

Delving deeper

Reflections on the response to the death of Kim Jong Il

Part 1 of a two part essay

Tim Beal

Posted as Pyongyang Report V14 N1, 24 January 2012

http://www.timbeal.net.nz/geopolitics/pyr_index.html

<http://www.timbeal.net.nz/geopolitics/>

(Pyongyang Report can be re-posted as long as it is unaltered and the provenance cited.

Correspondence to [Tim Beal](#))

North Korea is seldom in the news but when it is this is usually occasioned by some event, such as a nuclear test, or a rocket launch, that is seen to be portentous and so generates a deluge of articles and interviews. So it was with the death of Kim Jong Il. However, this lurch from famine to feast tends to make manifest how inadequate and tendentious the perception and understanding of North Korea, and the geopolitical imbroglio at whose vortex it sits, really is. Partly it is a matter of quantity at the expense of quality. Hacks are pressed into service, their attentions wrenched from Libya or Afghanistan, and experts, many of them self-proclaimed, are cajoled into expounding their punditry at short notice. – as James Church, the ‘veteran intelligence operative’ and pseudonymous author of the Inspector O series put it after the death of Kim Jong Il, ‘practically everyone who has ever eaten Korean food has been called on by the media to opine.’¹ The results are predictable.²

However, the problems lie deeper and it seems to me that it is possible to discern a number of strands, interconnected and overlapping, that define and distort assessments. It is difficult to discuss them one by one because they are so intertwined that each one feeds and reinforces the others. None of these strands (and no doubt there are others) exist in isolation but it is necessary to attempt to disentangle them if we are make any sense of how what is seen to be the reality of North Korea is constructed.

The five strands I want to discuss are:

- Ignorance, knowledge, lies, and uncertainty
- Context
- Personalisation
- Agency
- Inversion

The first two, which are broad and encompassing, I will discuss in this essay, with the other three in a subsequent one.

Ignorance

Ignorance, and its corollary, the false claiming of knowledge, is the easy one. Donald Rumsfeld was much criticised and mocked for his musings on unknown unknowns:

Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns - the ones we don't know we don't know.³

Rumsfeld got many things wrong (as well arguably being a war criminal) but here he was right. Knowing the limits of knowledge is vitally important.

The death of Kim Jong Il and the falsification of the predictions of instability, turmoil, and collapse made apparent, once again, how little the outside world knows about North Korea. The same is probably true of the inside world; very few people in North Korea would know of the inner workings of the elite. However perhaps they have some advantage in knowing that they do not know whereas in open societies such as the United States many people think they know what is going on but clearly don't – just look at the blogs and the comments on newspaper articles.

Intelligence deficit

The false predictions, or rather wishful thinking, about collapse is a subject to be taken up some other time, but Kim's death itself is a good illustration of how limited intelligence about North Korea is. Nothing new about that and there is a long, if undistinguished, line of analysts, writers, and journalists who have had recourse to imaginative reconstruction, otherwise known as making things up, because they were expected to know something which they didn't or needed something to sell a book. This is by no means confined to Korea; the US intelligence community's construction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction is the classic example of the process. Of less consequence (though still important) was the recent story in the *New York Times* in which the reporter rather cheerfully admitted that a story he had written about a drug epidemic in NK was based on talking to one person, and that perhaps not a very trustworthy one. He confessed, apparently without any sense of guilt:

I painted a picture of the drug's abuse for my article: part escape from the desolation of North Korean life, part medicine in a country with practically no healthcare infrastructure. Yet after months of research I have to admit that I have no idea what is actually happening inside North Korea.⁴

Turning from a single muck-raking journalist to the huge, well-funded (1 trillion won, about \$900 million) National Intelligence Service (NIS) of the Republic of Korea, we see the same failure to find out what is happening (or in the case of the drug epidemic, perhaps not happening).⁵

Fig 1: A panoramic view of (South Korean) National Intelligence Service headquarters



Source: Lee, Tae-hee. "Nis Chief Won Criticised for Destroying Its N.Korean Human Intelligence Part." Hankyoreh, 22 December 2011.

The NIS was much embarrassed by its failure to know of the death of Kim Jong Il before the official announcement from North Korea, a couple of days after the death itself.⁶ To make things worse, it was suggested that China had been informed prior to the announcement.⁷ The South Korean government subsequently denied this, which may well mean that it was true.

The NIS, it might be remembered, was set up by Park Chung-hee as the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) but rather blotted its copybook when the then director, Kim Jae-kyu, shot and killed Park in 1979. The KCIA has been rebranded a couple of times since that unfortunate incident, most recently in 1999 when it got its current title. An important role of the KCIA/NIS over the years has been to keep tabs on the South Korean people, particularly any dissident elements, and one of the interesting things to have surfaced in the aftermath of its embarrassing 'failure' over Kim's death was the revelation of this shift in emphasis.

An 'opposition party figure' was quoted:

"If [former NIS director] Kim Man-bok produced intelligence according to the wishes of President Roh Moo-hyun, then the current intelligence system has been retooled to suit the desires of President Lee Myung-bak," the figure said, indicating that Lee's focus on domestic politics rather than on North Korea has led the NIS to focus more on gathering domestic intelligence than North Korean intelligence.

The figure also said agencies ranging from the NIS and Defense Security Command to prosecutors and police began buying large amounts of surveillance equipment at tremendous cost in 2008. The equipment, which included devices for Internet "packet eavesdropping" and e-mail surveillance, was brought in for the purposes of "ushering in an era of scientific intelligence."

"The fact that holes appeared in our North Korean intelligence network despite this investment has to be attributed to the use of this surveillance equipment for domestic affairs," the figure said.⁸

As in other ways, this is part of a situation that the Lee Myung-bak administration has created. They cut off links with the north, removed North Korean specialists from NIS (people with knowledge of 'the enemy' always excite suspicion as McCarthyism demonstrated) and relied more and more on the Americans and their technology:

The lawmaker argued that Won's removal of North Korea experts in his agency to hire those close to him and the Lee administration led to a loophole in intelligence gathering.

Some North Korean experts say the government's preference of signal intelligence through the latest technology over human intelligence is also responsible for the government's failure to get word of Kim's death.

"Satellites and surveillance equipment are great tools that help us to detect military movements near the demilitarized zones, but they have great limits in looking inside Pyongyang," a senior government official said.

"In order to find out what is really going on inside the North Korean leadership, it is urgent to build a human network with access to top military sources."

Some argue that the lack of inter-Korean exchanges over recent years since the Lee administration took office played a role in the shrinking of human intelligence in the secretive North.⁹

This final point was confirmed in an article about the latest *Statistics Korea* assessment of the state of the North Korean economy. For the first time in some years it omitted estimated data on grain output. This was partly because, it was claimed, it might stimulate calls for aid to the North. But there was also a practical reason:

"With inter-Korean relations so tense, it is no longer possible for us to do the kind of North Korean grain production estimates that were possible under the previous administration," a government official explained on Tuesday...

A government official explained, "Since inter-Korean relations were decent during the previous administration, it was possible to go to the North and get samples to use as a basis for estimates."

"With inter-Korean exchange all but completely halted under the current administration, the basis for releasing estimates has disappeared," the official added.¹⁰

And so we have the irony that Lee Myung-bak, whose *nordpolitik* was premised on the assumption that North Korea was close to collapse, and that it might be tipped over the precipice by a crisis (such as those of 2010) or by the death of Kim Jong Il, emasculated the ability of the NIS to conduct intelligence on the North. Not the first time in history that wishful thinking, and tailored intelligence, has replaced dispassionate, professional, analysis to cater to the strategies of forceful leaders.

Predictions confounded

As the transition proceeded in North Korea two things became clear.

First, despite all the predictions of instability, chaos, 'provocations' and collapse, the transition has been smooth so far.¹¹ Predictions of 'provocations' had always provided an interesting example of intelligence failure because they reveal not merely an inability to foresee the future, something which is hazardous at the best of times, but also a failure to understand and acknowledge the past. They had been based on two assumptions; one that the events of 2010 – the sinking of the Cheonan and the Yeonpyeong Incident – had been the result of North Korean provocation. In fact, what provocation and tension building there was came from the South.¹² The other was that, as Paul B Stares put it:

....there is always the possibility that, to burnish the credentials, the credentials as a strong leader, that they may orchestrate further provocations against South Korea. There is some evidence that Kim Jong Un may have been involved at some level in the decision to attack the South Korean naval ship, the Cheonan, as well as he may have also been involved in the shelling of the island in the West Sea. And so there is obviously concern that, as part of the transition process, that we may see

provocations of this kind -- again, designed to enhance his leadership and image as a strong leader in North Korea.¹³

Just why Kim Jong Un would provoke an incident that could provide an excuse for an invasion from forces which are hugely stronger than his, is a bit bemusing and perhaps tells us more about Washington than Pyongyang. In fact one of Kim Jong Un's first acts, it appears, was to call a halt to military exercises that the Korean People's Army (KPA) was carrying out, perhaps to prevent them being used as a pretext for an incident.¹⁴ Incidentally, Stares has the title of 'General John W. Vessey Senior Fellow for Conflict Prevention' at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington. We may presume that an American general's idea of conflict prevention is rather different from that of a Buddhist monk or Presbyterian minister, seeking to ameliorate causes of conflict, and revolves more around the use of bombs and drones to deter rebellion.

Predications of instability and collapse have been confounded, to the discomfort of the experts:

"The biggest surprise so far is just how smooth it's going," said Andrei Lankov, a North Korea scholar at Seoul's Kookmin University. "Kim Jong Eun has been accepted almost immediately by the leadership."¹⁵

Who runs the show?

Secondly, as Stares himself admits

We will be able to glean more information in coming days and weeks about the new leadership, though we shouldn't kid ourselves that we will know who's really in charge.¹⁶

Fair enough; who knows who really runs the show in Washington, or in the Vatican? But of course pundits must pronounce and the media has been full of stories about the role of Kim Jong Il's brother in law Jang Song Thaek, husband of Kim's younger sister, Kim Kyong Hui.¹⁷ The stories say much the same thing and none show signs of having any privileged information. People look at photographs (especially of Jang in military uniform), or the order of the list of the funeral committee, and draw some obvious conclusions, but there is no sense that anyone really knows much at all.¹⁸ What happened to all those rebellious generals that were going to lead a coup?¹⁹ Who knows what is the relationship between Jang Song Thaek and Kim Jong Un?

If the NIS had so little knowledge about hard events – the death of Kim Jong Il – why should we expect it to know anything about soft ones, such as relationships within the elite?

The NIS, and its counterparts in the US intelligence community, are central in any discussion of what is known about North Korea. Whilst stories are written by journalists and articles by 'experts', academic and think tank, the feedstock usually comes from officials. Most of what we read in the media can be traced back to officials who, apart from having to pretend to having more knowledge than they possess, also have to serve the agenda of their political masters. What starts off as a lie or an embroidery, grows into 'common knowledge' as it passes through the media chain. Lies become inherited, their provenance forgotten.

Journalists repeat other journalists, and academics other academics. In a situation where there is no independent corroboration or testing of information, 'facts' tend to be accepted through repetition. But repetition is no guarantee of veracity, merely that the reported fact is in some way consistent with the interests of the powerful, be they media owners, advertisers, government ministers or the establishment in general.

