

May 25, 2010

## **Record of North Korea's Major Conventional Provocations since 1960s**

Compiled by the Office of the Korea Chair, CSIS

Please note that the conventional provocations we listed herein only include *major* armed conflicts, military/espionage incursions, border infractions, acts of terrorism including sabotage bombings and political assassinations since the 1960s that resulted in *casualties* in order to analyze the significance of the attack on the *Cheonan* and loss of military personnel. This list excludes any North Korean verbal threats and instigation, kidnapping as well as the country's missile launches and nuclear tests.

**January 21, 1968**

### **Blue House Raid**

A North Korean armed guerrilla unit crossed the Demilitarized Zone into South Korea and, in disguise of South Korean military and civilians, attempted to infiltrate the Blue House to assassinate South Korean President Park Chung-hee. The assassination attempt was foiled, and in the process of pursuing commandos escaping back to North Korea, a significant number of South Korean police and soldiers were killed and wounded, allegedly as many as 68 and 66, respectively. Six American casualties were also reported.

**ROK Response:** All 31 North Korean infiltrators were hunted down and killed except Kim Shin-Jo. After the raid, South Korea swiftly moved to strengthen the national defense by establishing the ROK Reserve Forces and defense industry and installing iron fencing along the military demarcation line.

**January 23, 1968**

### ***USS Pueblo* Seizure**

The U.S. navy intelligence ship *Pueblo* on its mission near the coast of North Korea was captured in international waters by North Korea. Out of 83 crewmen, one died and 82 men were held prisoners for 11 months.

**U.S. Response:** The U.S. immediately dispatched its aircraft carrier near Wonsan. Bilateral talks between the U.S. and DPRK began, and negotiations finally resulted in a U.S. written apology; prior to the apology, the U.S. issued a verbal statement that the apology was made only to secure the safe returning of its soldiers. On December 23, 1968, the 82 crewmen were released.

**October 30 –  
November 2, 1968**

**Commando Incursions in Uljin and Samchuck**

Approximately 120-130 North Korean commandos secretly penetrated into the eastern region of South Korea to wage a guerilla war. The armed espionage agents raided South Korean households, coerced civilians to join the communist party and killed those who disobeyed. The incursions resulted in about 20 South Korean civilian, military and police officer casualties.

**ROK Response:** The ROK military and the police were immediately dispatched to the regions to subdue the incursions. Massive roll-back operations continued for two months. Eventually, around 110-113 agents were killed and seven were captured.

**April 15, 1969**

**EC-121 Incident**

Claiming a violation of its territorial airspace, North Korea launched its attack on an unarmed U.S. EC-121 reconnaissance plane over the East Sea. All 31 American lives were lost.

**U.S. Response:** One U.S. aircraft carrier and two destroyers were sent from Hong Kong to waters off Korea. Widespread alert of Air Force jet fighters and bombers was ordered. The U.S. lodged a formal complaint with North Korea, and President Nixon verbally rebuked the attack.

**November 15, 1974 –  
November 1978**

**Discovery of North Korean Infiltration Tunnels**

The first tunnel was discovered in 1974, reaching an estimated 1,000 meters into the DMZ. The initial discovery was met with machine gun fire. Five days later, a U.S. Navy Commander and ROK Marine Corps Major were killed in the tunnel by a North Korean explosive device. A third tunnel was discovered after a tip from a defector in November 1978. It reached 400 meters south of the DMZ and was nearly 2 kilometers from a U.S. base.

**U.S. and ROK Response:** UN Command issued a protest statement after each tunnel was discovered. The United States military formed a Tunnel Neutralization Team, equipped with tunnel-detection technologies. Following each discovery, counter-tunnels were dug at each tunnel site. South Korean forces still maintain an around-the-clock watch along the DMZ with sensitive seismic equipment.

**August 18, 1976**

**Axe Murders and Poplar Tree Incident**

In the neutral area in the JSA, a team of U.S. and ROK soldiers trimming the branches of a poplar tree for blocking visibility came under an

attack of a group of North Korean soldiers. Two U.S. army officers were killed and nine other Korean and American soldiers were also wounded. **U.S. and ROK Response:** ROK raised alert level. Three days after the incident, joint ROK-U.S. task force (involving a total of 813 men) entered the JSA and cut down the tree in question, aka Operation Paul Bunyan.

### October 9, 1983

#### **Rangoon Bombing**

North Korea made an assassination attempt against then-South Korean President Chun Doo-hwan during his visit to the Martyr's Mausoleum in Rangoon, Burma. The bomb explosion caused the deaths of 17 South Korean high ranking officials and four Burmese nationals and injured 46 others on site. The Burmese government investigation found that a North Korean special force was behind the scheme and shot down one and captured two North Korean nationals. Pyongyang denied its involvement with the bombing, and claimed in 2000 that any indication by South Korea that North Korea is connected to the bombing is "a criminal attempt to brand the North as a sponsor of terrorism."

