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North Korean Endgame

By Dana Lewis and Takashi Yokota

●前半

For a moment it looks like a training exercise. Marines rappel from the U.S.S. Lassen's Seahawk helicopter as it hovers over the empty decks of the decrepit North Korean freighter wallowing in heavy seas just outside territorial waters off Wonsan. More boarding teams maneuver boats through the flying salt spray and the thumping beat of rotor blade to the ship's side. It's a textbook operation, the U.S. Navy and the Dear Leader's sailors performing the high-tension dance of "Stop & Search" at sea. When suddenly, all hell breaks loose. Black smoke smears the sky as a Russian-made antiaircraft missile shrieks from the freighter and sends the helicopter cart-wheeling into the waves. A staccato barrage of machine gun fire sweeps sailors off the boats, dyeing the sea red. And as the U.S. Aegis destroyer careens to save her men, three North Korean Soju-class missile boats monitoring the search just across the demarcation line launch a wave of Styx sea-to-sea missiles into the frantic rescue scene. At a fund-raising dinner in Southern California, a stunned President Bush gets the word just minutes later. A U.S. Navy warship with 300 men and women aboard is sinking off North Korea. He gives the order, "Take them down!" In Northern Virginia, Pentagon planners are already distributing copies of OPLAN 5027, the battle plan for war on the Korean peninsula.

Simulation novel, or tomorrow's headlines? For years, diplomats, military, planners and North Korea watchers have been gaming the end of Kim Jong-II. Be it research projects at the Rand Corporation and the U.S. Naval War College, or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's "Asia-Pacific Crisis Simulations" and closed-door exercises at Tokyo Zaidan, all have tried to divine what will happen to Northeast Asia's most inveterate and resilient trouble-maker. **Now, with last week's nuclear test, and impending 臨検 at sea in the wake of Sunday's sanctions vote in the U.S. Security Council, the question has become more urgent than ever.** Will Kim go down in a sea of fire, unleashing nuclear weapons before U.S. air strikes and ground troops bring his regime to an end? Will he roll out of bed one morning to find himself surrounded by armed guards in a "palace coup" by dissatisfied cronies. Or will he live out his old age in comfy luxury as North Korea climbs out **its economic hole** behind **the shield of his** nuclear deterrent? Any one, or none, may be the answer (see chart). What happens tomorrow will be determined by real-world decisions made today. Which makes it more imperative than ever--life-or-death imperative--to make sure we get it right.

Getting rid of Kim Jong Il is still the sub-text of the new breed of "smart sanctions," designed to ramp up internal dissent by blocking the foreign currency and luxury products like foreign cognacs and Mercedes Benz's that keep North Korea's ruling elite loyal. "In the days of Kim Il-sung ideology was dominant, but Kim Jong-II has to perform in order to retain his legitimacy," says Scott Snyder, Korea expert at The Asia Foundation and a frequent visitor to the North. "There are 500,000 to a million people that he really does need to take good care of." When the Dear Leader can't send new cars to his top echelon, who will they turn to next?

Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown. Just last week rumors swept Pyongyang that an army truck that smashed into the Dear Leader's younger brother-in-law's car in an assassination attempt. After the still unexplained explosion that flattened

Ryongchon north of Pyongyang just hours afater Kim's personal armored train passed through in April 2004, North Korea delayed a planned roll-out of cell phone service. But it wouldn't take assassination--or perhaps a timely heart attack--to trigger a collapse. Kim still has a firm hand on the army, but a palace coup by his own colleagues could leave army units trading gunfire with turncoat state security forces in the streets of Pyongyang. The harsher the sanctions, the thinking goes, the sooner it happens. 「早ければ2、3ヶ月以内、遅くともアメリカ大統領選が始まる1年半後、もっとも可能性があるのは半年後」と 趙宏偉・法政大学教授がいう。「特に軍内部で物資の窮乏に対する不満が高まり、穏健派(=新中国派)が主導権を取り戻し、中国へ仲介を依頼。民衆は食糧だけあれば何とか生きていけるが、上層部は贅沢品なしには暮らしていけない。」