There is the story, perhaps apocryphal, perhaps not, of the government minister who wined and dined a journalist one evening to plant a lie. Waking up next morning he read his story duly regurgitated in the morning newspaper and exclaimed to himself, "my god, I must have been telling the truth after all!".

To be aware of ignorance and uncertainty, and acknowledge that, is vitally important. Known unknowns are preferable to unknown unknowns.

False knowledge

However, if not knowing what is going on, or being unaware of the limits of your knowledge are bad, far worse is to base your analysis on untruth, whether that is a deliberate lie or something whose provenance is somewhat less designed. The obvious case of that is the *Cheonan* incident

The official South Korean version, embraced by the United States and most governments around the world, with the significant exception of China and Russia, was that the *Cheonan* was deliberately sunk by a North Korean submarine. A very popular gloss on that was that the sinking was ordered personally by Kim Jong Un, or by his father in order to ensure the succession.²⁰ The South Korean version had a lot going for it. It had all the qualities of a good conspiracy story – skulduggery, mystery, deception. But since it was promulgated by the authorities no one who accepted it would be accused of being a conspiracy theorist. On a more academic level it was consistent with (and reinforced) the prevailing paradigm on North Korean behaviour; it was the sort of thing that North Koreans, with their insolent disregard of international law, did.²¹ It offered a perfectly respectable basis for predicting future events; the prevailing paradigm provides safety in an uncertain world, not so much from error, but from criticism. This 'provocation to ensure succession' before Kim Jong Il's death became 'provocation to establish position' – 'designed to enhance his [Kim Jong Un] leadership and image as a strong leader in North Korea' as Scott Snyder put it.²²

However, there is a problem. The available evidence suggests that the *Cheonan* sunk by accident, having detonated a South Korean mine. It also seems that South Korea fabricated evidence to incriminate the North. Moreover, this incident and its exploitation occurred within the framework of Lee Myung-bak's *nordpolitik*, based on the hopeful assumption that the North was on the verge of collapse, that a crisis could take it over the brink and that this would lead to the reunification of Korea under the rule of Seoul²³

If all those journalists and analysts who uncritically accepted the official South Korean line of the *Cheonan* were wrong, as they almost certainly were, then their analysis of the situation, and their predictions, based on it are nearly inevitably wrong. One may stumble on the truth even from false premises but the chances are low. Why there was so much uncritical acceptance outside Korea of an official narrative, about which quite a substantial proportion of educated South Koreans were sceptical, is a story to be explored on another occasion.

Here we do need to distinguish between the utterances of, on the one hand, journalist, analysts, and academics, and on the other politicians and officials. For the latter group deception and spin is part of the job description. In Sir Henry Wotton's famous quip "an ambassador is an honest gentleman sent to lie abroad for the good of his country" and so too we should not take official pronouncements at face value. There may be a number of reasons for mendacity and we should not assume that the official who dispenses it actually believes it. Thus when US Assistant Secretary of State Kurt M. Campbell is quoted as having 'called on China to help restrain the new leadership in North Korea from military provocations during the transition of power there' we cannot know from outside whether he really believes such nonsense himself. He may be going through the motions – after all he has to say something at a press conference and this might seem to fit the bill combining as it does criticism of North Korea with apparent concern for peace and stability. On the other hand there may be some coded message to China. Or a message to the folks back home.

Not all deception originates in high politics. Sometimes it comes from pursuit of a quick buck. This appears to have been the root of a 'rumour' that spread through South Korean financial circles on 6 January 2012. This alleged that there had been an explosion at North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear facility and the news caused the stock market to dip and the won to weaken against the dollar. However the story was untrue and probably not innocently so. The South Korean state news agency Yonhap was quite explicit in its article:

Police probing rumors on N. Korea atomic accident

The national police said Saturday they have launched an investigation into an earlier market rumor about a nuclear explosion in North Korea, trying to determine if speculators had intentionally spread the false report to make profits.²⁴

Significantly, perhaps, the *Washington Post* relegated the scam to a small part of a longer standard propaganda piece on the dangers of the North's nuclear programme (the civilian, research and production part of it, not bombs as such).

...the rumor reflected concerns — often discussed among nuclear experts — about the unregulated nuclear activity in the North; the possibility that North Korean technicians would struggle to contain an accident if one occurred; and the widely held belief that the government in Pyongyang would neglect to warn the region about spreading radiation.²⁵

It may be that North Korea's nuclear facilities are more vulnerable than those of other countries and the fact that there have been no accidents may be due to the small size of its programme.²⁶

However it does seem rather disingenuous of the *Washington Post* to say that the incident illustrated 'one of the ways in which Seoul is vulnerable to its neighbour.' In fact, since there had been no explosion, what it illustrated was South Korea's vulnerability to its own propaganda about, and hostility towards, the North. The *Washington Post* has played a role on both counts.

The danger of panic arising from disinformation, of course, is exacerbated by the viral nature of the Internet where a story, however false or unlikely, can spread exponentially. Although the origins of such rumours may lie in the innocent foolishness of bloggers rather than in calculated deception, their treatment in the mainstream media may reflect more considered policy. It was perhaps not entirely accidental that the *Washington Post* ran a story by the same correspondent, Chico Harlan, on the 5th of January about rumours of a military coup in North Korea which, it said, were spreading in social media in China. This was because, explained Harlan, '....with its secretive dynastic dictators

and its nuclear-armed military, North Korea produces its fair share of intrigue.²⁷ The reference to the military being 'nuclear-armed' seems rather redundant since nuclear weapons do not play any role in coups. But of course there had not been a coup, nor was there any likelihood of one. We do not know how significant this military coup rumour was amongst all the other rumours in Chinese cyberspace that day, but the *Washington Post's* interest may reflect its wishful thinking (and that of the Washington establishment and especially the Lee Myung-bak administration) for such an eventuality, presaging a collapse of North Korea and its takeover by the South.

Recognising and accepting ignorance

It should be basic procedure in any analysis to recognise the limits of knowledge available and critically to assess the sources of information; do they know what they claim to know, and do they have reason to massage the information and to distort their conclusions?

A little story to illustrate that point.

Towards the end of 2011, beginning of 2012 two separate indexes were published:

- Corruption Perceptions Index 2011 from Transparency International (TI)²⁸
- Nuclear Threats Initiative (NTI) Nuclear Materials Security Index²⁹

Both were from 'respected' Western non-governmental organisations – TI from Germany and NTI from the United States. Both included North Korea in their survey. For TI this was for the first time in its annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) and for NTI the index itself was new. On examination of their published indexes, and accompanying methodology, and in the case of TI supplemented by an email enquiry it was clear their neither had any meaningful intelligence on North Korea. Despite this both put North Korea at the bottom of their index; in TI's CPI it was ranked equal bottom with Somalia. The point is not whether their conclusions about corruption and the safety of nuclear material in North Korea are correct or not; they are probably both way off the mark but that is another matter. The issue is that they have no evidence on which to make an assessment.

The clue to this non-evidence-based judgement is a saying that used to be prevalent in American business a couple of decades back – 'no one gets fired for buying IBM'. At that time International Business Machines (IBM) set the industry standard so their equipment was a safe (if not necessarily optimal) bet for any executive who had to make a purchase decision. So too, presumably with the researchers at TI and NTI – they had been instructed to include North Korea but had no evidence to make a meaningful judgement. The solution is obvious – put the pariah at the bottom and no will complain (apart from perhaps cranky New Zealand academics).³⁰

So, *caveat emptor* – all that glitters is not gold even if it comes from seemingly respectable sources.

Context

To discern the realities of North Korea amongst this welter of ignorance, deception, wishful thinking, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns is extremely difficult but the starting point must be to locate whatever information that is presented to us within context.

Lies are one way of creating false information, but not embedding facts within context is perhaps a more invidious, and probably far more common, way of misleading people. Here it is not so much that the 'fact' is untrue – although the details may not withstand close scrutiny – but that it is given in isolation in such a way that the reader gets the wrong impression, often a diametrically false impression, of reality.

Two examples spring to mind.

'The world's fourth-largest army'

The first is the frequently mentioned size of the North Korean army. Thus we read

North Korea's newly minted leader presents the U.S. and its allies with an even more unknown character than his recently deceased father — and the strategic challenge of dealing with an inexperienced young man who sits on a nuclear arms program, a stash of chemical weapons and the world's fourth-largest army.³¹

The implication is clear. A small country with an army of that size must be aggressive, belligerent, and threat to its neighbours and the world.

Leaving aside the question of nuclear weapons, discussed next, and 'the stash of chemical weapons' of which there is no evidence and has echoes of subsequently disproved allegations about Iraq and Libya, what of the world's 'fourth largest army'?

The journalist probably got this from the *Military Balance*, the annual publication of the International Institute for Strategic Studies:

In terms of personnel numbers, the unified Korean People's Army (KPA) – comprising army, navy, air force, an artillery guidance bureau and special operations forces – ranks as the fourth largest in the world, behind the forces of China, the United States and India. Approximately 5% of estimated population of 24m serve as active duty personnel.³²

5% of 24 million is 1.2 million, and this figure is frequently quoted.³³ In reality the figure, which presumably originated as a 'useful guess' of a South Korean or American official, and cannot be independently substantiated, is probably much inflated. In 2010 a South Korean analysis of the 2008 census in North Korea, conducted in cooperation with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), came up with an estimate of 700,000.³⁴

700,000 is still a huge number and is roughly equal to that of South Korea's military, which has twice the population. It is when we bring in South Korea's military capability, and then that of the United States, that things take on a different complexion. And we should not lose sight of Japan which, while it has a relatively small army, has the sixth largest military expenditure in the world.³⁵ The point is not the size of the armed forces, either in personnel or equipment, but its military capability.

Vice President Joe Biden recently boasted that the US had taken out Libya at a cost of \$1.1billion without losing a single (American) life.³⁶ Libya is admittedly a small country which only had an army 70,000 strong, and the Americans did use proxy forces whose casualties are not counted (perhaps do not count).³⁷ The 2003 invasion of Iraq is arguably a better indicator. In the aftermath of the invasion (and before the US ran into pacification problems), Max Boot gloated over the rapid, and relatively painless, defeat of the 450,000 strong Iraqi army:

Previously, the gold standard of operational excellence had been the German blitzkrieg through the Low Countries and France in 1940. The Germans managed to conquer France, the Netherlands, and Belgium in just 44 days, at a cost of "only" 27,000 dead soldiers. The United States and Britain took just 26 days to conquer Iraq (a country 80 percent of the size of France), at a cost of 161 dead, making fabled generals such as Erwin Rommel and Heinz Guderian seem positively incompetent by comparison.³⁸

It might have been an empty victory, but it was a stunning one nonetheless, and an awesome demonstration of the power of advanced military technology. War is no longer a numbers game. Or rather the numbers that count are the dollars (and access to the best technology) rather than men, and women, in uniform. This may well change in the pacification phase but that is another, but very important, issue. The size of the North Korean army is of very limited significance. The United States could destroy North Korea with relative impunity and North Korea would no more be able to retaliate against America than could Libya or Iraq. There is an important difference, however, in that North Korea would be able to attack Americans in South Korea and Japan. And of course if the US invaded North Korea it would be a different ball game.

