

*The Military, Ideological Frameworks and Familial Marxism: A Comment on Jung-chul Lee, "A Lesson from Cuba's Party-Military Relations and a Tale of 'Two Fronts Line' in North Korea"*¹

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For the last 25 years, the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE) has sought to embed analysis of the special case of Cuba within the main stream of discussion of law, economics, politics, and culture. That process has sometimes found resistance in the long cultivated notion that the Cuban situation was *sui generis*, a porridge composed of equal parts colonialism, cultural hegemony, geography, race and religion, cooked in a pot created by the Cold War of the last century and stirred by the fairly large ladle that is the product of an ideology of developing states. Yet that *sui generis* is more a product of the romanticism of Europe and North America than any reality, combining large dollops of Caribbean exoticism, Gnosticism in political conflicts, and the exportation of ideological battles between the European and North American left and right.

This becomes clearer when strangers to this odd cultural construction of "Cuba in the World" begin to examine the situation of Cuba. This is quite apparent in the excellent papers sponsored by the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU).² These papers suggest a better picture of Cuba within larger streams of economic, cultural, political and social evolution that are touching, in distinct ways, virtually every country of this planet within (or without) the strong currents of globalization. While much of the interest in this area tends to center on the contests between politics and economics in the context of what most in the West view as a necessary transition to something else (usually democratic in character and market based operation), few consider the issue from the institutional character of change that focuses on civil military relations. For developing states, these institutions relations are sometimes critical for determining the pace and scope of transition, as well as its direction. Consider in this respect recent changes in Egypt and Turkey, two states with traditionally strong militaries that have moved in very different directions in the last 10 years.

Even less often considered, except by specialist institutions, are civil military relations in Marxist Leninist developing states. It is this issue that is taken up by Jung-chul Lee of Soongsil University in Korea in the excellent paper, "*A Lesson from Cuba's Party-Military Relations and a Tale of 'Two Fronts Line' in North Korea.*" Professor Lee's argument is intriguing and straightforward (Lee, *supra*, p. 1). Professor Lee argues that the Cuban military, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR) has embraced the model of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) since the start of the Deng Xiaoming leadership. Its institutionalization, through the Union of Military Industries (UIM) has

¹ Presented at the 25th Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, July 31, 2015

² Available <https://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/>. KINU's mission and history may be accessed at https://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/about/about_02_01.jsp.

created a cadre of western business school trained cadres that now operate a powerful conglomerate that meets both military and civilian needs and serves as a site for foreign inbound investment. Military governance is anchored in economic institutions and the military is autonomous of the Cuban Communist Party (CCP). This presents a singular variation on a form of evolving Marxist Leninist economic organization. It is one that has been rejected by the North Koreans, who have adopted a "Two Fronts Line" Policy. In this model, the military and Korean Communist Party (KCP) have divided control on functional lines (KCP economic development and Korean military on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capacity). Both KCP and military share production spaces as coordinate units of production and the KCP controls the military, through control of the joint political principles under which both operate. Effectively the PLA and FAR have been developed loosely in parallel but the CCP has does not have effective *control* of the FAR that remains and embedded actor within and outside the structures of the CCP and the state apparatus. On the other hand, the military and the KCP have effectively divided the economy, diverting productive forces either to national defense and weapons policies or to domestic needs through a system in which both military and KCP adhere to the same ideological lines under a hereditary leadership. *Cuba appears headed toward a form of Praetorian Marxism and Korea toward Monarchical Marxism.* My comments are directed to that paper.

