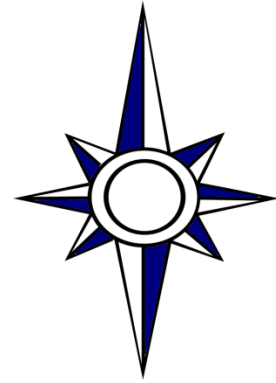


# Comparative Connections

A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations



## South Korea-North Korea Relations: Sunshine's Final Sunset? Maybe Not

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North Korea's decision to start the new year with a bang – its fourth nuclear test, carried out on Jan. 6 – guaranteed a downturn in inter-Korean ties, and in the DPRK's relations with the international community. The bad news came just in time for the last issue of *Comparative Connections*; our January headline read "Pyongyang's Bang Explodes Hope." What was not yet clear then was how severe the backlash would prove. In Seoul, Washington and elsewhere Kim Jong Un's double whammy – a successful satellite launch on Feb. 7, which also serves as a partial ballistic missile test, followed the nuclear test – was treated not as a familiar and predictable move by a still newish leader ahead of a crucial Party Congress in May, but rather as the last straw from a recidivist regime with which the world has finally run out of patience.

The usual China-US discord over tactics and wording meant it took almost two months for the UN Security Council (UNSC) to agree a new resolution and fresh sanctions. Finally adopted (unanimously, as always) on March 2, UNSCR 2270 imposed measures much more severe than any previously applied to North Korea. Meanwhile on the specifically inter-Korean front, which is our focus here, the big event was the Feb. 10 suspension – but in all probability, permanent closure – of the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC): the last surviving North-South joint venture from the "Sunshine" Era of engagement (1998-2007). Kaesong has shut before, in April 2013 when Pyongyang abruptly pulled out its 55,000 workers. On that occasion South Korea's then newly elected President, Park Geun-hye, worked patiently and successfully to mend fences, and the zone reopened five months later in September. (All this was of course fully chronicled and analyzed in *Comparative Connections* at the time.)

This time it is Park who has pulled the plug on Kaesong, as discussed in detail below. With all trade and aid now cancelled, as of May 2016 the two Koreas have no contact of any kind, but have reverted to mutual hostility comparable to the height of the Cold War. Infuriating as the North's nuclear recidivism is, it is hard to see this "back to the future" trajectory as any kind of progress. With Pyongyang's insults of Park plumbing new depths of juvenile smut, the standoff looks set to last for the remainder of her term of office, which ends Feb. 25, 2018; her successor – a second term is not permitted – will be elected on Dec. 19, 2017.

So a lengthy freeze looms – but despite current appearances, not necessarily a permanent one. Parliamentary elections on April 13 saw an unexpected rebuff for Park's conservative ruling

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Saenuri Party, which lost its majority in the National Assembly, and a striking win for South Korea's liberal opposition, even though it is currently split into two parties. This increases the center-left's chances of regaining the Blue House in late 2017, after a decade in opposition. If that happens, then from 2018 some form of outreach to Pyongyang is likely to resume, albeit probably more cautious than the full-blown engagement pursued during the "Sunshine" decade (1998-2007) by Kim Dae-jung and his successor Roh Moo-hyun. Right now it is sunset for "Sunshine" on the Peninsula, but the sun may yet rise again. Never say never in Korea.

## **KIC, RIP**

Clutching at straws, the best one can say of the current inter-Korea situation is that it has at last brought clarity to Park Geun-hye's *Nordpolitik* – which is now dead. As regular readers of this journal know, for the past three years Park had been hard to read. Her original slogan of *Trustpolitik*, and her Dresden Declaration in 2014, suggested a will to engage Pyongyang, whose fierce response from the very start of her presidency in early 2013 (nuclear and missile tests, and sabotaging Kaesong) showed how tough a task that would be, and can hardly have encouraged her. On the other hand, her new-found enthusiasm for unification – conceived as a happy contingency, rather than a partnership effort with the North – unnerved Pyongyang. It was hard to see how these disparate thrusts added up to a coherent policy or strategy.

Last year's events exemplified and amplified the uncertainty. In August, the Peninsula lurched from high tension to a seemingly positive accord – negotiated by very senior emissaries, in talks live-fed to both Park and Kim Jong-un – and family reunions resumed. Yet when the two sides met again in December they could agree on nothing, not even a date to meet again. But by then, as we now know, Kim Jong Un had already signed off on January's nuclear test.

