

moment today, and we still have time – though not much time – to organize. Activist and civil society groups abroad should ask their Palestinian and Israeli counterparts for their evaluation of the political moment and suggestions on what to do should the Palestinian Authority collapse together with the peace process. Thought should be given on how to transform the BDS campaign and the infrastructure of resistance it is creating from a blunt instrument into one capable of more focused resistance – of mobilizing churches, trade unions and universities, for example, and by priming sympathetic politicians to act when the moment arrives. In the absence of an African National Congress-type organization to direct us, we have a much more difficult job of communicating and coor-

## Activist and civil society groups abroad should ask their Palestinian and Israeli counterparts for their evaluation of the political moment.

inating our actions. But we are in touch with one another. The political moment looming just weeks or months ahead demands our attention.

Life in the Occupied Territories is about to get even more difficult, I believe, but perhaps we are finally approaching the breaking point. If that is the case, we must be there for the Palestinians on all the fronts: to protect them, to play our role in pushing the occupation into unsustainability, to resist re-occupation, to act as watchdogs over political processes that threaten to impose apartheid in the guise of a two-state solution, and, ultimately, to ensure that a just and lasting peace emerges. As weak and failed attempts by governments head for collapse, we must pick up the slack – 2011 is upon us. CP

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# How Real is the Threat of War? North Korea Deathwatch

By Peter Lee

**N**orth Korea is more than a military threat to South Korea and Japan, and an affront to the values of democracy, human rights, and nonproliferation ostensibly promoted by the United States. It is East Asia's last bonanza, a potential El Dorado of underexploited resources and cheap labor inadvertently created by the DPRK's isolationism and its faltering policy of economic self-reliance.

The continued survival of the DPRK and the separation of North Korea from the global economy is, in economic terms, an anomaly, a temporary inefficiency that the invisible hand, directed by the world's inexorable avarice, should sweep aside in a historical heartbeat.

Last year, South Korea's conservative president, Lee Myung-bak, conducted a road show to persuade international financial institutions that the sizable costs of reunification (estimated at somewhere upward of \$1.7 trillion) could be covered by the exploitation of North Korea's considerable mineral deposits alone.

The anticipated collapse of the North Korean regime has evolved from a hope and expectation to the cornerstone of Lee Myung-bak's anticipated political legacy – and, almost by default, U.S. policy for the peninsula. North Korea, which has struggled to confound predictions of its imminent demise, has seen its problems compounded by the joint U.S./Republic of Korea (ROK) policy of malign neglect toward engagement with the Pyongyang regime.

Lee Myung-bak is determined to reverse the dynamic toward accommodation and closer economic ties between North and South Korea – and distancing from the United States – initiated under the Sunshine Policy of his predecessors. In its place Lee has substituted his own policy. It pays lip service to diplomatic engagement with North Korea in order to placate the large and suspicious liberal/left component of South Korean public opinion, while tailoring his strategies and actions around the increasing marginalization and eventual eradication of the DPRK regime and reunification under the leadership of the South, in co-

operation with the United States.

Wikileaks provides the text of a January 2009 cable from the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, which convincingly describes the actual state of play:

“President Lee is determined not to give in to North Korean pressure. Our Blue House contacts have told us on several occasions that President Lee remained quite comfortable with his North Korea policy and that he is prepared to leave the inter-Korean relations frozen until the end of his term in office, if necessary. It is also our assessment that Lee's more conservative advisors and supporters see the current standoff as a genuine opportunity to push and further weaken the North, even if this might involve considerable brinkmanship. Also favoring the Lee administration's stance is the Korean public, which is calm to the point of apathy about the inter-Korean situation.” (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/186621>.)

The United States, mindful of the frustrations and embarrassments it has endured in its direct negotiations with Pyongyang and eager to cooperate with a determined ally in North Asia, has supported Lee Myung-bak's initiatives.

