



Discussion of “The Folly of Forcing Regime Change”



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PFO 05-25A: March 22nd, 2005

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Kenneth Lieberthal

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I. Introduction

The following are comments on the essay "The Folly of Forcing Regime Change" by Kenneth Lieberthal, professor of political science and of business administration at the University of Michigan, and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution, which appeared as Policy Forum Online 05-25A: March 22nd, 2005.

This report includes comments by Ralph Cossa, President of the Pacific Forum CSIS, a Honolulu-based nonprofit research institute.

II. Comments on Essay by Kenneth Lieberthal

1. Comments by Ralph Cossa

All of Ken's arguments against regime change make perfect sense. That is why the Bush administration, to my knowledge, decided against pursuing this course of action, despite its personal disdain for Kim Jong-il. Even John Bolton has said that the objective is not regime change; so has the President and both the current and former Secretaries of State. Creating a false hypothesis and then arguing against it is a time honored academic tradition but it is not very helpful, since it reinforces the paranoia in the minds of many in the ROK that this is truly the Bush administration's objective, despite its repeated protestations to the contrary. Obviously Ken does not believe the stated policy is the real policy but he should at least acknowledge that this is stated policy rather than help perpetuate the myth and make finding a solution all that much harder (since we will only reach a solution AFTER North Korea comes to the table and it is Pyongyang's refusal, not Washington's, that has made a negotiated settlement --which I, no less than Ken support -- impossible).

2. Response by Kenneth Lieberthal

Ralph seems to have misread my article on a very important issue. I did not argue that the Bush administration's policy is to create or pursue regime change. I did argue that key players in the Administration believe that no worthwhile deal can be signed with a North Korean regime as reprehensible and untrustworthy as they feel the Kim Jong-Il regime is. The policy, therefore, is to hope for (not to act to precipitate) regime change and, effectively, to fail to put forward a negotiating position before then that holds out a realistic prospect of being acceptable to North Korea. My article says, essentially, that people who hope for regime change need to think through far more seriously the possible adverse consequences of such a development.

III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org . Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

Produced by The Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development
Northeast Asia Peace and Security Project (napsnet-reply@nautilus.org)

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