was able to detect and track the missile, then launch a blocking missile with a kinetic warhead, which successfully destroyed the target. United States officials said the test operation in

Hawaii demonstrated that the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense system was fully functional.

Negotiations Planned and Canceled

On June 6, 2013, North Korea proposed convening talks with South Korea over the jointly-administered Kaesong industrial zone, which had been shut down months earlier amidst heightened tensions. The proposal also included a provision to restart tours at the Mount Kumgang resort, which was suspended when a South Korea tourist was shot by a North Korean guard in 2008.

In regards to the more recent closure of the industrial complex, more than 50,000 North Korean workers at Kaesong were withdrawn and South Koreans and supplies were banned entry as part of North Korea's illustration that it was in a "state of war" with South Korea. As intimated above in the "Background" note, the Kaesong complex has often been viewed as a symbol of cross-border cooperation between the two Koreas and its closure augured negatively as regards the overall geopolitical security on the Korean Peninsular. But with North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea offering the overture of dialogue on Kaesong and Mount Kumgang, it was believed that an effort was being made to de-escalate tensions and move to a more constructive footing.

North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea issued the following statement outlining its proposal of dialogue: "We propose holding talks between authorities of the North and South for the normalization of operations at Kaesong and the resumption of tours to Mount Kumgang on the occasion of the anniversary of the June 15 joint declaration." South Korea's Ministry of Unification, which administers inter-Korean affairs, said the government in Seoul was "considering the proposal in a positive light." Earlier, South Korea made it clear that given the precipitous and dangerous decline in bilateral relations during the first part of 2013, it would not only consider government level engagement with North Korea.

One day later on June 7, 2013, South Korea accepted North Korea's offer of bilateral talks but insisted that rather than have them take place in the North Korean border town of Kaesong, that the dialogue site be in the truce village of Panmunjom in the demilitarized zone between the countries. South Korea also noted that it was interested in taking up a range of issues, including the Kaesong Industrial Complex, the tourist center at Mount Kumgang, and the notion of family reunions. The North reacted to South Korea's stance in a rare show of cordiality asserting the following via a statement: "We appreciate the fact that the South side promptly and positively responded to the proposal made by us for holding talks between the authorities of both sides."

It should be noted that the North Korean government in Pyongyang also said that if Seoul accepted its proposal, it would also re-establish the emergency hotline channels, which were severed earlier in the year, as noted above.

But optimism about diplomatic progress between the two Koreas plummeted on June 11, 2013, when despite the fact that preliminary talks on technical and administrative details were reported to have gone smoothly. By June 13, 2013, more details emerged related to the cancellation of the negotiations. The cause was attributed to the composition of the respective delegations at the negotiating table in the first ministerial level talks since 2007.

Originally, South Korean Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae was slated to lead South Korea's delegation. When South Korea requested that North Korea send Kim Yang-gon, an adviser to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, to the talks, North Korea declined. Seoul then decided to dispatch Vice-Unification Minister Kim Nam-shik to lead its delegation instead. North Korea took offense to the apparent "downgraded" level of South Korean officials present at the talks and decided to withdraw completely. North Korea placed the blame on South Korea for "arrogant obstruction" and "deliberate disturbance" resulting in the aborted negotiations. North Korea further characterized South Korea's decision to change the composition of its delegation in this manner as "the height of discourtesy and disrespect unprecedented in the history of the North-South dialogue".

For its part, South Korea said it was disappointed with North Korea's response. South Korea also made it clear that it would not be offering to participate in negotiations with North Korea at any point in the near future. As noted by South Korean Prime Minister Chung Hong-won: "In the past, we have made infinite concessions to the North, but the time has come to hold talks where both sides are represented by officials of the same level."

At the start of July 2013, relations between the two Koreas seemed to be moving in a more productive direction when North Korea agreed to hold talks on the Kaesong industrial complex, only hours after South Korea suggested the meeting. It was hoped that this overture would end more positively than the situation in June 2013 when the proposed Kaesong discussions were halted over procedural disagreements, as discussed just above. However, as of mid-July 2013, there was no immediate agreement reached on resuming operations at their joint Kaesong industrial complex.

With relations between the two Koreas at a stalemate of sorts in mid-June 2013 (subsequently improved in early July 2013, as discussed above), it came as something of a surprise when North Korea proposed direct talks with the United States. North Korea's National Defense Commission, headed by North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, said it hoped for "serious discussions... to secure peace and stability." The United States responded to this overture by saying it looked towards "credible negotiations," made clear that North Korea had to be compliant with United Nations resolutions and travel down the path of denuclearization. At the start of July 2013, North Korea renewed its push for engagement with the United States when Choi Myung-nam, an international affairs director at the North Korean Foreign Ministry, said Washington should take Pyongyang's diplomatic offers seriously. It should be noted that while representatives of the United States and

North Korea have held meetings sporadically, the two sides have not engaged in high-level talks since 2009.

Meanwhile, in the third week of June 2013, North Korea was apparently building on its sudden appetite for diplomatic engagement as it expressed an interest in restarting international nuclear negotiations. According to China's foreign ministry, North Korean officials were now indicating that they wanted to "peacefully resolve the nuclear issue." It should be noted that multilateral talks between North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States over North Korea's controversial nuclear program collapsed in 2008. North Korea's renewed interest in diplomatic engagement at the multilateral level came as a result of high-level strategic talks with Chinese officials in Beijing. It was to be seen if an actual return to the multilateral negotiating table was in the offing.

In mid-August 2013, the two Koreas were able to successfully reach an agreement to re-open the jointly-administered Kaesong industrial complex. The accord between the two countries included a provision ensuring that Pyongyang would never again shut the industrial complex -- often viewed as a symbol of cross-border cooperation -- "under any circumstances." Another key provision of the accord was the move to "internationalize" the Kaesong industrial complex by hosting foreign visitors at the factory park. This element would effectively make it harder for North Korea to take any unilateral action involving the facility. Left unspecified at the time was a precise date for the reopening of the facility and the resumption of regular operations.

By September 2013 the two Koreas agreed on a "trial" start date of Sept. 16, 2013. It should be noted that agreement was also forged in regard to exempting South Korean firms from taxes for the rest of 2013 to offset losses incurred during the period of months when the complex was closed. Agreement was also made to facilitate easier access to the complex for South Koreans carrying out commercial responsibilities, and for the purpose of attracting foreign investors to the Kaesong Industrial Complex.

Nuclear site activity --

In mid-2013, despite the overtures of diplomatic engagement to the United States, and a stated interest in returning to multilateral talks, satellite imagery depicting a North Korean test site indicated possible preparations for a possible test of a nuclear device in the future. Researchers at John Hopkins University's North Korean Blog 38 Forum reported that satellite imagery of the Punggye-ri nuclear test site showed that some construction was being carried out the site where North Korea conducted nuclear tests in 2009 and 2013. Researchers at John Hopkins University said: "This activity appears to have begun by late April 2013 and gathered momentum over the next few months." While there was no conclusive sense of what the increased activity at the Punggye-ri nuclear test site really meant, the researchers suggested that the construction could simply be a matter of repairs, or preparations for a future test. As stated in the Blog 37: "These

activities do not appear to be part of preparations for a nuclear test in the near-term. Rather, they seem to be long-term projects ... that may be necessary for the conduct of future tests."

In September 2013, signs pointed to the fact that operations were being restarted at North Korea's Yongbyon reactor. Of note was the fact that white steam was seen rising from the Yongbyon nuclear facility. According to the Blog 38 North website of the United States-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins University, the color and volume of the steam signaled that the reactor was getting close to being operational. The blog entry read as follows: "The white coloration and volume are consistent with steam being vented because the electrical generating system is about to come online, indicating that the reactor is in or nearing operation," said the Washington-based institute." It seemed that regardless of calming of tensions, North Korea was going forward with the threat made in April 2013 about re-opening its Yongbyon facility.

As stated by Jeffrey Lewis of Blog 38 in an interview with BBC News, "The reactor looks like it either is or will within a matter of days be fully operational, and as soon as that happens, it will start producing plutonium." He continued, "They really are putting themselves in a position to increase the amount of material they have for nuclear weapons, which I think gives them a little bit of leverage in negotiations, and adds a sense of urgency on our part." Still, that sense of urgency was a relative one with the Institution for Science and International Security issuing a report in which it would yet take time before North Korea could use new plutonium in nuclear weapons. The institute's report issued the following finding: "Given that North Korea will likely need two-three years before it discharges irradiated fuel containing plutonium and another six to 12 months to separate the plutonium, there remains time to negotiate a shutdown of the reactor before North Korea can use any of this new plutonium in nuclear weapons."

*** Note: See below for information on North Korea's nuclear test history, nuclear capability, and the United States' reaction to the threat posed by North Korea to its national security. ***

Special Report:

North Korean ship carrying Cuban weapons intercepted by Panamanian authorities

An international imbroglio was in the making in mid-July 2013 when a North Korean ship carrying Cuban weapons was intercepted by Panamanian authorities. According to Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli, the ship was targeted by drug enforcement officials as it traveled from Cuba and approached the Panama Canal. Of concern to the Panamanian authorities was the fact that the ship disappeared from satellite tracking systems after it left the Caribbean side of the Panama Canal. This situation raised the suspicions of Panamanian authorities who wondered why the ship's crew would de-activate the tracking system that conveys details of the vessel's location.

As stated by Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli, "We had suspected this ship, which was coming from Cuba and headed to North Korea, might have drugs aboard so it was brought into port for search and inspection." When the vessel, Chong Chon Gang, was taken into port and subject to search and inspection, its cargo of suspected missiles was uncovered. Of note was the fact that the weapons were discovered amidst a shipment of sugar.

The drama in the Panama Canal reached new heights, according to Panamanian President Martinelli, when the North Korean ship captain had a heart attack and tried to commit suicide, while a riot involving the ship's crew of 35 ensued. The entire crew was subsequently taken into custody while the vessel and its shipments were seized. As well, President Martinelli posted an image via his Twitter account depicting a large green object inside a cargo container, which he characterized as the suspected "sophisticated missile equipment."

Soon after the fracas unfolded, Cuba admitted that this stash of weapons was included in its shipment of 10,000 tonnes of sugar to North Korea. Cuba explained that the weapons were obsolete Soviet-era arms from Cuba being sent for repair in North Korea. That explanation was plausible since North Korea possesses some expertise in the weapons arena. However, Panama called on the United Nations to lead an inquiry into the weapons materials to determine precisely what was stashed in the shipment.

Under the aegis of prevailing United Nations sanctions, the transportation of all weapons to or from North Korea is prohibited. Moreover, even a benign matter such as the transportation of weapons for repair to North Korea would, nonetheless, require a waiver from the United Nations Security Council. It would seem that no such waiver was procured by Cuba or North Korea.

As well, regulations pertaining to the transfer of shipments through the Panama Canal required the declaration of military cargo, including so-called "obsolete" weapons. Thus, an investigation into the matter was underway, while the North Korean crew was faced with the prospect of charges of illegal weapons smuggling in Panama. As noted by President Martinelli, "The world needs to sit up and take note: you cannot go around shipping undeclared weapons of war through the Panama Canal."

It should be noted that North Korea issued a demand that its ship be returned and the crew of the Chong Chon Gang be released. Panama was not acquiescing to this demand and, instead, was moving forward with the aforementioned investigation.

By the close of July 2013, woes for Cuba and North Korea over the infamous ship carrying weapons cargo only increased. At issue was the report by Panamanian authorities that four new undeclared containers were found aboard the Chong Chon Gang, quite likely in violation of United Nations sanctions. That determination, however, was yet to be made.

In February 2014 , Panama had released the Chong Chon Gang and the ship's owner was forced to pay a fine totalling almost \$700,000 for violating navigation regulations (specifically those attending to the transporation of weapons). As well, three crew members were facing weapons trafficking charges, although the charges against the other 32 crew members were dropped.

At issue for the Panamanian government was the fact that the weapons being smuggled were not "obsolete defensive weapons" as claimed by Cuba, but in fact several sophisticated weapons in perfect condition. Indeed, it was soon revealed that the stash of weapons included two MiG-21 aircraft, 15 MiG engines and nine anti-aircraft missiles.

A preliminary report by a panel of experts to the Sanctions Committee at the United Nations Security Council concluded that the Chong Chon Gang violated prevailing United Nations sanctions against North Korea, which ban the transfer of weapons to that country. Yet to be determined would be the type of penalties the United Nations Security Council would levy against Cuba.

Special Entry:

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un executes uncle referring to Chang Song-thaek as a "traitor" --

In December 2013, Chang Song-thaek -- the uncle of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un -- was removed from his top military post as the vice-chairman of the National Defense Commission. South Korean media reported that in addition to Chang's dismissal, two of his close aides were also executed for corruption.

Less than a week after the news broke about Chang's dismissal, the official Korean Central News Agency took the unprecedented step in this secretive and hermetic country of announcing that a military trial had been held and Chang had been put to death. Chang was branded both a "traitor" and "human scum," and executed for "acts of treachery." The state media went the extra mile by detailing those acts of treachery.

During his military trial, Chang supposedly admitted that he attempting to overthrow the state via the formation of his own reformist faction or "little kingdom." A central element of Chang's agenda, according to the state, was a scheme to drive the economy into "an uncontrollable catastrophe." According to the official report, which was cited in the North Korean state media: "Chang dreamed such a foolish dream that once he seizes power by a base method, his despicable true colors as a reformist would be known to the outside world and would help his new government get recognized by foreign countries in a short span of time." Clearly, if such a plan was really part of Chang's agenda, it had not ended successfully and the man at the center was now eliminated.

At the level of political strategy, the removal of Chang from a position of power, followed by his quick military trial and execution marked the most significant signs of political upheaval in North Korea since Kim Jong-un succeeded his father -- the late Kim Jong-il -- as the leader of the paranoid and secretive North Korean nation state.

Chang has, in the past, been subject to political "purges" in North Korea. Despite being elected to the Central Committee of North Korea's Korean Workers' Party (KWP) in 1992, he disappeared from the public purview in 2004 with speculation abounding that he was under house arrest. There were additional rumors that he was sent to a "re-education" camp. Chang re-emerged in 2006 and has since he regarded as an economic reformer and an ally to Kim Jong-un. His dismissal was viewed, at the time, as a major shake-up on the North Korean political scene. Clearly, his execution signified an even more shocking shift on the North Korean landscape. Since the position of the vice-chairman of the National Defense Commission has long been regarded as the "second in command" position to the supreme leader, Chang's removal and execution was likely to create a seismic shift in the power hierarchy of North Korea. Indeed, Kim Jong-un was making his mark on the political structure and making it clear that he had full control and absolute authority over the North Korean state. Kim Jong-un was further warning would-be antagonists, reformists, and dissenters that the price for disloyalty would be death.

The White House in the United States reacted to the news of Chang's execution by with the following statement: "If confirmed, this is another example of the extreme brutality of the North Korean regime. We are following developments in North Korea closely and consulting with our allies and partners in the region."

Special Entry:

Satellite photos indicate North Korea producing fuel rods for nuclear reactor at Yongbyon --

On Dec. 24, 2013, the United States-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins University in Washington D.C. reported that satellite imagery indicated that North Korea was producing fuel rods for its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon.

Months earlier in September 2013, amidst progress on the diplomatic front as the two Koreas agreed to re-open operations at the jointly-administered Kaesong industrial complex, there was retrenchment on the matter of North Korea's nuclear program. There were indications that operations were being restarted at North Korea's Yongbyon reactor. Of note was the fact that white steam was seen rising from the Yongbyon nuclear facility.

According to the Blog 38 North website of the United States-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins University, the color and volume of the steam signaled that the reactor was getting close to being operational. The blog entry read as follows: "The white coloration and volume are consistent with steam being vented because the electrical generating system is about to come online, indicating that the reactor is in or nearing operation," said the Washington-based institute." It seemed that regardless of calming of tensions, North Korea was going forward with the threat made in April 2013 about re-opening its Yongbyon facility.

As stated by Jeffrey Lewis of Blog 38 in an interview with BBC News in September 2013, "The reactor looks like it either is or will within a matter of days be fully operational, and as soon as that happens, it will start producing plutonium." He continued, "They really are putting themselves in a position to increase the amount of material they have for nuclear weapons, which I think gives them a little bit of leverage in negotiations, and adds a sense of urgency on our part."

Still, that sense of urgency was a relative one with the Institution for Science and International Security issuing a report in which it would yet take time before North Korea could use new plutonium in nuclear weapons. The institute's report issued the following finding: "Given that North Korea will likely need two-three years before it discharges irradiated fuel containing plutonium and another six to 12 months to separate the plutonium, there remains time to negotiate a shutdown of the reactor before North Korea can use any of this new plutonium in nuclear weapons."

But as of late December 2013, clearly no "shutdown" of the reactor was in the immediate offing. Instead, the United States-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins University was reporting that satellite imagery showed that North Korea was producing fuel rods for its Yongbyon nuclear reactor. The United States-Korea Institute further concluded that one building at Yonbyon had been renovated to produce fresh fuel rods for the reactor, which appeared to be operational. As well, another building was identified which could be used to produce fuel for a light-water reactor.

Via the Blog 38 North website, the United States-Korea Institute offered the following assessment: "The identification of these facilities indicates a more wide-ranging, extensive effort by North Korea to modernize and restart the Yongbyon complex." The institute continued, "Based on this analysis, it appears the North Koreans anticipated that future requirement before 2009 and knew the lead times required to produce the necessary fresh fuel. Once international inspectors were expelled in 2009, they moved forward with the renovation of the main pilot plant building as part of what was likely their contingency plan for reactivation."

The "good news" for neighboring countries anxious about a nuclear-armed North Korea was the belief that Pyongyang holds possession of only 25 percent of the fuel rods necessary for the reactor to reach full power.

Special Entry

North Korea and South Korea exchange fire following North Korean threat of another nuclear test

On Feb. 27, 2014, North Korea fired four short-range missiles over the sea off its eastern coast -- essentially to the north of the border with South Korea. The South Korea Yonhap News Agency speculated that the missiles were Scud short-range missiles with a capacity of traversing 125 miles and thus capable of reaching targets in South Korea but not as far as Japan.

On March 2, 2014, North Korea fired another two short-range missiles into the sea off the eastern coast of the Korean peninsula. The South Korea Yonhap news Agency reported that the missiles likely flew about 300 miles and were believed to be Scud-C models -- this time capable of reaching targets in both South Korea and Japan.

In the third week of March 2014, North Korea fired a series of 30 short-range rockets into the sea off the eastern end of the Korean peninsula. The rockets were thought to be Soviet-era FROG rockets that have been in North Korea's possession since the 1960s, and seemingly flew for more than 35 miles before landing in the sea. This launch of the 30 FROG missiles came after other such missile tests in the weeks prior, as discussed above.

In the last week of March 2014, North Korea test fired two medium range Nodong missiles, which landed in the ocean between North Korea and Japan. The action essentially triggered a condemnation from the United Nations Security Council, which noted that the missile launches were a violation of prevailing United Nations resolutions, such as Security Council Resolutions 1718 and 1874 that prohibit North Korea from carrying out ballistic or nuclear activity. The United Nations Security Council also warned of an "appropriate response" to come. Undeterred, North Korea lashed back at the United Nations Security Council, characterizing its condemnation as "absolutely intolerable" and justifying its own action as being a "self-defensive" move.

There were suggestions that North Korea was reacting to the annual joint military exercises by United States and South Korean forces, which Pyongyang typically characterizes as acts of war and aggression. Fueling the fire for North Korea was the flight of a United States nuclear-capable B-52 bomber over South Korea. South Korean authorities have put forth the theory that North Korea's missile launched constituted an "armed protest" against the joint South Korean-United States military drills that were taking place.

Perhaps exasperated by North Korea's provocative acts and saber rattling, which were manifest most recently by the missile launches, China had already entered the equation. Even before the launch of the medium range missiles in the last week of March 2014, China had earlier declared a "red line," saying that it would not allow war or chaos on the Korean peninsula, and asserting

that peace was possible only via denuclearization. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was on the record saying, "The Korean peninsula is right on China's doorstep. We have a red line, that is, we will not allow war or instability on the Korean peninsula." Wang demanded that all parties "exercise restraint" and noted that "genuine and lasting peace" on the Korean peninsula was only possible with denuclearization. He said, "Confrontation can only bring tension, and war can only cause disaster." The Chinese foreign minister also endorsed the resumption of multilateral nuclear talks, saying, "Some dialogue is better than none, and better early than later."

This stance by China -- North Korea's most important diplomatic and economic supporter -- suggested that Beijing was no longer willing to accept Pyongyang's theatrics on its doorstep. Pressure on North Korea had already begun to intensify a month earlier in February 2014 when the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, urged global powers to refer North Korea to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court following a report that documented horrific crimes against humanity in that country. While China was unlikely to join the human rights chorus against North Korea, it certainly seemed prepared to use its influence to compel North Korea to return to the nuclear negotiating table. Adding to the suggestion that dialogue might be at hand, Japan and North Korea were scheduled to engage in their first high level talks in years.

However, the nuclear negotiating table appeared to be a distant notion as March 2014 came to a close, and as North Korea threatened to go forward with a nuclear test. As reported by the North Korean Central News Agency, North Korea said it would not foreclose the possibility of testing a "new form" nuclear weapon in defiance of international condemnation and in contravention of prevailing international law. While Pyongyang did not specify the type of nuclear weaponry it intended to test, the conventional wisdom has long been held that North Korea was attempting to develop small and sophisticated nuclear devices that could be delivered by intercontinental ballistic missiles.

South Korea warned that if its neighbor to the north went forward with a nuclear test, there would be consequences in the offing. As noted by South Korea Foreign Ministry spokesman Cho Tae-young, "North Korea should bear in mind that if it ignores the stern demand from the neighboring countries and the international community and carries out a nuclear test, it will have to pay a price for it."

On March 31, 2014, tensions on the Korean peninsula exponentially increased as North Korea and South Korea exchanged fire across its western maritime border.

According to South Korean authorities, this exchange of fire was presaged by North Korea's announcement that it would hold "live fire" military drills along its border zone with South Korea. South Korea warned that there would be immediate retaliation if any ordinance touched its jurisdiction. North Korea then fired more than 500 artillery rounds, some 100 of which landed in

South Korean territorial waters. As promised, the South Koreans responded by firing more than 300 rounds into North Korean waters and scrambling F-15s on its side of the maritime border.

Known as the Northern Limit Line, the maritime border has been a well known flashpoint region between the two Koreas, and its very existence is a matter of dispute from the point of view of the North Koreans. The boundary was established after the end of the Korean War in the 1950s by the United Nations, but the line of demarcation has been accepted by North Korea. It should be noted that North Korean artillery fire killed four South Koreans on the Yeonpyeong border island in the same disputed area in 2010. In another egregious incident in 2010, North Korea torpedoed a South Korean warship in the disputed border region, sinking the vessel and killing 46 people. Now, in 2014, it was again the locus of dissonance between the two Koreas as a result of the North's decision to hold military drills in this hotspot region.

It was to be seen if these were actions by North Korea were aimed at improving Pyongyang's negotiating position for the future as it attempted to stave off further sanctions that were likely to come, or, if they were intended to be blatant and irrational acts of provocation. South Korean Defence Ministry spokesperson, Kim Min-seok, intimated that Pyongyang's actions were being motivated by both factors as he said, "We believe the North's maritime firing is a planned provocation and an attempt to test our military's determination to defend the Northern Limit Line and to get an upper hand in South-North relations."

*** Note: See below for information on North Korea's nuclear test history, nuclear capability, and the United States' reaction to the threat posed by North Korea to its national security. ***

Special Entry

North Korea test fires missiles ahead of South Korean visit by Chinese president

On July 2, 2014, North Korea fired a series of short-range rockets into the sea off its east coast. While the type of rockets could not be confirmed by South Korean sources that reported the event, they surmised that they were likely 300 mm rockets. Days earlier, North Korea fired two short range ballistic missiles. It should be noted that while the short range rocket launch were not in violation of prevailing United Nations Security Council resolutions against North Korea, the firing of short range ballistic missiles were, indeed, in violation of international law.

The apparent display of military might by North Korea came ahead of a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to South Korea. It was not known if the test firing of missiles was intended to intimidate China, which is North Korea's only major ally and home to a own far more sophisticated military. But with China being pressured by South Korea and the West to use its influence to curb North Korea's provocative actions, and return to the negotiating table as regards its nuclear and

missile program, it was possible that North Korea was delivering the message that it would not be swayed by its closest ally, especially when that ally's leader was on a formal visit to South Korea. In truth, Chinese President Xi Jinping was returning the courtesy of a visit to China by South Korean President Park Geun-hye; however, it was not likely that paranoid Pyongyang would interpret the visit in the most benign manner.

Note that in the second week of July 2014, Jon Pyong Ho -- a former North Korean missile expert who played a central role in his country's nuclear weapons and missile programs -- died. The news of his death occurred even as North Korea launched a fresh volley of short-range missiles into waters off its eastern coast. Although Ho was sanctioned by the United Nations because of his nuclear development work, including his direction of the infamous 2006 nuclear test, he had more recently entered retirement. As such, his death was not likely to impact North Korea's nuclear and missile development program. A state funeral was in the offing.

North Korea fires three short-range rockets ahead of Pope Francis' visit to South Korea

In mid-August 2014, North Korea fired three short range rockets from the port city of Wonsan; the rockets landed in the sea off the east coast of the Korean peninsula. The incident coincided with Pope Francis' arrival in South Korea for a five day visit and ahead of scheduled joint military exercises between South Korea and the United States. North Korea objects to those drills, charging that they are intended to prepare for war. As such, North Korea has typically taken some sort of provocative action to protest the joint military activity. In this case, North Korea reacted with the firing of the rockets as well as the issuance of a statement that read as follows: "Given that the U.S. and the puppet forces of South Korea continue staging nuclear war exercises against us in particular, we will take countermeasures for self-defense which will include missile launches, nuclear tests, and all other programs." It was to be seen if North Korea would indeed follow up the rocket launches with nuclear tests, as indicated.

*** Note: See below for information on North Korea's nuclear test history, nuclear capability, and the United States' reaction to the threat posed by North Korea to its national security. ***

Special Note

No "Game of Thrones" in North Korea as Kim Jong-un returns to spotlight

With North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un out of the public spotlight for several weeks, speculation began to rise in the early autumn of 2014 about his health and / or whether he remained in control of the country.

Most of the speculation has focused on the matter of Kim Jon-un's health. Some of the last

footage of the North Korean leader indicated his leg may have been injured and thus prevented him from taking part in state activities. Still, there were questions as to why a leg or foot injury, quite possibly caused either by gout or a broken ankle, may have kept Kim Jong-un cloistered for such an extended period of time.

Accordingly, speculation was slowly moving in the direction of whether Kim Jong-un was embroiled in -- and perhaps even sidelined by -- a power struggle. Indeed, a spate of reports emerged at the start of October 2014, ruminating as to whether the North Korean leader had been deposed in a secret coup. The absence of Kim Jong-un on Oct. 10, 2014, at the annual commemoration of the foundation of the Korean Workers Party only added to the mounting suggestions that a power shift might be underway.

Of significance, according to Remco Breuker, Professor of Korean studies at Leiden University in the Netherlands, was the deployment of three leading political officers in the North Korean military to the closing ceremony of the Asian Games in South Korea. Referring to these individuals at that event, Breuker said: "They have sent out high ranking officials before but never in the capacity of representing the supreme leader. This may well be the first time." Defectors from North Korea also commented on the presence of the three leading political officers at the ceremony in South Korea, drawing attention to the fact that they were accompanied by bodyguards (a measure typically reserved for the North Korean president), and that they exhibited odd behavior (specifically, they were shown smiling, made no mention of Kim Jung-un, and delivered no letter from the North Korean leader, as is the typical practice).

Meanwhile, in an interview with the publication, The Telegraph, Toshimitsu Shigemura, a professor at Waseda University in Japan, observed that a recent ban on travel passes might be a sign that either a coup had taken place or that a coup plot may have been uncovered. Other North Korea experts have suggested that a low key power shift or transfer of power might be underway. Still others have indicated that a battle for control -- something akin to a "game of thrones" -- was evolving in the isolated and secretive east Asian country. To this end, one prevailing theory was the Kim Jung-un was removed from the leadership position. With no obvious "heir" to the metaphoric "throne," North Korea could possibly be governed by the Organization and Guidance Department (OGD) of the Korean Workers Party.

It should be noted that some sources in North Korea have insisted that Kim Jong-un remained in "total control" of the country and attributed his absence from the public scene to an injury. Likewise, the United States has said that it has not seen any signs of a transfer of power in North Korea. United States National Security Adviser Susan Rice said in an interview with NBC News, "Obviously we are watching very carefully what's happening in North Korea. We have not seen any indications of a transfer of power at this point in North Korea that we view as definitive but we'll continue to watch it carefully."

That guidance turned out to be true as Kim Jong-un re-emerged in the public purview on Oct. 14, 2014. According to North Korea's state media, Kim Jong-un visited a residential district and a science academy. The news of these public visits ended speculation over his health as well as the rumors of a transition of power.

Special Note

United States slaps sanctions on North Korea in response to alleged cyber-attack on Sony

At the start of 2015, the United States imposed new sanctions on North Korea in response to an alleged cyber-attack on Sony Pictures Entertainment. Of note was the fact that United States sanctions against North Korea were already in place as a result of Pyongyang's provocative and dangerous nuclear program. This new tranche of sanctions was being imposed as a retributive measure promised by the Obama White House in response to a cyber-attack on Sony Pictures, which the United States government charged was carried out by agents of North Korea. While some cyber-experts have cast doubts on the claim that North Korea was behind the cyber-attack, the United States government has held steadfastly to that claim.

The cyber-attack on Sony Pictures began when the so-called Guardians of Peace hacked and released data from Sony's computers, exposing embarrassing electronic mail correspondence. The group soon took its attack to new heights, threatening theaters intending to screen Sony's satirical comedy, *The Interview*, which featured a humorous assassination plot against the leader of North Korea. Those threats caused Sony to cancel its cinema release of the movie, ultimately earning the rebuke of United States President Obama who suggested that decision by Sony was "a mistake." To that end, Sony later reversed its decision and released the film in some theaters and in online formats.

Meanwhile, North Korea's response to the hacking drama plaguing Sony was confusing. Powers in that country at first praised the cyber-attack, casting it as a "righteous deed," and even implying it might be the work of its own agents; later, they denied culpability altogether. However, as noted above, the United States made clear that it placed the blame for the Sony cyber-attack on North Korea, with Obama administration officials warning of a "proportional response" in the offing.

By late 2014, there was speculation that a disruption or "blackout" of Internet service in North Korea may have been part of the package of consequences promised by the Obama administration against North Korea. However, the United States government refused to acknowledge whether or not it was responsible for cutting off Internet connectivity in North Korea.

By contrast, at the start of 2015, the Treasury Department in the United States was utterly forthright when it publicly named three entities as well as 10 North Korean government officials

in its sanctions announcement. The United States Treasury's list of targets included individuals working in Iran, Syria, China, Russia and Namibia. The three entities covered by the sanctions were as follows: The Reconnaissance General Bureau -- North Korea's primary intelligence organization; the Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation (Komid) -- North Korea's primary arms dealer; and Korea Tangun Trading Corporation -- a defense research agency. It should be noted that the targets of the new sanctions were not necessarily linked to the cyber-hacking attack on Sony Pictures. Instead, it appeared that the United States was simply augmenting its sanctions regime already in place against North Korea. The intent was to isolate North Korea's defense industry as a deterrent against future cyber-attacks.

For his part, President Barack Obama signed an executive order on Jan. 2, 2015, officializing the sanctions, while the White House released a statement that read as follows: "We take seriously North Korea's attack that aimed to create destructive financial effects on a U.S. company and to threaten artists and other individuals with the goal of restricting their right to free expression. Today's actions are the first aspect of our response." The White House added, "This step reflects the ongoing commitment of the United States to hold North Korea accountable for its destabilizing, destructive and repressive actions, particularly its efforts to undermine U.S. cyber-security and intimidate U.S. businesses and artists exercising their right of freedom of speech."

Special Note

North Korea launches anti-ship missiles in latest display of belligerence

In the second week of February 2015, with joint military exercises looming between the United States and South Korea, North Korea launched anti-ship missiles from hoverships. North Korea's news agency published images showing the hoverships launching a so-called "cutting-edge anti-ship rocket" that would be used to secure the contested marine border with South Korea.

Some observers expressed alarm over what they thought to be signs of intensifying technical abilities by North Korea and thus raising the threat level to neighboring countries. They also suggested that the anti-missile technology may have come from either Russia or China, thus raising questions about those countries' culpability in facilitating North Korea's menacing behavior. Still others dismissed the event as simply an act of aggression ahead of the aforementioned joint military exercises looming between the United States and South Korea. But a third contingent of observers have suggested that the so-called advances in North Korean military capabilities were actually overblown. Peter Singer, a strategist at the New America Foundation, said "North Korea has a long track record of exaggerating and outright faking its military accomplishments... This is not going to disrupt the balance of power in the region." Indeed, the use of hovercraft vessels can hardly be regarded as a cutting edge or breakthrough technology. It has been in use for some time across the world.

That being said, North Korea's use of new missiles from hoverships would still pose a threat to the region. Should they be deployed in the area of contested marine waters, the South Korean military would be compelled to respond. As such, the chances of a situation escalating militarily remained high, making it clear that North Korea remained a regional menace.

Special Note

U.S. Ambassador to South Korea brutally attacked; North Korea calls the violence justified

In the first week of March 2015, United States Ambassador Mark Lippert was brutally attacked by a pro-North Korean activist in the South Korean capital of Seoul.

Ambassador Lippert, who was serving as the United States envoy to South Korea, was attending a breakfast aimed at a discussion of the reunification of the two Koreas. During the breakfast, the assailant pushed Lippert onto a table and slashed his face with a knife, seriously injuring him. The ambassador was then rushed to the hospital and endured 80 stitches and several hours of surgery to close his facial wound. South Korean doctors later said that Lippert narrowly survived the injury.

The assailant was soon identified as as pro-North Korean activist, Kim Ki-jong, who was known to authorities due to a previous attempt to attack Japanese Ambassador Toshinori Shigeie, for which he received only a suspended sentence. As well, there was a long record of Kim Ki-jong's participation in anti-American protests. In South Korea, activists with pro-Pyongyang sensibilities are few in number; however, they hold passionate beliefs about the contribution of foreign powers to the divisions between the Koreas.

