


Policy Forum 02-07A: North Korea - Carrots or Sticks?

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By C. Kenneth Quinones

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I. Introduction

Dr. C. Kenneth Quinones short essay offers an alternative approach to dealing with North Korea. Abandoning the narrow rubric of "carrots" or "sticks," Quinones argues for a reminder and re-visitation of the over-arching objective of peace and stability. After all, complete US disengagement from North Korea will only further isolate North Korea, while straight-up appeasement will only encourage North Korea to continue its history of coercive diplomacy. Therefore, cooler heads must prevail and calm and collected multilateral engagement free of pre-conditions must be pursued on both sides.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Nautilus Institute. Readers should note that Nautilus seeks a diversity of views and opinions on contentious topics in order to identify common ground.

II. Essay by C. Kenneth Quinones

"North Korea - Carrots or Sticks?"

By Dr. C. Kenneth Quinones, American Research Center for Asia and the Pacific

No one should be surprised that North Korea's words and deeds again threaten peace and stability in Northeast Asia. This has been going on for fifty years. Equally predictable is Washington's reaction. The usual factions inside and out of the Bush Administration are quarreling over whether to punish Pyongyang with "sticks" for its misdeeds or to offer "carrots" to induce it back into compliance with its previous promises. Instead of rushing to address Pyongyang's agenda with either "sticks or carrots," we would do well to calm our rhetoric and meaningfully consider what is in the US' best interest. After all, the greater the concern we demonstrate over North Korea's apparent "secret uranium enrichment program," the greater the price to dismantle it, either peacefully or militarily.

Let's begin by concentrating on the future, not the past. Do we have a crisis? No, not yet. There is no fire, yet, but a lot of metaphorical dry wood is piled up in Pyongyang and Washington. Obviously, now is not the time to begin lighting matches. Fortunately, both sides do not appear intent on doing so. In Washington, the Bush Administration appears to be moving adroitly to head off a crisis. President Bush has had little to say about the situation. That is a definite plus. His tendency to "shoot from the hip" could quickly play into the hands of Pyongyang's hardliners who probably anticipate he will replay his "axis of evil" theme. Kim Jong Il's continued quiet likewise helps to stabilize the situation. Neither side has pulled the plug on their long term joint projects. The activities of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and the US-DPRK joint operations to recovery the remains of some 8,100 US military personnel missing in action (MIA) since the Korean War continue without disruption. This is reassuring to moderates on both sides. Disruption of these activities by either side could promptly be misinterpreted in either capital as indicating the other side is preparing to take drastic steps. Similarly, Seoul and Tokyo are keeping open their diplomatic channels to Pyongyang. Most importantly, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors continue their routine daily monitoring of activities at North Korea's primary nuclear research facility.

Threatening disengagement to punish North Korea and to compel its disarmament has not achieved our preferred goal of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. Instead, disengagement would blind us to what is going on in North Korea. It could even get the IAEA expelled from North Korea's nuclear research center. Nor do we want to start talking about carrots. This could encourage Pyongyang to prolong tensions and raise its expectations of what it might gain through continued

reliance on coercive diplomacy.

Now is the time for cool headed, quiet diplomacy. All the concerned parties must remain engaged with North Korea. We (Washington, Seoul, Tokyo, Beijing and Moscow, et. al.) would do well to support the IAEA's efforts to inspect North Korea's nuclear program. Pyongyang should allow IAEA inspectors to see its new uranium enrichment equipment and place it under IAEA seal pending eventual destruction. We could team up with Beijing, Moscow and Tokyo to declare that no single or team of nations would initiate an armed, first strike against either Korea so long as both are making substantive progress toward a transparent, nuclear free Korean Peninsula. Washington should then engage Pyongyang in negotiations without preconditions, as the Bush Administration has long avowed.

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.

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