

The Media War at the UN and the DPRK

Why Netizen Journalism Matters

Notes for a Talk

by Ronda Hauben

[Author's note: The following are slightly edited Notes prepared for a talk presented at Stony Brook University on December 4, 2013. The talk was part of a series of discussions in the fall of 2013 sponsored by the Center for Korean Studies at Stony Brook focusing on North Korea. The talk was presented with slides available at the website at the end of this article.* Comments are welcome.]

I – Preface

I am honored to be here today and to give this talk as part of the series of talks on North Korea.

In October 2006, I began covering the United Nations as a journalist for the English edition of the South Korean online newspaper OhmyNews International. When OhmyNews ended its English edition in 2010, I became a correspondent covering the UN for an English language blog <http://blogs.taz.de/netizen> blog (No longer available.) at the website of the German newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*. Both OhmyNews International and my blog at the taz.de website are online publications.

With Michael Hauben, I am a coauthor of the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. The book was first published online in January 1994. On May 1, 1997, the print edition of the book *Netizens* was published in English. Later that year, in October, a Japanese translation was published. *Netizens* was the first book to recognize that along with the development of the Internet, a new form of citizenship, called netizenship had emerged. This is a form of citizenship that has developed based on the broader forms of political participation made possible by the Net (i.e., the Internet).

I want to share some of the background about the origin, use, and impact of the netizen concept and its relation to what I call netizen journalism before presenting two case studies of how netizen journalism has affected the media war at the UN.

II – Introduction

While many people are now interested in the impact of the internet on society, pioneering research was done by my coauthor Michael Hauben in the early 1990s when the internet was first beginning to spread and to connect people around the world.

In his research, Hauben recognized that there were people who appreciated the communication the internet made possible and that these people worked to spread the Net and to do what they felt needed for it to help to create a better world. Taking the common network term, “net.citizen” used online at the time, Hauben proposed that these people who worked to contribute to the Net and the bigger world it was part of were “netizens.”

In an article he wrote on the impact of the Net on journalism, Hauben recognized that many people online were frustrated with the mainstream media and that the netizens would be creating a broader and more widespread media.

Hauben recognized in the early 1990s that “the collective body of people assisted by (the Net)... has grown larger than any individual newspaper....” I want to look at two news events about North Korea and the UN in the context of this prediction. Then I will consider the implication of these case studies for the kind of journalism about North Korea that I propose netizens and the internet are making possible.

III – Korea

In February 2003, I was glancing at the front page summaries of the articles in an issue of the *Financial Times*. I saw a surprising headline for an article that continued later in the issue. The article said that in 2002 netizens in South Korea had elected the president of the country, Roh Moo-hyun. He had just taken office on February 25, 2003. The new president had even promised that the Internet would be influential in the form of government he established. Also, I learned that an online Korean newspaper called OhmyNews had been important in making these developments possible. Colleagues encouraged me to get in contact with OhmyNews and to learn more about the netizens’ activities in South Korea and about OhmyNews.

I was able to get in contact with OhmyNews. I began to submit articles to it. They would be printed along with a few other English language articles others were submitting. By 2004 OhmyNews began an English-language online edition called OhmyNews International. I began to write for it. I soon became the first woman columnist for the English edition.

I subsequently learned that both South Korea and China are places where the role of netizens is important in building more democratic structures for society. I began to pay attention to both of these netizen developments. South Korea, for example, has been an advanced model of grassroots efforts to create examples of netizen forms for more participatory decision-making processes. I wrote several research papers documenting the achievements and activities of Korean netizens.

IV – Reporting on the UN

By October 2006, the second five-year term for Kofi Annan as the Secretary-General of the United Nations was soon to end. One of the main contenders to become the 8th Secretary-General of the UN was the Foreign Minister of South Korea, Ban Ki-moon.

I had covered one previous United Nations event which I had found of great interest. That event was the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) which encouraged access to the internet for everyone. The event took place in Tunis, Tunisia in November 2005. Also, I had watched with interest some of the press reports of the speeches made by heads of state at the 2006 opening of the General Assembly session. These events gave me the sense that it probably would be interesting to go to the UN and cover the activities for OhmyNews if the new Secretary-General were Ban Ki-moon, the Korean candidate.

On October 9, 2006, Ban Ki-moon won the Security Council nomination. This nomination was to be approved by the General Assembly on October 13.

I thought this would be a historic event for South Korea.

By 2006, I was writing regularly as a featured columnist for OhmyNews International (OMNI).

I asked the Editor of OhmyNews International if I could get a letter for a press credential to cover the UN for OMNI. He agreed and I was able to get my credentials in time to go to the General Assembly meeting when the General Assembly voted to accept the Security Council’s nomination of Ban Ki-moon.