South Korean President Park Guen-hye condemned what she cast as an "attack on the South Korea-U.S. alliance." However, the incident did not reflect well on her, the South Korean government, or South Korean security authorities. Indeed, there were vital questions arising about (1) the level of security at the high-level breakfast, and (2) the fact that the assailant -- with his known history -- was not only free, but permitted to attend a diplomatic breakfast attended by high ranking officials.

Meanwhile, North Korea entered the fray, lauding the act of violence and characterizing it as "just punishment for U.S. warmongers." On behalf of the United States, Secretary of State John Kerry asserted that his country would not be "intimidated or deterred by threats or by anybody who harms any American diplomats." For his part, Ambassador Lippert exhibited great resilience, writing after surgery via the social media outlet, Twitter, "Doing well and in great spirits... Will be back ASAP to advance US-ROK [Republic of Korea] alliance!"

Special Note

Talks between two Koreas ends in agreement to de-escalate tensions after exchange of fire and North Korean move to "war footing"

On Aug. 20, 2015, North Korea shelled across the border, prompting South Korea to retaliate with several rounds of artillery fire. Reports indicated that North Korea carried out the initial burst of shelling in retaliation for anti-Pyongyang rhetoric that has been broadcast on loudspeakers from South Korea. The broadcasts have generally be regarded as a type of psychological warfare against Pyongyang and intended to counteract the North's nationalist propaganda.

South Korea responded to North Korea's shelling, as noted here, by firing rounds of artillery. North Korea did not immediately return fire, opting instead to warn South Korea to cease its broadcasts, which it viewed as a declaration of war, along the border area within 48 hours. North Korea warned that if South Korea did not heed its warning, it would take military action. However, South Korean authorities said that the broadcasts would not be stopped, thus prompting the exchange of multiple rounds of fire -- none of which ended at this time with any casualties.

The exchange of fire came after two South Korean soldiers died in a landmine blamed on North Korea earlier in August 2015, and before annual joint military exercises between the United States and South Korea that North Korea regularly condemns as an act of aggression. As a result of these incidents and the impending joint military exercises, tensions were now markedly intensified between the two Koreas. Given this unstable landscape, South Korea moved to evacuate residents from Yeoncheon in the western sea border. South Korea's National Security Council was also set to convene an emergency session.

Then, on Aug. 21, 2015, in a disturbing escalation of tensions, the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, placed his country on "war footing." North Korean state media reported that after an emergency meeting of the central military commission, King Jong-un had ordered that North Korean troops be "fully ready for any military operations at any time." While North Korea has often indulged in fiery militaristic rhetoric, this instance was regarded as more alarming since an exchange of fire had just taken place.

On Aug. 23, 2015, South Korean President Park Geun-hye released a statement in which she said that the anti-Pyongyang broadcasts would continue unless North Korea apologized for the landmine incident that killed two South Korean soldiers. She said, "We need a clear apology and measures to prevent a recurrence of these provocations and tense situations. Otherwise, this government will take appropriate steps and continue loudspeaker broadcasts." The program of cross-border broadcasts actually ended in 2004 but resumed in recent times as a result of North

Korean aggression. It was to be seen how North Korea would respond to the South Korean leader's demand, and if high level bilateral talks between the two sides -- presumably with an eye on decreasing tensions -- would yield productive results.

A day later on Aug. 24, 2015, following marathon negotiations between the two Koreas in the in the so-called "truce village" of Panmunjom inside the demilitarized zone (DMZ), the two Koreas released a statement indicating they had reached an agreement to de-escalate tensions. According to the statement, North Korea expressed "regret" over the deaths of two South Korean soldiers in the aforementioned landmine incident, stopping just short of taking responsibility for the loss of life. North Korea also agreed to end its war footing, which had actually commenced in earnest. For its part, South Korea agreed to end its cross-border loudspeaker broadcasts. Also of note was the fact that North Korea and South Korea agreed to future discussions on a range of issues, with an eye on diffusing tensions and improving bilateral ties.

The agreement could only be regarded as a positive development on the Korean peninsula, especially given the volatile personality of nuclear-armed North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un. But Pyongyang officially applauded the agreement, with the state news agency noting that it had moved the inter-Korean relations from a catastrophic path on to "the track of reconciliation and trust." North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un, also lauded the accord between the two Koreas, calling it "a landmark occasion."

On the other side of the border, South Korean President Park Geun-hye enjoyed a political boost from her handling of the North Korean crisis, according to survey data that showed a spike in her job approval rating.

Of significance was the fact that the 1950-1953 war between the two Koreas ended with an armistice and not a peace treaty. As such, any escalation of tensions or movement to military action is generally regarded with gravity and alarm by countries of the region of eastern Asia.

Further deterioration in relations between the two Koreas

Relations on the Korean peninsula deteriorated in the period in early 2016 when North Korea carried out a hydrogen bomb test and launched a satellite into space, the latter of which was generally regarded as a ruse for a ballistic missile test. The two actions were regarded as virulent acts of provocation, committed in flagrant contravention of international law, and thus constituted a threat to regional -- if not global -- security, .

Tensions on the Korean peninsula deteriorated further in February 2016 when South Korea decided to suspend operations at the Kaesong industrial zone, which has been jointly administered by the two Koreas and viewed as a venue for cooperation. South Korea made the move in response to North Korea's provocative and belligerent actions, as noted just above. But North

Korea itself reacted by evicting all South Koreans from the Kaesong industrial zone and accusing South Korea of effectively "declaring war." The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea released a statement that read as follows: "Unpardonable is the puppet group's act of totally suspending the operation in (Kaesong), finding fault with the DPRK's H-bomb test and launch of a satellite."

Agreement on draft resolution expanding sanctions against North Korea over nuclear activities

In late February 2016, in response to North Korea's provocative nuclear activities in contravention of international law, the United States and China arrived at an agreement intended to expand United Nations Security Council sanctions against that country. In the aftermath of North Korea's hydrogen bomb test in January 2016, Washington D. C. and Beijing have been ensconced in rigorous negotiations aimed at drafting a draft resolution.

The two sides were not in complete agreement about what types of initiatives should be undertaken, with Beijing favoring dialogue and advocating non-proliferation, and with Washington D.C. pushing for more stringent punitive measures, including curbs on Pyongyang's ability to access the global financial system. Other provisions being explored included mandatory inspections on cargo passing from or to North Korea, a ban on all supplies of aviation and rocket fuel to North Korea, and a ban on the transfer to North Korea of any item that could be used for military purposes.

Despite the distance on some of these items, Washington D. C. and Beijing were finally able to find concurrence and craft the draft resolution, which they hoped would be introduced and voted on in the full 15-member United Nations Security Council at the start of March 2016.

Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, www.countrywatch.com

National Security

External Threats

For over half a century, the greatest external threat to South Korea has been North Korea. In 1950, a civil war broke out on the Korean peninsula, pitting the south against Chinese-backed communist forces in the north. The United States (U.S.) and other United Nations members intervened on behalf of South Korea. The opposing sides signed an armistice in 1953, effectively ending armed hostilities and dividing Korea into two countries along the 38th parallel. An approximately two-mile wide demilitarized zone continues to separate North and South Korea. Tension between the two Koreas has remained high. The U.S. maintains a substantial military presence in South Korea, comprised of approximately 37,000 troops, as a deterrent to a North Korean assault.

In the late 1990s, relations between the governments of North and South Korea showed signs of improvement. Under the auspices of his so-called "sunshine policy," South Korean President Kim Dae-jung advocated greater communication between the two governments. His initiative ultimately led to a historic inter-Korean summit in June 2000. As the tension dissipated, both governments openly embraced the idea of reunification.

The possibility that the North Korean government had acquired weapons of mass destruction or would do so in the near future, however, undermined efforts to reconcile longstanding differences. In October 2002, the North Korean government admitted to the existence of a covert program to enrich uranium.

The U.S. government initiated rounds of multilateral discussions (despite the North Korean government's steadfast insistence on bilateral talks with the United States) in April and August 2003 and in February 2004 with the objective of persuading the North Koreans to abandon their efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. In addition to representatives from the two Koreas and the U.S., the discussions included officials from Japan, China, and Russia. In February 2005, after the admission of the development of nuclear weapons by North Korea, the six-party talks were halted for an 'indefinite period' by North Korea.

In October 2006, North Korea said it intended to test a nuclear weapon. The international community, including [China](#), strenuously urged North Korea not to do so. Nevertheless, North Korea carried out an apparent test of a nuclear weapon. The international community responded to North Korea's announcement with widespread condemnation and a punitive United Nations Security Council resolution endorsing financial and security sanctions.

Resolution 1718 called for the inspections on cargo going to and from North Korea to search for weapons, a ban on the sale or transfer of materials related to North Korea's unconventional weapons program, and a freeze on the transfer of funds connected with North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The resolution was passed under Chapter Seven, Article 41, of the United Nations Charter; however, absent from Resolution 1718 was the Chapter Seven provision that would enforce the sanctions via military force. For its part, the North Korean government in

Pyongyang decried Resolution 1718, and warned that subsequent pressure by the [United States](#) would be regarded as "a declaration of war."

April 2009 saw North Korea take provocative action by launching a communications satellite into space via rocket. That claim was widely viewed as obfuscation of a missile test. Then a month later in May 2009, less than three years after the earlier underground nuclear test, North Korea conducted a second such test, arguing the merits of its right to a military deterrent. Days later, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the armistice that ended the Korean War.

At the international level, the United Nations Security Council noted that the 2009 nuclear test by North Korea was a violation of Security Council Resolution 1718, which prohibits Pyongyang from carrying out nuclear tests. In response, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1874 in June 2009 -- a month after the underground nuclear test. The resolution was passed under Chapter Seven, Article 41, of the United Nations Charter, and imposed further economic and commercial sanctions on North Korea. Additionally, it encouraged United Nations member states to search North Korean cargo in the effort to enforce those sanctions.

It should be noted that the nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009 constituted unassailable violations of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1718 and 1874, which exist in tandem with Article 41 of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter and compel compliance by all member states. They are binding under international law. The 2006 and 2009 nuclear tests were also breaches of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. The apparent nuclear test on Feb. 12, 2013 would also stand as a flagrant violation of that treaty.

In March 2013, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2094 censuring North Korea for its February nuclear test and imposing an even stricter sanctions regime on that country. The United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the unanimous adoption of the resolution delivered a strong message to North Korea that its pursuit of nuclear weapons would not be tolerated by the international community. Still, North Korea responded by issuing brazen threats against the South Korea and the [United States](#).

Amidst these developments, a reunification between the two Koreas is not viable for the foreseeable future.

Outside of tension with North Korea, South Korea remains engaged in a territorial dispute with Japan over the Liancourt Rocks which has been occupied by South Korea since 1954 (referred to as Tok-do in Korea and Takeshima in Japan).

Crime

The overall rate of crime in South Korea is low, but there are reports of a fairly high occurrence of petty theft.

Insurgencies

There are no insurgent organizations inside or outside of South Korea that directly threaten its government or general population. Generally stable conditions have prevailed there for most of the last two decades. Demonstrations occasionally turn violent.

Popular issues include opposition to the large American military presence in South Korea, support for and resistance to labor accords, and a movement to impeach South Korea's president.

Terrorism

There are no specific threats of terrorist attacks against targets in South Korea or its interests abroad.

South Korea is an ally in the global war on terrorism, and has pledged "all necessary cooperation and assistance as a close United States ally in the spirit of the Republic of Korea-United States Mutual Defense Treaty." South Korea has since contributed air and sea transport craft and a medical unit in support of the military action in Afghanistan. It also has provided humanitarian relief and reconstruction funds to help rebuild that country. South Korea also has strengthened its domestic legislation and institutions to combat financial support for terrorism, including the creation of a financial intelligence unit. South Korea is party to eleven of the twelve conventions and protocols pertaining to terrorism.

*** Please see "Political Conditions" and "Foreign Relations" for more information related to the threat posed by North Korea to South Korea ***

Defense Forces

Military Data

Military Branches:

Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps

Eligible age to enter service:

18 for voluntary; 20 for conscripted service

Mandatory Service Terms:

Minimum conscript service obligation - 21 months (Army, Marines), 23 months (Navy), 24 months (Air Force)

Manpower in general population-fit for military service:

males age 16-49: 10,864,566

females age 16-49: 10,168,709

Manpower reaching eligible age annually:

males: 365,760

females: 321,225

Military Expenditures-Percent of GDP:

2.8%

Chapter 3

Economic Overview

Economic Overview

Overview

Since the 1960s, South Korea has transformed from an agricultural-based economy into an industrialized and high-tech modern economy. The country's per capita GDP, which was a mere US\$100 in 1963, reached US\$35,300 in 2014, and South Korea today is among the world's 20 largest economies. In recent years, South Korea has seen its economy shift from a centrally-planned, government-directed investment model toward a more market-oriented one. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 and 1998 exposed long-standing weaknesses in South Korea's development model, including high corporate debt-equity ratios, huge overcapacity and duplication, massive foreign borrowing and an undisciplined financial sector. This forced the country to implement an overdue economic restructuring and opening of the economy. Extensive financial reforms restored market stability, facilitating a swift recovery from the crisis. Integration with the global economy along with prudent macroeconomic policies has contributed to strong growth, moderate inflation, low unemployment, and fiscal and current account surpluses.

Like other open economies, South Korea was hit hard by the global economic crisis, which resulted in a sharp slowdown of economic growth in 2008 and 2009. In response to the crisis, the government has implemented comprehensive monetary and fiscal measures to mitigate the impact and support economic activity. These timely measures have successfully stabilized the economy and the financial system, paving the way for a recovery that is now being increasingly led by private sector demand. As a result, economic growth remained positive in 2009 and grew strongly in 2010. By 2011, inflation was well above the central bank's target and rapidly deteriorating external conditions were impacting South Korea's environment. The country was vulnerable to contagion from a eurozone debt crisis of emerging Asia economies. In late September 2011, South Korea's central bank reiterated concerns about increasing economic uncertainties and said it would be careful in exercising monetary policy. Still, in September 2011, exports in September were up 20.5 percent compared to the prior year while imports were up 30.3 percent. China was the biggest market for South Korean exports and electronics goods accounted for 28.1 percent of the country's total exports. Also in 2011, the U.S.-South Korea Free Trade Agreement was ratified by both governments and was projected to go into effect in early 2012. Overall, after 2010's strong rebound, the Korean economy moderated in 2011 and into 2012 in line with global developments. Activity in the second half of 2012 was expected to expand at a moderate pace supported by Korea's competitive export sector and the recently concluded EU and US free-trade agreements. Still, overall, due to the weakening global economic outlook, Korea's growth likely was expected to be weaker than expected in 2012. In June 2012, the IMF said: "The outlook is...subject to

substantial uncertainty. The main downside risk relates to the intensification of the crisis in Europe. While the direct exposure to Europe is not high, if weaknesses there were to spill over to the United States and China, the impact on Korea can be substantial.” Meanwhile, in July 2012, South Korea's central bank lowered its economic growth and inflation forecasts for the year as the euro zone's slump worsened. The move came just one day after an interest rate cut. “Downside effects from the long-term extension of the euro zone debt crisis and slowing growth in emerging countries are predominant in the country's future growth path,” the central bank said in a statement. Going forward, South Korean macroeconomic policy also faces the challenges of a rapidly aging population, inflexible labor market, and overreliance on manufacturing exports to drive economic growth. Indeed, the economy experienced sluggish growth throughout 2012 because of market slowdowns in the United States, China, and the Eurozone.

The incoming administration in 2013, following the December 2012 presidential election, faced the challenges of balancing heavy reliance on exports with developing domestic-oriented sectors, such as services. By late October 2013, things were looking up. South Korea’s central bank noted the economy would likely post steady growth for the year. Offshore investors set a record net buying streak of South Korean stocks in 2013 and that was expected to continue for some time. “Foreign stock inflows will be maintained for the time being on strong fundamentals like a current account surplus,” the Bank of Korea said in its twice-yearly financial stability report cited by Reuters. “However, when considering the high uncertainties in the global financial markets, there is a large chance flow volatility will widen.”

Throughout 2013 the South Korean economy again experienced sluggish growth because of market slowdowns in the United States, China and the Eurozone. The administration in 2014 was likely to face the challenge of balancing heavy reliance on exports with developing domestic-oriented sectors, such as services.

A ferry disaster in April 2014 that left more than 300 people dead or missing set the economy back by leading to consumers cutting spending on entertainment and travel in mourning.

In July 2014, Bloomberg reported that South Korea had unveiled US\$11.4 billion in government initiatives to shore up the economy after growth slumped to the weakest pace in more than a year in the second quarter.

Part of the government’s goals were to ease regulations to help create more jobs and spur investment so that household income could rise steadily in order for consumption to increase. The stimulus included housing support for the poor and aid for small and medium-sized companies. The government also loosened home-loan restrictions in a bid to revive a stagnant property market, and announced tax incentives to encourage companies to boost wages, investment and dividends, according to Bloomberg.

Meanwhile, the government had cut its growth projection for 2014 to 3.7 percent from 3.9

percent. In August 2014, South Korea's annual inflation eased to its lowest in five months, encouragement for the central bank to cut interest rates again to spur economic growth.

Growth, as expected, slowed for 2014.

In August 2015, South Korea's won, shares and bond futures all fell as tensions heightened with North Korea after an exchange of shelling added volatility to markets already hit by concerns about the global economy. That same month, South Korea's president called for “major surgery” on the economy.

Park Geun-hye was viewed as having fallen short on pledges to breathe life into the South Korean economy as her push for labor market reforms and job creation have faltered.

"Major surgery across the entire economy is inevitable for us to fundamentally solve chronic and structural problems and make a fresh leap as a major global player," Park was quoted as saying in a Reuters article.

In September 2015, Standard & Poor's raised South Korea's sovereign currency rating to AA-minus from A-plus, commending the strength of its economic growth, decline in short-term debt component of external borrowings and reduced foreign indebtedness of its banks.

“(South) Korea will maintain economic growth performance superior to most developed economies in the next three to five years,” the agency said in a statement. It marked the first time that South Korea's sovereign ratings from S&P, Moody's Investors Service and Fitch Ratings were set at AA-minus or the equivalent, the highest place that South Korea's ratings have reached, noted Reuters.

Still, in a note to clients, S&P cut growth forecasts of several countries, including South Korea, due to weaker global trade and worries over China's economy. (China is South Korea's largest trading partner, accounting for more than one-fifth of its smaller neighbor's total foreign trade.)

Economic Performance

Following strong growth in 2006 and 2007, real GDP slowed in 2008 and 2009 as the economy was hit by the global economic crisis. However, growth rebounded in 2010 before moderating in 2011 and slowing in 2012.

According to CountryWatch estimated calculations for 2014:

Real GDP growth rate was: 3 percent

The fiscal deficit/surplus as percent of GDP (%) was: 1.7 percent

Inflation was measured at: 2.9 percent

Updated in 2015

**Please note that the figures in our Economic Performance section are estimates or forecasts based on IMF-based data that are formulated using CountryWatch models of analysis.*

Supplementary Sources: Roubini Global Economics, Bloomberg, International Monetary Fund and Reuters

Nominal GDP and Components

Nominal GDP and Components					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Nominal GDP (LCU billions)	1,332,681.00	1,377,456.60	1,429,445.40	1,485,078.00	1,561,136
Nominal GDP Growth Rate (%)	5.325	3.360	3.774	3.892	5.121
Consumption (LCU billions)	679,141.60	707,613.80	727,800.10	748,724.10	799,157.
Government Expenditure (LCU billions)	194,381.10	204,324.20	214,467.30	224,045.20	239,136.
Gross Capital Formation (LCU billions)	439,236.10	427,028.60	416,000.20	433,068.90	447,015.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Exports of Goods & Services (LCU billions)	742,936.00	776,062.50	770,114.80	752,061.90	781,344.
Imports of Goods & Services (LCU billions)	723,013.80	737,572.50	698,937.00	672,822.10	705,519.

Population and GDP Per Capita

Population and GDP Per Capita					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Population, total (million)	49.779	50.004	50.220	50.424	50.638
Population growth (%)	0.7468	0.4520	0.4320	0.4062	0.3800
Nominal GDP per Capita (LCU 1000s)	26,771,952.03	27,546,928.25	28,463,667.86	29,451,808.66	30,834,000.00

Real GDP and Inflation

Real GDP and Inflation					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Real Gross Domestic Product (LCU billions 2005 base)	1,311,887.58	1,341,961.71	1,380,826.50	1,426,546.79	1,464,508
Real GDP Growth Rate (%)	3.681	2.292	2.896	3.311	2.661
GDP Deflator (2005=100.0)	101.585	102.645	103.521	104.103	106.59
Inflation, GDP Deflator (%)	1.585	1.043	0.8534	0.5622	2.397

Government Spending and Taxation

Government Spending and Taxation					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Government Fiscal Budget (billions)	264,870.53	283,219.00	298,734.00	296,319.93	324,006.91
Fiscal Budget Growth Rate (percentage)	7.505	6.927	5.478	-0.8081	9.344
National Tax Rate Net of Transfers (%)	21.566	22.119	21.548	20.733	20.252
Government Revenues Net of Transfers (LCU billions)	287,403.64	304,677.45	308,023.65	307,897.21	316,155.43
Government Surplus(-) Deficit(+) (LCU billions)	22,533.11	21,458.45	9,289.65	11,577.27	-7851.4810
Government Surplus(+) Deficit(-) (%GDP)	1.691	1.558	0.6499	0.7796	-0.5029

Money Supply, Interest Rates and Unemployment

Money Supply, Interest Rates and Unemployment					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Money and Quasi-Money (M2) (LCU billions)	1,751,458.36	1,835,641.60	1,920,795.02	2,077,234.03	2,183,600.00
Money Supply Growth Rate (%)	5.476	4.806	4.639	8.144	5.12
Lending Interest Rate (%)	5.758	5.396	4.643	4.263	6.70
Unemployment Rate (%)	3.408	3.225	3.125	3.542	3.70

Foreign Trade and the Exchange Rate

Foreign Trade and the Exchange Rate					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Official Exchange Rate (LCU/\$US)	1,108.29	1,126.47	1,094.85	1,052.96	1,120.74
Trade Balance NIPA (\$US billions)	17.976	34.169	65.011	75.254	67.657
Trade Balance % of GDP	1.495	2.794	4.979	5.336	4.857
Total Foreign Exchange Reserves (\$US billions)	306.935	327.724	345.694	362.835	344.192

Data in US Dollars

Data in US Dollars					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Nominal GDP (\$US billions)	1,202.46	1,222.81	1,305.60	1,410.38	1,392.95
Exports (\$US billions)	670.343	688.933	703.396	714.235	697.169
Imports (\$US billions)	652.368	654.764	638.384	638.981	629.512

Energy Consumption and Production Standard Units

Energy Consumption and Production Standard Units					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petroleum Consumption (TBPd)	2,259.58	2,321.08	2,327.69	2,339.40	2,410.00
Petroleum Production (TBPd)	59.796	74.292	78.629	77.119	80.000
Petroleum Net Exports (TBPd)	-2199.7865	-2246.7901	-2249.0597	-2262.2802	-2333.000
Natural Gas Consumption (bcf)	1,640.73	1,793.44	1,877.17	1,686.79	1,840.00
Natural Gas Production (bcf)	35.844	37.556	18.225	11.211	11.000
Natural Gas Net Exports (bcf)	-1604.8906	-1755.8811	-1858.9442	-1675.5750	-1835.000
Coal Consumption (1000s st)	140,087.24	137,599.32	139,191.49	141,432.04	146,000.00
Coal Production	2,253.35	2,172.47	1,901.30	1,922.80	1,810.00

	2011	2012	2013	2014	20
(1000s st)					
Coal Net Exports (1000s st)	-137833.8889	-135426.8552	-137290.1935	-139509.2426	-14423
Nuclear Production (bil kwh)	147.763	143.550	132.529	149.356	149.
Hydroelectric Production (bil kwh)	4.552	3.929	4.246	3.606	3.4
Renewables Production (bil kwh)	2.984	3.194	3.932	4.946	5.4

Energy Consumption and Production QUADS

Energy Consumption and Production QUADS					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petroleum Consumption (Quads)	4.825	4.956	4.970	4.995	5.155
Petroleum Production (Quads)	0.1277	0.1597	0.1684	0.1684	0.1381
Petroleum Net Exports (Quads)	-4.6971	-4.7964	-4.8018	-4.8268	-5.0171
Natural Gas Consumption (Quads)	1.674	1.829	1.915	1.721	1.884
Natural Gas Production (Quads)	0.0365	0.0382	0.0186	0.0116	0.0101
Natural Gas Net Exports (Quads)	-1.6370	-1.7911	-1.8962	-1.7089	-1.8735
Coal Consumption (Quads)	2.802	2.752	2.784	2.829	2.921
Coal Production (Quads)	0.0459	0.0461	0.0400	0.0385	0.0328
Coal Net Exports (Quads)	-2.7558	-2.7059	-2.7439	-2.7902	-2.8882
Nuclear Production (Quads)	1.478	1.436	1.325	1.494	1.499
Hydroelectric Production (Quads)	0.0455	0.0393	0.0425	0.0361	0.0343
Renewables Production (Quads)	0.0298	0.0319	0.0393	0.0495	0.0544

World Energy Price Summary

World Energy Price Summary					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petroleum-WTI (\$/bbl)	95.054	94.159	97.943	93.112	48.709
Natural Gas-Henry Hub (\$/mmbtu)	3.999	2.752	3.729	4.369	2.614
Coal Thermal-Australian (\$/mt)	121.448	96.364	84.562	70.130	57.511

CO2 Emissions

CO2 Emissions					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petroleum Based (mm mt C)	107.790	110.724	111.039	111.598	115.173
Natural Gas Based (mm mt C)	26.619	29.097	30.455	27.367	29.960
Coal Based (mm mt C)	80.284	78.858	79.771	81.055	83.701
Total CO2 Emissions (mm mt C)	214.694	218.679	221.265	220.019	228.834

Agriculture Consumption and Production

Agriculture Consumption and Production					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Corn Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	7,832.21	8,303.29	8,803.11	8,866.09	8,530
Corn Production (1000 metric tons)	73.476	82.957	80.137	83.263	77.60
Corn Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	-7758.7344	-8220.3321	-8722.9748	-8782.8273	-8452.4
Soybeans Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	1,276.82	1,262.14	1,268.88	1,218.61	1,139
Soybeans Production (1000 metric tons)	129.564	122.297	153.133	137.014	127.2
Soybeans Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	-1147.2513	-1139.8471	-1115.7443	-1081.5974	-1012.4

	2011	2012	2013	2014	201
Rice Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	5,615.91	5,405.15	5,631.68	5,637.61	5,286
Rice Production (1000 metric tons)	5,619.70	5,405.07	5,629.22	5,635.47	5,410
Rice Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	3.789	-0.0837	-2.4651	-2.1448	124.2
Coffee Total Consumption (metric tons)	109,405.00	98,130.00	106,219.00	106,540.45	104,87
Coffee Production (metric tons)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.000
Coffee Net Exports (metric tons)	-109405.0000	-98130.0000	-106219.0000	-106540.4460	-104870
Cocoa Beans Total Consumption (metric tons)	4,215.00	3,568.00	4,712.00	4,934.46	5,169
Cocoa Beans Production (metric tons)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.000
Cocoa Beans Net Exports	-4215.0000	-3568.0000	-4712.0000	-4934.4627	-5169.0

	2011	2012	2013	2014	201
(metric tons)					
Wheat Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	4,715.01	5,692.17	4,699.90	4,807.46	4,226
Wheat Production (1000 metric tons)	43.580	37.210	19.031	23.486	19.5
Wheat Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	-4671.4310	-5654.9591	-4680.8719	-4783.9735	-4206.8

World Agriculture Pricing Summary

World Agriculture Pricing Summary					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Corn Pricing Summary (\$/metric ton)	291.684	298.417	259.389	192.881	169.750
Soybeans Pricing Summary (\$/metric ton)	540.667	591.417	538.417	491.771	390.417
Rice Pricing Summary (\$/metric ton)	458.558	525.071	473.989	425.148	386.033
Coffee Pricing Summary (\$/kilogram)	5.976	4.111	3.076	4.424	3.526
Cocoa Beans Pricing Summary (\$/kilogram)	2.980	2.392	2.439	3.062	3.135
Wheat Pricing Summary (\$/metric ton)	316.264	313.242	312.248	284.895	203.177

Metals Consumption and Production

Metals Consumption and Production					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	20
Copper Consumption (1000 mt)	773,825.21	708,114.25	706,054.52	763,951.67	697,6
Copper Production (1000 mt)	588,927.34	583,842.55	601,869.83	662,000.56	587,7
Copper Net Exports (1000 mt)	-184897.8746	-124271.7008	-104184.6927	-101951.1169	-10991
Zinc Consumption (1000 mt)	463,392.83	472,481.17	481,511.89	587,857.74	555,6
Zinc Production (1000 mt)	822,349.96	866,749.62	880,130.20	940,957.58	940,6
Zinc Exports (1000 mt)	358,957.13	394,268.46	398,618.31	353,099.84	385,0
Lead Consumption (1000 mt)	425,859.33	404,357.44	417,083.98	385,759.06	341,0
Lead Production (1000 mt)	413,639.34	455,662.66	425,346.54	481,913.73	468,0

	2011	2012	2013	2014	20
Lead Exports (1000 mt)	-12219.9875	51,305.22	8,262.56	96,154.68	127,0
Tin Consumption (1000 mt)	14,775.82	15,979.46	14,186.22	13,452.20	13,06
Tin Production (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.00
Tin Exports (1000 mt)	-14775.8250	-15979.4550	-14186.2200	-13452.1976	-13069
Nickel Consumption (1000 mt)	38,771.79	31,892.13	23,661.73	33,707.07	28,36
Nickel Production (1000 mt)	19,151.30	19,613.31	19,136.13	18,501.54	17,27
Nickel Exports (1000 mt)	-19620.4901	-12278.8212	-4525.6010	-15205.5299	-11093
Gold Consumption (kg)	3,930.38	3,930.38	3,930.38	3,807.32	3,52
Gold Production (kg)	3,762.25	3,863.47	3,984.71	4,228.75	4,08
Gold Exports (kg)	-168.1335	-66.9129	54.326	421.425	556.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	20
Silver Consumption (mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.00
Silver Production (mt)	111,732.29	116,955.25	118,318.60	122,356.88	112,356.88
Silver Exports (mt)	111,732.29	116,955.25	118,318.60	122,356.88	112,356.88

World Metals Pricing Summary

World Metals Pricing Summary					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Copper (\$/mt)	8,828.19	7,962.35	7,332.10	6,863.40	5,510.46
Zinc (\$/mt)	2,193.90	1,950.41	1,910.26	2,160.97	1,931.68
Tin (\$/mt)	26,053.68	21,125.99	22,282.80	21,898.87	16,066.63
Lead (\$/mt)	2,400.81	2,064.64	2,139.79	2,095.46	1,787.82
Nickel (\$/mt)	22,910.36	17,547.55	15,031.80	16,893.38	11,862.64
Gold (\$/oz)	1,569.21	1,669.52	1,411.46	1,265.58	1,160.66
Silver (\$/oz)	35.224	31.137	23.850	19.071	15.721

Economic Performance Index

Economic Performance Index

The Economic Performance rankings are calculated by CountryWatch's editorial team, and are based on criteria including sustained economic growth, monetary stability, current account deficits, budget surplus, unemployment and structural imbalances. Scores are assessed from 0 to 100 using this aforementioned criteria as well as CountryWatch's proprietary economic research data and models.

