

Editorial

U.S. Continues to Muddy the Waters in Korea

On March 18, the final day of annual joint U.S.-South Korea military exercises, the South Korean warship *Cheonan* exploded and sank in disputed waters off the coast of the Korean Peninsula. Initial reports from the South Korean navy discounted any hostile causes of the explosion and suggested either an internal problem or the hitting of an old mine. However, the U.S. immediately began speculating that the *Cheonan* had been sunk by a North Korean torpedo and established an “independent inquiry” consisting of American, British, Australian and Swedish investigators. On May 20 the “independent investigators” released their report claiming that the only possible explanation for the explosion was a North Korean torpedo launched by a mini-submarine.

There are a number of problems with the conclusions of the Americans and their allies, not the least of which is the fact that it can, in no sense, be claimed that the investigation was independent. An independent investigation of the facts of the sinking

would, at the very least, have included investigators from a country which is not openly allied with the United States, such as China. It would have been carried out under the auspices of the UN, rather than under the control of the U.S. Even then, the results may be suspect considering the enormous pressure that the U.S. habitually places on the UN and other international agencies to see things from its perspective. However, an investigation in which the U.S. advances its theories, appoints itself and its allies as investigators and then arrives at conclusions which serve its interests cannot be taken seriously, especially considering what is at stake in the Korean Peninsula.

It was a foregone conclusion that the U.S.-led investigation would blame the DPRK for the incident, despite the considerable evidence against such a conclusion. The *Cheonan* was sunk in relatively shallow waters – less than 30 metres – which provide little shelter for submarines. The *Cheonan* is a

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Nuclear Security Summit – An Exercise in Disinformation

On April 12 and 13, 47 national delegations participated in a Nuclear Security Summit in Washington D.C. Iran and North Korea were not invited to the summit, while Israel decided not to attend for fear that the Arab countries would demand that it comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NNPT) and allow UN inspection of its nuclear facilities and weapons.

In his opening address to the summit, U.S. president Barack Obama stated: “Two decades after the Cold War we face a cruel irony of history. The risk of nuclear confrontation between nations has gone down, but the risk of nuclear attack has gone up.” He went on to claim that the greatest security threat now facing the world is “nuclear terrorism”, the threat that a terrorist group could get hold of a

nuclear weapon and detonate it. The summit concluded with an agreement that all nations present would ensure the security of their nuclear materials within four years, Canada, Mexico, Chile and Ukraine also agreed to give up their limited stockpiles of weapons-grade uranium.

From beginning to end, the summit was little more than a massive exercise in disinformation. The impression was created that hundreds of nuclear warheads and tons of nuclear materials are simply lying around in abandoned warehouses waiting for “terrorists” to sneak in and steal them. The countries in attendance dutifully pledged to take measures to clean up this supposed mess and secure these allegedly unsecured materials within four years!

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modern warship complete with American-supplied surveillance equipment and the incident took place in an area where confrontations have taken place before between the navies of the DPRK and the Republic of Korea (ROK). It has also been reported that several American warships and a detachment of Navy SEALs were involved in war exercises in the immediate vicinity. While anything is possible, the suggestion that a DPRK submarine travelled a relatively long distance, sunk an ROK warship and escaped undetected, borders on the unbelievable, particularly at a time when the U.S. and the ROK were carrying out large-scale joint military exercises and would be anticipating some reaction from the DPRK.

However, the issue of who is responsible for the sinking of the *Cheonan* is really a red herring to cover up the real motives of the U.S. The Korean War was caused by the refusal of the U.S. imperialists to withdraw their occupation troops from the Korean Peninsula following the Second World War to allow the Korean people to determine their own destiny. While it started out as a civil war between the north and the south, it quickly transformed into the first major proxy war of the Cold War, involving hundreds of thousands of soldiers from the U.S. and its allies on the side of the south, as well as a million or so Chinese troops and air support from the Soviet Union on the side of the north. It ended with the signing of an armistice on July 27, 1953, but a peace agreement has never been signed, mainly due to the intransigence of the U.S.

So long as a state of war remains in place on the Korean Peninsula, the U.S. can justify maintaining a military foothold there, a foothold that would become crucial in a showdown with China and/or Russia. Over the past two decades there has been a growing movement within the ROK for an accommodation with the DPRK and some kind of reunification of Korea. However, whenever progress is made in that direction, the U.S. intervenes overtly or covertly to sabotage any *rapprochement*. Its interference has ranged from military provocations to the rigging of elections in order to ensure a state of no war, no peace on the Korean Peninsula.