Did Kim not realize this would be a deal-breaker with Seoul? – just as his April 2012 satellite launch (regarded by the US, and indeed the UN, as a quasi-ballistic missile test) aborted that year's Leap Day Accord with Washington. Maybe not. Only this time, the deal destroyed was nothing tentative or hypothetical, but a solid and successful already existing project with a decade of history: the last North-South joint venture still surviving from the "Sunshine" Era.

Hitherto the Kaesong zone had led a charmed life, tacitly ring-fenced by both sides from wider inter-Korean disputes; although those did stop it growing to the much larger scale originally envisaged. (By 2012 an expanded zone was slated to employ as many as 700,000 North Koreans; one can only wonder whether the DPRK labor market, or indeed polity, could ever have handled that many). Thus in May 2010, when the ROK's then president Lee Myung-bak banned all trade with and investment in the North in reprisal for the sinking of the ROKN corvette *Cheonan* that March, he exempted Kaesong. While anomalous logically – so large an exception made nonsense of the rule – this made political sense, as a tacit attempt to retain at least one last exemplar of win-win inter-Korean cooperation. Similarly, the newly elected Park Geun-hye's successful efforts in 2013 to revive the KIC after Kim Jong Un had closed it suggests that she too, at that point, shared this vision. Indeed, Seoul insisted on inserting a new clause that the zone henceforth was "not to be affected by inter-Korean situations under any circumstances." ("Second Chance for Trustpolitik?" was our headline at the [time](#).)

Notably, in 2013 Park did not treat North Korea's then recent third nuclear test as any reason to stop mending fences, much less leave the Kaesong zone shut. Why then, three years later, did she do the opposite and make a U-turn, breaking a deal she herself had crafted and taking the drastic step of closing the KIC altogether? Two reasons are plausible, while a further one proffered is implausible. Seoul initially cited fears for the safety of its citizens when it reacted to January's nuclear test by slightly restricting which of them could enter the zone. But that is hardly convincing. Were such fears serious, the South should and would have pulled everyone out – as it eventually did a month later, after North Korea's satellite launch in February.

Even then, personal safety was not the issue. The real reason seems to be that Park Geun-hye finally lost patience with “the runaway Kim Jong Un regime,” as she termed it in a Feb. 16 speech that declared “enough [is] enough.” Supposedly, the Unification Ministry (MOU) wanted less drastic action than total closure of the KIC, but was overruled by the Blue House. If that is true, then a reinforcing factor and second reason may well have been foreign pressure. Some Seoul media claimed that both the US and China pointed out the inconsistency of the ROK keeping the KIC open, while lobbying other states to cut cash flows to the DPRK.

The cash issue loomed large in explanations proffered. Both Park and Unification Minister Hong Yong-pyo claimed that Seoul's payments – 616 billion won (\$500 million) in total since the zone opened in 2004, with 132 billion won (\$107m) in 2015 alone – were going to fund nuclear and missile development. It is unclear whether this reflects any hard data or intelligence on financial flows and budgetary allocations in Pyongyang, or is just a plausible assessment of fungibility and probable virement with any cash dollar payments made to the DPRK. Most of these monies were supposedly for wages, but the KIC's 55,000 workers saw only a fraction of the sum paid to their government; how much exactly is disputed.

Few observers, probably including Kim Jong Un, had expected Park to go so far as closing Kaesong. Events then moved fast. Rather than playing hostage games, the North added its own expulsion order to the South's recall. The victims of both governments were the 124 ROK SMEs who had invested in good faith in the zone, enduring many vicissitudes over the past decade. Their owners and employees had just a few hours to stuff their cars and trucks with all the goods they could carry, [and then some](#), for the last journey home; leaving behind all their equipment and most of their inventory. The 2013 closure by the North had been a body-blow from which these firms were just starting to recover. Motivated by patriotism as well as profit, they never expected their own government to sabotage their livelihoods. Estimates of their total losses this time run as high as 2 trillion won. Compensation for the 2013 shutdown was seen as inadequate, and a similar row is shaping up this time. On May 9, the companies filed suit with the ROK Constitutional Court, claiming that the KIC's closure was illegal and violated their property rights. A favorable ruling might increase monetary compensation, but the damage is done: at least one businessman involved has attempted suicide.