The Canadian writer Stephen Gowans has come up with the analogy:

North Korea is a military pipsqueak, whose personnel are deployed in large numbers to agriculture. The military budgets and weapons' sophistication of its adversaries, the United States, South Korea and Japan, tower over its own. If the Pentagon's budget is represented by the 6' 9" basketball player Magic Johnson, North Korea's military budget is 1", the height of a large beetle. South Korea's is 4.5" and Japan's 3.9", multiple times larger than the North's³⁹

In fact Gowans may be exaggerating North Korea's military budget because he is using CIA data which is almost certainly misleading. Neither the International Institute for Strategic Studies nor the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the standard sources for this sort of data, give estimates for North Korea's military expenditure because of methodological problems. There is no need to say more about the huge military advantage of the United States, but it is useful to note just how much stronger South Korea is than the North.

Fig 2: South Korea's K2 main battle tank



Source: Lee, Tae-hoon. "Military to Delay Production of K2 Tanks." *Korea Times*, 17 January 2012.

South Korea is quite an important producer of weapons systems though like other countries (the American's F-35 being a case in point) these often encounter problems.⁴⁰ The K2 main battle tank, touted as one of the most advanced main battle tanks in the world on its debut in 2007 has run into production difficulties.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it does produce advanced weapons such as missiles and stealth boats, though much is due to licenced foreign, mainly US, technology and the import of key components.⁴² More than that, it is already a substantial arms exporter far outstripping the North as Table 1 shows. This gives data for the two Koreas, plus the United States to remind us just how big the big beast is.

Table 1: Arms sales by the Koreas, and the US, 2000-2010

Trend Indicator Values (TIV)⁴³

Supplier	USA	South Korea	North Korea
Rank 2000-2010	1	15	24
Rank 1999-2009	1	18	23
2000	7,398	8	13
2001	5,908	165	77
2002	5,229		161
2003	5,698	100	126
2004	6,866	29	40
2005	6,700	48	
2006	7,453	94	
2007	8,003	220	
2008	6,288	80	
2009	6,658	163	
2010	8,641	95	
2000-2010	74,841	1,001	415

Source:

SIPRI Arms Transfers Database

<http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>

Top list TIV tables – top 50 suppliers of conventional weapons

Downloaded 19 January 2012

As the table shows, North Korea is not recorded as having made any sales since 2004, while South Korea moves ahead. The Trend Indicator Values used by SIPRI are based on constant 1990 prices, so whilst valuable for cross country comparisons (between 2000 and 2010 South Korea sold two and a half times as much as North Korea and the US sold 183 times as much) they do not prepare us for current values. Thus it comes as a bit of a surprise to read the claim that South Korea sold \$2.4 billion worth of arms in 2011.⁴⁴ With more to come. Noh Dae-lae, commissioner of the state-run Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) was interviewed, with some reverence, by the *Korea Times*:

Noh said South Korea will become a major player in the global defense market, overtaking nearly all competitors, including Germany, France and the United Kingdom.

“South Korea can boost its annual volume of arms exports to \$10 billion,” said [Noh]⁴⁵

Whether that will come to pass is another matter but South Korea does have the advantage, in this as in civilian fields, of being able to draw on US technology and then produce at lower cost, which is particularly valuable in a time of straightened arms budgets. This, in turn, has produced a certain amount of friction with the Americans who accuse the Koreans of stealing their technology to capture their markets.⁴⁶

However, perhaps the best single indicator of (pre-pacification) military capability is the amount spent on imports of weapons. Neither Korea can produce very top-end military equipment, such as fighters, so imports are a robust measure of technological advantage. South Korea is the world’s

third largest importer of arms, and North Korea scarcely registers.⁴⁷ Between 2000 and 2008 South Korea's imports of arms was roughly *one hundred times* greater than that of the North.⁴⁸

So the size of the North Korean army is not an indicator of belligerency but rather of its weakness faced by vastly more powerful military force. Whilst North Korea has counter-offensive capabilities, its military posture is, despite all the allegations, obviously primarily defensive. Even with the worst will in the world it could not contemplate attacking the United States. Nor could it attack South Korea which not merely is much stronger but has the alliance with the United States.

The nuclear arsenal

The second supposed indicator of belligerence and threat is nuclear weapons. It is always amazing how commentators from nuclear weapons states, or supporters thereof, suffuse their condemnation of North Korea's puny nuclear arsenal with so much moral opprobrium. It is as if the owner of the largest brothel in town ('underage virgins of either sex a speciality') were to lambast the local newsagent for having some racy magazines on the top shelf. Double standards are an essential element of modern imperialism. Indeed we might say that they are the defining ideological characteristic. Imperial powers, and here we need to think principally, but not exclusively, of the United States, abrogate to themselves things which are denied to others. It is legitimate for the United States to have a huge arsenal of nuclear, and non-nuclear, weapons, to have an unsurpassed array of missiles, bombers, fighter planes, submarines, aircraft carriers, etc. but not legitimate for other countries, except those with express permission, to have such weapons.

In truth, the United States has to accord to large countries some rights to weapons but it still sticks in the craw. Thus we get, for instance, after the sea trials in August 2011 of China's first aircraft carrier a media report that these

... were met with concern from regional powers including Japan and the **United States, which called on Beijing to explain why it needs an aircraft carrier.**[emphasis added]⁴⁹

Needless to say, the United States feels no obligation to explain why it needs its eleven carriers. Indeed, it has been reported that when formulating the 2012 Defense Strategic Review Obama personally ruled out cutting the number of aircraft carrier groups below 11 because that 'would undermine his ambitions in the Pacific', in other words the containment of China.⁵⁰

The imperial mind set was nicely expressed by President Obama at a speech introducing this review which, because of budget cuts necessitated by America's declining economic primacy, outlined a slowing in growth of military expenditure:

The United States of America is the greatest force for freedom and security that the world has ever known. And in no small measure, that's because we've built the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped military in history -- and as Commander-in-Chief, I'm going to keep it that way.... Over the next 10 years, the growth in the defense budget will slow, but the fact of the matter is this: **It will still grow, because we have global responsibilities that demand our leadership.** In fact, the defense budget will still be larger than it was toward the end of the Bush administration. And I firmly believe, and I think the American people understand, that we can keep our military strong and our nation secure with a defense budget that continues to be larger than roughly the next 10 countries combined. [Emphasis added]⁵¹

Thus the United States sees its military power, and its nuclear weapons, as legitimate and not belligerent – ‘responsibilities that demand our leadership’. The military power of other countries, particularly small independent ones such as North Korea which are not client states, are illegitimate and inherently belligerent. To say that this runs counter to the concept of Westphalian sovereignty and its contemporary embodiment, the Charter of the United Nations, is of no consequence.

It is important therefore to recognise this ideological distortion and not get distracted from the manifestation of power that it obscures. When the United States gets the United Nations Security Council to condemn North Korea for a nuclear test, or for (attempting) to launch a satellite – activities which the US has done a thousand times over – it is not because it has right on its side, but might.⁵² Having stripped away the sanctimonious rhetoric about North Korea’s test being condemned because of ‘danger it poses to peace and stability in the region and beyond’ we are in a better position to analyse why it has developed nuclear weapons.⁵³

Why nuclear weapons?

Two reasons are usually given.⁵⁴ The first is as a deterrent against US attack. As a DPRK (North Korea) statement put it in 2005:

However, no sooner had the Bush administration come to office than it scrapped the AF [Agreed Framework sign by the Clinton administration in 1994] and listed the DPRK as part of "an axis of evil" and a "target of its preemptive nuclear attack."

As a self-defence measure to cope with this, the DPRK pulled out of the NPT [Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty] and under the situation where it was in the imminent danger of meeting the same fate as Iraq's it opted to bolster its nuclear deterrence for self-defence.⁵⁵

A number of people have suggested that Libya would not have been invaded in 2011 if it had not scrapped its nuclear programme in a deal with the United States.⁵⁶

Personally I am not convinced that nuclear deterrence is a major factor at the moment given North Korea’s lack of effective delivery mechanisms. Peter Hayes and Scott Bruce concluded in 2011 that:

We assess that the North is capable of operationally using nuclear weapons, but its options for a nuclear strike are severely constrained. We conclude that the only credible use of the DPRK’s nuclear arsenal is to detonate a bomb within North Korea itself to slow down or to stop an invasion in the context of an all-out war.⁵⁷

That is not much of a deterrent.

In the future, perhaps, if North Korea does manage to develop effective, nuclear-capable, intercontinental missiles calculations will be different. Americans in the ‘defense industry’, in particular, are fond of predicting that North Korea will ‘soon’ have long-range missiles, but they have to justify their jobs.⁵⁸ In January 2011 Robert Gates, then US Defense Secretary, forecast that North Korea would have a missile capable of reaching the west coast ‘in five years’.⁵⁹ Perhaps, but I suspect that if they were really worried that North Korea would be able to develop an effective nuclear weapons system they would have negotiated a deal long ago.

In fact, although North Korea cannot defend itself at the moment against a long-range strike by the United States, nuclear or otherwise, it has sufficient conventional military capacity to deter such an attack, or an invasion. That is why the US, and Lee Myung-bak even more so, have been hoping for a 'collapse' which would divest the North of its capacity to retaliate and resist.⁶⁰

The other reason, and surely the main one, for North Korea to develop nuclear weapons is for bargaining purposes. It is proliferation, and the setting of an example, that worries the Americans, one suspects, rather than the actual weapons themselves. If small, poor North Korea can develop nuclear weapons then this might inspire other countries. Nuclear weapons are, conceptually at least, a great equaliser. The United States may have a military budget equal to the ten next countries combined, and can devastate most countries with impunity (pacification being another matter) but if there is a possibility that the victim can explode a nuclear device in an American city then that military advantage loses much of its value. The bogey of nuclear terrorism takes this asymmetry to the edge, and Goliath becomes fearful of David.⁶¹

The history of US-North Korean negotiations has been long and tortuous, going back to the late 1940s. It is only in the last two decades that nuclear weapons have entered the calculus. Pyongyang probably saw them as a game changer, but that has not happened yet. Why this is so is a matter of conjecture.⁶² Foreign commentators, especially Americans, endlessly go on about how difficult it is to negotiate but what is curious about the whole business is that North Korea wants so little – peaceful coexistence sums it up. Former president Jimmy Carter, who has had more interaction with the North Korean leadership than any other American, pointed this out in an interview in 2009:

[Carter] discussed North Korea's nuclear program, saying he thought the communist nation would be willing to give up its nuclear weapons for U.S. diplomatic recognition, a peace deal with South Korea and America, and if it got new atomic power reactors and free fuel oil. "It could be worked out, in my opinion, in half a day," Carter said.⁶³

The main reason, I think, that the United States balks at this is because it needs tension on the Korean peninsula as part of its strategy to contain China.

The issue of North Korea's nuclear programme is not quite what it is portrayed to be, and getting some grasp on the context is essential if we are to begin to understand what has happened, and why it is not resolved. Recognising the importance of context also gets us looking in other directions for explanations rather than, as is so often the case, focusing on North Korea (or Iraq, Iran, or whatever the target of the moment is) in itself as if countries existed in isolation and not in interaction with others, as well as more general forces such as a technology or globalisation.

