CHAPTER 7

CRISIS MANAGEMENT UNDER THE ARMISTICE STRUCTURE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA DURING THE COLD WAR

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To examine the causes of peace is essentially to turn the causes of war upside down.

—GEOFFREY BLAINEY—

War and Peace are alternative phases of the relationship in which independent states interact with each other violently or peacefully. To examine the causes of war is to examine the causes of peace, because to examine the former is essentially to turn the latter upside down. Ever since Thucydides explained the causes of the war between Athens and Sparta in his “everlasting possession,” History of the Peloponnesian War, by distinguishing between the remote (underlying) causes and immediate (precipitating) causes of the war, his mode of analysis of war has attracted attention from students of war studies. Subsequent students of war studies have followed Thucydides’ example in not only distinguishing between the two different categories but also in treating the remote causes as the more important of the two. But it is very rare to find students of peace studies who employ Thucydides’ mode of analysis. Richard Ned Lebow attempted to turn Thucydides upside down in evaluating which causes are more important between the remote and immediate causes of war by studying the nature of international crises, which can be the turning points between war and peace. According to Lebow, the immediate causes of war can exercise an important and even decisive influence on the course of the conflict.
Ever since the establishment of the Korean armistice in 1953, ending the three-year long Korean War, there have been several serious incidents which could have escalated into another war on the Korean peninsula. There was the commando raid on the South Korean President’s Residence (The Blue House – 1968), the *Pueblo* incident (the seizure of a US Navy intelligence ship in 1968), the shooting down of an American EC-121 reconnaissance aircraft (1969), the DMZ axe murders of UN command personnel (1976), the Rangoon terrorist bombing of South Korean leaders (1983), and North Korea’s bombing of a Korean airliner (1987). All these events created by North Korea threatened the armistice structure, thereby opening the possibility of another Korean War for the purpose of the communist national unification of the Korean peninsula. But, while some incidents were serious, others simply faded away. Therefore, not all these events could be called “crises.”

“Crisis” is etymologically a medical term (derived from the Greek) describing a decisive and sudden change which can lead to either recovery or death. Based on this definition, a political crisis usually is understood as a situation in which the survival of a political system is threatened, or in which an intensive political interaction carries implications for some stable patterns of interactions. When the crisis is so understood, its analysis is likely to be cast in some form of “systemic” framework. Thus an international crisis may be viewed in the framework of a global or subsystemic international system. Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeld defined international crisis as:

a situational change characterized by an increase in the intensity of disruptive interactions between two or more adversaries, with a high probability of military hostility in time of peace. The higher-than-normal conflictual interactions destabilize the existing relationship of the adversaries and pose a challenge to the existing structure of an international system — global, dominant and/or subsystem.

When this definition of international crisis is applied to incidents on the Korean peninsula, some of them do not measure up to the definition of crisis. The commando raid on the South Korean presidential residence was almost completely overshadowed by the subsequent *Pueblo* incident. The bombing of a Korean airliner by North Korean agents in 1987 was treated secondarily in the vortex of the South Korean presidential election campaign fervor and the strong desire of the South Korean government to downplay the event in order not to create an atmosphere of danger and insecurity on the eve of the Seoul Olympics. The Rangoon terrorist bombing (1983) occurred in Burma, not on the Korean peninsula. Furthermore, the long delay in the releasing of the results of the investigation by the