



## Europeans Want to Denuclearize Korea: They Should Defend Themselves First

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Of course, the world would be a better place if the North did not possess nuclear weapons. But after roughly three decades and six U.S. presidents insisting that North Korea *cannot, must not* be allowed to have nuclear weapons, it has them. Probably a lot of them – 60 is one common estimate. And a recent Rand Corporation/Asan Institute study figures that Pyongyang could end up with 200 weapons by the end of the decade, which would make it a significant secondary nuclear power. [The G-7 nevertheless expressed its commitment "to the goal of complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization and dismantlement," commonly known as CVID, which few policy analysts believe is realistic.]

There's an old saying about opinions that cannot be repeated in polite company. But it applies to the recent statement of the G7 countries about North Korea and nuclear weapons. The seven rich industrialized nations – U.S., Canada, Japan, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy – announced to the world that they don't want the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to have nuclear weapons.

That is an unexceptional position. Heck, *I don't want the DPRK to have nuclear weapons!* However, the special pleading is obvious. One of the governments has used nuclear weapons in war. Three of the participants possess nukes. The other four states are theoretically covered by Washington's "nuclear umbrella."

The G-7 nations could have acknowledged the dubious morality of nuclear weapons and the nuclear states could have reaffirmed their commitment under the nonproliferation treaty to disarm. They all could have, but they didn't. The governments involved apparently don't see anything wrong with possessing nukes or being defended by nukes. Indeed, the US spent the Cold War threatening to use nuclear weapons against North Korea; during the same time Japan expected Washington to be ready to use them to defend it against the North.

The hypocrisy is almost charming. America, France, and Britain take the position that they have tasted sin and want to save the rest of the world from engaging in similar destructive behavior.

Their allies offer support, clutching their pearls and expressing horror at Pyongyang entering the nuclear club uninvited. G-7's collective position is understandable, certainly, but not principled.

Last month the group sent out an official statement with 37 points. It is largely unexceptional boilerplate. The G-7 begins by stating its commitment "to working together and with our partners to build the conditions for a more secure, more stable, and safer world." What else are they going to say, despite having followed the US in spending the last two decades blowing up the Middle East and spreading disorder, destruction, and death? The allies, led by America, share responsibility for carnage stretching from Libya through Iraq and Syria to Afghanistan.

The G-7 might have asked how these efforts affected nonproliferation. The Afghan Taliban was quickly overwhelmed because it faced overwhelming Western military superiority. Iraq's Saddam Hussein was ousted and executed because he did not possess nuclear weapons as charged. The U.S. and Europeans ensured the defeat of Libya's Muammar Khadafy because he had given up his nuclear and missile programs; he was captured, tortured, and executed, suffering a particularly gruesome end. Washington and an assortment of other forces, including the local al-Qaeda affiliate, almost sent Syria's Bashar al-Assad into premature retirement before Russia came to his aid.

Even Third World dictators can see the pattern here. Without a nuclear deterrent, there is little to stop the US and its allies from wreaking death and devastation whenever the zeitgeist shifts.

However, self-reflection is unlikely in any Western capital these days, and especially in Washington, D.C. American policymakers across the political spectrum proclaim that we are the exceptional nation, stand taller and see further than others, and can decide that the price is worth it when we kill prodigiously, so there is nothing to reconsider or regret.

The G-7 statement provides lots of details about being committed to all sorts of good and necessary steps to prevent proliferation. Such as upholding standards, countering financing, coordinating actions, enhancing controls, challenging transfers, etc. All true, but probably not much advanced by the G-7's rhetorical efforts here.

The assembled governments devoted two paragraphs to the DPRK. The allies called on everyone else to live up to their sanction obligations. Alas, no one should hold their breath on Beijing and Moscow complying with a call from countries that have become adversaries if not enemies. The G-7 showed its unintended sense of humor when it added: "We call on the DPRK to refrain from provocations and to commit to engaging in dialogue." The North's foreign policy is *built on and around provocations*. Kim Jong-un, who has done so much to expand his country's nuclear and missile programs, isn't likely to consider the G-7's pronouncements to be the sort of dialogue he desires.

More interesting, however, was the G-7's pronouncement:

"We remain committed to the goal of complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization and dismantlement of all of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) unlawful WMD and ballistic missiles in accordance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions, and call for

the DPRK to return at an early date to the NPT and to IAEA safeguards. We are deeply concerned that the DPRK continues to develop its illicit ballistic missile program, to include testing a variety of short-range missiles. In this regard, we condemn the recent launches of ballistic missiles on 25 March 2021 in violation of the relevant UNSC resolutions. They threaten regional peace and security and pose a serious challenge to the international community. We are concerned that the DPRK considers itself no longer bound by its moratorium on nuclear and long range ballistic missiles testing. Continued secondary proliferation also remains a source of major concern. We reiterate that the DPRK will never be accepted as a nuclear power. We strongly support the IAEA's intensified efforts to enhance its readiness to play its essential role in monitoring and verifying the DPRK's nuclear program." [The spelling is Americanized.]

