

## Trump's losing N. Korea policy requires change

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North Korea staged its sixth nuclear test. There's no evidence that the weapon has been miniaturized to fit on a missile, but the test was the North's most powerful yet. And it follows steady North Korean progress in missile development.

Despite matching Kim Jong-un bluster for bluster, President Donald Trump is doing no better than his cerebral predecessor in halting Pyongyang's military developments. The good news is that Kim Jong-un doesn't intend to wage war on America. Rather, he hopes to prevent Washington from attacking the DPRK.

Unfortunately, negotiated denuclearization is dead. The fearful, even paranoid, North Korean regime has invested too much and is too close to creating a nuclear deterrent.

Moreover, Pyongyang faces ever greater threats: the Republic of Korea has continued to race ahead economically, China and Russia are undependable friends, and the U.S. is far more aggressive internationally. Washington even took advantage of Libya's voluntary denuclearization to oust the latter's dictator.

Despite the president's insistence that "all options are on the table," there is no politically viable military option. Any strike likely would trigger full-scale war. Pyongyang is aware of America's capabilities and if faced with U.S. military attack would not likely allow Washington to build up its forces and strike at leisure.

Increased sanctions would hurt North Korea but probably not stop its nuclear and missile programs. Two decades ago famine killed at least a half million people, without changing Pyongyang's course. Moreover, China is not yet ready to impose the sort of economic penalties that could cause a North Korean implosion.

President Donald Trump should follow his earlier instinct for engagement. To start he should stop threatening war. Doing so reinforces the Kim dynasty's case for building nukes and missiles.

The U.S. also should talk to Pyongyang. To encourage substantive talks Washington should pick up the idea from both the DPRK and China for freezing joint U.S.-ROK military exercises in return for suspending North Korean missile and nuclear tests.

The further its programs develop the less likely Pyongyang will ever halt them. Moreover, the steady increase in regional tensions and rising panic in Washington makes confrontation more likely.

The president tweeted a threat to end trade with "any country doing business with North Korea," no doubt aimed at China. However, if the administration wants support for tougher measures, it needs to negotiate with Beijing.

The People's Republic of China's influence with the DPRK is limited. Moreover, the North's survival is a security issue for China, which wants neither a failed state nor a united U.S. ally hosting American military forces on its border.

Worse, attempts to threaten and browbeat China's nationalistic leadership are likely to backfire. In this case the PRC likely would find support from Moscow, which has its own reasons for making life more difficult for the U.S.

In return for Chinese support, Washington should lower the peninsula's rhetorical temperature, offer to talk with the North, and develop a comprehensive benefit package in exchange for denuclearization. The U.S. also should accommodate the PRC's interests: For instance, offer to help care for refugees from a North Korean collapse, give Beijing a free hand intervening in the DPRK, and promise to remove U.S. forces in the event of reunification.

U.S. officials also should consider how to deal with a nuclear North Korea. Bilateral communication would become even more necessary, like with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Improving missile defense would take on greater urgency.

Most important, Washington should reconsider outdated policies which endanger the U.S. America should phase out its security treaty with and military deployment in South Korea. If the North develops the ability to destroy American cities, Washington's participation in another Korean War will become far too dangerous. The moment Pyongyang found itself to be losing it could target America's homeland.

Even Washington's long-standing nuclear umbrella would become problematic. Although nonproliferation remains a worthy objective, in Northeast Asia it ensures that only China, Russia, and now North Korea possess the world's most fearsome weapons. But if nuclear war arrived, what president would sacrifice U.S. cities for the ROK?

It is time to consider countervailing South Korean and Japanese nuclear deterrents. An extra benefit: If Beijing saw such a response as likely, it would have greater incentive to act against the North.

The latest nuclear test dramatically reminds us of the DPRK's growing capabilities. Washington should consider new approaches to disarming North Korea.

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