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## China Calls For Talks Over Korean Crisis, Parties Unresponsive

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China yesterday called for emergency direct diplomacy with North Korea in order to lower escalating tensions following last week's artillery attack on South Korea (see [GSN](#), Nov. 24).

However, the United States and its allies said now is not the time to address Pyongyang's demands for new six-party talks.

North Korea's shelling of the inhabited South Korean island of Yeonpyeong resulted in the deaths of several soldiers and civilians and injuries to nearly 20 more. The incident directly followed news from Washington that Pyongyang revealed to visiting U.S. experts earlier this month that it had covertly built a large-scale advanced uranium enrichment facility at its Yongbyon nuclear complex, the *Wall Street Journal* reported.

The two events have renewed international attention on the North Korean nuclear impasse. Beijing dispatched its senior foreign affairs official to lead a delegation to Seoul over the weekend for talks on the crisis. However, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak told the Chinese visitors that it was not the "right time" to relaunch long-stalled six-nation talks aimed at the permanent denuclearization of North Korea, according to an administration official.

The nuclear talks involve China, Japan, the two Koreas, Russia and the United States. They were last held almost two years ago. Pyongyang withdrew from the negotiations in April 2009 and one month later carried out its second nuclear weapons test, an action for which it was punished with heightened U.N. Security Council sanctions.

The North for some time has declared its willingness to return to the nuclear talks. However, Washington, Seoul and Tokyo are leery of returning to a negotiating framework that has been used by the North in the past as a means to win international concessions only to later resume work on its nuclear weapons program. The three allies have called on Pyongyang to demonstrate its "sincere" commitment to nuclear disarmament before they will agree to resume negotiations.

China is North Korea's strongest foreign ally and chief economic benefactor. Beijing's continued support of the Kim Jong Il regime is frequently cited in Washington as the only thing keeping the Stalinist government from collapsing. Because of this, China has come under growing criticism from the international community to do more to press North Korea over its belligerent behavior.

"It's hard to know why China doesn't push harder," Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in a CNN interview aired yesterday. "They clearly are interested in this -- in the region not spinning out of control -- so my sense is they try to control this guy, and I'm not sure he is controllable."

Lee yesterday told Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo in blunt remarks that China must take a "more fair and responsible position" on peninsula affairs and leave Cold War-era considerations behind, according to presidential spokesman Hong Sang-pyo.

In a television address today, Lee pledged North Korea "would pay a price" for any future hostilities and said that "more endurance and forgiveness would only result in bigger provocations" (Fairclough/Ramstad, *Wall Street Journal I*, Nov. 28).

Japan today dismissed Beijing's call for direct talks with North Korea. Japanese Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara said it would be "unacceptable for us to hold six-party talks only because North Korea has gone amok," the *Wall Street Journal* reported (Yuka Hayashi, *Wall Street Journal II*, Nov. 29).

The United States has yet to give a response to China's call for emergency talks, saying it would carry out discussions with the South Korean government first, Reuters reported.

A high-ranking Pyongyang official voiced doubts about Beijing's initiative to engage in discussions. While the North has not responded to China's call, the unidentified official told Kyodo News that countries involved in the latest incident should meet for talks first (Laurence/Choonsik, [Reuters](#), Nov. 29).

While urging that the two Koreas to refrain from actions that would raise tensions on the peninsula, China has abstained from condemning Pyongyang's shelling of the South Korean island, indicating that Beijing will refuse the urging of Washington and other states to punish the North, the *Los Angeles Times* reported last Thursday.

North Korea's presumed possession of the nuclear bomb, its large arsenal of chemical weapons and a massive standing army make a military assault on the isolated state an unattractive option, according to reports. The United States and much of the international community have already drastically curtailed trade relations with the Stalinist state. In the White House view, China remains the only nation to have sway over the North and the only hope of producing a change in the Korean nuclear impasse.

"China is pivotal to moving North Korea in a fundamentally different direction," U.S. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said.

"You can go [to] the U.N. Security Council or call for a five-party meeting (minus North Korea). But first you've got to go after China," said Victor Cha, point man for North Korean policy during the Bush administration.

"You want them to issue a statement that they strongly condemn the attack. This time, there can't be any excuses, no saying that they have to look at the facts. The U.S. needs both Russia and China to get involved in this," Cha said.

Chinese news coverage of the shelling incident has tended to back up the North Korean version of events last week where South Korean naval ships were accused of first firing on North Korean waters.