Professor Lee starts by situating the issue, not as a Marxist Leninist problem, but as a variant of the much more common problem of civil-military relations (Lee, supra, p. 2). Professor Lee starts with a basic binary—allocations of civil-military power are *externalized* in democratic states but are *internalized* in Marxist Leninist states. Civil-military relations are renegotiated within political space in democratic states. In Marxist Leninist states, this renegotiation occurs within the structures of Party and state apparatus. He rejects the traditional typologies of ways in which military institutions realize corporate goals (influencing, blackmailing, displacing, and taking over) and embraces the view, now half a century old, that differentiates civil-military relations between those in western states and those in what are sometimes called "peripheral" states.³

But Professor Lee would further distinguish between Marxist Leninist and other "peripheral" states. The distinguishing factor centers on the extent to which a state has established a Leninist "vanguard" party (I discuss this here). Two points are worth considering in more detail. The first is Professor's Lee's intuition that the effect of Leninist vanguard party ideology on civil-military relations (or better Party-military relations) is grounded on the Soviet model. The second, springing from the first, is that in "communist regimes, a vanguard party was presumed to exist, distinguished from the military in terms of organizational and instructional capacities." (Lee, supra, p. 3). That produces an institutional context in which there are at least two institutional structures of modernization in Marxist Leninist peripheral regimes.

³ Citing Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New States* (U Chi Press, 1964).

The perspective is insightful. Grounding the analysis on Soviet era key work,⁴ Professor Lee (Lee, supra, p. 4) describes a model of Soviet Leninist Party-State structures. These are grounded in the older notion of a (1) hegemonic communist party (hierarchically organized and operating under Leninist principles of democratic centralism); a centrally planned economy based on state ownership of all productive forces (with a vestigial non-state sector); and (3) operationalization through a state apparatus that is dominated by communist party cadres (dual role elites shunts conflict into Party structures). Within this Soviet Leninist model, Lee notes (Lee, supra, p. 4-5) Perlmutter and Leogrande's development of a three-part idealized typology of party-military relations—coalitional, symbiotic and fused categories. Within these categorical types, the Soviets serve as a model of the coalitional type, China of the symbiotic type and Cuba of the fused type.

Professor Lee then applies this analytical model to the Cuban case (Lee, supra, pp. 5-6). They posit that Cuba is more an example of *Praetorian Marxism* rather than traditional Soviet Marxist Leninism. Cuba is somewhat distinctive because the modern version of the PCC was established by the leaders of the military apparatus that produced the current government.⁵ The foundations of legitimacy—and of the state, military and civil apparatus—is grounded on revolutionary victory rather than on Leninist notions of a victory of professional revolutionaries steeped in party discipline. The fusion, then, arises from the nature of the origins of the PCC and the superior legitimacy of the military. Yet that fusion appears strained. While the PCC and state apparatus officials remained wedded to Soviet ideological models of macro economic policy, the FAR began training its cadres in western business schools and began operating autonomously through the UIM, a conglomerate that resembles on a smaller scale, its Chinese model. Income from the operations of the UIM might be shared, but it also was reinvested in FAR personnel, and operations. As a consequence FAR had the economic ability to enhance loyalty to FAR first, and the state apparatus within that larger loyalty. This, Professor Lee, distinguishes FAR from PAL and its Vietnamese counterpart. "While the military participation in the economy of China and Vietnam have always been regulated and controlled by the party apparatus, the Cuban case does not abide by this rule." (Lee, supra, p. 6).⁶ As a consequence, the notion appears more current now that Cuba may no longer be understood as a traditional Marxist Leninist State. Rather analyzed from a functional perspective, it appears to fall more in line with traditional models common to

⁴ See, e.g., Amos Perlmutter and W.M. Leogrande, "Civil Military Relations in Communist Political Systems," *American Political Science Review* 76:778-789 (1982).

⁵ Ernesto Che Guevara, Notes for the Study of the Ideology of the Cuban Revolution (Verde Olivo (8 Oct. 1960) Transcription/Markup: A .N./Brian Baggins. Online Version: Ernesto Che Guevara Internet Archive (marxists.org) 2002. Available <https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1960/10/08.htm>

⁶ Citing to D. Amuchasteguí, "Cuba's Armed Forces: Power and Reforms," *ACSE Papers and Proceedings* 24:456-473 (2014).