**ROK Response:** President Chun Doo-hwan issued a statement that the bombing was "a grave provocation not unlike a declaration of war" and warned that South Korea will retaliate against the North if such provocation arises again.

**U.S. Response:** The government ordered DEFCON 3 and dispatched forces to ROK to enhance military readiness, but reportedly exhorted the South Korean government not to undertake military retaliation even if North Korea was found to be responsible.

**Response of Other Nations:** Burma broke its diplomatic relations with North Korea and deported North Korean diplomats out of the country. China's resentment about alleged North Korean involvement in the bombing brought a temporary halt to official government dialogues and meetings with DPRK.

### November 29, 1987

#### **Bombing of Korean Air Flight 858**

Two North Korean espionage agents conspired to explode a South Korean civilian airplane and the detonation of the bomb caused the killings of all 115 passengers on board. Both agents were arrested and attempted to commit a suicide. Only one of them, Kim Hyon Hui, survived and later confessed that the bombing was directly ordered by Kim Jong-il.

**ROK Response:** To prevent escalation of tensions in the face of the upcoming presidential election and the 1988 Olympics, the government chose to bring the case to the UN rather than taking military action.

Several UNSC meetings were held to discuss the responsibility of North Korea in the bombing incident, but all of them failed to pass any U.N. resolution. Kim Hyun Hui was sentenced to death in March 1989, but later pardoned by South Korean president Roh Tae-woo.

**U.S. Response:** In view of the incident as an act of terrorism, the U.S. listed North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1988.

**September 18, 1996**      **Submarine Infiltration in East Sea**

A North Korean sub crossed into ROK waters, dropping several spies off on the coast south of Gangneung with a mission to gain information about ROKAF base. Strong waves forced the crew to abandon the mission and try to return via land to the North. The man hunt lasted 53 days, with 24 of the 26 crew/spies dead. 13 ROK soldiers and 4 civilians also died. A few days later, a South Korean diplomat working in Russia was professionally assassinated.

**ROK Response:** President Kim Young-sam banned assistance to North Korea and prohibited civilian inter-Korean exchanges and business visits to North Korea. South Korea strongly condemned North Korea at the UN General Assembly and sought for international response and cooperation. Later, North Korea apologized for the incident and South Korea eventually returned the ashes of the 24 dead North Koreans at Panmunjom.

**June 15, 1999**      **First Battle of Yeonpyeong**

North Korea naval boats crossed the Northern Limit Line on several occasions between June 7-15th. The South Korean Navy conducted ramming or bumping operations to force the ships back across the NLL, sinking one torpedo boat on June 15th. Fire was exchanged, severely damaging two other North Korean boats and killing 30 North Koreans. Nine South Korean servicemen were injured and two patrol boats were slightly damaged.

**U.S. Response:** The U.S. dispatched additional forces to South Korea, including an Aegis-class cruiser, electronic warfare aircraft and antisubmarine aircraft. North Korea suspended contact with South Korea.

**June 29, 2002**      **Second Battle of Yeonpyeong**

North Korean patrol boats allegedly crossed the NLL in the Yellow Sea and opened fire on a South Korean patrol boat. This resulted in the deaths of six South Koreans and serious injury to nine South Korean sailors and the sinking of one South Korean speed boat. A North Korean vessel also caught fire and is believed to have been destroyed.

**ROK Response:** South Korean armed forces “strengthened security

preparedness.” South Korea received U.S. approval to change strategic military rules to allow its troops to strike first if threatened by intruding North Korean ships.

**November 10, 2009**

**Battle of Daecheong**

South Korean forces issued three verbal warnings to a ship from the North once it had crossed the NLL. The South Koreans then fired a warning shot, but when the North Korean vessel continued southward, the South Koreans opened fire. The North Koreans returned fire before heading back after their ship was damaged in the exchange. One North Korean sailor was killed and three wounded.

**ROK Response:** South Korean Prime Minister Chun called the incident “accidental.” The North threatened merciless retaliation. South Korea sent additional naval ships near disputed waters and put its military on heightened alert.

**March 26, 2010**

**Sinking of the Cheonan**

The ROK Navy corvette Cheonan sank in the Yellow Sea just south of the disputed Northern Limit Line near Baengnyeong Island after an explosion in the ship’s stern ripped it in two. Of the 104 South Korean sailors on board, 58 were rescued; 46 are dead or remain missing. The explosion was later determined by an international investigation to have been caused by a North Korean torpedo.

**ROK Respose:** All inter-Korean trade, save the Kaesong Industrial Complex, will be severed, and North Korean merchant vessels will be barred from using South Korean sea lanes. South Korea also will restart its propaganda campaign across the DMZ.

For a more comprehensive list of North Korean provocations, see [CRS Report for Congress: North Korean Provocative Actions, 1950-2007](#)