



If America Can Have Cutting Edge Weapons Why Not North Korea?

Washington's policies are based on self-interest, not on principle.

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Speaking before the United Nations General Assembly's Sixth Committee, which contemplates legal matters involving the United Nations, North Korea's Ambassador Kim In-chol denounced the United States and double standards. He accused America and the world of demonstrating rank hypocrisy.

He noted that America was seeking to develop hypersonic missiles, without the criticism leveled at the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and that North and South Korea were treated very differently when both recently tested missiles. Even sharper was his assault on Washington's deal with Australia over nuclear submarines. "The United States, with a permanent seat in the Council, has laid bare its double-dealing attitude as ringleader of nuclear proliferation through its decision to transfer technology for building a nuclear-powered submarine to Australia," Kim Jong-un complained.

The Pyongyang Times joined the conversation by attacking "the founding of the US-led 'AUKUS' and the US decision on transferring the technology of building a nuclear-powered submarine to Australia as a 'military bloc based on the logic of Cold War' and an 'irresponsible act posing danger of nuclear proliferation and triggering the arms race.'" Similarly, North Korea's Foreign Ministry's had a similar critique. "The U.S. itself has ignored the principle of nuclear non-proliferation and allowed for double standards in line with their strategy for the domination of the world," according to the ministry.

The North has a point. The United States and the Republic of Korea get away with activities that would and sometimes do subject the North to an avalanche of criticism. AUKUS does increase the potential for nuclear proliferation. The purpose of the new arrangement is to strengthen existing military alignments, which could encourage other nations to counter with increased military outlays and cooperation.

Of course, North Korea's credibility is not the best. In 1950 founder Kim Il-sung triggered one of the twentieth century's worst conflicts when he invaded the South. By one estimate, nearly five million people died. North Korea was responsible for numerous violent incidents in subsequent years, including the 1968 attempt on South Korean President Park Chung-hee's life, the 1968 seizure of the USS Pueblo, and the 2010 sinking of South Korea's Choenan and bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island. So, there is good reason for the "international community"—or at least South Korea, Japan, and America—to do their best to prevent or limit Pyongyang's access to nuclear weapons. Sometimes hypocrisy, even if rank, has a logical basis.

However, Washington's double standards are not without consequence. Cheerfully accepting Israel's nuclear arsenal leaves America with no principled objection to an Iranian bomb. And accepting Pakistan's nukes, even reluctantly, indicates that the United States does not view the dangerous, unstable, and Islamist nature of the Pakistani political system—and inherent recklessness of a regime that moves nuclear materials via common vans in regular traffic—as being disqualifying for possession of nuclear weapons. Every time U.S. officials make a deal with the devil and acknowledge another nuclear state, it becomes harder to tell the next aspirant no. War becomes the only effective means of dissuasion, and then the cost is too high.

Moreover, North Korea also punctured the sanctimony with which U.S. officials often drench their realpolitik practices. For instance, *The Pyongyang Times* charges that "It is a well-known fact that the US has long deployed its nuclear assets all over the world to threaten and blackmail the countries of its dislike with nuclear weapons, in utter breach of international agreements and order." There are reasons for America's likes and dislikes, of course, as in Northeast Asia, but Washington's policy is based on self-interest, not on principle.

Also, North Korea made light of America's supposed commitment to the "rules-based order." As the North Koreans put it: the United States talks quite often about "rules-based international order," posing as if it alone is "faithful" to the international agreements and order and has authority to "supervise" them.

Obviously, the North is in little position to complain, given its behavior over the years. Nevertheless, U.S. policymakers are for rules except when they aren't, just like they support stability except when they don't, work with the United Nations except when they won't, and favor agreements except when they don't.

Also, North Korea doubts America's commitment to peace. "Peace is the common desire of mankind," according to *The Pyongyang Times*. However, "the US is 'a global hex' and 'the US is the biggest troublemaker in terms of global stability.'" Indeed, "it is high-handedness and arbitrariness of the US that totally destroys and tramples on peace and security in the region and the rest of the world," according to the state publication.

Sadly, the last two decades prove this point. The United States has been involved in five different wars which all have been disastrous in their own ways. There is Afghanistan, which is where the United States spent nearly twenty years devoted to failed nation-building. Then there is Iraq, which is where the United States launched a catastrophically destructive war based on the false claim that Iraq had nuclear weapons. In Libya, the United States lied about the threat to civilian lives to justify another regime change war that turned into an endless civil war. Over

in Yemen, Washington turned policy over to the region's vilest regime. Then there is Saudi Arabia, which is where U.S. activity created a humanitarian catastrophe that continues to kill nearly seven years later. Don't forget America's multiple excessive drone campaigns in Pakistan, Yemen, and elsewhere, which kill civilians and thereby promote terrorism.

Anyone who listens to the rhetoric from Pyongyang realizes that everything should be taken with several barrels full of salt. Nevertheless, sometimes some truth seeps through. U.S. officials would do well to judge their policies against the principles Washington typically espouses. As North Korea's delegate Kim noted: hypocrisy too often is the foundation of U.S. policy.

Washington officials should use the upcoming holidays to reflect on their plans. There is no doubt that the foreign policy establishment desperately wants to maintain American hegemony. But peace seems not to be a priority—and that should change.

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