Latin America, most of which suggest military or military-bureaucratic authoritarianism devoid of foundational and unifying ideology.⁷

This perspective, and its insights, remains powerful, but I suspect might also present some limitations worth considering. The limitations are bound up in two distinct but interrelated challenges. The first is that the analytical framework does not appear to incorporate the effects of the quite robust changes in Chinese Marxist Leninism since the period of opening up started in the 1970s. The second, is that ideology continues to matter in Cuba, and perhaps more than in Korea, precisely because FAR autonomy might be understood as a crisis of ideology within an elite structure in which its ideological bases are now challenged from within.

Much, indeed, has changed since the 1980s, though from an ideological perspective with substantially less effect in Cuba (see my work here and here).⁸ Most important is not so much the withering away of the Soviet Union, but rather the rise of modern Marxist Leninist state and Party models under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party since 1978. That development has had substantial changes on both the internal development of the structures and operation of the communist party (see, e.g., here)⁹ but more importantly on the nature of the relationship of the communist party with the state, and of the state with economic policy. Deng Xiaoping's policy of opening up and the CCP's policy of internal democratization has substantially changed the nature of macro economic policy (*shifting from central planning to centralized management*) and of the role of the party (*shifting towards institutionalization, mass line politics, internal democratization, and rule of law*). What has not changed are the hierarchical organization of the party, the leadership role of the communist party (principles of democratic dictatorship), the centrality of democratic centralism or the internalization of conflict within the communist party. China may still remain symbiotic but that nature of that symbiosis has changed substantially. And that symbiosis is worth considering in substantially more detail as it becomes a more influential model for governance in Asia and Africa.

⁷ Citing to Yvon Grenier, Cultural Policy, Participation and the Gatekeeper State in Cuba," *ASCE Papers and Proceedings* 24:456-473 (2014); Daniel I. Pedreira, "Cuba's Prospects for a Military Oligarchy," *ASCE Papers and Proceedings* 23:243-247 (2013); Vegard Bye, 2012, The Politics of Cuban Transformation-What Space for Authoritarian Withdrawal?," *ASCE Papers and Proceedings* 22:22-43 (2012); and Michael Aranda, "The Evolution of the Cuban Military: A Comparative Look at the FAR with the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian Model of South America," *ASCE Papers and Proceedings* 20:200-208 (2010).

⁸ Larry Catá Backer, [The Cuban Communist Party: Current Status and Future Reform](http://www.ascecuba.org/c/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/v24-backer.pdf) ASCE Proceedings 24:72-88 (2014). Available <http://www.ascecuba.org/c/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/v24-backer.pdf>.

⁹ See, e.g., Backer, Larry Catá and Wang, Keren, 'What is China's Dream?' Hu Angang Imagines China in 2020 as the First Internationally Embedded Superpower (February 23, 2013). Consortium for Peace & Ethics Working Paper No. 2013-2. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2223279> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2223279>

These changes have changed the nature of Party-state relations. The development of a post 1980s variant on symbiotic relations among CCP and PLA, one grounded in ideological shifts as Chinese Marxist Leninism evolves along lines quite different from the trajectory of development in the Soviet era, has collateral effects on other, more peripherally situated Marxist Leninist states. Cuba remains fundamentally tied to a Soviet model for its internal operation and that of its communist party. But the communist party was a creation of the military elites that overthrew the prior regime in 1959, and it has to be clear that from its inception that the military was subordinated to party. The lack of clarity stems, in part, not just from an institutional perspective but a family one. The brothers, Raúl and Fidel Castro, have between them retained control of both the PCC and FAR apparatus. Thus the *fusion is personal rather than institutional*. That brings the FAR-PCC relations closer to those of North Korea (to be discussed below) rather than either to the Soviet, Chinese or Vietnamese model. Though “vanguard” families and the “*historicos*” that support them have made somewhat different choices in operationalization, both systems present modifications of Marxist Leninist organization that meld family and ideological structures in unique ways. And it may be that for purposes of sustaining stability along family control models, the North Koreans might be the better organizational choice.