On a wider canvas the Kaesong Zone is dead, and hope with it. Some analysts, including [Ruediger Frank](#) and [the present writer](#), mourned the closure as a short-sighted and retrograde step. Critics no doubt view this as sentimental, and in any case there is no going back now. Inevitably, Kaesong's demise also precipitated the unraveling of what little still remained of wider inter-Korean cooperation. The North declared the KIC a military zone – as it had been

before this small part of the front line briefly became a front door – and cut all hotlines. The South for its part ended most humanitarian aid and all civilian cooperation, both in any case very limited. All that now survives is some funding of UN health programs in the DPRK.

The ROK appeared unconcerned by collateral damage, some of it international. As previously noted in these pages, a puzzling exception to Park Geun-hye's overall refusal to lift sanctions on North Korea had been her enthusiasm to import Russian coal via the DPRK port of Rajin. Three ROK companies were encouraged to buy into a Russian-built cross-border rail link and a project to upgrade Rajin port. Trial coal shipments were sent three times during 2014-15, and the companies made two inspection visits – but seem not to have actually invested yet. Just as well, since even though Russian pressure secured this project's exemption from the latest UN sanctions, Seoul suspended it as part of its further unilateral anti-DPRK sanctions (over and above the UNSC package) announced on March 9. Moscow was not pleased. For that matter, suppose Park Geun-hye's [quixotic quest](#) in 2013-14 to attract foreign investment to Kaesong – the idea was to stop Pyongyang playing political games with the complex in future – had succeeded? (At least [two German](#) firms took a look.) In that case, could or would Seoul have killed off the KIC so summarily? But such counterfactuals are water under the bridge now.

## **Dirty bombs**

It goes without saying that cross-border tensions rose during the past four months. In reaction to January's nuclear test, South Korea resumed the loudspeaker propaganda broadcasts across the DMZ which had so riled the North last August. As noted in our last issue, not everyone thought this a great idea: British Foreign Secretary and former Defense Minister Philip Hammond, on a visit to Japan, urged Seoul to be bigger than Pyongyang and not rise to its bait. That was ignored, and at this writing the powerful speakers continue to blast away, causing headaches (literally) to those unlucky enough to live nearby. Naturally the North retaliated: switching on its own speakers, which are much less powerful. It also took a leaf from the book of defectors who regularly send propaganda into the North, carried on helium-filled balloons across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Here again the DPRK's efforts were low-grade, in several senses. At least one load failed to disperse crashing onto a parked car in the ROK city of Ilsan. The Northern leaflets were crude in message and style: calling on South Koreans to kick out Park Geun-hye, cartooned in a red bikini and trashed as “political filth.” Some consignments also contained more literal filth, including cigarette butts and even, incredibly, used toilet paper.

Filth is also the only word for the depths DPRK propaganda descended to. In the past we have sought to fully catalogue such episodes, like the sickening cartoons in 2012 of Park's predecessor Lee Myung-bak as a rat being killed in multiple ways, for the record, and in hope of shaming Pyongyang into civilized behavior. There seems no chance of that. This time the rhetoric went off the scale. Park was endlessly insulted, most inventively in a March 3 *Rodong Sinmun* diatribe headlined “Ugly Female Bat-Disgrace of Worst Traitor” (sic). Just as rabid were the menaces; these included videos showing the Blue House and Park personally in the crosshairs before being blown up, not to mention a threat to nuke Manhattan and burn it to ashes.

These paroxysms grew even more frenzied during the almost two months (most of March and all of April) when the US and ROK held, as every spring, their joint military exercises *Key Resolve*

and *Foal Eagle*. Each year the DPRK shrilly denounces these as a supposed rehearsal for invasion, and this time they had a point. In the wake of the nuclear test and satellite launch the allies decided a show of overwhelming force was required. Not only were these the largest US-ROK exercises ever, but they explicitly incorporated a recently-signed operational plan, *OPLAN 5015*, which provides that in the event of war the allies will launch precision attacks on not only the DPRK's nuclear and other bases but also its top leadership. The charmingly topical metaphor "decapitate" was bandied about in this context. No doubt the aim was to send an unambiguous warning, but this did nothing to lower tensions on the peninsula.

The North's lurid propaganda is of course two-faced: meant to scare off the enemy, but also to rally its own people around the Leader. South Korea does it less outlandishly, but the aim is the same. The time-honored but tiresome habit of parliamentarians leaking supposedly secret intelligence briefings was deployed in February, when a lawmaker of the ruling Saenuri Party claimed that the North was plotting terrorist attacks, including cyber warfare, poisoning, and kidnappings. President Park warned of the "risk of cyber-attacks, biological warfare, and new types of terrorist threat." A hit-list of top ROK officials was reported, and a prominent Northern defector in Seoul had his police guard quadrupled after death threats.

