

False Findings Intent Upon Triggering Confrontation between North and South Korea

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Asia Times Editor's Note:

North Korean leader Kim Jong-il has ordered his million-strong armed forces to “combat readiness”, according to a broadcast by the North Korean military.

On Monday, [South Korea](#) announced it was suspending almost all trade links with [North Korea](#) in retaliation for the torpedoing of its warship Cheonan with the loss of 46 lives. The South has also banned all North Korean shipping from its waters and vowed to resume sensitive propaganda broadcasts across the Demilitarized Zone that were suspended in 2004.

“We do not hope for war but if South Korea, with the US and Japan on its back, tries to attack us, Kim Jong-il has ordered us to finish the task of unification left undone during the ... (Korean) war (in 1953),” the military broadcast said.

The South Korea-led multinational investigation team of the March 26 night sinking of the South Korean corvette Cheonan held a news conference in Seoul on May 20 to unveil its finalized forensic report with false findings pointing a finger at North Korea.

The report has all the hallmarks of rushing to invoke an all-too-familiar North Korean bogeyman in a bid to cover up the US role in a friendly fire incident.

The May 20 report is the only visible part of the iceberg-like “proof” that the South Korean people and the world public have all been lied to.

It is safe to state that the May 20 presentation is another lie of the century, as was the February 5, 2003, speech by the then-US secretary of state Colin Powell at the [United Nations](#).

As the Powell speech paved the way for the invasion of Iraq by the US-led “coalition of the willing”, the May 20 report carries strong risks of trading charges quickly escalating into a nuclear war between two nuclear powers, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the [United States](#).

CBS News reported on May 19 a significant Iraq War-like split among multi-national investigators: “The US, Britain and Australia – all of which helped in the investigation – are all prepared to back up the findings. Only [Sweden](#), which also sent investigators, is a reluctant partner in blaming the North Koreans.”

The US, the [United Kingdom](#) and Australia were members of the “coalition of the willing”, whereas Sweden deeply opposed the invasion of Iraq. A major producer of AIP submarines, Sweden has vast expertise on shallow-water submarine warfare.

The Financial Times reported on May 19 on the skeptical reaction of the South Korean people:

Nevertheless, despite what appears to be the bloodiest North Korean attack for more than two decades, there has been no outpouring of public rage against Pyongyang. The loss of the warship has also exposed South Koreans’ mistrust of whatever the government says and a historic sense of fraternity with the North, feelings that can override strategic dangers.

The government seems to be hiding something. If not, why did it take so long to announce the conclusion?’ said Bae Sung-hoon, a 37-year-old office worker. Many ordinary South Koreans say that their government is merely seeking a convenient scapegoat for what was a mistake on the part of the South’s navy, or what was a “friendly fire” incident involving the US military.

A South Korean sister paper of the Washington Times, Segye Ilbo, on March 29 quoted a military source as saying: “The radar of the CIC on the corvette Cheonan is capable of easily detecting any torpedo within any radius of 20-30 kilometers but on that fateful day it detected no sign of a torpedo attack or naval firing by North Korea.

Japan’s conservative mass circulation daily Yomiuri Shimbun on March 21 quoted South Korean security experts as commenting, “Material evidence does not directly tally with the act of firing a torpedo. Absent is a perfect demonstration of the presence of a North Korean submarine and its launch of a torpedo. North Korea will likely counter-argue that South Koreans acquired a North Korean torpedo in a third country and launched it.”

Too Clumsy to Be a Compelling Case

The discovery of a given suspect’s weapon at the scene of crime does not establish his or her guilt because it could have been deliberately placed there by the true culprit to impute responsibility.

To establish the culpability of a suspect it is essential to satisfy at least three requirements. The first is demonstration of his or her presence at the time of the crime; corroboration of his or her actual use of the deadly weapon in question in perpetrating the crime; determination of how and why the suspect was able to get away.

As the three salient facts indicate, the final findings and accompanying pieces of evidence are so crudely crafted that they neither place North Korea at the scene of the tragedy nor establish North Korea’s guilt. The reason is obvious: the Americans and the South Koreans failed to study Perry Mason and Sherlock Holmes.

Firstly, the multi-national investigation did four things:

- It identified that the cause of the sinking of the South Korean ship was a torpedo.
- It disclosed that a few small North Korean submarines were out of their home port a

couple of days before and after the ship disaster.

- It produced fragments of what was purported to be a torpedo with markings in Korean script retrieved from the seabed.
- It speculated that the torpedo was fired by a North Korean submarine.

The investigation team did not prove at all the presence of a North Korean submarine at the scene of the sinking at the time of one of the world's greatest military exercises, as illustrated by telltale failures:

- Failure to identify the name of a suspect small, primitive museum piece-like North Korean submarine and the names of its crew. A Toyota vehicle abandoned at the scene of a terrorist attack does not mean that either Japan or Toyota Motor Corporation was responsible for the action.

- Failure to discuss the manner in which the suspected slow-moving North Korean submarine managed to penetrate South Korean waters, operate in shallow waters (depth of less than 30 meters) without being detected by the state-of-art radar and sonar-mounted US and South Korean ships and get away scot-free after the corvette sank in an explosion with a column of water so high (about 100 meters), so flashy and so noisy that a sentry on the shore of the Island of Baekryon witnessed it.

