

Obama's new security doctrine



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ON May 27th, President Barack Obama announced the new national security doctrine. It is rooted in diplomatic engagement and international alliances, essentially repudiating his predecessor's emphasis on unilateral US power and the right to wage pre-emptive war. The President unveiled a preview of the new security doctrine on 15th May, at the US Military Academy at West Point.

Eight years after President George Bush came to the US Military Academy to set a new security doctrine after the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001, President Obama used the same setting to lay out the broad principles of his National Security Strategy, a document required by law of every administration, stressing international engagement over Bush's "cowboy diplomacy."

Vowing no retreat against enemies while seek-

ing "national renewal and global leadership", the President told graduating cadets: "Yes, we are clear-eyed about the short-falls of our international system. But America has not succeeded by stepping out of the current cooperation. We have succeeded by steering in the direction of liberty and justice, so nations thrive by meeting their responsibilities and face consequences when they don't."

While President Obama never mentioned his predecessor's name, Obama's revised approach is to implicitly repudiate the 2002 "Bush Doctrine" asserting the right to wage pre-emptive war against countries and terrorist groups deemed a threat to the United States. It was part of a policy Bush called a "distinctly American internationalism" established after the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Cooperative international response
On 27 May, the White House rolled out Obama's

first formal declaration of national security goals, which deviated sharply from the go-it-alone approach of the Bush era that included justification for pre-emptive war and alienated many in the Muslim world.

The 52-page document on national security doctrine reads like an argument for restoration of an older order of reliance on international institutions, updated to confront modern threats. It is reported that the author of the draft of new security doctrine is Ben Rhodes, a deputy national security adviser.

In the 2002 document President Bush explicitly said Washington would never allow the rise of a rival super power. President Obama argues that the US faces no real military competitor, but that global power is diffusing increasingly. "To succeed, we must face the world as it is."

The document tries to balance the idealism of Obama's campaign promises with the realities of his confrontations with a fractious and threatening world over the past sixteen months; Obama recognises limits on how much the US can spend to shape the globe.

He said: "The burdens of a young century cannot fall on American shoulders alone. Indeed our adversaries would like to see America sap our strength by overextending our power."

Obama's insistence that the United States cannot act alone in the world is also a message to current and emerging powers that they must shoulder their share of the global burden. Obama's move to replace the Group of 8 nations with a broader group, G-20 that includes China, India, and Brazil, recognises the reality.

The President argues that the "the gravest danger to the American people and global security continues to come from weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons. He considers cyber threats, climate change, and the US's dependence on fossil fuels as fundamental national security issues.

Larry Summers, President Obama's chief economic adviser used to ask a year ago "How long can the biggest borrower remain the world's biggest power?" America is broke. The US government's outgoings will exceed income by about \$US1.6 trillion this year; over the next 10 years combined, the predicted gap is \$US8.5

trillion.

Grappling with a fragile US economy and mounting deficits, Obama also signalled he would place new emphasis on the link between US economic strength and discipline at home and restoring America's standing in the world.

The President thus defines national security more broadly than his predecessor did; for example, reducing the deficit in the national budget is critical to sustaining US power. The United States' fiscal problems presented a long-term threat to its diplomatic clout and it cannot sustain this level of deficit financing and debt without losing its global influence. In short, the deficit begins to threaten the post-1945 security architecture.

No war against Islam

John Brennan, Obama's leading counter-terrorism adviser, said: "We have never been and will never be at war with Islam. The President's strategy is unequivocal with regard to our posture - the United States of America is at war. We are at war against al Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates."

Brennan's words dovetailed with Obama's outreach to the Muslim world, where the US image under former President George W. Bush was hurt by the US-led invasion of Iraq, the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal and his use of phrases like "war on terror" and "Islamofascism."

Obama has been widely credited with improving the tone of US foreign policy but is still struggling with unfinished wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, nuclear standoffs with Iran and North Korea, and sluggish Middle East peace efforts due to intransigence of Israel, supported by a strong Jewish lobby in the US.