With one major exception none of this happened, nor was it ever likely. Cyber-attacks are a constant, and the ROK did suffer a brief spell of another kind of electronic warfare: jamming of Global Positioning Systems (GPS) signals, which can only have come from north of the DMZ. But the rest was far-fetched. The DPRK is capable of anything, so precautions were sensible. Yet it is hard to see why Kim Jong Un would risk reverting to terror. Some saw here a cynical bid to sway April's parliamentary elections by playing the Northern card, which in the past has often scared voters into swinging to the right. The new mood did affect what at this stage was a demoralized and divided progressive camp, many of whom expected to lose heavily in April. On March 2 the National Assembly passed *nem.con.* (the vote was 212-0) a long-stalled bill on human rights in North Korea, first tabled as long ago as 2005, after liberals stopped blocking it (their view had been that it would make inter-Korean dialogue harder). However, being chronically suspicious of handing yet more powers to the scandal-ridden National Intelligence Service (NIS), the main opposition Minjoo Party maintained its hostility to an even more delayed anti-terrorism bill, first filed in 2001 shortly after 9/11. Only after a world record eight-day Minjoo filibuster did Saenuri ram that through, also on March 2.

### **Southern voters rebuff Park**

Domestic politics *per se* are not in this journal's remit, but sometimes they impinge mightily on bilateral issues. This time that applies to both Koreas, highlighting how very differently each conducts politics. In April, Southern voters gave Park Geun-hye an unexpected slap. A month later, not unexpectedly yet very disappointingly, the North's first Party Congress for 36 years praised Kim Jong Un to the skies while offering no hint of change on any front.

For its first 12 years (1999 through 2010) *Comparative Connections* appeared quarterly. Were that still the case, writing in early April one could easily have prophesied not just sunset for sunshine, but night without end. Yet this goes to show how easy it is to mistake a moment for a movement. On April 13, as every four years, South Korea held parliamentary elections. President

Park's ruling Saenuri Party expected, and was predicted, to win. The liberal opposition, long ineffectual, had plumbed such depths of factional disarray that in December it split into two separate parties, seemingly suicidal in a first-past-the-post voting system. Saenuri thus hoped not just to retain its majority – it had held 157 out of 300 seats in the outgoing 19<sup>th</sup> National Assembly – but to increase it. There was talk of gaining a super-majority: 180 seats would have allowed Saenuri to railroad legislation, with 200 it could even change the Constitution, subject to a referendum.

Dream on. Saenuri blew its big chance with a last-minute eruption of factional strife. Several lawmakers viewed as critics of Park were deselected: they quit the party, ran as independents and retained their seats. On the day, against all opinion polls, disillusioned voters rebuffed the ruling camp and swung firmly leftward. Saenuri was reduced to 122 seats: one fewer than the 123 won by the main opposition party, whose name changes often but since the split has been Minjoo (meaning democratic: Saenuri translates as new frontier, but both choose to use the Korean words as their official Romanized names). The new breakaway People's Party gained 38 seats. With the far-left Justice Party having six, progressive parties will hold a combined 167 seats in the new 20<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, due to open on May 30.

This shocking result has far-reaching implications, both immediate and longer-term. Unable now to get her legislative program (much was already stalled) passed without opposition support, Park Geun-hye risks becoming a lame duck throughout the final third of her single five-year presidential term. Admittedly, North Korea was hardly an election issue. As everywhere, voters were more concerned with the economy, whose performance is lackluster and where Park's policy stance – as hitherto on the DPRK – has been both inconsistent and ineffective.

Looking further ahead, this result greatly improves liberals' chances of regaining the Blue House from February 2018 – provided they can reunite behind a single candidate at the next presidential elections in December 2017. If that happens, South Korea's policy toward the North will swing back toward some form or degree of engagement. How much, depends on the individual. Moon Jae-in, who ran Park a close second in 2012, still favors a return to the former "Sunshine" policy. Other Minjoo figures, as well as People's Party leader Ahn Cheol-soo, have either lost hope of Pyongyang or doubt that this is a vote-winner. But as Yonsei University's John Delury notes in a perceptive recent [article](#), no future liberal ROK president will maintain the hard line Park Geun-hye has now embraced. That may not please whoever occupies the White House from 2017, but US policymakers had better brace themselves.

