March 5th saw the launch of four ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan at the hands of North Korea. Of the four launched, three landed within the exclusive economic zone of Japan. Having launched similar misses only a month prior, the time in between tests is rapidly decreasing.

It is speculated that the launch was a result of joint military exercises between South Korea and the United States.

Acting President of South Korea Hwang Kyo-ahn stated that the launches were a direct challenge to the international community, and a grave violation of international law.

The United States have remained adamant in their willingness to use all force necessary to combat the growing threat of North Korea. China, while condemning the launches, noted the US-South Korea exercises, and called for all parties to use restraint to avoid escalating tensions.

The missile tests are directly in violation of multiple U.N Security Council Resolutions, most recently 2270, and 2094.

South Korea is now offering a reward of roughly $850,000 for defectors from the North who are willing to share information that will help enhance security.

Recent intelligence reports from the United States suggest that North Korea will soon undertake a new round of testing. The movement of equipment associated with ICBM launches, as well as new signs of digging and tunnel activity at previously monitored test sites all indicate the likelihood of an impending test. During his overseas trip to Asia, United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerman highlighted the fact that previous negotiations to denuclearize North Korea have failed. Other US official
China plans to build the first permanent structure on one of the more disputed territories in the South China Sea on the Scarborough Shoal. Preparations are underway to build an environmental monitoring station on the shoal. This particular area is contested between China, Taiwan, and the Philippines whilst being occupied and administered by China since 2012. Such a move is likely to renew concerns over China’s persistent assertions of its claims over the strategic waterways.

A top priority for the Chinese government in 2017 is to facilitate preparatory work on the Scarborough Shoal’s station as well as other stations on the other five islands in the South China Sea. The monitoring stations, in addition to docks and other infrastructure, are under the island restoration and erosion prevention efforts on the government’s agenda. However, Scarborough has no proper land mass and any structure on it would likely have to be built on stilts.

Prior to this announcement tensions regarding the South China Sea had slightly eased since the arbitration tribunal ruled in favor of the Philippines. This ruling invalidated China’s vast claims on the waterways as well as stated that China violated the rights of the Filipinos to fish at the Scarborough Shoal. Since then, China has allowed Filipino fishermen to return to the shoal, despite not recognizing the tribunal’s ruling as valid as they have historic claims to most of the South China Sea. Such moves by China has drawn the criticism from some of the international community, who consider the country to blame for further exacerbating the situation by increasingly militarizing the region and adjusting geography to support its claims. The U.S. has warned China against their quest for land reclamation work in the area, as it has been known to do in other parts of the region. Also, some U.S. senators have introduced a bill that would impose sanctions on the Chinese activity in the region if their actions persist. In addition, The Philippines which have previously fought China’s claim to the shoal extensively, are wavering in their opposition to China in the recent months. The country with previously close ties to Washington and sought closer ties with China. It is possible that the dispute over the shoal could be overlooked in lieu of strengthening the Filipino-Chinese economic and trade relationship. It seems as if they are pursuing more diplo-

Special points of interest:
• How can issues of overlapping sovereignty be addressed by the council?
• How will the council address the militarization of the region, especially in regards to preventing future conflict?
• How will resources be allocated within the region?
• What role will other parties, such as the U.S. and ASEAN have?
• How will the council address China’s increased aggression in the region?

Sources: