FROM ONE COLD WAR TO ANOTHER – THE ROLE OF KOREA

Lee Myung-bak, Cheonan, and the New Cold War

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Outline

- Framework – Global and regional
- Lee Myung-bak’s *nordpolitik*
- To the brink of war
- Back from the brink
- The New Cold War
Korean peninsula is a link between (1st) Cold War and New Cold War

1950 – Korean War kickstarted Cold War
  - Impetus for remilitarisation of US

Cold War reaction to period of instability
  - Major powers strengthen-
    - Military
    - Alliances

To protect/extend zone of control
Cold War>>> New Cold War

- Collapse of Soviet Union >> end of Cold War
- Period of unchallenged US hegemony
- ‘Peace dividend’ limited
- US
  - Soon increased military expenditure
  - Sought to extend zone of control
    - Destruction of Yugoslavia
    - Extension of NATO/(EU) to east
    - Invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya...
Creation/Reactivation of alliances
Increased military expenditure
Firmer line against US
  - Veto of Syria motion in UNSC
Korean peninsula important component
Differences between CW and NCW

- Rise of China
- Loss of coherent ideologies
  - No longer struggle between capitalism and socialism
Regional framework - Six Party Talks

- Bring together the main protagonists
- China (host), US, ROK, DPRK, Russia, Japan
- Examine positions and policies
Japan

- Can be discounted
- Dean Acheson: Britain has lost an empire, not yet found a role
  - Even more apposite for Japan
- Not grown out of its client relationship with its conqueror
- Scarcely plays an independent role commensurate with economic power
- Two aspects to foreign policy
Japanese foreign policy

- Lurching down road of confrontation with China
- Remilitarisation – becoming a ‘normal state’
- ‘North Korean threat’ plays important role
- In terms of Korean peninsula plays role of spoiler
  - Does not want peace
  - Does not want unified Korea
China and Russia

- Both want stability on Korean peninsula
  - Fear war and tension
- Neither want to give US excuse, pretext for conflict during
  - Russian resurgence
  - Chinese ‘peaceful’ rise
- South Korea is much more important economically
- But, differences between them
Differences between China and Russia

- **Locus of conflict**
  - China – close to capital, northern part of industrial heartland
    - Already substantial Korean population in Dongbei
    - Fear of irredentism?
  - Russia – far from power heartland
- Korea is more important to China than Russia
- China has more leverage over both Koreas
DPRK

- Small, weak, vulnerable
- Seeks survival rather than aggrandisement
- Primary objective is peaceful coexistence with US (and Japan)
  - Removal of military threat, lifting of sanctions, freedom to trade and attract FDI
- Friendly relations with US (and Japan) to counterbalance China
- Good relations with ROK
- No pretext/opportunity for invasion
  - No ‘provocations’
  - No display of weakness
Very difficult to analyse foreign policy

- Privileges the domestic, especially as elections approach
- Large, invulnerable, lots of options and challenges
  - Dissensions with elite

- Policy towards Korea?
US Korean policy

- Emotion
  - First war US did not win
  - 60 years of hostile propaganda
    - Racism – good niggers and bad niggers

- Global strategy
  - DPRK nuclear weapons red herring
  - Fear of setting ‘bad example’
    - Empires do not willingly concede equality (peaceful coexistence) to small countries
  - Looks at DPRK and sees China
China factor in US Korean policy

- US seeks to contain China partly through alliances
  - India, Australia....
- Japan and ROK are the core
  - US troops
  - Economic might
  - Military might
    - Military expenditure: Japan + ROK > China
- DPRK which can be portrayed as a threat is essential glue
Republic of Korea

- US client state
  - Clients can capture hegemon’s policy
- Created (militarily and economically) by US
- US still has wartime command over ROK military (OPCON)
  - For technical reasons (interoperability, logistics, intelligence) ROK military cannot operate independently of US
  - Cf DRPK – much weaker, but independent
- Ambivalent attitude towards North
  - Brothers and enemies
Lee Myung-bak’s ‘nordpolitik’

- Kim Dae-jung, Roh Moo-hyun
  - Engagement, ‘Sunshine policy’
- Lee (Feb 2008) hardline policy
- Ostensibly to produce change in DPRK policy (‘grand bargain’)
- Reality three assumptions
  - DPRK near to collapse
  - Crisis would precipitate collapse
  - Collapse would give ROK opportunity for invasion/takeover of DPRK
Tours to Kumgangsan suspended
  - Important money earner for North, potent symbol of Korean unity
  - Plan to create ‘zone of peace’ in West Sea dumped
    - Roh Moo-hyun and Kim Jong Il summit October 2007
Northern Limit Line