Of course, the world would be a better place if the North did not possess nuclear weapons. But after roughly three decades and six US presidents insisting that North Korea *cannot, must not* be allowed to have nuclear weapons, it has them. Probably a lot of them – 60 is one common estimate. And a recent Rand Corporation/Asan Institute study figures that Pyongyang could end up with 200 weapons by the end of the decade, which would make it a significant secondary nuclear power. The G-7 nevertheless expressed its commitment "to the goal of complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization and dismantlement," commonly known as CVID, which few policy analysts believe is realistic.

First, irreversibility is impossible once the process is known. Second, denuclearization becomes more difficult once weapons are developed and arsenals assembled. Only South Africa abandoned weapons as well as a program, and its circumstances were unique, a small number of bombs and an impending power transfer. It is fine to imagine the DPRK tossing scores or hundreds of nukes in the geopolitical trash bin, but it almost certainly is only a dream.

Third, insisting on North Korean compliance with a fantasy is likely to result in failure. The best way to short-circuit any disarmament talks with Kim Jong-un is to insist on denuclearization up front with rewards to come, maybe, if Washington feels like following through (witness the impact of John Bolton's policy sabotage by suggesting the Libya model to Pyongyang).

Kim agreed to the (undefined) objective of denuclearization, but only as part of a process that included better relations and regional arrangements. Absent transformation of what the North Koreans call America's "hostile policy" they would be fools to yield their nukes, leaving them vulnerable to regime change. (I doubt they would be willing to disarm if such a transformation occurred, but that is a separate issue.)

The G-7 governments also stated their concern about the North possessing nukes and missiles. That would be more convincing, of course, if every member of the group didn't possess or wasn't defended by the same weapons. Of course, the DPRK is not to be trusted. Yet with Washington's penchant for not just nation-building, but catastrophic, disastrous, destabilizing, destructive regime change – hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed in the ensuing sectarian strife in Iraq alone – the reference is more than a little hypocritical. Of course, Pyongyang's intentions are malign and motivated by more than fear. However, fear is almost certainly one of its motivations, and for that blame is shared with Washington, whose leadership class is suffused with almost illimitable hubris and leavened with abundant sanctimony.

Finally, G-7 members "reiterate that the DPRK will never be accepted as a nuclear power." The threat may be sincerely made but also likely is empty. Israel doesn't even admit that it is a nuclear power but everyone knows it is and still deals with it. The US tried sanctions against both India and Pakistan in hopeless attempts to reverse their nuclear programs, but eventually gave up and cooperates with both. If North Korea possessed a couple hundred nukes a decade from now, would the West continue its failed policy of isolation? Washington and its allies would have to decide whether the increasingly serious nuclear power was more dangerous engaged or segregated.

There is an even larger elephant in the room, however. Why are the European members of the G-7 so concerned about the North, which has rarely even noticed them, when they do so little to defend Europe, instead expecting America to handle their security?

What Britain, France, Germany, and Italy spend on their militaries is their own business. However, they are wealthy nations and could field capable, sizable armed forces. Britain and France do capable only; Germany and Italy do neither. If these and other European states don't believe there is a threat, that's fine. Yet all of them expect the US to station troops in Europe, provide subsidies for Europe, and promise to defend Europe.

Rather than opine on North Korean nuclear weapons, they should do more to confront any real threats to them, presumably involving Russia, which is amply armed with conventional and nuclear weapons and surely is a greater worry than the DPRK. Europe is not helpless: in fact, it already includes two nuclear states. Why should Americans be expected to risk their cities to safeguard European capitals? Yet European defense dependence is so deeply engrained that continental leaders prefer to meddle overseas to no practical end – who believes that a G-7 statement will cause a chastened Kim to meekly surrender his nukes? – than to address their own weaknesses. Perhaps they believe that sanctimoniously pontificating on a subject beyond their control will divert attention from the far more serious security failings within their control.

The G-7 believes the DPRK should disarm. So do most other people. However, the North doesn't care what the G-7 believes. Instead of wasting their time prattling on about issues which they can and will do little to solve, such as Kim's nuclear ambitions, European governments should address problems in their own neighborhood.

For instance, do they really believe the incipient new Cold War is the best way to address Moscow? Many of their own people would like to hear the answer, rather than listen to the G-7's meaningless pontifications on North Korea.

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