



## How do you solve a problem like North Korea? Three viewpoints

By: Tracy Connor – April 2, 2013

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North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's brinkmanship is in full bloom. He's ordered the missiles prepped, dismissed the armistice and announced plans to bring a nuclear reactor back on line.

The U.S. response -- a restrained show of force by fighter jets and warships, along with comments that simultaneously decry and downplay the threat -- has not stopped the threats.

Foreign-policy analysts agree the situation is troubling, though there's a deep difference of opinion on what approach would convince Kim to play nice.  
Ignore him

The U.S. routine of flexing its muscles whenever Pyongyang lobs another threat Washington's way is playing right into Kim's hands, said Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. Like many a parenting expert, he believes the White House should react to North Korea's bad behavior by ignoring it.

Ordering fighter and bomber flyovers meant to show the U.S. means business "just reinforces their behavior," Bandow said. "It gives them attention, showing how this bankrupt, starving country can get a response from the great superpower.

"We are acting as if we are worried about them. To my mind, the response should be, 'Who? Oh, THEM.'"

Yes, Kim could respond to the cold shoulder by ramping up the provocations to get some kind of response, but he's already used up so many that "at some point it's hard to imagine what new threats he could make," Bandow said.

Photos of Kim surveying U.S.-bound missile routes aside, Bandow finds it hard to believe that he's truly the supreme commander "with the power by himself to careen off into war."

"There's nothing to suggest they're suicidal," he said of the regime. But "it's easy to make a mistake" when tensions are escalating fast, he added.

The solution is for the U.S. to disengage. "Why is North Korea our problem?" he said.

Punish him

Ignoring the threats would be a terrible mistake, according to Gordon Chang, author of "Nuclear Showdown: North Korea Takes on the World," who says the U.S. should be stepping up action against a nuclear-capable North Korea.

He said B-2 bomber and F-22 Raptor overflights should continue, if only to send a message to the South Korean public, which is increasingly losing confidence in America's ability to defend them and pushing for Seoul to develop its own nuclear program, which would destabilize the region.

The time has come for stepped-up interdiction of North Korean shipping and aircraft movements, to stop Pyongyang from selling nuclear technology to Iran with the cooperation of China, he said.

And Chang said the Obama administration should be driving a wedge between North Korea and China by telling Beijing there will be consequences if it continues cozying up to Kim. "North Korea would not be making these threats if they felt like the Chinese were going to clamp down on them," he said.

Chang does not buy the argument that North Korea doesn't have many more tricks up its sleeve, noting that Kim could make good on his threat to shut down the jointly run Kaesong Industrial Region, the main symbol of cooperation with the South. Hours after this interview, North Korean authorities were not allowing South Korean workers into Kaesong, according to the South Korea's Unification Ministry and Reuters.

The U.S. should one-up Kim's declaration that the armistice in place for 60 years has been replaced by a state of war -- and agree that the armistice is over, so the U.S. is legally able to use force.

"That would shake up the North Korean regime," he said. "It would show there's a new attitude in Washington."

"What I argue for has very substantial downsides, but they are the least worst solutions," he added. "Nobody wants to provoke a crisis, but it's that type of thinking that got us into this situation."

Hug it out

Little more than a year into the job held by his father and his grandfather, Kim has managed to paint himself into a corner -- and the U.S. needs to give him a way out, says Han Park, a University of Georgia professor who has served as an unofficial negotiator in North Korea.

Because he has not consolidated his power at home, the fledgling leader cannot back off. "There has to be a face-saving device," Park said. "Sanctions will not work. They have never worked," the professor said. "It will aggravate the North Korean leadership even more."

Now that it has some nuclear capability, Pyongyang will not relinquish it unless its security is assured, he said. And the only way to do that is bestowing diplomatic recognition on North Korea and working toward a peace treaty.

Without good-faith talks, Kim will stay on a collision course with the U.S.  
"Military confrontation would be unthinkable, but unthinkable things can happen," Park said.

There's no question North Korea would be on the losing end of a conflict, he said.  
Regardless, "war is something that we cannot afford."

"Giving North Korea peace? What's wrong with that?" he said.