I was surprised that some of the speeches welcoming Ban Ki-moon as the Secretary-General elect were meaningful speeches referring to actual problems at the UN such as the need for reform of the Security Council. Conversely, the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, made no pretense to hide both his welcoming of Ban and his dissatisfaction with Kofi Annan, the outgoing Secretary-General who had condemned the U.S. invasion of Iraq. A significant focus of the comments to the new Secretary-General from member states emphasized the importance of communication at the UN, that it was critical for the incoming Secretary-General to listen to all states and to hear their views.

It was a thrill to be at the UN witnessing the vote for a new Secretary-General who was from South Korea. I wondered if the internet would be able to have any impact on the new Secretary-General and on what happened at the United Nations, since the internet had been able to make it possible for netizens in South Korea to impact politics.

The very next day after Ban Ki-moon's nomination was approved by the General Assembly, the Security Council took up to condemn the recent nuclear test by North Korea. This had been North Korea's first nuclear test. The Security Council imposed sanctions on North Korea, not giving the North Korean Ambassador to the UN, Pak Gil Yon, a chance to respond until after the sanctions had been voted on. When the North Korean Ambassador responded, he referred among other issues, to financial sanctions that the U.S. had imposed on North Korea. No one in the Security Council asked him what he was referring to or how this affected the issues the Security Council had acted on concerning North Korea.

It impressed me that just as a diplomat from South Korea was being chosen as the new Secretary-General of the UN, at the same time sanctions were being imposed on North Korea. The Security Council acted against North Korea before hearing its views on the issue they were considering. This was in sharp contrast to the emphasis member nations had put on the importance of hearing the views of all members when member nations welcomed Ban Ki-moon to the United Nations in the meeting just one day earlier in the General Assembly.

The article I wrote for OhmyNews International described this situation. It explained:

The urgent problem facing the UN at this juncture in history is not whether North Korea has developed and tested a nuclear device. It is the breakdown reflected by the lack of participation and investigation by the international community into how a crisis will be handled once it develops, and whether the concerns and problems of those involved in the crisis will be considered as part of the process of seeking a solution. It is how the UN functions when tensions reach a point where serious attention is needed to help understand and solve a problem. (Quoted from "The Problem Facing the UN," OhmyNews International, October 17, 2006).¹

In general when at the UN, I paid attention to Security Council developments, particularly with regard to the meetings imposing sanctions on North Korea and also on Iran. Also, I particularly followed the meetings of the Security Council and the General Assembly when Security Council reform was being discussed.

V – Some Mainstream Media Created a Story

Soon after Ban Ki-moon took office as Secretary-General at the beginning of January 2007, a story appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) accusing North Korea of using UN funds from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for its nuclear program. An editorial in the January 19 issue of the *WSJ* by Melanie Kirkpatrick had the headline: "United Nations Dictators."

No evidence was presented in the *WSJ*, just accusations. This situation was reminiscent of

how the WSJ and some other mainstream media had accused the former Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, of misusing UN funds in Iraq, and how this had mushroomed into what had come to be known as the “Food for Oil” scandal.

The significance of this story for me, was to see that some of the mainstream media were active creating stories and accusations with no real evidence, while only very few media appeared to be investigating the actual underlying issues that had led the North Korean government to carry out its first nuclear test.

VI – The Six-Party Talks and the Banco Delta Asia Story

In January 2007 there were reports in the press about a meeting that had taken place in Berlin between Christopher Hill, the Assistant Secretary of State for the U.S. and Kim Kye-gwan, the Deputy Foreign Minister of North Korea.

Around this time I learned some of the background behind what had led to North Korea carrying out its first nuclear test. An agreement was reached on September 19, 2005, between the six parties to talk about the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. The six parties were North Korea, South Korea, the U.S., Japan, Russia and China. Shortly after the agreement was signed in Sept. 2005, the U.S. Treasury Department announced that it was freezing the assets of the Banco Delta Asia (BDA) a bank in Macao, China, which held \$25 million of North Korean funds.

The result of this action was that North Korea lost access to \$25 million of its bank funds, and also to the use of the international banking system. North Korea’s response was to leave the six-party talks to protest this action which it considered hostile and politically motivated.

North Korea was encouraged by some parties to the six-party talks to have bilateral negotiations with the U.S. over the financial sanctions. The U.S., however, refused to negotiate. Unable to find a way to negotiate with the U.S. over this situation, North Korea, in July 2006, tested a missile. The response of the UN Security Council was to condemn North Korea by passing UN Resolution 1695 but not to investigate what the problem was that led North Korea to carry out a missile test.

Then on October 9, 2006, North Korea carried out its first nuclear test. Once again the Security Council failed to investigate what was behind this action. Instead, the Security Council passed Resolution 1718 imposing more sanctions on North Korea.

Only after this nuclear test did the U.S. demonstrate a willingness to negotiate with the DPRK over the financial sanctions imposed on Banco Delta Asia.