	Bank stability risk	Monetary/ Currency stability	Government Finances	Empl./ Unempl.	Econ.GNP growth or decline/ forecast
	0 - 100	0 - 100	0 - 100	0 - 100	%
North Americas					
Canada	92	69	35	38	3.14%
United States	94	76	4	29	3.01%
Western Europe					
Austria	90	27	30	63	1.33%
Belgium	88	27	19	23	1.15%
Cyprus	81	91	16	80	-0.69%
Denmark	97	70	45	78	1.20%
Finland	89	27	41	33	1.25%

France	87	27	18	27	1.52%
Germany	86	27	22	21	1.25%
Greece	79	27	5	24	-2.00%
Iceland	90	17	2	34	-3.04%
Italy	85	27	37	24	0.84%
Ireland	92	27	11	10	-1.55%
Luxembourg	99	27	28	66	2.08%
Malta	77	27	41	51	0.54%
Netherlands	91	27	26	74	1.30%
Norway	98	44	10	76	1.08%
Portugal	77	27	13	20	0.29%
Spain	83	27	9	3	-0.41%
Sweden	94	72	54	32	1.23%
Switzerland	97	86	55	77	1.53%
United Kingdom	85	12	9	37	1.34%
Central and Eastern Europe					
Albania	44	60	33	6	2.30%
Armenia	45	59	49	30	1.80%

Azerbaijan	56	4	84	99	2.68%
Belarus	59	21	83	98	2.41%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	34	68	69	N/A	0.50%
Bulgaria	58	75	88	49	0.20%
Croatia	69	68	94	9	0.18%
Czech Republic	80	89	29	70	1.67%
Estonia	72	90	66	92	0.80%
Georgia	36	60	53	56	2.00%
Hungary	70	66	26	54	-0.16%
Latvia	67	100	65	44	-3.97%
Lithuania	65	91	87	79	-1.65%
Macedonia (FYR)	53	69	56	2	2.03%
Moldova	23	36	81	67	2.50%
Poland	74	74	38	12	2.72%
Romania	62	56	70	62	0.75%
Russia	73	18	90	8	4.00%
Serbia	48	49	52	5	1.97%

Montenegro	39	27	73	1	-1.70%
Slovak Republic	80	62	30	14	4.06%
Slovenia	81	27	36	65	1.12%
Ukraine	41	11	57	N/A	3.68%
Africa					
Algeria	57	18	96	7	4.55%
Angola	49	1	97	N/A	7.05%
Benin	19	91	20	N/A	3.22%
Botswana	68	58	76	N/A	6.33%
Burkina Faso	16	91	13	N/A	4.41%
Burundi	2	91	6	N/A	3.85%
Cameroon	26	91	91	N/A	2.58%
Cape Verde	52	87	4	N/A	4.96%
Central African Republic	9	91	32	N/A	3.18%
Chad	22	91	89	N/A	4.42%
Congo	52	87	87	N/A	12.13%
Côte d'Ivoire	25	91	82	28	2.98%
Dem. Republic					

Congo	4	91	47	N/A	5.44%
Djibouti	31	76	50	N/A	4.47%
Egypt	37	20	24	69	5.01%
Equatorial Guinea	82	91	85	N/A	0.94%
Eritrea	1	3	1	18	1.81%
Ethiopia	6	45	8	N/A	6.96%
Gabon	64	91	96	N/A	5.36%
Gambia	8	48	86	N/A	4.82%
Ghana	9	11	69	N/A	4.50%
Guinea	10	7	91	N/A	3.03%
Guinea-Bissau	5	91	46	N/A	3.47%
Kenya	20	41	59	N/A	4.11%
Lesotho	13	40	12	N/A	2.98%
Liberia	12	73	74	N/A	5.92%
Libya	73	2	94	N/A	5.22%
Madagascar	4	22	24	N/A	-1.02%
Malawi	7	25	55	N/A	5.96%
Mali	20	91	82	N/A	5.12%

Mauritania	15	13	93	N/A	4.58%
Mauritius	65	52	56	55	4.10%
Morocco	37	72	48	26	3.23%
Mozambique	12	23	71	N/A	6.45%
Namibia	40	39	62	N/A	1.70%
Niger	10	91	21	N/A	4.41%
Nigeria	30	6	61	N/A	6.98%
Rwanda	21	40	68	N/A	5.39%
Sao Tome & Principe	1	61	100	N/A	3.40%
Senegal	24	91	63	N/A	3.44%
Seychelles	60	67	97	N/A	4.01%
Sierra Leone	5	10	39	N/A	4.77%
Somalia	2	38	59	N/A	3.19%
South Africa	61	37	70	N/A	2.59%
Sudan	16	5	73	N/A	5.52%
Swaziland	32	44	79	N/A	1.09%
Tanzania	15	45	32	N/A	6.17%
Togo	8	91	92	N/A	2.56%

Tunisia	50	61	44	39	4.00%
Uganda	11	17	54	N/A	5.59%
Zambia	29	20	49	N/A	5.84%
Zimbabwe	0	8	16	N/A	2.24%
South and Central America					
Argentina	66	3	80	36	3.50%
Belize	47	76	80	N/A	1.00%
Bolivia	32	51	61	81	3.99%
Brazil	71	47	78	11	5.50%
Chile	78	25	92	73	4.72%
Columbia	47	52	34	47	2.25%
Costa Rica	60	42	39	57	3.45%
Ecuador	43	76	75	64	2.51%
El Salvador	35	76	67	N/A	1.04%
Guatemala	46	59	58	N/A	2.52%
Honduras	27	47	58	N/A	2.00%
Mexico	69	42	52	61	4.07%
Nicaragua	23	49	42	N/A	1.75%

Panama	66	76	72	45	5.00%
Paraguay	35	46	66	16	5.27%
Peru	59	66	75	22	6.33%
Suriname	58	26	81	59	4.02%
Uruguay	70	26	27	N/A	5.71%
Venezuela	55	1	28	13	-2.63%
Caribbean					
Antigua & Barbuda	72	76	15	N/A	-2.01%
Bahamas	74	76	45	87	-0.50%
Barbados	67	76	33	15	-0.50%
Bermuda	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cuba	45	76	18	95	0.25%
Dominica	53	76	65	N/A	1.40%
Dominican Republic	54	39	43	4	3.50%
Grenada	63	76	48	N/A	0.80%
Guyana	28	56	17	N/A	4.36%
Haiti	11	27	89	N/A	-8.50%
Jamaica	42	9	85	19	-0.28%

St Lucia	55	76	67	N/A	1.14%
St Vincent & Grenadines	49	76	95	N/A	0.50%
Trinidad & Tobago	82	37	77	72	2.13%
Middle East					
Bahrain	84	76	62	91	3.48%
Iran	51	19	40	58	3.01%
Iraq	48	9	8	N/A	7.27%
Israel	87	62	12	48	3.20%
Jordan	41	51	3	N/A	4.10%
Kuwait	96	4	99	N/A	3.10%
Lebanon	63	54	2	N/A	6.00%
Oman	76	16	88	N/A	4.71%
Qatar	99	16	83	N/A	18.54%
Saudi Arabia	76	8	98	N/A	3.70%
Syria	61	24	40	N/A	5.00%
Turkey	75	23	27	60	5.20%
United Arab Emirates	96	24	98	94	1.29%

Yemen	28	2	78	N/A	7.78%
Asia					
Afghanistan	17	70	74	N/A	8.64%
Bangladesh	13	43	25	N/A	5.38%
Bhutan	24	55	5	N/A	6.85%
Brunei	78	19	99	75	0.48%
Cambodia	18	67	42	N/A	4.77%
China	54	90	19	68	11.03%
Hong Kong	89	76	14	82	5.02%
India	31	38	34	35	8.78%
Indonesia	42	46	37	31	6.00%
Japan	88	89	6	71	1.90%
Kazakhstan	62	13	76	42	2.40%
Korea North	18	65	23	N/A	1.50%
Korea South	83	63	22	85	4.44%
Kyrgyz Republic	24	15	84	88	4.61%
Laos	17	54	7	N/A	7.22%
Macao	91	76	14	82	3.00%

Malaysia	68	65	44	90	4.72%
Maldives	44	55	17	N/A	3.45%
Mongolia	33	5	77	93	7.22%
Myanmar	3	41	72	N/A	5.26%
Nepal	3	14	25	N/A	2.97%
Pakistan	19	15	31	41	3.00%
Papua New Guinea	75	50	11	N/A	7.96%
Philippines	30	48	53	43	3.63%
Singapore	93	75	63	40	5.68%
Sri Lanka	38	22	10	N/A	5.50%
Taiwan	84	88	35	89	6.50%
Tajikistan	6	6	60	97	4.00%
Thailand	56	64	90	96	5.46%
Turkmenistan	51	53	68	N/A	12.00%
Uzbekistan	40	10	60	100	8.00%
Vietnam	25	12	20	N/A	6.04%
Pacific					
Australia	96	63	31	46	2.96%

Fiji	46	53	3	N/A	2.06%
Marshall Islands	27	76	46	N/A	1.08%
Micronesia (Fed. States)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Caledonia	96	73	51	52	2.00%
New Zealand	98	73	51	52	2.00%
Samoa	34	88	64	N/A	-2.77%
Solomon Islands	14	71	1	N/A	3.36%
Tonga	26	57	38	N/A	0.60%
Vanuatu	33	58	47	N/A	3.80%

Source:

CountryWatch Inc. www.countrywatch.com

Updated:

This material was produced in 2010; it is subject to updating in 2012.

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Chapter 4

Investment Overview

Foreign Investment Climate

Background

Since the 1960s, South Korea has achieved an incredible record of growth and integration into the high-tech modern world economy. Four decades ago, GDP per capita was comparable with levels in the poorer countries of Africa and Asia. In 2004, South Korea joined the trillion dollar club of world economies. In 2008, its GDP per capita was roughly the same as that of the Czech Republic and New Zealand. Initially, this success was achieved by a system of close government/business ties including directed credit, import restrictions, sponsorship of specific industries, and a strong labor effort. The government promoted the import of raw materials and technology at the expense of consumer goods and encouraged savings and investment over consumption.

Foreign Investment Assessment

Openness to Foreign Investment

The new Foreign Investment Promotion Act (FIPA) went into effect on Nov. 17, 1998, replacing the former 1966 Foreign Capital Inducement Act (FCIA). Like the FCIA before it, the FIPA (and related regulations) categorizes business activities as either open, conditionally or partly restricted, or closed to foreign investment. FIPA considerably reduced the number of restricted sectors, although restrictions remain on 28 industrial sectors, four of which are entirely closed to foreign investment. As a result of a March 2000 revision of the Korean Industrial Classification Standards restricted industrial sectors increased to 28 (from 21 in 1999). The revision added several industrial sub-sectors, such as cable television distribution, satellite broadcasts, radioactive disposal, etc, which did not exist when the previous standards were drafted. In contrast, 120 categories were restricted in 1996. Although the ROKG has no plans to open currently restricted sectors, it will review restricted sectors from time to time for possible further openings. According to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Energy (MOCIE), 99.6% of industrial sectors are open to foreign investors (that is, only four of 1121 industrial sectors are completely closed to foreign investment), well above the OECD average.

The major points of the 1998 FIPA are as follows:

- Simplified procedures, including those for FDI notification and registration;
- Expanded tax incentives for high-technology FDI;
- Reduced rental fees and lengthened lease durations for government land (including local

governments);

- Increased central government support of local FDI incentives;
- Establishment of a one-stop Investment Promotion Center (IPC) within the Korea Trade
- Promotion Corporation to assist foreign investors in dealing with the bureaucracy;
- Establishment of an ombudsman office within the IPC to assist foreign investors.

Transparency of Regulatory System

The Korean regulatory environment is difficult for domestic firms to work in and poses an even greater challenge to foreign firms. Laws and regulations are framed in general terms and are subject to differing interpretations by government officials, who rotate frequently. Basic concepts of administrative procedure are not well developed. The regulatory process is not transparent and frequent informal discussions with the bureaucracy are necessary. Mid-level bureaucrats rely on unpublished ministerial guidelines and unwritten administrative advice for direction. Proposed rules often are not published prior to promulgation, or are published with insufficient time to permit public comment and industry adjustment. After promulgation, rules can be applied retroactively and arbitrarily. While Korea has an administrative procedures law, the rule-making process continues to be opaque and non-transparent, particularly for foreigners.

President Kim Dae-jung has made deregulation one of the cornerstones of his economic policy. To date this has taken a back seat to more "critical" economic and financial system restructuring, though the ROKG has made a major effort to cut back on the number of regulations in force. The regulatory picture is mixed depending on the ministry or agency. Some have made unprecedented outreach efforts to foreign business. Complaints about regulatory impediments vary by business sector. The practical effect of Korea's laws regulating monopolistic practices and unfair competition is limited by the long-standing economic dominance of a few large business conglomerates, referred to locally as "chaebol." Most recently, on Dec. 28, 1999, the ROKG amended the Anti-Monopoly and Fair Trade Act. The Act has been repeatedly changed to address the issue of unwieldy chaebol growth. In this latest revision the ROKG repealed the prohibition of cross ownership but instead instituted a new restriction on intra-group cross-payment guarantees. Therefore, no new intra-group payment guarantees were allowed for the top 30 chaebol starting from April 1, 1998. The top 30 chaebol are committed to eliminating all existing intra-group payment guarantees by March 31, 2001. The top four chaebol already have eliminated almost all cross-guarantees.

Chaebol domination of the Korean economy causes some practical business problems for foreign investors. Small-and medium suppliers, for example, may be reluctant to deal with foreign firms for fear of jeopardizing a prized chaebol relationship. Distribution channels may be blocked by chaebol competitors who own or dominate distribution channels, although such practices are declining as result of the Fair Trade Commission's (FTC) vigorous intervention and consumer advocate activities. Obtaining access to credit may be complicated by the privileged relationships competing

chaebol enjoy with local banks, though regulations limit a bank's exposure to any single chaebol group to 25% of capital and stipulate that 35% of lending must go to small and medium enterprises.

Labor Force

Total: 22.9 million

By occupation: agriculture 8%, industry 19%, services 73%

Agriculture and Industry

Agriculture products: rice, root crops, barley, vegetables, fruit; cattle, pigs, chickens, milk, eggs; fish

Industries: electronics, telecommunications, automobile production, chemicals, shipbuilding, steel

Import Commodities and Partners

Commodities: machinery, electronics and electronic equipment, oil, steel, transport equipment, organic chemicals, plastics

Partners: Japan 20.3%, US 13.9%, China 12.3%, Saudi Arabia 5.2%

Export Commodities and Partners

Commodities: semiconductors, wireless telecommunications equipment, motor vehicles, computers, steel, ships, petrochemicals

Partners: China 18.2%, US 17.8%, Japan 9%, Hong Kong 7.6%

Telephone System

Telephones- main lines in use: 22.877 million

Telephones- mobile cellular: 33,591,800

General Assessment: excellent domestic and international services

Domestic: N/A

International: country code - 82; fiber-optic submarine cable to China; the Russia-Korea-Japan submarine cable; satellite earth stations - 3 Intelsat (2 Pacific Ocean and 1 Indian Ocean) and 1 Inmarsat (Pacific Ocean region)

Internet

Internet Hosts: 694,206

Internet users: 29.22 million

Roads, Airports, Ports and Harbors

Railways: 3,125 km

Highways: 86,990 km

Ports and harbors: Chinhae, Inch'on, Kunsan, Masan, Mokp'o, P'ohang, Pusan, Tonghae-hang, Ulsan, Yosu

Airports: 179; w/paved runways: 88

Legal System and Considerations

South Korea's legal system combines elements of continental European civil law systems, Anglo-American law, and Chinese classical thought.

Dispute Settlement

Serious investment disputes involving foreigners are the exception rather than the rule in Korea, except in cases involving intellectual property rights. There exists a body of Korean law governing commercial activities and bankruptcies that constitutes a means to enforce property and contractual rights, with monetary judgments usually made in the domestic currency. The judgments of foreign courts are not enforceable in Korea.

Although commercial disputes can be adjudicated in a civil court, foreign businesses often feel that this is not a practical means to resolve disputes. For example, proceedings are conducted in the Korean language, often without adequate translation. Foreign lawyers, (i.e., those whom have not passed the Korean Bar), are almost always prohibited by Korean law from representing clients in Korean courts.

During litigation of a dispute, foreigners may be barred from leaving the country until a decision is reached. Legal proceedings are expensive and time-consuming. Lawsuits often are contemplated only as a last resort, signaling the end of a business relationship.

Commercial disputes may also be taken to the Korean Commercial Arbitration Board (KCAB). The Korean Arbitration Act and its implementing rules outline the following steps in the arbitration process:

- parties may request the KCAB to act as informal intermediary to a settlement;
- unsuccessful, either or both parties may request formal arbitration, in which case the KCAB appoints a mediator to conduct conciliatory talks for 30 days;
- if unsuccessful, an arbitration panel consisting of one or three arbitrators is assigned to decide the case.

If one party is a not resident in Korea, either may request an arbitrator from a neutral country.

When drafting contracts, it always is a good idea to provide for arbitration by a neutral body such as the International Commercial Arbitration Association (ICAA). Foreign companies should seek local expert legal counsel when drawing up any type of contract with a Korean entity.

Korea is a member of the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID). It has also acceded to the New York Convention (formally called the United Nations Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards). Korea is a member of the International Commercial Arbitration Association and the World Bank's Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA). It is important to keep in mind that Korean courts may ultimately be called upon to enforce an arbitrated settlement.

Corruption Perception Ranking

See the most recent listing by Transparency International in this report from the least to most corrupt countries; typically, South Korea ranks as one of the least corrupt nations in the world (according to this index).

Cultural Considerations

Korean men tend to greet each other with a slight bow, sometimes accompanied by a handshake, while maintaining eye contact. In order to indicate respect for the person being greeted, one might support one's right forearm with one's left hand during the handshake. It is common for the junior person to initiate the greetings and be the first to bow. The senior person is usually the first one to offer his hand. Weak handshakes or the nod of the head is sometimes sufficient within business circles. Among Korean women, handshaking is rarely used; reciprocal bowing may suffice. Western men should not shake hands with a Korean woman while Western women in business circles should initiate a handshake with Korean men.

Modesty is another cardinal concern in Korea. One should not enter a home or office until one is invited to do so, and one should not sit down unless one has been asked to take a seat. Indeed, in many such circumstances, waiting for the invitation to be extended several times before accepting is considered to be good practice. Another way of demonstrating modesty is when one receives a compliment. Rather than expressing thanks for the compliment, as in the West, one should politely

refute it instead. Of course, at the same time, one should offer compliments to others, and the onus is upon them to politely refuse, as good practice dictates.

For more information see:

United States' State Department Commercial Guide

Foreign Investment Index

Foreign Investment Index

The Foreign Investment Index is a proprietary index measuring attractiveness to international investment flows. The Foreign Investment Index is calculated using an established methodology by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on a given country's economic stability (sustained economic growth, monetary stability, current account deficits, budget surplus), economic risk (risk of non-servicing of payments for goods or services, loans and trade-related finance, risk of sovereign default), business and investment climate (property rights, labor force and laws, regulatory transparency, openness to foreign investment, market conditions, and stability of government). Scores are assigned from 0-10 using the aforementioned criteria. A score of 0 marks the lowest level of foreign investment viability, while a score of 10 marks the highest level of foreign investment viability, according to this proprietary index.

Country	Assessment
Afghanistan	2
Albania	4.5
Algeria	6
Andorra	9
Angola	4.5-5

Antigua	8.5
Argentina	5
Armenia	5
Australia	9.5
Austria	9-9.5
Azerbaijan	5
Bahamas	9
Bahrain	7.5
Bangladesh	4.5
Barbados	9
Belarus	4
Belgium	9
Belize	7.5
Benin	5.5
Bhutan	4.5
Bolivia	4.5
Bosnia-Herzegovina	5
Botswana	7.5-8

Brazil	8
Brunei	7
Bulgaria	5.5
Burkina Faso	4
Burma (Myanmar)	4.5
Burundi	4
Cambodia	4.5
Cameroon	5
Canada	9.5
Cape Verde	6
Central African Republic	3
Chad	4
Chile	9
China	7.5
China: Hong Kong	8.5
China: Taiwan	8.5
Colombia	7
Comoros	4

Congo DRC	4
Congo RC	5
Costa Rica	8
Cote d'Ivoire	4.5
Croatia	7
Cuba	4.5
Cyprus	7
Czech Republic	8.5
Denmark	9.5
Djibouti	4.5
Dominica	6
Dominican Republic	6.5
East Timor	4.5
Ecuador	5.5
Egypt	4.5-5
El Salvador	6
Equatorial Guinea	4.5
Eritrea	3.5

Estonia	8
Ethiopia	4.5
Fiji	5
Finland	9
Former Yugoslav Rep. of Macedonia	5
France	9-9.5
Gabon	5.5
Gambia	5
Georgia	5
Germany	9-9.5
Ghana	5.5
Greece	5
Grenada	7.5
Guatemala	5.5
Guinea	3.5
Guinea-Bissau	3.5
Guyana	4.5
Haiti	4

Holy See (Vatican)	n/a
Hong Kong (China)	8.5
Honduras	5.5
Hungary	8
Iceland	8-8.5
India	8
Indonesia	5.5
Iran	4
Iraq	3
Ireland	8
Israel	8.5
Italy	8
Jamaica	5.5
Japan	9.5
Jordan	6
Kazakhstan	6
Kenya	5
Kiribati	5.5

Korea, North	1
Korea, South	9
Kosovo	4.5
Kuwait	8.5
Kyrgyzstan	4.5
Laos	4
Latvia	7
Lebanon	5
Lesotho	5.5
Liberia	3.5
Libya	3
Liechtenstein	9
Lithuania	7.5
Luxembourg	9-9.5
Madagascar	4.5
Malawi	4.5
Malaysia	8.5
Maldives	6.5

Mali	5
Malta	9
Marshall Islands	5
Mauritania	4.5
Mauritius	7.5-8
Mexico	6.5-7
Micronesia	5
Moldova	4.5-5
Monaco	9
Mongolia	5
Montenegro	5.5
Morocco	7.5
Mozambique	5
Namibia	7.5
Nauru	4.5
Nepal	4
Netherlands	9-9.5
New Zealand	9.5

Nicaragua	5
Niger	4.5
Nigeria	4.5
Norway	9-9.5
Oman	8
Pakistan	4
Palau	4.5-5
Panama	7
Papua New Guinea	5
Paraguay	6
Peru	6
Philippines	6
Poland	8
Portugal	7.5-8
Qatar	9
Romania	6-6.5
Russia	6
Rwanda	4

Saint Kitts and Nevis	8
Saint Lucia	8
Saint Vincent and Grenadines	7
Samoa	7
San Marino	8.5
Sao Tome and Principe	4.5-5
Saudi Arabia	7
Senegal	6
Serbia	6
Seychelles	5
Sierra Leone	4
Singapore	9.5
Slovak Republic (Slovakia)	8.5
Slovenia	8.5-9
Solomon Islands	5
Somalia	2
South Africa	8
Spain	7.5-8

Sri Lanka	5.5
Sudan	4
Suriname	5
Swaziland	4.5
Sweden	9.5
Switzerland	9.5
Syria	2.5
Tajikistan	4
Taiwan (China)	8.5
Tanzania	5
Thailand	7.5-8
Togo	4.5-5
Tonga	5.5-6
Trinidad and Tobago	8-8.5
Tunisia	6
Turkey	6.5-7
Turkmenistan	4
Tuvalu	7

Uganda	5
Ukraine	4.5-5
United Arab Emirates	8.5
United Kingdom	9
United States	9
Uruguay	6.5-7
Uzbekistan	4
Vanuatu	6
Venezuela	5
Vietnam	5.5
Yemen	3
Zambia	4.5-5
Zimbabwe	3.5

Editor's Note:

As of 2015, the global economic crisis (emerging in 2008) had affected many countries across the world, resulting in changes to their rankings. Among those countries affected were top tier economies, such as the [United Kingdom](#), [Iceland](#), [Switzerland](#) and [Austria](#). However, in all these cases, their rankings have moved back upward in the last couple of years as anxieties have eased. Other top tier countries, such as [Spain](#), [Portugal](#), [Ireland](#), and [Italy](#), suffered some effects due to debt woes and the concomitant effect on the euro zone. Greece, another euro zone nation, was also downgraded due to its sovereign debt crisis; however, Greece's position on the

precipice of default incurred a sharper downgrade than the other four euro zone countries mentioned above. Cyprus' exposure to Greek bank yielded a downgrade in its case. Slovenia and [Latvia](#) have been slightly downgraded due to a mix of economic and political concerns but could easily be upgraded in a future assessment, should these concerns abate. Meanwhile, the crisis in eastern [Ukraine](#) fueled downgrades in that country and neighboring [Russia](#).

Despite the "trifecta of tragedy" in [Japan](#) in 2011 -- the earthquake, the ensuing tsunami, and the resulting nuclear crisis -- and the appreciable destabilization of the economic and political terrain therein, this country has only slightly been downgraded. Japan's challenges have been assessed to be transient, the government remains accountable, and there is little risk of default. Both [India](#) and China retain their rankings; [India](#) holds a slightly higher ranking than [China](#) due to its record of democratic representation and accountability.

There were shifts in opposite directions for [Mali](#) and [Nigeria](#) versus the [Central African Republic](#), [Burkina Faso](#), and [Burundi](#). [Mali](#) was slightly upgraded due to its efforts to return to constitutional order following the 2012 coup and to neutralize the threat of separatists and Islamists. Likewise, a new government in [Nigeria](#) generated a slight upgrade as the country attempts to confront corruption, crime, and terrorism. But the [Central African Republic](#) was downgraded due to the takeover of the government by Seleka rebels and the continued decline into lawlessness in that country. Likewise, the attempts by the leaders of [Burundi](#) and [Burkina Faso](#) to hold onto power by by-passing the constitution raised eyebrows and resulted in downgrades.

Political unrest in [Libya](#) and [Algeria](#) have contributed to a decision to marginally downgrade these countries as well. [Syria](#) incurred a sharper downgrade due to the devolution into de facto civil war and the dire security threat posed by Islamist terrorists. [Iraq](#) saw a similar downgrade as a result of the takeover of wide swaths of territory and the threat of genocide at the hands of Islamist terrorists. [Yemen](#), likewise, has been downgraded due to political instability at the hands of secessionists, terrorists, Houthi rebels, and the intervention of external parties. Conversely, [Egypt](#) and [Tunisia](#) saw slight upgrades as their political environments stabilize.

At the low end of the spectrum, devolving security conditions and/or economic crisis have resulted in countries like [Pakistan](#), [Afghanistan](#), [Somalia](#), and [Zimbabwe](#) maintaining their low ratings.

The [United States](#) continues to retain its previous slight downgrade due to the enduring threat of default surrounding the debt ceiling in that country, matched by a conflict-ridden political climate. In the case of [Mexico](#), there is limited concern about default, but increasing alarm over the security situation in that country and the government's ability to contain it. In [Argentina](#), a default to bond holders resulted in a downgrade to that country. Finally, a small but significant upgrade was attributed to [Cuba](#) due to its recent pro-business reforms and its normalization of ties with the United States.

Source:CountryWatch Inc. www.countrywatch.comUpdated:

2015

Corruption Perceptions Index

Corruption Perceptions Index

Transparency International: [Corruption Perceptions Index](#)Editor's Note:

Transparency International's [Corruption Perceptions Index](#) is a composite index which ranks countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials. This index indicates the views of national and international business people and analysts about the levels of corruption in each country. The highest (and best) level of transparency is indicated by the number, 10. The lower (and worse) levels of transparency are indicated by lower numbers.

Rank	Country/Territory	CPI 2009 Score	Surveys Used	Confidence Range
1	New Zealand	9.4	6	9.1 - 9.5
2	Denmark	9.3	6	9.1 - 9.5
3	Singapore	9.2	9	9.0 - 9.4
3	Sweden	9.2	6	9.0 - 9.3
5	Switzerland	9.0	6	8.9 - 9.1

6	Finland	8.9	6	8.4 - 9.4
6	Netherlands	8.9	6	8.7 - 9.0
8	Australia	8.7	8	8.3 - 9.0
8	Canada	8.7	6	8.5 - 9.0
8	Iceland	8.7	4	7.5 - 9.4
11	Norway	8.6	6	8.2 - 9.1
12	Hong Kong	8.2	8	7.9 - 8.5
12	Luxembourg	8.2	6	7.6 - 8.8
14	Germany	8.0	6	7.7 - 8.3
14	Ireland	8.0	6	7.8 - 8.4
16	Austria	7.9	6	7.4 - 8.3
17	Japan	7.7	8	7.4 - 8.0
17	United Kingdom	7.7	6	7.3 - 8.2
19	United States	7.5	8	6.9 - 8.0
20	Barbados	7.4	4	6.6 - 8.2
21	Belgium	7.1	6	6.9 - 7.3
22	Qatar	7.0	6	5.8 - 8.1
22	Saint Lucia	7.0	3	6.7 - 7.5

24	France	6.9	6	6.5 - 7.3
25	Chile	6.7	7	6.5 - 6.9
25	Uruguay	6.7	5	6.4 - 7.1
27	Cyprus	6.6	4	6.1 - 7.1
27	Estonia	6.6	8	6.1 - 6.9
27	Slovenia	6.6	8	6.3 - 6.9
30	United Arab Emirates	6.5	5	5.5 - 7.5
31	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	6.4	3	4.9 - 7.5
32	Israel	6.1	6	5.4 - 6.7
32	Spain	6.1	6	5.5 - 6.6
34	Dominica	5.9	3	4.9 - 6.7
35	Portugal	5.8	6	5.5 - 6.2
35	Puerto Rico	5.8	4	5.2 - 6.3
37	Botswana	5.6	6	5.1 - 6.3
37	Taiwan	5.6	9	5.4 - 5.9
39	Brunei Darussalam	5.5	4	4.7 - 6.4
39	Oman	5.5	5	4.4 - 6.5
39	Korea (South)	5.5	9	5.3 - 5.7

42	Mauritius	5.4	6	5.0 - 5.9
43	Costa Rica	5.3	5	4.7 - 5.9
43	Macau	5.3	3	3.3 - 6.9
45	Malta	5.2	4	4.0 - 6.2
46	Bahrain	5.1	5	4.2 - 5.8
46	Cape Verde	5.1	3	3.3 - 7.0
46	Hungary	5.1	8	4.6 - 5.7
49	Bhutan	5.0	4	4.3 - 5.6
49	Jordan	5.0	7	3.9 - 6.1
49	Poland	5.0	8	4.5 - 5.5
52	Czech Republic	4.9	8	4.3 - 5.6
52	Lithuania	4.9	8	4.4 - 5.4
54	Seychelles	4.8	3	3.0 - 6.7
55	South Africa	4.7	8	4.3 - 4.9
56	Latvia	4.5	6	4.1 - 4.9
56	Malaysia	4.5	9	4.0 - 5.1
56	Namibia	4.5	6	3.9 - 5.1
56	Samoa	4.5	3	3.3 - 5.3

56	Slovakia	4.5	8	4.1 - 4.9
61	Cuba	4.4	3	3.5 - 5.1
61	Turkey	4.4	7	3.9 - 4.9
63	Italy	4.3	6	3.8 - 4.9
63	Saudi Arabia	4.3	5	3.1 - 5.3
65	Tunisia	4.2	6	3.0 - 5.5
66	Croatia	4.1	8	3.7 - 4.5
66	Georgia	4.1	7	3.4 - 4.7
66	Kuwait	4.1	5	3.2 - 5.1
69	Ghana	3.9	7	3.2 - 4.6
69	Montenegro	3.9	5	3.5 - 4.4
71	Bulgaria	3.8	8	3.2 - 4.5
71	FYR Macedonia	3.8	6	3.4 - 4.2
71	Greece	3.8	6	3.2 - 4.3
71	Romania	3.8	8	3.2 - 4.3
75	Brazil	3.7	7	3.3 - 4.3
75	Colombia	3.7	7	3.1 - 4.3
75	Peru	3.7	7	3.4 - 4.1

75	Suriname	3.7	3	3.0 - 4.7
79	Burkina Faso	3.6	7	2.8 - 4.4
79	China	3.6	9	3.0 - 4.2
79	Swaziland	3.6	3	3.0 - 4.7
79	Trinidad and Tobago	3.6	4	3.0 - 4.3
83	Serbia	3.5	6	3.3 - 3.9
84	El Salvador	3.4	5	3.0 - 3.8
84	Guatemala	3.4	5	3.0 - 3.9
84	India	3.4	10	3.2 - 3.6
84	Panama	3.4	5	3.1 - 3.7
84	Thailand	3.4	9	3.0 - 3.8
89	Lesotho	3.3	6	2.8 - 3.8
89	Malawi	3.3	7	2.7 - 3.9
89	Mexico	3.3	7	3.2 - 3.5
89	Moldova	3.3	6	2.7 - 4.0
89	Morocco	3.3	6	2.8 - 3.9
89	Rwanda	3.3	4	2.9 - 3.7
95	Albania	3.2	6	3.0 - 3.3

95	Vanuatu	3.2	3	2.3 - 4.7
97	Liberia	3.1	3	1.9 - 3.8
97	Sri Lanka	3.1	7	2.8 - 3.4
99	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.0	7	2.6 - 3.4
99	Dominican Republic	3.0	5	2.9 - 3.2
99	Jamaica	3.0	5	2.8 - 3.3
99	Madagascar	3.0	7	2.8 - 3.2
99	Senegal	3.0	7	2.5 - 3.6
99	Tonga	3.0	3	2.6 - 3.3
99	Zambia	3.0	7	2.8 - 3.2
106	Argentina	2.9	7	2.6 - 3.1
106	Benin	2.9	6	2.3 - 3.4
106	Gabon	2.9	3	2.6 - 3.1
106	Gambia	2.9	5	1.6 - 4.0
106	Niger	2.9	5	2.7 - 3.0
111	Algeria	2.8	6	2.5 - 3.1
111	Djibouti	2.8	4	2.3 - 3.2
111	Egypt	2.8	6	2.6 - 3.1

111	Indonesia	2.8	9	2.4 - 3.2
111	Kiribati	2.8	3	2.3 - 3.3
111	Mali	2.8	6	2.4 - 3.2
111	Sao Tome and Principe	2.8	3	2.4 - 3.3
111	Solomon Islands	2.8	3	2.3 - 3.3
111	Togo	2.8	5	1.9 - 3.9
120	Armenia	2.7	7	2.6 - 2.8
120	Bolivia	2.7	6	2.4 - 3.1
120	Ethiopia	2.7	7	2.4 - 2.9
120	Kazakhstan	2.7	7	2.1 - 3.3
120	Mongolia	2.7	7	2.4 - 3.0
120	Vietnam	2.7	9	2.4 - 3.1
126	Eritrea	2.6	4	1.6 - 3.8
126	Guyana	2.6	4	2.5 - 2.7
126	Syria	2.6	5	2.2 - 2.9
126	Tanzania	2.6	7	2.4 - 2.9
130	Honduras	2.5	6	2.2 - 2.8
130	Lebanon	2.5	3	1.9 - 3.1

130	Libya	2.5	6	2.2 - 2.8
130	Maldives	2.5	4	1.8 - 3.2
130	Mauritania	2.5	7	2.0 - 3.3
130	Mozambique	2.5	7	2.3 - 2.8
130	Nicaragua	2.5	6	2.3 - 2.7
130	Nigeria	2.5	7	2.2 - 2.7
130	Uganda	2.5	7	2.1 - 2.8
139	Bangladesh	2.4	7	2.0 - 2.8
139	Belarus	2.4	4	2.0 - 2.8
139	Pakistan	2.4	7	2.1 - 2.7
139	Philippines	2.4	9	2.1 - 2.7
143	Azerbaijan	2.3	7	2.0 - 2.6
143	Comoros	2.3	3	1.6 - 3.3
143	Nepal	2.3	6	2.0 - 2.6
146	Cameroon	2.2	7	1.9 - 2.6
146	Ecuador	2.2	5	2.0 - 2.5
146	Kenya	2.2	7	1.9 - 2.5
146	Russia	2.2	8	1.9 - 2.4

146	Sierra Leone	2.2	5	1.9 - 2.4
146	Timor-Leste	2.2	5	1.8 - 2.6
146	Ukraine	2.2	8	2.0 - 2.6
146	Zimbabwe	2.2	7	1.7 - 2.8
154	Côte d'Ivoire	2.1	7	1.8 - 2.4
154	Papua New Guinea	2.1	5	1.7 - 2.5
154	Paraguay	2.1	5	1.7 - 2.5
154	Yemen	2.1	4	1.6 - 2.5
158	Cambodia	2.0	8	1.8 - 2.2
158	Central African Republic	2.0	4	1.9 - 2.2
158	Laos	2.0	4	1.6 - 2.6
158	Tajikistan	2.0	8	1.6 - 2.5
162	Angola	1.9	5	1.8 - 1.9
162	Congo Brazzaville	1.9	5	1.6 - 2.1
162	Democratic Republic of Congo	1.9	5	1.7 - 2.1
162	Guinea-Bissau	1.9	3	1.8 - 2.0
162	Kyrgyzstan	1.9	7	1.8 - 2.1
162	Venezuela	1.9	7	1.8 - 2.0

168	Burundi	1.8	6	1.6 - 2.0
168	Equatorial Guinea	1.8	3	1.6 - 1.9
168	Guinea	1.8	5	1.7 - 1.8
168	Haiti	1.8	3	1.4 - 2.3
168	Iran	1.8	3	1.7 - 1.9
168	Turkmenistan	1.8	4	1.7 - 1.9
174	Uzbekistan	1.7	6	1.5 - 1.8
175	Chad	1.6	6	1.5 - 1.7
176	Iraq	1.5	3	1.2 - 1.8
176	Sudan	1.5	5	1.4 - 1.7
178	Myanmar	1.4	3	0.9 - 1.8
179	Afghanistan	1.3	4	1.0 - 1.5
180	Somalia	1.1	3	0.9 - 1.4

Methodology:

As noted above, the highest (and best) level of transparency with the least perceived corruption is indicated by the number, 10. The lower (and worse) levels of transparency are indicated by lower numbers.