Action and response

The two examples of the failure to contextualise we have been looking at happen in the same time plane but a major aspect of context is the temporal one. On a grand scale this is historical context but we can also usefully consider it in a more modest framework. Things are so often a sequence of action and response. Sometimes the origins of the dispute are lost in history, or have evolved slowly over time so that it is difficult, perhaps impossible to say where or how it started. In other situations, far less common, we have an action which is a definite departure from what has gone before; the landing of Columbus in the Americas set in train a series of events for which pre-Columbian America had no responsibility. Actions are not necessarily equal and a response may be disproportionate to

the event that provoked it. An action may be innocent, if unwise (dressing like sluts) and the reaction, rape, criminal.⁶⁴ Things may evolve in a linear, exponential, or stepped process. Whatever judgment we might make about culpability, or whatever solutions we might propose to resolve a crisis, has to take into account the complex sequence of events that preceded it. The simplest and most common way of misrepresenting is to open the history book part of the way through; thus 9/11 is an event with no origins ('they just hate us'), or the Palestinians are, in the phrase of Newt Gingrich, an 'invented people'.⁶⁵ Or indeed that the Korea War suddenly, without antecedent, happened because North Korea invaded the South.⁶⁶

Again, two recent Korean examples illustrate this point.

Yeonpyeong incident

The Yeonpyeong Incident of 23 November 2010 is portrayed by the South Korean government, and its supporters, as a surprise, unprovoked attack – 'the attack came as a complete surprise to the ROK government'.⁶⁷ In fact the North had given a number of warnings in the preceding period, even making a telephone call on the morning of the artillery exchange, stating that they would take action if the South went ahead with 'live-fire' artillery exercises into what they considered their territorial waters.⁶⁸ North Korea has been with some justification criticised for over-reaction to the South's exercises – a 'disproportionate response, John Feffer called it.⁶⁹ As an aside, few seem to express outrage when the South kills Northerners. According to Wikipedia, the North has suffered 53 casualties and the South 54 in and around the Northern Limit Line (where Yeonpyeong Island is located).⁷⁰ However the Wikipedia total does not include the unknown numbers of Northern casualties during the Yeonpyeong Incident, but it does incorrectly include those 46 sailors who died when the *Cheonan* sunk.⁷¹ If we take casualties caused by direct enemy fire, then the North has suffered overwhelmingly more than the South, some 53 to 8.

However, disproportionate or not, it was a response to an action initiated by the South. That should lead us to wonder why the South Korean government chose to carry out exercises which it knew, in all probability, would provoke a response from the North. Apart from warnings from the North it had its own intelligence reports indicating that the other side was getting ready to take action if the exercises went ahead.⁷² Failure of communication within the South Korean chain of command? Perhaps, though at least one report has the intelligence assessment being handed to President Lee Myung-bak.⁷³

The standard response when there is an incident between North and South Korea is to blame the North. So it was with the Yeonpyeong Incident, and of course with the preceding Cheonan Incident. However, the problem soon arises that when we look for motive, or ask *cui bono*? then the accusation looks rather suspect. That is why, of course, that the media often has recourse to the irrationality argument; if there is no plausible reason for the North to do something which we 'know' it did, then that must be because they are irrational.⁷⁴

And plausibility is hard to find. As Paul Stares, no friend of North Korea put it:

So why would North Korea set back its coercive diplomatic campaign by launching yet another deadly provocation that antagonized everyone—including its principal patron China—just when the wind was clearly beginning to blow in its favor? Did North Korea fail to see this or did it miscalculate the impact of its actions? Did other factors, notably the succession process underway in Pyongyang, affect the calculus or tip the scales in some decisive way?⁷⁵

The succession argument, although often put forward (as with the mythical attack on the *Cheonan*), is not really convincing. On the contrary, as a South Korean reporter wrote on the day on the incident (perhaps before people had the opportunity to think up bogus explanations):

The artillery bombardment also came as a surprise as North Korea experts here largely anticipated that the communist state would seek to improve ties with its southern neighbor as it has been striving to solidify its second hereditary power succession.⁷⁶

However, things become rather more convincing if we examine what reasons the South might have. The wind, as Stares pointed out, was moving in the North's favour. Lee Myung-bak's popularity, always rather tenuous, had receded. The local elections held shortly after the *Cheonan* verdict was released (and the release was timed to coincide with the beginning of the election campaign) had been a great setback for Lee and the Grand National Party (GNP). Lee had anticipated that the *Cheonan* would swing the election in the GNP's favour.⁷⁷ He, and the GNP, were to be bitterly disappointed as the opposition made sweeping gains.⁷⁸ Whether the *Cheonan* helped stem the tide against the government or not is unclear. However, it is evident that the 'Cheonan effect' evaporated to quite an extent during the year. The South Korean government had a setback when the United Nations Security Council, under Russian and Chinese pressure, rather contradictorily condemned the 'the attack which led to the sinking of the Cheonan' but declined to condemn North Korea.⁷⁹ If the Cheonan had been attacked then it must have been by North Korea; if North Korea had not attacked then it must have sunk through misadventure. The latter explanation became fairly irrefutable as the results of the Russian investigation in June were leaked out, but how much effect this had on popular opinion in the South is unknown; it certainly seems to have had no impact on the Western media and the majority of 'Korea experts' who continue, despite the available evidence, to accept the South Korea government verdict.

As the year passed, whether ordinary South Koreans had changed their minds or not, the *Cheonan* sinking receded somewhat from view. Not that the government did not do its best to keep it there. The wreck of the *Cheonan* was put on display and became something of a shrine. This was initially not very successful and it had only 80,000 visits during 2010. However, the number of visits shot up to 240,000 by December 2011.⁸⁰ What had brought about this upsurge? Clearly the Yeonpyeong Incident. Indeed, the same article notes that:

According to the Defense Ministry, altogether 740,000 civilians and schoolchildren visited the sites of last year's attacks by North Korea on the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong Island and several other sites, took part in hands-on experience at Army barracks, training programs at Army camps, and various events at military units. That was more than three times the 210,000 last year.⁸¹

All in all a bit of a blessing for the Defense Ministry which had come under a lot of criticism in 2010.⁸²

The 'Yeonpyeong effect', and the way it resuscitated anti North Korean sentiment was very noticeable and many commented on it. To take just one example here is the American Peter Peck:

The sudden explosion and sinking of the warship Cheonan on the night of March 26, 2010, killing 46 sailors, was initially shrouded in mystery, but Seoul's interim report on May 20 pointed the finger at

North Korea. ... However, there were enough ambiguities and inconsistencies even in the final report released on September 13 that many Koreans of a more liberal persuasion remain skeptical. ... Even though the rain of artillery unleashed by the North on the South's island of Yeonpyeong on the afternoon of November 23 killed far fewer people (two marines and two villagers) than the sinking of the warship, the South Korean public reacted with deeper shock and anger. Not only was there no ambiguity about the perpetrator, but it was also the first time since the Korean War that the North had launched artillery against civilians.⁸³

South Korean conservatives have a long history of either inciting or exploiting incidents with the North to fan what is called the North Wind in order to strengthen their position.⁸⁴ Just because the South Korean government benefitted from the Yeonpyeong Incident in terms of inflaming anti-North sentiment does not prove that it deliberately engineered the artillery duel in order to achieve that outcome. It could not have predicted the specific consequences and, Beck argues, it came under criticism 'for its halting and confused response'.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, it does seem that it carried out a provocative exercise knowing full well that the North would retaliate. To what degree it anticipated the strength of the ensuing North Wind is unknown. It may be that North Korea walked into a trap. On the other hand it may be that the vigour of the North's response was both unexpected, and took the South aback; it is perhaps significant that there have been no military clashes since then and that the South Korean military took great care when it commemorated the anniversary in November 2011 with great displays of firepower, not to force the North into another battle.⁸⁶

It is probably safest to see the Yeonpyeong exercises as part of a general policy of provocative action intended to build up tension (as were the accompanying *Hoguk* military exercises with their 70,000 troops, 50 warships, 500 warplanes, and 600 tanks) rather than a deliberate attempt to foment a physical battle.⁸⁷ It was certainly not an attempt to set off a second Korean War because as long as the KPA command structure was intact, although the South, or rather the Americans, would ultimately prevail, the costs and dangers would be immense. War would only be feasible if there were a collapse in the North and resistance minimal. That might be wishful thinking, and it almost certainly is since there is very little likelihood of such a thing occurring.⁸⁸ But wishful think can be the basis for a strategy, and Lee Myung-bak's *nordpolitik* seems to have been based on the hope that tension and pressure, along with sanctions, would do the trick and precipitate a crisis of confidence in Pyongyang.

The death of Kim, father and son

This policy of keeping tension alive, without actually going over the brink is seen in Lee's response to the death of Kim Jong il. Here there was a blueprint – the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994.

Then, according to a South Korean government official in 2011:

"When Kim Il-sung died in 1994, the government issued an emergency alert and did not offer condolences, which greatly provoked North Korea... It took a long time for bilateral relations to thaw after that."⁸⁹

The consequences of Kim Young-sam's response to the death of Kim Il Sung were well known and there was a hope that this time things would be handled differently. Dr Haksoon Paik, a well-connected South Korean scholar-cum-official suggested:

South Korea had already fumbled once in 1994 under the Kim Young-sam government when Kim Il Sung died, and has every reason not to repeat the same mistake. Even if the current Lee Myung-bak government desires a hardline policy toward the North, there is little chance to execute it because President Lee has become a lame duck, deep and wide.⁹⁰

But lame ducks can still waddle. Whilst the response in 2011 under Lee Myung-bak was more nuanced than it had been in 1994 under Kim Young-sam the outcome was the same and we might assume that, despite the rhetoric, that was expected and intended.

Firstly there was the immediate mobilisation of the South Korean military and their generals had emergency meetings with Gen. James Thurman, commander of U.S. Forces Korea (and the man with ultimate control over the South Korean forces in the event of war). This was due, it was said, 'to fears of mounting instability across the border, or any possible aggression'.⁹¹ Since the idea of aggression was preposterous – if North Korea was going to attack the immeasurably more powerful South Korean and American forces this was the least likely time – then perhaps it was so they could be ready to move if hoped-for 'instability' gave opportunity for intervention. On the other hand, since we do not know how high their hopes were, perhaps it was just an automatic reaction to provoke tension. After all, putting the military on alert when the leader of a neighbouring country dies is not usual practice unless the countries are already on the brink of war. The military were taken off alert after a week.⁹² If the measures were intended to get the North worried and annoyed, they succeeded:

No sooner had the important report of the DPRK [i.e. the announcement of Kim's death] been released than the south Korean puppet group convened an emergency "state security meeting" and "state affairs meeting" and put even overseas missions on emergency alert duty, kicking off rackets to create the impression that a "contingency" was created as expected, and a "golden opportunity" presented itself to lead the north to "system change".

The south Korean authorities put the three services of the puppet army on an emergency alert and ordered them to adopt combat posture, creating a war-like atmosphere on the ground and in the seas and air.⁹³

Then there was the issue of condolences. Kim Young-sam did not offer condolences but Lee Myung-bak did. In a manner of speaking.

