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## **The North Korean Security Threat: An Historical Context and Current Policy Options**

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**Abstract:** *Predictably, North Korea's shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010 following its admission it had built a new nuclear facility, created a great deal of consternation among the international community. Much of the commentary in the aftermath of these events, as with the sinking of the Cheonan in March 2010 and North Korea's nuclear tests in May 2009 and October 2006, focussed on the security threat posed by Pyongyang and its potentially destabilising impact, especially in the Northeast Asian region. Since the first North Korean nuclear crisis in 1994, commentaries on the security threat from Pyongyang have, understandably, almost solely concentrated on the regime's pursuit of a nuclear capability. This article analyses the actual nature of the overall North Korean security threat, emphasising its multifaceted components –conventional, terrorist and nuclear – and argues that the danger from Pyongyang is problematic. The article also appraises the historical context of the North Korean security threat and the viability of some of the policy options available to the international community in dealing with North Korea. The article argues that there are no good or easy options in dealing with Pyongyang. All of the possibilities discussed here involve serious risks and none guarantee success. Nevertheless, the article argues that the international community must continue attempts to engage Pyongyang and cannot dismiss the option of accepting a nuclear North Korea. This may offer the best prospect of breaking the intractability that has characterised most of the historical dealings between the regime and the key powers whose interests converge on the Korean peninsula – the US, China, South Korea, Russia and Japan.*