In this situation, the diplomatic odd man out has been China, which has attempted to midwife the DPRK's emergence from geopolitical isolation through the mechanism of the Six Party Talks, involving the U.S.A., China, Russia, Japan, and the two Koreas in a dialogue held largely under Beijing's aegis. However, the DPRK has proved a most obstreperous and inconvenient partner in these talks, walking out, detonating atomic devices, firing missiles, and apparently providing ample grounds for the conclusion that it is not a rational negotiating partner.

The U.S.A. and South Korea have, therefore, adopted a policy of ignoring the DPRK, shifting the terms of the relationship to an adversarial process involving the democracies of the West and of North Asia, i.e., the U.S., the ROK and Japan confronting a rogue state, the DPRK. Therefore, the preferred venue of the Lee government and the Obama

administration has been the United Nations, instead of the Six Party Talks, leaving China standing awkwardly and quite angrily on the sidelines.

This state of affairs was made abundantly clear in the aftermath of the Cheonan incident. The *Cheonan*, a South Korean anti-submarine warfare frigate, was sunk on March 26 under somewhat mysterious circumstances near North Korean waters, with the loss of 46 lives. North Korea, not unreasonably, was presumed to be the culprit, although it denied involvement. The South Korea military, by virtue of its predilection for secrecy and tampering with official records, was unable to come up with a persuasive dossier.

In the end, South Korea convened an international team of experts that pointedly excluded Russia and China, the two nations most familiar with the DPRK's military capabilities, and returned a verdict of North Korean culpability. President Lee agitated for the Cheonan matter to be placed on the U.N. Security Council agenda and received the support of the United States.

However, with China and Russia refusing to endorse the report and additional sanctions against the DPRK, the process concluded with a damp squib – a presidential statement from the UN Security Council that declined to finger Pyongyang for the sinking. President Obama then took the diplomatically questionable step of accusing China of “willful blindness” in ignoring the ROK's Cheonan report. China riposted by hosting DPRK supremo Kim Jung Il on a visit to China at the end of August, with President Hu Jintao flying in for a photo opportunity with Kim.

The high-profile meeting was taken as a statement by China that it would be standing by North Korea and supporting it as the party and government coped with a risky transfer of power from the ailing Kim Jung Il to his 27-year-old, untested son, Kim Jong Un. With his northern flank secured, Kim Jong Il could concentrate on what has been the focus of North Korean diplomacy since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989: regularizing relations with the United States to ensure the survival of his regime.

No peace treaty followed the armistice agreement negotiated at Panmunjon in 1953. The United States maintains a considerable military force in South Korea,

28,000 troops in over a dozen bases. As recently as 2001-2002, when the George W. Bush Korea policy was in the hands of the hardliners, the U.S. pursued a virtually overt policy of regime change against the DPRK.

North Korean geopolitical strategy can be described charitably as unique and, considering the near institutional disdain and occasional outright hostility of the world's own superpower and lukewarm support from its only ally, China, surprisingly successful.

Kim Jung Il has consistently played a swashbuckling diplomatic hand. In recent years, especially after his country's induction into the Axis of Evil by

## **Considering the near institutional disdain and occasional outright hostility of the world's own superpower and lukewarm support from its only ally, North Korea's unique geopolitical strategy has been surprisingly successful.**

President George W. Bush, he has determined that his regime's primary source of diplomatic leverage and security is best served by playing the WMD bargaining chip and engaging in prolonged and excruciating negotiations to denuclearize the DPRK.

By developing and testing nuclear devices and ballistic missiles, the DPRK has tried to compel the United States to acknowledge its existence, parley with it as a sovereign state with reasonable prospects for a prolonged survival, provide economic incentives to reward its continued good behavior, and, in the offing, dangle the prospect of meaningful security guarantees and a peace treaty.

The effectiveness of this strategy has, in recent years, been hampered by the deplorable state of the DPRK economy. Flooding, failed harvests, mismanagement, malnutrition, energy shortages, sanctions, and starvation have imbued Kim's diplomacy with desperation, as he has subordinated long-term considerations to the need of securing food-and-energy aid for his tottering economy.