According to Transparency International, the [Corruption Perceptions Index](#) (CPI) table shows a country's ranking and score, the number of surveys used to determine the score, and the confidence range of the scoring.

The rank shows how one country compares to others included in the index. The CPI score indicates the perceived level of public-sector corruption in a country/territory.

The CPI is based on 13 independent surveys. However, not all surveys include all countries. The surveys used column indicates how many surveys were relied upon to determine the score for that country.

The confidence range indicates the reliability of the CPI scores and tells us that allowing for a margin of error, we can be 90% confident that the true score for this country lies within this range.

Note:

Kosovo, which separated from the Yugoslav successor state of [Serbia](#), is not listed above. No calculation is available for [Kosovo](#) at this time, however, a future corruption index by Transparency International may include the world's newest country in its tally. Taiwan has been listed above despite its contested status; while Taiwan claims sovereign status, [China](#) claims ultimate jurisdiction over Taiwan. Hong Kong, which is also under the rubric of Chinese sovereignty, is listed above. Note as well that Puerto Rico, which is a [United States](#) domain, is also included in the list above. These inclusions likely have to do with the size and fairly autonomous status of their economies.

Source:

Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index; available at URL: <http://www.transparency.org>

Updated:

Uploaded in 2011 using most recent ranking available; reviewed in 2015.

Competitiveness Ranking

Competitiveness Ranking

Editor's Note:

The Global Competitiveness Report's competitiveness ranking is based on the Global

Competitiveness Index (GCI), which was developed for the World Economic Forum. The GCI is based on a number of competitiveness considerations, and provides a comprehensive picture of the competitiveness landscape in countries around the world. The competitiveness considerations are: institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, labour market efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, business sophistication, and innovation. The rankings are calculated from both publicly available data and the Executive Opinion Survey.

Country/Economy	GCI 2010 Rank	GCI 2010 Score	GCI 2009 Rank	Change 2009-2010
Switzerland	1	5.63	1	0
Sweden	2	5.56	4	2
Singapore	3	5.48	3	0
United States	4	5.43	2	-2
Germany	5	5.39	7	2
Japan	6	5.37	8	2
Finland	7	5.37	6	-1
Netherlands	8	5.33	10	2
Denmark	9	5.32	5	-4
Canada	10	5.30	9	-1
Hong Kong SAR	11	5.30	11	0
United Kingdom	12	5.25	13	1
Taiwan, China	13	5.21	12	-1

Norway	14	5.14	14	0
France	15	5.13	16	1
Australia	16	5.11	15	-1
Qatar	17	5.10	22	5
Austria	18	5.09	17	-1
Belgium	19	5.07	18	-1
Luxembourg	20	5.05	21	1
Saudi Arabia	21	4.95	28	7
Korea, Rep.	22	4.93	19	-3
New Zealand	23	4.92	20	-3
Israel	24	4.91	27	3
United Arab Emirates	25	4.89	23	-2
Malaysia	26	4.88	24	-2
China	27	4.84	29	2
Brunei Darussalam	28	4.75	32	4
Ireland	29	4.74	25	-4
Chile	30	4.69	30	0
Iceland	31	4.68	26	-5

Tunisia	32	4.65	40	8
Estonia	33	4.61	35	2
Oman	34	4.61	41	7
Kuwait	35	4.59	39	4
Czech Republic	36	4.57	31	-5
Bahrain	37	4.54	38	1
Thailand	38	4.51	36	-2
Poland	39	4.51	46	7
Cyprus	40	4.50	34	-6
Puerto Rico	41	4.49	42	1
Spain	42	4.49	33	-9
Barbados	43	4.45	44	1
Indonesia	44	4.43	54	10
Slovenia	45	4.42	37	-8
Portugal	46	4.38	43	-3
Lithuania	47	4.38	53	6
Italy	48	4.37	48	0
Montenegro	49	4.36	62	13

Malta	50	4.34	52	2
India	51	4.33	49	-2
Hungary	52	4.33	58	6
Panama	53	4.33	59	6
South Africa	54	4.32	45	-9
Mauritius	55	4.32	57	2
Costa Rica	56	4.31	55	-1
Azerbaijan	57	4.29	51	-6
Brazil	58	4.28	56	-2
Vietnam	59	4.27	75	16
Slovak Republic	60	4.25	47	-13
Turkey	61	4.25	61	0
Sri Lanka	62	4.25	79	17
Russian Federation	63	4.24	63	0
Uruguay	64	4.23	65	1
Jordan	65	4.21	50	-15
Mexico	66	4.19	60	-6
Romania	67	4.16	64	-3

Colombia	68	4.14	69	1
Iran	69	4.14	n/a	n/a
Latvia	70	4.14	68	-2
Bulgaria	71	4.13	76	5
Kazakhstan	72	4.12	67	-5
Peru	73	4.11	78	5
Namibia	74	4.09	74	0
Morocco	75	4.08	73	-2
Botswana	76	4.05	66	-10
Croatia	77	4.04	72	-5
Guatemala	78	4.04	80	2
Macedonia, FYR	79	4.02	84	5
Rwanda	80	4.00	n/a	n/a
Egypt	81	4.00	70	-11
El Salvador	82	3.99	77	-5
Greece	83	3.99	71	-12
Trinidad and Tobago	84	3.97	86	2
Philippines	85	3.96	87	2

Algeria	86	3.96	83	-3
Argentina	87	3.95	85	-2
Albania	88	3.94	96	8
Ukraine	89	3.90	82	-7
Gambia, The	90	3.90	81	-9
Honduras	91	3.89	89	-2
Lebanon	92	3.89	n/a	n/a
Georgia	93	3.86	90	-3
Moldova	94	3.86	n/a	n/a
Jamaica	95	3.85	91	-4
Serbia	96	3.84	93	-3
Syria	97	3.79	94	-3
Armenia	98	3.76	97	-1
Mongolia	99	3.75	117	18
Libya	100	3.74	88	-12
Dominican Republic	101	3.72	95	-6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	102	3.70	109	7
Benin	103	3.69	103	0

Senegal	104	3.67	92	-12
Ecuador	105	3.65	105	0
Kenya	106	3.65	98	-8
Bangladesh	107	3.64	106	-1
Bolivia	108	3.64	120	12
Cambodia	109	3.63	110	1
Guyana	110	3.62	104	-6
Cameroon	111	3.58	111	0
Nicaragua	112	3.57	115	3
Tanzania	113	3.56	100	-13
Ghana	114	3.56	114	0
Zambia	115	3.55	112	-3
Tajikistan	116	3.53	122	6
Cape Verde	117	3.51	n/a	n/a
Uganda	118	3.51	108	-10
Ethiopia	119	3.51	118	-1
Paraguay	120	3.49	124	4
Kyrgyz Republic	121	3.49	123	2

Venezuela	122	3.48	113	-9
Pakistan	123	3.48	101	-22
Madagascar	124	3.46	121	-3
Malawi	125	3.45	119	-6
Swaziland	126	3.40	n/a	n/a
Nigeria	127	3.38	99	-28
Lesotho	128	3.36	107	-21
Côte d'Ivoire	129	3.35	116	-13
Nepal	130	3.34	125	-5
Mozambique	131	3.32	129	-2
Mali	132	3.28	130	-2
Timor-Leste	133	3.23	126	-7
Burkina Faso	134	3.20	128	-6
Mauritania	135	3.14	127	-8
Zimbabwe	136	3.03	132	-4
Burundi	137	2.96	133	-4
Angola	138	2.93	n/a	n/a
Chad	139	2.73	131	-8

Methodology:

The competitiveness rankings are calculated from both publicly available data and the Executive Opinion Survey, a comprehensive annual survey conducted by the World Economic Forum together with its network of Partner Institutes (leading research institutes and business organizations) in the countries covered by the Report.

Highlights according to WEF --

- The [United States](#) falls two places to fourth position, overtaken by [Sweden](#) and [Singapore](#) in the rankings of the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2010-2011
- The People's Republic of [China](#) continues to move up the rankings, with marked improvements in several other Asian countries
- [Germany](#) moves up two places to fifth place, leading the Eurozone countries
- [Switzerland](#) tops the rankings

Source:

World Economic Forum; available at URL: <http://www.weforum.org>

Updated:

2011 using most recent ranking available; reviewed in 2015.

Taxation

Corporate tax

The main corporate tax rate is 27.5 percent.

Individual tax

Individual tax rates are progressive rates and range as high as 38.5 percent.

Capital gains

Capital gains are taxed as income.

Indirect tax

The value-added tax (VAT) applies to most transactions at a standard rate of 10 percent. There is a zero rate that applies to certain kinds of machinery, transport, fertilizers and exports. Meanwhile, food, financial services, agricultural and livestock products, and property leases are exempt.

Stock Market

The South Korean Stock Exchange listed 725 companies at the end of the 1990's.

All foreigners wishing to invest in the Exchange must register with the Securities Supervisory Board in order to receive an Investment Registration card that is required to work through a brokerage firm. Foreign investors must also have a foreign currency as well as a Won currency account in order to transfer funds to the brokerage's share transaction account. Foreigners are limited to purchasing listed stocks.

Total foreign investment limits are 20 percent, with any individual limited to 3 percent. Foreign investment for KEPCO and POSCO is limited to 15 percent.

For more information about the South Korean Stock Exchange, see URL:
<http://www.kse.or.kr/eng/>.

Partner Links

Partner Links

Chapter 5

Social Overview

People

Background

South Korea is situated at the south part of the Korean peninsula between the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea. The Korean Peninsula is one of the most homogeneous regions in the world both ethnically and linguistically. The population of South Korea is almost entirely Korean, although there is a small number of Chinese who constitute the only significant minority group in the country.

Demography

The population of South Korea -- now around 49 million -- more than doubled from the 1950s to the 1990s. Large numbers of Koreans who emigrated to Japan before World War II returned to South Korea after 1945. In addition, about two million people migrated to South Korea from North Korea during and after the Korean War in the 1950s.

Of the almost-50 million people in South Korea, three-fourths of them live in cities that are populated by a larger percentage of young people. Although the overall population growth rate is low in the country, South Korea has one of the world's highest population densities. On the other hand, its vast rural areas are depopulated, with larger percentage of older people.

Language

Korean is the only language spoken in the country. Although dialects exist, the Korean spoken throughout the peninsula is mutually comprehensible. The Korean language is related to Japanese, and its written language is a combination of Chinese characters and the Korean script known as Hangul in South Korea and Choson muntcha in North Korea. Chinese characters are still in limited use in South Korea, although the trend is toward using less Chinese characters.

Religion

Korea's traditional religions are Buddhism and Shamanism. Buddhism has lost some influence over the years but is still followed by about 47 percent of the population. A religious belief known as Shamanism, derived from belief in gods, demons and ancestral spirits responsive to a priest, or Shaman, existed in Korea before the introduction of Confucianism and Buddhism, but its practice in South Korea today is limited to certain occasions such as funerals.

Confucianism had been a basis of national ethics in Korea for several hundred years from the late 14th to early 20th century, and it still has a dominant cultural influence in the peninsula. Christian missionaries arrived in Korea and began missionary activities there in the 19th century. Christians now are the largest religious group in South Korea with 49 percent of the population practicing Christianity.

Human Development

The population of South Korea has a healthy life expectancy at birth of 77.42 years of age -- 81.1 years for females and 74 years for males -- according to recent estimates. The infant mortality rate of South Korea is 5.94 deaths per 1,000 live births. In terms of literacy, 97 percent of the female population and over 99 percent of the male population, age 15 and over, can read and write.

In terms of health and welfare, 4.2 percent of GDP in this country is spent on education' 6.5 percent of GDP is spent on health expenditures. Generally, access to sanitation and water in this country is excellent.

One notable measure used to determine a country's quality of life is the Human Development Index (HDI), which has been compiled annually since 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The HDI is a composite of several indicators, which measure a country's achievements in three main arenas of human development: longevity, knowledge and education, as well as economic standard of living. In a recent ranking of 175 countries, the HDI placed South Korea in the high human development category, at 30th place. In a subsequent ranking of 169 countries, South Korea was ranked as being in 12th place.

Note: Although the concept of human development is complicated and cannot be properly captured by values and indices, the HDI, which is calculated and updated annually, offers a wide-ranging assessment of human development in certain countries, not based solely upon traditional economic and financial indicators.

Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, www.countrywatch.com . See

Bibliography for list of research sources.

Human Development Index

Human Development Index

Human Development Index (Ranked Numerically)

The [Human Development Index](#) (HDI) is used to measure quality of life in countries across the world. The HDI has been compiled since 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on a regular basis. The HDI is a composite of several indicators, which measure a country's achievements in three main arenas of human development: longevity, education, and economic standard of living. Although the concept of human development is complicated and cannot be properly captured by values and indices, the HDI offers a wide-ranging assessment of human development in certain countries, not based solely upon traditional economic and financial indicators. For more information about the methodology used to calculate the HDI, please see the "Source Materials" in the appendices of this review.

Very High Human Development	High Human Development	Medium Human Development	Low Human Development
1. Norway	43. Bahamas	86. Fiji	128. Kenya
2. Australia	44. Lithuania	87. Turkmenistan	129. Bangladesh
3. New Zealand	45. Chile	88. Dominican Republic	130. Ghana
4. United States	46. Argentina	89. China	131. Cameroon
5. Ireland	47. Kuwait	90. El Salvador	132. Myanmar (Burma)
6. Liechtenstein	48. Latvia	91. Sri Lanka	133. Yemen

7. Netherlands	49. Montenegro	92. Thailand	134. Benin
8. Canada	50. Romania	93. Gabon	135. Madagascar
9. Sweden	51. Croatia	94. Suriname	136. Mauritania
10. Germany	52. Uruguay	95. Bolivia	137. Papua New Guinea
11. Japan	53. Libya	96. Paraguay	138. Nepal
12. South Korea	54. Panama	97. Philippines	139. Togo
13. Switzerland	55. Saudi Arabia	98. Botswana	140. Comoros
14. France	56. Mexico	99. Moldova	141. Lesotho
15. Israel	57. Malaysia	100. Mongolia	142. Nigeria
16. Finland	58. Bulgaria	101. Egypt	143. Uganda
17. Iceland	59. Trinidad and Tobago	102. Uzbekistan	144. Senegal
18. Belgium	60. Serbia	103. Micronesia	145. Haiti
19. Denmark	61. Belarus	104. Guyana	146. Angola
20. Spain	62. Costa Rica	105. Namibia	147. Djibouti
21. Hong Kong	63. Peru	106. Honduras	148. Tanzania
22. Greece	64. Albania	107. Maldives	149. Cote d'Ivoire
23. Italy	65. Russian Federation	108. Indonesia	150. Zambia

24. Luxembourg	66. Kazakhstan	109. Kyrgyzstan	151. Gambia
25. Austria	67. Azerbaijan	110. South Africa	152. Rwanda
26. United Kingdom	68. Bosnia and Herzegovina	111. Syria	153. Malawi
27. Singapore	69. Ukraine	112. Tajikistan	154. Sudan
28. Czech Republic	70. Iran	113. Vietnam	155. Afghanistan
29. Slovenia	71. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	114. Morocco	156. Guinea
30. Andorra	72. Mauritius	115. Nicaragua	157. Ethiopia
31. Slovakia	73. Brazil	116. Guatemala	158. Sierra Leone
32. United Arab Emirates	74. Georgia	117. Equatorial Guinea	159. Central African Republic
33. Malta	75. Venezuela	118. Cape Verde	160. Mali
34. Estonia	76. Armenia	119. India	161. Burkina Faso
35. Cyprus	77. Ecuador	120. East Timor	162. Liberia
36. Hungary	78. Belize	121. Swaziland	163. Chad
37. Brunei	79. Colombia	122. Laos	164. Guinea-Bissau
38. Qatar	80. Jamaica	123. Solomon Islands	165. Mozambique

39. Bahrain	81. Tunisia	124. Cambodia	166. Burundi
40. Portugal	82. Jordan	125. Pakistan	167. Niger
41. Poland	83. Turkey	126. Congo RC	168. Congo DRC
42. Barbados	84. Algeria	127. Sao Tome and Principe	169. Zimbabwe
	85. Tonga		

Methodology:

For more information about the methodology used to calculate the HDI, please see the "Source Materials" in the appendices of this Country Review.

Reference:

As published in United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report 2010.

Source:

United Nations Development Programme's [Human Development Index](http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/) available at URL: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

Updated:

Uploaded in 2011 using ranking available; reviewed in 2015

Life Satisfaction Index

Life Satisfaction Index

Life Satisfaction Index

Created by Adrian G. White, an Analytic Social Psychologist at the University of Leicester, the "Satisfaction with Life Index" measures subjective life satisfaction across various countries. The data was taken from a metastudy (see below for source) and associates the notion of subjective happiness or life satisfaction with qualitative parameters such as health, wealth, and access to basic education. This assessment serves as an alternative to other measures of happiness that tend to rely on traditional and quantitative measures of policy on quality of life, such as GNP and GDP. The methodology involved the responses of 80,000 people across the globe.

Rank	Country	Score
1	Denmark	273.4
2	Switzerland	273.33
3	Austria	260
4	Iceland	260
5	The Bahamas	256.67
6	Finland	256.67
7	Sweden	256.67
8	Iran	253.33
9	Brunei	253.33
10	Canada	253.33
11	Ireland	253.33

12	Luxembourg	253.33
13	Costa Rica	250
14	Malta	250
15	Netherlands	250
16	Antiguaand Barbuda	246.67
17	Malaysia	246.67
18	New Zealand	246.67
19	Norway	246.67
20	Seychelles	246.67
21	Saint Kitts and Nevis	246.67
22	United Arab Emirates	246.67
23	United States	246.67
24	Vanuatu	246.67
25	Venezuela	246.67
26	Australia	243.33
27	Barbados	243.33
28	Belgium	243.33
29	Dominica	243.33

30	Oman	243.33
31	Saudi Arabia	243.33
32	Suriname	243.33
33	Bahrain	240
34	Colombia	240
35	Germany	240
36	Guyana	240
37	Honduras	240
38	Kuwait	240
39	Panama	240
40	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	240
41	United Kingdom	236.67
42	Dominican Republic	233.33
43	Guatemala	233.33
44	Jamaica	233.33
45	Qatar	233.33
46	Spain	233.33
47	Saint Lucia	233.33

48	Belize	230
49	Cyprus	230
50	Italy	230
51	Mexico	230
52	Samoa	230
53	Singapore	230
54	Solomon Islands	230
55	Trinidad and Tobago	230
56	Argentina	226.67
57	Fiji	223.33
58	Israel	223.33
59	Mongolia	223.33
60	São Tomé and Príncipe	223.33
61	El Salvador	220
62	France	220
63	Hong Kong	220
64	Indonesia	220
65	Kyrgyzstan	220

66	Maldives	220
67	Slovenia	220
68	Taiwan	220
69	East Timor	220
70	Tonga	220
71	Chile	216.67
72	Grenada	216.67
73	Mauritius	216.67
74	Namibia	216.67
75	Paraguay	216.67
76	Thailand	216.67
77	Czech Republic	213.33
78	Philippines	213.33
79	Tunisia	213.33
80	Uzbekistan	213.33
81	Brazil	210
82	China	210
83	Cuba	210

84	Greece	210
85	Nicaragua	210
86	Papua New Guinea	210
87	Uruguay	210
88	Gabon	206.67
89	Ghana	206.67
90	Japan	206.67
91	Yemen	206.67
92	Portugal	203.33
93	Sri Lanka	203.33
94	Tajikistan	203.33
95	Vietnam	203.33
96	Bhutan	200
97	Comoros	196.67
98	Croatia	196.67
99	Poland	196.67
100	Cape Verde	193.33
101	Kazakhstan	193.33

102	South Korea	193.33
103	Madagascar	193.33
104	Bangladesh	190
105	Republic of the Congo	190
106	The Gambia	190
107	Hungary	190
108	Libya	190
109	South Africa	190
110	Cambodia	186.67
111	Ecuador	186.67
112	Kenya	186.67
113	Lebanon	186.67
114	Morocco	186.67
115	Peru	186.67
116	Senegal	186.67
117	Bolivia	183.33
118	Haiti	183.33
119	Nepal	183.33

120	Nigeria	183.33
121	Tanzania	183.33
122	Benin	180
123	Botswana	180
124	Guinea-Bissau	180
125	India	180
126	Laos	180
127	Mozambique	180
128	Palestinian Authority	180
129	Slovakia	180
130	Myanmar	176.67
131	Mali	176.67
132	Mauritania	176.67
133	Turkey	176.67
134	Algeria	173.33
135	Equatorial Guinea	173.33
136	Romania	173.33
137	Bosnia and Herzegovina	170

138	Cameroon	170
139	Estonia	170
140	Guinea	170
141	Jordan	170
142	Syria	170
143	Sierra Leone	166.67
144	Azerbaijan	163.33
145	Central African Republic	163.33
146	Republic of Macedonia	163.33
147	Togo	163.33
148	Zambia	163.33
149	Angola	160
150	Djibouti	160
151	Egypt	160
152	Burkina Faso	156.67
153	Ethiopia	156.67
154	Latvia	156.67
155	Lithuania	156.67

156	Uganda	156.67
157	Albania	153.33
158	Malawi	153.33
159	Chad	150
160	Côte d'Ivoire	150
161	Niger	150
162	Eritrea	146.67
163	Rwanda	146.67
164	Bulgaria	143.33
165	Lesotho	143.33
166	Pakistan	143.33
167	Russia	143.33
168	Swaziland	140
169	Georgia	136.67
170	Belarus	133.33
171	Turkmenistan	133.33
172	Armenia	123.33
173	Sudan	120

174	Ukraine	120
175	Moldova	116.67
176	Democratic Republic of the Congo	110
177	Zimbabwe	110
178	Burundi	100

Commentary:

European countries, such as [Denmark](#), [Iceland](#), [Finland](#), [Sweden](#), [Switzerland](#), [Austria](#) resided at the top of the ranking with highest levels of self-reported life satisfaction. Conversely, European countries such as [Latvia](#), [Lithuania](#), [Moldova](#), [Belarus](#) and [Ukraine](#) ranked low on the index. African countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo, [Zimbabwe](#) and [Burundi](#) found themselves at the very bottom of the ranking, and indeed, very few African countries could be found in the top 100. [Japan](#) was at the mid-way point in the ranking, however, other Asian countries such as [Brunei](#) and [Malaysia](#) were in the top tier, while [Pakistan](#) was close to the bottom with a low level of self-identified life satisfaction. As a region, the Middle East presented a mixed bag with Saudi Arabians reporting healthy levels of life satisfaction and Egyptians near the bottom of the ranking. As a region, Caribbean countries were ranked highly, consistently demonstrating high levels of life satisfaction. The findings showed that health was the most crucial determining factor in life satisfaction, followed by prosperity and education.

Source:

White, A. (2007). A Global Projection of Subjective Well-being: A Challenge To Positive Psychology? *Psychiatry* 56, 17-20. The data was extracted from a meta-analysis by Marks, Abdallah, Simms & Thompson (2006).

Uploaded:

Based on study noted above in "Source" ; reviewed in 2015

Happy Planet Index

Happy Planet Index

The Happy Planet Index (HPI) is used to measure human well-being in conjunction with environmental impact. The HPI has been compiled since 2006 by the New Economics Foundation. The index is a composite of several indicators including subjective life satisfaction, life expectancy at birth, and ecological footprint per capita.

As noted by NEFA, the HPI "reveals the ecological efficiency with which human well-being is delivered." Indeed, the index combines environmental impact with human well-being to measure the environmental efficiency with which, country by country, people live long and happy lives. The countries ranked highest by the HPI are not necessarily the ones with the happiest people overall, but the ones that allow their citizens to live long and fulfilling lives, without negatively impacting this opportunity for either future generations or citizens of other countries. Accordingly, a country like the [United States](#) will rank low on this list due to its large per capital ecological footprint, which uses more than its fair share of resources, and will likely cause planetary damage.

It should be noted that the HPI was designed to be a counterpoint to other well-established indices of countries' development, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which measures overall national wealth and economic development, but often obfuscates the realities of countries with stark variances between the rich and the poor. Moreover, the objective of most of the world's people is not to be wealthy but to be happy. The HPI also differs from the [Human Development Index](#) (HDI), which measures quality of life but not ecology, since it [HPI] also includes sustainability as a key indicator.

Rank	Country	HPI
1	Costa Rica	76.1
2	Dominican Republic	71.8
3	Jamaica	70.1
4	Guatemala	68.4

5	Vietnam	66.5
6	Colombia	66.1
7	Cuba	65.7
8	El Salvador	61.5
9	Brazil	61.0
10	Honduras	61.0
11	Nicaragua	60.5
12	Egypt	60.3
13	Saudi Arabia	59.7
14	Philippines	59.0
15	Argentina	59.0
16	Indonesia	58.9
17	Bhutan	58.5
18	Panama	57.4
19	Laos	57.3
20	China	57.1
21	Morocco	56.8
22	Sri Lanka	56.5

23	Mexico	55.6
24	Pakistan	55.6
25	Ecuador	55.5
26	Jordan	54.6
27	Belize	54.5
28	Peru	54.4
29	Tunisia	54.3
30	Trinidad and Tobago	54.2
31	Bangladesh	54.1
32	Moldova	54.1
33	Malaysia	54.0
34	Tajikistan	53.5
35	India	53.0
36	Venezuela	52.5
37	Nepal	51.9
38	Syria	51.3
39	Burma	51.2
40	Algeria	51.2

41	Thailand	50.9
42	Haiti	50.8
43	Netherlands	50.6
44	Malta	50.4
45	Uzbekistan	50.1
46	Chile	49.7
47	Bolivia	49.3
48	Armenia	48.3
49	Singapore	48.2
50	Yemen	48.1
51	Germany	48.1
52	Switzerland	48.1
53	Sweden	48.0
54	Albania	47.9
55	Paraguay	47.8
56	Palestinian Authority	47.7
57	Austria	47.7
58	Serbia	47.6

59	Finland	47.2
60	Croatia	47.2
61	Kyrgyzstan	47.1
62	Cyprus	46.2
63	Guyana	45.6
64	Belgium	45.4
65	Bosnia and Herzegovina	45.0
66	Slovenia	44.5
67	Israel	44.5
68	South Korea	44.4
69	Italy	44.0
70	Romania	43.9
71	France	43.9
72	Georgia	43.6
73	Slovakia	43.5
74	United Kingdom	43.3
75	Japan	43.3
76	Spain	43.2

77	Poland	42.8
78	Ireland	42.6
79	Iraq	42.6
80	Cambodia	42.3
81	Iran	42.1
82	Bulgaria	42.0
83	Turkey	41.7
84	Hong Kong	41.6
85	Azerbaijan	41.2
86	Lithuania	40.9
87	Djibouti	40.4
88	Norway	40.4
89	Canada	39.4
90	Hungary	38.9
91	Kazakhstan	38.5
92	Czech Republic	38.3
93	Mauritania	38.2
94	Iceland	38.1

95	Ukraine	38.1
96	Senegal	38.0
97	Greece	37.6
98	Portugal	37.5
99	Uruguay	37.2
100	Ghana	37.1
101	Latvia	36.7
102	Australia	36.6
103	New Zealand	36.2
104	Belarus	35.7
105	Denmark	35.5
106	Mongolia	35.0
107	Malawi	34.5
108	Russia	34.5
109	Chad	34.3
110	Lebanon	33.6
111	Macedonia	32.7
112	Republic of the Congo	32.4

113	Madagascar	31.5
114	United States	30.7
115	Nigeria	30.3
116	Guinea	30.3
117	Uganda	30.2
118	South Africa	29.7
119	Rwanda	29.6
120	Democratic Republic of the Congo	29.0
121	Sudan	28.5
122	Luxembourg	28.5
123	United Arab Emirates	28.2
124	Ethiopia	28.1
125	Kenya	27.8
126	Cameroon	27.2
127	Zambia	27.2
128	Kuwait	27.0
129	Niger	26.9
130	Angola	26.8

131	Estonia	26.4
132	Mali	25.8
133	Mozambique	24.6
134	Benin	24.6
135	Togo	23.3
136	Sierra Leone	23.1
137	Central African Republic	22.9
138	Burkina Faso	22.4
139	Burundi	21.8
140	Namibia	21.1
141	Botswana	20.9
142	Tanzania	17.8
143	Zimbabwe	16.6

Source: This material is derived from the Happy Planet Index issued by the New Economics Foundation (NEF).

Methodology: The methodology for the calculations can be found at URL: <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/>

Status of Women

Gender Related Development Index (GDI) Rank:

27th out of 140

Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) Rank:

59th out of 80

Female Population:

24 million

Female Life Expectancy at birth:

81 years

Total Fertility Rate:

1.2

Maternal Mortality Ratio (2000):

20

Total Number of Women Living with HIV/AIDS:

3,900-16,000

Ever Married Women, Ages 15-19 (%):

1%

Mean Age at Time of Marriage:

26

Contraceptive Use Among Married Women, Any Method (%):

81%

Female Adult Literacy Rate:

97%

Combined Female Gross enrollment ratio for Primary, Secondary and Tertiary schools:

97%

Female-Headed Households (%):

17%

Economically Active Females (%):

54.4%

Female Contributing Family Workers (%):

88%

Female Estimated Earned Income:

\$11,698

Seats in Parliament held by women (%):

Lower or Single House: 13.0%

Upper House or Senate: N/A

Year Women Received the Right to Vote:

1948

Year Women Received the Right to Stand for Election:

1948

*The Gender Development Index (GDI) is a composite index which measures the average

achievement in a country. While very similar to the Human Development Index in its use of the same variables, the GDI adjusts the average achievement of each country in terms of life expectancy, enrollment in schools, income, and literacy in accordance to the disparities between males and females.

*The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is a composite index measuring gender inequality in three of the basic dimensions of empowerment; economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making, and power over economic resources.

*Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is defined as the average number of babies born to women during their reproductive years. A TFR of 2.1 is considered the replacement rate; once a TFR of a population reaches 2.1 the population will remain stable assuming no immigration or emigration takes place. When the TFR is greater than 2.1 a population will increase and when it is less than 2.1 a population will eventually decrease, although due to the age structure of a population it will take years before a low TFR is translated into lower population.

*Maternal Mortality Rate is the number of deaths to women per 100,000 live births that resulted from conditions related to pregnancy and or delivery related complications.

*Economically Active Females are the share of the female population, ages 15 and above, whom supply, or are able to supply, labor for the production of goods and services.

*Female Contributing Family Workers are those females who work without pay in an economic enterprise operated by a relative living in the same household.

*Estimated Earned Income is measured according to Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) in US dollars.