If new leaders did seize control, and even returned to 6-Party talks, it might be good news for the region and the world. But more likely it would trigger an equally dangerous political meltdown in Pyongyang. One coup would lead to another in a series of succession battles taking years to shake out. 「金正日を倒すと国自体も倒れてしまうことを軍部はわかっている」と早稲田大学の重村智計がいう。「金正日を倒すクーデターは自ら崩壊することになってしまう。」

The collapse would hurt more than the elite. Fighting and disruption would send refugees rushing for the borders. Nam Sung Wook of Korea University estimates a leadership upheaval would result in less than 100,000 refugees, 70% to 80% of them splashing across the Yalu River into China or rushing North Korea's sliver of northern border with Russia. But a total regime collapse into anarchy would be a different story. More than 200,000 would head north and west, and if the heavily-defended DMZ were opened, a human tsunami 2 million strong would roll over South Korea. Getting to Japan is a lot harder. 「モーター付きの船を奪取するには北朝鮮の監視網をくぐらなければならないし、心配するほどの難民が流入するとは思えない。」 says宮本悟 of the 日本国再問

題センター。 But it wouldn't take many refugees to pose flummox Tokyo, which was condemned internationally for only allowing a handful of the 11,000 Vietnamese boat people that reached its shores to stay. 「受け入れるとなったら、スクリーニングをする必要がある」 says a Ministry of Justice Immigration Department official. 「北朝鮮難民と偽ってテロリストや中国人が入ってくると問題だから。」

They would be the lucky ones. In the late 1990s, three years of catastrophic famine left an estimated 2 million North Koreans dead; posters went up threatening execution for cannibals. A political collapse this winter after last July's torrential rains ravaged the harvest could replay that disaster. And without a functioning government in Pyongyang, South Korean and U.S. forces might find themselves putting down their weapons and delivering rice to a desperate countryside. Meanwhile, South Korea would stagger under a re-unification price-tag the World Bank has estimated could run between \$2 to \$3 trillion. Bad news for China, which has been counting on South Korea--it's fourth-largest source of investment--to help drive its own economic transformation.

Such bad news, in fact, even if South and China join in sanctions under U.N. resolution TK (INSERT # IF RESOLUTION PASSES SUNDAY), few expect them to stay the course. 「韓国と中国が本気で経済制裁に踏み切れば、北朝鮮経済には深刻な問題が起きる」 says Korea University's Nam. 「だが、中国は制裁に反対はしないだろうが、実際に制裁に参加するとは思えない。食糧とエネルギーの援助は続けるだろう。」

And looming behind all calculations is North Korea's newly proven nuclear arsenal. If the regime collapses, what happens to nuclear command and control? Who emerges with the weapons? Or does an unscrupulous general use the chaos of civil war to sell warheads to the highest bidder?

Not everyone expects such a dire outcome. In an

M.I.T .simulation of a North Korean collapse run shortly after the 1994 nuclear crisis (Note: 1995 to be exact), South Korean forces quickly recovered Kim's nuclear weapons and promised to dismantle them, while generous Japanese financial aid smoothed the resettlement of North Korean refugees in the South. But for Pyongyang's closest neighbors, 内部崩壊 is still something more dreaded than welcomed.

Which means what the future really promises might be more of the same. The Dear Leader stays right where he is, playing his game of nuclear bluff for years to come. "The Chinese and the South Koreans have looked at the alternatives and they just don't see anybody who is better," says the Asia Foundation's Snyder. "If you look at the military leadership, they probably have less exposure [to the outside world] than Kim and his family. I think the Chinese have looked, and the most likely power-holders are home-grown and that would be a step backwards."