These problems are exacerbated by the need to bequeath to Kim Jung Un a reasonably viable regime. The DPRK's weakness is manifest.

The Obama administration has finally made the determination that North Korea will never abandon its nuclear capabilities. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates described U.S. policy when he stated that the United States was “tired of buying the same horse twice,” i.e., embarking upon negotiations with Pyongyang that resulted in the flow of aid to the regime but little progress in denuclearization.

Unfortunately, however, the U.S.A. has apparently been unable to figure out what to do with that knowledge beyond a policy of malign neglect, watching Kim's regime twist in the wind and hoping that the transition to Kim Jong Un occasions the collapse of the family business.

China, for its part, has been somewhat more proactive. It continues to supply North Korea with an energy and food lifeline, but it appears that neither side is interested in turning the DPRK into an economic dependency of the PRC. China has become much more interested in the benefits of doing business with the emerging economic powerhouse, South Korea, than propping up North Korea. As a result, at one point, the DPRK took the startling step of threatening to establish civil air links with Taiwan to shock Beijing into increased attentiveness.

Nevertheless, China prefers the continued survival of the DPRK as an independent, viable state capable of managing its relations with the U.S.A. and the ROK, and acting as an effective buffer to the U.S. presence on the southern half of the peninsula – and a check on the ROK's burgeoning economic and strategic ambitions in North Asia.

While Beijing consistently calls for a return to the Six Party Talks, the U.S. and ROK talk of “improvements in behavior” that must be demonstrated first. Without benefit of time travel to undo the sinking of the *Cheonan* and the detonation of two atomic devices, it is difficult to determine what the North Koreans could do to endear themselves to the U.S. and ROK governments at this point.

With this background, North Korea's anti-diplomacy has recently sounded a frantic note.

In early November, the DPRK invited Stanford professor and emeritus director

of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, Siegfried Hecker, to tour a new and previously unknown uranium enrichment facility. Hecker described the facility as state of the art, as opposed to the dismal Soviet-style exhibits the North Koreans had previously displayed, a rather surprising development considering the economic and sanctions-related difficulties that the DPRK has recently endured. The facility is set up to produce lightly enriched uranium (LEU) of the type used to fuel civilian nuclear reactors; it is not piped with the arrangement of centrifuges suitable for production of highly enriched uranium (HEU) for nuclear weapons. But, of course, it could be, as Hecker reported: “[T]he senior Yongbyon official confirmed that they are enriching uranium now in the facility. When I pointed out that the outside world will be concerned about their ability to convert the facility to make HEU, he stated that anyone can tell by looking at the monitors in the control room that the cascades are configured for LEU. Besides, he said, they can think what they want.” (<http://iis-db.stanford.edu/pubs/23035/HeckerYongbyon.pdf>)

It is unlikely that giving the U.S. non-proliferation agenda an Iran-style enrichment headache is going to increase American eagerness to negotiate with Pyongyang, at least in the short term. Later that month, on November 23, the DPRK signaled its relations with its antagonist to the south, by pounding Yeonpyeong, an island in disputed waters garrisoned by South Korea, with a ferocious artillery barrage that killed four, including two civilians.

Presumably, this was meant as a demonstration to the South Korean government that there were definite costs to its policy of calculated disdain. However, the U.S.A. and ROK still cling to the line that there is nothing that the DPRK can do that can force them to resume the Six Party Talks.

The Lee Myung-bak government presented an interesting spectacle as it combined outrage with the studied insistence that the only necessary direct response to the Yeonpyeong Island shelling was to call for the resignation of the South Korean defense minister for failing pay attention to movements in North Korean artillery prior to the attack.