### **North's Party Congress looks inward, not South**

Strictly, the Seventh Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) fell outside the period under review. Announced last October, 35 years after the Sixth Congress in 1980, this was held in early May (5-8). Yet it would be perverse to omit so important an event, which neatly bookends the first third of 2016 and was expected to provide pointers on key policy issues.

That expectation went unfulfilled. The Seventh Congress was long on loyalty to Kim's past and especially present. Kim Jong Un, thunderously cheered by the 3,400 delegates, gained a new title as chairman of the WPK. But nothing much was said about the economy, and ditto South Korea.



As ever, to avoid taking phrases out of context, we reproduce here in full the short section of Kim's three-hour report to the Congress which addressed unification issues:

The WPK aroused all the Koreans to the struggle for national reunification based on the idea and line on independent reunification and the proposal for founding the Democratic Federal Republic of Koryo initiated by Kim Il Sung.

In the crucible of the nationwide struggle for the great unity of the nation the Pan-national Alliance for Korea's Reunification was formed comprising broad patriotic forces in the north and the south and abroad, reunification events took place one after another to demonstrate the wisdom of the nation and the movement for national reunification further developed into a nationwide one.

The noble patriotic will for reunification of Kim Jong Il and his bold decision resulted in two rounds of north-south summit and the adoption of the June 15 joint declaration and the October 4 declaration, its action program, guided by the idea of By Our Nation Itself, the first of their kind in the history of national division. This was an epochal event that provided a historic milestone for independent reunification and opened up a turning phase for national reunification.

Thanks to the wise guidance of the great leaders, the cause of national reunification could advance along the orbit of national independence for decades despite the complicated situation where the separatist forces at home and abroad got all the more frantic in their moves, and the driving force of national reunification could steadily grow stronger to prevail over the anti-reunification forces.

We should consistently keep a firm hold on the three charters for national reunification which comprehensively deal with the will and requirements of all the Koreans and whose vitality was proved in practice and should pave the road for reunification.

There is naught for any South Koreans' comfort here, only a rehash of Pyongyang-centric tropes as familiar as they are unacceptable. In separately reported comments, Kim was slightly more concrete and forthcoming: he called on both Koreas to "respect and cooperate with each other as partners for unification" while ceasing hostile acts, and proposed military talks to ease tensions. Yet even this included the statutory demand for US forces to leave Korea. The ROK rejected the talks offer as insincere, absent any movement on the nuclear issue. Not all South Koreans agreed: the moderate *Korea Times* ran an [article](#) headlined "It's time to talk about dialogue with N. Korea." That seems unlikely while Park Geun-hye is president.

## **MOU counts the cost**

Again trespassing a little into the second quadrimester – but aptly, since this looks backward – on May 12 MOU published its annual White Paper, covering 2015. Three aspects are worthy of note. The number of Northern defectors reaching South Korea continues to fall: last year's total of 1,276 was the lowest for 14 years. Second, even before this year's rupture, Southern aid to the North was very low. With an optimistic spin, *Yonhap* said that in 2015 this "soared to a six-year high of 25.4 billion won (\$21.8 million)"; but that is still minuscule compared to the "Sunshine" decade (1998-2007). Third, the MOU revealed how well Kaesong was doing before Seoul abolished it. Over 1,000 extra Northern workers brought the total to 54,988, nearly as many as before 2013's temporary closure. Southern managers' cross-border commutes totaled 132,101,

an eight-year high. In 2015 the zone's output was worth a record \$563.3 million, pushing last year's inter-Korean trade (of which Kaesong since mid-2010 has been the sole component) to a record \$2.71 billion. The KIC's cumulative output in its 11 years of existence was worth \$3.23 billion. That is paltry compared to the scale of the China-Taiwan interactions that Kaesong hoped to emulate. But it was a start. Now it is finished. History will judge whether Park Geun-hye made the right move in closing it all down.

## **Chronology of North Korea-South Korea Relations January – April 2016**

**Jan. 1, 2016:** Kim Jong Un's New Year [speech](#) lays less emphasis on inter-Korean issues than last year's, and is more "finger-wagging" in tone. Mostly it focuses on domestic policy.