But would Kim be able to keep his country running? Not for long, says 関西大学 Korea watcher 李英和. 「改革開放に転すれば、1－2年は持つ。仮に改革開放をしたとしても、国民の氾濫など独裁体制に割る影響があるだろうから、1－2年しかもたないのではないか」と李がいう。

Yet new economic factors could overturn the conventional wisdom. China is investing heavily in North Korean natural resources; South Korea will likely resume its own investment in the North after the crisis settles down. And since 2000, Kim has made legal and legislative changes to adopt Chinese and Vietnamese economic reform models. "In a 3 to 8 year period they[the North Koreans] could hope to make a transition to becoming, not the Singapore of the region, but possibly the Panama Canal -- a semi-colonally dependent adjunct to the South Korea economy," says Peter Hayes of the Nautilus Institute, a think-tank focusing on North Korea. "And from the viewpoint of the party bosses in the north, that's fine, because they can be real estate billionaires in 10 years on the DMZ. What do they have to sell?

Cheap labor and land. So it's sweatshops and real estate development on the DMZ.”

Internal collapse, or steady-state? Either one reshuffles the balance of power in Northeast Asia. An internal collapse, with China backing the winning horse, would leave Beijing running a virtual puppet state north of the DMZ. A continuation of the status quo leaves Kim in power with a proven nuclear bargaining chip. Russia has washed its hands of its old client state ever since Kim publicly insulted President Putin in 2001 by revoking a Moscow pact to trade Russian satellite launches for shutting down his missile program as soon as he returned to Pyongyang. “The political dividends from ‘special relations’ with Pyongyang do not promise anything good,” says Russian political analyst Sergey Strokan. “Even if we brought Kim Jong-Il into the fold...he would have still exploded his [nuclear] device.” And if North Korea's economy improves, the world could see the emergence of a Beijing-Seoul-Pyongyang economic and political axis long before actual reunification with the South occurred. “China has no intention whatsoever of blockading Korea in a way that would destabilize it, so if the U.S. goes down that road, it will be perceived as a rogue superpower in the region,” says Hayes. “In coming years Japan will deal bilaterally with Pyongyang because the United States has abdicated a leadership role, [and] They won’t want to be left behind by China and South Korea.”

●後半

But the reality now is that current geopolitics contains the seeds for an all-out catastrophe in Northeast Asia. At last week’s UN Security Council, the Chinese scrambled to tone down Washington’s hard-line response to North Korea’s belligerency—all of which rings reminiscent of the first nuclear crisis in 1994.

The threat was real—so real that a second Korean War was about to erupt. By June 1994, the Clinton Administration concluded

that all diplomatic options were exhausted and announced to take the issue to the UN Security Council. Between April and June, the United States deployed Patriot anti-ballistic missiles, additional fighter and bomber aircraft and 5,000 personnel to military headquarters in South Korea. Deployment of a total of an additional 200,000 troops was recommended. American school children in Seoul were told to take an early summer break and go back to the US, followed by plans to evacuate Americans out of South Korea through the ports of Pusan. “The United States was about one week away from a flat-out, full-scale war,” says Kenneth Quinones, then a State Department North Korea negotiator and now Akita International University professor.

Only now, the stakes are exponentially higher. Back in 1994, Pyongyang’s ballistic missile capabilities were limited at best, and it didn’t have “the bomb.” Now they have both. Moreover, after 60 years of pacifism, Japan could be involved in a military conflict with the 1998 revised defense guidelines stipulating the SDF to engage in rear-area support missions should a 周辺事態 break out. Most worrying for Japan is that it’s still vulnerable to a North Korean missile attack. The United States has already deployed PAC3 systems on Okinawa and sent an anti-missile Aegis vessel to Yokosuka. But Japan’s own PAC3s won’t come online until 2007. Considering the heightened volatility of Pyongyang, a 臨検 or 船舶検査 could provoke a skirmish that would escalate to a full-scale military confrontation. Asked about the chances of 臨検、小池百合子国家安全保障担当補佐官 didn’t rule out the chances of that by saying「安全保障上、危機管理上で必要な対応を考えている」.

