

# *Change on the agenda for the Korean Peninsula*

Tim Beal

*[http://www.timbeal.net.nz/Crisis\\_in\\_Korea/](http://www.timbeal.net.nz/Crisis_in_Korea/)*

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

# Outline

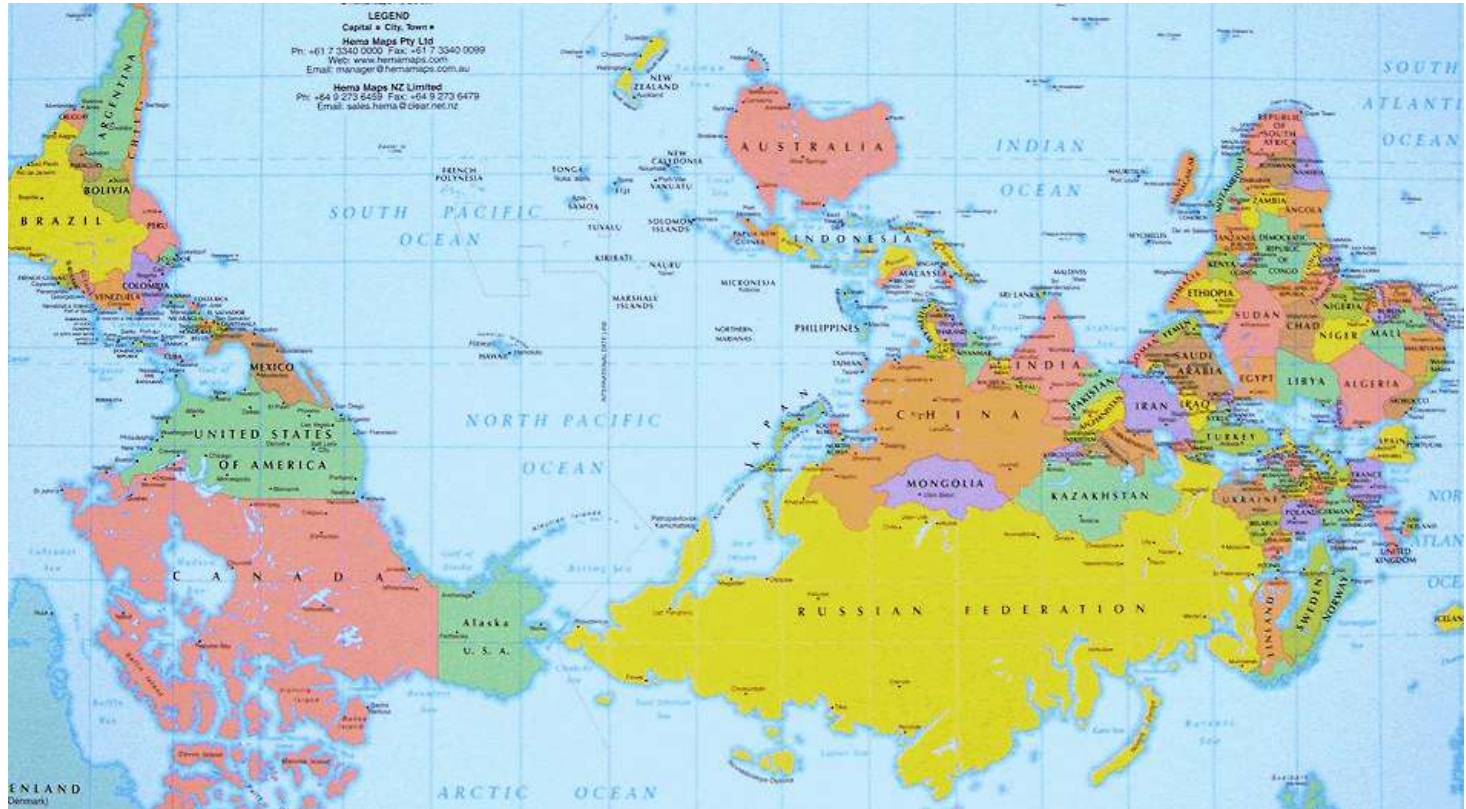
- Analytical framework
- Administration of Lee Myung-bak
- Policies and positions of the main actors
  - China, Russia, US, Japan, North Korea, South Korea
- Prospects and hopes for post-2012 Korea