**Jan. 4, 2016:** *JoongAng Ilbo* [reports](#) a Red Cross survey on the 412 Southern separated family members who participated in October's reunions. 167 (40 percent) said the event left them unhappy, while 100 reported emotional distress such as depression and insomnia.

**Jan. 6, 2016:** Denouncing the North's nuclear test, South Korea [vows](#) close cooperation with allies and the global community to punish this.

**Jan. 7, 2016:** MOU [says](#) it will restrict ROK entry into the KIC to business persons directly invested there. It is unclear how far this is actually implemented, at first.

**Jan. 7, 2016:** Calling the North's nuclear test a "grave violation" of the Aug. 25 inter-Korean agreement, Cho Tae-yong, deputy chief of national security in the ROK presidential office, [says](#) the South will resume propaganda broadcasts across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

**Jan. 7, 2016:** Won Yoo-chul, floor leader of the ROK's ruling conservative Saenuri Party, [says](#) South Korea should consider creating its own nuclear potential for self-defense.

**Jan. 8, 2016:** South Korea marks Kim Jong Un's 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday by switching on its propaganda loudspeakers along the DMZ. The ROK's liberal main opposition Minjoo party [warns](#) that this may raise tensions and stoke uncertainty. North Korea denounces the move as a provocation and activates its own south-facing speakers, which are less powerful.

**Jan. 8, 2016:** The North's *Korean Central Broadcasting Station (KCBS)* TV airs images of Kim Jong Un giving field guidance during an ejection test of a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) supposedly conducted on Dec. 21 in the East Sea.

**Jan. 10, 2016:** *Yonhap* [reports](#) ROK Defense Minister Han Min-koo as telling Army Missile Command commanders during a field inspection the previous day that "If the enemy provokes, retaliate speedily and accurately without hesitation."



**Jan. 10, 2016:** *KCNA* reports Kim Jong Un as [visiting](#) the Ministry of People’s Armed Forces (MPAF). Offering New Year congratulations on the “H-bomb” test, Kim also “informed them of the complicated situation which the Korean revolution is now facing.”

**Jan. 10, 2016:** A US [B-52 Stratofortress](#) strategic bomber flies low over [Osan](#) Air Force Base south of Seoul, accompanied by ROK *F-15* and US *F-16* fighters, in a show of force also described as a training mission. The *B-52* later returns to Andersen Air Force Base in Guam.

**Jan. 11, 2016:** MOU [says](#) that from Jan. 12 it will restrict South Koreans’ staying in the KIC to those directly running businesses there. Contractors must go in and out the same day.

**Jan. 13, 2016:** North Korea [sends](#) leaflets by balloon across the DMZ. As reproduced by the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) – arguably in breach of the National Security Law – these call on South Koreans to “knock out the Park Geun-hye gang” and end psy-war broadcasts.

**Jan. 13, 2016:** ROK JCS [says](#) a small DPRK drone briefly crossed the Military Demarcation Line (MDL), retreating when the ROK military fired some 20 warning shots.

**Jan. 16, 2016:** A bundle of North Korean leaflets, which fail to separate, [crashes](#) onto a car parked in Ilsan near the DMZ, seriously denting its roof.

**Jan. 23-29, 2016:** Commenting on recent South Korean diplomacy, notably the accord with Japan on comfort women and popular opposition thereto, DPRK media [opine](#) that “the current crisis in South Korea is an inevitable product of sycophantic and treacherous politics.”

**Jan. 26, 2016:** MOU [says](#) it suspects North Korea is behind recent cyber-attacks on Southern targets. No details are given.

**Feb. 2, 2016:** Seoul press reports [quote](#) ROK police and military sources as claiming that the cargo of some recent North Korean propaganda balloons found in the South includes “lots of filth difficult to describe in words,” such as cigarette butts, daily waste and used toilet paper.

**Feb. 7, 2016:** Pyongyang announces the successful launch and placing in orbit of a [satellite](#). South Korea, the US, the UN and others [condemn](#) this as a violation of UNSC prohibitions on the DPRK engaging in ballistic missile-related activities.

**Feb. 9, 2016:** In the wake of the DPRK rocket launch, Seoul and Washington [say](#) they will start talks on deploying the US Terminal High Altitude Aerial Defense (THAAD) anti-missile system in South Korea. The ROK had long hesitated, due to strong Chinese opposition.

**Feb. 10, 2016:** In retaliation for the DPRK’s nuclear test and satellite launch/missile test, the ROK government [orders](#) the “[complete shutdown](#)” of the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC).