But this view suggests that in the case of Cuba, ideology no longer matters. Indeed, the opposite might be true, and I might suggest that any such implication may be problematic.¹⁰ At the time of the Revolution, Cuban leaders took the position that ideology was implicit in the very revolutionary movement.¹¹ Ideology still plays an important role within the structures of Cuban governance, either within FAR or the PCC (for my discussion, see, e.g., here).¹² The ideological basis of both FAR and PCC remains vibrant, to some extent, and deeply held among FAR and PCC elites. The problem here is not ideology but that the ideological visions of FAR and PCC may no longer be aligned. That ideological analysis suggests a significant variation from the situation in North Korea where, indeed, the need to maintain ideological unity falls at the heart of the stability of the state.

¹⁰ For my discussion, see, e.g., Backer, Larry Catá, *The Cuban Communist Party at the Center of Political and Economic Reform: Current Status and Future Reform* (March 30, 2015). Available http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2473351.

¹¹ It was noted:

This is a unique revolution which some people maintain contradicts one of the most orthodox premises of the revolutionary movement, expressed by Lenin: "Without a revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary movement." It would be suitable to say that revolutionary theory, as the expression of a social truth, surpasses any declaration of it; that is to say, even if the theory is not known, the revolution can succeed if historical reality is interpreted correctly and if the forces involved are utilised correctly.

Ernesto Che Guevara, *Notes for the Study of the Ideology of the Cuban Revolution*, supra.

¹² See, Backer, *The Cuban Communist Party at the Center of Political and Economic Reform*, supra.

More importantly, ideological flexibility made possible by the substantial innovation in ideology evolving in China might suggest the basis of another view of Cuban FAR-PCC relations. Professor Lee is quite correct to note the growing convergence of FAR-PLA relations from the 1980s. And indeed, the autonomy of the military made that influence possible. But Fidel Castro and the PCC establishment has not been a friend to Chinese development of Marxist Leninism from the 1970s (for my discussion, see, e.g., here).¹³ Raúl Castro has been more open. But his efforts have been limited to the FAR not because he wants it that way but because of the resistance of PCC elites to changing the fundamental basis of ideology away from traditional Soviet models.¹⁴ What shifting typological models grounded in deeply important ideological models suggests in Cuba is an increasing divergence between FAR and PCC expressed through the language of ideology but positioning FAR and PCC on quite different sides of debates about future reform and also about the way in which each approaches reform within their jurisdictions.

With this in mind, Professor Lee's comparison of the PLA with the North Korean situation becomes more relevant (Lee, supra, pp. 7-9). And indeed, that comparison reminds us that the usual Western (and Cuban) comparisons of Cuba with Vietnam for purposes of thinking through Cuban transitions may be less valuable than the comparisons of the Cuban and Korean models. Those comparisons, of course, are hard to make, not for technical, but for political and ideological reasons. First, Korea tends to be viewed as an outlier and potentially and illegitimate expression of Marxist Leninism even within the socialist camp. Second, because "transition" advocates have focused on moving Cuba toward Latin American and Vietnamese models, Korea presents an unpalatable alternative, one best left untouched. That, as Professor Lee suggests, would be a mistake. *Yet, the experiences of the North Koreans might well prove to be more useful to understand Cuba than any other place. It is the only other state that conjoins the character of the state as peripheral but one geographically contingent to giant powerful states, with a Marxist Leninist political foundation, whose politics and policy choices are also tinged with paranoia grounded in their vulnerability to neighbors and enemies.* This underexplored relationship deserves wider study.

Professor Lee notes, quite correctly (Lee, Supra, p. 7) that both Cuba and North Korea went through profoundly important Soviet "crises." Cuba's of course, occurred at the time of the fall of the Soviet Union and was characterized by the desperation of the so-called special period. North Korea's occurred much earlier, in 1962. There is irony here. In December 1962, in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis, the North Koreans

¹³ See Larry Catá Backer, [Fidel Castro on Deng Xiaoping and Erich Honecker--Understanding the Foundations of Cuban Political and Economic Policy](http://lcbackerblog.blogspot.com/2012/08/fidel-castro-on-deng-xiaoping-and-erich.html), Law at the End of the Day (Aug. 19, 2012). Available <http://lcbackerblog.blogspot.com/2012/08/fidel-castro-on-deng-xiaoping-and-erich.html>.