# Analytical framework

- Geographical
- Historical, geopolitical
- Geography >> History, geopolitics

# Location, Location

Korean peninsula is where US, China, Russia, Japan intersect and contend



# Conduit and dagger

Buddhism, writing, Confucianism...invasion both directions



# Strategic location

- Japan needed Korea for invasion of Asia
- 1945 – US divided Korea to have a buffer against Communist contagion
- Need continues today as containment of China
  - Division of Korea>>tension>>justifies US presence
- China (+ Russia) want NK as buffer against US
  - But also want stability

# Administration of Lee Myung-bak

- Feb 2008 – Feb 2013 (election December 2012)
- Conservative - succeeded progressives Kim Dae-jung, Roh Moo-hyun
- Hardline NK policy versus engagement
- NK policy widely seen as a failure
  - Park Geun-hye distances herself from Lee, and NK policy
  - Article in *Foreign Affairs* , Sep/Oct 2011
    - A new kind of Korea: building trust between Seoul and Pyongyang

# Failure to achieve what?

- Lee's 'grand bargain- NK's denuclearisation in exchange for aid and trade
- Bogus – no SK president can speak for US
  - Even US presidents have problems
- Real objective – collapse of NK and takeover by SK
  - NK debilitated by sanctions
  - Kim Jong Il sickly
  - Crisis ( KJI death, incapacitation...) would lead to implosion



# Lee's Northern strategy

- Sanctions
- Buildup of tension through military exercises
  - Practice for invasion
- Cheonan incident (March 2010)
  - SK ship sank after accidentally detonating SK mine
  - Fabricated evidence to incriminate NK

# Growing scepticism in SK

The Chosunilbo  
english.chosun.com

## Fewer People Trust Gov't Account of Cheonan Sinking

Some 71.3 percent of South Koreans now believe the South Korean government's announcement that the Navy corvette Cheonan was torpedoed by North Korea, according to a poll. The Chosun Ilbo commissioned Media Research to conduct the survey on Saturday to mark the second anniversary of shipwreck.

That is 8.7 percent less than the 80 percent who believed the official version in a survey by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and Hankook Research a year ago. The decline could be due to conspiracy theories circulating among young people that the government fabricated or concealed the truth.

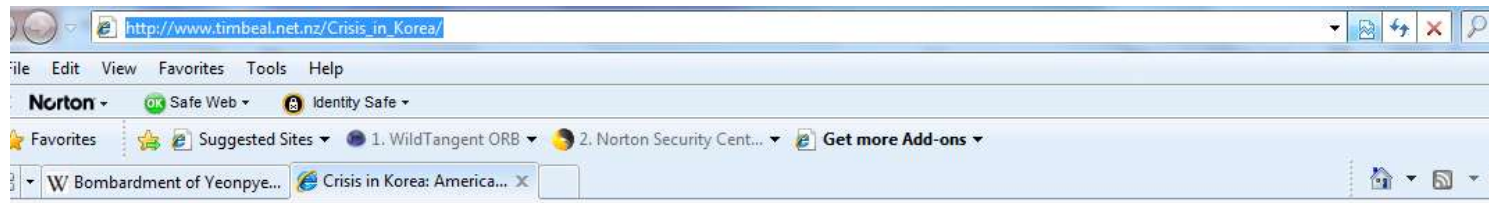
In this year's survey, only 55.8 percent of those in their 20s and 30s said they trust the findings of the investigation done by the South Korean government, compared to 74.3 percent in their 40s and 85 percent in their 50s. Distrust was the highest among women in their 20s and men in their 30s with 45.6 percent and 43.1 percent saying they do not believe the official version.

Source: "Fewer People Trust Gov't Account of Cheonan Sinking." *Chosun Ilbo*, 19 March 2012.  
[http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2012/03/19/2012031901151.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/03/19/2012031901151.html)

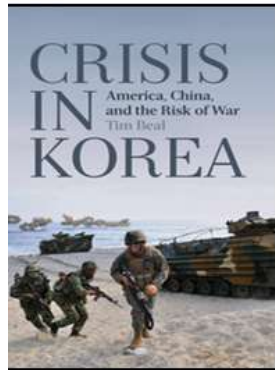
# Increasing tension

- Yeonpyeong Incident (Nov 2010)
  - Provoke NK response to firing into disputed waters
- End of 2010 – peninsula on brink of war

# Read all about it



## Crisis in Korea: America, China, and the Risk of War Tim Beal



- [Description](#)
- [Foreword and table of contents](#)