**Feb. 11, 2016:** Pyongyang [orders](#) all South Koreans out of the KIC by 5pm, saying it will “completely freeze all [their] assets including equipment, materials and products.” It also designates the area as a military zone, and says it will sever all inter-Korean [hotlines](#).

**Feb. 12, 2016:** Press reports claim that [pressure](#) from abroad (specifically, the US and China) prompted Seoul to shut down the Kaesong zone. MOU reportedly pleaded for [less drastic](#) measures than total closure, but was overruled by the Blue House.

**Feb. 12, 2016:** A survey [reports](#) South Koreans as divided by age over the KIC's shutdown. Younger citizens mostly oppose this, whereas their elders tend to approve.

**Feb. 12, 2016:** In an [editorial](#) headlined "A mute President," the *Korea JoongAng Daily*, a leading center-right Seoul daily, calls on Park Geun-hye to explain the closure of the KIC: "The commander-in-chief must speak up in times of crisis."

**Feb. 15, 2016:** Despite government [pledges](#) to ease the losses of ROK investors at Kaesong, press headlines [claim](#) its closure means "financial loss and ruin" for the companies concerned.

**Feb. 16, 2016:** Finally addressing the National Assembly (on Kim Jong Il's birthday), President Park [attacks](#) "the runaway Kim Jong Un regime" for its "countless provocations ... We can no longer afford to be pushed around by North Korea's deceit and intimidation."

**Feb. 17, 2016:** Four *F-22 Raptors*, the world's most advanced fighter, arrive at Osan Air Base from Kadena in Japan. One headline [reads](#): "*US F-22 Raptors* deployed to rattle Pyongyang".

**Feb. 18, 2016:** MOU [announces](#) the suspension of almost all ROK financial aid to the DPRK.

**Feb. 18, 2016:** *Voice of America* [headlines](#) that the upcoming joint US-ROK military drills *Key Resolve* and *Foal Eagle* will be the largest ever held.

**Feb. 18, 2016:** Briefed by the National Intelligence Service (NIS), Lee Chul-woo, a lawmaker of the ruling Saenuri Party, [claims](#) Kim Jong Un is preparing terror attacks on the South: "The North can inflict damage on ... activists, defectors and government officials ... It could target public facilities and key infrastructure, including subways, shopping malls and power stations."

**Feb. 19, 2016:** President Park [warns](#) a meeting of mayors and provincial governors at the Blue House of the threat from North Korea: "New types of threats such as terror (attacks), cyberattacks or biological weapons could occur anywhere."

**Feb. 19, 2016:** South Koreans continue to debate the Kaesong closure, with critics querying the ROK government's case and numbers; for example in the left-leaning *Hankyoreh daily*.

**Feb. 19, 2016:** Minister of Strategy and Finance Yoo Il-ho [insists](#) the KIC's closure will not impact the wider ROK economy – it accounted for just 0.04 percent of GDP – nor its credit [ratings](#). Moody's had called the closure "credit negative" for South Korea due to heightened geopolitical risks, but left the country's rating unchanged.

**Feb. 19, 2016:** The NIS [warns](#) that the DPRK may target ROK officials for assassination. A prominent North Korean [defector](#) in the South has his security detail quadrupled.

**Feb. 29, 2016:** *Voice of America* highlights the plight of companies that had invested in the KIC, under the [headline](#) “Sanctions on North Korea Hurting Businesses in South Korea.”

**March 2, 2016:** UN Security Council (UNSC) [passes](#) a unanimous resolution condemning the DPRK’s January nuclear test and its February missile test. Resolution 2270 includes sanctions much stronger than any previously levied on the DPRK.

**March 2, 2016:** The ROK National Assembly passes two bills, both originally tabled years before, after an 8-day [filibuster](#) (a world record) by the liberal Minjoo opposition party, which however fails to stop the ruling conservative Saenuri Party passing an anti-terrorism bill. But the opposition accepts a law on human rights in North Korea, which passes by 212-0.

**March 3, 2016:** ROK Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se [exults](#) at the new UNSC sanctions on the DPRK; calling them “full-scale,” “super-strong,” and set to “bring about ‘bone-numbing’ outcomes that the North Korean government couldn’t ever imagine in the past.”

