

## Media Relations

# East Asia Researcher Available To Discuss Growing Tension Between North And South Korea

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DURHAM, N.H. – Recent increased tension on the Asian peninsula not only has endangered the security situation in Northeast Asia, but also whether reunification between North and South Korea will ever take place. The situation could push the United States to introduce more military resources into the region and encourage China to be a more dominant political player, according to Chris Reardon, associate professor of political science at the University of New Hampshire.

Reardon, who studies the elite politics of East Asia, is available to discuss the escalation of tension between North and South Korea, what this could mean for the United States and China, and the increased challenges now faced by the Obama Administration.

According to Reardon, the North Korean leadership clearly has been upset with the leadership of South Korean President Lee Myong Bak, who was elected two years ago on a more conservative platform critical of the more liberal, "Sunshine" policy. This policy was initiated in the late 1990s by former President Kim Daejung and continued by his successor, President Roh Moo-hyun in order to foster greater political, economic, and social interaction with North Korea. The hope was to effect greater efforts to peace on the Korean peninsula, and eventually engage in peace and reunification talks.

"Current South Korean policies to retaliate against the North Korean torpedoing and sinking of the South Korean navy ship, the Cheonan, are actually a continuation of stricter policies toward the North, which have included the 2009 signing of the Proliferation Security Initiative to prevent the trade of weapons of mass destruction, which was prompted by the explosion of the North Korean nuclear weapon," Reardon says.

"The sinking of the Cheonan has been put the Obama administration in a more difficult position, as the relationship between North and South Korea effectively has returned to the pre-Sunshine policy period of increased tension between the North and the South," Reardon says.

During that period, the North Koreans stormed the South Korean presidential palace (1968), hijacked a South Korean plane (1969), attempted an assassination against the South Korean president (1983), bombed a South Korean airliner (1987), and engaged in a series of naval firefights (1999, 2002). Under this scenario, the United States and the South Koreans thus should expect greater aggressive measures taken by the North Koreans.

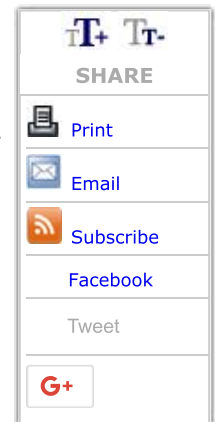
"Previous attempts from 2003 to 2007 to undertake six-party talks achieved certain success, but essentially are moribund following the North Korean refusal to participate in any future talks," Reardon says.

Instead of reviving the regional approach to addressing North Korean nuclear weapons, Reardon believes the United States will be pushed to introduce more high-tech military weaponry into the region, engage in more bilateral military exercises and provide greater military weaponry to the South Koreans. This will ramp up strategic tensions in Northeast Asia.

The United States currently has 28,000 troops in South Korea.

"In his recent decision to renege on an electoral promise to remove a U.S. airbase on Okinawa, the Japanese prime minister no doubt was very aware of the increased tension in East Asia with North Korea and the importance of the U.S. security guarantee," he says.

Yet the United States is not the only regional power concerned about North Korea. Going back to the demise of the "Sunshine Policy," the question that should be posed is whether it is in the Chinese interest to bring about reunification of North and South Korea. The Chinese continue to provide the North Koreans with vital economic aid to keep their economy afloat; like the Japanese colonial rulers of the (1910-45), China is very



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interested in North Korea's mineral wealth and geographic location. For instance, China recently signed a ten-year lease to the North Korean port of Rajin, which provides China's northeast provinces with direct access to the Sea of Japan.

"Should the tensions on the Korean peninsula increase and international embargoes imposed, North Korea will become even more dependent on the Chinese state. Such economic dependence would coincide with increased internal instability, resulting from Kim Jong-il's succession question. Such weakness could result in a decrease in North Korean sovereignty and an increased Chinese control over the North Korean state. Such loss of sovereignty would reduce chances of an eventual North-South reunification, and re-impose indirect Chinese control over the northern areas of Korea," Reardon says.

Reardon's research focuses on the elite strategies in opening China's economy to the outside world in the 1980s. He has published "The Reluctant Dragon: Crisis Cycles in Chinese Foreign Economic Policy," and translated two volumes of Chinese foreign economic policy documents. He is a research associate at the John King Fairbanks Center for East Asian Studies at Harvard University and coordinator of Asian Studies at the University of New Hampshire. He is fluent in Mandarin Chinese.

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