Global Gender Gap Index

Global Gender Gap Index

Editor's Note:

The Global Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum ranks most of the world's countries in terms of the division of resources and opportunities among males and females. Specifically, the ranking assesses the gender inequality gap in these four arenas:

1. Economic participation and opportunity (salaries and high skilled employment participation levels)
2. Educational attainment (access to basic and higher level education)
3. Political empowerment (representation in decision-making structures)
4. Health and survival (life expectancy and sex ratio)

	2010 rank	2010 score	2010 rank among 2009 countries	2009 rank	2009 score	2008 rank	2008 score	2007 rank
Country								
Iceland	1	0.8496	1	1	0.8276	4	0.7999	4
Norway	2	0.8404	2	3	0.8227	1	0.8239	2
Finland	3	0.8260	3	2	0.8252	2	0.8195	3
Sweden	4	0.8024	4	4	0.8139	3	0.8139	1
New Zealand	5	0.7808	5	5	0.7880	5	0.7859	5
Ireland	6	0.7773	6	8	0.7597	8	0.7518	9
Denmark	7	0.7719	7	7	0.7628	7	0.7538	8
Lesotho	8	0.7678	8	10	0.7495	16	0.7320	26
Philippines	9	0.7654	9	9	0.7579	6	0.7568	6
Switzerland	10	0.7562	10	13	0.7426	14	0.7360	40

Spain	11	0.7554	11	17	0.7345	17	0.7281	10
South Africa	12	0.7535	12	6	0.7709	22	0.7232	20
Germany	13	0.7530	13	12	0.7449	11	0.7394	7
Belgium	14	0.7509	14	33	0.7165	28	0.7163	19
United Kingdom	15	0.7460	15	15	0.7402	13	0.7366	11
Sri Lanka	16	0.7458	16	16	0.7402	12	0.7371	15
Netherlands	17	0.7444	17	11	0.7490	9	0.7399	12
Latvia	18	0.7429	18	14	0.7416	10	0.7397	13
United States	19	0.7411	19	31	0.7173	27	0.7179	31
Canada	20	0.7372	20	25	0.7196	31	0.7136	18
Trinidad and Tobago	21	0.7353	21	19	0.7298	19	0.7245	46
Mozambique	22	0.7329	22	26	0.7195	18	0.7266	43
Australia	23	0.7271	23	20	0.7282	21	0.7241	17
Cuba	24	0.7253	24	29	0.7176	25	0.7195	22
Namibia	25	0.7238	25	32	0.7167	30	0.7141	29
Luxembourg	26	0.7231	26	63	0.6889	66	0.6802	58
Mongolia	27	0.7194	27	22	0.7221	40	0.7049	62

Costa Rica	28	0.7194	28	27	0.7180	32	0.7111	28
Argentina	29	0.7187	29	24	0.7211	24	0.7209	33
Nicaragua	30	0.7176	30	49	0.7002	71	0.6747	90
Barbados	31	0.7176	31	21	0.7236	26	0.7188	n/a
Portugal	32	0.7171	32	46	0.7013	39	0.7051	37
Uganda	33	0.7169	33	40	0.7067	43	0.6981	50
Moldova	34	0.7160	34	36	0.7104	20	0.7244	21
Lithuania	35	0.7132	35	30	0.7175	23	0.7222	14
Bahamas	36	0.7128	36	28	0.7179	n/a	n/a	n/a
Austria	37	0.7091	37	42	0.7031	29	0.7153	27
Guyana	38	0.7090	38	35	0.7108	n/a	n/a	n/a
Panama	39	0.7072	39	43	0.7024	34	0.7095	38
Ecuador	40	0.7072	40	23	0.7220	35	0.7091	44
Kazakhstan	41	0.7055	41	47	0.7013	45	0.6976	32
Slovenia	42	0.7047	42	52	0.6982	51	0.6937	49
Poland	43	0.7037	43	50	0.6998	49	0.6951	60
Jamaica	44	0.7037	44	48	0.7013	44	0.6980	39
Russian Federation	45	0.7036	45	51	0.6987	42	0.6994	45

France	46	0.7025	46	18	0.7331	15	0.7341	51
Estonia	47	0.7018	47	37	0.7094	37	0.7076	30
Chile	48	0.7013	48	64	0.6884	65	0.6818	86
Macedonia, FYR	49	0.6996	49	53	0.6950	53	0.6914	35
Bulgaria	50	0.6983	50	38	0.7072	36	0.7077	25
Kyrgyz Republic	51	0.6973	51	41	0.7058	41	0.7045	70
Israel	52	0.6957	52	45	0.7019	56	0.6900	36
Croatia	53	0.6939	53	54	0.6944	46	0.6967	16
Honduras	54	0.6927	54	62	0.6893	47	0.6960	68
Colombia	55	0.6927	55	56	0.6939	50	0.6944	24
Singapore	56	0.6914	56	84	0.6664	84	0.6625	77
Thailand	57	0.6910	57	59	0.6907	52	0.6917	52
Greece	58	0.6908	58	85	0.6662	75	0.6727	72
Uruguay	59	0.6897	59	57	0.6936	54	0.6907	78
Peru	60	0.6895	60	44	0.7024	48	0.6959	75
China	61	0.6881	61	60	0.6907	57	0.6878	73
Botswana	62	0.6876	62	39	0.7071	63	0.6839	53

Ukraine	63	0.6869	63	61	0.6896	62	0.6856	57
Venezuela	64	0.6863	64	69	0.6839	59	0.6875	55
Czech Republic	65	0.6850	65	74	0.6789	69	0.6770	64
Tanzania	66	0.6829	66	73	0.6797	38	0.7068	34
Romania	67	0.6826	67	70	0.6805	70	0.6763	47
Malawi	68	0.6824	68	76	0.6738	81	0.6664	87
Paraguay	69	0.6804	69	66	0.6868	100	0.6379	69
Ghana	70	0.6782	70	80	0.6704	77	0.6679	63
Slovak Republic	71	0.6778	71	68	0.6845	64	0.6824	54
Vietnam	72	0.6776	72	71	0.6802	68	0.6778	42
Dominican Republic	73	0.6774	73	67	0.6859	72	0.6744	65
Italy	74	0.6765	74	72	0.6798	67	0.6788	84
Gambia, The	75	0.6762	75	75	0.6752	85	0.6622	95
Bolivia	76	0.6751	76	82	0.6693	80	0.6667	80
Brueni Darussalem	77	0.6748	77	94	0.6524	99	0.6392	n/a
Albania	78	0.6726	78	91	0.6601	87	0.6591	66

Hungary	79	0.6720	79	65	0.6879	60	0.6867	61
Madagascar	80	0.6713	80	77	0.6732	74	0.6736	89
Angola	81	0.6712	81	106	0.6353	114	0.6032	110
Bangladesh	82	0.6702	82	93	0.6526	90	0.6531	100
Malta	83	0.6695	83	88	0.6635	83	0.6634	76
Armenia	84	0.6669	84	90	0.6619	78	0.6677	71
Brazil	85	0.6655	85	81	0.6695	73	0.6737	74
Cyprus	86	0.6642	86	79	0.6706	76	0.6694	82
Indonesia	87	0.6615	87	92	0.6580	93	0.6473	81
Georgia	88	0.6598	88	83	0.6680	82	0.6654	67
Tajikistan	89	0.6598	89	86	0.6661	89	0.6541	79
El Salvador	90	0.6596	90	55	0.6939	58	0.6875	48
Mexico	91	0.6577	91	98	0.6503	97	0.6441	93
Zimbabwe	92	0.6574	92	95	0.6518	92	0.6485	88
Belize	93	0.6536	93	87	0.6636	86	0.6610	94
Japan	94	0.6524	94	101	0.6447	98	0.6434	91
Mauritius	95	0.6520	95	96	0.6513	95	0.6466	85
Kenya	96	0.6499	96	97	0.6512	88	0.6547	83

Cambodia	97	0.6482	97	104	0.6410	94	0.6469	98
Malaysia	98	0.6479	98	100	0.6467	96	0.6442	92
Maldives	99	0.6452	99	99	0.6482	91	0.6501	99
Azerbaijan	100	0.6446	100	89	0.6626	61	0.6856	59
Senegal	101	0.6414	101	102	0.6427	n/a	n/a	n/a
Suriname	102	0.6407	102	78	0.6726	79	0.6674	56
United Arab Emirates	103	0.6397	103	112	0.6198	105	0.6220	105
Korea, Rep.	104	0.6342	104	115	0.6146	108	0.6154	97
Kuwait	105	0.6318	105	105	0.6356	101	0.6358	96
Zambia	106	0.6293	106	107	0.6310	106	0.6205	101
Tunisia	107	0.6266	107	109	0.6233	103	0.6295	102
Fiji	108	0.6256	108	103	0.6414	n/a	n/a	n/a
Guatemala	109	0.6238	109	111	0.6209	112	0.6072	106
Bahrain	110	0.6217	110	116	0.6136	121	0.5927	115
Burkina Faso	111	0.6162	111	120	0.6081	115	0.6029	117
India	112	0.6155	112	114	0.6151	113	0.6060	114
Mauritania	113	0.6152	113	119	0.6103	110	0.6117	111

Cameroon	114	0.6110	114	118	0.6108	117	0.6017	116
Nepal	115	0.6084	115	110	0.6213	120	0.5942	125
Lebanon*	116	0.6084	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Qatar	117	0.6059	116	125	0.5907	119	0.5948	109
Nigeria	118	0.6055	117	108	0.6280	102	0.6339	107
Algeria	119	0.6052	118	117	0.6119	111	0.6111	108
Jordan	120	0.6048	119	113	0.6182	104	0.6275	104
Ethiopia	121	0.6019	120	122	0.5948	122	0.5867	113
Oman	122	0.5950	121	123	0.5938	118	0.5960	119
Iran	123	0.5933	122	128	0.5839	116	0.6021	118
Syria	124	0.5926	123	121	0.6072	107	0.6181	103
Egypt	125	0.5899	124	126	0.5862	124	0.5832	120
Turkey	126	0.5876	125	129	0.5828	123	0.5853	121
Morocco	127	0.5767	126	124	0.5926	125	0.5757	122
Benin	128	0.5719	127	131	0.5643	126	0.5582	123
Saudi Arabia	129	0.5713	128	130	0.5651	128	0.5537	124
Côte d'Ivoire*	130	0.5691	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Mali	131	0.5680	129	127	0.5860	109	0.6117	112

Pakistan	132	0.5465	130	132	0.5458	127	0.5549	126
Chad	133	0.5330	131	133	0.5417	129	0.5290	127
Yemen	134	0.4603	132	134	0.4609	130	0.4664	128
Belarus	n/a	n/a	n/a	34	0.7141	33	0.7099	23
Uzbekistan	n/a	n/a	n/a	58	0.6913	55	0.6906	41

*new country 2010

Commentary:

According to the report's index, Nordic countries, such as [Iceland](#), [Norway](#), [Finland](#), and [Sweden](#) have continued to dominate at the top of the ranking for gender equality. Meanwhile, [France](#) has seen a notable decline in the ranking, largely as a result of decreased number of women holding ministerial portfolios in that country. In the Americas, the [United States](#) has risen in the ranking to top the region, predominantly as a result of a decreasing wage gap, as well as higher number of women holding key positions in the current Obama administration. [Canada](#) has continued to remain as one of the top ranking countries of the Americas, followed by the small Caribbean island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, which has the distinction of being among the top three countries of the Americans in the realm of gender equality. [Lesotho](#) and South African ranked highly in the index, leading not only among African countries but also in global context. Despite [Lesotho](#) still lagging in the area of life expectancy, its high ranking was attributed to high levels of female participation in the labor force and female literacy. The [Philippines](#) and [Sri Lanka](#) were the top ranking countries for gender equality for Asia, ranking highly also in global context. The [Philippines](#) has continued to show strong performance in all strong performance on all four dimensions (detailed above) of the index. Finally, in the Arab world, the [United Arab Emirates](#) held the highest-rank within that region of the world; however, its placement near the bottom of the global list highlights the fact that Arab countries are generally poor performers when it comes to the matter of gender equality in global scope.

Source:

This data is derived from the latest edition of The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum.

Available at URL:

<http://www.weforum.org/en/Communities/Women%20Leaders%20and%20Gender%20Parity/Gende>

Updated:

Based on latest available data as set forth in chart; reviewed in 2014

Culture and Arts

Content to come!

Etiquette

Cultural Dos and Taboos

- Korean men tend to greet each other with a slight bow, sometimes accompanied by a handshake, while maintaining eye contact. In order to indicate respect for the person being greeted, one might support one's right forearm with one's left hand during the handshake. It is common for the junior person to initiate the greetings and be the first to bow. The senior person is usually the first one to offer his hand. Weak handshakes or the nod of the head is sometimes sufficient within business circles. Among Korean women, handshaking is rarely used; reciprocal bowing may suffice. Western men should not shake hands with a Korean woman while Western women in business circles should initiate a handshake with Korean men.
- Elderly people are very highly respected in Korean culture and as such, in group settings, it is customary to greet and speak to them first, taking care to spend a few moments with them.

Offering compliments regarding an elder person's good health is also good practice. One might also show respect to an elderly person by touching one's left hand, palm up, lightly to the right elbow when shaking hands or passing objects, such as a dish of food or business documents. Meanwhile, if one encounters an elderly person by a doorway, it is polite to allow them to pass through first. One should also avoid smoking or wearing sunglasses when in the company of an elderly person as both acts suggest a lack of respect for their presence.

- Travelers should be aware that Korean males possess higher social status than Korean women. This hierarchy is evidenced by the sight of women opening doors for men, and allowing them to pass through first. Although Western women are excluded from these rules, all travelers should be aware of this cultural difference and should not show that they are offended by it.
- In South Korea, physical contact is inappropriate with older people, with people of the opposite sex, or with people who are not good friends and family. In general, one should not indulge in either physical contact with others, or in public displays of affection with one's own family and friends.
- Koreans are restrained and self-possessed people; travelers should avoid being loud and boisterous around them.
- When in South Korea, one should cover your mouth when yawning or using toothpicks. Likewise, blowing one's nose in public is considered bad manners.
- As in many Asian cultures, smiling and laughter does not always denote amusement and pleasure; smiling and laughter can just as easily denote discomfort. For example, a Korean is embarrassed, he or she may laugh excessively.
- Koreans are very conscious of dignity and self-respect. As in other parts of eastern Asia, protecting "face" -- the pride of another person -- is a very important and delicate concern. One should never embarrass another person, especially in public, and one should always be aware that their self-respect be preserved.
- Modesty is another cardinal concern in Korea. One should not enter a home or office until one is invited to do so, and one should not sit down unless one has been asked to take a seat. Indeed, in many such circumstances, waiting for the invitation to be extended several times before accepting is considered to be good practice. Another way of demonstrating modesty is when one receives a compliment. Rather than expressing thanks for the compliment, as in the West, one should politely refute it instead. Of course, at the same time, one should offer compliments to others, and the onus is upon them to politely refuse, as good practice dictates.
- When offering compliments about someone's belongings, one should take care not to be overly-

appreciative as good manners suggests that they would then be obligated to give it to you.

- One should not visit a Korean at home without prior notice or an outright invitation to do so. One should, at least, call ahead before visiting a home. After visiting a home or meeting a Korean colleague for business, when one is about to leave, one should express thanks for their time and bow slightly.
- When entering a Korean home, restaurant or religious building (such as a temple), it is customary to remove one's shoes. In temples, shoes should be left on the floor with the toes pointing away from the inside of the building. When putting one's shoes back on, one should take care not to sit with one's back to the temple.
- Feet are considered unclean and should not touch other people or objects. Men should keep their feet flat on the floor during formal situations. At other times men should take care that the soles of their shoes are pointing down. Women are permitted to cross their legs, but they should also try to keep their shoes pointing in a downward position.
- When sitting on the floor for a meal, it is customary for men to cross their legs while sitting on the cushion. Both women and men may sit with their legs to the side, but never straightened out under the table.
- When eating a meal, one should not finish everything on one's plate as it will indicate that one is still hungry, and that the host did not provide enough food. It is customary for the host to offer food several more times. If one is, indeed, still hungry, one should refuse at least twice before accepting more. If one is hosting a party or a dinner, one should offer food at least three times to one's guests.
- In South Korea, good topics of conversation in social settings include the Korean cultural heritage, sports, and the health of the other's family (further family inquiries on topics other than health are considered intrusive). Topics that should be avoided include politics, socialism, Communism, the country of Japan, and the wife of the host (the wife of any one present is likely to be an inappropriate and intrusive subject).
- When visiting a family, it is appropriate to bring a gift of fruit, imported coffee or quality ginseng tea, chocolates, or crafts from one's homeland. Liquor may be given to a man, but it is not an appropriate gift for a woman.
- When giving or receiving a gift, one should always use both hands. Gifts are not opened in the presence of the giver, and initial resistance to receiving a gift should be anticipated. Initial refusal of a gift is considered to be good manners and as such, if one is giving the gift, one should be persistent. If one is the recipient, be sure not to accept the gift outright but rather, to demonstrate

some small measure of reticence.

- It is customary to reciprocate a gift with one of similar value and thus, one should choose a gift that takes into account the receiver's economic means. If one receives such an extravagant gift that one cannot reciprocate in kind, one might return the gift, being very careful not to offend the sender. One should indicate that the sender's generosity is great and the gift is too much.
- After invitations to dinner at the home of a Korean, one should send a thank-you note to the host. It is also polite to reciprocate by inviting the host to a meal of equal value at a later date.
- Dress in South Korea should be casual and practical outside the office, while suits, for both men and women, are appropriate for business settings. Koreans wear their traditional costume, called "*hanbok*" on holidays and special occasions. For men, it consists of a short jacket and loose trousers that are tied at the ankles. Women's "*hanboks*" consist of a wrap-around skirt and a bolero-style jacket. Both men's and women's ensembles may be topped by a long coat called a "*durumagi*."

Travel Information

Please Note

This is a generalized travel guide and it is intended to coalesce several resources, which a traveler might find useful, regardless of a particular destination. As such, it does not include travel warnings for specific "hot spot" destinations.

For travel alerts and warnings, please see the United States Department of State's listings available at URL:

<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html>

Please note that travel to the following countries, based on these warnings, is ill-advised, or should be undertaken with the utmost precaution:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia,

Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Honduras, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories of West Bank and Gaza, Philippines areas of Sulu Archipelago, Mindanao, and southern Sulu Sea, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Yemen.

International Travel Guide

Checklist for Travelers

1. Take out travel insurance to cover hospital treatment or medical evacuation. Overseas medical costs are expensive to most international travelers, where one's domestic, nationalized or even private health insurance plans will not provide coverage outside one's home country. Learn about "reciprocal insurance plans" that some international health care companies might offer.
2. Make sure that one's travel insurance is appropriate. If one intends to indulge in adventurous activities, such as parasailing, one should be sure that one is fully insured in such cases. Many traditional insurance policies do not provide coverage in cases of extreme circumstances.
3. Take time to learn about one's destination country and culture. Read and learn about the place one is traveling. Also check political, economic and socio-cultural developments at the destination by reading country-specific travel reports and fact sheets noted below.
4. Get the necessary visas for the country (or countries) one intends to visit - but be aware that a visa does not guarantee entry. A number of useful sites regarding visa and other entry requirements are noted below.
5. Keep in regular contact with friends and relatives back at home by phone or email, and be sure to leave a travel itinerary.
6. Protect one's personal information by making copies of one's passport details, insurance policy, travelers checks and credit card numbers. Taking copies of such documents with you, while leaving another collection copies with someone at home is also good practice for travelers. Taking copies of one's passport photograph is also recommended.
7. Stay healthy by taking all possible precautions against illness. Also, be sure to take extra supplies of prescription drugs along for the trip, while also taking time to pack general pharmaceutical supplies, such as aspirin and other such painkillers, bandages, stomach ailment medication, anti-inflammatory medication and anti-bacterial medication.
8. Do not carry illicit drugs. Understand that the punishment for possession or use of illegal drugs in some countries may be capital punishment. Make sure your prescription drugs are legal in the countries you plan to visit.
9. Know the laws of one's destination country and culture; be sure to understand the repercussions of breaking those laws and regulations. Often the transparency and freedoms of the juridical

system at home is not consistent with that of one's destination country. Become aware of these complexities and subtleties before you travel.

10. For longer stays in a country, or where the security situation is volatile, one should register one's self and traveling companions at the local embassy or consulate of one's country of citizenship.

11. Women should take care to be prepared both culturally and practically for traveling in a different country and culture. One should be sure to take sufficient supplies of personal feminine products and prescription drugs. One should also learn about local cultural standards for women, including norms of dressing. Be aware that it is simply inappropriate and unsafe for women to travel alone in some countries, and take the necessary precautions to avoid risk-filled situations.

12. If one is traveling with small children, one should pack extra supplies, make arrangements with the travel carrier for proper seating that would adequately accommodate children, infants or toddlers. Note also that whether one is male or female, traveling with children means that one's hands are thus not free to carry luggage and bags. Be especially aware that this makes one vulnerable to pickpockets, thieves and other sorts of crime.

13. Make proper arrangements for accommodations, well in advance of one's arrival at a destination. Some countries have limited accommodation, while others may have culturally distinctive facilities. Learning about these practicalities before one travels will greatly aid the enjoyment of one's trip.

14. Travel with different forms of currency and money (cash, traveler's checks and credit cards) in anticipation that venues may not accept one or another form of money. Also, ensuring that one's financial resources are not contained in one location, or by one person (if one is traveling with others) can be a useful measure, in the event that one loses a wallet or purse.

15. Find out about transportation in the destination country. In some places, it might be advisable to hire a local driver or taxi guide for safety reasons, while in other countries, enjoying one's travel experience may well be enhanced by renting a vehicle and seeing the local sights and culture independently. Costs may also be prohibitive for either of these choices, so again, prior planning is suggested.

Tips for Travelers

(Provided by the United States Department of State)

The Republic of Korea (South Korea or ROK) is a highly developed, stable, democratic republic with powers shared between the president and the legislature. It has a modern economy, and tourist facilities are widely available. English is often not spoken outside the main tourist and business centers.

In recent years, the U.S. Embassy and U.S. military installations throughout the Republic of Korea have taken steps to increase security at all facilities. U.S. citizens in the Republic of Korea should review their own personal security practices, be alert to any unusual activity around their homes or

businesses, and report any significant incidents to local police authorities.

Although the crime rate in the Republic of Korea is low, in major metropolitan areas, such as Seoul and Pusan, there is a greater risk of pickpocketing, purse-snatching, assaults, hotel room burglaries, and residential crime, and foreigners can be targeted. U.S. citizens are more likely to be targeted in known tourist areas, like Itaewon and other large market areas. Americans should stay alert, be aware of personal surroundings and exercise caution. Travelers may reduce the likelihood of encountering incidents of crime by exercising the same type of security precautions that they would take when visiting any large city in the United States.

The emergency number to reach the police anywhere in South Korea is 112. English interpreters may be available. The Korean National Police (KNP) operate a Central Interpretation Center (CIC) where foreigners can report incidents of crime. The CIC is available on a twenty-four hour, seven-day-a-week basis. In Seoul, its telephone number is 313-0842; outside Seoul, its number is (02) 313-0842.

Health care facilities in the Republic of Korea are good. Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the United States can cost thousands of dollars or more. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for health services. Consult with medical insurance companies prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. U.S. medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Further, U.S. Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States. However, many travel agents and private companies offer insurance plans that will cover health care expenses incurred overseas, including emergency services such as medical evacuations.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, travelers should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to one's home country may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or if you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur. Some insurance policies also include coverage for psychiatric treatment and for disposition of remains in the event of death.

While in a foreign country, U.S. citizens may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. The information below concerning South Korea is provided for general reference only, and it may not be totally accurate in a particular location or circumstance.

Safety of Public Transportation: Good

Urban Road Conditions/Maintenance: Good

Rural Road Conditions/Maintenance: Good

Availability of Roadside/Ambulance Assistance: Good (However, assistance personnel may not be able to speak English.)

Although South Korean roads are well paved, traffic lights function and most drivers comply with basic traffic laws, the ROK has a significantly higher traffic fatality rate than the United States. Causes of accidents include excessive speed, frequent lane changes, running of red lights,

aggressive bus drivers, and weaving motorcyclists. Pedestrians should be aware that motorcycles are sometimes driven on the sidewalks, and drivers of all types of vehicles do not always yield to pedestrians in marked pedestrian crosswalks. It is safer to use pedestrian underpasses and overpasses where available.

Traffic laws in South Korea differ from laws in the United States in some respects. At many intersections with traffic lights, drivers are not permitted to make a left-hand turn if there is a green light and no oncoming traffic; normally there is a green arrow for left-hand turns and drivers may turn only when the left-hand arrow is illuminated. In most other cases, left-hand turns are prohibited, and drivers must continue until special u-turn lanes are indicated, where drivers may reverse direction and make a right-hand turn at the desired intersection. Drivers may turn right on a red light after coming to a complete stop. Seat belts are mandatory. Children riding in the front seat of vehicles must wear a seat belt or must use an appropriate child car seat. Passengers on motorcycles must wear protective helmets. An international driving permit is required of short-term visitors who drive in Korea. Otherwise, drivers must have a Korean driver's license.

In all accidents involving an automobile and a pedestrian or motorcycle, the driver of the automobile, regardless of citizenship, is presumed to be at fault. Police investigations of traffic accidents usually involve long waits at police stations. Police may request to hold the passport of a foreigner involved in a traffic accident if there is any personal injury or a dispute about the cause of the accident. Criminal charges and heavy penalties are common in accidents involving injury, even if negligence is not proven. Persons arrested in accidents involving serious injury or death may be detained until the conclusion of the police investigation and legal process. Driving under the influence of alcohol is a serious offense. People driving in South Korea may wish to carry a disposable camera to document any traffic accidents, even minor ones

Legally, North and South Korea remain in a state of war. Peace has been maintained on the Korean peninsula under an Armistice for nearly 50 years. Recently, political, economic, and social contacts between North and South Korea have increased significantly. However, the possibility of military hostilities that could necessitate the evacuation of U.S. citizens from South Korea cannot be excluded. The U.S. Government has developed a Non-combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) plan for the evacuation of U.S. citizens.

To provide enhanced protection to the dependents of U.S. military service members and to civilian Department of Defense (DOD) employees and their families, the DOD provides protective gas masks and hoods to its noncombatant community in the Republic of Korea. In addition, the U.S. Embassy provides the same level of protection to its U.S. citizen personnel and their dependents. The gas masks and hoods provide the most fundamental level of protection in an emergency in which chemical substances are present.

These measures do not result from any recent incident. They are a prudent precaution to further enhance the safety of U.S. Government-affiliated personnel and their families, and are part of a continuing effort to improve the U.S. Government's overall safety and security posture. If the Department of State becomes aware of any specific and credible threat to the safety and security of U.S. citizens, that information will be provided to the American public at large.

The U.S. Government is not providing protective equipment to private American citizens in the

Republic of Korea. As always, U.S. citizens should review their own personal security practices and must make their own decisions with regard to those precautions that they might take to avoid injury.

Source: *United States Department of State Travel Warnings and Consular Information Sheets*

Business Culture: Information for Business Travelers

For general information on etiquette in South Korea see our Cultural Etiquette page.

Online Resources Regarding Entry Requirements and Visas

Foreign Entry Requirements for Americans from the United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html

Visa Services for Non-Americans from the United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/visa/visa_1750.html

Visa Bulletins from the United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/bulletin/bulletin_1360.html

Visa Waivers from the United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html - new

Passport and Visa Information from the Government of the United Kingdom

<http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

Visa Information from the Government of Australia

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/visas/index.html>

Passport Information from the Government of Australia

<https://www.passports.gov.au/Web/index.aspx>

Passport Information from the Government of Canada

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/passport_passeport-eng.asp

Visa Information from the Government of Canada

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/visas-eng.asp

Online Visa Processing by Immigration Experts by VisaPro

<http://www.visapro.com>

Sources: United States Department of State, United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Government of Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Canada Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Useful Online Resources for Travelers

Country-Specific Travel Information from United States

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html

Travel Advice by Country from Government of United Kingdom

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/>

General Travel Advice from Government of Australia

<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/General>

Travel Bulletins from the Government of Australia

<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/TravelBulletins/>

Travel Tips from Government of Australia

<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/tips/index.html>

Travel Checklist by Government of Canada

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/checklist_sommaire-eng.asp

Travel Checklist from Government of United Kingdom

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/staying-safe/checklist>

Your trip abroad from United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1225.html

A safe trip abroad from United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1747.html

Tips for expatriates abroad from United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/residing/residing_1235.html

Tips for students from United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/studying/studying_1238.html <http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/broc>

Medical information for travelers from United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1185.html

US Customs Travel information

<http://www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/travel/>

Sources: United States Department of State; United States Customs Department, United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Government of Australia; Government of Canada: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Other Practical Online Resources for Travelers

Foreign Language Phrases for Travelers

<http://www.travlang.com/languages/>

<http://www.omniglot.com/language/phrases/index.htm>

World Weather Forecasts

<http://www.intellicast.com/>

<http://www.wunderground.com/>

<http://www.worldweather.org/>

Worldwide Time Zones, Map, World Clock

<http://www.timeanddate.com/>

<http://www.worldtimezone.com/>

International Airport Codes

<http://www.world-airport-codes.com/>

International Dialing Codes

<http://www.kropla.com/dialcode.htm>

<http://www.countrycallingcodes.com/>

International Phone Guide

<http://www.kropla.com/phones.htm>

International Mobile Phone Guide

<http://www.kropla.com/mobilephones.htm>

International Internet Café Search Engine

<http://cybercaptive.com/>

Global Internet Roaming

<http://www.kropla.com/roaming.htm>

World Electric Power Guide

<http://www.kropla.com/electric.htm>

<http://www.kropla.com/electric2.htm>

World Television Standards and Codes

<http://www.kropla.com/tv.htm>

International Currency Exchange Rates

<http://www.xe.com/ucc/>

Banking and Financial Institutions Across the World

<http://www.123world.com/banks/index.html>

International Credit Card or Automated Teller Machine (ATM) Locator

<http://visa.via.infonow.net/locator/global/>

<http://www.mastercard.com/us/personal/en/cardholderservices/atmlocations/index.html>

International Chambers of Commerce

<http://www.123world.com/chambers/index.html>

World Tourism Websites

<http://123world.com/tourism/>

Diplomatic and Consular Information

United States Diplomatic Posts Around the World

<http://www.usembassy.gov/>

United Kingdom Diplomatic Posts Around the World

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/embassies-and-posts/find-an-embassy-overseas/>

Australia's Diplomatic Posts Around the World

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/missions/>

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html>

Canada's Embassies and High Commissions

<http://www.international.gc.ca/ciw-cdm/embassies-ambassades.aspx>

Resources for Finding Embassies and other Diplomatic Posts Across the World

<http://www.escapeartist.com/embassy1/embassy1.htm>

Safety and Security

Travel Warnings by Country from Government of Australia

<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/>

Travel Warnings and Alerts from United States Department of State

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_1766.html

Travel Reports and Warnings by Government of Canada

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/menu-eng.asp

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/updates_mise-a-jour-eng.asp

Travel Warnings from Government of United Kingdom

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/>

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/?action=noTravelAll#noTravelAll>

Sources: United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the United States Department of State, the Government of Canada: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Government of Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Other Safety and Security Online Resources for Travelers

United States Department of State Information on Terrorism

<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/>

Government of the United Kingdom Resource on the Risk of Terrorism

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?>

[pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1044011304926](http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1044011304926)

Government of Canada Terrorism Guide

<http://www.international.gc.ca/crime/terrorism-terrorisme.aspx?lang=eng>

Information on Terrorism by Government of Australia

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/icat/index.html>

FAA Resource on Aviation Safety

<http://www.faasafety.gov/>

In-Flight Safety Information for Air Travel (by British Airways crew trainer, Anna Warman)

<http://www.warman.demon.co.uk/anna/inflight.html>

Hot Spots: Travel Safety and Risk Information

<http://www.airsecurity.com/hotspots/HotSpots.asp>

Information on Human Rights

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hr/>

Sources: The United States Department of State, the United States Customs Department, the Government of Canada, the Government of United Kingdom, the Government of Australia, the Federal Aviation Authority, Anna Warman's In-flight Website, Hot Spots Travel and Risk Information

Diseases/Health Data

Please Note: Most of the entry below constitutes a generalized health advisory, which a traveler might find useful, regardless of a particular destination.

As a supplement, however, reader will also find below a list of countries flagged with current health notices and alerts issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Please note that travel to the following countries, based on these 3 levels of warnings, is

ill-advised, or should be undertaken with the utmost precaution:

Level 3 (highest level of concern; avoid non-essential travel) --

Guinea - Ebola

Liberia - Ebola

Nepal - Earthquake zone

Sierra Leone - Ebola

Level 2 (intermediate level of concern; use utmost caution during travel) --

Cameroon - Polio

Somalia - Polio

Vanuatu - Tropical Cyclone zone

Throughout Middle East and Arabia Peninsula - MERS ((Middle East Respiratory Syndrome)

Level 1 (standard level of concern; use practical caution during travel) -

Australia - Ross River disease

Bosnia-Herzegovina - Measles

Brazil - Dengue Fever

Brazil - Malaria

Brazil - Zika

China - H7N9 Avian flu

Cuba - Cholera

Egypt - H5N1 Bird flu

Ethiopia - Measles

Germany - Measles

Japan - Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD)

Kyrgyzstan - Measles

Malaysia -Dengue Fever

Mexico - Chikungunya

Mexico - Hepatitis A

Nigeria - Meningitis

Philippines - Measles

Scotland - Mumps

Singapore - Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD)

South Korea - MERS ((Middle East Respiratory Syndrome)

Throughout Caribbean - Chikungunya

Throughout Central America - Chikungunya

Throughout South America - Chikungunya
Throughout Pacific Islands - Chikungunya

For specific information related to these health notices and alerts please see the CDC's listing available at URL:

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>

Health Information for Travelers to South Korea

The preventive measures you need to take while traveling in East Asia depend on the areas you visit and the length of time you stay. You should observe the precautions listed in this document in most areas of this region. However, in highly developed areas of Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan, you should observe health precautions similar to those that would apply while traveling in the United States.

Travelers' diarrhea, the number one illness in travelers, can be caused by viruses, bacteria, or parasites, which can contaminate food or water. Infections may cause diarrhea and vomiting (*E. coli*, *Salmonella*, cholera, and parasites), fever (typhoid fever and toxoplasmosis), or liver damage (hepatitis). Make sure your food and drinking water are safe. (See below.)

Malaria is a preventable infection that can be fatal if left untreated. Prevent infection by taking prescription antimalarial drugs and protecting yourself against mosquito bites (see below). Malaria risk in this region exists only in some rural areas of China. For specific locations, see Malaria Information for Travelers to East Asia (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/regionalmalaria/eastasia.htm>). Most travelers to East Asia at risk for malaria should take chloroquine to prevent malaria.

A certificate of yellow fever vaccination may be required to enter certain of these countries if you are coming from tropical South America or sub-Saharan Africa. (There is no risk for yellow fever in East Asia.) For detailed information, see Comprehensive Yellow Fever Vaccination Requirements (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/yelfever.htm>).

Dengue, filariasis, Japanese encephalitis, leishmaniasis, and plague are diseases carried by insects that also occur in this region. Protecting yourself against insect bites (see below) will help to prevent these diseases.

If you visit the Himalayan Mountains, ascend gradually to allow time for your body to adjust to the high altitude, which can cause insomnia, headaches, nausea, and altitude sickness. In addition, use sunblock rated at least SPF 15, because the risk of sunburn is greater at high altitudes.

CDC Recommends the Following Vaccines (as Appropriate for Age):

See your doctor at least 4-6 weeks before your trip to allow time for shots to take effect.

- Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG), except travelers to Japan.
- Hepatitis B, if you might be exposed to blood (for example, health-care workers), have sexual contact with the local population, stay longer than 6 months, or be exposed through medical treatment.
- Japanese encephalitis, only if you plan to visit rural areas for 4 weeks or more, except under special circumstances, such as a known outbreak of Japanese encephalitis.
- Rabies, if you might be exposed to wild or domestic animals through your work or recreation.
- Typhoid, particularly if you are visiting developing countries in this region.
- As needed, booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria and measles, and a one-time dose of polio for adults. Hepatitis B vaccine is now recommended for all infants and for children ages 11-12 years who did not receive the series as infants.

All travelers should take the following precautions, no matter the destination:

- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Because motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of injury among travelers, walk and drive defensively. Avoid travel at night if possible and always use seat belts.
- Always use latex condoms to reduce the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Don't eat or drink dairy products unless you know they have been pasteurized.
- Don't share needles with anyone.
- Eat only thoroughly cooked food or fruits and vegetables you have peeled yourself. Remember: boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it.
- Never eat undercooked ground beef and poultry, raw eggs, and unpasteurized dairy products. Raw shellfish is particularly dangerous to persons who have liver disease or compromised immune systems.

Travelers visiting undeveloped areas should take the following precautions:

To Stay Healthy, Do:

- Drink only bottled or boiled water, or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in cans or bottles. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes. If this is not possible, make water safer by BOTH filtering through an "absolute 1-micron or less" filter AND adding iodine tablets to the filtered water. "Absolute 1-micron filters" are found in camping/outdoor supply stores.
- If you visit an area where there is risk for malaria, take your malaria prevention medication before, during, and after travel, as directed. (See your doctor for a prescription.) Protect yourself from insects by remaining in well-screened areas, using repellents (applied sparingly at 4-hour intervals), and wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants from dusk through dawn.
- To prevent fungal and parasitic infections, keep feet clean and dry, and do not go barefoot.

