



## Pyongyang Goes Ballistic

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At any moment, the North Korean regime of Kim Jong-Il – one of the most despotic and dangerous on the planet – will demonstrate that it has acquired the means to deliver nuclear weapons and other payloads over very long distances. It is likely that one of the intended targets for such weapons is the United States of America.

At the very least, that is the message the launch of the so-called Taepo-dong 2 is intended to convey. Pyongyang wants to get our attention and this launch is certain to achieve that purpose.

Two questions occur: First, why would Kim Jong-Il be willing to risk fresh isolation and possible sanctions that have been threatened by the United States and Japan in the wake of a missile launch that will, if past practice is any guide probably transit Japanese airspace and fly a trajectory towards U.S. territory?

And second, what does the answer to the previous question mean for American policy toward the so-called “Hermit Kingdom”?

While to some, North Korea’s behavior at the moment is a puzzlement, it is actually a perfectly logical response to recent international actions with respect to other pariah states. Call it “the squeaking wheel” syndrome.

In particular, the other remaining member of the original “Axis of Evil,” Islamofascist Iran, has lately been systematically rewarded for its misbehavior. The more belligerent the rhetoric from Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmedinijad, the more imminent the completion of Iran’s ominous nuclear weapons program, the more the U.S. and other Western powers have tried to appease Tehran.

Should we be surprised then that

the Iranian regime's partner in terror, nuclear weaponry, and ballistic-missile developments, North Korea, would be redoubling its threatening behavior — confident that the result would be, not sanctions and isolation, but fresh rewards?

Other powers, even lesser ones, have similarly learned that behavior explicitly hostile to the United States and its vital interests can be undertaken with impunity. In fact, Washington has once again conditioned them to believe it will go to great lengths to ensure that such behavior will not be allowed to interfere with diplomatic, commercial, and other bilateral ties.

For example, Vladimir Putin's Russia and Communist China have collaborated in military exercises and arms build-ups whose objects are unmistakably aimed at this country and its armed forces. At their instigation, nations of Central Asia are being encouraged to distance themselves from us — with potentially far-reaching strategic and energy implications.

What is more, both Russia and the PRC are actively encouraging and abetting our hemisphere's version of the Axis of Evil — Hugo Chavez's budding dictatorship in Venezuela and that enduring well-spring of revolution, Fidel Castro's Cuba — to foment instability in the region. Toward that end, for example, Putin has sold the oil-rich Chavez at least 100,000 AK-47 assault rifles and reportedly has on offer aircraft, missiles and the makings of a nuclear weapons program.

In short, forceful rhetoric from Washington and Tokyo notwithstanding, North Korea has every reason to believe that its missile test will actually improve its position, not worsen it. Russia and China and most especially South Korea (and, for that matter, the U.S. State Department) can be expected to demand that the United States respond as it has elsewhere — with more concessions.

Of course, the last thing we should contemplate doing is compounding the aforementioned problems and expectations by rewarding the most directly threatening move North Korea has made to date.

This is particularly true insofar as the Taepodong 2 launch may portend Pyongyang's determination to be able to inflict the single most devastating sort of attack on this country: detonating a nuclear weapon high in space over the United States in order to unleash an electromagnetic pulse (EMP). Such a burst of immensely powerful energy would devastate our power grid and damage, if not destroy, all unshielded electronic devices coast-to-coast.

A blue-ribbon commission tasked by Congress with assessing this threat found in 2004 that it could have a "catastrophic" effect on this 21<sup>st</sup> Century superpower, possibly reducing it in the blink of an eye to a pre-industrial society (not unlike much of North Korea). Interestingly, the commission also established that the Soviet Union's foremost experts on this phenomenon were in North Korea. Collaborative missile testing

with Iran may signal that Kim Jong-il is even farther along than we suspect in operationalizing such a capability.

Under these circumstances, the United States must now make a redoubled effort to deploy effective, comprehensive defenses against ballistic missiles that might be used for EMP and other attacks. We must urgently augment the modest ground-based systems put into place in Alaska and California in the wake of President Bush's laudable decision to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. This can be done most efficiently and quickly by modifying existing Navy ships equipped with the Aegis fleet air defense system so as to give them the capability to shoot down such missiles at

various points along their flight trajectory.

Second, we must recognize that negotiating with the North Koreans — either multilaterally or bilaterally is a loser, just as it is with the Iranians. Pyongyang's next missile test must be met not with intensified negotiations and more inducements to play ball with our diplomats.

Instead, we must work toward the only end that is likely to make a whit of difference for the future security of this country: Do as Ronald Reagan did with the Soviet Union — work not just to contain, but to bring down the odious despot in North Korea and his allies in Tehran.

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