On January 16 and 17, 2007, Christopher Hill and Kim Kye-gwan held talks in Berlin and agreed. Though not officially announced, it was believed that they agreed that the \$25 million being held in the Macau BDA, along with access to the international banking system would be restored to North Korea. In exchange, North Korea would return to the six-party talks. The Berlin meeting appeared to break the deadlock and the six-party talks were held again starting on February 8, 2007. Another agreement was announced five days later on February 13, 2007.

Then on March 5 and 6, Hill and Kim held bilateral talks in New York City. Despite the agreement reached in Berlin, however, the U.S. Treasury Department issued a finding on March 19 against the BDA under Section 311 of the U.S. Patriot Act. This move again deadlocked the six-party talks, even as the delegates arrived for the talks in Beijing.

The deadlock continued for the next few months, with much of the mainstream U.S. press blaming North Korea for continuing to insist that its \$25 million be returned via a banking transaction before it would agree to any further steps in the sixparty talks. The North Korean delegate

said he understood that the agreement in Berlin with Christopher Hill had provided for the return of the \$25 million from the BDA as a money transfer via the international banking system.

The U.S. Treasury Department officials claimed that their decision against the BDA left it up to the bank to return the funds to North Korea. The decision against the bank, however, meant that it had no means to return the funds as a money transfer as the Section 311 finding against the bank meant that it lost access to the international banking system.

During this period, there were rumors that a bank in China had been asked by the U.S. State Department to make the transfer. The bank allegedly considered the request. Eventually, however, the bank refused based on its fear that it too would be frozen out of the international banking system by the U.S. Treasury Department, as the BDA had been if it offered to help make the transfer of funds back to North Korea.

The McClatchy Newspaper Company, in a way that is different from much of the rest of the mainstream U.S. media, carried articles which helped to investigate the issues underlying this dispute between the U.S. and North Korea. Other banks in Macau, an article in the McClatchy Newspapers explained, had played a similar role with regard to North Korea, helping North Korea to sell its gold, but only the BDA had been singled out for sanctions. The article suggested that the U.S. Treasury Department's actions were not based on actual criminal activity by the bank or by North Korea, but instead were motivated by a political objective.

One of the McClatchy newspaper articles described some documents that the newspaper had acquired including the BDA's complaint challenging the U.S. Treasury Department's decision against the bank. Also, the McClatchy newspaper article referred to a statement filed by the owner of the BDA to protest the Treasury Department's action.

I tried to find a way to get copies of the documents. I tried to contact the law firm and even wrote to the McClatchy reporter, but none of these efforts succeeded.

I did, however, find on the internet a copy of the Patriot Act and read Section 311, the section being used against the bank. I was able to see that the section of the law was such that the U.S. government did not have to present any proof of its actions.

In March 2007, I did a story titled "North Korea's \$25 Million and Banco Delta Asia," documenting how the use of Section 311 of the Patriot Act against the bank was a political act, rather than a criminal determination. The U.S. Treasury Department did not have to provide any evidence and acted as the accuser and judge in the case. Even though there had been an agreement between the U.S. and North Korea to return the \$25 million to North Korea, nothing happened.

The stalemate continued.

In May 2007, I covered the 50th Anniversary dinner celebration of the New York City-based Korea Society. Chris Hill gave a short talk as part of the program. He indicated that he would persevere until a means was found to break the impasse over the \$25 million so as to make it possible for the six-party talks to continue.

Several journalists covered the event for other South Korean publications. They were particularly interested in what Hill said, but Hill's talk in itself did not seem to represent a newsworthy event.

In the next few days, however, it appeared that an important story was developing. An article by Kevin Hall titled, "Bank Owner Disputes Money-Laundering Allegations," published by the McClatchy Newspaper Company said that the blog "China Matters" had published links to some documents refuting the Treasury Department's charges against the bank.

"China Matters" is a blog about U.S.-China policy. The links that the blog made available

included an appeal submitted by the lawyer for Banco Delta Asia to an administrative hearing at the Treasury Department and to a statement by the owner of the Bank in Macao, Stanley Au.

I now had the documents in the case. The U.S. government's findings were general statements providing no specific evidence of wrongdoing on the part of the bank. The bank's statements and refutation gave significant documentation refuting charges of illegal activity on the part of the bank. The refutation also made the case that there was a political motive for the U.S. government's allegations rather than actual illegal activity on the part of the bank.

Also, the blogger at China Matters who uses the pseudonym China Hand or Peter Lee posted some of the Congressional testimony by David Asher, a former U.S. government official who had helped to plan and enforce the U.S. Treasury Department sanctions against the Banco Delta Asia.

Asher explained that the U.S. government had targeted a small Macau bank in order to scare the banks in China. "To kill the chicken to scare the monkeys," the ex-government official explained, quoting an old Chinese proverb in his testimony in a U.S. Congressional hearing.