To Avoid Getting Sick:

- Don't eat food purchased from street vendors.

- Don't drink beverages with ice.
- Don't handle animals (especially monkeys, dogs, and cats), to avoid bites and serious diseases (including rabies and plague). (For more information, please see the Animal-Associated Hazards on the Making Travel Safe page.)
- Don't swim in fresh water (except for well-chlorinated swimming pools) in certain areas of China (southeast, east, and Yangtze River valley) to avoid infection with schistosomiasis. Salt water is usually safer. (For more information, please see the Swimming Precautions on the Making Travel Safe page at URL <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/safety.htm>.)

What You Need To Bring with You:

- Long-sleeved shirt and long pants to wear while outside whenever possible, to prevent illnesses carried by insects.
- Insect repellent containing DEET (diethylmethylnolamide), in 30%-35% strength for adults and 6%-10% for children.
- Over-the-counter antidiarrheal medicine to take if you have diarrhea.
- Iodine tablets and water filters to purify water if bottled water is not available. See Do's above for more detailed information about water filters.
- Sunblock, sunglasses, hat.
- Prescription medications: make sure you have enough to last during your trip, as well as a copy of the prescription(s).

After You Return Home:

If you have visited an area where there is risk for malaria, continue taking your malaria medication weekly for 4 weeks after you leave the area. If you become ill-even as long as a year after your trip-tell your doctor the areas you have visited.

For More Information:

Ask your doctor or check the CDC web sites for more information about how to protect yourself against diseases that occur in East Asia, such as:

For information about diseases-

Carried by Insects

Dengue, Japanese encephalitis, Malaria, Plague

Carried in Food or Water

Cholera, *Escherichia coli*, diarrhea, Hepatitis A, Schistosomiasis, Typhoid Fever

Person-to-Person Contact

Hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS

For more information about these and other diseases, please check the Diseases (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/diseases.htm>) section and the Health Topics A - Z (<http://www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm>).

Note:

South Korea is located in the East Asia health region.

Sources:

The Center for Disease Control Destinations Website:
<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/destinat.htm>

Chapter 6

Environmental Overview

Environmental Issues

General Overview:

As South Korea 's economy has developed, environmental concerns have become increasingly important.

Current Issues:

- air pollution in large cities
- water pollution from the discharge of sewage and industrial effluents
- depletion of fisheries, due to inappropriate drift net fishing

Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions (Mtc):

143.3

Country Rank (GHG output):

12th

Natural Hazards:

- typhoons
- earthquakes

Environmental Policy

Regulation and Jurisdiction:

The regulation and protection of the environment in South Korea is under the jurisdiction of the following:

- Ministry of the Environment

Major Non-Governmental Organizations:

- Korean Central Council for Nature Preservation (KCCNP)

International Environmental Accords:

Party to:

- Antarctic-Environmental Protocol
- Antarctic-Marine Living Resources
- Antarctic Treaty
- Biodiversity
- Climate Change
- Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol
- Desertification
- Endangered Species
- Environmental Modification
- Hazardous Wastes
- Law of the Sea
- Marine Dumping
- Nuclear Test Ban
- Ozone Layer Protection
- Ship Pollution
- Tropical Timber 83
- Tropical Timber 94
- Wetlands
- Whaling

Signed but not ratified:

- None

Kyoto Protocol Status (year ratified):

2002

Greenhouse Gas Ranking

Greenhouse Gas Ranking

GHG Emissions Rankings

Country Rank	Country
1	United States
2	China
4	Russia
5	Japan
6	India

7	Germany
8	United Kingdom
9	Canada
10	Korea, South
11	Italy
12	Mexico
13	France
14	South Africa
15	Iran
16	Indonesia
17	Australia
18	Spain
19	Brazil
20	Saudi Arabia
21	Ukraine
22	Poland
23	Taiwan
24	Turkey

25	Thailand
26	Netherlands
27	Kazakhstan
28	Malaysia
29	Egypt
30	Venezuela
31	Argentina
32	Uzbekistan
33	Czech Republic
34	Belgium
35	Pakistan
36	Romania
37	Greece
38	United Arab Emirates
39	Algeria
40	Nigeria
41	Austria
42	Iraq

43	Finland
44	Philippines
45	Vietnam
46	Korea, North
47	Israel
48	Portugal
49	Colombia
50	Belarus
51	Kuwait
52	Hungary
53	Chile
54	Denmark
55	Serbia & Montenegro
56	Sweden
57	Syria
58	Libya
59	Bulgaria
60	Singapore

61	Switzerland
62	Ireland
63	Turkmenistan
64	Slovakia
65	Bangladesh
66	Morocco
67	New Zealand
68	Oman
69	Qatar
70	Azerbaijan
71	Norway
72	Peru
73	Cuba
74	Ecuador
75	Trinidad & Tobago
76	Croatia
77	Tunisia
78	Dominican Republic

79	Lebanon
80	Estonia
81	Yemen
82	Jordan
83	Slovenia
84	Bahrain
85	Angola
86	Bosnia & Herzegovina
87	Lithuania
88	Sri Lanka
89	Zimbabwe
90	Bolivia
91	Jamaica
92	Guatemala
93	Luxembourg
94	Myanmar
95	Sudan
96	Kenya

97	Macedonia
98	Mongolia
99	Ghana
100	Cyprus
101	Moldova
102	Latvia
103	El Salvador
104	Brunei
105	Honduras
106	Cameroon
107	Panama
108	Costa Rica
109	Cote d'Ivoire
110	Kyrgyzstan
111	Tajikistan
112	Ethiopia
113	Senegal
114	Uruguay

115	Gabon
116	Albania
117	Nicaragua
118	Botswana
119	Paraguay
120	Tanzania
121	Georgia
122	Armenia
123	Congo, RC
124	Mauritius
125	Nepal
126	Mauritius
127	Nepal
128	Mauritania
129	Malta
130	Papua New Guinea
131	Zambia
132	Suriname

133	Iceland
134	Togo
135	Benin
136	Uganda
137	Bahamas
138	Haiti
139	Congo, DRC
140	Guyana
141	Mozambique
142	Guinea
143	Equatorial Guinea
144	Laos
145	Barbados
146	Niger
147	Fiji
148	Burkina Faso
149	Malawi
150	Swaziland

151	Belize
152	Afghanistan
153	Sierra Leone
154	Eritrea
155	Rwanda
156	Mali
157	Seychelles
158	Cambodia
159	Liberia
160	Bhutan
161	Maldives
162	Antigua & Barbuda
163	Djibouti
164	Saint Lucia
165	Gambia
166	Guinea-Bissau
167	Central African Republic
168	Palau

169	Burundi
170	Grenada
171	Lesotho
172	Saint Vincent & the Grenadines
173	Solomon Islands
174	Samoa
175	Cape Verde
176	Nauru
177	Dominica
178	Saint Kitts & Nevis
179	Chad
180	Tonga
181	Sao Tome & Principe
182	Comoros
183	Vanuatu
185	Kiribati
Not Ranked	Andorra
Not Ranked	East Timor

Not Ranked	Holy See
Not Ranked	Hong Kong
Not Ranked	Liechtenstein
Not Ranked	Marshall Islands
Not Ranked	Micronesia
Not Ranked	Monaco
Not Ranked	San Marino
Not Ranked	Somalia
Not Ranked	Tuvalu

* European Union is ranked 3rd

Cook Islands are ranked 184th

Niue is ranked 186th

Global Environmental Snapshot

Introduction

The countries of the world face many environmental challenges in common. Nevertheless, the nature and intensity of problem vary from region to region, as do various countries' respective capacities, in terms of affluence and infrastructure, to remediate threats to environmental quality.

Consciousness of perils affecting the global environment came to the fore in the last third or so of the 20th century has continued to intensify well into the new millennium. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, considerable environmental progress has been made at the level of institutional developments, international cooperation accords, and public participation.

Approximately two-dozen international environmental protection accords with global implications have been promulgated since the late 1970s under auspices of the United Nations and other international organizations, together with many additional regional agreements. Attempts to address and rectify environmental problems take the form of legal frameworks, economic instruments, environmentally sound technologies and cleaner production processes as well as conservation efforts. Environmental impact assessments have increasingly been applied across the globe.

Environmental degradation affects the quality, or aesthetics, of human life, but it also displays potential to undermine conditions necessary for the sustainability of human life. Attitudes toward the importance of environmental protection measures reflect ambivalence derived from this bifurcation. On one hand, steps such as cleaning up pollution, dedicating parkland, and suchlike, are seen as embellishments undertaken by wealthy societies already assured they can successfully perform those functions deemed, ostensibly, more essential-for instance, public health and education, employment and economic development. On the other hand, in poorer countries, activities causing environmental damage-for instance the land degradation effects of unregulated logging, slash-and-burn agriculture, overgrazing, and mining-can seem justified insofar as such activities provide incomes and livelihoods.

Rapid rates of resource depletion are associated with poverty and high population growth, themselves correlated, whereas consumption per capita is much higher in the most developed countries, despite these nations' recent progress in energy efficiency and conservation. It is impossible to sequester the global environmental challenge from related economic, social and political challenges.

First-tier industrialized countries have recently achieved measurable decreases in environmental pollution and the rate of resource depletion, a success not matched in middle income and developing countries. It is believed that the discrepancy is due to the fact that industrialized countries have more developed infrastructures to accommodate changes in environmental policy, to apply environmental technologies, and to invest in public education. The advanced industrialized countries incur relatively lower costs in alleviating environmental problems, in comparison to developing countries, since in the former even extensive environmental programs represent a rather minuscule percentage of total expenditures. Conversely, budget constraints, lagged provision of basic services to the population, and other factors such as debt service and militarization may preclude institution of minimal environmental protection measures in the poorest countries.

A synopsis for the current situation facing each region of the world follows:

Regional Synopsis: Africa

The African continent, the world's second-largest landmass, encompasses many of the world's

least developed countries. By global standards, urbanization is comparatively low but rising at a rapid rate. More heavily industrialized areas at the northern and southern ends of the continent experience the major share of industrial pollution. In other regions the most serious environmental problems typically stem from inefficient subsistence farming methods and other forms of land degradation, which have affected an increasingly extensive area under pressure of a widely impoverished, fast-growing population. Africa's distribution of natural resources is very uneven. It is the continent at greatest risk of desertification, especially in the Sahel region at the edge of the Sahara but also in other dry-range areas. Yet at the same time, Africa also harbors some of the earth's richest and most diverse biological zones.

Key Points:

Up to half a billion hectares of African land are moderately to severely degraded, an occurrence reflecting short-fallow shifting cultivation and overgrazing as well as a climatic pattern of recurrent droughts.

Soil degradation is severe along the expanse directly south of the Sahara, from the west to the east coasts. Parts of southern Africa, central-eastern Africa, and the neighboring island of Madagascar suffer from serious soil degradation as well.

Africa contains about 17 percent of the world's forest cover, concentrated in the tropical belt of the continent. Many of the forests, however, are severely depleted, with an estimated 70 percent showing some degree of degradation.

Population growth has resulted in continuing loss of arable land, as inefficient subsistence farming techniques affect increasingly extensive areas. Efforts to implement settled, sustainable agriculture have met with some recent success, but much further progress in this direction is needed. Especially in previously uninhabited forestlands, concern over deforestation is intensifying.

By contrast, the African savanna remains the richest grassland in the world, supporting a substantial concentration of animal and plant life. Wildlife parks are sub-Saharan Africa's greatest tourist attraction, and with proper management-giving local people a stake in conservation and controlling the pace of development-could greatly enhance African economies.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of northern, southern and eastern Africa are currently threatened, while the biological diversity in Mauritania and Madagascar is even further compromised with over 20 percent of the mammal species in these two countries currently under threat.

With marine catch trends increasing from 500,000 metric tons in the 1950s to over 3,000,000 metric tons by 2000, there was increasing concern about the reduction in fisheries and marine life,

should this trend continue unabated.

Water resource vulnerability is a major concern in northeastern Africa, and a moderate concern across the rest of the continent. An exception is central Africa, which has plentiful water supplies.

Many Africans lack adequate access to resources, not just (if at all) because the resources are unevenly distributed geographically, but also through institutional failures such as faulty land tenure systems or political upheaval. The quality of Africa's natural resources, despite their spotty distribution, is in fact extraordinarily rich. The infrastructure needed to protect and benefit from this natural legacy, however, is largely lacking.

Regional Synopsis: Asia and the Pacific

Asia-earth's largest landmass-and the many large and nearly innumerable small islands lying off its Pacific shore display extraordinarily contrasting landscapes, levels of development, and degrees of environmental stress. In the classification used here, the world's smallest continent, Australia, is also included in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to 9 of the world's 14 largest urban areas, and as energy use for utilities, industry and transport increases in developing economies, urban centers are subject to worsening air quality. Intense population density in places such as Bangladesh or Hong Kong is the quintessential image many people have of Asia, yet vast desert areas such as the Gobi and the world's highest mountain range, the Himalayas, span the continent as well. Forested areas in Southeast Asia and the islands of Indonesia and the Philippines were historically prized for their tropical hardwood, but in many places this resource is now severely depleted. Low-lying small island states are extremely vulnerable to the effects of global warming, both rising sea levels and an anticipated increase in cyclones.

Key Points:

Asian timber reserves are forecast to be depleted in the next 40 years. Loss of natural forest is irreversible in some areas, but plantation programs to restore tree cover may ameliorate a portion of the resulting land degradation.

Increased usage of fossil fuels in China and other parts of southern Asia is projected to result in a marked increase in emissions, especially in regard to carbon dioxide. The increased usage of energy has led to a marked upsurge in air pollution across the region.

Acidification is an emerging problem regionally, with sulfur dioxide emissions expected to triple by 2010 if the current growth rate is sustained. China, Thailand, India, and Korea seem to be

suffering from particularly high rates of acid deposition. By contrast, Asia's most highly developed economy, Japan, has effected substantial improvements in its environmental indicators.

Water pollution in the Pacific is an urgent concern since up to 70 percent of the water discharged into the region's waters receives no treatment. Additionally, the disposal of solid wastes, in like manner, poses a major threat in a region with many areas of high population density.

The Asia-Pacific region is the largest expanse of the world's land that is adversely affected by soil degradation.

The region around Australia reportedly suffers the largest degree of ozone depletion.

The microstates of the Pacific suffer land loss due to global warming, and the consequent rise in the levels of ocean waters. A high-emissions scenario and anthropogenic climate impact at the upper end of the currently predicted range would probably force complete evacuation of the lowest-elevation islands sometime in this century.

The species-rich reefs surrounding Southeast Asia are highly vulnerable to the deleterious effects of coastal development, land-based pollution, over-fishing and exploitative fishing methods, as well as marine pollution from oil spills and other activities.

With marine catch trends increasing from 5,000,000 metric tons in the 1950s to over 20,000,000 metric tons by 2000, there was increasing concern about the reduction in fisheries and marine life, should this trend continue unabated.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of China and south-east Asia are currently threatened, while the biological diversity in India, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia and parts of Malaysia is even further compromised with over 20 percent of the mammal species in these countries currently under threat.

Water resource vulnerability is a serious concern in areas surrounding the Indian subcontinent.

Regional Synopsis: Central Asia

The Central Asian republics, formerly in the Soviet Union, experience a range of environmental problems as the result of poorly executed agricultural, industrial, and nuclear programs during the Soviet era. Relatively low population densities are the norm, especially since upon the breakup of the U.S.S.R. many ethnic Russians migrated back to European Russia. In this largely semi-arid region, drought, water shortages, and soil salinization pose major challenges.

Key Points:

The use of agricultural pesticides, such as DDT and other chemicals, has contributed to the contamination of soil and groundwater throughout the region.

Land and soil degradation, and in particular, increased salinization, is mostly attributable to faulty irrigation practices.

Significant desertification is also a problem in the region.

Air pollution is prevalent, mostly due to use of low octane automobile fuel.

Industrial pollution of the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea, as a result of industrial effluents as well as mining and metal production, presents a challenge to the countries bordering these bodies of water.

One of the most severe environmental problems in the region is attributable to the several billion tons of hazardous materials stored in landfills across Central Asia.

Uzbekistan's particular problem involves the contraction of the Aral Sea, which has decreased in size by a third, as a consequence of river diversions and poor irrigation practices. The effect has been the near-total biological destruction of that body of water.

Kazakhstan, as a consequence of being the heartland of the former Soviet Union's nuclear program, has incurred a high of cancerous malignancies, biogenetic abnormalities and radioactive contamination.

While part of the Soviet Union, the republics in the region experienced very high levels of greenhouse gas emissions, as a consequence of rapid industrialization using cheap but dirty energy sources, especially coal.

By contrast, however, there have recently been substantial reductions in the level of greenhouse gas emissions, especially those attributable to coal burning, with further decreases anticipated over the next decade. These changes are partially due to the use of cleaner energy technologies, such as natural gas, augmented by governmental commitment to improving environmental standards.

Regional Synopsis: Europe

Western Europe underwent dramatic transformation of its landscape, virtually eliminating large-scale natural areas, during an era of rapid industrialization, which intensified upon its recovery from World War II. In Eastern Europe and European Russia, intensive land development has been less

prevalent, so that some native forests and other natural areas remain. Air and water pollution from use of dirty fuels and industrial effluents, however, are more serious environmental problems in Eastern than in Western Europe, though recent trends show improvement in many indicators. Acid rain has inflicted heavy environmental damage across much of Europe, particularly on forests. Europe and North America are the only regions in which water usage for industry exceeds that for agriculture, although in Mediterranean nations agriculture is the largest water consumer.

Key Points:

Europe contributes 36 percent of the world's chlorofluorocarbon emissions, 30 percent of carbon dioxide emissions, and 25 percent of sulfur dioxide emissions.

Sulfur and nitrogen oxide emissions are the cause of 30 to 50 percent of Central and Eastern Europe's deforestation.

Acid rain has been an environmental concern for decades and continues to be a challenge in parts of Western Europe.

Overexploitation of up to 60 percent of Europe's groundwater presents a problem in industrial and urban areas.

With marine catch trends increasing from 5,000,000 metric tons in the 1950s to over 20,000,000 metric tons by 2000, there was increasing concern about the reduction in fisheries and marine life, should this trend continue unabated.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of western Europe, Eastern Europe and Russia are currently threatened, while the biological diversity on the Iberian Peninsula is even further compromised with over 40 percent of the mammal species in this region currently under threat. As a result, there has been a 10 percent increase in protected areas of Europe.

A major environmental issue for Europe involves the depletion of various already endangered or threatened species, and most significantly, the decline of fish stocks. Some estimates suggest that up to 50 percent of the continent's fish species may be considered endangered species. Coastal fisheries have been over-harvested, resulting in catch limits or moratoriums on many commercially important fish species.

Fortunately, in the last few years, these policies have started to yield measurable results with decreasing trends in marine fish catch.

Recently, most European countries have adopted cleaner production technologies, and alternative methods of waste disposal, including recycling.

The countries of Eastern Europe have made air quality a major environmental priority. This is exemplified by the Russian Federation's addition to the 1995 "Berlin Mandate" (transnational legislation based on resolutions of the Rio Earth Summit) compelling nations to promote "carbon sinks" to absorb greenhouse gases.

On a relative basis, when compared with the degree of industrial emissions emitted by many Eastern European countries until the late 1980s, there has been some marked increase in air quality in the region, as obsolete plants are closed and a transition to cleaner fuels and more efficient energy use takes place.

Regional Synopsis: The Middle and Near East

Quite possibly, the Middle East will exemplify the adage that, as the 20th century was a century fixated on oil, the 21st century will be devoted to critical decisions about water. Many (though far from all) nations in the Middle East rank among those countries with the largest oil and gas reserves, but water resources are relatively scarce throughout this predominantly dry region. Effects of global warming may cause moderately high elevation areas that now typically receive winter "snowpack" to experience mainly rain instead, which would further constrain dry-season water availability. The antiquities and religious shrines of the region render it a great magnet for tourism, which entails considerable economic growth potential but also intensifies stresses on the environment.

Key Points:

Water resource vulnerability is a serious concern across the entire region. The increased usage of, and further demand for water, has exacerbated long-standing water scarcity in the region. For instance, river diversions and industrial salt works have caused the Dead Sea to shrink by one-third from its original surface area, with further declines expected.

The oil industry in the region contributes to water pollution in the Persian Gulf, as a result of oil spills, which have averaged 1.2 million barrels of oil spilt per year (some sources suggest that this figure is understated). The consequences are severe because even after oil spills have been cleaned up, environmental damage to the food webs and ecosystems of marine life will persist for a prolonged period.

The region's coastal zone is considered one of the most fragile and endangered ecosystems of the world. Land reclamation, shoreline construction, discharge of industrial effluents, and tourism (such as diving in the Red Sea) contribute to widespread coastal damage.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of the Middle East are currently threatened.

Since the 1980s, 11 percent of the region's natural forest has been depleted.

Regional Synopsis: Latin America and the Caribbean

The Latin American and Caribbean region is characterized by exceedingly diverse landforms that have generally seen high rates of population growth and economic development in recent decades. The percentage of inhabitants residing in urban areas is quite high at 73.4 percent; the region includes the megacities of Mexico City, Sao Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. The region also includes the world's second-highest mountain range, the Andes; significant expanses of desert and grassland; the coral reefs of the Caribbean Sea; and the world's largest contiguous tropical forest in the Amazon basin. Threats to the latter from subsistence and commercial farming, mineral exploitation and timbering are well publicized. Nevertheless, of eight countries worldwide that still retain at least 70 percent of their original forest cover, six are in Latin America. The region accounts for nearly half (48.3 percent) of the world's greenhouse gas emissions derived from land clearing, but as yet a comparatively minuscule share (4.3 percent) of such gases from industrial sources.

Key Points:

Although Latin America is one of the most biologically diverse regions of the world, this biodiversity is highly threatened, as exemplified by the projected extinction of up to 100,000 species in the next few decades. Much of this loss will be concentrated in the Amazon area, although the western coastline of South America will also suffer significant depletion of biological diversity. The inventory of rainforest species with potentially useful commercial or medical applications is incomplete, but presumed to include significant numbers of such species that may become extinct before they are discovered and identified.

Up to 50 percent of the region's grazing land has lost its soil fertility as a result of soil erosion, salinization, alkalinization and overgrazing.

The Caribbean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean have all been contaminated by agricultural wastes, which are discharged into streams that flow into these major waters. Water pollution derived from phosphorous, nitrates and pesticides adversely affects fish stocks, contributes to oxygen depletion and fosters overgrowth of aquatic vegetation. Marine life will continue to be severely compromised as a result of these conditions.

Due to industrial development in the region, many beaches of eastern Latin America and the Caribbean suffer from tar deposits.

Most cities in the region lack adequate sewage treatment facilities, and rapid migration of the rural poor into the cities is widening the gap between current infrastructure capacity and the much greater level needed to provide satisfactory basic services.

The rainforest region of the Amazon Basin suffers from dangerously high levels of deforestation, which may be a significant contributory factor to global warming or "the greenhouse effect." In the late 1990s and into the new millennium, the rate of deforestation was around 20 million acres of rainforest being destroyed annually.

Deforestation on the steep rainforest slopes of Caribbean islands contributes to soil erosion and landslides, both of which then result in heavy sedimentation of nearby river systems. When these sedimented rivers drain into the sea and coral reefs, they poison the coral tissues, which are vital to the maintenance of the reef ecosystem. The result is marine degradation and nutrient depletion. Jamaica's coral reefs have never quite recovered from the effects of marine degradation.

The Southern Cone of Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay) suffers the effects of greatly increased ultraviolet-B radiation, as a consequence of more intense ozone depletion in the southern hemisphere.

Water resource vulnerability is an increasingly major concern in the northwestern portion of South America.

Regional Synopsis: North America

North American nations, in particular the United States and Canada, rank among the world's most highly developed industrial economies—a fact which has generated significant pollution problems, but also financial resources and skills that have enabled many problems to be corrected. Although efforts to promote energy efficiency, recycling, and suchlike have helped ease strains on the environment in a part of the world where per capita consumption levels are high, sprawling land development patterns and recent preferences many households have demonstrated for larger vehicles have offset these advances.

Meanwhile, a large portion of North America's original forest cover has been lost, though in many cases replaced by productive second-growth woodland. In recent years, attitudes toward best use of the region's remaining natural or scenic areas seem to be shifting toward recreation and preservation and away from resource extraction. With increasing attention on the energy scarcity in the United States, however, there is speculation that this shift may be short-lived. Indeed, the energy shortage on the west coast of the United States and associated calls for energy exploration, indicate a possible retrenchment toward resource extraction. At the same time, however, it has also

served to highlight the need for energy conservation as well as alternative energy sources.

Despite generally successful anti-pollution efforts, various parts of the region continue to suffer significant air, water and land degradation from industrial, vehicular, and agricultural emissions and runoff. Mexico, as a middle-income country, displays environmental problems characteristic of a developing economy, including forest depletion, pollution from inefficient industrial processes and dirty fuels, and lack of sufficient waste-treatment infrastructure.

Key Points:

Because of significantly greater motor vehicle usage in the United States (U.S.) than in the rest of the world, the U.S. contribution of urban air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, especially carbon dioxide, is disproportionately high in relation to its population.

Acid rain is an enduring issue of contention in the northeastern part of the United States, on the border with Canada.

Mexico's urban areas suffer extreme air pollution from carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, and other toxic air pollutants. Emissions controls on vehicles are in their infancy, compared to analogous regulations in the U.S.

The cities of Mexico, including those on the U.S. border, also discharge large quantities of untreated or poorly treated sewage, though officials are currently planning infrastructure upgrades.

Deforestation is noteworthy in various regions of the U.S., especially along the northwest coastline. Old growth forests have been largely removed, but in the northeastern and upper midwestern sections of the United States, evidence suggests that the current extent of tree cover probably surpasses the figure for the beginning of the 20th century.

Extreme weather conditions in the last few years have resulted in a high level of soil erosion along the north coast of California; in addition, the coastline itself has shifted substantially due to soil erosion and concomitant landslides.

Agricultural pollution-including nitrate contamination of well water, nutrient runoff to waterways, and pesticide exposure-is significant in various areas. Noteworthy among affected places are California's Central Valley, extensive stretches of the Midwest, and land in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Inland waterways, especially around the Great Lakes, have substantially improved their water quality, due to concentrated efforts at reducing water pollution by governmental, commercial and

community representatives. Strict curbs on industrial effluents and near-universal implementation of sewage treatment are the chief factors responsible for this improvement.

A major environmental issue for Canada and the United States involves the depletion of various already endangered or threatened species, and most significantly, the decline of fish stocks. Coastal fisheries have been over-harvested, resulting in catch limits or moratoriums on many commercially important fish species. In the last few years, these policies have started to yield measurable results with decreasing trends in marine fish catch.

Due to the decay of neighboring ecosystems in Central America and the Caribbean, the sea surrounding Florida has become increasingly sedimented, contributing to marine degradation, nutrient depletion of the ecosystem, depletion of fish stocks, and diseases to coral species in particular.

Polar Regions

Key Points:

The significant rise in sea level, amounting 10 to 25 centimeters in the last 100 years, is due to the melting of the Arctic ice sheets, and is attributed to global warming.

The Antarctic suffers from a significant ozone hole, first detected in 1976. By 1985, a British scientific team reported a 40 percent decrease in usual regeneration rates of the ozone. Because a sustained increase in the amount of ultraviolet-B radiation would have adverse consequences upon all planetary life, recent environmental measures have been put into effect, aimed at reversing ozone depletion. These measures are projected to garner significant results by 2050.

Due to air and ocean currents, the Arctic is a sink for toxic releases originally discharged thousands of miles away. Arctic wildlife and Canada's Inuit population have higher bodily levels of contaminants such as PCB and dioxin than those found in people and animals in much of the rest of the world.

Global Environmental Concepts

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1. Global Warming and Greenhouse Gases

The Greenhouse Effect:

In the early 19th century, the French physicist, Jean Fourier, contended that the earth's atmosphere functions in much the same way as the glass of a greenhouse, thus describing what is now understood as the "greenhouse effect." Put simply, the "greenhouse effect" confines some of the sun's energy to the earth, preserving some of the planet's warmth, rather than allowing it to flow back into space. In so doing, all kinds of life forms can flourish on earth. Thus, the "greenhouse effect" is necessary to sustain and preserve life forms and ecosystems on earth.

In the late 19th century, a Swedish chemist, Svante Arrhenius, noticed that human activities, such as the burning of coal and other fossil fuels for heat, and the removal of forested lands for urban development, led to higher concentrations of greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide and methane, in the atmosphere. This increase in the levels of greenhouse gases was believed to advance the "greenhouse effect" exponentially, and might be related to the trend in global warming.

In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, after industrial development took place on a large scale and the total human population burgeoned simultaneously with industrialization, the resulting increase in greenhouse gas emissions could, many scientists believe, be significant enough to have some bearing on climate. Indeed, many studies in recent years support the idea that there is a linkage between human activities and global warming, although there is less consensus on the extent to which this linkage may be relevant to environmental concerns.

That said, some scientists have argued that temperature fluctuations have existed throughout the evolution of the planet. Indeed, Dr. S. Fred Singer, the president of the Science and Environment Policy Project has noted that 3,000-year-old geological records of ocean sediment reveal changes in the surface temperature of the ocean. Hence, it is possible that climate variability is merely a normal fact of the planet's evolution. Yet even skeptics as to anthropogenic factors concur that any substantial changes in global temperatures would likely have an effect upon the earth's ecosystems, as well as the life forms that inhabit them.

The Relationship Between Global Warming and Greenhouse Gases:

A large number of climatologists believe that the increase in atmospheric concentrations of "greenhouse gas emissions," mostly a consequence of human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels, are contributing to global warming. The cause notwithstanding, the planet has reportedly warmed 0.3°C to 0.6°C over the last century. Indeed, each year during the 1990s was one of the very warmest in the 20th century, with the mean surface temperature for 1999 being the fifth warmest on record since 1880.

In early 2000, a panel of atmospheric scientists for the National Research Council concluded in a report that global warming was, indeed, a reality. While the panel, headed by Chairman John Wallace, a professor of atmospheric sciences at the University of Washington, stated that it remained unclear whether human activities have contributed to the earth's increasing temperatures, it was apparent that global warming exists.

In 2001, following a request for further study by the incoming Bush administration in the [United States](#), the National Academy of Sciences again confirmed that global warming had been in existence for the last 20 years. The study also projected an increase in temperature between 2.5 degrees and 10.4 degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2100. Furthermore, the study found the leading cause of global warming to be emissions of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels, and it noted that greenhouse gas accumulations in the earth's atmosphere was a result of human activities.

Within the scientific community, the controversy regarding has centered on the difference between surface air and upper air temperatures. Information collected since 1979 suggests that while the earth's surface temperature has increased by about a degree in the past century, the atmospheric temperature five miles above the earth's surface has indicated very little increase. Nevertheless, the panel stated that this discrepancy in temperature between surface and upper air does not invalidate the conclusion that global warming is taking place. Further, the panel noted that natural events, such as volcanic eruptions, can decrease the temperature in the upper atmosphere.

The major consequences of global warming potentially include the melting of the polar ice caps, which, in turn, contribute to the rise in sea levels. Many islands across the globe have already experienced a measurable loss of land as a result. Because global warming may increase the rate of evaporation, increased precipitation, in the form of stronger and more frequent storm systems, is another potential outcome. Other consequences of global warming may include the introduction and proliferation of new infectious diseases, loss of arable land (referred to as "desertification"), destructive changes to existing ecosystems, loss of biodiversity and the isolation of species, and concomitant adverse changes in the quality of human life.

International Policy Development in Regard to Global Warming:

Regardless of what the precise nature of the relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and global warming may be, it seems that there is some degree of a connection between the phenomena. Any substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and global warming trends will likely involve systematic changes in industrial operations, the use of advanced energy sources and technologies, as well as global cooperation in implementing and regulating these transformations.

In this regard, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) stipulated the following objectives:

1. To stabilize "greenhouse gas" concentrations within the atmosphere, in such a manner that would preclude hazardous anthropogenic intervention into the existing biosphere and ecosystems of the world. This stabilization process would facilitate the natural adaptation of ecosystems to changes in climate.
2. To ensure and enable sustainable development and food production on a global scale.

*** See section on "International Environmental Agreements and Associations" for information related to international policies related to limiting greenhouse gases and controlling climate change emanating from historic summits at Kyoto, Copenhagen, Doha, and Paris. ***

2. Air Pollution

Long before global warming reared its head as a significant issue, those concerned about the environment and public health noted the deleterious effects of human-initiated combustion upon the atmosphere. Killer smogs from coal burning triggered acute health emergencies in London and other places. At a lower level of intensity motor vehicle, power plant, and industrial emissions impaired long-range visibility and probably had some chronic adverse consequences on the respiratory systems of persons breathing such air.

In time, scientists began associating the sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides released from coal burning with significant acid deposition in the atmosphere, eventually falling as "acid rain." This phenomenon has severely degraded forestlands, especially in Europe and a few parts of the [United States](#). It has also impaired some aquatic ecosystems and eaten away the surface of some human artifacts, such as marble monuments. Scrubber technology and conversion to cleaner fuels have enabled the level of industrial production to remain at least constant while significantly reducing acid deposition. Technologies aimed at cleaning the air and curtailing acid rain, soot, and smog may, nonetheless, boomerang as the perils of global warming become increasingly serious. In brief, these particulates act as sort of a sun shade -- comparable to the effect of volcanic eruptions on the upper atmosphere whereby periods of active volcanism correlate with temporarily cooler weather conditions. Thus, while the carbon dioxide releases that are an inevitable byproduct of combustion continue, by scrubbing the atmosphere of pollutants, an industrial society opens itself to greater insolation (penetration of the sun's rays and consequent heating), and consequently, it is likely to experience a correspondingly greater rise in ambient temperatures.

The health benefits of removing the sources of acid rain and smog are indisputable, and no one would recommend a return to previous conditions. Nevertheless, the problematic climatic effects of continually increasing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases pose a major global

environmental challenge, not as yet addressed adequately.

