

제1세션 발제문

Searching for a Peace Community in Yellow Sea: The roles to be played by two Koreas, China, and the US

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1. At least at present time, in comparison with the South China Sea and the East China Sea, the Yellow Sea is relatively calm and peaceful. There is an increasing tense geopolitical competition/conflict between the rising China and predominant US (and allied with Japan) in the South China Sea and East China Sea. So far there is not such a tense great-power relationship in the Yellow Sea.

But the Yellow Sea is far from being the sea of peace and cooperation. We have witnessed three serious military conflicts and tragic events between the North and South Korea in the beginning of this century. In 2002, as the 2002 Korea/Japan World Cup games was drawing successfully to a close, two North Korean patrol ships crossed the Northern Limit Line, or NLL, in the Yellow Sea. One of the North Korean patrol ships opened surprise fire at a ROK Navy speed boat. The naval clash resulted in the death of four ROK sailors, one missing, and 19 injured. One damaged South Korean PKM sank while being towed. From the North Korean side, one patrol ship was destroyed and the North Koreans also suffered heavy casualties as well. The ROK argued that The NLL on the Yellow Sea has functioned as a maritime boundary between South and North Korea since 1953, and has been reaffirmed via Article 11 of the South-North Basic Agreement of 1992. The act of provocation by the North

Korean patrol ships that crossed the NLL is regarded by the South as a flagrant violation of both the Military Armistice Agreement of 1953 and the South-North Basic Agreement of 1992. North Korea replied with a message specifying that "the ROK must abandon the NLL and the NLL removal issue is a priority for the North-South discussions. A more tragic confrontation between the South and North Korea in the Yellow Sea came in 2010. That was the sinking of a South Korean corvette, the Cheonan, on March 26 , 2010, with the resultant death of 46 crew members. An investigation into the incident was organized by the U.S. and included experts from the U.S., South Korea, Britain, Australia and Sweden, but not from China and Russia which both border the Korean Peninsula. On May 20 of that year, the five-nation team released a report blaming a North Korean torpedo for the sinking of the Cheonan. North Korea denied the accusation and neither Russia nor China, excluded from the investigation, have concurred with the U.S. accusation. Again, in November of 2010, the North and South militaries exchanged fires in the Yellow Sea. A North Korean vessel started shelling two days after the South fired warning shots at the North ships crossing the maritime border. Residents on Yeonpyeong island, where four people were killed in November 2010, were evacuated to bomb shelters. A North Korean navy ship fired two artillery shells in the vicinity of a South Korean warship in the disputed waters near Yeonpyeong island on Thursday, and the South Korean vessel fired several rounds back in response.

The previous conflicts in the Yellow Sea mainly came from the dispute on the NLL between the DPRK and ROK, although there were occurrences of conflicts in the Yellow Sea between Chinese fishing boats and the ROK enforcement agents. Solving the conflicts between the two Koreas is not only in the hands of the North Korea, but also in the hand of the South Korea. Therefore, in order to avoid clashes in the Yellow Sea and turn the Yellow Sea into the sea of peace and cooperation, it is necessary for the two Koreas to reach a compromise on the NLL. And before the consensus on the NLL is reached, it is important for the two sides to take any provocative action against each other. Further more, holding high-level talks at Panmunjom, as the recent talks on the detonation of a land mine, 23-25 August of 2015, is also valuable.

2. To avoid two Korea's' conflicts and ensure the peace in the Yellow Sea seems to be the shared policy goal and strategic intension of the US and China. Unlike the South China Sea and East China Sea, as mentioned above, there has been so far not a tense competition or conflict between the two countries in the Yellow Sea.

In addition, the two countries also have different strategic intentions in the Yellow Sea. As a rising power, China has been searching for the status of maritime power. 2015 China Defense White Paper for the first time officially acknowledged Chinese ambitions towards the open oceans. The Yellow Sea is very close to China's coast, therefore it is very important for the Chinese navy North Sea fleet to sail and operate to ensure China's maritime security. As the only superpower and the greatest maritime power in the world, the US wants to preserve its own supremacy over the region. To some Chinese analysts, the US has been worrying about being overtaken by a rising China in East Asia. US' pivot to Asia strategy or rebalancing to Asia strategy has been implemented by Obama administration. The military measures were concrete: put 60 percent of the navy in the Pacific, send Marines to Australia, enhance military co-operation with Singapore and especially Japan, get US troops back in the Philippines...

In the context of China's rise and US rebalance policy, the two countries might be suspicious of each other's intentions and actions in the Yellow Sea and get involved into the two Korea's' conflicts in this area. The possibility of US-China future confrontation in Yellow Sea might have a great deal to do with the two Korea's' confrontation in the Yellow Sea as the aftermath of the 2010 Cheonan incident demonstrated. At the Group of 20 (G20) summit in Toronto on June 27 of 2010, when U.S. President Barack Obama (in his own words) held a "blunt" conversation with China's President Hu Jintao, accusing him and his nation of "willful blindness" in relation to North Korea's "belligerent behavior." Upbraiding his Chinese counterpart, Obama stated, "I think there's a difference between restraint and willful blindness to consistent problems." President Hu and the Chinese government as a whole would be fully justified in suspecting that mounting U.S. threats are aimed not only (and perhaps not so much) against North Korea as against China itself. Delayed until after the United States achieved a United Nations Security Council statement on July 9 of

2010 condemning the sinking of a South Korean warship in March of 2010, Washington's plans for naval maneuvers in the Yellow Sea near Chinese territorial waters were forging ahead. Confirmation that the U.S. nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS George Washington will participate has further exacerbated concerns in China and raised alarms over American intentions not only vis-a-vis North Korea but China as well. The presence of a U.S. nuclear aircraft carrier and scores of advanced American and South Korean warplanes off the coast of China in the Yellow Sea qualitatively and precariously raised the level of brinkmanship in Northeast Asia.

3. Although China and the US are not the center players in the Yellow Sea, but they might get involved into the two Koreas' conflicts there. So the resolution of the two Koreas' conflicts, including the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, is the key to avoid confrontation between China and the US in the Yellow Sea.

In order to deal with potential conflicts between the two countries, the US and China, in the Yellow Sea, a code of conduct for the two countries' navies in the Yellow Sea is needed and should be strictly followed.

4. The suggestions for the creation of peace community in the Yellow Sea: The North and South Korea reach consensus on the NLL; China and the US support the efforts by the two Koreas for dialogues and reconciliation; appropriate management of crises in the Yellow Sea, etc.