- Failure to cite one of the world's greatest war games that was going on at the scene. Yonhap reported on March 26 from Pyongyang City on the west coast of South Korea that "The Foal/Eagle US-South Korean joint exercise is currently underway in the West Sea as US Aegis ships arrived May 25 at the Pyongyang Naval Base where the Second Fleet is headquartered".

- Failure to discuss the presence in the war games on the fateful March 26 night of four Aegis ships, the USS Shiloh (CG-67), a 9,600-ton Ticonderoga class cruiser, the USS Curtis Wilbur(DDG-54), a 6,800-ton Arleigh Burke class guided-missile destroyer, the USS Lassen, a 9,200-ton Arleigh Burke class guided-missile destroyer and Sejong the Great, a 8,500-ton South Korean guided-missile destroyer, most probably supported by US nuclear and South Korean German Type 209 and 212 AIP submarines.

- Failure to refer to the German explosives found at the wreckage of the corvette despite an initial announcement. The Korea Times reported on May 7, "The multinational investigation team is also closely looking into the possibility that a North Korean submarine fired a German-made torpedo used both by the South Korean and American navies in an attempt to dodge its responsibility."

The Blue House (presidential house) was dismayed at the multinational investigators' May 7 announcement that they had detected German RDX in the wreckage and pressured the Defense Ministry not to accept the findings, as Yonhap reported two days later.

- Failure to explain the failure to find and retrieve two harpoon anti-ship missiles and a torpedo tube lost when the corvette sank, while succeeding in recovering the motor and propeller of the spent torpedo.

The investigation team produced what it termed "conclusive evidence": the eye-catching hand-written Korean markings "ilbon" or "No 1" in English found on the propulsion section of

the used torpedo allegedly recovered from the sea bed.

This turns out to be most inconclusive and counter-productive, calling into serious question the credibility of the findings. The use of “ilbon” in Korean script – not in Chinese characters – may look like North Korean writing, which is distinctly different from what is written in South Korea.

But native North Koreans use “ilho” for the English “No 1”. “Ilbon” is what South Koreans would use, although North Korean street addresses more often than often not do contain numerals like “ilbon”.

A likely theory for this blunder is the sense on the part of the investigators that there was an absence of hard evidence to impress a skeptical South Korean and world audience.

Disaster Overrides Key US Policy Objectives

A key policy objective of [United States President](#) Barack Obama and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak is to bring North Korea back to the six-party talks to persuade it to give up its nuclear arsenal and prevent it from exporting weapons.

They should be well informed that the May 20 forensic report carries four serious risks in its fallout.

Risk No 1: The most effective high-profile global cost-free advertisement of the high performance of inexpensive weapons produced in North Korea.

The Yomiuri Shimbun on March 21 commented: “Weapons experts observe, ‘North Korean torpedoes are not less reliable than those deployed by Western countries.’ For North Korea, which earns foreign currency by exporting weapons, the sinking of the corvette is a good opportunity to demonstrate the performance of its domestically produced torpedoes, increasing their value as an export item.”

According to the SIPRI Yearbook 2005 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), North Korea exported 3,250 anti-tank missiles and 1,250 surface-to-air missiles(SAMs) to Russia between 1992 and 2005, and 45 Scud-C missiles (range 500km) to Yemen between 2001 and 2002.

Risk No 2: Embarrassing proof that the much-touted expensive and sophisticated US military hardware is a white elephant and that the US offer of a security guarantee to South Korea does not make any sense.

The world knows that air and sea supremacy and the presence of high-tech weapons are useless against small rag-tag insurgent forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their one-dollar improvised explosive devices play havoc with eight-wheel armored combat vehicles, high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (Humvees) and mine resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicles.

The net outcome will be reduced international demand for American weapons.

Risk No 3: Gone once and for all is the only small opportunity for North Korea to agree to return to the table for nuclear talks and renounce its nuclear arsenal.

Risk No 4: A sharpening of tensions on the Korean Peninsula has brought about a very explosive situation in which an armed clash may ignite hot war at any moment. The US is fighting two wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Obama administration appears to be opting for another war.

The Korean People's Army has been put on combat readiness. Supreme Commander Kim Jong-il is one click away from turning Seoul, Tokyo and [New York](#) into a sea of fire with a fleet of nuclear-tipped North Korean intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Why have the two presidents put on the back burner their shared top policy priority objectives? What consideration has overridden them?

The answer is the urgent need to keep secret from the public that the tragic sinking of the corvette was a result of inadvertent friendly fire by a US nuclear submarine or an Aegis ship or any other naval ship. (See [Pyongyang sees US role in Cheonan sinking](#) Asia Times Online, May 5, 2010.)

Public knowledge of US friendly fire would generate a destructive bubble-jet effect of launching waves of anti-Americanism and attendant objections to US bases in South Korea, Japan and the rest of Asia, landing Obama and Lee in trouble. The latter would see his ruling party soundly defeated in June's nationwide gubernatorial and municipal elections.

There is no other plausible explanation.

Kim Myong Chol is author of a number of books and papers in Korean, Japanese and English on North Korea, including Kim Jong-il's Strategy for Reunification. He has a PhD from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's Academy of Social Sciences and is often called an "unofficial" spokesman of Kim Jong-il and North Korea.

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