I wanted to verify the testimony of Asher and understand its implications, so I searched online and found an earlier government document from November 2006. Asher had testified in a similar vein at a Congressional hearing titled "China's Proliferation to North Korea and Iran, and Its Role in Addressing the Nuclear and Missile Situations in Both Countries," on September 14, 2006. The document I found was the transcript of that hearing.

The hearing was held by a special Congressional Commission about the U.S.-China relationship which held hearings semi-annually.

What was most surprising in this document, however, was the explanation that the Banco Delta Asia sanctions were an issue that was only secondarily aimed at North Korea. The primary issue that was of interest to the U.S. government officials involved in the Commission Hearing was what was China's foreign policy and how closely China's behavior matched the foreign policy goals set out by the U.S.

In the discussion at the September 2006 hearing about the Banco Delta Asia, David Asher described the political objectives of the action. Speaking about China, Asher said:

They get the message from the financial angle... there's an old saying in Chinese, 'You kill the chicken to scare the monkeys.' We didn't go out and cite a multitude of Chinese financial institutions that have been publicly identified as working with North Korea over the years.... We did need to designate one small one though, and that one small one sent a message to all the others, that they had to get in line, and it was timed to coincide with other information that we were making public.... I think they got the message.... We need to try to align our financial and economic interests. I do think, though the use of some pressure, including veiled pressure is effective. (Hearing before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2006, p. 115-116.)²

The Commission hearing clarified that the purpose of freezing North Korean funds in the Banco Delta Asia was not about stopping criminal activity by that bank or by North Korea, as there was never any evidence presented of any such activity. Instead, it was an act with a political objective which was to pressure China to act in conformity with U.S. policy goals in general and in its actions toward North Korea in particular.

At last, I had the news peg for an important story. I wrote the article, "Behind the Blacklisting of Banco Delta Asia: Is the Policy Aimed at Targeting China as well as North Korea?" submitting it to around 5:00 a.m. my time to OhmyNews International. By noon the next day, my story

appeared. That was on May 18.

Also on May 18, the *Wall Street Journal* carried an Op-Ed by the former U.S. Ambassador to the UN, John Bolton. The article scolded the U.S. government for negotiating to return the \$25 million to North Korea

In late May I was an invited speaker at the International Communications Association (ICA 2007) conference in San Francisco. I summed up my experience writing for OhmyNews International, particularly describing the BDA story and the helpful role of online media in making it possible to present an alternative narrative as opposed to that of the mainstream U.S. media about the situation.

VII – Voice of America News Service

Little did I realize when I gave my talk in San Francisco, however, that my experience with this story was not ending, but actually a new episode was beginning.

A short time later, on June 11, I received a surprising e-mail message. The message was from a reporter who said she worked for *Voice of America News Korea* (VOA News Korean Service). VOA is an official U.S. government news broadcasting service.³

She began:

“Hello, Ms. Hauben”

She introduced herself as a reporter with the Korean Service of the Voice of America News in Washington, D.C.

Her e-mail continued:

While I was working on a story about BDA issue, I read your report, ‘Behind the Blacklisting of Banco Delta Asia.’ I thought you made some valuable points about the BDA issue in this report, I was wondering if I could have a conversation with you in this matter. Since I am on a deadline, I’m trying very hard to get a hold of you. So I would really appreciate it if you call or e-mail me back ASAP.

She gave her phone number.

I wondered if it was advisable to speak with her as VOA News has a reputation of being a promoter of U.S. government policy, rather than a news service seeking the facts. I asked my editors at OhmyNews International and I also spoke with a Korean journalist I know who covers stories at the UN for another Korean newspaper. They all encouraged me to speak with her.

I called her as she had asked. She said she wanted to interview me by phone. I asked her to let me know what she would want to speak with me about. She sent me an e-mail message elaborating.

Her message explained:

The purpose of this interview is to let our listeners know what is going on regarding the BDA issue and how the BDA issue is developing.

When I read your article, I thought you made valuable and critical points about the BDA issue, and I thought it might be very important to let your idea about the BDA issue be heard by our listeners.

She listed questions she would ask me in the interview. They were:

1. How you come up with the idea of writing this article? How you prepared it. About your sources.

2. Briefly summarize your findings or main points of the article.

3. What you are trying to accomplish by writing this article? What needs to be done to

resolve the BDA issue?

“Finally,” she wrote, “I wanted to ask you if we could do this interview sometime between 9:00 a.m. and 9:30 a.m.... Thanks again,” she ended the e-mail message.

She called at the arranged time.

She told me her listeners were in North Korea. I was surprised that a reporter for a U.S. government media would offer to do a story about the hidden political objectives of U.S. policy against North Korea which were being camouflaged by false criminal accusations against North Korea.