The Chinese government sent State Councilor Dai Bingguo to Seoul to make

a show of pushing mediation on the issue and, inevitably, proposing a revival of the Six Party Talks. Lee Myung-bak pointedly refused, and his office leaked the purported inside story of Dai’s visit in the most insulting terms possible, listing Dai’s transgressions “against diplomatic protocol,” his “inappropriate” behavior, “tedious speechifying,” calling his visit “a series of incomprehensible blunders from start to finish.”

This sort of mudslinging is of a piece with the characterization of China’s representative at the Six Party Talks, Wu Dawei. According to another cable from the Wikileaks trove, an unnamed official participating in a meeting between the U.S. ambassador to the ROK and Vice Foreign Minister Chun Young-woo

## **Will the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea belatedly fling itself into China’s economic embrace and turn the northern half of the peninsula into a prosperous satrapy of Beijing?**

stated that Wu is an “arrogant, Marx-spouting former Red Guard who ‘knows nothing about North Korea, nothing about nonproliferation, and is hard to communicate with because he doesn’t speak English.’” (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/249870>)

This contemptuous treatment of China’s diplomats may have the goal of poisoning the well and disqualifying China (and its preferred Six Party framework) as effective interlocutors in peninsular affairs. In any case, it is good politics: China’s refusal to condemn North Korea for the Yeonpyeong shelling is extremely unpopular inside the ROK. China has made its position relatively clear. Its good offices in dealing with the DPRK problem will be available within the framework of Six Party Talks, i.e., discussions that include North Korea as an equal and are predicated, at least by implication, on the idea of the DPRK’s continued existence.

Despite persistent Western efforts to depict China as shirking its international

obligations as a regional power out of fecklessness and timidity – and thereby endangering its relations with the ROK, the U.S., and Japan – by declining to exert pressure on North Korea, it is more plausible to conclude that China has a firm grasp of its national interest and believes it will gain nothing by abandoning Pyongyang and knuckling under to three governments that are fundamentally hostile to China’s aspirations.

In the end, Beijing is calculating that its neighbors’ need for peace and prosperity in harmony with China will trump their desire to make common cause with the United States to contain and confront Beijing. It is, therefore, willing to go along with North Korean brinkmanship. The Chinese media consistently transcribe and amplify dire North Korean statements emphasizing the threat of war on the peninsula and incessantly urges the resumption of the Six Party Talks as a panacea.

Lee Myung-bak, on the other hand, has no interest in doing anything to prolong the survival of the regime in Pyongyang and will try to sidestep calls for talks by waving the bloody shirt of Yeonpyeong and demanding an apology from North Korea as a precondition for talks.

The Obama administration, whose domestic political difficulties preclude any North Korea-related initiatives that could be construed as appeasement by the out-for-blood GOP, has little alternative but to coordinate its policies with Lee Myung-bak’s. With both the DPRK and the ROK inclined toward confrontational posturing and China and the United States loathe to intervene prematurely to rein in their allies, the potential for trouble is surprisingly high.

And the situation also holds the ultimate geopolitical risk for Seoul and Washington: that the North Korean leadership, with its back against the wall and despairing of any productive intercourse with South Korea and the United States, will belatedly fling itself into China’s economic embrace and turn the northern half of the peninsula into a prosperous satrapy of Beijing. **CP**

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# Serge Avedikian's "Barking Island" Dog Slaughter as Overture to the Armenian Genocide

By Larry Portis

I think by now we can forget about the slogan "never again." The real question is, "how long to the next genocide?" In this time of capitalist crisis and growing political disaffection, will war provide opportunities to whip up some crusade aiming to ostracize and even physically annihilate victims on a mass scale, most obviously those who profess belief in a different deity and, collaterally, those politically troublesome people who deny deities altogether?

Serge Avedikian doesn't explicitly ask these questions in his new film, *Barking Island* (*Chiienne d'histoire* in French). In fact, no one says a word about anything. It is an animated film about dogs. But it is not one of those Disney-type productions, where the dogs (or other animals) speak in a human tongue and express ideas and emotions. No. In this film, the dogs live in an environment ruled by human beings, but there is no dialogue to disturb our perception of the social relations existing between the canines and *homo sapiens*.

