**A Chilling Warning**

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Ambassador Sin Son Ho, Permanent Representative of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (“North Korea”) to the United Nations, gave a rare press briefing at UN headquarters in New York on June 15, 2010. His subject was what he called South Korea’s “fabricated” claim that its warship Cheonan was torpedoed by North Korea’s military. He claimed that North Korea was the “victim” of a deceitful investigation. If the UN Security Council ends up taking the side of South Korea and “is again deceived by another lie,” admonished the North Korean ambassador, “the U.S. and the Security Council shall bear the full responsibility for the subsequent consequences arising there from.”

After reading a lengthy press release, Ambassador Ho responded to my question regarding North Korea’s likely response if the UN Security Council imposes additional sanctions against North Korea, or approves a resolution or Presidential Statement condemning North Korea for the torpedo attack. He warned that “Follow-up measures will be carried out by our military forces.”

When asked whether such measures might include the use of nuclear weapons, he did not directly reply except to say that, “Nuclear weapons is our deterrent.”

Ambassador Ho spent most of his time during the press conference attacking the credibility of the Joint Investigation Group, which included foreign experts, and rejecting its finding that a torpedo launched by North Korea was responsible for the sinking of the South Korean warship on March 26, 2010. He charged that the Joint Investigation Group’s procedures for selection of its members, the members’ independence and scope of authority and how the members arrived at the investigation result have been shrouded in secrecy. “If the South Korean authorities have nothing to hide,” he said, “there is no reason for them not to accept our inspection group for the verification of their ‘investigation result’.”

The North Korean envoy also questioned the reliability of South Korea’s alleged “material evidence” for the sinking of the ship by a North Korean torpedo, which included the rear part of a torpedo found by a civilian fishing boat just five days before the release of the Joint Investigation Group’s finding. “This is indeed as funny story as some kind of fiction in the Aesop’s Fables,” Ambassador Ho quipped.

Ambassador Ho stressed that, on the day of the sinking, U.S.-South Korean joint military exercises were in full swing in the vicinity with many warships engaged in anti-submarine, anti-air and marine interdiction operations. “It was inconceivable,” he claimed, “that the U.S. and South Korean warships equipped with the state-of-the-art [detection]devices failed to detect” the North Korean submarine alleged to be responsible for the torpedo launching. Under such conditions, he argued, it was doubtful that North Korea’s “small size submarine attacked the corvette ‘Cheonan’, which has anti-submarine capacity.”

Ambassador Ho accused South Korea and the United States of concocting a “farce in pursuit of their political purposes.” He claimed that the U.S. benefited the most from the sinking of the South Korean ship.

“Soon after the incident,” said Ho, “the U.S. hyped the ‘threat from North Korea’ to sound real,” using the incident to pressure Japan into accepting American demands regarding its military base in Okinawa and to justify a further build-up of American military presence in the area.

Ambassador Ho charged South Korea with exploiting the incident to evade its own responsibility for the sinking caused possibly by “self-grounding“ or “fatigue failure.“ He also charged that South Korean authorities were attempting to “drive a wedge between China and my country which have excellent relations.”

I got in touch with a spokesperson from the South Korean UN embassy to ask for a response to North Korea’s litany of charges. Other than saying that there was “nothing new regarding North Korea’s political rhetoric,” he refused to comment until his government had the opportunity to issue a formal statement.

North Korea’s UN ambassador – who quipped that he would lose his job if the Security Council took any action against North Korea in response to the sinking – was not joking when he warned:

“Our people and army will smash out aggressors with merciless counteraction if they dare to provoke us despite of (sic) our repeated demand and warnings, and build the most thriving reunified nation on the Korean peninsula.”

In contrast to the urgency with which the Security Council approved a Presidential Statement condemning Israel for the tragic events that ensued aboard one of the Turkish ships in the blockade-running Gaza flotilla, the Security Council has been proceeding very slowly since the sinking of the South Korean ship that killed 46 sailors. The current president of the Security Council, Mexico’s UN Ambassador, defended the deliberative pace – which has included an informal session with North Korea on June 14th – as necessary to maintain stability in the region.

In other words, it is perfectly alright for the UN to rush to judgment against Israel, which is a victim of perpetual terrorism, but North Korea needs to be handled with kid gloves after its chief UN diplomat threatens military aggression. Once again, we are witnessing the UN’s double-standard and appeasement in action.