



Seven ways to get serious with North Korea

By Michael Mazza, February 14, 2013

Editor's note: Yesterday, GPS heard from Cato Scholar Doug Bandow, who suggested a hands off response to North Korea's latest nuclear test. Today, American Enterprise Institute research fellow Michael Mazza suggests a very different response. The views expressed are his own.

Tuesday morning on the Today show, senior Barack Obama adviser Valerie Jarrett asserted that North Korea's nuclear program "doesn't strengthen North Korea. It makes it more vulnerable." If only that were so. While the North's nuclear weapons do contribute to its international isolation, it's not at all clear that Pyongyang has any interest in joining the "world community," as the president so often suggests.

In fact, North Korea's nuclear achievements have, to date, made it feel less vulnerable. First, they provide leader Kim Jong-un with fodder for domestic propaganda, which may help shore up the regime. Second, and perhaps more importantly, they enhance its nascent nuclear deterrent. Kim and his cronies are already confident they can act with impunity, as they did in carrying out deadly attacks – indeed, what should be seen as acts of war – on South Korea in 2010 with the sinking of the Cheonan naval vessel and the shelling of Yeonpyeong island. As they continue to deploy their own nuclear capabilities, that confidence will surely only grow.

In its January 22 resolution in response to North Korea's last missile test, the U.N. Security Council conveyed "its determination to take significant action in the event of a further DPRK launch or nuclear test." The Obama administration may appreciate the Security Council's good intentions, but it should by now realize that the U.N. body is unlikely to impose measures sufficient to change the thinking in Pyongyang. It's time for the president to take significant actions of his own.

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Such moves should convince Kim that this latest test makes him less rather than more secure. After all, it is clear he will not alter his behavior unless he is made to regret his actions. But how might the president make Kim reconsider North Korea's current trajectory?

Here are a few suggestions, some more provocative than others. In all cases, these measures would be more effective when carried out alongside our allies, especially South Korea and Japan.

1. Park an aircraft carrier off the coast of North Korea and engage in regular and sustained bilateral and multilateral naval exercises.

2. Blockade North Korea's busiest ports. Allow nothing but food, medicine, and other essentials into the country.

3. Designate as a “primary money laundering concern” any bank – including those in China and Europe – providing financial services for the North Korean regime. This worked to great effect with Banco Delta Asia in 2005. Treat North Korea as the criminal enterprise that it is.

4. Re-designate North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism

5. With satellites and/or stealth aircraft sent into North Korean skies, track Kim Jong-un's movements. Provide any imagery to the press.

6. Pressure governments – including friendly ones – to cease tolerating North Korean front companies operating within their borders, like this one in Taiwan.

7. Work with South Korea to expand broadcasting and other information operations aimed at providing more of North Korea's people with more information about their own country and the outside world.

If we simply “do the usual drill,” as Ambassador Susan Rice has put it, the only thing we can be certain of is that we'll be faced with going through the drill again and again in the not-too-distant future. It's time for a new approach to North Korea: one that the Kim regime will actually take seriously.