Terrorism threat

Obama's strategy refers to Al Qaeda and its affiliates as the enemy, rather than terrorism and terrorists. Terror, administration officials say, is a state of mind and a tactic, not an enemy. The Bush administration repeatedly referred to the war against terror in its strategy. Obama has dropped the term.

Brennan made clear there would be no let-up

in the counter-terrorism fight, saying the United States would need a broad campaign that "harnesses every tool of American power, military and civilian, kinetic and diplomatic."

"We will take the fight to al Qaeda and its extremist affiliates wherever they plot and train - in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and beyond," he said.

"We will not simply degrade al Qaeda's capabilities or simply prevent terrorist attacks against our country or citizens, we will not merely respond after the fact, after an attack that has been attempted. Instead the United States will disrupt, dismantle and ensure a lasting defeat of al Qaeda and violent extremist affiliates," he said.

Middle East observers believe that until the Palestinian issue is resolved, Islamic militants will continue to disrupt the stability of the region and beyond through violent means.

Brennan said curbing the growing threat of "home-grown" terrorism would be a top priority, along with boosting defences against lone al Qaeda recruits who hold foreign passports, allowing them to enter the United States with little to no screening.

This comes in the aftermath of the failed Christmas Day bombing of a US airliner and the botched Times Square car-bomb attempt earlier in May - incidents Brennan called part of a "new phase" of the counter-terrorism fight.

"The President's national security strategy explicitly recognises the threat to the United States posed by individuals radicalised here at home," he said.

Critics say some of his efforts at diplomatic outreach show US weakness and they question whether he jeopardises American interests by relying too heavily on "soft power." There was no discussion of what has become an emerging consensus in foreign policy circles - that heavy US indebtedness to countries like China poses a security problem.

But the report did reflect Washington's enigmatic relationship with Beijing, praising it for a more active role in world affairs while insisting it must act responsibly. It also reiterated unease over China's rapid military build-up.

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The Cheonan crisis

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SINCE the end of the World War II, the Korean peninsula has been known to the world as one of the flash points in the map of international conflicts. The situation in the Korean Peninsula is again turning into a genuine strategic predicament in the whole region. The recent crisis is centered on the sinking of the Cheonan, a South Korean naval vessel, on 26 March 2010 causing the deaths of 46 sailors. The sinking of Cheonan as such did not generate much heat in the Peninsula at the initial stage, because immediately after the incident the South Korean government formed an international investigation team officially known as the Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group (JIG) consisting of experts from the US, the UK, Australia, Sweden and South Korea. It clearly shows the South Korean government has taken the appropriate step to identify the real cause behind the incident. The report of the investigators was finally published on 20 May 2010. The report reveals that a North Korean submarine's torpedo sank the Cheonan on 26 March 2010. As it states, "The evidence points overwhelmingly to the conclusion that the torpedo was fired by a North Korean submarine. There is no other plausible explanation."

This has triggered the recent crisis between the two nations. Based on the strong evidence from the investigation report the South Korean government blamed the Northern regime for this unprovoked and aggressive behavior. The President of ROK, Lee Myung-bak, declared, "I solemnly urge North Korean authorities to do the following: Apologize immediately to the Republic of Korea and the international community. Immediately punish those who are responsible for and those who are involved in the incident." On the other hand, the North Korean regime denies any involvement in the sinking, calling the investigation results a "fabrication", "conspiratorial farce", and threatening war if sanctions are imposed. Its main newspaper called the investigation an "intolerable, grave provocation". The reaction from North Korea is understandable as the country has been engaged in such war of words game for decades.

It is against this background some questions are pertinent. To what extent is the evidence of international investigation team credible? What are the options for South Korea and its allies? How has international community reacted to this crisis? What is its impact for inter-Korean relations as well as regional peace? So far the report clearly establishes the case that North Korea is to blame for this incident. The scientific evidence provided by an international investigation team gives no scope to believe in other explanations whatsoever behind this incident. In addition, the past actions by the North Korean regime also provide further justification to accept the conclusion of the report.