It is most likely that the *Cheonan* sank, as originally announced, either due to an internal explosion or from striking an old mine which could have been planted decades ago by either side. Some commentators have raised the possibility that the vessel was deliberately sunk by the Americans in order to destabilize the region and thwart Japanese

attempts to close an American military base in Okinawa. However, while we may never know the truth about why the *Cheonan* sank, the responsibility for this and the sinking of various other vessels on both sides of the conflict rests with the U.S. These are the unfortunate incidents that occur when the U.S. plays big power politics and puts roadblock after roadblock in the way of the peaceful resolution of the differences between the two Koreas. The only way to end such incidents and to put an end to the spectre of war hanging over the Korean Peninsula is for the U.S. to stop interfering there, pull its troops and its warship out of the region and allow the Korean people to find a peaceful solution to their problems.

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On the military side the Afghanistan war has been similarly unsuccessful. The Karzai government remains in control of Kabul and there is little fighting in the Northern provinces. U.S. commanders have acknowledged however that the Afghan army and NATO forces are not in effective control of the southeastern Pashtun areas in the southern provinces bordering Pakistan. NATO is also having trouble maintaining its supply lines through the Khyber Pass to Peshawar and Islamabad. The forces of the insurgency seem to be able to strike at will within Kabul itself and have created such extreme insecurity that some non-governmental agencies have withdrawn their developmental workers from the country.

The Canadian government's lack of enthusiasm for continuing its combat commitment in Afghanistan seems to be an admission of defeat. It sees the military situation in Afghanistan as evolving into a stalemate that could go indefinitely. The military has been exhausted by numerous rotations of troops into Afghanistan and the number of killed and wounded soldiers continues to climb. In the absence of any prospect of military resolution in the conflict and a growing public disgust with the incompetent and corrupt Afghan regime there is little to be gained from a continued Afghan commitment. It also seems likely that the latest domestic revelations about the Canadian forces' murder of Afghan insurgents and its see-no-evil attitude about the treatment of prisoners turned over to the Afghan security forces will lead to declining public support for this particular overseas adventure.

Coming to the Inevitable Conclusion in Afghanistan

The Canadian military adventure is grinding slowly to its inevitable conclusion. It now seems certain that Canadian combat operations in Afghanistan will end in 2011. There may be a small contingent of Canadian soldiers that remains to aid in the training of the Afghanistan army and various development projects but any extension of Canadian role in actual fighting now appears highly unlikely.

As recently as six month ago the Canadian government looked as though it would try to extend its military role in Afghanistan beyond 2011. Although there is no legislative impediment to Canada keeping troops in Afghanistan past 2011 there seems to be a lack of interest in doing so. The often quoted resolution passed by the House of Commons setting the 2011 date for withdrawal of Canadian forces from Afghanistan actually applies only to the forces' combat deployment in Kandahar province. When the Canadian troops took up a front line, heavy combat role in that province, the House established the 2011 end date for that deployment but not for its overall military participation in Afghanistan. Canada's military commitment in that area is open ended and could go on indefinitely if the government had any political will to keep Canadian forces there.

The Harper government has stated that it will end its combat activities in 2011. This decision appears to reflect the realization that support for the mission in Afghanistan in Canada continues to decline and there is no political advantage to remaining in a shooting war that will likely go on for some time to come. The war continues to produce combat deaths and serious injuries but has failed to achieve any of the various objectives used to justify Canada's participation in the Afghanistan invasion in the first place.

Although the U.S.-led war that began in October 2001 managed to remove the Taliban from state power in Afghanistan, it did not lead to any real change in the situation in the country. The Taliban had been playing host to Osama bin Laden and some members of Al Qaida at the time of the 2001 attacks on the U.S. However neither the Taliban nor any other Afghans played any role in those attacks. Neither has Al Qaida had any significant presence in Afghanistan since 2001. The Taliban itself has very little interest in anything outside Afghanistan nor has it been a threat to anyone outside of the country. Consequently, there is no reason to believe that continuing to fight the Taliban in Afghanistan will have any security

implications in any other parts of the world.

The U.S.-led NATO invasion replaced the Taliban government in Kabul with one made up of elements of the Northern Alliance which had been fighting the Taliban for control of Afghanistan since the early 1990s. The Northern Alliance is based in different ethnic/linguistic communities than the Taliban. However, in most ways the current government led by Hamid Karzai is little different from the Taliban government it replaced. The Karzai regime however is arguably far more corrupt. Many of its members are regional warlords, many of whom are engaged in the production and export of opium. Although the Karzai government maintains a tentative hold on the Afghan capital, large portions of southeastern Afghanistan are under the effective control of the Taliban. In other areas the country and people are ruled by warlords much as it was prior to the Taliban taking control in Kabul in the mid-1990s.