- Unilaterally established by US in 1953 to stop Syngman Rhee reigniting fighting after Armistice
- Not accepted by DPRK (MDL)
- No standing in international law
- NLL where majority of N-S clashes take place
The South and the North designate the common fishery zone in order to prevent accidental clashes in the West Sea. Both sides will hold Defense Ministers' talks in Pyongyang November this year in order to discuss military confidence-building measures, including methods to foster the aforementioned zone into a zone of peace, as well as military assurance measures for various cooperative projects.
The South and the North will establish "The West Sea Special Zone for Peace and Cooperation" encompassing Haeju area and its adjoining waters, and actively seek the designation of a common fishery zone and peace zone, construction of special economic zone, and utilization of the Haeju port, direct passage of civilian vessels to Haeju, and joint utilization of the Han River estuary.
Lee BM and NLL

- Scraps ‘Zone of Peace’
- Reiterates NLL is the border
- NLL is where both Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents take place
ROKS Cheonan sank 26 March 2010 in the West Sea, claiming 46 lives while massive US/ROK military exercises were taking place in the vicinity.
Sinking and its context

- Cause uncertain and contested
- Important to understand it within its context
- Two aspects now – others later
  - Military exercises
  - Location
US/ROK Military exercises
ROK corvettes on patrol
Anti-submarine warfare
Amphibious invasion exercises
Amphibious invasion exercises
Amphibious invasion exercises
Cheonan sinking
The investigation (s)

- ROK military
- Russian navy
- Innumerable dissections
  - National Defence Commission (DPRK)
  - Korean scientists in North America
  - Civil groups in ROK
  - Cyberworld........
ROK military

- Officially Civilian-Military Joint Investigation Group (JIG)
- Token civilians
  - One (Shin Sang-cheol) expelled for dissent
- Also billed as ‘international’/‘multinational’
  - US, Australia, UK, Sweden
  - China and Russia not invited
  - DPRK requests refused
Serial Number of Torpedo Traced to N.Korea

Investigators have found at the 11th hour found a desperately needed smoking gun linking North Korea to the sinking of the Navy corvette Cheonan, a government official claimed Tuesday. Investigators apparently discovered a propeller from the torpedo that likely sank the ship in relatively good condition in waters where it sank and the serial number handwritten on it is North Korean.
Investigation Result on the Sinking of ROKS "Cheonan"

THU. 20 MAY, 2010

The Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group
Verdict

Based on all such relevant facts and classified analysis, we have reached the clear conclusion that ROKS "Cheonan" was sunk as the result of an external underwater explosion caused by a torpedo made in North Korea. The evidence points overwhelmingly to the conclusion that the torpedo was fired by a North Korean submarine. There is no other plausible explanation.
Final report - September

Russian investigation

- Not invited to original investigation
  - Subsequently to review the evidence compiled by ROK military
    The invitation of Russian and Chinese experts into the team of foreign investigators should have been done from the outset. It was strange to see the investigation team composed only of ROK’s allies (US, Australia, Canada, UK and neutral Sweden). This can only be explained by the sensitivity of joint ROK-US military and naval exercises which were going on in the area where Cheonan sank.

  Now, two months after the incident, inviting Russian experts does not make much sense because they will get access only to the second-hand evidence and convenient answers rather than the crime scene. I doubt that they will be allowed to inspect the incident site and examine the seabed as thoroughly as it was done by their predecessors


- Russia has big debt with ROK
  - Lee Myung-bak thought it a safe way to add credibility
A group of Russian Navy experts visited the Republic of Korea from May 30 to June 7, 2010, reviewed the ROK sponsored Joint Investigation Group (JIG) report and collected material necessary for analysis and experiments.
Frequent reports in South Korean press that Russian investigation ‘inconclusive’

Russian report not published

- Copies to China and US, but not to either Korea
- Why was it not published?
- Was it saying something more than ‘not proven’?
Former CIA operative, Bush Sr ambassador to ROK, Chairman of the Korea Society:

- South Korea has not officially referred to the Russian conclusions. When I asked a well-placed Russian friend why the report has not been made public, he replied, “Because it would do much political damage to President Lee Myung-bak and would embarrass President Obama.”

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/01/opinion/01iht-edgregg.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print
What did the Russians conclude?

- Though not officially published, the conclusions were leaked to the South Korean newspaper Hankyoreh.
the accident occurred when "the vessel's propeller happened to get caught in a net as it was sailing through shallow waters near the coast, and as the vessel was trying to extricate itself to deep waters, its lower part struck a [mine] antenna and set off the triggering device."

"Russia's Cheonan investigation suspects that the sinking Cheonan ship was caused by a mine in water." Hankyoreh, 28 July 2010. http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/englishEdition/e_northkorea/432232.html
Accident rather than NK attack
Mine was South Korean

....there is a risk of mines in the area where damage to the vessel occurred....," the Russian team said.

Analysts are interpreting this as referring to the large-scale placement of depth charges by the South Korean government in the 1970s to prevent a North Korean landing on Baengnyeong Island.

Another possibility raised by the Russian investigation team was that the explosion occurred from of the South Korean military’s own torpedoes.