As the report has come into light, ROK government and its allies have sharply reacted and have declared punitive measures against North Korea. South Korea has suspended trade with the North. South Korea also indicated that it would resume "psychological operations" against the North and meet any further attack with an immediate military response. The ROK would not tolerate any provocative act and would maintain a principle of proactive deterrence. The tough stance by the ROK is also supported by the United States for obvious reasons. US President Barack Obama already endorsed President Lee's demand that North Korea immediately apologize and punish those responsible for the attack, and, most importantly, stop its belligerent and threatening behavior. These measures in terms

of non-coercive actions such as suspension of trade and talks and threats of tough actions have not restrained the North. A commander of the North stated, "More powerful physical strikes will be taken to eradicate the root of provocation if [South Korea] challenges to our fair response." It seems that the North would retaliate and might even launch action of its own. Under these circumstances, the options for the South and its allies are really difficult choices. Analysts agree that a retaliatory military strike is not a viable option because it could escalate into a full-scale war or hurt the country's fast-recovering economy. South Korea also would not want to disrupt the G-20 summit scheduled for November in Seoul. Other military option such as staging a show of force aimed at warning against a similar provocation may also not be very effective.

The international community has condemned the North although China, North Korea's closest trading partner remains silent. Beijing has distanced herself from giving any reaction to the investigation report and reportedly was slow to express sympathy for the loss of South Korean sailors. The dilemma for China is not unknown to any observers of East Asian politics and security. This time it is a unique situation for China. Both sides are seeking support from China as they are in friendly relations with China. The Russian government also maintains its own position in this crisis particularly regarding the measures against the North. Russia indicated that she would not support to raise the issue in the U.N Security Council until it gets 100% proof that the ship was sunk by North Korea. As expected, US and Japan are strongly behind South Korea. Japan has already indicated it would back a UN Security Council resolution against North Korea. Undoubtedly, the Northern regime has been further alienated from the international community through its recent acts. In a joint statement on 26 May 2010 both the ASEAN and the EU expressed "deep concern" over rising tensions in the Korean peninsula and called on both sides to exercise restraint.

The impact of the crisis is serious given the history of inter-Korean relations in the post-Korean War era. The North Korean authority formally declared that from now on it would put into force the resolute measures to totally freeze the inter-Korean relations, totally abrogate the agreement on non-aggression between the North and the South and completely halt the inter-Korean cooperation. It is true that North and South Korea are technically still at war after the Korean War ended without an armistice in 1953. But for the last decade the two Koreas have come forward a long way to strengthen their bilateral

ties. The Sunshine policy of South Korea played a major role in engaging the Northern regime in the process of bilateral cooperation. Since its articulation in 1998 by South Korean President Kim Dae Jung, the policy resulted in greater political contact between the two nations and some historical moments for the Korean peninsula; the two Korean summit meetings in Pyongyang (June 2000) which broke ground with several high-profile business ventures, as well as brief meetings of separated family members. Now everything looks like a distant past for the inter-Korean relations; a return to the Cold War era.

Regionally, nuclearisation, North's missile programme, Japan-North Korea relations, China's relations with two Koreas, US relations with the North are going to be affected by the recent developments in the Peninsula. The role of China will be a critical factor in reversing the deteriorating scenarios in the Korean peninsula. A Chinese scholar, Shen Dingli maintains that China wants to avoid a conflict on the Korean peninsula, and is concerned that taking South Korea's side may provoke North Korea into further escalations and even lead to war. Once declared by the US as the member of the Axis of Evil and more frequently identified as one of the rogue states in the world, North Korea will further perplex its friends and enemies by its unpredictable and aggressive actions as done earlier. The way North Korea had dismissed the report of the international investigation team just gives another demonstration of her highly provocative behavior.

