

## **Responses to PacNet #9 -- Is Obama about to go wobbly on North Korea?**

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Many thanks to Dr. Green for his cogent analysis. I feel most of the DPRK's interlocutors, including the USA and, even China, are skirting around a key point – short of initiating regime-change in Pyongyang, there is little practical in terms of policy options held in Washington, or anywhere else, to prevent N. Korea from building, miniaturizing and deploying nuclear warheads on its ballistic missile. The DPRK is not quite like South Africa at the end of the Apartheid era and voluntary renunciation is out of the realm of practical possibility.

Dr Green is also right that negotiations have not changed DPRK's provocative behavior – only temporarily held it back. Since there is now sixty years' worth of experience, one would question the validity of the assumed efficacy of powerful shows of naval and aerial force in the DPRK's periphery. That has not changed Pyongyang's behavior either. So, one logical option would be to examine DPRK motives. It seems to me regime survival and a quest to be taken as 'normal' are two key drivers. Former Presidents Carter and Clinton have noted that whenever Pyongyang feels it is being taken seriously and is shown consideration – if not respect – it tends to deliver (such as detained American citizens in its custody). If that painful reality is recognized, there may be a way forward in "normalizing" the DPRK's approach to the rest of the world. Piling on pressure on an already insecure and semi-bankrupt regime has not helped so far and is unlikely to do so now.

As regards the DPRK's insecurity – it is reasonable to ask why is the DPRK treated like an illegitimate state; why it should not feel threatened when the ROK is a well-defended ally; why is the DPRK, despite being a UN-member state, treated like a pariah whereas the ROK is held up as a model of probity; why the DPRK's nuclear program places it beyond the pale while the South's extra-NPT nuclear activities are treated as a scientific curiosity; and why the Northern Limit Line – unilaterally imposed as it was by General Mark Clark at the end of August 1953, is treated as though it is the legally – defined maritime boundary between the ROK and the DPRK? Too many inconsistencies and Cold War loose ends characterize the peninsula, and no single party can claim a monopoly over the moral high ground.

The fact is, when nuclear deterrence is at play, even the system manager cannot frighten all its presumed wards into acceptable behavior. Since eight months of US-Japanese-ROK naval-air exercises have done nothing to coerce Pyongyang into solid global citizenship, Obama may finally be acknowledging the limits of America's military power. After

all, he may be sensitive to the fact that Iraq and Afghanistan bear in their tormented bowels historical lessons for powers driven by imperious righteousness.

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