Based on the White House’s 1994 war plan and current military strength, here’s what a war would look like: B-2 stealth bombers from Andersen Air Base in Guam would take out military targets in the north, followed by a barrage of cruise missile attacks from submarines on both sides of the Korean Peninsula. F-15 and F-16 fighters from Kadena, Misawa and Osan Air Bases would take out the North’s aerial capabilities. Okinawa-based Marines would

breach the east-coast city of Wonsan with an amphibious attack before foraying towards Pyongyang. Also headed to Pyongyang would be US and South Korean troops that have crossed the DMZ before the North has. Meanwhile, new counter-battery radar would pinpoint any of the incoming 10,000 North Korean artillery aimed at Seoul, triggering American and South Korean counter-fire to wipe out most of them.

While there are varying war scenarios, military experts predict a long-term battle. That's because there are so many variables and uncertainties regarding North Korea's military. 「アメリカがピンポイント攻撃に出る可能性はあるが、実行性には疑問がある」 says former KCIA North Korea expert 康仁徳. 「核施設を狙うにしてもダミーが多いし、イラクのようにはいかないだろう。1～2カ月では終わらない。地下坑道が多くあるから北朝鮮軍はゲリラ的な戦い方で抵抗を続けるだろう」 As the fighting continues, conventional wisdom says an exodus of refugees would bolt to South Korea and China. But in the event of a war, the chances of that are unclear. Those heading south would run into an estimated 1,000,000 mines planted across the DMZ, as well as South Korean troops heading north.

The war, should it ever happen, could escalate to further bloodshed with the Chinese entering the fray. History has proved that, for example, in the run-up to World War I, the existence of treaties and obligations made war inevitable. Should the Americans send boots on the ground in the North, China would likely intervene and side with the North as stipulated in the 中朝友好協力相互援助条約. “The Chinese have made it repeatedly clear that if the situation escalates to a military conflict, they would respect their alliance with North Korea, because their goal is to keep the United States and Japan out of North Korea,” Quinones says. The last thing Beijing would want is the presence of American troops on the doorstep of China.

An even more apocalyptic scenario, while extremely remote, is Kim Jong Il developing full-scale nuclear capabilities and pushing the button. Fatalities in heavily-populated cities like Seoul and Tokyo

would be of unimaginable scale. According to a study by RAND's Bennett, the fatalities of a 10kT nuclear attack on Seoul would be well above 100,000. And that's not it—the nuclear fallout would kill another 100,000 in the area. A retaliatory strike on North Korea would most likely follow, turning Northeast Asia into a nuclear war zone.

How can such doomsday scenarios be averted? The problem is that the North Korean crisis is debated by two extremes that only create a downward spiral of confrontation. While South Korean President Roh Moo-hyon's Sunshine Policy of appeasement has only emboldened the North's bellicose regime to survive, the Bush administration's adamant insistence of disengagement has only bought time for the Kim Jong-Il regime to further isolate itself and advance its missile and nuclear weapons programs. The failure of the Sunshine Policy is one thing, but it is shortsighted to equate that with a realistic engagement policy that involves strong commitment on both sides to resolve the current crisis. "It's very dangerous to pursue a policy that aims only at the hardliners of North Korea," says Kyongnam University professor Lim Il-chul (慶南大学 林乙出イム・イルチュル). "There needs to be a policy that keeps in mind the class of moderate reform pragmatists that has fairly grown."

Given the horrific consequences of an all-out war, a cool-headed diplomatic effort must kick in. A knowledgeable source says that one possible solution is already in the works—an intermediary ironing out the differences between Washington and Pyongyang. A possible candidate, sources say, is Ban Ki-moon, being both a South Korean diplomat and the next UN Secretary General. It's a feasible option, but the future doesn't rest on one man's shoulders. Ultimately, the future depends on whether all nations involved prioritize finding a way out of this entanglement--or be preoccupied with distrust and hatred of each other.

With Yoshihiro Nagaoka, Naofumi Sano, Hiroshi Uesugi in Tokyo, Jinna Park in Seoul and Owen Matthews in Moscow