In the conclusion, there is no way to let the situation slide into further crisis leading to military confrontation in the Korean Peninsula with deep implications for bilateral, regional, and global contexts. While it has been strongly emphasized to show mutual restraint by the primary parties of the crisis, there is a need for creating international pressure on the Northern regime. It is not the first time that the North has resorted to such acts. It has been persistently fooling the experts and policy makers through its bizarre behavior. The collapsing regime in North Korea has been living dangerously in this region. The hard earned economic prosperity of the East Asian countries would be threatened by the fear of instability and war where the North has a very little stake. The world community must come forward to understand the importance of peace in the Korean Peninsula and show solidarity with the forces that are fighting for justice and prosperity.

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China refuses to sanction N. Korea over Cheonan

China resisted pressure on May 30 from South Korea and Japan to censure North Korea publicly for the sinking of a warship, calling only for regional tensions over the incident to be defused.

Host President Lee Myung-Bak and Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama teamed up at the two-day summit to nudge China's Premier Wen Jiabao to declare Pyongyang responsible for the March sinking of the South Korean corvette.

But Wen gave no sign that China is ready to back U.N. Security Council action against its ally over the sinking, which cost 46 lives.

"The urgent task now is to defuse the impact of the Cheonan incident, change the tense situation and avoid clashes," Wen told a joint news conference on the southern resort island of Jeju.

"China will actively communicate with relevant parties and lead the situation to help promote peace and stability in the region, which fits our common and long-term interests best."

In Pyongyang on May 30, some 100,000 North Koreans held a rally accusing Seoul of heightening cross-border tensions over the sinking, according to the North's state broadcasting network monitored by Yonhap news agency. The rally was led by slogans denouncing President Lee as a traitor, it said.

Wen, whose country is the North's economic lifeline, has been cautious since arriving in South Korea on May 28.

At a meeting with Lee that day he said Beijing would, before determining its position, review the results of the international investigation into the Cheonan's sinking but would not protect whoever was responsible.

Lee said in Jeju that he expected "wise co-operation" from neighbouring countries in handling the disaster.

According to his senior spokesman Lee Dong-Kwan, Lee also told the summit: "We are not afraid of war, but we do not want war either. We have no intention to go to war."

Hatoyama, whose government on May 28 announced new sanctions against the North, said the three leaders agreed that "this is a serious issue related to peace and stability in Northeast Asia".

South Korea, at least in public, appeared fairly satisfied with the outcome of the Jeju summit. "The inclusion of those remarks on the Cheonan in the joint press announcement in itself has significance," Lee's spokesman said.

But Paik Haksoon, of the Sejong Institute think-tank, said Wen's comments "indicate that China is still questioning the authenticity and authority of the investigation."

"There would be no point in taking this issue to the U.N. Security Council without securing support from China in advance," Paik said.

Numerous countries have condemned the North for the sinking, one of the worst military attacks on the South since the 1950-53 war. The North says Seoul faked evidence to incite tensions and boost its support before local elections this week. South Korea, the United States and Japan need the support of veto-wielding member China to sanction - or, at least, to censure - the North at the Security Council.

The South plans to send a letter to the chairman of the UN Security Council this week, an unidentified official told Yonhap news agency.

Japan's Hatoyama had promised to fully support Seoul when the case is referred to the council, his spokesman told AFP.

Hatoyama had also stated clearly that the resumption of six-party nuclear talks is unthinkable until the North offers a clear apology for attacking the Cheonan, South Korean officials said.

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Lebanon fires on Israeli warplanes

Lebanon's military fired anti-aircraft artillery at Israeli warplanes that were flying over Lebanon, a senior Israeli security official said on Tuesday.

"Our aircraft have been targeted by the Lebanese anti-aircraft guns while flying over southern Lebanon, and there was no damage," the official who requested the anonymity told AFP.

A military spokesperson neither confirmed nor denied the report.

Lebanon issues almost daily reports of Israeli violations of its air space, but its military rarely opens fire unless the planes fly within range of its guns.

The overflights violate UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended a devastating 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon's Shiite Hezbollah militia, but Israel argues they are needed to monitor arms smuggling.

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