"China wants the environment to be peaceful and stable," Shanghai-based professor Ni Lexiong said. "We don't want a conflict and neither does the United States. Like parents of fighting children, we will drag them apart to keep things under control. Who fired first is meaningless" (*Los Angeles Times I*, Nov. 25).

Worries about a new outbreak of hostilities were high yesterday, with the Yonhap News Agency reporting that the North had fielded ground-to-air missiles and was preparing several launch pad systems not far from its sea boundary, the *Times* reported. Due to these concerns, news reporters and all civilians on Yeonpyeong island were ordered to evacuate.

"At this stage, it is unpredictable what kind of a provocative action North Korea will take, using the South Korean-U.S. joint drills as a justification," the South Korean Defense Ministry said in a statement (Barbara Demick, *Los Angeles Times II*, Nov. 29).

North Korea said the deaths of the civilians killed in last week's artillery attack were "regrettable," though it blamed South Korea for using the island residents as a "human shield" for its military installations, the *Journal* reported.

Pyongyang castigated the ongoing joint-maritime drills taking place between the United States and the South as "reckless war maneuvers" and threatened it would carry out a "merciless military counterattack" should its waters be violated, according to the *Journal* (Fairclough/Ramstad, *Wall Street Journal I*).

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency warned that it "would be a miscalculation if the U.S. and South Korean warlike forces attempt to astound and pressure us by deploying a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier," the *Washington Post* reported.

The *USS George Washington* aircraft carrier group is taking part in the previously scheduled naval exercises with the South. The four-day maneuvers began yesterday.

In his television address, President Lee signaled a new change in South Korea's policy toward the North.

In the past, the South did not rise to meet North Korean aggression "in the belief that one day North Korea will change, and because of our hope for peace on the Korean Peninsula," the president said.

But today, "South Koreans realize that tolerance and generosity bring more provocation," Lee said (Keith Richburg, *Washington Post*, Nov. 29).

Under the current circumstances, U.S. experts do not have high expectations that a renewal of diplomacy with North Korea would lead to its nuclear disarmament, particularly in light of its new uranium enrichment program, Voice of America reported on Thursday.

"In the end, it is becoming clearer and clearer that ... they are willing to 'rent' pieces of their program for a freeze for a few years," but not go much further than that, former Bush official Victor Cha said.

This month, former Los Alamos National Laboratory director Siegfried Hecker was given a tour by North Korean officials of the new uranium facility at Yongbyon, where he reported seeing "hundreds and hundreds" of centrifuges; he projected the facility had the potential to annually enrich enough weapon-grade material to fuel one warhead.

Pyongyang officials claimed to Hecker their uranium site was only enriching uranium to 3.5 percent. Hecker said he could not independently verify that assertion. To be used in a warhead, uranium must be enriched to about 90 percent. North Korea is currently estimated to possess enough processed plutonium for about six bombs.

"In the end they are trying to get us all to accept that they are going to be a nuclear weapons state," Cha said.

Pyongyang does not have much incentive to shutter its nuclear weapons program, according to Cato Institute senior fellow Doug Bandow.

"The reality is they [nuclear weapons] are a wonderful bargaining tool. ... Nobody would pay attention to the North without them. And especially imagine the political dynamic in Pyongyang today: Would anyone, including the Dear Leader [Kim Jong II], want to go to the military and say we are giving away your most important weapon?" Bandow asked. "My guess is that with a political transition in the offing, that is very unlikely."

U.S. National Defense University professor Balbina Hwang said she believes Washington must change its bargaining stance on North Korea's weapons.

"The problem is that if we continue to insist that North Korea has to give up everything first -- which may be morally correct -- that simply is not going to work practically," she said.

Should Washington enter into diplomacy with the North, the Obama administration must be willing to "have a very, very serious conversation amongst the United States and the allies about what it would take to actually address North Korea's security concerns," Hwang said. "Any other

type of diplomacy is frankly just a waste of time" (William Ide, **Voice of America**, Nov. 25).

Meanwhile, North Korea's state-controlled *Rodong Sinmun* newspaper asserted that the country's nuclear fusion program was on "the front line of technologies," the London *Telegraph* reported today.

Pyongyang has made claims before of unparalleled advances in nuclear fusion, though these assertions have routinely been dismissed by outside nuclear experts (**London Telegraph**, Nov. 29).