We had a half-hour telephone conversation discussing my stories, the sources I had used, and the problem represented by the American government freezing the BDA funds. She also asked for the URLs to follow up on the sources I had cited. These were materials I had found on the internet, including several government documents, and copies of the legal documents submitted by the bank owner to appeal the U.S. Treasury Department ruling against the bank.

The VOA News reporter said she was interested in contacting former U.S. government officials like David Asher who was responsible for crafting the plan to freeze North Korea’s bank account assets. She wanted to ask them to respond to my article.

Just as this contact with the VOA News journalist was happening, there were news stories describing the ongoing efforts to find a solution to the roadblock that the frozen North Korean funds represented.

Soon there were reports that the Federal Reserve Bank of New York had agreed to transfer the funds from the BDA to an account held by a Russian bank for North Korea. In the following weeks, the funds transfer was done.

The VOA News reporter wrote me saying she had other stories to do and was not for now going to pursue this story any longer.

Whether the contact had any impact on the resolution of the stalemate, I can only speculate. Regardless of her motivation, however, the VOA News reporter had contacted me before the situation was resolved. At the very least, an article I had done had caught the attention of someone connected to the Voice of America News. I was given the chance to explain what I had learned about the BDA story and to explain how I understood the controversy surrounding it. So my story did indeed have more of an impact than I had understood when I gave my talk at the ICA 2007 in San Francisco.

The experience I had with my BDA story and the encounter with the Korean News Service of the VOA News demonstrates that the internet makes it possible not only to spread an accurate narrative among the public, but also to reach officials with an interest in the issues being critiqued.

The reason I have taken the time to tell this story is that it represents for me a taste of the impact that such online journalism makes possible.

VIII – The Phenomenon of Netizen Journalism

In the research I have been doing and the experiences I have had exploring the potential of what I call netizen journalism, several questions have been raised:

What is this new form of news and what are its characteristics?

Is there something different from traditional journalism?

Is there some significant new aspect represented by netizen journalism?

Essentially I have found that there is an important research component of what I call netizen journalism. Netizen journalism, is a socially oriented journalism. As such, at times there is a need

to do serious research into the background, context and political significance of conflicts. By revealing the actual forces at work, netizen journalism provides a more accurate grasp of whose interests are being served, and what is at stake in the events that make up the news.

Traditionally, the press can function as a watchdog for society by exposing the use and abuse of power. Or, the press can act to support the abuse of political power.

Netizens, whether journalists or citizens who turn to journalism to challenge problems in their society, have demonstrated in a number of instances that they are able to bring public attention to situations needing change, and exert the needed pressure for the change so that the change gets made.

If netizen journalism can provide a more accurate understanding of conflicts, it can help make more likely the peaceful resolution of these conflicts.

Also as an aside, my stories about the U.S.-BDA-North Korea-UN conflict led to my being short-listed for one of the journalism awards presented each year by the United Nations Correspondence Association (UNCA) for the best journalism articles about the UN for 2007. While I did not get the award in 2007, I did get it the following year, in 2008.

IX – The *Cheonan* – Some Background

The *Cheonan* conflict, which was brought to the UN in 2010, provides another interesting example how netizen journalism affected the media war and helped to make a significant contribution to a peaceful resolution of the conflict by the Security Council.

The *Cheonan* incident concerns a South Korean warship which broke in two and sank on March 26, 2010. Forty-six of the crew died. At the time, the ship was involved in naval exercises with the U.S. military in an area in the West Sea/Yellow Sea between North Korea and China. This is a situation that had been the subject of much discussion on the internet.

Initially, the South Korean government and the U.S. government said there was no indication that North Korea was involved. Then at a press conference on May 20, 2010, the South Korean government claimed that a torpedo fired by a North Korean submarine exploded in the water near the *Cheonan*, causing a pressure wave that was responsible for the sinking. Many criticisms of this scenario have been raised.

There was no direct evidence of any North Korean submarine in the vicinity of the *Cheonan*. Nor was there any evidence that a torpedo was actually fired causing a pressure wave phenomenon. Hence the South Korean government had no actual case that could be presented in a court of law to support its claims.

In fact, if this claim of a pressure wave were true even those involved in the investigation of the incident acknowledge that North Korea would be the first to have succeeded at using this kind of bubble jet torpedo action in actual fighting.⁴

X – The *Cheonan* Press Conference and the Local Election

The press conference held by the South Korean government on May 20, 2010, to announce that North Korea was responsible for the sinking of the *Cheonan* came, it turns out, was at the start of the local election period. Many South Koreans were suspicious that the accusation was a ploy to help the ruling party candidates win in the local elections. The widespread suspicions about the government's motives led to the ruling party losing many of the local election contests. These election results demonstrated the deep distrust among the South Korean population of the motives behind the South Korean government's accusations about North Korea's responsibility for the

sinking of the *Cheonan*.