¹⁴ Discussed in Backer, Larry Catá, *The Cooperative as Proletarian Corporation: Property Rights between Corporation, Cooperatives and Globalization in Cuba* (August 3, 2012). Northwestern Journal of International Law & Business, Vol. 33, 2013; Penn State Law Research Paper No. 16-2012; Consortium for Peace and Ethics Working Paper No. 2012-8-1. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2115135> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2115135>.

determined that the Soviet Union had gone “soft” on the capitalist states and determined to embrace a policy that would protect the regime against foreign subversion. “During this time it is told that Kim Il-sung desperately sensed the inevitability to develop self-defense capabilities when Khrushchev approached U.S. hardline approach in compromising and conciliatory manner.” (Lee, supra., p. 7). The result was adoption of a system that was characterized by ideological unity and functional differentiation in managing the state. The system was referenced as a “Two Fronts line”.¹⁵

Perceiving the threat of being abandoned by the Soviet Union, North Korean regime established a compartmentalized system that embraces the economy and the military simultaneously. Production lines for arms supplies were installed in every production facility assuring the resources for the military. This appeared to expand the military role on the one hand, but the regime of course has firmly brought the military under the party’s control. . . (Lee, supra., p. 7).

That control was grounded in a very tight control of the ruling ideology by the Korean Community Party and the expectation of ideological loyalty by all members of the elite—civil and military.

That framework remained intact when the defacto organization of the Party-State along family lines was recognized. At a Korean Communist Party meeting in 2010, the hereditary character of the Korean Communist state was proclaimed (Lee, supra, p. 7). Korea, like Cuba, then was organized as a revolutionary Marxist Leninist state but operated through a tight network of elite members held together by family ties and loyalty. In Korea that was blended into Korean Marxist ideology. In Cuba the importance of the family remains de facto and not de jure. Yet in both, loyalty to family became part of ideological loyalty, even as ideological foundations were shifted to suit the ambitions of leading family members. Indeed, in Korea that became apparent when the Two Fronts Line of the 1960s was revived in 2010 as a core tenet of loyalty to the new hereditary leader (Lee, supra). It remains a core foundation of Korean policy on nuclear capability. Korea has moved toward a monarchical Marxism even as Cuba embraced Praetorian Marxism; neither embraced China’s opening up as state policy, though FAR’s autonomy in Cuba permitted the introduction of Chinese ideological positions within some sectors of Cuban macro-economic planning, though with limited effect.¹⁶

¹⁵ On the importance of party line in Chinese Marxism, some of which may be relevant here, see, e.g., Backer, Larry Catá, *The Rule of Law, the Chinese Communist Party, and Ideological Campaigns: Sange Daibiao (the 'Three Represents'), Socialist Rule of Law, and Modern Chinese Constitutionalism*. *Journal of Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2006. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=929636>.

¹⁶ Discussed in Backer, Larry Catá, *Cuban Corporate Governance at the Crossroads: Cuban Marxism, Private Economic Collectives and Free Market Globalism*. *Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2005. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=652563>.

But Professor Lee suggests more. Within “the ‘Two fronts’ lie the dynamics of bureaucratic politics. . . . [and] signals the end of the policy priority debates and the declaration to coordinate party-military bureaucratic rivalry.” (Ibid., p. 8). Interestingly, there is a resonance here with the ideological rifts between the Cuban FAR and PCC. In both cases elites chose to partition authority, but the choices were different. The Korean communists closed ranks on ideology (around the hereditary leader) and divided economic activity on functional grounds. The Cubans closed ranks on foreign policy but divided economic activity (and ideological basis for policy) by sector.

