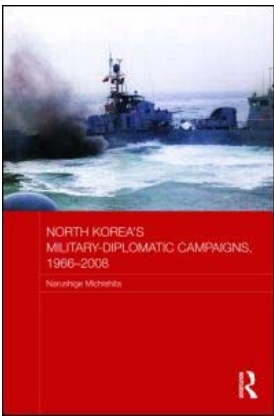


North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns, 1966-2008

By [Narushige Michishita](#)

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Description	Reviews	Contents	Author Bio	Subjects
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"In North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns, 1966-2008, Dr. Narushige Michishita provides a unique, refreshing and extremely well researched study of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) idiosyncratic military/political strategies and doctrines. . . . Dr. Michishita's book is **highly recommended to both the serious student of the DPRK and the general reader interested in gaining a better understanding of this dangerous and volatile nation.**" - Joseph S. Bermudez, Jr., author of *The Armed Forces of North Korea* and *A History of Ballistic Missile Development in the DPRK*

"Michishita dissects four decades of North Korean military adventurism to demonstrate Pyongyang's consistent and calculated use of military tools to advance strategic objectives vis-à-vis its adversaries. Rather than being irrational or unpredictable, North Korea emerges in these pages as a proactive but no less dangerous actor in the international system. **Michishita's scholarship is compelling and important.**"- Michael J. Green, Former Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Senior Director for Asia, National Security Council

"It is **an excellent, comprehensive and important addition to the literature** on North Korean policies and actions. It sheds new light on many disputed episodes, to the benefit of scholars, journalists and interested citizens." - Don Oberdorfer, a Distinguished Journalist in Residence at Johns Hopkins University's Nitze School of Advanced International Studies and the author of *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*

"Thinking that a second Korean War is all but improbable, we are often guilty of downplaying North Korea's military activities. Fortunately, Narushige Michishita has undertaken a comprehensive study of Pyongyang's military-diplomatic campaigns, providing the analysis and linkage to North Korea's overall foreign policy objectives. The **case studies he cites are rich with detail and provide the critical element in understanding what otherwise might appear as random, unconnected acts of military adventurism by Pyongyang.** Michishita's North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns, 1966-2008 is **a valuable resource negotiators and scholars alike should have.**" - Charles L. (Jack) Pritchard, former ambassador and special envoy for negotiations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the author of *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb*

"This is a worthwhile chronicle of North Korea's military and diplomatic efforts since the mid-1960s, in which Michishita carefully documents a variety of crises generated by North Korea... Summing Up: Recommended. Graduate, research, and professional collections." - *C. Pottholm II, CHOICE (July 2010)*

Features -North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns, 1966-2008

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Every time the nuclear stand-off with North Korea flares up one can expect to see the usual suspects attempt to interpret the often provocative actions of Kim Jong-Il's regime. These interpretations generally range from dire predictions of the imminent collapse of the state (which have been reappearing every six months or so for the past twenty years) to attributing the DPRK's actions to the barbaric nature of the North Korean government. It is much rarer that we are presented with a rigorous analysis of North Korea's tactics that can actually help us understand the DPRK and its strategic goals. Michishita's *North Korea's Military Diplomatic Campaigns, 1966-2008* is one of these rare treasures.

Michishita tracks North Korea's military/diplomatic campaigns from the early intrusions and assaults along the DMZ in the 1960s to the current round of nuclear bargaining over the DPRK's nuclear programme. Michishita looks at these provocations in terms of the strategic goals of the North Korean state and explores how the tactics employed in these offensives advanced or undercut those objectives. He finds that 'North Korean skill in using military force in conjunction with diplomatic action has become more sophisticated over time'"(p. 192) even if the tactical co-ordination of those activities often produced 'negative mid- to long-term repercussions' that left the DPRK further away from its strategic goals than when it started.

My only critique of this book is that the argument tends to downplay the domestic significance of many of these events with the suggestion that 'domestic political objectives... have been of secondary importance' (p. 195). While the degree to which military planning in the DPRK addresses the needs of the state to maintain domestic legitimacy is not clear, it is a driver of some of the country's campaigns. Missile launches for example have often been timed to coincide with significant anniversaries in the history of the state. The first North Korean nuclear test was conducted on 8 October 2006, one day before the anniversary of the founding of the Korean Workers' Party and one day after the anniversary of Kim Jong-Il's inauguration as General Secretary. The domestic message was very clear: long live the Leader, long live the state, and long live the bomb. It is very hard to definitively demonstrate that the need for domestic legitimacy

was not the primary motivator of these military-diplomatic campaigns. These concerns clearly played an important role.

Thinking of the calculated diplomatic gain that these military actions might seek provides a very interesting way of thinking about the current, unresolved stand-off between the US and the DPRK. In particular, the chapter on DPRK escalation leading up to the Battle of Yeongpyeong is particularly relevant to the current investigation over the sinking of the *Cheonan*. The author notes that North Korea has so few cards to play that it cannot hope to surrender them unless its maximal, end-stage goals are on the table, otherwise the country will be left with ‘no effective policy leverage’ (p. 197) to barter for diplomatic or economic gain. On the other hand the implication is that North Korea is looking for some quid for its nuclear quo. So while the DPRK is not going to be easily dealt with, it is looking for a deal, even if its “‘hort-term success could turn into mid- to long-term disadvantages’ (p. 197).

Finally, Michishita notes that, when it comes to this round of negotiations with North Korea, we have seen all of these tactics before. As he notes, ‘since the 1990s, North Korea has started to recycle old tricks’ (p. 192). North Korea’s calculated missile launches, nuclear programs, and clashes at sea are not new activities for the North. Does this recycling of provocations, no matter how deadly they are even as a rerun, indicate that the North is running out of options to keep itself afloat? The implication is that while North Korea is highly unconventional in timing it does follow a somewhat predictable cycle of escalation and negotiation. If more attention is paid to this cycle and less to reading tea leaves in Pyongyang, a resolution to the nuclear crisis may not be so hard to arrive at.