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Pluto Press, 2005

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# Failure in either case

- NK did not accept 'grand bargain'
- NK did not collapse
  - KJI died but stable transition
- China and Russia rallied to NK after Cheonan
- Great increase in Chinese trade and investment
- Failure

# Policies and positions of the main actors

- China
- Russia
- Japan
- US
- North Korea
- South Korea

# China

- Peaceful rise main priority
- Avoid giving US cause/excuse/pretext for conflict
- Korean peninsula is most likely place for conflict
- Stability on peninsula essential
- Keep US away from border
- Has issued warnings to US that it will support NK if invaded

# Fifth generation

- New leadership in 2012, no major changes anticipated
- Curious case of Bo Xilai being replaced by Zhang Dejiang
  - Graduate in economics from Kim Il Sung University
  - May lead to closer relations between China and NK



# Russia

- Similar to China but involvement less
- Far East is where it is at most military disadvantage
- Medvedev/Kim summit reactivated gas pipeline project to stabilise peninsula
- Third Putin presidency >>stronger line

# Japan

- Still US client
- Embracing confrontation with China
- Tension on peninsula important for remilitarisation
- Opposes reunification of peninsula, even under Seoul

# US

- Global difficulties and options>> strategic incoherence
- Obama paid little attention to Asia
- Obama captured by Lee Myung-bak
- Pivot to Asia to contain China
- Korea policy subset of China policy
- Needs tension on Korean peninsula to keep SK and Japan in order

# Obama, elections, Korea

- Obama continues to refuse to enter substantial negotiations with Pyongyang
  - Incumbent candidates reluctant to negotiate
  - Realise Six Party Talks give advantage to China
- Go through motions but no progress likely
- After the election
  - Will a second term Obama be different?
  - What would a Republican president do?

# North Korea

- Small, vulnerable, threatened country with few options
- Prime foreign policy objective is to force US into peaceful coexistence
  - Lifting of sanctions (physical, financial)
  - Removal of military threat
  - Normal state-to-state relations (no ‘hostility’)
  - Aid
- Friendly relations with US to counterbalance China
- Transition stable – no major changes anticipated

# South Korea – change agent

- Elections in 2012
  - April: National Assembly
  - December: Presidency
- Lee Myung-bak
  - Lame duck
  - Deeply unpopular, bedevilled by corruption scandals
    - Changed name of party
  - Failure, esp of NK policy

# Change in NK policy inevitable

- Whoever wins Lee's NK policy will be abandoned
  - Move to engagement
- Conservative: Park Geun-hye
- Progressives: still jostling
  - Han Myeong-sook (former PM) leader of main opposition party
  - Ahn Cheol-soo, very popular but has still not decide whether to run for president

# Confrontation to Engagement



## **Rival party leaders offer to engage with NK's new leadership**

Leaders of the ruling and main opposition parties on Tuesday offered to engage with North Korea's new leadership, although in different ways and to varying extents.

Park Geun-hye, leader of the ruling Saenuri Party, and Han Myeong-sook, chief of the main opposition Democratic United Party (DUP), told a forum in Seoul their respective parties will work to improve inter-Korean ties amid persisting tensions over the North's two deadly attacks on the South in 2010.

"The Saenuri Party and I are willing to support efforts for change in North Korea and work together (with the North), in order to swiftly improve South-North relations that have been marked by distrust since the (two attacks), and start on a path of sustainable peace and mutual growth," Park said at the forum marking Seoul's hosting of the Nuclear Security Summit next month.

She remained firm, however, about the attacks that killed a total of 50 South Koreans.

Source: Yonhap. "Rival Party Leaders Offer to Engage with NK's New Leadership." *Korea Times*, 28 February 2012.  
[http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/02/113\\_105907.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/02/113_105907.html)



# Prospects and hopes

- New government in Seoul will engage meaningfully with Pyongyang
- Kim Jong Un will respond positively
- Rapprochement will be strongly supported by China and Russia
- US will be forced to follow on

# Optimal scenario

- Improved inter-Korean relations>> US accepts peace
  - NK denuclearises, US removes nuclear umbrella
- Long-term, consensual, mutual beneficial unification measures
  - Trade, investment, people-to-people
- US military presence removed
- Reunifying Korea independent of major powers but on good relations with all
- Korea's location becomes an asset rather than a liability