...the South Korean government stated on Monday [19 December 2011], "We offer our consolation to the citizens of North Korea. We hope that North Korea will swiftly regain stability and become able to cooperate in order to achieve peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula."

The government also stated, "We have decided not to send a governmental delegation to North Korea. However, we will permit relatives of late former president Kim Dae-jung and late Hyundai chairman Chung Mong-hun to visit North Korea to offer condolences, in return for visits made by the North [when the two men died]." In other words, Kim Dae-jung's widow, Lee Hee-ho, and Chung's widow, Hyundai Group chairwoman Hyun Jeong-eun, will be allowed to make visits to the North to express their condolences.⁹⁴

So no official delegation and only two South Koreans (with aides) allowed to go to Pyongyang. Significantly, family members of the late president Roh Moo-hyun, who had accompanied him to the 2007 summit- a symbol of North South reconciliation- were forbidden to go to the North.⁹⁵ Hwang Hye-ro, a 35-year-old researcher based in France, described as a 'progressive South Korean civic activist' who flouted the prohibition and went on a condolence visit to Pyongyang was threatened with unspecified 'punishment' should she return to South Korea, Hwang had been jailed for two and a half years back in 1999 for an unauthorised trip to the North so she presumably had no illusions about what that might mean.⁹⁶

And the phrasing of the official condolences, made only to the 'citizens' and not the government of North Korea nor to the family of Kim Jong Il, as would be normal protocol, was surely deliberately

provocative. That is certainly how it was taken in Pyongyang. The North also complained about the South's censoring of condolence messages:

When south Koreans of various circles intended to send condolence messages, the puppet group invented complicated procedures and pretexts such as "applications for contact with inhabitants in the north," throwing obstacles and snatching all of them before they reached the north. It deleted all the expressions that courted its displeasure like the words "demise," "sorrow" and "condolences."⁹⁷

Engineering a predictable response

Despite frequent assertions by politicians and officials, and by the media, the North Korean government is not 'unpredictable'.⁹⁸ On the contrary, it is very predictable, certainly at the strategic level. As Leon Sigal put it some years back in respect of US-DPRK negotiations:

Pyongyang's bargaining tactics led many to conclude that it was engaging in blackmail in an attempt to obtain economic aid without giving up anything in return. It was not. It was playing tit for tat, cooperating whenever Washington cooperated and retaliating when Washington reneged, in an effort to end enmity.⁹⁹

So it was after Kim Jong Il's death. Pyongyang responded to Seoul in a quite predictable manner. It regarded Lee Myung-bak as acting in a non-Korean (and hence 'unethical') manner and reacted with anger.

He sought to attain his foolish goal by taking the advantage of the mourning period, and if that fails, to lead the DPRK to "contingency" and "change of system".

From the olden times, it was considered inhumane to raise one's fist at the neighbor visited by misfortune and seek profits.

Even a foreign country which has no diplomatic relations with the DPRK stopped the planned military exercises being considerate of the sorrow of the army and people of the DPRK and set a mourning period to express condolences. In the light of this, the traitorous group's bullying acts can not but be viewed as one defying human ethics and morality.

Lee group's stepped-up show of enmity toward the DPRK culminated in its act of blocking south Koreans who wanted to visit Pyongyang to mourn the demise of leader Kim Jong Il.¹⁰⁰

Lee was also accused of ignoring the essential homogeneity of the Korean people:

Though the country remains divided into the north and the south due to foreign forces, we are one nation.

The army and people of the DPRK, though suffering pain resulting from the division, have valued this homogenous nation more than anything else, always regarding as their faith the truth that the nation is above the ideology and system.

But this time the south Korean puppet group perpetrated such rash act as hurting the grief-stricken compatriots and rubbing salt into their wounds, determined to stop remaining as part of the nation of its own accord.¹⁰¹

Accordingly, Lee Myung-bak was excoriated: 'Lee Myung Bak Group of Traitors Accused of Thrice-cursed Crimes' and S. Korea's Crimes against Ethics and Treachery under Fire'.¹⁰²

In the meantime, while Lee was stoking up Pyongyang, he was giving a New Year's address in Seoul in which he claimed that he was opening a window to the North.

- Lee Holds Out Hand to N.Korea (*Chosun Ilbo*, Seoul)¹⁰³
- Lee pledges to open window to N.Korea in his last year in office (*Hankyoreh*, Seoul)¹⁰⁴
- S. Korean president sees 'window' to deal with North (*Washington Post*, Washington)¹⁰⁵
- South Korean president offers talks with North's new ruler (*Guardian*, London)¹⁰⁶

Given his handling of the condolence issue he could be confident that all he would get through that window would be angry stares. Indeed, he could be doubly confident because his new address offered nothing new, just a reprise of the 'grand bargain' by which North Korea would dismantle its nuclear programme in return for South Korean aid. This proposal had been rejected many times before and was essentially meaningless since the nuclear issue could only be discussed between Pyongyang and Washington. We will return to this in part 2 under 'agency'.

Even before the New Year address North Korea, inflamed by the condolence issue, had declared in the strongest possible political and emotional terms that it would have no dealings with Lee Myung-bak and his administration:

Upon joint authorization of the Party, state, army and people of the DPRK, the DPRK National Defence Commission clarifies the following principled stand on the group of traitors' hideous crimes committed at the time of the great misfortune of the nation:

As already declared, the DPRK will have no dealings with the Lee Myung Bak group of traitors forever. To company with them is a disgrace for the clear and honest-minded Korean nation as they are ignorant in politics, vulgar in morals and lack elementary human nature.¹⁰⁷

Pyongyang may not have handled the whole business wisely but the refusal to 'have no dealings with the Lee Myung Bak group of traitors forever' may be less consequential than it appears. Firstly, Lee had shown no signs of really wanting to open up dialogue with the new leadership. Certainly there were a number of people urging him to make 'a bold move' with the North and it would have made sense and he might have been able to rescue his presidency.¹⁰⁸ As a conservative he could do things vis-à-vis the North that might be difficult for a progressive, and the analogy with Nixon is apposite, as John Delury and Chung-in Moon point out:

Seoul's reaction is even more crucial, and delicate. The South Korean public is divided over inter-Korean relations, and President Lee Myung-bak takes a hit whichever way he steps. But there have been increasing signs of fatigue with a hard-line approach, and this president, who has proven his conservative credentials, is uniquely positioned for a kind of 'Nixon-in-China' moment. In fact, President Lee has sent a New Year's message to Pyongyang, noting the South's willingness to reopen talks and foster cooperation with the North. Nonetheless, Pyongyang's response has been quite hostile.¹⁰⁹

He could have done that but he chose not to and the reasons for that must lie in the complexities of South Korean politics. In addition, of course, he did not have the inducement that Nixon had – playing the China card to counterbalance the Soviet Union.

Secondly, he had already done his worst on the economic front; the tourism cooperation had been closed off (and the North had been looking to China and other partners) and while inter-Korean trade was down 10% in 2011 Lee had not managed to curtail the Kaesong Industrial Complex which

continued to grow.¹¹⁰ Thirdly, Lee Myung-bak was not merely a lame-duck president, but his clique was again mired in corruption charges and the GNP, riven between his dwindling supporters and those of Park Geun-hye, was looking towards further electoral disaster in 2012.¹¹¹ Fourthly, Lee himself was so unpopular that he was being urged to leave the GNP in order to save it.¹¹²

Winning the propaganda battle

Not everyone was so easily convinced that Lee was making real overtures to the North. The liberal *Hankyoreh* agonised over what it saw as his 'mixed messages' with the appointment of hard-liners to senior positions.¹¹³ Nevertheless, Lee certainly won the propaganda battle – 'noting the South's willingness to reopen talks and foster cooperation with the North. Nonetheless, Pyongyang's response has been quite hostile'. To many it seemed that he had offered an olive branch to the North but that had been rudely pushed aside.

Again it is careful reading of the evidence and placing events within context that enables us to grasp the dynamics. It may be that Lee Myung-bak will make a serious attempt to build bridges with North Korea during his last year in office. If South Korean politics is undergoing a sea change and his personal position within the GNP, especially vis-a-vis Park Geun-hye, and the position of the GNP itself under threat, as many suggest, then some Nixonesque gesture might be seen as a solution.

Deciphering the spin

Armed with a knowledge of the context, and aware of the play of events, we are able to recognise articles such as that produced by the South Korean state news agency Yonhap for the propaganda and self-serving spin they are:

S. Korea renews hope for talks with N. Korea

South Korea's point man on North Korea expressed hope Tuesday that Pyongyang will quickly stabilize and come forward for talks with Seoul.

South Korea has been seeking to have dialogue with North Korea to ease tension that still persists over the North's two deadly attacks on the South in 2010.

"I hope that North Korea will quickly restore stability and come forward for dialogue," Unification Minister Yu Woo-ik said in a meeting with more than 60 experts on North Korean affairs.¹¹⁴

There had been no sign of instability in North Korea after the death of Kim Jong Il, so there could be no question of it restoring stability. The North did not really conduct two deadly attacks on the South in 2010 and the tension was primarily the result of the South's fabrication (*Cheonan*) and provocation (Yeonpyeong). Minister Yu knows full well that North Korea will not 'come forward for dialogue' because his government has seen to it that they will not.

However, interpretation is also helped by recognising how Western media articles often work, and this one is a classic example.¹¹⁵ Articles often have to have some grounding in reality, even if that is inconvenient. In addition, I suspect, there is often a tension between journalists, who despite everything do attempt, within their limitations, to describe reality as they see it, and sub-editors who affix the heading that anchors the story into the official line. We often see, as here, the article starts off with a flagrant untruth but ends with a truth:

No high-level talks have been held between the two divided Koreas since 2008 when the conservative Lee Myung-bak government took power with a hard-line policy toward Pyongyang.¹¹⁶

That is really what has been happening. Lee Myung-bak's hardline *nordpolitik* has brought inter-Korean relations to a level of antipathy not seen since the days of the military dictatorships. The offer of talks with the North was yet another deceptive ploy.

The deceitful carapace

So delving deeper involves many things. In this particular case, penetrating beneath the deceitful carapace of the heading and reading to the end of the article, or skipping to it, looking for some truth amongst the spin. Recognising that most official statements are like commercials, intended to convince and persuade rather than enlighten. Being aware that we are picking our way through a fog of uncertainty and ignorance through a field littered with lies and deception, false signs, half-truths and 'murdered truths'.¹¹⁷

We need to read carefully and with discernment, attempting to put what we are told into a context that can help to validate or disprove assertions. Unfortunately, most assertions are not susceptible to verifiability or falsifiability in any sense that might satisfy natural scientists or philosophers, and we usually have to make do with plausibility. But that is the nature of the real world, of people and politics, and there is much we can do to get a clearer, and more truthful, picture.

The heading of a newspaper article has been compared to a carapace that both protects the contents from assault and also constrains them and gives them a meaning beyond their independent sense. This particular article could have been given the heading 'How S. Korea's tough policy on North backfired' and that would have radically changed the reader's perception of what the article was about. It so happens that this latter heading was used, a year previously, over an article by Mike Chinoy.¹¹⁸ Admittedly Chinoy's article has a broader sweep, but what essentially distinguishes it from the Yonhap one is that he is analysing the situation from a somewhat critical perspective – he is one of the few American commentators who do that – while the Yonhap article expresses the official line; it is a state news agency after all.