**March 3, 2016:** Pyongyang papers [publish](#), then widely comment on, an article about Park Geun-hye headlined “Ugly Female Bat-Disgrace of Worst Traitor” (sic). This also calls the ROK President “a tailless bitch.” Much similar venom fills DPRK media for several weeks.

**March 6, 2016:** The ROK-US Combined Forces Command (CFC) [announces](#) the start of the usual pair of annual joint military exercises next day. *Key Resolve* finishes on March 18, while the much larger *Foal Eagle* continues through April 30.

**March 8, 2016:** The ROK and US [begin](#) formal talks on THAAD deployment.

**March 8, 2016:** South Korea’s NIS [claims](#) Pyongyang recently hacked into the smartphones of some 50 senior defense-related ROK officials, using text messages to try to lure them into following links to malicious software.

**March 9, 2016:** South Korea [imposes](#) its own unilateral sanctions against North Korea. It also [suspends](#) a logistics project to import Russian coal via the DPRK’s Rajin port. Seoul further instructs South Koreans not to patronize DPRK-owned restaurants in third countries.

**March 12, 2016:** *AP* [reports](#) that ongoing US-ROK military exercises include rehearsing scenarios for “decapitation strikes” to take out the top DPRK leadership in the event of war. Pyongyang’s response to such menacing *lèse-majesté* is predictably apoplectic.

**March 16, 2016:** Some 1,100 former KIC investors and sub-contractors [rally](#) at the Imjingak Mangbaedan Altar in Paju near the DMZ, demanding a special law to compensate them.

**March 17, 2016:** MOU [rejects](#) any special law compensation for KIC investors, saying this might cause “unnecessary disputes.” One KIC company owner, Choi Jae-ho, angrily retorts: “Do we really have to burn ourselves to death with gasoline to make changes?”

**March 26, 2016:** In just one of many such threats, DPRK media [report](#) a statement by the long-range artillery forces of the frontline large combined units of the Korean People's Army (KPA). Criticizing a South Korean precision strike drill, this threatens that "If Park does not make an official apology, North Korea will take military actions to blow up Cheongwadae."

**March 31, 2016:** *NKNews* [reports](#) that a former Kaesong investor attempted suicide with an overdose of sleeping pills. He was found by his daughter, hospitalized and later discharged.

**April 1, 2016:** South Korea [reports](#) that Global Positional System (GPS) signals north and west of Seoul are being jammed from five locations in North Korea. Pyongyang denies any responsibility. This continues for a week, affecting the signal reception of over 1,000 aircraft and 700 ships. No accidents are reported, but many fishing vessels have to return to port.

**April 8, 2016:** In the largest group defection in years, MOU [reveals](#) the arrival in Seoul a day earlier of 13 North Koreans: apparently most of the staff (12 waitresses and a male manager) from an overseas DPRK restaurant, soon revealed to be the Ryugyong in Ningbo, China.

**April 12, 2016:** China's Foreign Ministry [says](#) the Ningbo 13 all carried valid passports and left the PRC legally. Most defectors enter China illegally, and if caught are repatriated. The legalities aside, Beijing is seen as sending a signal to Pyongyang.

**April 12, 2016:** North Korea [claims](#) the Ningbo group are victims of a "hideous" abduction plot by the ROK. It continues to repeat this claim and demand their return.

**April 13, 2016:** South Korea holds parliamentary elections for the 20<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, whose four-year term commences on May 30. President Park's ruling conservative Saenuri Party unexpectedly [loses](#) its majority, while both parties in the split liberal opposition do well.

**April 21, 2016:** North Korea's Ministry of Land and Environmental Protection [denounces](#) a Southern defector group for sending balloons across the DMZ carrying anti-DPRK leaflets.

**April 30, 2016:** *Foal Eagle* ends. Pyongyang's rhetoric starts to wind down, slightly.

**May 1, 2016:** A month after the latest bout of GPS jamming blamed on North Korea, South Korea [says](#) it will revive a plan to develop a backup system less vulnerable to interference.

**May 2, 2016:** MOU [says](#) South Korea is "on alert for the possibility that the North may try to abduct our citizens or conduct terrorist acts abroad," in reprisal for the defection (which Pyongyang claims is an abduction) of its 13 restaurant workers from China.

**May 6-9, 2016:** Seventh Congress of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) is held in Pyongyang: the first such of its kind since the Sixth Congress in 1980. Kim Jong Un gets a new title as WPK Chairman: he gives a three hour work report, as well as opening and closing speeches. A grand parade follows the Congress.