The NATO-supported Karzai/Northern Alliance regime is for all practical purposes just as oppressive as the Taliban government that preceded it. Women are still treated as the property of men and have few rights as independent beings. Development of the economy and society in Afghanistan has been rudimentary at best and possibly even regressive as large portions of the economy have been built around the cultivation and export of opium of which Afghanistan is now the world's principle producer. Many members of the government and parliament are involved in the opium trade including the brother of President Hamid Karzai. Karzai himself was accused of rigging the recent elections to insure he would be returned to office and is now seeking to take over control of the Afghani elections commission in order to make sure his vote rigging will in future come under less scrutiny. Female members of parliament are routinely threatened if they object to laws that are against the interests of women and girls and some have been expelled from the National Assembly by other members who include the very warlords that undermine the central government. The democratic rebuilding of Afghanistan has been a conspicuous failure and is a growing embarrassment to the governments that have been providing soldiers to prop up the Afghani state.

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Nuclear warheads are already the most highly secured weapons on the planet, not only because of the danger they represent, but also because of their extreme value to the states that possess them. The suggestion that they are presently unsecured is worthy of a Hollywood action movie, but little else.

As far as nuclear materials are concerned, it is conceivable that non-weapons grade materials may be somewhat less secure due to their widespread use in power generation, medical facilities and research labs. However, only a small handful of states have the technology to concentrate such material into weapons-grade material and to suggest that a “dirty” bomb utilizing such materials represents the greatest current threat to humanity is charlatanry of the highest order.

The real threat of nuclear proliferation comes from two main sources. The first is the transfer of nuclear materials and technologies from current nuclear powers to their allies. In the 1960s and 1970s first the technology and then tons of weapons-grade nuclear material were given to Israel by the United States and France, enough to produce scores of nuclear warheads. Israel, in turn, transferred several nuclear warheads to South Africa to help prop up the apartheid regime there. Where those warheads went after the fall of apartheid no one is saying. The nuclear powers also turned a blind eye to the acquisition of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan.

The second source of the danger of nuclear proliferation stems from the UN Security Council veto power which the big powers granted themselves when the United Nations was established. This veto power gives the big powers the *de facto* right to invade any country they wish (or dare to) with impunity. This has been demonstrated repeatedly, most recently with the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq by the U.S. and its allies. Countries threatened by the U.S. have learned the hard way that the only deterrence to an American invasion is the possession of nuclear weapons. After years of American threats to its sovereignty, North Korea finally took such measures to force the U.S. to ramp down its bellicosity, with apparent success. It is also clear that Iran, while not currently developing nuclear weapons, is at least interested in achieving near-nuclear status, that is, the ability to build a functional nuclear bomb within a matter of a few months, in response to the constant threats of military attack by Israel and the U.S.

Furthermore, the claim that the danger of a nuclear confrontation between nations has diminished is also patently false. Hardly a day goes by that some Israeli official doesn't make a veiled threat to use nuclear weapons against Iran and Israel has a standing nuclear first strike policy if faced with a large-scale conventional attack by its neighbours. India and Pakistan have come close to nuclear war on at least two occasions in recent history and are currently engaged in a nuclear arms race with each other. In addition, the Obama administration has yet to repudiate the “Bush Doctrine” which pledged to launch nuclear weapons on a first-strike basis against any country that dares to challenge the U.S. not only militarily, but also economically.

Obama is clearly lying about the danger of “nuclear terrorism” in order to cover up for the real aim of the summit, which is to justify further sanctions against countries, such as Iran, which refuse to give up their rights under the NNPT to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, as well as to tighten their own monopoly over such materials. So, in one sense, Obama's claim about the great danger posed by “nuclear terrorism” is valid. However, it is not some unnamed, shadowy terrorists who pose the danger. Rather, it is the same old gang of nuclear terrorists who have been threatening the world's people with nuclear annihilation for over 50 years – the big nuclear power, including the U.S., Britain, France, Russia, China, Israel, India and Pakistan. If Obama were serious about reducing the nuclear threat, the obvious place to start is the immediate destruction of all nuclear weapons possessed by those eight “nuclear terrorist” states.

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