The concept of carapace can be extended far beyond a newspaper heading to serve as an analogy for a paradigm, a belief system that is used to 'understand and explain' facts. If we challenge the prevailing paradigm about the Korean peninsula and its geopolitical setting, if we delve beneath the carapace, then all sorts of things can be discovered or reinterpreted.¹¹⁹

In the next part of this essay I will look at three constructs –personalisation, agency, and inversion – which seem to me to be the main ways in which a false paradigm is fashioned and renewed.

Ahn, Chang-hyun. "Lee Administration Changing Its Attitude Towards North Korea." *Hankyoreh*, 23 December 2011.

———. "Lee Government Sends Mixed Messages with Reshuffled North Korea Policy." *Hankyoreh*, 16 January 2012.

———. "Lee Pledges to Open Window to N.Korea in His Last Year in Office." *Hankyoreh*, 3 January 2012.

———. "President's Close Associates Face Slew of Allegations." *Hankyoreh*, 14 January 2012.

Ahn, Christine. "A Korean Spring?" *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 4 January 2012.

Allison, Graham, and Douglas Dillon. "North Korea Won't Fire Nuke ... But Could Sell One to Osama." *Sun*, 28 May 2009.

Associated Press. "Armed to the Teeth: Mystery around North Korea's New Leader Presents Strategic Challenge." *Washington Post*, 23 December 2011.

———. "North Korea Shows Heir Kim Jong Un's Uncle in Military Uniform, Sign He'll Play a Bigger Role." *Washington Post*, 25 December 2011.

———. "Reforms of North Korea's Economy May Languish as New, Young Leader Consolidates Power." *Washington Post*, 23 December 2011.

———. "Sen. Richard Lugar Fears That North Korean Nuclear Materials, Nuclear Weapons Could Be Sold." *Washington Post*, 26 December 2011.

Avnery, Uri. "Gingrich, Israel and the Palestinians." *Global Research*, 16-18 December 2011.

Beal, Tim. *Crisis in Korea: America, China, and the Risk of War*. London: Pluto, 2011.

———. "Korean Brinkmanship, American Provocation, and the Road to War: The Manufacturing of a Crisis." *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 8, no. 51:1 (20 December 2010).

———. "On the Death of Kim Jong Il: Contrasting Perspectives." *Korean Quarterly*, 2012.

———. "Theatre of War and Prospects for Peace on the Korean Peninsula on the Anniversary of the Yeonpyeong Incident." *The Asia Pacific Journal* 9, no. Issue 51 No 1, December 19, 2011 (19 December 2011).

———. "The United Nations and the North Korean Missile and Nuclear Tests ". *NZ Journal of Asian Studies* 9, no. 2 (December 2007): 104-25.

Beck, Peter. "North Korea in 2010: Provocations and Succession." *Asian Survey* 51, no. 1 (January/February 2011).

Boot, Max "The New American Way of War." *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2003.

Broad, William J. "New Study Ranks Countries on Security of Materials That Fuel Nuclear Arms." *New York Times*, 10 January 2012.

Bumiller, Elisabeth, and David E. Sanger. "Gates Warns of North Korea Missile Threat to U.S." *New York Times*, 11 January 2011.

"China's First Aircraft Carrier Starts Second Trial." *AFP*, 29 November 2011.

Chinoy, Mike. "How S. Korea's Tough Policy on North Backfired." *CNN*, 1 January 2011.

———. *Meltdown: The inside Story of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis*. St. Martin's Press 2008.

———. "Method in North Korea's Madness." *Forbes*, 17 May 2010.

Cho, Jae-eun, and Ki-heon Kang. "Eyes on Local Polls, Parties Squabble over 'North Wind'." *JoongAng Ilbo*, 25 May 2010.

Choe, Sang-hyun. "In North Korean Mourning, Succession Clues." *New York Times*, 25 December 2011.

Choi, Hyun-june. "Statistics Korea Omits Grain from N.Korean Figures." *Hankyoreh*, 18 January 2012.

Church, James. "Reflections on "the Party as the Kingmaker"." *38 North*, 27 December 2011.

"Controversy Erupts over Feasibility of Next-Generation Fighter Jet Program." *Korea Times*, 12 January 2012.

"Corruption Perception Index." *Transparency International*, 1 December 2011.

Costello, Stephen. "South Korea's Big Dilemma." *38 North*, 4 January 2012.

Delury, John, and Chung-in Moon. "North Korea's Transition: Do Not Let Contingencies Distract from Realities." *East Asia Forum*, 15 January 2012.

"Dprk Can Never Accept U.S. Brigandish Demand." *KCNA*, 16 September 2005.

Editorial. "Blown Down by a North Wind." *JoongAng Ilbo*, 19 May 2010.

Fackler, Martin. "Ship Sinking Aids Ruling Party in S. Korean Vote." *New York Times*, 1 June 2010.

Feffer, John. "Transparency Fundamentalists." *World Beat*, 30 November 2010.

Fish, Isaac Stone. "The Black Hole of North Korea." *New York Times*, 8 August 2011.

Gearan, Anne, and Matthew Lee. "South Korea Warns of Problems When Nk Power Shifts." *Washington Post*, 8 October 2010.

Gowans, Stephen. "Kim Jong-Il's Death Is a Danger for North Korea, Not Its Neighbors " *What's Left*, 20 December 2011.

Gupta, Karunakar. "How Did the Korean War Begin?". *The China Quarterly*, no. 52 (1972): 699-716.

Harlan, Chico. "North Korea Coup Rumors Fueled by Chinese Social Media." *Washington Post*, 5 January 2012.

———. "Rumor of N. Korean Nuclear Explosion Prompts Brief Stock Panic in South." *Washington Post*, 6 January 2012.

———. "S. Korean President Sees 'Window' to Deal with North." *Washington Post*, 3 January 2012.

———. "A Week after N. Korean Leader's Death, Signs of Smooth Transition." *Washington Post*, 26 December 2011.

Hayes, Peter, and Scott Bruce. "Unprecedented Nuclear Strikes of the Invincible Army: A Realistic Assessment of North Korea's Operational Nuclear Capability." *Nautilus*, 22 September 2011.

Hildreth, Steven A. *North Korean Missile Threat to the United States*. Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2009.

Hoogvelt, Ankie. "Picking Your Way through a Field of Murdered Truths." *Comments on 'Crisis in Korea' by Tim Beal*, 6 March 2011.

"How Soon Can N.Korea Develop Long-Range Missiles? ." *Chosun Ilbo*, 13 January 2011.

Hughes, Nathan "The North Korean Nuclear Test and Geopolitical Reality." *Stratfor.com*, 26 May 2009.

Hwang, Joon-bum. "S.Korean Government Offers Condolences to the North over Kim Jong-Il's Death." *Hankyoreh*, 21 December 2011.

International Crisis Group. "North Korea: The Risks of War in the Yellow Sea." *Asia Report* N°198 (23 December 2010).

Kim, Hyung-jin. "Skoreans Dismissed Intel North Might Attack Island." *Washington Post*, 2 December 2010.

Kim, Ji-seok. "A Chance to Eliminate North Wind Politics." *Hankyoreh*, 9 June 2010.

Kim, John. "The Artillery Duel in Korea: Missing Facts and Historical Context in the Military Clash of Nov. 23." *Korea Policy Institute*, 18 March 2011.

"Kim Jong-Un Orders Army Back to Barracks." *Chosun Ilbo*, 22 December 2011.

"Korea Remains World's 3rd Biggest Arms Importer." *Chosun Ilbo*, 8 December 2011.

"Korean People's Army Estimated to Number 700 Thousand Troops." *Hankyoreh*, 19 March 2010.

Lee, Chi-dong. "Main Opposition Heading for Stunning Victory in Local Elections." *Yonhap*, 3 June 2010.

"Lee Holds out Hand to N.Korea." *Chosun Ilbo*, 3 January 2012.

"Lee Myung Bak Group of Traitors Accused of Thrice-Cursed Crimes." *KCNA*, 30 December 2011.

Lee, Tae-hee. "Nis Chief under Fire for Lack of Information on Kim's Death." *Hankyoreh*, 21 December 2011.

———. "Nis Chief Won Criticised for Destroying Its N.Korean Human Intelligence Part." *Hankyoreh*, 22 December 2011.

Lee, Tae-hoon. "Korea Eyes Tenfold Growth in Defense Exports." *Korea Times*, 16 January 2012.

———. "Korea Succeeds in Developing Interceptor Missile." *Korea Times*, 15 December 2011.

———. "Military to Delay Production of K2 Tanks." *Korea Times*, 17 January 2012.

———. "Seoul Admits Intelligence Failure." *Korea Times*, 20 December 2011.

McCurry, Justin. "South Korean President Offers Talks with North's New Ruler." *Guardian*, 2 January 2012.

The Military Balance 2011. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2011.

"Military Knew of N.Korean Artillery Move before Attack." *Chosun Ilbo*, 26 November 2010.

"Military on Emergency Alert after Kim Jong-Il's Death." *Chosun Ilbo*, 20 December 2011.

"Military Suggests Counterfire Caused 'Many Casualties' in N. Korea ". *Yonhap*, 2 December 2010.

"More Than 300,000 People Visit Cheonan Wreck." *Chosun Ilbo*, 14 December 2011.

"Nis in the Dark over Kim Jong-Il's Death." *Chosun Ilbo*, 20 December 2011.

"Nk Pointing to Heir's Uncle Playing Key Role." *Korea Times*, 25 December 2011.

"Northern Limit Line." Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Limit_Line.

"Nti Nuclear Materials Security Index." *Nuclear Threat Initiative and Economist Intelligence Unit*, January 2012.

"Nuclear Power Accidents by Country." Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_accidents_by_country.

Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President on the Defense Strategic Review." *White House*, 5 January 2012.

Oliver, Christian "Theories Why Pyongyang Sank Warship." *Financial Times*, 24 May 2010.

Paik, Haksoon. "Kim Jong Un's Power and Policy: Current State and Future Prospects." *38 North*, 27 December 2011.

Park, Hyo-chong. "Don't Let History Repeat Itself." *JoongAng Ilbo*, 24 May 2010.

Park, Hyun. "Business Goes on as Usual at the Kaesong Complex after Kim's Death." *Hankyoreh*, 22 December 2011.

Pilkington, Ed. "Slutwalking Gets Rolling after Cop's Loose Talk About Provocative Clothing." *Guardian*, 6 May 2011.

"Record Numbers of Workers at Kaesong Industrial Complex." *Chosun Ilbo*, 17 November 2011.

"Resolution 1718." *United Nations Security Council*, 14 October 2006.

Reuters. "Japan Drops Ban on Military Exports." *Guardian*, 27 December 2011.

Rogers, Simon, and Claire Provost. "Corruption Index 2011 from Transparency International: Find out How Countries Compare." *Guardian*, 1 December 2011.

"Rum Remark Wins Rumsfeld an Award." *BBC*, 2 December 2003.

"S. Korea's Crimes against Ethics and Treachery under Fire ". *KCNA*, 4 January 2012.

