

"North Korea should divert its military spending into manufacturing goods and raising agricultural productivity for the benefits of its own people and find a way to export its way out of abject poverty" writes Jin Hong, South Korean Cultural attaché in Stockholm.



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The 26th of March, 2011 marks the first anniversary of the sinking of the South Korean naval vessel, the Cheonan, which claimed the lives of 46 sailors aboard the warship and drew the global media attention to the fragile political and military conditions underlying the Korean peninsula, in almost six decades after the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement was concluded in the war-torn country.

In the wake of the tragic incident, the government of the Republic of Korea requested that an international joint civilian-military investigation team be formed and conduct an objective and scientific investigation into the case by experts from four nations, aside from South Korean experts. Sweden was one of those foreign countries, along with Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States that provided experts for the inquiry. The final report issued by the team of experts deemed North Korea culpable for the sinking of the warship and the United Nations Security Council formally condemned the sinking of the Cheonan.

In the face of the condemnation, North Korea claimed its innocence, rejecting the investigation findings outright, questioning the validity of the experts involved. However, North Korea's always bellicose rhetoric and attitude towards South Korea turned into another fatal artillery attack on Yeongpyeong Island last November, leaving two South Korean marines and two civilians dead.

North Korea's recent military brinkmanship is widely believed to be a show of strength designed to ensure a smooth transfer of the state's leadership from the Dear Leader to his hand-picked successor. However, the North Korean regime's reckless adventurism only resulted in its deepening isolation from the international community, while a majority of North Koreans are suffering from the lack of food, on the verge of being starved.

In response to the North Korean request, the Republic of Korea recently agreed to hold bilateral

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Thursday, 24 March 2011 13:46 - Last Updated Thursday, 24 March 2011 17:12

talks in the border area of Panmunjom early February, only to see the North Korean delegation stalk away from the negotiating table less than five hours after the second round of talks had begun.

North Korea's recent military brinkmanship, followed by a proposal to resume a bilateral dialogue readily fits into a predictable pattern of provocation and a gesture of peace without substance over the past six decades. The North Korean regime's strategy appears to be designed to unite its people by stoking tensions in the divided peninsula and show off its leadership on one hand and to put on a gesture of seeking peace through dialogue on the other hand.

North Korea's intention is to hold direct talks with the US government while being recognized as a "nuclear power" and to have the embargo lifted to receive food and energy supplies it desperately needs. However, North Korea would not be able to get what it aims to, unless it dramatically changes its threatening posture, including the tests on nuclear weapons, long-range missiles and declines to engage in six party talks in a meaningful manner.

Now is the time for North Korea to change its course. North Korea should divert its military spending into manufacturing goods and raising agricultural productivity for the benefits of its own people and find a way to export its way out of abject poverty. The "external threats" by the United States and the Republic of Korea cannot be used as a pretext for North Korea to exert harsh control over its population any longer.

The North Korean leadership insists that it has pursued the dream of making the country strong and prosperous and feed its people abundantly and this dream of making a prosperous nation and its people happy is shared by its southern neighbor.

The Korean government urges North Korea to join the new wave of peace and prosperity in North Asia. Nothing should stop South Korea to help out compatriots in the North, when South Korea is reaching out to many countries in poverty or in need. The North should step forward for serious and substantial dialogue and cooperation for mutual benefits and refrain from developing nuclear weapons and missiles further. At the same time, the North Korea should hold those who committed military provocations responsible and get on the path of reconciliation.

In this age, the world is changing rapidly and we cannot afford to fall behind the waves of the times, repeating the dark chapter of history. The Republic of Korea is ready to engage in another round of dialogue with North Korea anytime.

The Republic of Korea and North Korea should embark upon building mutually beneficial relations that would lead us to an eventual reunification. When that happens, one Korean nation and unified territory will serve as a pillar supporting peace and promoting common prosperity in North East Asia.

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