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North Korea ignores 'the world' yet again

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Yet again North Korea has angered "the world." Pyongyang violated another United Nations ban, launching a satellite into orbit. Washington is leading the campaign to sanction the North.

Announced UN Ambassador Samantha Power: "The accelerated development of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile program poses a serious threat to international peace and security — to the peace and security not just of North Korea's neighbors, but the peace and security of the entire world."

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a bad actor. No one should welcome further enhancements to the DPRK's weapons arsenal.

Yet inflating the North Korean threat also doesn't serve anyone's interests. For instance, the U.S. has the most powerful military on earth, including 7100 nuclear warheads and almost 800 ICBMs/SLBMs/nuclear-capable bombers.

Absent evidence of a suicidal impulse in Pyongyang, there's little reason to fear a North Korean attack. And members of the Kim dynasty long have wanted their virgins in this world, not the next.

Moreover, the North is surrounded by nations with nuclear weapons (China, Russia) and missiles (those two plus Japan and South Korea). As a "shrimp among whales," any Korean government could understandably desire to possess the ultimate weapon.

Finally, Pyongyang actually sent up a satellite. Of course, there is reason to suspect that Pyongyang's launch was cover for a missile test.

However, the satellite might be legitimate. "It must be very frustrating, and frightening, for the generals in Pyongyang to know that the enemy can see what they are up to, but they can't reciprocate," wrote NK News' Tim Beal. He noted that even Laos wanted its own satellite.

Under such circumstances, allied complaints about the North Korean test sound an awful lot like whining. For two decades U.S. presidents have said that Pyongyang cannot be allowed to develop nuclear weapons. It has done so. Assertions that the DPRK cannot be allowed to deploy ICBMs sound no more credible.

After all, the UN Security Council still is working on new sanctions after the nuclear test last

month. China continues to oppose meaningful penalties. Despite U.S. and South Korean criticism, the People's Republic of China has reason to fear disintegration of the North Korean regime: loss of political influence and economic investments, possible mass refugee flows, violent factional combat, and loose nukes, and creation of a reunified Korea hosting American troops on China's border. Moreover, Beijing blames the allies for creating the hostile security environment which encourages the North to develop WMDs.

Why should Beijing sacrifice its interests to solve a problem of someone else's making?

Moreover, Pyongyang appears to have taken the measure of its large neighbor. The Kim regime announced its satellite launch on the same day that it reported the visit of a Chinese envoy. The trip appeared to result in another insulting rebuff for Beijing.

Even if China does more, the North might not yield.

Thus, the U.S. and Republic of Korea have no better alternatives in dealing with Pyongyang today than they did last month after the nuclear test. War would be foolhardy, sanctions are a dead-end, and China remains unpersuaded.

The only alternative that remains is some form of engagement with the DPRK. Cho Han-bum of the Korea Institute for National Unification argued that the North was using the satellite launch to force talks with America. However, Washington showed no interest in negotiation, so the DPRK launched.

Of course, no one should bet on negotiating away North Korea's weapons. If nothing else, Pyongyang watched American and European governments oust Libya's Moammar Khadafy after, in its view, at least, he foolishly traded away his nuclear weapons and missiles.

Nevertheless, there are things which the North wants, such as direct talks with America, a peace treaty, and economic assistance. Moreover, the DPRK, rather like Burma's reforming military regime, appears to desire to reduce its reliance on Beijing. This creates an opportunity for Washington and Seoul.

Perhaps negotiation would temper the North's worst excesses. Perhaps engagement would encourage domestic reforms. Perhaps an allied initiative would spur greater Chinese pressure on Pyongyang.

Perhaps not. But current policy has failed.

Yet again the North has misbehaved. Yet again other countries are talking tough. Samantha Power insisted that "we cannot and will not allow" the North to develop "nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles."

However, yet again the allies are only doing what it has done before. Unfortunately, the same policy will yield the same result as before. It is time to try something different.

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