

INKERMAN UPDATE

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KOREAN TENSIONS – INCREASED RHETORIC OR PRECURSOR TO FORTHCOMING MILITARY ACTION?

North Korea has steadily escalated its rhetoric since February 2013, when it completed another nuclear test. Pyongyang has threatened both South Korea and the US with a nuclear attack, severed its hotline with Seoul, closed the main Panmunjom border crossing, reactivated the Yongbyon nuclear reactor site, halted entry into the Kaesong joint development area, warned that “inter-Korean relations had entered into a state of war”, and now the movement of road-mobile missile systems. It also threatened to retaliate against any provocative acts by South Korea or the US, which are currently carrying out joint military exercises on the Korean peninsula.

Russia and China have increased formal statements urging caution with Beijing instructing the Chinese People's Liberation Army to increase its military presence on the eastern border with North Korea. Japan, on the other hand, said it was “gravely concerned” with developments including, claims of pre-emptive nuclear strikes on South Korea, the US and Japan. Washington used the US Commander of forces in Korea, General James Thurman, to call for greater rationality as he claimed “any miscalculation or impulsive decision causes kinetic provocation”. South Korea's new President Park Geun hye has called for “strong retaliation” against any provocations by the North.

For North Korea, the current rise in tensions are likely not a clear cut drive to war but rather they are used to shape the perceptions of those involved in peninsular affairs, to create political tensions in and between Seoul, Washington, Beijing, Tokyo, Moscow and others. By pressuring South Korea and the US to resume talks to dismantle its nuclear programmes, resume food aid in the face of increased UN backed international sanctions, North Korea is attempting to achieve its end goal of signing a defacto peace treaty to end the Korean War which is technically on hold and in its 60th year in 2013. Pyongyang feels that if it can force another set of negotiations that will exchange a brief relaxation of tensions for economic and political concessions. This does not diminish the threat of miscalculation or an accident grows as the level of tension grows.

Potential outcomes:

- **North Korea may conduct additional missile tests** this weekend to heighten tensions on the Korean Peninsula and to force negotiations for de-escalation. Military drills or test launches on or around the birth anniversary of North Korean state founder Kim Il-sung on 15 April 2013 are other reasons for this action - **LIKELY**
- Kim Jong Un may order a **limited strike on South Korea** — as a way to actually tamp down hostilities. A repeat of the Cheonan 2010 incident is more likely than an artillery strike like the November 2010 shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, because it lessens the chance of a definite retaliatory strike by the South. However, new South Korean President Park Geun Hee is determined not to echo that weakness and has vowed a strong response to any direct provocation. That said US President Obama will restrain South Korea from a major reprisal - **LIKELY**
- **Large scale military assault** via amphibious landings or transit through the DMZ, large scale missile launch at Seoul and other centres - **UNLIKELY**

- Either North or South Korea **issues guidance to population centres of imminent threat**, advises relocation evacuation of foreign embassies. Latter occurred on 05 April 2013 after DPRK advised Russia to consider evacuating its Embassy staff in Pyongyang – **REALISED**
- **No physical action.** The situation on the Korean peninsula is getting more serious, but there are still no signs the North is changing its “military posture.” Amid all the scary-sounding rhetoric, there haven't been any detectable mobilisations of any scale within North Korea, aside from the rumoured deployment of two 2 intermediate range missiles to the eastern seaboard. It is possible that the fierce language is a reflection of internal power-plays at the start of the plenary meeting for the Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea, which began on 01 April 2013, and is expected to see important changes in economic policy announced. Kim Jong UN will use these actions to cement position as a hard man within the security nexus dominated by aging and often mistrusting generals **MOST LIKELY**

Recommendations:

- Travel to South Korea can continue as the country remains at Medium risk on our itravelSAFE service. However, travellers should closely monitor developments during their stay. Saying this if the situation changes it increases the uncertainty and likelihood that travel could be interfered with or cancelled at the last moment by the authorities.
- If any missiles were successfully launched they would most likely be fired into the sea over Japan rather than towards populated areas. A serious military assault via the DMZ or via amphibious landings on either west or eastern seaboard also remain unlikely.
- Ask question such as do company employees / ex-pats know if situation deteriorates what to do? Is there a procedure for information to be promulgated to those in country, especially detailing the company's stance? How good are your crisis management team procedures, evacuation measures and support, are they up-to-date and effective.
- Travellers are urged to not only be tracked, whilst in transit to, during and returning from country, but that their company is actively monitoring travel patterns. For example are companies which operate on GMT aware that the Korean Peninsula is GMT +8?
- Register with your embassy and comply with any instructions issued by the authorities.

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