

## North Korea's Latest Provocations

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North Korea continues to disrupt the peace of Northeast Asia. The latest incidents include [the seizure of a South Korean fishing boat](#) and [firing artillery rounds into North Korean water](#) near its border with the South (on August 8 and 9, respectively). These provocations follow the blatant act of aggression in late March when a North Korean torpedo sank the South Korean naval vessel, Cheonan. Once again, Washington confronts rising tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

But that begs the question of why this should be primarily a U.S. problem. The same question could be asked concerning the persistent atmosphere of crisis surrounding North Korea's nuclear program. In a normal international system, the nations that would be most concerned about a regime's rogue behavior would be the nations in the immediate neighborhood, because they would be the most at risk. But in Northeast Asia, the United States is the designated point man. South Korea and Japan—and to a large extent China and Russia as well—look to Washington to maintain peace and resolve crises.

That's the price of being the hegemon in the region. And it is becoming an increasingly dangerous and thankless task. The United States needs to develop [a strategy to off load those security responsibilities](#) to the countries in East Asia who have the most at stake. In particular, Washington should stop encouraging the culture of dependency on the part of leaders in Tokyo and Seoul who are all too comfortable [free-riding on America's military power and security commitments](#). It's time to let the North Korean headache be their headache instead of ours.

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