The remarkable thing about this film is the contrast between its aesthetic beauty and the horror it recounts. The animated images are paintings rendered by a young artist Thomas Azuéllos. The luminous depth of the colors, the invocations of oriental Constantinople and the ferocity of the figures are sublimely, compellingly cruel. This is great art, and it is not surprising that Avedikian was given the Palme d'Or at Cannes for this 15-minute film.

The plan to kill upward of one and a half million Armenians between 1915 and 1918 required careful planning and rational experimentation. This is where the dogs came in. Cleansing Constantinople of the thousands of dogs roaming free there provided a fine opportunity to test methods used later on the Armenians. In 1910, the government of the Young Turks enlisted the best European scientists in their effort to find a solution to get rid of the homeless dog population. The Pasteur Institute in Paris provided a study explaining the scientific options,

several of which were attempted. The use of toxic gases in specially constructed vehicles was proposed, as was the subsequent rendering of the corpses into hides and meat. Incineration in specially designed ovens was another envisioned solution.

The problem for the Turkish authorities was financial. In practice, cost-benefit analysis made modern methods unacceptable. The potential expenditures for developing the needed technology for canine extermination overrode available resources. So, it was back to the drawing board. At some point, it was suggested that the animals be simply rounded up

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and transported to a desert island in the Bosphorus. It would be an open-air dog pound where, eventually, about 30,000 offending creatures were concentrated. And there the extermination proceeded. The fact that no vegetation or other edible substance existed on the island ensured a definitive resolution to the nuisance they represented. The island was too far from land to allow the creatures to swim back, although many tried. The only disagreeable aspect of the plan, once put into operation, were winds that conveyed the sounds of screams and howls to Constantinople. But this annoyance ceased after a few weeks.

The massacre of the Armenians followed much the same pattern. Although gassing, burning, drowning, the injection of typhus bacilli in children, and other imaginable methods were employed, in the end most of the victims were forcibly displaced and died from exhaustion and starvation.

Real understanding of the murder of one and a half million Armenians beginning in April of 1915 must include knowledge about the preparations for that national effort to cleanse a "modernizing" Turkey of people considered to be outside the pale of "Turkish identity." The Armenian Christian population of Turkey had long served as scapegoats in times of stress due to the declining fortunes of the Ottoman Empire. The attacks against them increased in intensity throughout the 19th century. Between 1894 and 1896, around 300,000 were killed in various urban centers. Around 30,000 were slaughtered in and around the southern city of Adana in 1909. But these were only the most dramatically massive misfortunes befalling the Armenians over a long period.

Increasing numbers of Armenians saw their salvation in having "autonomy" and "independence," as did Jews attracted to a messianic "Zionism" at the same time. The logic inherent in the process is a striking perversity: the realization of the national aspirations of one group means the physical elimination of others, either by removing them from one place to another or using the radical and, it is thought, definitive (or "final") means of group murder.

Thus opened the 20th century with the application of scientific rationalism in the service of the religion of nationalism against those who are "out of place" in the nationalistic scheme of things. The tragedy of the process is that the most prominent victims themselves turned to nationalist solutions in order to protect themselves. It was an understandable reaction, one that confirmed the Turkish mantra that Armenians could not be assimilated into the Turkish "nation."

The Young (which is say "modern" and "progressive") Turks had, they thought, to clear the field for the building of a new state. In their turn, the Nazis propagated the idea that Germany had to be purified of its "blood" enemies in its social and cultural reconstruction. In both cases, and many others, the new "religion of nationalism" (as Carl Jung called it) was a driving force.

For Serge Avedikian, the nationalist mindset is the real problem. This is the meaning of the dog massacre. He explained this during an interview at the Mediterranean Film Festival (Montpellier, France, October 22-30,