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**title text**

Yeonpyeong Naval Battle Revisited
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**photo**

Prime Minister Han Seung-soo speaks during a ceremony on June 29 at the Navy's Second Fleet in Pyeongtaek to commemorate the second battle with North Korea near Yeonpyeong Island.

**news**

U.S. Ambassador to South Korea James Laney called on President Kim Young-sam at Cheong Wa Dae in June 1994 when the first North Korean nuclear crisis was escalating. He told Kim that the U.S. Embassy would evacuate Americans. That evening, Kim phoned U.S. President Bill Clinton. "I had a big fight with Clinton. If not, there could have been a large-scale war," Kim said in recounting events during those tumultuous months.

At that time, North Korea, after announcing its unilateral withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), was speeding up development of nuclear weapons. The crisis ended when South Korea, the United States and other countries promised to provide light-water nuclear reactors and heavy fuel oil to Pyongyang in return for the North's freezing of nuclear programs. North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, aged 52, was healthy and full of stamina at the time.

It was just the first of North Korea's series of provocations. As part of its strategy to open dialogue with the United States and shun South Korea, the North started moves to nullify some of its agreements that ended the 1950-53 Korean War in an armistice, including respecting the northern limit line (NLL), a virtual maritime borderline between the two Koreas. On June 15, 1999, the North's provocation in the West Sea led to a major military clash.

North Korea's duplicity has become further sophisticated. One year after the naval clash, Kim "granted" President Kim Dae-jung a summit meeting. Two years after the summit, he waged the second Yeonpyeong naval battle, which occurred on June 29, 2002. The clash had been called the "West Sea Battle," but was

upgraded into the “Second Yeonpyeong Naval Battle.” Six South Korean soldiers died and another 18 suffered injuries, some of them seriously. The South Korean Navy suffered greater damage because after the first battle near Yeonpyeong Island the government changed the rules of engagement, stressing defense.

June has come again. There may be a third naval clash. North Korea is raising tension on the peninsula. It conducted a nuclear bomb test on Memorial Day, a major public holiday in the United States, which was seen as a message to the Obama administration. North Korea allowed detained American reporters to phone their families, which may have been part of an effort to open a dialogue channel with the United States. At the same time, it bolstered ammunition supplies at coastal military units. It is highly likely that North Korea will attempt a military provocation around the time of the South Korea-U.S. summit in the middle of this month.

Looking back on the series of events during the past 15 years, it is obvious that North Korea is using South Korea as a lever. They touch on our emotions under the pretext of sharing the same blood while at times piling up a huge amount of ammunition in front of us. South Korean society cannot but get lost in confusion. The problem is that the biggest damage is inflicted on the people.

Outstanding examples are those wounded during the second Yeonpyeong naval battle. Some of them still have shrapnel in their bodies because they did not receive full medical treatment and care. The state cannot maintain confidence of the people under these circumstances. National leaders must guard against a situation like this. We must clearly recognize the reality that the North Korean leadership is indifferent to co-existence with the South. North Korea exploits South Korea whenever it needs to tackle some international problems or seek its interests. It is against this background that some people believe the North is escalating tension to facilitate a third-generation dynastic succession of power.

In view of these latest developments, South Korea must stand firm if the North starts a third naval provocation near Yeonpyeong Island. The government would then receive public praise. There may be some fights inside the home but the outer walls must be protected without fail. In this context, we should pay no less respect to the soldiers who participated in the first and second Yeonpyeong battles than we do to those who perished in pro-democracy struggles. Rendering due respect and appreciation to those who firmly protected the nation’s walls – this is what the state has to do.
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