XI – The *Cheonan* and Netizen Journalism

Netizens who live in different countries and speak different languages took up to critique the claims of the South Korean government about the cause of the sinking of the *Cheonan*. This netizen activity had an important effect. It appears to have acted as a catalyst affecting the actions of the UN Security Council in its treatment of the *Cheonan* dispute.

There were substantial analyses by non-governmental organizations like Spark, PSPD, Peaceboat, and others posted on the internet in English or Korean or in both languages. Some of these online posts were in the form of letters that were also sent to the members of the UN Security Council. At the time, I saw discussions and critiques of the Korean government's claims at American, Japanese and Chinese websites, in addition to conversations and postings about the *Cheonan* on South Korean websites.

One such critique included a three-part analysis by the South Korean NGO People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD). This analysis raised several questions and problems with the South Korean government's case. The PSPD document was posted widely on the internet and also sent to the President of the United Nations Security Council for distribution to those Security Council members interested and to the South Korean Mission to the UN.

While there were many blog comments about the *Cheonan* issue in Korean, there were also some bloggers writing in English who became active in critiquing the South Korean investigation and the role of the U.S. in the conflict.

One blogger, Scott Creighton who uses the pen name Willy Loman, or American Everyman, wrote a post titled "The Sinking of the *Cheonan*: We Are Being Lied to."

The South Korean government had claimed that the diagram it displayed above the glass case containing the alleged torpedo shaft was from a North Korean weapons sales brochure which offered the torpedo. The torpedo was identified as the CHT-02D.

In a post he titled "A Perfect Match?," Creighton showed how there was a discrepancy between the diagram displayed by the South Korean government in the press conference and the part of the torpedo it had on display in the glass case below the diagram. He demonstrated that the diagram did not match the part of the torpedo on display because one of the components of the torpedo shown was in the propeller section, but in the diagram, the component appeared in the shaft section. There were many comments in response to this post, including some from netizens in South Korea. Also, the mainstream conservative media in South Korea carried accounts of this blogger's critique. Three weeks later, at a news conference, a South Korean government official acknowledged that the diagram presented by the South Korean government was not of the same torpedo as the part displayed in the glass case. Instead, the diagram displayed was of the PT97W torpedo, not the CHT-02D torpedo as claimed.

In a post titled "Thanks to Valuable Input" describing the significance of having documented one of the fallacies in the South Korean government's case, Creighton writes:

(I)n the end, thanks to valuable input from dozens of concerned people all across the world.... Over 100,000 viewers read that article and it was republished on dozens of sites all across the world (even translated). A South Korean MSM outlet even posted our diagram depicting the glaring discrepancies between the evidence and the drawing of the CHT-02D torpedo, which a high-ranking military official could only refute by stating he had 40 years of military experience and to his knowledge, I had

none. But what I had, what we had, was literally thousands of people all across the world, scientists, military members, and just concerned investigative bloggers who were committed to the truth and who took the time to contribute to what we were doing here. ‘40 years of military experience’ took a beating from ‘we the people WorldWide’ and that is the way it is supposed to be.

This is just one of a number of serious questions and challenges that were raised about the South Korean government’s scenario of the sinking of the *Cheonan*.

Another influential event which helped to challenge the South Korean government’s claims was a press conference in Japan held on July 9 by two academic scientists. The two scientists presented the results of experiments they had done which challenged the results of experiments the South Korean government used to support its case. These scientists also wrote to the Security Council with their findings.

Also a significant challenge to the South Korean government report was the finding of a Russian team of four sent to South Korea to look at the data from the investigation and to do an independent evaluation of it. The team of Russian navy experts visited South Korea from May 30 to June 7. The Russian team did not accept the South Korean government’s claim that a pressure wave from a torpedo caused the *Cheonan* to sink. Getting a leaked copy of the Russian team’s report, the *Hankyoreh* newspaper in South Korea reported that the Russian investigators determined that the ship had come in contact with the ocean floor and a propeller and shaft became entangled in a fishing net. Also, the investigators thought it likely that an old underwater mine had exploded near the *Cheonan* adding to the factors that led to it sinking.

Such efforts along with online posts and discussions by many netizens provided a catalyst for the actions of the UN Security Council concerning the *Cheonan* incident.

When the UN Security Council took up the *Cheonan* issue in June 2010, I was surprised to learn that some of the members of the Council knew of the criticism of the South Korean government investigation blaming North Korea for sinking the ship.