3. Ozone Depletion

The stratospheric ozone layer functions to prevent ultraviolet radiation from reaching the earth. Normally, stratospheric ozone is systematically disintegrated and regenerated through natural photochemical processes. The stratospheric ozone layer, however, has been depleted unnaturally as a result of anthropogenic (man-made) chemicals, most especially chlorine and bromide compounds such as chloroflorocarbons (CFCs), halons, and various industrial chemicals in the form of solvents, refrigerants, foaming agents, aerosol propellants, fire retardants, and fumigants. Ozone depletion is of concern because it permits a greater degree of ultraviolet-B radiation to reach the earth, which then increases the incidences of cancerous malignancies, cataracts, and human immune deficiencies. In addition, even in small doses, ozone depletion affects the ecosystem by disturbing food chains, agriculture, fisheries and other forms of biological diversity.

Transnational policies enacted to respond to the dangers of ozone depletion include the 1985 Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. The Montreal Protocol was subsequently amended in London in 1990, Copenhagen in 1992 and Vienna in 1995. By 1996, 155 countries had ratified the Montreal Protocol, which sets out a time schedule for the reduction (and eventual elimination) of ozone depleting substances (OPS), and bans exports and imports of ODS from and to non-participant countries.

In general, the Protocol stipulates that developed countries must eliminate halon consumption by 1994 and CFC consumption by 1996, while developing countries must eliminate these substances by 2010. Consumption of methyl bromide, which is used as a fumigant, was to be frozen at the 1995 in developed countries, and fully eliminated in 2010, while developing countries are to freeze consumption by 2002, based on average 1995-1998 consumption levels. Methyl chloroform is to be phased out by 2005. Under the Montreal Protocol, most ODS will be completely eliminated from use by 2010.

4. Land Degradation

In recent decades, land degradation in more arid regions of the world has become a serious concern. The problem, manifest as both "desertification" and "devegetation," is caused primarily by climate variability and human activities, such as "deforestation," excessive cultivation, overgrazing, and other forms of land resource exploitation. It is also exacerbated by inadequate irrigation practices. Although the effects of droughts on drylands have been temporary in the past, today, the productivity and sustainability of these lands have been severely compromised for the long term.

Indeed, in every region of the world, land degradation has become an acute issue.

Desertification and Devegetation:

"Desertification" is a process of land degradation causing the soil to deteriorate, thus losing its nutrients and fertility, and eventually resulting in the loss of vegetation, known as "devegetation." As aforementioned, "desertification" and "devegetation" are caused by human activities, yet human beings are also the greatest casualties. Because these forms of land degradation affect the ability of the soil to produce crops, they concomitantly contribute to poverty. As population increases and demographic concentrations shift, the extent of land subject to stresses by those seeking to wrest subsistence from it has inexorably risen.

In response, the United Nations has formed the Convention to Combat Desertification-aimed at implementing programs to address the underlying causes of desertification, as well as measures to prevent and minimize its effects. Of particular significance is the formulation of policies on transboundary resources, such as areas around lakes and rivers. At a broader level, the Convention has established a Conference of Parties (COP), which includes all ratifying governments, for directing and advancing international action.

To ensure more efficacious use of funding, the Convention intends to reconfigure international aid to utilize a consultative and coordinated approach in the disbursement and expenditure of donor funds. In this way, local communities that are affected by desertification will be active participants in the solution-generation process. In-depth community education projects are envisioned as part of this new international aid program, and private donor financing is encouraged. Meanwhile, as new technologies are developed to deal with the problem of desertification, they need to be distributed for application across the world. Hence, the Convention calls for international cooperation in scientific research in this regard.

Desertification is a problem of sustainable development. It is directly connected to human challenges such as poverty, social and economic well-being and environmental protection as well. Broader environmental issues, such as climate change, biological diversity, and freshwater supplies, are indirectly related, so any effort to resolve this environmental challenge must entail coordinated research efforts and joint action.

Deforestation:

Deforestation is not a recent phenomenon. For centuries, human beings have cut down trees to clear space for land cultivation, or in order to use the wood for fuel. Over the last 200 years, and most especially after World War II, deforestation increased because the logging industry became a

globally profitable endeavor, and so the clearing of forested areas was accelerated for the purposes of industrial development. In the long term, this intensified level of deforestation is considered problematic because the forest is unable to regenerate itself quickly. The deforestation that has occurred in tropical rainforests is seen as an especially serious concern, due to the perceived adverse effects of this process upon the entire global ecosystem.

The most immediate consequence of deforestation is soil degradation. Soil, which is necessary for the growth of vegetation, can be a fragile and vital property. Organically, an extensive evolution process must take place before soil can produce vegetation, yet at the same time, the effects of natural elements, such as wind and rain, can easily and quickly degrade this resource. This phenomenon is known as soil erosion. In addition, natural elements like wind and rain reduce the amount of fertile soil on the ground, making soil scarcity a genuine problem. When fertile topsoil that already exists is removed from the landscape in the process of deforestation, soil scarcity is further exacerbated. Equally significant is the fact that once land has been cleared so that the topsoil can be cultivated for crop production, not only are the nutrient reserves in the soil depleted, thus producing crops of inferior quality, but the soil structure itself becomes stressed and deteriorates further.

Another direct result of deforestation is flooding. When forests are cleared, removing the cover of vegetation, and rainfall occurs, the flow of water increases across the surface of land. When extensive water runoff takes place, the frequency and intensity of flooding increases. Other adverse effects of deforestation include the loss of wildlife and biodiversity within the ecosystem that supports such life forms.

At a broader level, tropical rainforests play a vital role in maintaining the global environmental system. Specifically, destruction of tropical rainforests affects the carbon dioxide cycle. When forests are destroyed by burning (or rotting), carbon dioxide is released into the air, thus contributing to an intensified "greenhouse effect." The increase in greenhouse gas emissions like carbon dioxide is a major contributor to global warming, according to many environmental scientists. Indeed, trees themselves absorb carbon dioxide in the process of photosynthesis, so their loss also reduces the absorption of greenhouse gases.

Tropical rainforest destruction also adversely affects the nitrogen cycle. Nitrogen is a key nutrient for both plants and animals. Plants derive nitrogen from soil, while animals obtain it via nitrogen-enriched vegetation. This element is essential for the formation of amino acids, and thereby for proteins and biochemicals that all living things need for metabolism and growth. In the nitrogen cycle, vegetation acquires these essential proteins and biochemicals, and then cyclically returns them to the atmosphere and global ecosystem. Accordingly, when tropical rainforest ecosystems are compromised, not only is vegetation removed; the atmosphere is also affected and climates are altered. At a more immediate level, the biodiversity within tropical rainforests, including wildlife and insect species and a wealth of plant varieties, is depleted. Loss of rare plants is of particular

concern because certain species as yet unknown and unused could likely yield many practical benefits, for instance as medicines.

As a result of the many challenges associated with deforestation, many environmental groups and agencies have argued for government policies on the sustainable development of forests by governments across the globe. While many countries have instituted national policies and programs aimed at reducing deforestation, and substantial research has been advanced in regard to sustainable and regenerative forestry development, there has been very little progress on an international level. Generally speaking, most tropical rainforests are located in developing and less developed countries, where economic growth is often dependent upon the exploitation of tropical rainforests. Timber resources as well as wildlife hunting tend to be particularly lucrative arenas.

In places such as the Amazon, where deforestation takes place for the construction of energy plants aimed at industrialization and economic development, there is an exacerbated effect on the environment. After forests are cleared in order to construct such projects, massive flooding usually ensues. The remaining trees then rot and decay in the wake of the flooding. As the trees deteriorate, their biochemical makeup becomes more acidic, producing poisonous substances such as hydrogen sulphide and methane gases. Acidified water subsequently corrodes the mechanical equipment and operations of the plants, which are already clogged by rotting wood after the floodwaters rise.

Deforestation generally arises from an economically plausible short-term motivation, but nonetheless poses a serious global concern because the effects go beyond national boundaries. The United Nations has established the World Commission on Forest and Sustainable Development. This body's task is to determine the optimal means of dealing with the issue of deforestation, without unduly affecting normal economic development, while emphasizing the global significance of protecting tropical forest ecosystems.

5. Water Resources

For all terrestrial fauna, including humans, water is the most immediate necessity to sustain life. As the population has increased and altered an ever-greater portion of the landscape from its natural condition, demand on water resources has intensified, especially with the development of industrialization and large-scale irrigation. The supply of freshwater is inherently limited, and moreover distributed unevenly across the earth's landmasses. Moreover, not just demand for freshwater but activities certain to degrade it are becoming more pervasive. By contrast, the oceans form a sort of "last wilderness," still little explored and in large part not seriously affected by human activity. However, coastal environments - the biologically richest part of the marine ecosystem-are experiencing major depletion due to human encroachment and over-exploitation.

Freshwater:

In various regions, for instance the Colorado River in the western [United States](#), current withdrawals of river water for irrigation, domestic, and industrial use consume the entire streamflow so that almost no water flows into the sea at the river's mouth. Yet development is ongoing in many such places, implying continually rising demand for water. In some areas reliant on groundwater, aquifers are being depleted at a markedly faster rate than they are being replenished. An example is the San Joaquin Valley in California, where decades of high water withdrawals for agriculture have caused land subsidence of ten meters or more in some spots. Naturally, the uncertainty of future water supplies is particularly acute in arid and semi-arid regions. Speculation that the phenomenon of global warming will alter geographic and seasonal rainfall patterns adds further uncertainty.

Water conservation measures have great potential to alleviate supply shortages. Some city water systems are so old and beset with leaking pipes that they lose as much water as they meter. Broad-scale irrigation could be replaced by drip-type irrigation, actually enhancing the sustainability of agriculture. In many areas where heavy irrigation has been used for decades, the result is deposition of salts and other chemicals in the soil such that the land becomes unproductive for farming and must be abandoned.

Farming is a major source of water pollution. Whereas restrictions on industrial effluents and other "point sources" are relatively easy to implement, comparable measures to reform hydraulic practices at farms and other "nonpoint sources" pose a significantly knottier challenge. Farm-caused water pollution takes the following main forms:

- Nitrate pollution found in wells in intensive farming areas as a consequence of heavy fertilizer use is a threat to human health. The most serious danger is to infants, who by ingesting high-nitrate water can contract methemoglobinemia, sometimes called "blue baby syndrome," a potentially fatal condition.
- Fertilizer runoff into rivers and lakes imparts unwanted nutrients that cause algae growth and eventual loss of oxygen in the body of water, degrading its ability to support fish and other desirable aquatic life.
- Toxic agricultural chemicals - insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides - are detectable in some aquifers and waterways.

In general, it is much easier to get a pollutant into water than to retrieve it out. Gasoline additives, dry cleaning chemicals, other industrial toxins, and in a few areas radionuclides have all been found in water sources intended for human use. The complexity and long time scale of

subterranean hydrological movements essentially assures that pollutants already deposited in aquifers will continue to turn up for decades to come. Sophisticated water treatment processes are available, albeit expensive, to reclaim degraded water and render it fit for human consumption. Yet source protection is unquestionably a more desirable alternative.

In much of the developing world, and even some low-income rural enclaves of the developed world, the population lacks ready access to safe water. Surface water and shallow groundwater supplies are susceptible to contamination from untreated wastewater and failing septic tanks, as well as chemical hazards. The occurrence of waterborne disease is almost certainly greatly underreported.

Marine Resources:

Coastal areas have always been desirable places for human habitation, and population pressure on them continues to increase. Many types of water degradation that affect lakes and rivers also affect coastal zones: industrial effluents, untreated or partially treated sewage, nutrient load from agriculture figure prominently in both cases. Prospects for more extreme storms as a result of global warming, as well as the pervasiveness of poorly planned development in many coastal areas, forebode that catastrophic hurricanes and landslides may increase in frequency in the future. Ongoing rise in sea levels will force remedial measures and in some cases abandonment of currently valuable coastal property.

Fisheries over much of the globe have been overharvested, and immediate conservation measures are required to preserve stocks of many species. Many governments subsidized factory-scale fishing fleets in the 1970s and 1980s, and the resultant catch increase evidently surpassed a sustainable level. It is uncertain how much of the current decline in fish stocks stems from overharvesting and how much from environmental pollution. The deep ocean remains relatively unaffected by human activity, but continental shelves near coastlines are frequently seriously polluted, and these close-to-shore areas are the major biological nurseries for food fish and the smaller organisms they feed on.

6. Environmental Toxins

Toxic chemical pollution exploded on the public consciousness with disclosure of spectacularly polluted industrial areas such as Love Canal near Buffalo, New York. There is no question that pollutants such as organophosphates or radionuclides can be highly deleterious to health, but evidence to date suggests that seriously affected areas are a localized rather than universal problem.

While some explore the possibilities for a lifestyle that fully eschews use of modern industrial

chemicals, the most prevalent remediative approach is to focus on more judicious use. The most efficient chemical plants are now able to contain nearly all toxic byproducts of their production processes within the premises, minimizing the release of such substances into the environment. Techniques such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM) dictate limited rather than broadcast use of pesticides: application only when needed using the safest available chemical, supplemented as much as possible with nontoxic controls.

While heightened public awareness and growing technical sophistication suggest a hopeful outlook on limiting the damage from manmade environmental toxins, one must grant that previous incidents of their misuse and mishandling have already caused environmental damage that will have to be dealt with for many years to come. In the case of the most hazardous radioactive substances, the time scale for successful remediation actually extends beyond that of the recorded history of civilization. Moreover, in this era of high population density and rapid economic growth, quotidian activities such as the transport of chemicals will occasionally, seemingly inevitably result in accidents with adverse environmental consequences.

7. "Islandization" and Biodiversity

With increased awareness regarding the adverse effects of unregulated hunting and habitat depletion upon wildlife species and other aspects of biodiversity, large-scale efforts across the globe have been initiated to reduce and even reverse this trend.

In every region of the world, many species of wildlife and areas of biodiversity have been saved from extinction. Nationally, many countries have adopted policies aimed at preservation and conservation of species, and one of the most tangible measures has been the proliferation of protected habitats. Such habitats exist in the form of wildlife reserves, marine life reserves, and other such areas where biodiversity can be protected from external encroachment and exploitation.

Despite these advances in wildlife and biodiversity protection, further and perhaps more intractable challenges linger. Designated reserves, while intended to prevent further species decline, exist as closed territories, fragmented from other such enclaves and disconnected from the larger ecosystem. This environmental scenario is referred to as "islandization." Habitat reserves often serve as oversized zoos or game farms, with landscapes and wildlife that have effectively been "tamed" to suit. Meanwhile, the larger surrounding ecosystem continues to be seriously degraded and transformed, while within the islandized habitat, species that are the focus of conservation efforts may not have sufficient range and may not be able to maintain healthy genetic variability.

As a consequence, many conservationists and preservationists have demanded that substantially larger portions of land be withheld as habitat reserves, and a network of biological corridors to connect continental reserves be established. While such efforts to combat islandization have

considerable support in the [United States](#), how precisely such a program would be instituted, especially across national boundaries, remains a matter of debate. International conservationists and preservationists say without a network of reserves a massive loss of biodiversity will result.

The concept of islandization illustrates why conservation and preservation of wildlife and biodiversity must consider and adopt new, broader strategies. In the past, conservation and preservation efforts have been aimed at specific species, such as the spotted owl and grizzly bear in North America, the Bengal tiger in Southeast Asia, the panda in [China](#), elephants in Africa. Instead, the new approach is to simultaneously protect many and varied species that inhabit the same ecosystem. This method, referred to as "bio-regional conservation," may more efficaciously generate longer-term and more far-reaching results precisely because it is aimed at preserving entire ecosystems, and all the living things within.

More About Biodiversity Issues:

This section is directly taken from the United Nations Environmental Program: "[Biodiversity Assessment](#)"

The Global Biodiversity Assessment, completed by 1500 scientists under the auspices of United Nations Environmental Program in 1995, updated what is known (or unknown) about global biological diversity at the ecosystem, species and genetic levels. The assessment was uncertain of the total number of species on Earth within an order of magnitude. Of its working figure of 13 million species, only 13 percent are scientifically described. Ecological community diversity is also poorly known, as is its relationship to biological diversity, and genetic diversity has been studied for only a small number of species. The effects of human activities on biodiversity have increased so greatly that the rate of species extinctions is rising to hundreds or thousands of times the background level. These losses are driven by increasing demands on species and their habitats, and by the failure of current market systems to value biodiversity adequately. The Assessment calls for urgent action to reverse these trends.

There has been a new recognition of the importance of protecting marine and aquatic biodiversity. The first quantitative estimates of species losses due to growing coral reef destruction predict that almost 200,000 species, or one in five presently contributing to coral reef biodiversity, could die out in the next 40 years if human pressures on reefs continue to increase.

Since Rio, many countries have improved their understanding of the status and importance of their biodiversity, particularly through biodiversity country studies such as those prepared under the auspices of UNEP/GEF. The [United Kingdom](#) identified 1250 species needing monitoring, of which 400 require action plans to ensure their survival. Protective measures for biodiversity, such as legislation to protect species, can prove effective. In the USA, almost 40 percent of the plants

and animals protected under the Endangered Species Act are now stable or improving as a direct result of recovery efforts. Some African countries have joined efforts to protect threatened species through the 1994 Lusaka Agreement, and more highly migratory species are being protected by specialized cooperative agreements among range states under the Bonn Agreement.

There is an emerging realization that a major part of conservation of biological diversity must take place outside of protected areas and involve local communities. The extensive agricultural areas occupied by small farmers contain much biodiversity that is important for sustainable food production. Indigenous agricultural practices have been and continue to be important elements in the maintenance of biodiversity, but these are being displaced and lost. There is a new focus on the interrelationship between agrodiversity conservation and sustainable use and development practices in smallholder agriculture, with emphasis on use of farmers' knowledge and skills as a source of information for sustainable farming.

Perhaps even more important than the loss of biodiversity is the transformation of global biogeochemical cycles, the reduction in the total world biomass, and the decrease in the biological productivity of the planet. While quantitative measurements are not available, the eventual economic and social consequences may be so significant that the issue requires further attention.

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Online resources used generally in the Environmental Overview:

Environmental Protection Agency Global Warming Site. URL: <http://www.epa.gov/globalwarming>

Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations: Forestry. URL: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/site/sofo/en/>

Global Warming Information Page. URL: <http://globalwarming.org>

United Nations Environmental Program. URL: http://www.unep.org/GEO/GEO_Products/Assessment_Reports/

United Nations Global Environmental Outlook. URL: <http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/media/>

Note on Edition Dates:

The edition dates for textual resources are noted above because they were used to formulate the original content. We also have used online resources (cited above) to update coverage as needed.

Information Resources

For more information about environmental concepts, CountryWatch recommends the following resources:

The United Nations Environmental Program Network (with country profiles)

[<http://www.unep.net/>](http://www.unep.net/)

The United Nations Environment Program on Climate Change

[<http://climatechange.unep.net/>](http://climatechange.unep.net/)

The United Nations Environmental Program on Waters and Oceans

[<http://www.unep.ch/earthw/Pdepwat.htm>](http://www.unep.ch/earthw/Pdepwat.htm)

The United Nations Environmental Program on Forestry: "Forests in Flux"

[<http://www.unep-wcmc.org/forest/flux/homepage.htm>](http://www.unep-wcmc.org/forest/flux/homepage.htm)

FAO "State of the World's Forests"

[<http://www.fao.org/forestry/FO/SOFO/SOFO99/sofo99-e.stm>](http://www.fao.org/forestry/FO/SOFO/SOFO99/sofo99-e.stm)

World Resources Institute.

[<http://www.wri.org/>](http://www.wri.org/)

Harvard University Center for Health and the Global Environment

[<http://www.med.harvard.edu/chge/the-review.html>](http://www.med.harvard.edu/chge/the-review.html)

The University of Wisconsin Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment

<http://sage.aos.wisc.edu/>

International Environmental Agreements and Associations

International Policy Development in Regard to Global Warming:

Introduction

Regardless of what the precise nature of the relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and global warming may be, it seems that there is some degree of a connection between the phenomena. Any substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and global warming trends will likely involve systematic changes in industrial operations, the use of advanced energy sources and technologies, as well as global cooperation in implementing and regulating these transformations.

In this regard, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) stipulated the following objectives:

1. To stabilize "greenhouse gas" concentrations within the atmosphere, in such a manner that would preclude hazardous anthropogenic intervention into the existing biosphere and ecosystems of the world. This stabilization process would facilitate the natural adaptation of ecosystems to changes in climate.
2. To ensure and enable sustainable development and food production on a global scale.

Following are two discussions regarding international policies on the environment, followed by listings of international accords.

Special Entry: The Kyoto Protocol

The UNFCCC was adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and entered into force in 1994. Over 175 parties were official participants.

Meanwhile, however, many of the larger, more industrialized nations failed to reach the emissions' reduction targets, and many UNFCCC members agreed that the voluntary approach to reducing emissions had not been successful. As such, UNFCCC members reached a consensus that legally binding limits were necessitated, and agreed to discuss such a legal paradigm at a meeting in [Kyoto, Japan](#) in 1997. At that meeting, the UNFCCC forged the Kyoto Protocol. This concord is the first legally binding international agreement that places limits on emissions from industrialized countries. The major greenhouse gas emissions addressed in the Kyoto Protocol include carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulfur hexafluoride, and methane.

The provisions of the Kyoto Protocol stipulate that economically advanced nations must reduce their combined emissions of greenhouse gases, by approximately five percent from their 1990 levels, before the 2008-2010 deadline. Countries with the highest carbon dioxide emissions, such as the [United States](#) (U.S.), many of the European Union (EU) countries, and [Japan](#), are to reduce emissions by a scale of 6 to 8 percent. All economically advanced nations must show "demonstrable progress" by 2005. In contrast, no binding limits or timetable have been set on developing countries. Presumably, this distinction is due to the fact that most developing countries - - with the obvious exceptions of [India](#) and [China](#) -- simply do not emit as many greenhouse gases as do more industrially advanced countries. Meanwhile, these countries are entrenched in the process of economic development.

Regardless of the aforementioned reasoning, there has been strong opposition against the asymmetrical treatment assigned to emissions limits among developed and developing countries. Although this distinction might be regarded as unfair in principle, associations such as the Alliance of Small Island States have been vocal in expressing how global warming -- a result of greenhouse gas emissions - has contributed to the rise in sea level, and thus deleteriously affected their very existence as island nation states. For this reason, some parties have suggested that economically advanced nations, upon returning to their 1990 levels, should be required to further reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by a deadline of 2005. In response, interested parties have observed that even if such reductions were undertaken by economically advanced nations, they would not be enough to completely control global warming. Indeed, a reduction in the rate of fossil fuel usage by developing nations would also be necessary to have substantial ameliorative effect on global warming. Indeed, a reduction in the rate of fossil fuel usage by developing nations would also be necessary to have substantial ameliorative effect on global warming.

As such, the Protocol established a "Clean Development Mechanism" which permits developed countries to invest in projects aimed at reducing emissions within developing countries in return for credit for the reductions. Ostensibly, the objective of this mechanism is to curtail emissions in developing countries without unduly penalizing them for their economic development. Under this model, the countries with more potential emissions credits could sell them to other signatories of the Kyoto Protocol, whose emissions are forecast to significantly rise in the next few years. Should this trading of emissions credits take place, it is estimated that the Kyoto Protocol's emissions targets could still be met.

In 1999, the International Energy Outlook projected that Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and Newly Independent States, as well as parts of Asia, are all expected to show a marked decrease in their level of energy-related carbon emissions in 2010. Nations with the highest emissions, specifically, the U.S., the EU and [Japan](#), are anticipated to reduce their emissions by up to 8 percent by 2012. By 2000, however, the emissions targets were not on schedule for achievement. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Energy estimates forecast that by 2010, there will be

a 34 percent increase in carbon emissions from the 1990 levels, in the absence of major shifts in policy, economic growth, energy prices, and consumer trends. Despite this assessment in the U.S., international support for the Kyoto Protocol remained strong, especially among European countries and island states, who view the pact as one step in the direction away from reliance on fossil fuels and other sources of greenhouse gases.

In 2001, U.S. President, George W. Bush, rejected his country's participation in the Kyoto Protocol, saying that the costs imposed on the global economic system, and especially, on the US, overshadowed the benefits of the Protocol. He also cited the unfair burden on developed nations to reduce emissions, as another primary reasons for withdrawal from the international pact, as well as insufficient evidence regarding the science of global warming. Faced with impassioned international disapproval for his position, the U.S. president stated that his administration remained interested in dealing with the matter of global warming, but would endorse alternative measures to combat the problem, such as voluntary initiatives limiting emissions. Critics of Bush's position, however, have noted that it was the failure of voluntary initiatives to reduce emissions following the Rio Summit that led to the establishment of the Kyoto Protocol in the first place.

In the wake of the Bush administration's decision, many participant countries resigned themselves to the reality that the goals of the Kyoto Protocol might not be achieved without U.S. involvement. Nevertheless, in Bonn, [Germany](#), in July 2001, the remaining participant countries struck a political compromise on some of the key issues and sticking points, and planned to move forward with the Protocol, irrespective of the absence of the U.S. The key compromise points included the provision for countries to offset their targets with carbon sinks (these are areas of forest and farmland which can absorb carbon through the process of photosynthesis). Another compromise point within the broader Bonn Agreement was the reduction of emissions cuts of six gases from over 5 percent to a more achievable 2 percent. A third key change was the provision of funding for less wealthy countries to adopt more progressive technologies.

In late October and early November 2001, the UNFCCC's 7th Conference of the Parties met in Marrakesh, [Morocco](#), to finalize the measures needed to make the Kyoto Protocol operational. Although the UNFCCC projected that ratification of the Protocol would make it legally binding within a year, many critics noted that the process had fallen short of implementing significant changes in policy that would be necessary to actually stop or even slow climate change. They also maintained that the absence of U.S. participation effectively rendered the Protocol into being a political exercise without any substance, either in terms of transnational policy or in terms of environmental concerns.

The adoption of the compromises ensconced within the Bonn Agreement had been intended to make the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol more palatable to the U.S. In this regard, it failed to achieve its objective as the Bush administration continued to eschew participation in the

international accord. Still, however, the Bonn Agreement did manage to render a number of other positive outcomes. Specifically, in 2002, key countries, such as [Russia](#), [Japan](#) and [Canada](#) agreed to ratify the protocol, bringing the number of signatories to 178. The decision by key countries to ratify the protocol was regarded as "the kiss of life" by observers.

By 2005, on the eve of a climate change conference in London, British Prime Minister Tony Blair was hoping to deal with the problems of climate change beyond the provisions set forth in the Kyoto Protocol. Acknowledging that the Kyoto Protocol could not work in its current form, Blair wanted to open the discussion for a new climate change plan.

Blair said that although most of the world had signed on to Kyoto, the protocol could not meet any of its practical goals of cutting greenhouse gas emissions without the participation of the United States, the world's largest polluter. He also noted that any new agreement would have to include India and China -- significant producers of greenhouse gas emissions, but exempt from Kyoto because they have been classified as developing countries. Still, he said that progress on dealing with climate change had been stymied by "a reluctance to face up to reality and the practical action needed to tackle problem."

Blair also touted the "huge opportunities" in technology and pointed toward the possibilities offered by wind, solar and nuclear power, along with fuel cell technology, eco-friendly biofuels, and carbon capture and storage which could generate low carbon power. Blair also asserted that his government was committed to achieving its domestic goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 20 percent by 2010.

In the United States, President George W. Bush has said that global warming remained a debatable issue and despite conclusions reached by his own Environmental Protection Agency, he has not agreed with the conclusion that global warming and climate change are linked with human activities. Bush has also refused to ratify Kyoto on the basis of its economic costs.

Australia, an ally of the United States, has taken a similarly dim view of the Kyoto Protocol. Ahead of the November 2005 climate change meeting in Canada in which new goals for the protocol were to be discussed, Australia's Environment Minister, Ian Campbell, said that negotiating new greenhouse gas emission levels for the Kyoto Protocol would be a waste of time. Campbell said, "There is a consensus that the caps, targets and timetables approach is flawed. If we spend the next five years arguing about that, we'll be fiddling and negotiating while Rome burns." Campbell, like the Bush administration, has also advocated a system of voluntary action in which industry takes up new technologies rather than as a result of compelling the reduction of emissions. But the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) has called on its government to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, to establish a system of emissions trading, and to set binding limits on emissions. Interestingly, although it did not sign on to Kyoto, Australia was expected to meet its emissions target by 2012 (an 8 percent increase in 1990 levels in keeping with the country's

reliance on coal). But this success has nothing to do with new technologies and is due to state-based regulations on land clearing.

Note: The Kyoto Protocol calls for developed nations to cut greenhouse emissions by 5.2 percent of 1990 levels by 2012.

Special Entry: Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen (2009) --

In December 2009, the United Nations Climate Change Summit opened in the Danish capital of Copenhagen. The summit was scheduled to last from Dec. 7-18, 2009. Delegates from more than 190 countries were in attendance, and approximately 100 world leaders, including British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and [United States](#) President Barack Obama, were expected to participate. At issue was the matter of new reductions targets on greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

Despite earlier fears that little concurrence would come from the conference, effectively pushing significant actions forward to a 2010 conference in [Mexico](#) City, negotiators were now reporting that the talks were productive and several key countries, such as [South Africa](#), had pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The two main issues that could still lead to cleavages were questions of agreement between the industrialized countries and the developing countries of the world, as well as the overall effectiveness of proposals in seriously addressing the perils of climate change.

On Dec. 9, 2009, four countries -- the [United Kingdom](#), [Australia](#), [Mexico](#) and [Norway](#) -- presented a document outlining ideas for raising and managing billions of dollars, which would be intended to help vulnerable countries dealing with the perils of climate change. Described as a "green fund," the concept could potentially help small island states at risk because of the rise in sea level. [Bangladesh](#) identified itself as a potential recipient of an assistance fund, noting that as a country plagued by devastating floods, it was particularly hard-hit by climate change. The "green fund" would fall under the rubric of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, for which developed countries have been committed to quantifying their emission reduction targets, and also to providing financial and technical support to developing countries.

The [United Kingdom](#), [Australia](#), [Mexico](#) and [Norway](#) also called for the creation of a new legal treaty that would replace the Kyoto Protocol. This new treaty, which could go into force in 2012, would focus largely on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. But [Australia](#) went even further in saying that the successor treaty to the Kyoto Protocol, should be one with provisions covering all countries. Such a move would be a departure from the structure of the Kyoto Protocol, which contained emissions targets for industrialized countries due to the prevailing view that developed countries had a particular historic responsibility to be accountable for climate change. More recently, it has become apparent that substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions demanded by scientists would only come to pass with the participation also of significant

developing nation states, such as [China](#) and [India](#). Indeed, one of the most pressing critiques of the Kyoto Protocol was that it was a "paper tiger" that failed to address the impact of the actions of emerging economies like [China](#) and [India](#), with its focus on the developed economies.

Now, in 2009, [China](#) -- as the world's biggest greenhouse gas emitter -- was responding this dubious distinction by vocalizing its criticism of the current scenario and foregrounding its new commitments. Ahead of the Copenhagen summit, [China](#) had announced it would reduce the intensity of its carbon emissions per unit of its GDP in 2020 by 40 to 45 percent against 2005 levels. With that new commitment at hand, [China](#) was now accusing the [United States](#) and the European Union of shirking their own responsibilities by setting weak targets for greenhouse gas emissions cuts. Senior Chinese negotiator, Su Wei, characterized the goals of the world's second largest greenhouse gas emitter -- the [United States](#) -- as "not notable," and the European Union's target as "not enough." Su Wei also took issue with [Japan](#) for setting implausible preconditions.

On Dec. 11, 2009, [China](#) demanded that developed and wealthy countries in Copenhagen should help deliver a real agreement on climate change by delivering on their promises to reduce carbon emissions and provide financial support for developing countries to adapt to global warming. In so doing, China's Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei said his country was hoping that a "balanced outcome" would emerge from the discussions at the summit. Echoing the position of the Australian government, He Yafei spoke of a draft agreement as follows: "The final document we're going to adopt needs to be taking into account the needs and aspirations of all countries, particularly the most vulnerable ones."

China's Vice Foreign Minister emphasized the fact that climate change was "a matter of survival" for developing countries, and accordingly, such countries need wealthier and more developed countries to accentuate not only their pledges of emissions reduction targets, but also their financial commitments under the aforementioned United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. To that end, scientists and leaders of small island states in the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, have highlighted the existential threat posed by global warming and the concomitant rise in sea level.

China aside, attention was also on [India](#) -- another major player in the developing world and a country with an industrializing economy that was impacting the environment. At issue was the Indian government's decision to set a carbon intensity target, which would slow emissions growth by up to 25 percent by the 2020 deadline. This strong position was resisted by some elements in [India](#), who argued that their country should not be taking such a strong position when developed wealthy countries were yet to show accountability for their previous commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The matter grew so heated that the members of the opposition stormed out of the parliament in protest as Indian Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh defended the policy. But the political pressure at home in [India](#) was leaving the Indian delegation in Copenhagen in a state of chaos as well. In fact, India's top environmental negotiator refused to travel to

Copenhagen in protest of the government's newly-announced stance.

China and [India](#) were joined by [Brazil](#) and [South Africa](#) in the crafting of a draft document calling for a new global climate treaty to be completed by June 2010. Of concern has been the realization that there was insufficient time to find concurrence on a full legal treaty, which would leave countries only with a politically-binding text by the time the summit at Copenhagen closed. But Guyana's leader, President Bharrat Jagdeo, warned that the summit in [Denmark](#) would be classified as a failure unless a binding document was agreed upon instead of just political consensus. He urged his cohorts to act with purpose saying, "Never before have science, economics, geo-strategic self-interest and politics intersected in such a way on an issue that impacts everyone on the planet."

Likewise, [Tuvalu](#) demanded that legally binding agreements emerge from Copenhagen. Its proposal was supported by many of the vulnerable countries, from small island states and sub-Saharan Africa, all of whom warned of the catastrophic impact of climate change on their citizens. [Tuvalu](#) also called for more aggressive action, such as an amendment to the 1992 agreement, which would focus on sharp greenhouse gas emissions and the accepted rise in temperatures, due to the impact the rise in seas. The delegation from [Kiribati](#) joined the call by drawing attention to the fact that one village had to be abandoned due to waist-high water, and more such effects were likely to follow. Kiribati's Foreign Secretary, Tessie Lambourne, warned that the people of [Kiribati](#) could well be faced with no homeland in the future saying, "Nobody in this room would want to leave their homeland." But despite such impassioned pleas and irrespective of warnings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that the rise in sea level from melting polar ice caps would deleteriously affect low-lying atolls such as such as [Tuvalu](#) and [Kiribati](#) in the Pacific, and the [Maldives](#) in the Indian Ocean, the oil-giant [Saudi Arabia](#) was able to block this move.

