

Policy Forum 01-02D: Dove Myths: No Better Than Hawk Myths



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Recommended Citation

"Policy Forum 01-02D: Dove Myths: No Better Than Hawk Myths", NAPSNet Policy Forum, March 07, 2001, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/nautilus-institute-pfo-dove-myths-no-better-than-hawk-myths/>

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PFO 01-02D: March 7, 2001

Dove Myths: No Better Than Hawk Myths

By Aidan Foster-Carter

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I. Introduction

This essay is by Aidan Foster-Carter, Senior Research Fellow in Sociology & Modern Korea at Leeds University. In his essay, Foster-Carter responds to an essay (PFO#01-02C) by Leon V. Sigal, author of "Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea." This is the fourth in a series on the future of US relations with Northeast Asian countries under the administration of incoming US President George W. Bush.

Foster-Carter states that he agrees with Sigal's conclusions, but not with the assumptions upon which they are based. Foster-Carter argues that a deal with North Korea for the stoppage of its missile program will not be easy or cheap and that the DPRK still wants US troops off the peninsula. He concludes by arguing that North Korea needs a US that will talk to it.

II. Essay by Aidan Foster-Carter

"Dove Myths: No Better Than Hawk Myths"

By Aidan Foster-Carter

In his wittily titled 1998 book, *Disarming Strangers*, Leon V. Sigal gives a valuable blow-by-blow account of US nuclear diplomacy with North Korea. He also has a case to make, and an ax to grind. The way to go with rogue states is dialogue, not isolation. Engagement works.

I agree with Sigal's conclusion, but not his premises. As Churchill long ago said, jaw-jaw is better than war-war. Inept US policy towards Pyongyang nearly led to a second Korean war in 1994. At a time when one of Sigal's chapter headings, "The Bushmen Go on the Warpath" (that was Bush Sr) once again seems ominously apt, there are few more important political tasks than to convince the new US administration to continue to engage with North Korea. That will be Kim Dae-jung's main challenge when he visits Washington in a week's time.

In this crucial cause, I find Sigal's latest contribution unhelpful. Most of his so-called "six myths" seem to me to be truths. In opposing them, he creates a mythical beast of his own: a pollyanna Pyongyang, ready for peace if only others would respond. Alas, it just ain't that simple. Sigal's doveishness - Jonathan Livingston Sigal? - is the mirror image of the hawks he opposes. Neither gives us a properly nuanced picture of a knotty reality. On the specifics:

1. If breaking your obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, then demanding (successfully) to be paid to stop what you shouldn't have been doing in the first place, isn't blackmail then I surely don't know what is. This doesn't mean you either can't or shouldn't do deals with North Korea. But sup with a long spoon, and call behavior by its real name.
2. True, the 1994 Agreed Framework defused (but did not resolve) a crisis. But the wider claim here - that Kim Jong-il is simply offering to disarm - is disingenuous, to put it mildly. On missiles, as with nukes, Pyongyang again demands to be paid to stop; and there are thorny problems of verification. On conventional forces, it has not yielded an inch: either in the Four Party talks - where Seoul and Washington do have a "common negotiating position", pace Sigal - or since last year's summit, refusing even the south's request for a military hotline.
3. On the contrary, North Korea's consistent publicly expressed position is US troops out. Witness its efforts to make this the priority agenda in the four party talks. True, we also get odd nods and whispers hinting they don't really mean it. Kim Dae-jung keeps saying that at the summit he convinced Kim Jong-il US troops should stay to preserve the regional balance of power. If so, we need to hear this from the dear leader's own lips - or better yet in writing.
4. North Korea "has tried to reach out" to its foes "since the late 1980s"? An interesting way to describe the rocket it fired over Japan without warning in August 1998; or the bombing of 115 South Koreans on KAL 858 in 1987. And in between, they say they want peace. Hmm. Sigal seems blind both to Pyongyang's vicious streak and its frequent U-turns, as in 1986 and 1992 when promising dialogues with South Korea and (latterly) Japan were abruptly ended.
5. Here I partially agree. Aid is a vital change agent. Some kinds - infrastructure, medicine, food - will work even on North Korea "as is". But China-style dynamism requires markets. And by its own rules, for the World Bank to lend does mean Pyongyang must pass Econ 101.
6. Of course North Korea is "trying to extort money". To get without giving has been their game (its name is *juche*) since way back. Ask the Russians, or the many western banks who were conned in the 1970s. Both are still owed billions. Sure, Pyongyang also has security concerns. But most are of its own making, after decades of playing the belligerent maverick.

Despite these criticisms, policy-wise we are on the same side. The last thing Korea needs is a macho Kim Jong Bush, kicking butt as per Iraq (a real success, huh?). To win this argument means convincing milder Republicans like Colin Powell to keep talking to Kim Jong-il. My fear is that one-sided op-eds like Sigal's will only confirm to hawks that liberals need a reality check. North Korea should not be treated as a stranger - but in no sense is it yet disarming.

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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
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Nautilus Institute

608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

nautilus@nautilus.org