



Bad Advice for Secretary Clinton by Victor Cha

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Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's first trip to Asia demonstrated well the Obama administration's commitment to the region. Her stops in Japan, Indonesia, Korea, and China displayed her ability to handle a brief quite well. Her mastery of the material was clear, and she demonstrated an understanding of the nuances in the region like an experienced Asia-hand.

Thankfully, she is not listening to the advice offered to her in the editorial pages in the United States when it comes to North Korea. At one end of the spectrum, you have Selig Harrison who, having recently returned from a trip to North Korea, testified in Congress (and on the opinion page of the *Washington Post*) that North Korea will not give up its nuclear weapons and that the United States should adjust to living with a nuclear North Korea, while negotiating to cap its existing capabilities.

He apparently offered Kim Kye-gwan his own "deal," which was basically a rehashing of the 2005 Joint Statement that the North has already agreed to. In the 2005 official agreement, the North committed to the six parties to verifiably abandon all nuclear programs and existing nuclear facilities in exchange for the promise of energy assistance, a peace treaty, and normalized relations with the United States. But Harrison apparently did less well for the same price: the North told him that it would not give up its nuclear weapons and demanded two light-water reactors. Secretary Clinton would be well-advised to listen to and accept what the U.S. and other six-party negotiators achieved rather than this latest North Korean renegotiation through Harrison.

Secretary Clinton was also right to restate during her Asia trip explicitly that the United States objective remains the complete and verifiable denuclearization of North Korea. The United States, under Obama or any other administration, will never accept nor recognize North Korea as a nuclear weapons state.

The term "never accept" means that the United States will neither normalize relations nor sign a peace treaty with a North Korean regime that has not abandoned its nuclear ambitions. For Washington to abandon this as a stated objective would have wider ramifications for the region, and would undermine the credibility of American extended deterrence commitments to its allies, Japan and South Korea

At the other end of the spectrum of bad advice was a piece by former Bush administration State Department official Philip Zelikow. Zelikow, a former advisor to Secretary Condoleezza Rice and now professor at the University of Virginia, essentially called for the United States to carry out a targeted military strike on the North Korean launch facility where apparent preparations are underway to test the *Taepodong II* missile. Zelikow argued that such a strike should only be done if the North stood up the missile on the gantry, and that the strike would be limited solely to that site.

Hopefully, Secretary Clinton is not listening to that bad advice either. While a strike would indeed set back the North's missile program, the two to three years gained from a strike pales in comparison to the potential wider fallout from such an action.

The retaliation could be artillery launched on Seoul, or the firing of a Nodong missile on a city in Japan. Then what? Does the United States fulfill its treaty commitments and go to war? Zelikow argues that the United States should only consider such an option once it has consulted with Seoul and Tokyo, but the existence of conservative governments in both places does not mean Seoul and Tokyo are willing to risk war.

The best advice for Secretary Clinton is probably what her advisors are already telling her: 1) Consult with allies and with China about sending coordinated warnings to the DPRK through inter-Korean, Japanese, and Chinese party, military, and diplomatic channels not to conduct a test; 2) stand up U.S. missile defense systems; 3) prepare the ground in the UN for the triggering of UN Resolution 1695 and 1718 sanctions (including financial sanctions) in the event of a ballistic missile test; and 4) impress upon the Chinese their need to tighten the spigots of aid to the military and to the party in the North.

Finally, Secretary Clinton's remark that the U.S. is interested in discussing the future of the peninsula after Kim Jong-il with Japan, South Korea, and China is neither surprising nor controversial. It reflects an emerging reality that political change in the North is on the horizon.

Preparing for that change and coordinating with concerned parties is smart and prudent. Living with a nuclear North Korea, or attacking their missile launch pad is not.