Meanwhile, within the developed countries, yet another power struggle was brewing. The European Union warned it would only agree to raise its target of 20 percent greenhouse gas emissions reductions to 30 percent if the [United States](#) demonstrated that it would do more to reduce its own emissions. It was unknown if such pressure would yield results. [United States](#) President Barack Obama offered a "provisional" 2020 target of 17 percent reductions, noting that he could not offer greater concessions at Copenhagen due to resistance within the [United States](#) Congress, which was already trying to pass a highly controversial "cap and trade" emissions legislation. However, should that emissions trading bill fail in the Senate, the [United States](#) Environment Protection Agency's declaration that greenhouse gases pose a danger to human health and the environment was expected to facilitate further regulations and limits on power plants and factories at the national level. These moves could potentially strengthen the Obama administration's offering at Copenhagen. As well, President Obama also signaled that he would be willing to consider the inclusion of international forestry credits.

Such moves indicated willingness by the Obama administration to play a more constructive role on

the international environmental scene than its predecessor, the Bush administration. Indeed, ahead of his arrival at the Copenhagen summit, President Barack Obama's top environmental advisors promised to work on a substantial climate change agreement. To that end, [United States](#) Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson said at a press conference, "We are seeking robust engagement with all of our partners around the world." But would this pro-engagement assertion yield actual results?

By Dec. 12, 2009, details related to a draft document prepared by Michael Zammit Cutajar, the head of the Ad-hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action, were released at the Copenhagen climate conference. Included in the document were calls for countries to make major reductions in carbon emissions over the course of the next decade. According to the Washington Post, industrialized countries were called on to make cuts of between 25 percent and 40 percent below 1990 levels -- reductions that were far more draconian than the [United States](#) was likely to accept. As discussed above, President Obama had offered a provisional reduction target of 17 percent. The wide gap between the released draft and the United States' actual stated position suggested there was much more negotiating in the offing if a binding agreement could be forged, despite the Obama administration's claims that it was seeking greater engagement on this issue.

In other developments, the aforementioned call for financial support of developing countries to deal with the perils of climate change was partly answered by the European Union on Dec. 11, 2009. The European bloc pledged an amount of 2.4 billion euros (US\$3.5 billion) annually from 2010 to 2012. Environment Minister Andreas Carlgren of [Sweden](#) -- the country that holds the rotating presidency of the European Union at the time of the summit -- put his weight behind the notion of a "legally binding deal." Meanwhile, Yvo de Boer, a top United Nations climate change official, focused less on the essence of the agreement and more on tangible action and effects saying, "Copenhagen will only be a success if it delivers significant and immediate action that begins the day the conference ends."

The division between developed and developing countries in Copenhagen reached new heights on Dec. 14, 2009, when some of the poor and less developed countries launched a boycott at the summit. The move, which was spurred by African countries but backed by [China](#) and [India](#), appeared to be geared toward redirecting attention and primary responsibility to the wealthier and more industrialized countries. The impasse was resolved after the wealthier and more industrialized countries offered assurances that they did not intend on shirking from their commitments to reducing greenhouse gases. As a result, the participating countries ceased the boycott.

Outside the actual summit, thousands of protestors had gathered to demand crucial global warming, leading to clashes between police and demonstrators elsewhere in the Danish capital city. There were reports of scattered violence across Copenhagen and more than 1,000 people were arrested.

Nevertheless, by the second week of the climate change summit, hopes of forging a strong deal were eroding as developed and developing nations remained deadlocked on sharing cuts in greenhouse gases, and particularly on the matters of financing and temperature goals. In a bid to shore up support for a new climate change, [United States](#) President Barack Obama joined other world leaders in Copenhagen. On Dec. 14, 2009, there was a standoff brewing between the [United States](#) and [China](#). At issue was China's refusal to accept international monitoring of its expressed targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The [United States](#) argued that China's opposition to verification could be a deal-breaker.

By the close of the summit, the difficult process eventually resulted in some consensus being cultivated. A draft text called for \$100 billion a year by 2020 to assist poor nations cope with climate change, while aiming to limit global warming to two degrees Celsius compared with pre-industrial levels. The deal also included specific targets for developed countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and called for reductions by developing countries as a share of their economies. Also included in the agreement was a mechanism to verify compliance. The details of the agreement were supported by President Barack Obama, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

This draft would stand as an interim agreement, with a legally-binding international pact unlikely to materialize until 2010. In this way, the summit in Copenhagen failed to achieve its central objective, which was to negotiate a successor to the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions.

Editor's Note

In the background of these developments was the growing global consciousness related to global warming and climate change. Indeed, as the Copenhagen summit was ongoing, it was clear there was enormous concurrence on the significance of the stakes with an editorial on the matter of climate change being published in 56 newspapers in 45 countries. That editorial warned that without global action, climate change would "ravage our planet." Meanwhile, a global survey taken by Globescan showed that concern over global warming had exponentially increased from 1998 -- when only 20 percent of respondents believed it to be a serious problem -- to 64 percent in 2009. Such survey data, however, was generated ahead of the accusations by climate change skeptics that some climate scientists may have overstated the case for global warming, based on emails derived in an illicit manner from a British University.

Special Entry: Climate change talks in Doha in [Qatar](#) extend life of Kyoto Protocol (2012)

December 2012 saw climate talks ensue in the Qatari city of Doha as representatives from countries across the world gathered to discuss the fate of the Kyoto Protocol, which seeks to minimize greenhouse gas emissions. The summit yielded results with decisions made (1) to extend

the Kyoto Protocol until 2020, and (2) for wealthier countries to compensate poorer countries for the losses and damage incurred as a result of climate change.

In regards to the second matter, Malia Talakai of [Nauru](#), a leading negotiator for the Alliance of Small Island States, explained the necessity of the compensation package as follows: "We are trying to say that if you pollute you must help us."

This measure was being dubbed the "Loss and Damage" mechanism, and was being linked with [United States](#) President Barack Obama's request for \$60 billion from Congress to deal with the devastation caused by Hurricane Sandy months before. The sight of a hurricane bearing down on the northern Atlantic seaboard, along with the reality of the scope of reconstruction, appeared to have illustrated the economic costs of climate change -- not so much as a distant environmental issue -- but as a danger to the quotidian lives of people. Still, there was blame to be placed on the [United States](#) and European countries -- some of world's largest emitters -- for failing to do more to reduce emissions.

To that latter end, there was in fact little progress made on the central issue of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Had those emissions been reduced, there would have been less of a need to financially deal with the devastation caused by climate change. One interpretation was that the global community was accepting the fact that industrialization was contributing to global warming, which had deleterious effects on the polar ice caps and concomitantly on the rise of sea level, with devastating effects for small island nations. Thus, wealthier countries were willing to pay around \$10 billion a year through 2020, effectively in "damages," to the poor countries that could be viewed as the "collateral damage" of industrial progress. But damages today could potentially be destruction tomorrow, leaving in place the existential challenges and burdens to be born by some of the world's smallest and least wealthy island countries.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the representative for the small island nation states at the Doha summit responded with ire, characterizing the lack of progress on reducing emissions as follows: "We see the package before us as deeply deficient in mitigation (carbon cuts) and finance. It's likely to lock us on the trajectory to a 3,4,5C rise in global temperatures, even though we agreed to keep the global average temperature rise of 1.5C to ensure survival of all islands. There is no new finance (for adapting to climate change and getting clean energy) -- only promises that something might materialize in the future. Those who are obstructive need to talk not about how their people will live, but whether our people will live."

Indeed, in most small island countries not just in the Pacific, but also the Caribbean and Indian Ocean, ecological concerns and the climate crisis have been dominant themes with dire life and death consequences looming in the background for their people. Small island nations in these region are already at risk from the rise of sea-level, tropical cyclones, floods. But their very livelihoods of fishing and subsistence farming were also at risk as a result of ecological and

environmental changes. Increasingly high storm surges can wipe out entire villages and contaminate water supplies. Accordingly, the very existence of island nations, such as [Kiribati](#) and [Tuvalu](#), are at severe risk of being obliterated from the map. Yet even with the existential threat of being wiped off the map in the offing, the international community has been either slow or restrictive in its efforts to deal with global warming, climate change, economic and ecological damage, as well as the emerging global challenge of environmental refugees.

A 2012 report from the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Pacific Regional Environment Program underlined the concerns of small island nations and their people as it concluded that the livelihoods of approximately 10 million people in Pacific island communities were increasingly vulnerable to climate change. In fact, low-lying islands in that region would likely confront losses of up to 18 percent of gross domestic product due to climate change, according to the report. The report covers 21 countries and territories, including [Fiji](#), [Kiribati](#), [Samoa](#) and [Tonga](#), and recommended environmental legislation intended to deal with the climate crisis facing the small island countries particularly. As noted by David Sheppard, the director general of the Pacific Regional Environment Program that co-sponsored this study: "The findings... emphasize the need more than ever to raise the bar through collective actions that address the region's environmental needs at all levels."

Regardless of the failures of the summit in [Qatar](#) (discussed above), the meeting did facilitate a process starting in 2015, which would bind both wealthy and poor countries together in the mission of forging a new binding treaty that would replace the Kyoto Protocol and tackle the central causes of climate change.

For more information on the threats faced in small island nations by climate change and the measures being undertaken to lobby for international action, please see the Alliance for Small Island States available online at the URL: <http://aosis.org/>

Special Report

COP 21 summit in Paris ends with historic agreement to tackle climate change; rare international consensus formed on environmental crisis facing the planet (2015) --

In mid-December 2015, the highly-anticipated United Nations climate conference of parties (COP) in Paris, [France](#), ended with a historic agreement. In fact, it would very likely be understood as the most significant international agreement signed by all the recognized countries of the world since the Cold War. Accordingly, the Paris Agreement was being distinguished as the first multilateral pact that would compel all countries across the world to cut its carbon emissions -- one of the major causes of increasing greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to global warming, and its deleterious effects ranging from the dangerous rise in sea level to catastrophic climate

change.

The accord, which was dubbed to be the "Paris Agreement," was the work of rigorous diplomacy and fervent environmental advocacy, and it aimed to address the climate change crisis facing the planet. As many as 195 countries were represented in the negotiations that led to the landmark climate deal. Indeed, it was only after weeks of passionate debate that international concurrence was reached in addressing the environmental challenges confronting the world, with particular attention to moving beyond fossil fuels and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The success of the COP 21 summit in Paris and the emergence of the landmark Paris Agreement was, to some extent, attributed to the efforts of France's Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius who presided over the negotiations. The French foreign minister's experience and credentials as a seasoned diplomat and respected statesman paid dividends. He skillfully guided the delegates from almost 200 countries and interest groups along the negotiations process, with ostensibly productive results and a reasonably robust deal to show for it.

On Dec. 12, 2015, French Foreign Minister Fabius officially adopted the agreement, declaring: "I now invite the COP to adopt the decision entitled Paris Agreement outlined in the document. Looking out to the room I see that the reaction is positive, I see no objections. The Paris agreement is adopted." Once Foreign Minister Fabius' gavel was struck, symbolically inaugurating the Paris Agreement into force, the COP delegate rushed to their feet with loud and bouyant cheers as well as thunderous applause.

In general, the Paris Agreement was being hailed as a victory for enviromental activists and a triumph for international diplomats, while at the same time being understood as simply an initial -- and imperfect -- move in the direction of a sustainable future. China's chief negotiator, Xie Zhenhua, issued this message, saying that while the accord was not ideal, it should "not prevent us from marching historical steps forward."

United States President Barack Obama lauded the deal as both "ambitious" and "historic," and the work of strenuous multilateral negotiations as he declared, "Together, we've shown what's possible when the world stands as one." The [United States](#) leader acknowledged that the accord was not "perfect," but he reminded the critics that it was "the best chance to save the one planet we have. "

Former [United States](#) Vice President Al Gore, one of the world's most well known environmental advocates, issued a lengthy statement on the accomplishments ensconced in the Paris Agreement. He highlighted the fact that the Paris Agreement was a first step towards a future with a reduced carbon footprint on Planet Earth as he said, "The components of this agreement -- including a strong review mechanism to enhance existing commitments and a long-term goal to eliminate global-warming pollution this century -- are essential to unlocking the necessary investments in our future. No agreement is perfect, and this one must be strengthened over time, but groups across

every sector of society will now begin to reduce dangerous carbon pollution through the framework of this agreement."

The central provisions of the Paris Agreement included the following items:

- Greenhouse gas emissions should peak as quickly as possible, with a move towards balancing energy sources, and ultimately the decrease of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century
- Global temperature increase would be limited to 1.5 degrees Centigrade above pre-industrial levels and would be held "well below" the two degrees Centigrade threshold
- Progress on these goals would be reviewed every five years beginning in 2020 with new greenhouse gas reduction targets issued every five years
- \$100 billion would be expended each year in climate finance for developing countries to move forward with green technologies, with further climate financing to be advanced in the years beyond

It should be noted that there both legally binding and voluntary elements contained within the Paris Agreement. Specifically, the submission of an emissions reduction target and the regular review of that goal would be legally mandatory for all countries. Stated differently, there would be a system in place by which experts would be able to track the carbon-cutting progress of each country. At the same time, the specific targets to be set by countries would be determined at the discretion of the countries, and would not be binding. While there was some criticism over this non-binding element, the fact of the matter was that the imposition of emissions targets was believed to be a major factor in the failure of climate change talks in Copenhagen, [Denmark](#), in 2009.

In 2015, the talks faced challenges as several countries, such as [China](#) and [India](#), objected to conditions that would stymie economic and development. In order to avoid that kind of landmine, a system Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) was developed and formed the basis of the accord. As such, the Paris Agreement would, in fact, facilitate economic growth and development, as well as technological progress, but with the goal of long-term ecological sustainability based on low carbon sources. In fact, the agreement heralded as "the beginning of the end of the fossil fuel era." As noted by Nick Mabey, the head of the climate diplomacy organization E3G, said, "Paris means governments will go further and faster to tackle climate change than ever before. The transition to a low carbon economy is now unstoppable, ensuring the end of the fossil fuel age."

A particular sticking point in the agreement was the \$100 billion earmarked for climate financing for developing countries to transition from traditional fossil fuels to green energy technologies and a low carbon future. In 2014, a report by the International Energy Agency indicated that the cost of that transition would actually be around \$44 trillion by the mid-century -- an amount that would render the \$100 billion being promised to be a drop in the proverbial bucket. However, the general expectation was that the Republican-controlled Senate in the [United States](#), which would have to

ratify the deal in that country, was not interested in contributing significant funds for the cause of climate change.

A key strength of the Paris Agreement was the ubiquitous application of measures to all countries. Of note was the frequently utilized concept of "flexibility" with regard to the Paris Agreement. Specifically, the varying capacities of the various countries in meeting their obligations would be anticipated and accorded flexibility. This aspect presented something of a departure from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which drew a sharp distinction between developed and developing countries, and mandated a different set of obligations for those categories of countries. Thus, under Kyoto, [China](#) and [India](#) were not held to the same standards as the [United States](#) and European countries. In the Paris Agreement, there would be commitments from all countries across the globe.

Another notable strength of the Paris Agreement was the fact that the countries of the world were finally able to reach consensus on the vital necessity to limit global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Centigrade. Ahead of the global consensus on the deal, and as controversy continued to surface over the targeted global temperature limits, the leaders of island countries were sounding the alarm about the melting of the Polar ice caps and the associated rise in sea level. Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga of [Tuvalu](#) issued this dismal reminder: "Tuvalu's future ... is already bleak and any further temperature increase will spell the total demise of [Tuvalu](#). No leader in this room carries such a level of worry and responsibility. Just imagine you are in my shoes, what would you do?" It was thus something of a victory for environmental advocates that the countries of the world could find consensus on the lower number -- 1.5 degrees rather than 2 degrees.

A significant weak point with regard to the Paris deal was a "loss and damage" provision, which anticipates that even with all the new undertakings intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move to a low carbon future, there would nonetheless be unavoidable climate change consequences. Those consequences ranged from the loss of arable land for farmers as well as soil erosion and contamination of potable water by sea water, to the decimation of territory in coastal zones and on small islands, due to the rise in sea level, with entire small island countries being rendered entirely uninhabitable. The reality was that peoples' homes across the world would be destroyed along with their way of life.

With that latter catastrophic effect being a clear and present danger for small island countries, the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS) demanded that the developed world acknowledge its responsibility for this irreversible damage.. Despite the fact that greenhouse gas emissions and the ensuing plague of global warming was, indeed, the consequence of development in the West (the [United States](#) and Europe) and the large power house countries, such as [Russia](#), [China](#) and [India](#), there was no appetite by those countries to sign on to unlimited liability. Under the Paris Agreement, there was a call for research on insurance mechanisms that would address loss and damage issues, with recommendations to come in the future.

The call for research was being regarded as an evasion of sorts and constituted the weakest aspect of the Paris Agreement. Not surprisingly, a coalition of small island nations demanded a "Marshall Plan" for the Pacific. Borrowing the term "Marshall Plan" from the post-World War II reconstruction effort, the coalition of Pacific island nation, which included [Kiribati](#), [Tuvalu](#), [Fiji](#), and the [Marshall Islands](#), called for an initiative that would include investment in renewable energy and shoreline protection, cultural preservation, economic assistance for economies in transition, and a plan for migration and resettlement for these countries as they confront the catastrophic effects of the melting of the Polar ice caps and the concomitant rise in sea level. The precise contours of the initiative remained unknown, unspecified, and a mere exercise in theory at the time of writing. Yet such an initiative would, at some point, have to be addressed, given the realities of climate change and the slow motion calamity unfolding each day for low-lying island nations across the world.

As noted by Vice President Greg Stone of Conservation International, who also functions as an adviser to the government of [Kiribati](#), "Imagine living in a place where you know it's going to go away someday, but you don't know what day that wave's going to come over and wash your home away." He added, "It's a disaster we know is going to happen." Meanwhile, the intervening years promised to be filled with hardship for small island nations, such as [Kiribati](#). Stone explained, "For every inch of sea-level rise, these islands lose 10 feet of their freshwater table to saltwater intrusion," Stone explained. "So it's not just about the day the water finally goes over the island; it's also about the day that there's just not enough water left and everyone has to move off the island." Presaging the future for island nations that could face submersion, Stone said, "If you look ahead 50 years, a country like [Kiribati](#) could become the first aqueous nation. possibility of migration. That is, they own this big patch of ocean, and they administer it from elsewhere."

Foreign Minister Minister Tony Debrum of the [Marshall Islands](#) emerged as the champion advocating on behalf of small island nation states and a loose coalition of concerned countries from the Pacific to the Caribbean, but with support from the [United States](#). He addressed the comprehensive concerns of small island nations regarding the weaknesses of the deal, while simultaneously making clear that the Paris Agreement signified hope for the countries most at risk. In a formal statement, Debrum declared: "We have made history today. Emissions targets are still way off track, but this agreement has the tools to ramp up ambition, and brings a spirit of hope that we can rise to this challenge. I can go back home to my people and say we now have a pathway to survival." Debrum highlighted the imperatives of Pacific island nations, saying, "Our High Ambition Coalition was the lightning rod we needed to lift our sights and expectations for a strong agreement here in Paris. We were joined by countries representing more than half the world. We said loud and clear that a bare-bones, minimalist agreement would not fly. We instead demanded an agreement to mark a turning point in history, and the beginning of our journey to the post-carbon era."

Debrum of the [Marshall Islands](#) espoused the quintessential synopsis of the accord and its effects for those most likely to be affected by climate change as he noted, “Climate change won’t stop overnight, and my country is not out of the firing line just yet, but today we all feel a little safer.”

Editor's Entry on [Environmental Policy](#):

The low-lying Pacific island nations of the world, including [Kiribati](#), [Tuvalu](#), the [Marshall Islands](#), [Fiji](#), among others, are vulnerable to the threats posed by global warming and climate change, derived from carbon emissions, and resulting in the rise in sea level. Other island nations in the Caribbean, as well as poor countries with coastal zones, were also at particular risk of suffering the deleterious effects of climate change.

Political policy in these countries are often connected to ecological issues, which have over time morphed into an existential crisis of sorts. Indeed, ecological concerns and the climate crisis have also been dominant themes with life and death consequences for the people of island nations in the Pacific. Indeed, the very livelihoods of fishing and subsistence farming remain at risk as a result of ecological and environmental changes. Yet even so, these countries are threatened by increasingly high storm surges, which could wipe out entire villages and contaminate water supplies. Moreover, because these are low lying island nations, the sustained rise in sea level can potentially lead to the terrain of these countries being uninhabitable at best, and submerged at worst. Stated in plain terms, these countries are at severe risk of being obliterated from the map and their plight illuminates the emerging global challenge of environmental refugees. In these manifold senses, climate change is the existential crisis of the contemporary era.

Since the time of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, there have been efforts aimed at extending the life of that agreement, with an eye on minimizing greenhouse gas emissions, and thus minimizing the effects of climate change. Those endeavors have largely ended in failure, as exemplified by the unsuccessful Copenhagen talks in 2009 and the fruitless Doha talks in 2012 respectively. The success of the COP 21 talks in [France](#), with the adoption of the landmark Paris Agreement in 2015, was regarded as the first glimmer of hope. Not only did the Paris Agreement signify the triumph of international diplomacy and global consensus, but it also marked the start of the end of the fossil fuel era, with the path forward toward a low carbon future reliant on greener technologies. Most crucially, the Paris Agreement stood as the first significant response in recent times to the central challenge of climate change and its quotidian effects on the lives of real human beings across the world.

1. Major International Environmental Accords:

General Environmental Concerns

Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, Espoo, 1991.

Accords Regarding Atmosphere

Annex 16, vol. II (Environmental Protection: Aircraft Engine Emissions) to the 1044 Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation, Montreal, 1981

Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP), Geneva, 1979

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), New York, 1992

Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, Vienna, 1985 including the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Depleted the Ozone Layer, Montreal, 1987

Accords Regarding Hazardous Substances

Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movements and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa, Bamako, 1991

Convention on Civil Liability for Damage Caused during Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road, Rail and Inland Navigation Vessels (CRTD), Geneva, 1989

Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (Basel Convention), Basel, 1989

Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, Helsinki, 1992

Convention to Ban the Importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes and to Control the Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within the South Pacific Region (Waigani Convention), Waigani, 1995

European Agreement Concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR), Geneva 1957

FAO International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides, Rome, 1985

2. Major International Marine Accords:

Global Conventions

Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (London Convention 1972), London, 1972

International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973, as modified by Protocol of 1978 relation thereto (MARPOL 73/78), London, 1973 and 1978

International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage 1969 (1969 CLC), Brussels, 1969, 1976, and 1984

International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage 1971 (1971 Fund Convention), Brussels, 1971

Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea (HNS), London 1996

International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response, and Co-operation (OPRC), London, 1990

International Convention Relation to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Oil Pollution Casualties (Intervention Convention), Brussels, 1969

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Montego Bay, 1982

Regional Conventions

Convention for the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping from Ships and Aircraft (Oslo Convention), Oslo, 1972

Convention for the Prevention of Marine Pollution from Land-based Sources (Paris Convention), Paris, 1974

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic (OSPAR Convention), Paris, 1992

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Conventions within the UNEP Regional Seas Programme

Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution, Bucharest, 1992

Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, Cartagena de Indias, 1983

Convention for the Protection, Management, and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region, Nairobi, 1985

Kuwait Regional Convention for Co-operation on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Pollution, [Kuwait](#), 1978

Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment and Coastal Region of the Mediterranean Sea (Barcelona Convention), Barcelona, 1976

Regional Convention for the Conservation of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Environment, Jeddah, 1982

Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region, Noumea, 1986

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and Coastal Area of the South-East Pacific, Lima, 1981

Convention for Co-operation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region, Abidjan, 1981

3. Major Conventions Regarding Living Resources:

Marine Living Resources

Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), Canberra, 1980

International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Rio de Janeiro, 1966

International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), Washington, 1946

Nature Conservation and Terrestrial Living Resources

Antarctic Treaty, Washington, D.C., 1959

Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention), Paris, 1972

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Nairobi, 1992

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), Bonn, 1979

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Washington, D.C., 1973

Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), Ramsar, 1971

Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), Paris 1994

FAO International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources, Rome, 1983

International Tropical Timber Agreement, 1994 (ITTA, 1994), Geneva, 1994

Freshwater Resources

Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, Helsinki, 1992

4. Major Conventions Regarding Nuclear Safety:

Convention on Assistance in the Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency (Assistance Convention), Vienna, 1986

Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident (Notification Convention), Vienna, 1986

Convention on Nuclear Safety, Vienna, 1994

Vienna Convention on Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage, Vienna, 1963

5. Major Intergovernmental Organizations

Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)

European Union (EU): Environment

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

Global Environment Facility (GEF)

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds (IOPC Funds)

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Environment Policy Committee (EPOC)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

World Bank

World Food Programme (WFP)

World Health Organization (WHO)

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

World Trade Organization (WTO)

6. Major Non-Governmental Organizations

Atmosphere Action Network East Asia (AANE)

Climate Action Network (CAN)

Consumers International (CI)

Earth Council

Earthwatch Institute

Environmental Liaison Centre International (ELCI)

European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

Friends of the Earth International (FoEI)

Greenpeace International

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)

International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)

International Solar Energy Society (ISES)

IUCN-The World Conservation Union

Pesticide Action Network (PAN)

Sierra Club

Society for International Development (SID)

Third World Network (TWN)

Water Environment Federation (WEF)

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)

World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

World Federalist Movement (WFM)

World Resources Institute (WRI)

World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF)

7. Other Networking Instruments

Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED)

Global Legislators for a Balanced Environment (GLOBE)

Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC)

United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS)

Appendices

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Methodology Note for Demographic Data:

The demographic numbers for cities and national populations listed in CountryWatch content are derived from the Geoba.se website, which analyzes data from the World Bank. The current demographic numbers displayed on the Countrywatch website are reflective of the latest available estimates.

The demographic information for language, ethnicity and religion listed in CountryWatch content is

derived from a mix of sources including the Altapedia, Central Intelligence Agency Factbook, Infoplease, and State Department Background Notes.

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-- See also list of News Wires services below, which are also used for research purposes. --

Note on Edition Dates:

The earlier edition dates are noted above because they were used to formulate the original Country Reviews and serve as the baseline for some of the information covered. Later editions have been used in some cases, and are cited as such, while other more recent online resources (cited above) contain recent and ever-updated data sets used for research.

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Methodology Notes for Economic Data:

Estimates by CountryWatch.com of GDP in dollars in most countries are made by converting local currency GDP data from the International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook to US dollars by market exchange rates estimated from the International Monetary Fund International Financial Statistics and projected out by the CountryWatch Macroeconomic Forecast. Real GDP was estimated by deflating current dollar values by the US GDP Implicit Price Deflator.

Exceptions to this method were used for:

- Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Nauru
- Cuba
- Palau
- Holy See
- San Marino
- Korea, North
- [Serbia](#) & Montenegro
- Liberia
- Somalia
- Liechtenstein
- Tonga
- Monaco
- Tuvalu

In these cases, other data and/or estimates by CountryWatch.com were utilized.

Investment Overview

C o r r u p t i o n a n d T r a n s p a r e n c y I n d e x . U R L :
<http://www.transparency.org/documents/cpi/2001/cpi2001.html#cpi>
<<http://www.transparency.org/documents/>

Deloitte Tax Guides. URL: <http://www.deloittetaxguides.com>

Trade Policy Reviews by the World Trade Organization . URL: http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tpr_e/tp_rep_e.htm#bycountry

United States Department of Energy, Country Analysis Briefs. URL: <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/contents.html>

United States Department of State, Background Notes. URL: http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/index.html

United States Department of State, Country Commercial Guides. 1996-2006. Washington, D.C.
U n i t e d S t a t e s o f A m e r i c a . U R L : http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/business/com_guides/index.html

World Bank: Doing Business. URL: <http://www.doingbusiness.org>

World Bank: Governance Indicators. URL: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance>

Social Overview

Borden, G.A., Conaway, W.A., Morrison, T. 1994. *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: How to do Business in Sixty Countries*. Holbrook, Massachusetts, 1994.

Center for Disease Control. URL: <http://www.cdc.gov>

Eldis Country Profiles. URL: <http://www.eldis.org/country/index.htm>

Ethnologue. URL: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>

Government of Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. URL: <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo>

Government of Canada Foreign Affairs and International Trade. URL: http://www.voyage.gc.ca/consular_home-e.htm

Library of Congress Country Studies. URL: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html>

Lonely Planet. URL: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/>

Steve Kropla's Online Help For World Travelers. URL: <http://www.kropla.com/>

United Kingdom Ministry of Foreign and Commonwealth Office. URL: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/>

United Nations Human Development Report. URL: <http://www.undp.org/hdro>

UNICEF Statistical Database Online. URL: <http://www.unicef.org/statis/atoz.html>

United States Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook. 2001. Washington, D.C.: Printing and Photography Group. URL: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>

United States Department of State, Background Notes. URL: http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/index.html

United States Department of State, Commercial and Business Affairs: Travel Tips. URL: http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/business/cba_travel.html

United States Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs. URL: <http://travel.state.gov/>

World Health Organization. URL: <http://www.who.int/home-page/>

World News Connection, National Technical Information Service. Springfield, Virginia, USA.

Internet News Service, Xinhua News Agency (U.S.) Inc. Woodside, New York. URL: <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/>

Note on Edition Dates:

The earlier edition dates are noted above because they were used to formulate the original country reviews and serve as the baseline for some of the information covered. Later editions have been used in some cases, and are cited as such, while other more recent online resources (cited above) contain recent and ever-updated data sets used for research.

Methodology Notes for the HDI:

Since 1990, the United Nations Development Programme, in concert with organizations across the globe, has produced the [Human Development Index](#) (or HDI). According to the UNDP, the index measures average achievement in basic human development in one simple composite index, and produces from this index a ranking of countries. The HDI is a composite of three basic components of human development: longevity, knowledge and standard of living. Longevity is measured by life expectancy. Knowledge is measured by combination of adult literacy and mean

years of schooling. Standard of living is measured by purchasing power, based on real GDP per capita (in constant US\$) adjusted for differences in international living costs (or, purchasing power parity, PPP). While the index uses these social indicators to measure national performance with regard to human welfare and development, not all countries provide the same level of information for each component needed to compute the index; therefore, as in any composite indicator, the final index is predicated on projections, predictions and weighting schemes. The index is a static measure, and thus, an incomplete measure of human welfare. In fact, the UNDP says itself the concept of human development focuses on the ends rather than the means of development and progress, examining in this manner, the average condition of all people in a given country.

Specifically, the index is calculated by determining the maximum and minimum for each of the three components (as listed above) and then measuring where each country stands in relation to these scales-expressed as a value between 0 and 1. For example, the minimum adult literary rate is zero percent, the maximum is 100 percent, and the reading skills component of knowledge in the HDI for a country where the literacy rate is 75 percent would be 0.75. The scores of all indicators are then averaged into the overall index.

For a more extensive examination of human development, as well as the ranking tables for each participating country, please visit: <http://www.undp.org>

Note on [History](#) sections

In some CountryWatch Country Reviews, open source content from the State Department Background Notes and Country Guides have been used.

Environmental Overview

Environmental Profiles: A Global Guide to Projects and People. 1993. Linda Sobel Katz, Sarah Orrick, and Robert Honig. New York: Garland Publishing.

The Environment Encyclopedia and Directory, 2nd Edition. 1998. London: Europa.

Environmental Protection Agency Global Warming Site. URL: <http://www.epa.gov/globalwarming>

Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations: Forestry. URL: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/site/sofo/en/>

Global Warming Information Page. URL: <http://globalwarming.org>

Introduction to Global [Environmental Issues](#), 2nd Edition. 1997. Kevin Pickering and Lewis Owen.

London: Routledge.

Trends: Compendium of Data on Global Change. URL: http://cdiac.esd.ornl.gov/trends/emis/em_cont.htm

United Nations Environmental Program. URL: http://www.unep.org/GEO/GEO_Products/Assessment_Reports/

United Nations Global Environmental Outlook. URL: <http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/media/>

United States Department of Energy, Country Analysis Briefs. URL: <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/contents.html>

World Climate Data Online. URL: <http://www.worldclimate.com>

World Directory of Country Environmental Studies. 1996. The World Resource Institute.

World Factbook. US Central Intelligence Agency. Washington, D.C.: Printing and Photography Group.

1998-1999 World Resources Guide to the Global Environment by the World Resources Institute. May, 1998.

1998/1999 Yearbook of International Cooperation on Environment and Development. 1998. London: Earthscan Publications.

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The earlier edition dates are noted above because they were used to formulate the original country reviews and serve as the baseline for some of the information covered. Later editions have been used in some cases, and are cited as such, while other more recent online resources (cited above) contain recent and ever-updated data sets used for research.

Other Sources:

General information has also been used in the compilation of this review, with the courtesy of governmental agencies from this country.

News Services:

CANA Daily Bulletin. Caribbean Media Agency Ltd., St. Michael, [Barbados](#).

Central and Eastern Africa Report, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Integrated Regional Information Network for Central and Eastern Africa.

Daily News, Panafrican News Agency. Dakar, [Senegal](#).

PACNEWS, Pacific Islands Broadcasting Association. Suva, [Fiji](#).

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Washington D.C. USA.

Reuters News. Thomson Reuters. New York, New York. USA.

Southern Africa Report, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Integrated Regional Information Network for Southern Africa.

Voice of America, English Service. Washington D.C.

West Africa Report, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa. 1998-1999

Note: Some or all these news services have been used to research various sections of this Country Review.

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For items in a "Works Cited" list, CountryWatch.com suggests that users follow recommended patterns for indentation given in the *MLA Handbook*, 4th edition.

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Basic form, using an Internet protocol:

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Examples:

Youngblood-Coleman, Denise. *Country Review: France*. 2003. Houston, Texas: CountryWatch Publications, 2003. *Country Review:France*. Online. Available URL : http://www.countrywatch.com/cw_country.asp?vCOUNTRY=61 October, 12, 2003.

Note:

This is the citation format used when the print version is not used in the reference.

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Examples:

Youngblood-Coleman, Denise. "People." *CountryWatch.com: France*. 2003. Houston, Texas: CountryWatch Publications, 2003. *CountryWatch.com: France*. Online. Available URL : http://www.countrywatch.com/cw_topic.asp?vCOUNTRY=61&SECTION=SOCIAL&TOPIC=CLPEO&TYPE=TEXT. October 12, 2003.

Note:

This is the citation format used when the print version is not used in the reference.

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