XII – The *Cheonan* and the UN Security Council

South Korea brought the dispute over the sinking of the *Cheonan* to the United Nations Security Council. The Mexican Ambassador to the UN, Claude Heller, was President of the Security Council for June 2010. (The presidency rotates each month to a different Security Council member nation.) In a letter to the Security Council dated June 4, South Korea asked the Council to take up the *Cheonan* dispute. Park Im-kook, then the South Korean Ambassador to the UN, requested that the Security Council consider the matter of the *Cheonan* and respond in an appropriate manner. The letter described the investigation into the sinking of the *Cheonan* carried out by the South Korean government and military officials. The conclusion of the South Korean investigation was to accuse North Korea of sinking the South Korean ship.

How would the Mexican Ambassador as President of the Security Council during June handle this dispute? This was a serious issue facing Ambassador Heller as he began his presidency.

Ambassador Heller adopted what he referred to as a “balanced” approach to treat both governments on the Korean peninsula fairly and objectively. He held bilateral meetings with each member of the Security Council which led to support for a process of informal presentations by both of the Koreas to the members of the Security Council. He arranged for the South Korean Ambassador to make an informal presentation to the members of the Security Council. Ambassador Heller also invited the North Korean Ambassador to make a separate informal presentation to the

members of the Security Council. Sin Son Ho was the UN Ambassador from North Korea.

In response to the invitation from the President of the Security Council, the North Korean Ambassador to the UN sent a letter dated June 8 to the Security Council which denied the allegation that his country was to blame. His letter urged the Security Council not to be the victim of deceptive claims, as had happened with the U.S. presentation by Colin Powell on Iraq in 2003. It asked the Security Council to support his government's call to be able to examine the evidence and to be involved in a new and more independent investigation of the sinking of the *Cheonan*.

In its June 8 letter to the Security Council, North Korea referred to the widespread international sentiment questioning the conclusions of the South Korean government's investigation. The North Korean Ambassador wrote:

It would be very useful to remind ourselves of the ever-increasing international doubts and criticisms, going beyond the internal boundary of South Korea, over the 'investigation result' from the very moment of its release....

What Ambassador Heller called "interactive informal meetings" were held on June 14 with the South Koreans and the North Koreans in separate sessions attended by the Security Council members, who had time to ask questions and then discuss the presentations.

At a media stakeout on June 14, after the day's presentations ended, Ambassador Heller said that it was important to have received the detailed presentation by South Korea and also to know and learn the arguments of North Korea. He commented that "it was very important that North Korea approached the Security Council."

In response to a question about his view on the issues presented, he replied, "I am not a judge. I think we will go on with the consultations to deal in a proper manner on the issue."

Ambassador Heller also explained that "the Security Council issued a call to the parties to refrain from any act that could escalate tensions in the region, and makes an appeal to preserve peace and stability in the region."

Though the North Korean Ambassador to the UN rarely speaks to the media, the North Korean UN delegation scheduled a press conference for Tuesday, June 15, the day following the interactive informal meeting. During the press conference, the North Korean Ambassador presented his government's refutation of the allegations made by South Korea. Also, he explained North Korea's request to be able to send an investigation team to the site where the sinking of the *Cheonan* occurred. South Korea had denied the request. During its press conference, the North Korean Ambassador noted that there was widespread condemnation of the investigation in both South Korea and around the world.

The press conference held on June 15 was a lively event. Many of the journalists who attended were impressed and requested that there be future press conferences with the North Korean Ambassador.

During his presidency of the Security Council in the month of June, Ambassador Heller held meetings with the UN ambassadors from each of the two Koreas and then with Security Council members about the *Cheonan* issue. On the last day of his presidency, on June 30, he was asked by a reporter what was happening about the *Cheonan* dispute. He responded that the issue of contention was over the evaluation of the South Korean government's investigation.

Ambassador Heller described how he introduced what he refers to as "an innovation" into the Security Council process. As the month of June ended, the issue was not yet resolved, but the "innovation" set a basis to build on the progress that was achieved during the month of his presidency.

The “innovation” Ambassador Heller referred to, was a summary he made of the positions of each of the two Koreas on the issue, taking care to present each objectively. Heller explained that this summary was not an official document, so it did not have to be approved by the other members of the Council. This summary provided the basis for further negotiations. He believed that it had a positive impact on the process of consideration in the Council, making possible the agreement that was later to be expressed in the Presidential Statement on the *Cheonan* that was issued by the Security Council on July 9, 2010.

Ambassador Heller’s goal, he explained, was to “at all times be as objective as possible” so as to avoid increasing the conflict on the Korean peninsula. Such a goal is the Security Council’s obligation under the UN Charter.

In the Security Council’s July 9 Presidential Statement (PRST) on the *Cheonan*, what stands out is that the statement follows the pattern of presenting the views of each of the two Koreas and urging that the dispute be settled in a peaceful manner.

In the PRST, the members of the Security Council did not blame North Korea. Instead, they refer to the South Korean investigation and its conclusion, expressing their “deep concern” about the “findings” of the investigation.

The PRST explains that “The Security Council takes note of the responses from other relevant parties, including the DPRK, which has stated that it had nothing to do with the incident.”

