



NK paranoiac on US

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North Korea's Kim Jong-un continues his confrontational course. After conducting his nation's fifth nuclear test, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter declared it to be a "direct challenge to the entire international community."

But this is complete hooey, to use a technical term. It's about time for the "international community" to stop acting as if there really is an international community. And especially that any of the many bad guys around the globe pay the slightest attention to that mythical body.

There's certainly no consensus of the world's 7.4 billion people behind whatever policy the U.S. government, let alone Secretary Carter, might advocate. Even more, it's fair to assume that Kim isn't much concerned about what the "international community" thinks, let alone intends to "challenge" it.

Kim, like his father and grandfather before him, has more specific foreign targets in mind. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea faces manifold threats and potential threats. The "international community" is not one of them. The United Nations Security Council might impose sanctions, but that body is only a tool of its members, and enforcement is possible only through them.

So Pyongyang adopts the perfectly sensible policy of targeting those countries, not the fantasy "international community." Why nukes? It's not hard to figure out.

First, and most important, there's the South Korea-U.S. alliance. Deterring the U.S. is no easy task, especially for the government of an impoverished, sometimes starving society; nuclear weapons are about the cheapest, most effective means of doing so.

After all, Washington's proclivity for regime change does not run to nuclear powers. Indian army officials made this observation after the first Gulf war. The DPRK was brutally dismissive of

Libya's decision to give up his nuclear and missile programs; Pyongyang made clear that it would not make a similar mistake.

While the U.S. might be the main target — in a deterrent sense, not for a suicidal first strike — it is not the only one.

Japan, though only slowly abandoning its pacifist heritage, remains distrusted, even hated, by Pyongyang (as well as the Republic of Korea). Also on the North's naughty list, ironically, are its traditional allies, Russia and China.

The DPRK began its nuclear program during the Cold War, when it still could theoretically rely upon support from both the People's Republic of China and Soviet Union. But North Korea's founder Kim Il-sung jealously guarded his regime's independence. Only nuclear weapons would free the North of reliance on its supposed friends.

Moreover, these days it's not so clear either qualifies as a friend. The Soviet-Pyongyang relationship essentially ruptured after the end of the Cold War, when Moscow established diplomatic relations with the ROK. Although bilateral relations recently rebounded, Russia remains a minor player in Korean affairs.

In contrast, the PRC plays a much larger role in DPRK affairs, and therefore is resented much more in Pyongyang.

Chinese enterprises heavily invest in and trade with the North; one reason offered for the execution of Kim Jong-un's uncle nearly three years ago was the "selling of precious resources of the country for cheap prices" to the PRC.

Beijing pressured all three Kim regimes to reform the economy and abandon the nuclear program. Pyongyang consistently dismissed the PRC's advice, sometimes in humiliating fashion. The two countries might better be referred to as "frenemies" than allies.

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