"Complex combination of factors” responsible for Cheonan sinking, Russian investigation concludes ", Hankyoreh, 28 July 2010.
http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/ISSUE/75/432233.html
The torpedo part that ROK presented seems to be an electronic torpedo with a radius of 533mm. However, we do not conclude that this particular torpedo was launched to and impacted on the Cheonan ship.


- Probably a mine, possibly a SK torpedo, but not this NK torpedo
- The only piece of evidence incriminating DPRK discounted by Russian torpedo experts on technical grounds
- But they went further
The Russians confirmed what South Korean critics had long pointed out.

‘Visual examination of the torpedo part indicates that the torpedo had been in the water for more than 6 months.’

"Russian Navy Expert Team’s analysis on the Cheonan incident." Hankyoreh, 29 July 2010.

But ROK claimed that it had been responsible for sinking on 26 March (ie 2 months)
Virtually certain that torpedo remnant was planted in order to incriminate DPRK
  - There is no other plausible explanation
Did Lee Myung-bak know and authorise?
  - Almost certainly
Did Hillary Clinton know?
  - Probably
  - Russian report did go to US government
ROK scheduled ‘live fire exercises’ by marines on Yeonpyeong in (contested) sea

DPRK warned number of times that it would not tolerate and would retaliate

ROK went ahead, DPRK fired killing 2 marines and 2 civilian contractors on military base

ROK returned fire, unknown number of casualties

Incident boosted anti-DPRK sentiment in South

Was it deliberate?

All of these incidents—in combination with actions and inactions by South Korea, the United States, and other regional powers—arguably moved the peninsula closer to “the brink” at the end of 2010 than it had been for some time.

Marines 'Made Trigger-Happy by Inter-Korean Tensions'. "Chosun Ilbo, 22 June 2011.
In fact, substantial easing of tension during 2011
Countries in turn
DPRK

- Did not take action over renewed live fire exercises
- Overtures to US
  - Clinton, Carter, Richardson missions
  - Agreed to MIA and meetings with US
- Kim’s visits to China
- Kim’s visit to Russia
China

- Welcomed Kim Jong Il, and ministers
- Relations with DPRK get warmer, those with ROK cooler
  - Great increase in trade, action over SEZ
- Strong protests over US naval exercises
Monday was the 50th anniversary of China and North Korea concluding the Sino-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (the Treaty) on July 11, 1951. But given its changing relationship with North Korea, should China think again about what the Treaty means? Five Chinese experts shared their insights on the issue.

Han Xiandong (deputy director of the Institute of International Studies at China University of Political Science and Law):
At Kim-Medvedev summit August 2011 gas pipeline (and railway) reactivated

Lock Korean peninsula into peace

Great economic benefit to Russia, both Koreas, and Japan
  - US and ROK right-wing unhappy, but difficult to oppose openly

Work on railways, Rason SEZ
Both China and Russia worried about de facto invasion of Libya, threats against Iran and Syria

Very unusual double veto of US Syria proposals in UNSC
Still unwilling to re-join Six Party Talks, serious negotiations with DPRK
Downgraded ‘Special envoy for North Korea’
Does not want any incidents in run-up to 2012 election
Surprised at resilience of Libya
- Lee Myung-bak now lame duck president
- Nordpolitik widely seen as a failure
- After three and a half years of a hard line with nothing to show for it except worsened inter-Korea relations, Lee Myung-bak is at long last executing a U-turn. Not openly and without fanfare of course; but the signs are clear.
  - Relations with China and Russia also suffered
GNP losing support

- Lost Seoul election on 26 October by wide margin
- Demographics – young are turning against conservatives
  - Immediately after the election, analysis of exit polls by three major broadcasters according to age groups suggested that Park received a flood of votes from those in their 20s, 30s and 40s. His support from these age groups was overwhelming, coming to 69.3% among those in their 20s, 75.8% among those in their 30s and 66.8% among those in their 40s. Na enjoyed the support of 56.5% of voters in their 50s and 69.2% of those in their 60s.
Although tension has eased the fissures of crisis remain

ROK after Lee Myung-bak will probably be less confrontational but conservatives/military remain a powerful force

Lee’s Nordpolitik has done much to bring back Cold War alliances
  - These will now remain
  - Korea a subset of wider confrontations
US hegemony faltering

- Challenged in various quarters (Middle East, ‘Arab Spring’, Russian resurgence)
- And especially China’s rise
The collapse of the North Korean regime could be a trigger for a military conflict between the U.S. and China, says the California-based RAND Corporation.

The hard-right think tank lists the end of the North Korean regime as one of six factors that could cause a clash between the two superpowers. Another factor is differing views on Taiwan and the South China Sea.

It also forecast an exodus of North Koreans to areas bordering China, not only to escape from armed conflicts but also to search for food. This situation would lead to increased threats from the North's weapons and missiles, leading to a military confrontation between the two powers.
To be continued....

Pluto Press, London 2011
http://www.plutobooks.com/display.asp?K=9780745331621&