

Asian Hotspots: North Korea and the South China Sea

Prof. Mel Gurtov

Political Science (Emeritus)

Portland State University

<https://mgurtov.com>

Korean Peninsula and East Asia



Motivating Forces in North Korea's World View

- Militant nationalism—a fierce determination to maintain independence, practice self-reliance to the extent possible, and reject external interference in its decision making.
- Mistrust of the outside world, which consists of implacable enemies and faithless friends.
- Insecurity, born of a pervasive sense of threats inside and outside the country.
- A need for international attention to its interests, security guarantees from the great powers, and respect for regime legitimacy.

US Options in North Korea

- Deeper sanctions: “peaceful pressure”
- Shows of force
- Regime change
- Preemptive attack
- Pressure on China
- Denuclearize, then talk
- Security assurances
- “Freeze-for Freeze”
- Dialogue
 - Resumption of 6 Party Talks
 - NEA Security Dialogue Mechanism

Rex Tillerson on “Peaceful Pressure” (August 1, 2017)

US goal is to “have [N Koreans] develop a willingness to sit and talk with us . . . A condition is there is no future where NK holds nuclear weapons or the ability to deliver those nuclear weapons”

China shares US objective and should “put pressure on and influence” DPRK.

“We do not seek regime change; we do not seek collapse of the regime; we do not seek an accelerated reunification of the peninsula; we do not seek an excuse to send our military north of the 38th parallel.”

Putting “ever greater pressure on the North Korean regime” is the only option.

North Korea's Options

- Continued nuclear and missile testing
- Fitting nuclear warhead on ICBM
- Armed provocations
- Defying sanctions
- Proliferation of missile components
- Cyberwarfare
- Talking

China's Options in Korea

- Deeper sanctions, crackdown on illicit trade
- Border security and repatriation
- Limited sanctions: food, not refugees
- Brokering peace
- Breaking relations with the DPRK
- Deeper cooperation with South Korea

“China should also make clear that if North Korea launches missiles that threaten U.S. soil first and the U.S. retaliates, China will stay neutral,” it added. “If the U.S. and South Korea carry out strikes and try to overthrow the North Korean regime and change the political pattern of the Korean Peninsula, China will prevent them from doing so.”

--*Global Times*, August 11, 2017

Principles of Engagement

- It should contain concrete incentives for peaceful exchange.
- It should accept the legitimacy of the DPRK regime as a negotiating partner.
- It should reject regime change as a foreign-policy aim, and offer security assurances.
- It should revive regional diplomacy.
- It should employ important symbolic steps to emphasize seriousness of purpose.
- It should maximize modes of direct contact that have substantive outcomes.

Ways to Engage the DPRK

- Deciding that the complete, verified denuclearization of North Korea is a policy objective but not the precondition to all other engagement steps that might be taken.
- Economic inducements, such as longterm development assistance.
- Avoidance of stereotyping and hostile rhetoric.
- Making symbolic, high-visibility gestures. Sending special emissary.
- Giving reassurances of “no hostile intent” and a determination to end the Korean War by peace treaty.
- Reciprocal steps to promote military transparency.
- Increasing Track II and Track III exchanges.
- Proposing multilateral projects that include China, Japan, and the ROK.
- Reviving regional diplomacy without preconditions.