Sanati, Reza. "A Troubling Lesson from Libya: Don't Give up Nukes." *Christian Science Monitor*, 30 August 2011.

"Security Council Condemns Attack on Republic of Korea Naval Ship 'Cheonan', Stresses Need to Prevent Further Attacks, Other Hostilities in Region." *United Nations Security Council*, 9 July 2010.

Seliger, Bernhard. "Time for a Bold New Offer from South Korea." *38 North*, 4 January 2012.

Seong, Yeon-cheol. "Gnp Infighting Spiralling out of Control." *Hankyoreh*, 14 January 2012.

———. "Gnp Key Figure Suggests Lee Myung-Bak Bow Out." *Hankyoreh*, 19 January 2012.

———. "New Evidence of Gnp Corruption Threatens the Party's Future." *Hankyoreh*, 12 January 2012.

"Seoul Keen to Avoid Provoking N.Korea." *Chosun Ilbo*, 22 December 2011.

Shanker, Thom, and Eric Schmitt. "Seeing Limits of 'New' War." *New York Times*, 22 October 2011.

Shin, Hae-in. "N.K. Emerges as Key Election Issue." *Korea Herald*, 20 May 2010.

Sigal, Leon V. *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea*. Princeton Studies in International History and Politics. edited by Jack L. Snyder and Richard H. Ullman Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998.

———. "North Korea Is No Iraq: Pyongyang's Negotiating Strategy." *Arms Control Today*, December 2002.

———. "Preventing a Nuclear North Korea." *The National Interest*, 23 June 2011.

———. "What Obama Should Offer North Korea." *Bulletin of the atomic scientists*, 28 January 2009.

Smith, Hazel. "Bad, Mad, Sad or Rational Actor? Why the 'Securitization' Paradigm Makes for Poor Policy Analysis of North Korea." *International Affairs* 76, no. 1 (January 2000).

Snyder, Scott A., Paul B. Stares, and Anya (presider) Schmemmann. "North Korea after Kim Jong-Il " *Council on Foreign Relations*, 19 December 2011.

Song, Sang-ho. "N.K. Artillery Strikes S. Korean Island." *Korea Herald*, 23 November 2010.

Spielmann, Peter James. "Carter: If No Palestine, Israel Sees 'Catastrophe' " *Associated Press*, 26 January 2009.

"Spies Intercepted Plans for Yeonpyeong Attack in August ". *Chosun Ilbo*, 2 December 2010.

Stares, Paul B. "On Escalation in Korea." *38 North* (13 January 2011).
 ———. "Seize the Moment in North Korea." *International Herald Tribune*, 22 December 2011.
 "Statement by the President of the Security Council." *United Nations Security Council*, 9 July.
 The World from Berlin. "'North Korea Seems to Have a Sort of Death Wish'." *Der Spiegel*, 21 May 2010.
 "Top Strategist Says N.Korea Will Be Able to Nuke U.S. In 2012." *Chosun Ilbo*, 17 June 2011.
 "U.S. Suspects Korea of Stealing Weapons Technology ". *Chosun Ilbo*, 1 November 2011.
 "U.S. Worries About Growing Korean Arms Exports." *Chosun Ilbo*, 18 November 2011.
 Ukman, Jason. "New Index Ranks Countries on Nuclear Security." *Washington Post*, 11 January 2012.
 Vorontsov, Alexander. "North Korea after Kim Jong Il." *38 North*, 28 December 2011.
 ———. "North Korean Nuclear Weapons: Lessons from Libya." *East Asia Forum*, 3 September 2011.
 "Was China Told First of Kim Jong-il's Death?". *Chosun Ilbo*, 21 December 2011.
 "Wide-Ranging Incompetence and Cover-Ups Took Place Night of Cheonan Sinking, Audit Reveals." *Hankyoreh*, 11 June 2010.
 Wilson, Scott, and Greg Jaffe. "In Creating New Defense Strategy, Obama Attempts to Outflank Congress." *Washington Post*, 8 January 2011.
World Development Indicators 2010. Washington: World Bank, 2010.
 Yonhap. "Inter-Korean Trade Drops 10% Last Year." *Korea Times*, 14 January 2012.
 ———. "Korea to Develop Stealth Infiltration Boats: Source." *Korea Times*, 17 December 2011.
 ———. "Korean Activist Pays Respects to Kim During Illegal Visit to N. Korea." *Korea Times*, 28 December 2011.
 ———. "Military Lowers Cyber Alert Level to Normal." *Korea Times*, 28 December 2011.
 ———. "Police Probing Rumors on N. Korea Atomic Accident." *Korea Times*, 7 January 2012.
 ———. "S. Korea Renews Hope for Talks with N. Korea." *Korea Times*, 17 January 2012.
 Yoo, Cheong-mo. "Election Defeat Casts Gloom over Lee Administration, Ruling Party." *Yonhap*, 3 June 2010.

¹ James Church, "Reflections on "The Party as the Kingmaker", " *38 North*, 27 December 2011.
² For a brief survey, and that quip from James Church again, see Tim Beal, "On the Death of Kim Jong Il: Contrasting Perspectives," *Korean Quarterly* 2012.
³ "Rum remark wins Rumsfeld an award," *BBC*, 2 December 2003.
⁴ Isaac Stone Fish, "The Black Hole of North Korea," *New York Times*, 8 August 2011.
⁵ Tae-hee Lee, "NIS chief under fire for lack of information on Kim's death," *Hankyoreh*, 21 December 2011.
⁶ *ibid*; Tae-hoon Lee, "Seoul admits intelligence failure," *Korea Times*, 20 December 2011; "NIS in the Dark Over Kim Jong-il's Death," *Chosun Ilbo*, 20 December 2011.
⁷ "Was China Told First of Kim Jong-il's Death?," *Chosun Ilbo*, 21 December 2011.
⁸ Tae-hee Lee, "NIS chief Won criticised for destroying its N.Korean human intelligence part," *Hankyoreh*, 22 December 2011.
⁹ Lee, "Seoul admits intelligence failure."
¹⁰ Hyun-june Choi, "Statistics Korea omits grain from N.Korean figures," *Hankyoreh*, 18 January 2012.
¹¹ Chico Harlan, "A week after N. Korean leader's death, signs of smooth transition," *Washington Post*, 26 December 2011.
¹² See Tim Beal, *Crisis in Korea: America, China, and the risk of war* (London: Pluto, 2011).
¹³ Scott A. Snyder, Paul B. Stares, and Anya (presider) Schmemmann, "North Korea After Kim Jong-Il " *Council on Foreign Relations*, 19 December 2011.
¹⁴ "Kim Jong-un Orders Army Back to Barracks," *Chosun Ilbo*, 22 December 2011.
¹⁵ Harlan, "A week after N. Korean leader's death, signs of smooth transition."
¹⁶ Paul B. Stares, "Seize the Moment in North Korea," *International Herald Tribune*, 22 December 2011.

¹⁷ "NK pointing to heir's uncle playing key role," *Korea Times*, 25 December 2011; Sang-hyun Choe, "In North Korean Mourning, Succession Clues," *New York Times*, 25 December 2011.

¹⁸ Associated Press, "North Korea shows heir Kim Jong Un's uncle in military uniform, sign he'll play a bigger role," *Washington Post*, 25 December 2011.

¹⁹ Anne Gearan and Matthew Lee, "South Korea warns of problems when NK power shifts," *Washington Post*, 8 October 2010.

²⁰ Christian Oliver, "Theories why Pyongyang sank warship," *Financial Times*, 24 May 2010; Peter Beck, "North Korea in 2010: Provocations and Succession," *Asian Survey* 51, no. 1 (2011).

²¹ Hazel Smith, "Bad, Mad, Sad or Rational Actor? Why the 'Securitization' Paradigm Makes for Poor Policy Analysis of North Korea," *International Affairs* 76, no. 1 (2000).

²² Snyder, Stares, and Schmemmann, "North Korea After Kim Jong-Il".

²³ Beal, *Crisis in Korea: America, China, and the risk of war*.

²⁴ Yonhap, "Police probing rumors on N. Korea atomic accident," *Korea Times*, 7 January 2012.

²⁵ Chico Harlan, "Rumor of N. Korean nuclear explosion prompts brief stock panic in South," *Washington Post*, 6 January 2012.

²⁶ "Nuclear power accidents by country," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_accidents_by_country.

²⁷ ———, "North Korea coup rumors fueled by Chinese social media," *Washington Post*, 5 January 2012.

²⁸ "Corruption Perception Index," *Transparency International*, 1 December 2011; Simon Rogers and Claire Provost, "Corruption index 2011 from Transparency International: find out how countries compare," *Guardian*, 1 December 2011.

²⁹ "NTI Nuclear Materials Security Index," *Nuclear Threat Initiative and Economist Intelligence Unit*, January 2012. William J. Broad, "New Study Ranks Countries on Security of Materials That Fuel Nuclear Arms," *New York Times*, 10 January 2012; Jason Ukman, "New index ranks countries on nuclear security," *Washington Post*, 11 January 2012.

³⁰ I hope to return to these indexes in more depth at some time

³¹ Associated Press, "Armed to the teeth: Mystery around North Korea's new leader presents strategic challenge," *Washington Post*, 23 December 2011.

³² *The Military Balance 2011*, (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2011).

³³ "NK pointing to heir's uncle playing key role."; Harlan, "A week after N. Korean leader's death, signs of smooth transition."

³⁴ "Korean People's Army estimated to number 700 thousand troops," *Hankyoreh*, 19 March 2010.

³⁵ Reuters, "Japan drops ban on military exports," *Guardian*, 27 December 2011.

³⁶ Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt, "Seeing Limits Of 'New' War," *New York Times*, 22 October 2011.

³⁷ *The Military Balance 2011*.

³⁸ Max Boot, "The New American Way of War," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2003.

³⁹ Stephen Gowans, "Kim Jong-il's Death is a Danger for North Korea, not its Neighbors " *What's Left*, 20 December 2011.

⁴⁰ "Controversy erupts over feasibility of next-generation fighter jet program," *Korea Times*, 12 January 2012.

⁴¹ Tae-hoon Lee, "Military to delay production of K2 tanks," *Korea Times*, 17 January 2012.

⁴² ———, "Korea succeeds in developing interceptor missile," *Korea Times*, 15 December 2011; Yonhap, "Korea to develop stealth infiltration boats: source," *Korea Times*, 17 December 2011.

⁴³ For an explanation of TIV see http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/background/explanations2_default

⁴⁴ Tae-hoon Lee, "Korea eyes tenfold growth in defense exports," *Korea Times*, 16 January 2012.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ "U.S. Suspects Korea of Stealing Weapons Technology ", *Chosun Ilbo*, 1 November 2011; "U.S. Worries About Growing Korean Arms Exports," *Chosun Ilbo*, 18 November 2011.

⁴⁷ "Korea Remains World's 3rd Biggest Arms Importer," *Chosun Ilbo*, 8 December 2011.

⁴⁸ *World Development Indicators 2010*, (Washington: World Bank, 2010). For a table see the statistical appendix for Crisis in Korea at http://www.timbeal.net.nz/Crisis_in_Korea/

⁴⁹ "China's first aircraft carrier starts second trial," *AFP*, 29 November 2011.