Except for North Korea, it is not indicated who “the other relevant parties” are. It does suggest, however, that it is likely there were some Security Council members, not just Russia and China, who did not agree with the conclusions of the South Korean investigation.

Analyzing the Presidential Statement, the Korean newspaper *Hankyoreh* noted that the statement “allows for a double interpretation and does not blame or place consequences on North Korea.” Such a possibility of a “double interpretation” allows for different interpretations.

The Security Council’s action on the *Cheonan* took place in a situation where there had been a wide-ranging international critique, especially in the online media, about the problems of the South Korean investigation, and of the South Korean government’s failure to make public any substantial documentation of its investigation, along with its practice of harassing critics of the South Korean government claims. The Security Council’s action included hearing the positions of the different parties to the conflict.

The result of such efforts was something that is unusual in the process of recent Security Council activity. The Security Council process in the *Cheonan* issue provided for an impartial analysis of the problem and an effort to hear from those with an interest in the issue.

The effort in the Security Council was described by the Mexican Ambassador, as upholding the principles of impartiality and respectful treatment of all members toward resolving a conflict between nations in a peaceful manner. It represents an important example of the Security Council acting in conformity with its obligations as set out in the UN charter.

In the July 9, 2010 Presidential Statement, the Security Council urged that the parties to the dispute over the sinking of the *Cheonan* find a means to peacefully settle the dispute. The statement says:

The Security Council calls for full adherence to the Korean Armistice Agreement and encourages the settlement of outstanding issues on the Korean peninsula by peaceful means to resume direct dialogue and negotiation through appropriate channels as early as possible, to avoid conflicts and avert escalation.⁵

The mainstream U.S. media, for the most part, chose to ignore the many critiques which have

appeared. These critiques of the South Korean government's investigation of the *Cheonan* sinking have appeared mainly on the internet, not only in Korean, but also in English, Japanese, and other languages. They present a wide-ranging challenge to the veracity and integrity of the South Korean investigation and its conclusions.

An article in the *Los Angeles Times* on July 28, 2010 noted the fact, however, that the media in the U.S. had ignored the critique of the South Korean government investigation that was being discussed online and spread around the world.

In this example, the netizen community in South Korea and internationally were able to provide an effective challenge to the misrepresentations by the South Korean government on the *Cheonan*.

In conclusion, I want to propose that the response of netizens to the problems raised by the investigation of the *Cheonan* incident is but a prelude to the potential of netizens in different countries to work together across national borders to solve the problems of our times.

XIII – Conclusion

Describing the frustration of many netizens with the traditional media that they had to rely on before the internet, Hauben wrote:

Today, similarly, the need for a broader and more cooperative gathering and reporting of the News has helped create the new online media that is gradually supplementing traditional forms of journalism.

In an article about the power of the internet, Hauben recognized that the Net gives the power of the reporter to the netizen. This represents a diffusion of a power formerly held by the few, placing it in hands that are different from its former masters.

Speaking about the potential for such a journalism Hauben predicted, "As people continue to connect to Usenet and other discussion forums, the collective population will contribute back to the human community this new form of news." He recognized that, "The Net has opened a channel for talking to the whole world to an even wider set of people than did the printed books."

In one of the press conferences at the UN when Li Baodong was the Chinese Ambassador to the UN, he told the media, "You are the 16th member of the Security Council." He was in general speaking to the traditional media. However, the case studies I have described, demonstrate the potential for the new media, the netizen media, to assume that membership.

Notes

1. http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?no=323351&rel_no=1, (site no longer available). Reprinted in the *Amateur Computerist* Vol 37 No. 2 at: <http://www.ais.org/~jrh/acn/ACn37-2.pdf>, pages 2-4.
2. <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/transcripts/9.14.06HearingTranscript.pdf>.
3. Voice of America (VOA) has been a part of several U.S. government agencies. From its founding in 1942 to 1945, it was part of the Office of War Information, and then from 1945 to 1953 as a function of the State Department. VOA was placed under the U.S. Information Agency in 1953. When the USIA was abolished in 1999, VOA was placed under the Broadcasting Board of Governors, or BBG, which is an autonomous U.S. government agency, with bipartisan membership. The Secretary of State has a seat on the BBG. The BBG replaced the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB) that oversaw the funding and operation of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, a branch of VOA. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voice_of_America.
4. http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/429769.html
5. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2010/sc9975.doc.htm>.

* The slides used for this talk are online at:

<http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/stony-brook/Stony-Brook-Slides-12-04-2013.pdf>.

The URL for the online version of *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* is: “Netizens: An Anthology” at: <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120>. A version of these Notes appeared on December 17, 2013 on the Netizenblog at: <http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2013/12/17/why-netizen-journalism-matters> (No longer Available.)
