



Launch the Perry Process 2 by Brad Glosserman

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The United States needs a new policy toward North Korea. The Obama administration is in no position to develop or implement it. It is time then for the next round of the Perry Process, a high-level review of Washington's North Korea policy and the articulation of a new strategy to replace it. Two very different problems are obstacles to that proposition, however: actually finding a better approach to the North, a negotiating partner that has managed to confuse and confound every interlocutor, and identifying a person who has the respect, knowledge, and gravitas in the US to midwife the review.

Since being burned by Pyongyang in the "Leap Day Agreement" in 2012 – by which North Korea, in exchange for the promise of large amounts of US food aid, agreed to a moratorium on uranium enrichment and missile testing and to allow the return of IAEA inspectors to Yongbyon, which would in turn yield a resumption of the Six-Party Talks; Pyongyang launched a satellite weeks later in seeming violation of the deal – the Obama administration has insisted that the ball is in North Korea's court and that it must make a "strategic choice" to show in word and deed its commitment to denuclearization as evidence of its seriousness of purpose.

While that policy makes a great deal of sense – even administration critics concede that it shows real learning from past experience in dealing with the North – it has frozen relations with Pyongyang. During that time, Pyongyang has not been idle. It has been improving its military capabilities, testing missiles, expanding its nuclear programs, and alternating between propaganda campaigns and diplomatic offensives against various external targets. The North has advanced its nuclear and missile programs enough to push senior figures in the US military to openly worry about a North Korean capacity to threaten the US homeland. Kim Jong Un has consolidated his grip on power and demonstrated both a capriciousness and an appetite for risk that make acquisition of those capabilities even more worrisome. Evidence suggests that North Korean Special Forces have already conducted cyber attacks against the US. Finally, North Korea has announced the "pyongjin" line of simultaneous military and economic development, a policy shift that argues Pyongyang no longer has to choose between the two goals, implying at least that the country no longer feels squeezed and economic leverage to force change has diminished.

This is an unsustainable position. The US needs a new policy toward North Korea, but there is no appetite in Washington to spend precious political capital to engage North Korea; the rewards are likely to be small and precious

resources are already being used in talks with Iran and Cuba. The GOP control of Congress has sharpened divisions in Washington and the countdown for the US presidential campaign in 2016 makes a meaningful shift in US policy virtually impossible. Moreover, an attempt to revise policy in the waning days of the Obama administration would encourage Pyongyang's worst inclinations, in particular the belief that outgoing US governments want to make a deal with North Korea to cement legacies, and will thus be eager to compromise.

In this environment, the Obama administration can still make an important contribution to the North Korean policy debate by initiating a review process that assesses options for the next US administration. Of course there is no guarantee that the next US government would adopt the conclusions of this policy review, but a rigorous, independent and impartial assessment would allow the next US president to hit the ground running and would help build the consensus that will be essential to any policy's success.

The model for this approach is the Perry Process, the congressionally mandated review of US policy of North Korea that occurred in the late 1990s. It was forced on the Clinton administration by a GOP-controlled Congress and allowed Washington to reach a consensus on how to deal with Pyongyang. By all accounts, it is considered a success.

There is no guarantee that this approach will work again. While it is hard to believe, polarization in Washington has intensified and any Obama administration review will be seen with great skepticism and its provenance alone may make consensus impossible. Moreover, the next administration may not take on board the review's conclusions, even if a Democratic candidate prevails in the 2016 presidential election. Finally, and perhaps the biggest obstacle, is the difficulty in finding an individual with stature equivalent to that of former Secretary of Defense William Perry. Perry's professional rigor and personal integrity were critical to the eventual acceptance of the review's conclusions. It is hard to identify a similar individual today who commands respect on both sides of the aisle and has the seniority to legitimate the entire process. One possible individual is Robert Gates, the former Secretary of Defense and former head of the CIA. He has the knowledge and the respect that would allow him to take the logic of the review to its appropriate conclusions.

Those difficulties notwithstanding, a review and the presentation of new options is much needed. It is time for a new Perry Process.

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