⁵⁰ Scott Wilson and Greg Jaffe, "In creating new defense strategy, Obama attempts to outflank Congress," *Washington Post*, 8 January 2011.

-
- ⁵¹ Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Defense Strategic Review," *White House*, 5 January 2012.
- ⁵² Tim Beal, "The United Nations and the North Korean missile and nuclear tests " *NZ Journal of Asian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2007).
- ⁵³ "Resolution 1718," *United Nations Security Council*, 14 October 2006.
- ⁵⁴ Nathan Hughes, "The North Korean Nuclear Test and Geopolitical Reality," *Stratfor.com*, 26 May 2009.
- ⁵⁵ "DPRK Can Never Accept U.S. Brigandish Demand," *KCNA*, 16 September 2005.
- ⁵⁶ Reza Sanati, "A troubling lesson from Libya: Don't give up nukes," *Christian Science Monitor*, 30 August 2011; Alexander Vorontsov, "North Korean nuclear weapons: Lessons from Libya," *East Asia Forum*, 3 September 2011.
- ⁵⁷ Peter Hayes and Scott Bruce, "Unprecedented Nuclear Strikes of the Invincible Army: A Realistic Assessment of North Korea's Operational Nuclear Capability," *Nautilus*, 22 September 2011.
- ⁵⁸ Steven A Hildreth, *North Korean missile threat to the United States* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2009); "Top Strategist Says N.Korea Will Be Able to Nuke U.S. in 2012," *Chosun Ilbo*, 17 June 2011.
- ⁵⁹ Elisabeth Bumiller and David E. Sanger, "Gates Warns of North Korea Missile Threat to U.S," *New York Times*, 11 January 2011; "How Soon Can N.Korea Develop Long-Range Missiles?," *Chosun Ilbo*, 13 January 2011.
- ⁶⁰ For more on this see Beal, *Crisis in Korea: America, China, and the risk of war*.
- ⁶¹ Graham Allison and Douglas Dillon, "North Korea won't fire nuke ... but could sell one to Osama," *Sun*, 28 May 2009; Associated Press, "Sen. Richard Lugar fears that North Korean nuclear materials, nuclear weapons could be sold," *Washington Post*, 26 December 2011.
- ⁶² The best writers on this subject are probably Mike Chinoy and Leon Sigal. See, for instance, Mike Chinoy, "Method In North Korea's Madness," *Forbes*, 17 May 2010; ———, *Meltdown: The Inside Story of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (St. Martin's Press 2008); Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea*, ed. Jack L. Snyder and Richard H. Ullman, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998); ———, "What Obama should offer North Korea," *Bulletin of the atomic scientists*, 28 January 2009; ———, "Preventing a Nuclear North Korea," *The National Interest*, 23 June 2011.
- ⁶³ Peter James Spielmann, "Carter: If no Palestine, Israel sees 'catastrophe' " *Associated Press*, 26 January 2009.
- ⁶⁴ Ed Pilkington, "SlutWalking gets rolling after cop's loose talk about provocative clothing," *Guardian*, 6 May 2011.
- ⁶⁵ Uri Avnery, "Gingrich, Israel and the Palestinians," *Global Research*, 16-18 December 2011.
- ⁶⁶ A well traversed story, but see for instance Karunakar Gupta, "How Did the Korean War Begin?," *The China Quarterly*, no. 52 (1972).
- ⁶⁷ International Crisis Group, "North Korea: The Risks of War in the Yellow Sea," *Asia Report* N°198 (2010).
- ⁶⁸ Tim Beal, "Korean Brinkmanship, American Provocation, and the Road to War: the manufacturing of a crisis," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 8, no. 51:1 (2010).
- ⁶⁹ John Feffer, "Transparency Fundamentalists," *World Beat*, 30 November 2010.
- ⁷⁰ "Northern Limit Line," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Limit_Line.
- ⁷¹ "Military suggests counterfire caused 'many casualties' in N. Korea ", *Yonhap*, 2 December 2010.
- ⁷² "Military Knew of N.Korean Artillery Move Before Attack," *Chosun Ilbo*, 26 November 2010; Hyung-jin Kim, "SKoreans dismissed intel North might attack island," *Washington Post*, 2 December 2010.
- ⁷³ "Spies Intercepted Plans for Yeonpyeong Attack in August ", *Chosun Ilbo*, 2 December 2010.
- ⁷⁴ The World from Berlin, "'North Korea Seems To Have a Sort of Death Wish'," *Der Spiegel*, 21 May 2010.
- ⁷⁵ Paul B. Stares, "On Escalation in Korea," *38 North* (2011).
- ⁷⁶ Sang-ho Song, "N.K. artillery strikes S. Korean island," *Korea Herald*, 23 November 2010.
- ⁷⁷ Hae-in Shin, "N.K. emerges as key election issue," *Korea Herald*, 20 May 2010. Editorial, "Blown down by a north wind," *JoongAng Ilbo*, 19 May 2010; Martin Fackler, "Ship Sinking Aids Ruling Party in S. Korean Vote," *New York Times*, 1 June 2010.
- ⁷⁸ Chi-dong Lee, "Main opposition heading for stunning victory in local elections," *Yonhap*, 3 June 2010; Cheong-mo Yoo, "Election defeat casts gloom over Lee administration, ruling party," *Yonhap*, 3 June 2010.

79 "Statement by the President of the Security Council," *United Nations Security Council*, 9 July; "Security Council Condemns Attack on Republic of Korea Naval Ship 'Cheonan', Stresses Need to Prevent Further Attacks, Other Hostilities in Region," *United Nations Security Council*, 9 July 2010.

80 "More Than 300,000 People Visit Cheonan Wreck," *Chosun Ilbo*, 14 December 2011.

81 *ibid.*

82 "Wide-ranging incompetence and cover-ups took place night of Cheonan sinking, audit reveals," *Hankyoreh*, 11 June 2010.

83 Beck, "North Korea in 2010: Provocations and Succession."

84 Ji-seok Kim, "A chance to eliminate North Wind politics," *Hankyoreh*, 9 June 2010; Hyo-chong Park, "Don't let history repeat itself," *JoongAng Ilbo*, 24 May 2010; Jae-eun Cho and Ki-heon Kang, "Eyes on local polls, parties squabble over 'north wind'," *JoongAng Ilbo*, 25 May 2010.

85 Beck, "North Korea in 2010: Provocations and Succession."

86 Tim Beal, "Theatre of War and Prospects for Peace on the Korean Peninsula on the Anniversary of the Yeonpyeong Incident," *The Asia Pacific Journal* 9, no. Issue 51 No 1, December 19, 2011 (2011).

87 John Kim, "The Artillery Duel in Korea: Missing facts and historical context in the military clash of Nov. 23," *Korea Policy Institute*, 18 March 2011.

88 Alexander Vorontsov, "North Korea After Kim Jong Il," *38 North*, 28 December 2011.

89 "Seoul Keen to Avoid Provoking N.Korea," *Chosun Ilbo*, 22 December 2011.

90 Haksoon Paik, "Kim Jong Un's Power and Policy: Current State and Future Prospects," *38 North*, 27 December 2011.

91 "Military on Emergency Alert After Kim Jong-il's Death," *Chosun Ilbo*, 20 December 2011.

92 Yonhap, "Military lowers cyber alert level to normal," *Korea Times*, 28 December 2011.

93 "Lee Myung Bak Group of Traitors Accused of Thrice-cursed Crimes," *KCNA*, 30 December 2011.

94 Joon-bum Hwang, "S.Korean government offers condolences to the North over Kim Jong-il's death," *Hankyoreh*, 21 December 2011.

95 *ibid.*; Chang-hyun Ahn, "Lee administration changing its attitude towards North Korea," *Hankyoreh*, 23 December 2011.

96 Yonhap, "Korean activist pays respects to Kim during illegal visit to N. Korea," *Korea Times*, 28 December 2011.

97 "S. Korea's Crimes against Ethics and Treachery under Fire ", *KCNA*, 4 January 2012.

98 Snyder, Stares, and Schmemmann, "North Korea After Kim Jong-Il "; Associated Press, "Reforms of North Korea's economy may languish as new, young leader consolidates power," *Washington Post*, 23 December 2011.

99 Leon V. Sigal, "North Korea Is No Iraq: Pyongyang's Negotiating Strategy," *Arms Control Today*, December 2002.

100 "Lee Myung Bak Group of Traitors Accused of Thrice-cursed Crimes."

101 *ibid.*

102 *ibid.*; "S. Korea's Crimes against Ethics and Treachery under Fire ".

103 "Lee Holds Out Hand to N.Korea," *Chosun Ilbo*, 3 January 2012.

104 Chang-hyun Ahn, "Lee pledges to open window to N.Korea in his last year in office," *Hankyoreh*, 3 January 2012.

105 Chico Harlan, "S. Korean president sees 'window' to deal with North," *Washington Post*, 3 January 2012.

106 Justin McCurry, "South Korean president offers talks with North's new ruler," *Guardian*, 2 January 2012.

107 "Lee Myung Bak Group of Traitors Accused of Thrice-cursed Crimes."

108 Bernhard Seliger, "Time For a Bold New Offer from South Korea," *38 North*, 4 January 2012; Stephen Costello, "South Korea's Big Dilemma," *38 North*, 4 January 2012.

109 John Delury and Chung-in Moon, "North Korea's transition: do not let contingencies distract from realities," *East Asia Forum*, 15 January 2012.

110 Yonhap, "Inter-Korean trade drops 10% last year," *Korea Times*, 14 January 2012; "Record Numbers of Workers at Kaesong Industrial Complex," *Chosun Ilbo*, 17 November 2011; Hyun Park, "Business goes on as usual at the Kaesong Complex after Kim's death," *Hankyoreh*, 22 December 2011.

111 Christine Ahn, "A Korean Spring?," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 4 January 2012; Yeon-cheol Seong, "New evidence of GNP corruption threatens the party's future," *Hankyoreh*, 12 January 2012; Chang-hyun Ahn,

"President's close associates face slew of allegations," *Hankyoreh*, 14 January 2012; Yeon-cheol Seong, "GNP infighting spiralling out of control," *Hankyoreh*, 14 January 2012.

¹¹² ———, "GNP key figure suggests Lee Myung-bak bow out," *Hankyoreh*, 19 January 2012.

¹¹³ Chang-hyun Ahn, "Lee Government sends mixed messages with reshuffled North Korea policy," *Hankyoreh*, 16 January 2012.

¹¹⁴ Yonhap, "S. Korea renews hope for talks with N. Korea," *Korea Times*, 17 January 2012.

¹¹⁵ North Korea's KCNA presents, and distorts, reality in a different way

¹¹⁶ Yonhap, "S. Korea renews hope for talks with N. Korea."

¹¹⁷ Ankie Hoogvelt, "Picking your way through a field of murdered truths," *Comments on 'Crisis in Korea'* by Tim Beal, 6 March 2011.

¹¹⁸ Mike Chinoy, "How S. Korea's tough policy on North backfired," *CNN*, 1 January 2011.

¹¹⁹ Smith, "Bad, Mad, Sad or Rational Actor? Why the 'Securitization' Paradigm Makes for Poor Policy Analysis of North Korea."