How does that different approach play out? Professor Lee notes:

Instead of the military dominating specific industries and the production line within them, the [Korean] regime has created a cooperative structure for the military to share one or two lines in the state run system to function as a sub-system of the whole production line of the state. This accounts for the furtherance of the ‘Two Fronts’ line by the North Korean Regime. (Lee, supra., p. 8)

Thus in Cuba, Professor Lee posits an institutional autonomy of FAR from the PCC, while in North Korea the military continues under the guidance of the party though the military enjoys some functional autonomy. The key difference with Cuba, then, amounts to a macro-economic choice in the division of economic labor and its allocation for policy objectives. The result in Korea is sectoral coordination; in Cuba sectoral allocation; in China, economic managerialism.

Thus, Professor Lee provides an insightful comparative analysis of two quite related national and ideological “brothers” in the context of ideology at the periphery and among Marxist Leninist states. But each has chosen to respond to similar policy challenges in distinct ways. Cuba chose institutional autonomy and a measure of ideological variation. Korea chose functional autonomy around a strict ideological discipline. In the wake of this insightful analysis some questions remain. One wonders, for example about the role of ideology in framing and explaining, perhaps managing, the differences between Cuba and Korea. One might as well wonder about the ideal role of military in Marxist Leninist states, but that requires substantially more attention to Vietnam and China. Both are issues worth further consideration. I might argue that in Cuba institutional autonomy follows from ideological divergence between a Chinese model oriented military and the old hard line Stalinism of PCC elites. This might have been made possible because the military came before and remained distinct from the party apparatus, but that autonomy merely provided a space for divergence. And that divergence was not suppressed harshly precisely because of the familial relations between the heads of the PCC and FAR. That echoes the Korean situation (though one ought to note the recent execution by the new leader in Korea).¹⁷ Yet it is precisely the formal establishment of a Marxist monarchy that

¹⁷ See, e.g., Entire family of Kim Jong-un’s uncle executed in N. Korea – reports, *Russia Times*, 26 Jan. 2014. Available <http://www.rt.com/news/korean-leader-family-slayed-213/>.

made possible the formal establishment of functional autonomy grounded in the legitimacy of the founder's actions.

The dead hand of the Soviet Union retains a powerful chokehold on key actors and institutions in both Cuba and North Korea, producing in both tendencies to zombie Marxism at least among certain elements of their respective "históricos."¹⁸ While substantial attention in Cuba comparative studies has focused on Vietnam and China, Professor Lee's insightful essay quite usefully suggests the value of deep comparison with North Korea, a subject far too often neglected. This zombie Marxism evokes the image of a dead husk animated by something that is no longer alive, the power of which is a function of the fear of their respective regimes that, as peripheral Marxist Leninist states, they have no place to turn for protection against mortal enemies. In both, that fear has propelled their respective militaries to prominence but in quite distinct ways, the product to some extent of the different histories of the establishment of these states. In Cuba the military has become institutionally and ideologically autonomous within the broad parameters of nationalist Marxism. In North Korea the military has achieved functional autonomy moderated by a severe ideological discipline. In both cases conflict is moderated by a familial overlay to the Marxist Leninist ideology on which each state is organized. Family control limits the consequences of conflict and preserves stability—in Cuba through the fraternal relations of the Castro brothers, in North Korea through the establishment of dynastic control of the Leninist state and military apparatus. That family overlay on organizing ideology remains crucial features of both states and distinguishes both from states like China and Vietnam. But this is a stability whose institutionalization will be difficult to maintain over the long run.

¹⁸ A reference to the historical or first generation leaders of the revolution, especially in Cuba. See, e.g., Cuba's 'Communist codgers' unlikely to establish Market-Leninism, *Democracy Digest* (April 21, 2011) ("The Communist regime desperately needs a fresh generation of leaders, President Raúl Castro told this week's opening session of the ruling party's congress, promising "to make Cuba's sclerotic communist system more open and efficient, and [promote] younger, reform-minded apparatchiks." . . . "What it means is any generational change and the implementation of reforms will be guided by the 'historicos' — or perhaps better put, constrained by the history of the Cuban revolution and the memories and goals of its founders," said Christopher Sabatini, editor of *Americas Quarterly*.) Available <http://www.demdigest.net/cubas-communist-codgers-unlikely-to-establish-market-leninism/>.